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## Eying Italians: Race, romance, and reality in American perception, 1880–1910

Joseph Peter Cosco  
*College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences*

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**EYING ITALIANS:  
RACE, ROMANCE, AND REALITY  
IN AMERICAN PERCEPTION, 1880-1910**

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**A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of American Studies  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia**

**In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

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**by  
Joseph P. Cosco  
1999**

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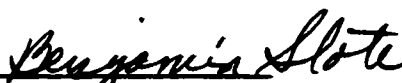
  
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**Author**

**Approved, December 1999**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Richard S. Lowry**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Kenneth M. Price**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Robert J. Scholnick**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Benjamin Slote**  
**Allegheny College**

## **DEDICATION**

**The author dedicates this dissertation to his father and mother, Anthony and Carmella Cosco, whose sacrifices made it possible for me to become an American and whose pride serves as a enduring reminder of my Italian heritage.**

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Finally, the writer wishes to thank his wife, Kathleen S. Cosco, for her support and patience during the project.

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how American representations of Italians and Italian Americans engaged, reflected and helped shape the United States' developing concepts of immigration, ethnicity, race, and national identity from 1880 to 1910, when masses of Italian and other "new immigrants" rigorously tested the country's attitudes and powers of assimilation. In a larger sense, the research examines how the process of constructing the modern Italian/Italian American was part of the process of America constructing for itself a modern national identity for a new century. The dissertation looks at a variety of "texts," including journalism, travel literature, autobiography, fiction, and photographs and illustrations of the period, but concentrates on a handful of American writers and their works.

Chapter 1 compares the reportage and photography of the immigrant journalist Jacob A. Riis with the reporting of the "new" immigrant journalist Edward A. Steiner.

Chapter 2 examines Henry James's *The American Scene* in the context of his other writings on Italy and Italians, including travel essays, short stories, and *The Golden Bowl*.

Chapter 3 focuses on Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *Those Extraordinary Twins*. Also part of the discussion are two works by William Dean Howells, *Venetian Life* and *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. The research showed that these writers alternately supported and subverted America's often conflicting and confused attitudes and ideas about Italy and Italians, a tangle of discourses related to the romance of artistic, heroic, picturesque Italy and the reality of the Italian "Other" arriving in the form of masses of immigrants on American shores.

**EYING ITALIANS:**

**RACE, ROMANCE, AND REALITY**

**IN AMERICAN PERCEPTION, 1880-1910**

Introduction  
 Those Magnificently Miserable Italians  
 And Their Wretched, Princely Italy

**“There is glut in the market. People have their house full of Italian views, and their libraries full of Italian travels, and the boarding school misses are twaddling *nelle parole Tuscane*”**

**-- *American Whig Review*, 1847**

**“Yes, yes, hang the dagoes!”**

**-- New Orleans lynch mob, 1891**

**“The killing of the eleven prisoners had in it no race feeling whatever. There has been no hostility to the Italians in America, as such. . . . The men were not killed in the New Orleans prison because they were Italians, but because they were believed to be members of a secret-assassination society responsible for a brutal murder.”**

**-- U.S. Representative Henry Cabot Lodge, 1891**

**“They are beaten men from beaten races; representing the worst failures in the struggle for existence.”**

**-- Francis A. Walker, president of MIT and former  
 superintendent of U.S. Census, 1896**

**A gloomy mist hung over New Orleans on the night of October 15, 1890, as David C. Hennessy, the popular police superintendent, left the precinct station after an evening meeting with the Police Board at City Hall. Before calling it a night, Hennessy stopped in at Dominic Virget’s saloon with his close friend Capt. William J. O’Connor, and indulged in a late-night snack of half a dozen oysters and a teetotaling glass of milk. Leaving the saloon around midnight, Hennessy parted company with his friend at the**

corner of Rampart and Girod. O'Connor, a former city policeman now working for one of the Crescent City's private protective forces, had offered to accompany Hennessy further, but the chief declined. "There's no need to come any further with me now, Bill," Hennessy reportedly insisted. "You go on your own way" (Gambino 2). Hennessy then headed home alone toward the river. He lived with his mother in a greatly deteriorated neighborhood of small cottages, rooming houses, and shanties now housing some blacks and Italian immigrants. Despite the physical and social decay, Hennessy's mother had sentimental attachments to the neighborhood and refused to leave. Hennessy, a 32-year-old bachelor, had acceded to his mother's wishes.

As Hennessy walked alone in the gloaming along Girod Street, just before he reached Basin Street, a gang of five men burst from an alley, opened fire with shotguns and perhaps rifles and pistols, and then fled into the night, chased by volleys of return fire from Hennessy. Although seriously wounded, with three slugs in the stomach and one in the chest, Hennessy would live for nine hours. Could he identify his attackers? Did he identify them? Here accounts conflict. The local *Times-Democrat* reported that Hennessy, asked if he knew his assailants, "shook his head from side to side in a negative way." However, Capt. O'Connor would offer a more attractive, because more dramatic, account: "Bending over the Chief I said to him: 'Who gave it to you, Dave?'" O'Connor reportedly told city officials and reporters gathered in a crowded corridor of the old Charity Hospital, where Hennessy had been taken. "He replied, 'Put you ear down here.' As I bent down again, he whispered the word 'Dagoes.'" Although no one but O'Connor

heard Hennessy's whispered reply (Gambino 4), the captain's account satisfied Mayor Joseph A. Shakespeare, certainly no friend of the large Italian community in New Orleans. Shakespeare would later refer to the city's Italian immigrants as "the most idle, vicious and worthless people among us" (18), but now, acting on O'Connor's "tip," Shakespeare issued summary orders to the police: "Scour the whole neighborhood! Arrest every Italian you come across, if necessary, and scour it again tomorrow morning as soon as there is daylight enough" (7).

Hennessy's shooting and death on October 15-16, 1890, was major news in the United States and Europe. The popular police superintendent had celebrity status, having made a name for himself in 1881, when he and his cousin, with two Italian private detectives, arrested a notorious Italian murderer and kidnaper in New Orleans. Newspapers in America and Europe had celebrated Hennessy as a model of heroic American manhood and anointed him the foremost expert on the Italian secret societies and criminal organizations that were seen to be infiltrating the United States and threatening American society. Hennessy's fame had endured, and so within hours of his death, the people of two continents received news of the vicious attack against America's greatest authority on the Sicilian 'stiletto' and 'vendetta' societies.

It wasn't long before most of New Orleans' outraged citizenry was convinced that Hennessy had been killed in the cross-fire of an ongoing feud between two rival Italian businesses organizations operating in the city. In the twenty-four hours following the shooting, the police rounded up approximately two hundred of the roughly thirty

thousand Italians living in the New Orleans area. Nineteen suspects were eventually indicted. Nine of these Italian men went on trial the following February 28, with the others scheduled for trial later that month. On March 13, 1891, amid reports and rumors of jury tampering and intimidation of witnesses, a jury found six of the defendants not guilty and failed to return verdicts for the remaining three suspects. Despite the six acquittals and three mistrials, Judge Joshua G. Baker ordered all nine defendants returned to the Parish Prison to await further charges.

The next morning, an advertisement in the New Orleans newspapers invited “[a]ll good citizens” to attend a mass meeting “to take steps to remedy the failure of justice in the Hennessy case.” The advertisement, signed by sixty-one prominent citizens, concluded with ominous advice: “Come prepared for action” (Gambino 77). By 10 a.m., between six and eight thousand citizens had gathered around the statue of Henry Clay at the corner of Canal and Royal. There, William S. Parkerson, an aide and confidant of Mayor Shakespeare, stood on the statue’s tall pedestal and addressed the crowd. “Will every man here follow me, and see the murder of D.C. Hennessy vindicated?” he demanded. The crowd responded, “Yes, yes, hang the dagoes!” (79). The mob, many of them in frock coats and derby hats, surged toward the Parish Prison, reinforced along the way by an execution squad of seventy to one hundred men armed with Winchester repeating rifles and shotguns (80). At the prison, the mob rammed its way through a back gate and hunted down, beat, and shot eleven of the Italian prisoners. Two of the wounded victims were dragged outside, hanged, used for target practice, and left hanging for two

hours. Some of the city's ladies dipped their lace handkerchiefs in the blood of the victims as souvenirs. Other souvenir hunters stripped bark from the tree used in one of the hangings (87). Of the Italians killed, three had been acquitted the day before, three had seen their cases end in mistrial, and five had not yet gone to trial. The victims included two U.S. citizens, six men who had formally declared their intention to become citizens, and three Italian subjects. It was, and remains, the largest mass lynching in American history, according to figures compiled by the NAACP (Gambino ix).

Shortly after the lynching, a grand jury and a private investigator for President Benjamin Harrison began looking into the incident. The grand jury quickly issued a report on May 6, 1891. It said Hennessy was killed because "his death was deemed necessary to prevent the exposure and punishment of criminals whose guilt was being fast established by his diligent pursuit." The grand jury said the lynch mob "embraced several thousands of the first, best and even most law-abiding, of the citizens" of New Orleans, whose decision to lynch was "general and spontaneous in character as truly indicating an uprising of the masses." Since the lynching "seemed to involve the entire people of the parish and city of New-Orleans," the grand jurors concluded that it was impossible to single out any individuals for indictment (107-08). And in passing, the grand jury report called for immigration restriction. President Harrison received his own report more than a week before the New Orleans grand jury released its findings. Harrison's investigator called the evidence against the Italians "exceedingly unsatisfactory" and inconclusive. The investigator concluded that he had failed to directly



connect any of the Italian suspects either to the Mafia or to any attempts to bribe the jury (114).

Immediately following the lynching, the Italian government demanded punishment for the lynchers and indemnity for relatives of the victims. President Harrison apologized for the killings, but the Italian government, unappeased, recalled its ambassador from Washington, touching off an intense upsurge in American anti-Italian sentiment. Some American newspapers printed reports that the large Italian naval fleet was planning to attack American coastal cities. An epidemic of panic and anger swept through the country (117). While some Americans feared war with Italy, others openly desired it. Thousands of individuals and groups from all parts of the country sent telegrams and letters to the White House, volunteering to fight in a war against Italy. Many newspapers and politicians stoked the war frenzy as a way to unite North and South for the first time since the Civil War. Not until the following April, when the United States paid an indemnity of about \$25,000 -- or just under \$2,500 for each victim's family -- were normal relations resumed between the two governments (Cunningham 28). Before long the mass lynching faded into a relatively obscure footnote in American history, in marked contrast to the more notorious lynching of Leo Frank, a Jew accused of killing a 13-year-old girl, in Georgia in 1915.

The New Orleans lynching incident and its aftermath stand in dramatic counterpoint to what, prior to the late nineteenth century, had been a long, often warm relationship between the United States and Italy and between Americans and Italians.

While there had always been certain negative attitudes towards the Italians on the part of some Americans, educated and otherwise, the lynching crystallized anti-Italian sentiments and dramatized America's rapidly changing opinions of Italy and Italians. These changes were in great measure influenced by the masses of poor Italian immigrants who had begun arriving in the United States in the 1880s with other so-called "new immigrants" from southern, central, and eastern Europe. These new immigrants, so unlike earlier American settlers in race, religion and national origin, touched off heated debates on the subjects of immigration and assimilation, debates that engaged with a host of other prevailing discourses related to manhood, the family, disease and hygiene, race, culture, national character, and civilization. Italian immigrants often found themselves at the very center of these debates and discourses. I am not claiming that the turn-of-the-century Italian immigrant experience in America was in any way unique or representative, but I would argue that Italians (along with Jews) are uniquely suited to illuminate these discourses that so dominated the American scene in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This dissertation, then, will look at American representations of Italy, Italians in Italy, and Italians in America as a way to examine American attitudes about America and American identity and national character around the turn of the century.

The Italian experience is important and instructive for a number of reasons. Perhaps most important were the sheer numbers and the impoverished socio-economic background of the Italians who were streaming into the United States. As John Higham

has noted, “The Italians were often thought to be the most degraded of the European newcomers. They were swarthy, more than half of them were illiterate, and almost all were victims of a standard of living lower than that of any of the other prominent nationalities” emigrating to America (Strangers 66). These Italian immigrants tended to congregate in the urban centers of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions; more than one-third would settle in New York City (Archdeacon 141). In New York and other urban centers, their high visibility was commented on by a host of reformers, journalists, writers, artists, thought leaders, and opinion-makers, among them Massachusetts legislator Henry Cabot Lodge, reforming journalist Jacob Riis, well-known writers Henry James and William Dean Howells, and Ashcan artists such as William Glackens and George Luks. As the cultural and communications center of the United States, New York took note of the densely populated Italian (and Jewish) neighborhoods that along with other ethnic enclaves contributed to New York’s status as America’s turn-of-the-century “shock city” -- the metropolis that epitomized developing trends in American society and life (Zurier 29). These ethnic populations and neighborhoods were intimately linked to other topics of great interest to New Yorkers and Americans throughout the country: the changing geography of the city, the great disparity between wealth and poverty, and the new trend toward public display played out in public spaces (15). By the 1880s, the metropolis had become shorthand for everything threatening to American society, and by the 1890s much of the focus was on Italians and other new immigrants. Turn-of-the-century New York can be seen as a borderlands or what Mary Louise Pratt calls a

“contact zone” -- a social space where disparate cultures meet and clash in uneven terms of power.

Between 1880 and 1921, some 4.5 million Italians came to America, some to settle permanently, some as seasonal workers who would eventually return to Italy. Approximately 80 percent of them came from the poor, backward southern portion of Italy known as the *Mezzogiorno* -- “the land that time forgot.” During the 1880s, nearly 270,000 Italian immigrants arrived, comprising some five percent of the United States’ total immigration that decade. Although the percentage was modest compared to those of America’s traditional immigrant sources in northwestern Europe, the Italian percentage in the 1880s was second only to Austria-Hungary’s six percent among the “new immigrant” countries of southern, central, and eastern Europe. During the 1890s, the total number of Italian immigrants more than doubled to slightly more than 600,000, or 16.3 percent of the country’s total immigration for the decade. Italy now had become the single largest supplier of American immigrants. Italian immigration to the United States nearly tripled during the first decade of the twentieth century. More than 1.9 million Italians arrived from 1900 to 1909, second only to the two million who came from Austria-Hungary. Together, Italy and Austria-Hungary provided one out of every two immigrants who landed in America during the first decade of the twentieth century. That decade, Italy’s percentage of the total immigration easily exceeded the total combined percentages for the United Kingdom, Ireland, Scandinavia, France, and the German Empire, those northern and western European countries, which, two decades earlier, had accounted for

more than 70 percent of America's immigrants. For the United States, it was a radical shift in immigration patterns. For example, one out of every two Italian immigrants who arrived in the first decade of the twentieth century was illiterate, while the far fewer northwestern European immigrants, including the Irish, had illiteracy rates of less than five percent (Archdeacon 152). During the following decade, Italian immigration would dip to slightly more than 1.2 million, with the First World War severely disrupting the flow. However, from 1910-1919, the highest percentage of immigrants, 19.4 percent, came from Italy. (All immigration figures from Kraut, The Huddled Masses 19-21).

The Italians, most of them Roman Catholics, occupied a curious position in America's immigration spectrum. They generally were different in socio-economic status, religion and appearance from most of the traditional earlier immigrants from the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, France, and the German Empire. They were both similar to and different from the mid-nineteenth century Irish Catholic immigrants who had represented the first real radical break in America's traditional immigration patterns. The Italian immigrants had the Irish's alien Roman Catholicism and poverty, but lacked their Anglo and Celtic looks and English language. However, unlike other "new immigrants" from Austria-Hungary, Poland, and Russia, the Italians were both unfamiliar and yet very familiar to many if not most Americans. The American's first encounter with large numbers of Slavs and Jews was indeed a new experience with alien peoples from countries with which the United States had had no extensive social contact. The Italians, in contrast, hailed from a land that had long occupied an important place in the American

psyche. Many Americans were already quite familiar with Italy and, perhaps to a lesser extent, with Italians themselves. By the late nineteenth century, when boatloads of Neapolitans, Calabrians, and Sicilians started landing in the United States, Americans already had myriad ideas, perceptions, attitudes, and feelings about Italy and Italians, some negative, many positive. By the late nineteenth century, Italy had achieved canonical status in America in much the same way that the "Orient" had in England and France, as Edward W. Said has argued. Americans saw Italy as not simply a place, a geographical region or country, but as an aesthetic, cultural and moral construct. To paraphrase Said, Italy was for Americans a complex idea that had a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that had given it reality and presence in and for America (5). Americans had an inherited knowledge of Italians, their race, character, culture, history, traditions, society and possibilities (38). Some of that knowledge derived from first-hand experience of Italy, Italians, and things Italian; much of it, however, was based on "textual" representations in newspaper and magazine articles; paintings, engravings, photographs and illustrations; imaginative literature; and histories and political/sociological/scientific reports.

A rich, yet tangled relationship had developed between America and Italy during the early and mid-nineteenth century. Americans had begun going to Italy in noticeable numbers not long after the American Revolution. And long before that, Italians had been coming to the Americas as explorers, adventurers, religious missionaries, artists, and intellectuals. Italians were among the first Europeans to arrive in what would become the

United States. The names of some of the earliest arrivals have long been familiar to generations of American schoolboys and schoolgirls: the great explorers Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, Giovanni Verrazano, and the anglicized John Cabot. Another Italian, Filippo Mazzei, has achieved a more limited celebrity, his influence on the thinking of his good friend Thomas Jefferson acknowledged in some quarters, but his fame much less than that of the early sailors. Invited by Jefferson to Monticello, Mazzei in 1774-75 prepared a philosophical justification for revolution that Jefferson translated, published as "Furioso" in the *Virginia Gazette*, and, some historians say, drew on for ideas and the most important phrase of the Declaration of Independence: "that all men are created equal, that they . . ." (Mangione 12).

Nearly ignored now but important in their time were other early Italians in America such as Enrico de Tonti, a soldier of fortune and fur trader who explored the Mississippi Valley with LaSalle; Francesco Vigo, a Spanish Army veteran and wealthy fur trader who provided intelligence to General George Rogers Clark during the Revolution and later reportedly became the first Italian American citizen; and the numerous Italian missionaries in the Colonial Southwest, among them Father Eusebio Francesco Chino, a Jesuit scholar and cartographer who spent a quarter of a century combining missionary work and exploration/development of the Spanish lands from the Colorado River to the Gulf of Mexico. Other early Italians in America included the four Venetian glass-makers who were brought to the English colony at Jamestown in the 1620s; the Italian immigrants who accepted a generous offer of land from the proprietary colony of

Maryland; and the largest group of Italian settlers, the fewer than two hundred Protestant Italian Waldensians who escaped persecution by establishing a colony in New Amsterdam in 1657. During the American Revolution, some American soldiers would have interacted with Italian men who enlisted in the Continental Army. Fifty or so are named in regimental lists, but there are no lists or recorded history for two regiments of Italians recruited in Italy to fight with the colonists in America (Mangione 12).

Compared to the English, Scotch Irish, Germans, Scandinavians, French, Spanish, and Portuguese who settled the American colonies, emigrants from the Italian states came in small numbers. However, Italian contacts with colonial America were more numerous than generally assumed (Nelli 7). Most Italian settlers during the Colonial period, as well as during most of the early and mid-nineteenth century, came from northern Italy. They sought economic opportunities or political exile. Many were artists, artisans, tradesmen, teachers, and political refugees. Between American independence and Italian unification in 1871, relatively small numbers of Italians came to America, scattering throughout the nation but establishing concentrated colonies in the Northeast and in the Lower Mississippi Valley.

The traffic between Italy and America went both ways in these early days. Even before the founding of the American republic, and long before there would be a unified Italian state, Americans had begun traveling to Italy, mostly as intrepid tourists and cultural pilgrims. These “discoverers,” as Paul R. Baker calls them, ignited an American passion for Italy that would burn throughout the nineteenth century. The earliest



American account of a pleasure tour of Italy is a journal thought to have been written by Benjamin Pollard, a sheriff from Suffolk County, Massachusetts, in 1736-37. The artist Benjamin West, who went to Italy in 1760, most likely was the first American notable to visit the country, followed by another distinguished artist, John Singleton Copley, in 1774-75. West and Copley blazed the artistic trail that would be followed by American writers and artists both celebrated and obscure during the nineteenth century. Thomas Jefferson followed on the heels of West and Copley. While minister to France, he made a brief excursion into the north of Italy in 1787. Like the artists, and like so many Americans who would go to Italy after him, Jefferson made his visit for utilitarian purposes: to check out the lay of the land, to study the rice farming, and, as it turned out, to pilfer some rice seeds from the Italians. If Jefferson went for science, most of his fellow Americans went for culture. Lured by the early accounts of the “discoverers,” America’s privileged classes fell under the spell of Italy’s siren’s song. By the early part of the nineteenth century, “a European tour and a visit to Italy had become a significant American cultural phenomena” (Baker 19). These early American cultural pilgrims took their lead from the British and Continental Europeans who had been the true “discoverers” of Italy. The Grand Tour, with Italy usually the high point of the excursion, had become popular in England as far back as the Restoration. English travel books dominated the market in the early nineteenth century. Most American travelers used a guide published by the Englishman Joseph Forsythe to show them the way, but they let their emotions and aesthetic sensibilities be guided primarily by European romantic

literature. They carried copies of Madame de Stael's Corinne (1807) and Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1818). Their mantra came from Byron's Italian Fourth Canto:

"Italia! Oh, Italia! thou who hast/The fatal gift of Beauty, which became/A funeral dower of present woes and past---/On thy sweet brow is sorrow ploughed by shame,/And annals graved in characters of fame."

Contacts between Italy and America intensified during the course of the nineteenth century, and the two countries established an extensive cultural exchange that was often complex, conflicting and contradictory. Between 1820 and 1860, approximately fourteen thousand Italians would arrive in the United States, nearly three-quarters of them during the 1850s (Nelli 40). Among them were about two hundred Italians who traveled to mine gold in California between 1848 and 1854. By 1850, nearly one thousand Italians, mostly from Sicily and the south of Italy, had followed the citrus trade to New Orleans and were living in Louisiana (Scarpaci 137). A part of the French Quarter was known as Little Palermo. By the 1890s, prior to the lynching of the eleven Italians, this "Piccola Palermo" would also be known less affectionately as "Dago Street" and "Vendetta Alley" (Gambino 50). Also during the mid-nineteenth century, failed nationalist efforts in Italy brought small numbers of political exiles to America, the most famous being Giuseppe Garibaldi, whom American newspapers acclaimed as "the distinguished champion of liberty" on his arrival in 1849, following the fall of the Roman republic. Less celebrated, but no less important in America's gallery of Italian types, were the organ-grinders who appeared in, among other places, Concord, Massachusetts.

Henry David Thoreau, writing in his journals in 1851, offered varied assessments of these organ-grinders. In a prickly mood, he described their music as “sounding as if a cheeta had skulked howling through the streets of the village with knotted tail.” Yet, a few days later Thoreau praised “the Italian boy who seeks my door with his organ.” The boy, he says, serves him better than the musicians of “All Vienna” (147, 150). By 1880, almost 45,000 Italians lived in the United States, certainly a presence, but one that was small enough to blend into the national landscape.

American contacts with Italy and with Italians in Italy were also fairly extensive by mid-century. By 1858, some two thousand Americans, many of them artists, intellectuals and leisured dilettantes, were visiting Florence every year. By the 1890s, travelers had become tourists and the aristocratic Grand Tour had become a middle-class package tour. Rome was getting some 30,000 American visitors annually (Baker 20). During the course of the nineteenth century, nearly every major American artist and writer, with the exceptions of Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau and Emily Dickinson, made cultural pilgrimages to Italy. Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Allston, Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Russell Lowell, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hiram Powers, William Wetmore Story, Thomas and Horatio Greenough, Thomas Crawford, Harriet Hosmer, Herman Melville, Margaret Fuller, Samuel Clemens, William Dean Howells, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Jane Addams, and Constance Fenimore Woolson -- they, and a host of lesser artists and intellectuals, traveled to, often lived in, and nearly always wrote about or otherwise made art of Italy and Italians. Many

went with romantic notions about classical Italy already encoded in their imaginations. Very often their idealized picture clashed with the reality of the country. Emerson's reaction may have been typical when he wrote with disgust about the fenced-in ruins teeming with "this vermin of ciceroni and padroni." As Ann Douglas writes, "Emerson, in other words, expected Italy to look like prints of Italian scenes so in vogue in America; he wanted it to arouse the emotions Byron's and Goethe's poetic tributes to Italy evoked; he expected not a country but a museum, not life but art" (284).

However, with the exception of Emerson and a few others, most Americans *did* see a story-book Italy to which they responded with Byronic raptures. Americans embraced and appropriated different aspects of Italian culture and customs both abroad and at home. Arm-chair travelers followed the lead of the cultural pilgrims, just as these "fortunate pilgrims," as Baker calls them, followed the lead of the early "discoverers." Long before pizza, the Mafia, and Bruno Magli, Italy and things Italian were hot commodities in America. If nineteenth-century Americans saw Europe itself "not so much a real place as a very commodious signifier," as William W. Stowe says (ix), then Italy was a particularly rich and complex sign -- a source of social and cultural capital, a land of romance and the picturesque, and a site/symbol of self-definition -- for many Americans. Accounts of travel in Italy and views of Italian landscapes filled American homes. In 1853, George Stillman Hillard published Six Months in Italy, which went through twenty-one editions during the rest of the century and was probably the most popular book about Italy by an American. Additionally, magazines and newspapers

“followed and further stimulated public interest with countless articles on Italian literature, art, society, and customs” (Baker 1). Further proof of America’s infatuation with Italy was the popularity of Italian opera. George Templeton Strong, the New York diarist, commenting on a Bellini opera at Castle Garden in 1851, wrote, “The people are *Sonnambula*-mad” (qtd. in Levine 85). The song sheets of Bellini, Rossini, and Donizetti sold alongside of those of Stephen Foster (96). *Rigoletto* was played at Abraham Lincoln’s 1861 inauguration. And the writer and editor Nathaniel Parker Willis underscored the American attraction to Italian opera by noting “the quiet ease with which the luxury of the exclusives---Italian music---has passed into the hands of the people . . . Now it is as much theirs as anyone’s! . . . Opera music has . . . become a popular taste” (qtd. in Levine 97). The young Henry James was perhaps typical of this mania for things Italian, recalling, in his autobiography, the Italian landscapes that hung in his home and trips to Castle Garden to see the Italian singer Adelina Patti.

However, there was also reaction against this Italomania. In 1847, the *American Whig Review* complained: “There is glut in the market. People have their house full of Italian views, and their libraries full of Italian travels, and the boarding school misses are twaddling nelle parole Tuscanne” (qtd. in Baker 26). With regard to Italian opera, “The sale of exclusive private boxes at the Italian opera house came to signify the Old World pretensions and effete snobberies that so frequently angered playgoers and served as a catalyst for the numerous theater riots of the first half of the century” (Levine 94). In 1859, the *Chicago Daily World* fretted about Italian opera “with its fashionable toilets,”

and advised its readers that “the high spiced esculents will do now and then, but they hurt the digestion; the plain, everyday dish administers to our nutriment” (qtd. in Levine 94). Audiences in New Orleans, which had America’s first permanent opera company, demanded that “Yankee Doodle” and “Hail Columbia” complement the performances of Italian operas (Levine 95). Around mid-century, we begin to see the growth of anti-Italian attitudes that would harden and become more extreme by century’s end. In 1857, the *Atlantic* claimed that Italian opera, promoted by a group of “musical Jew-brokers,” was not an art but “merely a few singers lifted up on the cheapest platform of an opera.” One year later, the magazine said “the passionate music of Italy” was the music of “hand organs,” which “electrifies our cooler blood, but . . . does not express our feelings nor in any way represent our character” (qtd. in Levine 220).

For many Americans, both those abroad and at home, the interest in Italy focussed on the country’s glorious past, its cultural and social refinements, and the pastoral Italian landscape with its picturesque ruins and rustic peasants. “The concentration on art, nature, and the remnants of Roman antiquity was perhaps one of the reasons why the rest of the Italian scene seemed to interest travellers so little” (Barzini 29). Their Italy was Italy the land of art and romance, an idealized, heroic Italy. For many Americans visiting Italy, “the whole country was like a stage, while the Italians seemed to them like actors playing parts in some poetic drama” (Brooks, *The Dream* 51). Most of the American travelers ignored Italian politics entirely. Many showed insensitivity to Italy’s contemporary social problems or sharply criticized its modern institutions. “Cooper,

Hawthorne, Emerson, Story, James, and most of the American tourists who left records of their travels testified to the fascination Italy exerted over them; but the needs they expected it to serve were rather special ones. They concurred in slighting the political, intellectual, and domestic habits of the Italian people, even while they praised and envied the Italian's love of art and capacity for leisure. They unanimously resented the encroachment of the present on the classical past" (Douglas 283).

However, there were exceptions. Culterati such as Catharine Sedgwick, Margaret Fuller, Julia Ward Howe, the sculptors Horatio Greenough and Thomas Crawford, William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, James Russell Lowell, and Horace Greeley, as well as some ordinary Americans, took an interest in Italian nationalism, the failed Italian revolution of 1848-49, and the subsequent unification of the country in the 1860s. Perceptive Americans couldn't help but see parallels between the nearly contemporaneous American Civil War and Italian Risorgimento. They would have noticed that Italians were struggling to define themselves as a people and pursuing a unified republic during the Risorgimento, just as Americans were struggling to re-define themselves as a people and fighting over their own threatened republic during the Civil War. This link is dramatized in an early chapter of Jane Addams's Twenty Years at Hull-  
House, when she recalls how, as a twelve-year-old, she walked into her father's room and found him solemnly holding a newspaper, overcome by the news "that Joseph Mazzini was dead." Young Jane had never heard of the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini (interesting that Addams' father anglicized the first name), so her father tries to educate

her. But she grows argumentative, “asserting that my father did not know him, that he was not an American, and that I could not understand why we should be expected to feel badly about him.” Of course, the father, a liberal entrepreneur and future Illinois state senator, succeeds in teaching the child a valuable lesson: that differences in nationality, language and creed are less important than shared hopes and desires, that the differences “count for absolutely nothing between groups of men who are trying to abolish slavery in America or to throw off Hapsburg oppression in Italy” (21-32). Americans could also measure themselves and their democracy against the early failures of Italy’s republican dreams and the limited successes of Italy’s evolving constitutional monarchy.

Furthermore, thinking Americans most likely remembered that their early republic was itself partly inspired by the Roman republic of antiquity that was so much praised by America’s Founding Fathers. James Russell Lowell spoke for many when, during a trip to Italy in 1851, he said that Americans found themselves at home in Rome as logical heirs of the old Roman Empire. “I cannot help believing that in some respects we represent more truly the old Roman Power and sentiment than any other people,” he wrote to his friend John Holmes on March 5, 1852. “Our art, our literature, are, as theirs, in some sort exotics; but our genius for politics, for law, and, above all, for colonization, our instinct for aggrandizement and for trade, are all Roman” (qtd. in Scudder 1: 342).

Still, we shouldn’t overstate the case. Although many Americans sympathized with the Italian nationalists, “these sympathies were only vaguely directed. Few Americans took a knowledgeable interest in the political events, and only a limited number became



personally concerned” (Baker 188). The few notable exceptions included Margaret Fuller, who took a passionate, active interest in the Italian revolution that culminated in the short-lived Roman republic of 1849, and Horace Greeley, whose New York newspaper carried Fuller’s Roman dispatches. Greeley also helped organize a series of public rallies held in New York in support of the Italian nationalists. At least two other Americans, the sculptors Horatio Greenough and Thomas Crawford, participated extensively in Italian society and later joined the republican Civic Guard in Florence. With the establishment of the unified Italian constitutional monarchy in the 1860s, Americans would praise Italians for coming together but express disappointment that the country had remained a monarchy.

Despite having generally sympathetic feelings about Italy, American travelers could be highly critical of Italian life and society. When not rhapsodizing about cultural, romantic, picturesque Italy, American travel accounts often fixated on recurring negative images: the dirt and disorder; the oppressive Roman Catholic religion and pervasive superstition; and the stereotypical characters of the mercenary *vitturini*, the bloodthirsty *banditti*, the loafing *lazzaroni*, and the abject beggars. All these themes, tropes and images had been mined and developed by Washington Irving, the most influential of the American “discoverers,” in his Italian travel journals and in his collection, Tales of a Traveller (1824), both of which took their cue from traditional English accounts of Italy. American travelers, even the mid-nineteenth-century expatriate artists in Florence and Rome, “did not as a rule enter extensively into Italian social life and had few Italian

friends” (Baker 80). Therefore, as Horatio Greenough pointed out, for many travelers life in Italy was “like lovely scenery to a blind man” (qtd. in Baker 81). The American’s overall attitude toward the ordinary Italian, “based as much on accepted stereotypes as his own experience,” was superficial and to a considerable extent negative, this despite the Italian’s generally sympathetic ideas and feelings about the United States (Baker 83). Italy itself was seen as fallen, its greatness as a political entity long gone. Americans “were struck by the contrast between prosperous America and the fallen magnificence and languor of the Italian scene, where all things visible were in disrepair, cracking, crumbling, peeling, rotting, and everything seemed to speak of an irrecoverable past” (Brooks, The Dream 26). Most American travelers had little contact with ordinary Italians. Like Henry James, they dealt mostly with the lower orders (carriage drivers, servants, self-appointed guides) who were doubly foreign in their class and culture. The Italian people were seen as dishonest, mendacious, immoral, lazy, dirty, degraded, sensual, theatrical, childlike, and without enterprise. Bayard Taylor, who wrote a popular mid-century travel book, Views A-Foot or Europe Seen with Knapsack and Staff (1846), typified a general attitude of loving Italy, but disparaging the Italians. Speaking for many and foreshadowing Jamesian raptures, Taylor rhapsodizes, “Sweet, sweet Italy! I can feel now how the soul may cling to thee, since thou canst gratify its insatiable thirst for the Beautiful (298). A few pages later, however, he says that the Italians, “as a race, are indolent and effeminate,” with little conception of human moral dignity. Taylor blames Italy’s woes on the character of its people, and sees little hope for national progress

without moral improvement of its people. "This dark shadow in the moral atmosphere of Italy hangs like a curse on her beautiful soil, weakening the sympathies of citizens of freer lands with her fallen condition. No people can ever become truly great or free, who are not virtuous" (305-306). Taylor was typical of many travelers to Italy from both America and northern Europe. As Luigi Barzini says, "They were thrilled by one of the pleasurable sensations Italy always gives visitors from the north, that of feeling morally superior to the natives." Furthermore, the Italians' "misfortunes seemed to be the natural result of their lack of virtue and their lack of virtue, in turn, the inevitable consequence of the misfortunes" (16, 38).

However, dissenting accounts of the Italians (those of Howells and Margaret Fuller come to mind) spoke not only of the Italians' industriousness, courtesy, sociability and temperance, but also of their bravery, democratic tendencies, and potential to be free and great. Paradoxical representations abounded. One of the most striking concerned the nature of the Italian mind: Curiously, Italians were often seen as being intellectually deficient *and* remarkably witty (Baker 86-88). Overall, the Italian lower classes obviously took the brunt of the criticism. "Their strange dress, their often swarthy countenances, their superstitious curiosity gave them a forbidding aspect; and the traveler, passing through the narrow lanes of a poor country town, thought about robberies and kidnappings, fastened the coach doors, and urged the driver to hurry on," Baker writes. "The lower classes in particular were excoriated for cunning and avarice, a demeaning servility, and an insincerity of behavior" (92). These perceived deficiencies in

contemporary Italian society -- the dirt and dishonesty, the begging, the degradation of women into beasts of burden -- were often interpreted as deficiencies in Italian character, a vague attitude that would harden into racial nativism in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century America. By observing (and usually disparaging) contemporary Italian national character in its nineteenth-century guise, Americans could analyze (and, in comparison, promote) their own national character. Ultimately, many Americans, especially the most perceptive observers of Italy and Italians, maintained "a curious two-sided attitude that condemns, yet hesitates to condemn, praises and yet cannot help but disparage at the same time" (Baker 104). These multifaceted perceptions persisted throughout most of the nineteenth century. "Italy was variously seen as friend of America, land of Garibaldi, party of popular liberty and freedom, birthplace of Dante, *la mere des arts*, Italy the brave, gallant, intelligent. Yet the image of Italian people as being fickle, immoral, and decadent persisted" (Mangione 26-27). As we shall see, America defined itself and Americans often defined themselves in opposition to established, but evolving notions of the character of Italy and Italians. Again to paraphrase Said, Americans (with help from their British cousins) in a sense created Italy, Italians and their world, and in the process helped created America, Americans and their world. Throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century, Americans had found in Italy both a cultural and spiritual homeland and a stage for the aesthetic and the sensual. In the Italians of historic, heroic Italy, Americans found political and artistic soul ancestors; but

in the Italians of contemporary Italy, Americans often saw either sentimentally picturesque subjects for art or exotic "Others" who both attracted and repelled.

The social and representational equations between Americans and Italy/Italians start to change around 1880, when large numbers of these sometimes picturesque, sometimes "Other" Italians turned up in America with other southern and eastern European immigrants, and forever changed America's social fabric and challenged America's self-identity. This first truly mass migration to the United States was, even more importantly, a "new immigration" of Italians, Slavs, non-German Jews, and Russians who were not only generally poorer, less literate, and less skilled than earlier immigrants, but who also looked markedly different from the English, Scotch-Irish, German, Scandinavians, and Irish who had populated America. The recent arrivals, in particular southern Italians, were much darker-skinned than the earlier immigrants. The only earlier immigrant group that closely resembled the new immigrants was the Irish. The Irish immigrants of mid-century were non-Protestant and poor victims of the great Potato Famine, but to their immense advantage, many of them spoke English and many had some skills. The southern Italians would come to be seen as doubly alien, not only different from the earlier immigrant groups, but also different from the mostly northern Italians who had come before them. The northern Italian immigrants tended to be lighter-skinned and less poor, among them political refugees, artists, language and music teachers, opera singers, and fencing masters. The immigrants from Italy's *Mezzogiorno* were generally swarthy and, if not the poorest of the poor, many were illiterate peasants,

tenant farmers, field workers, and shepherds from rural districts and small villages. They had begun leaving Italy in large numbers when they realized that life in unified Italy was for them no better, and to some extent worse, than it had been under the oppressive Bourbon rule. Although Italian unification had created a new nation, it had failed miserably in forging a unified people. The *Risorgimento* had been a creation of the wealthier, more enlightened, more privileged North. However, unification had made little progress at incorporating the South -- Italy's "other half" -- into the modern Italian state. The new national government quickly imposed new taxes and military conscription on the South; in return, southerners transferred their hatred of the Bourbons to the new rulers in Turin (Mangione 60). Northern Italians tended to see and represent southern Italians as an inferior people, backward, apathetic, fatalistic. At the same time, with the rise of the radical cooperative *Fasci Siciliani* movement in the late 1880s, southern Italians were also seen as being lawless. Under the Bourbons, Italian lawlessness had had an element of the political, even of the heroic. But now, the Northern government characterized Southern political activism as strictly criminal activity, exaggerated it, and attributed it the Mafia. This image of the Mafia then went to justify the government's repressive policies in the South (73). Curiously, Americans themselves would adopt the northern Italians' negative attitudes toward the Southerners and apply them first to Italian immigrants in general and later specifically to southern Italian immigrants. "Anti-foreign sentiment filtered through a specific ethnic stereotype when Italians were involved; for in

American eyes they bore the mark of Cain. They suggested the stiletto, the Maffia, the deed of impassioned violence” (Higham, Strangers 90).

By the late 1880s, then, Americans could no longer ignore the Italian reality pushing through America’s “golden gates” in the form of masses of Italian economic refugees seeking a better life in the United States. If the early and mid-nineteenth century had seen the construction of a romantic, heroic, cultured Italy -- the trope that had run through the cultural pilgrimage of the Grand Tour, Margaret Fuller’s “sad but glorious days” of the Italian revolution, and the idyll of graceful *dolce far niente* life -- the century would conclude with images of hundreds of thousands of poor, ignorant, dark-skinned Italians pouring into New York and other parts of the country, in many cases willing to do work usually reserved for American blacks. These images produced a hardening of the more diffuse anti-Italian attitudes that had circulated earlier in the century. Again, American attitudes toward Italian opera are instructive. During the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Italian opera was not only criticized, but now was also suffering unfavorable comparison to German/Wagnerian opera, just as Italian immigrants were being disparaged in comparison to Germanic immigrants. Writing on America’s Italophobia in 1879, William Francis Allen spoke for his class when he said that Italians “have by no manner of means reached so high a degree of development in their art of musical composition as the Germans have,” and that the Germans “appeal to the feelings in a far higher way than the Italians” (qtd. in Levine 220). In 1884, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* announced the appearance of “another audience of the highest

cultivation and of another taste," which harbored "a significant disposition to regard Italian opera itself as a kind of Mother Goose melodies, good enough for a childish musical taste, but ludicrous for the developed and trained taste of to-day" (102). That same year, the *New York Daily Tribune* dismissed Italian opera as "the sweetmeats of the hurdy-gurdy repertory" (220).

It was the misfortune of the Italians and the other new immigrants to look for their promised land in a country then experiencing an "age of anxiety," when many native-born Americans were nervous and insecure about a whole host of perceived threats to the nation's economic, social, cultural and racial health. Throughout the land there were signs of material success, but moral panic. Americans became uncertain about their assumptions concerning progress, self-help, and equal opportunity. Before the Civil War Americans tended to see technology and mechanization -- factories, railroads, telegraph wires -- as instruments and engines of democracy and republicanism, as well as material wealth. But, as Alan Trachtenberg has shown, by the late nineteenth century technology and mechanization were being blamed for poverty, slums and wretched industrial conditions (The Incorporation 38). The pressing questions of immigration and assimilation that the new immigrants brought with them would have to be discussed in a charged atmosphere of economic upheaval and recessions, tense race, class and labor relations, and dizzying social change associated with the late nineteenth century's rapid advances in industrialization, urbanization, and communication. By the late 1880s there was a palpable separation between workers and capitalists. "And more and more, as the



industrial working class took on a distinctly 'foreign cast' with heavy immigration from Catholic and Slavic nations, the wealthy came to seem a homogenous group: white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and Republican" (79).

More specifically, the period was marked, by among other events, the Haymarket riots of 1886 and the great Pullman strike of 1894, the end of the Indian wars with the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* "separate but equal" Supreme Court ruling of 1896, and America's imperialist expansion into the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific toward the end of the century. Social reform movements and the flood of utopian writings reflected and fed the country's unsettled state and psyche. Adding to the malaise was a crisis of spirit and "the discovery of unfathomable multiplicity in the universe" (Rydell 4). As a number of scholars have shown, Americans of this period were preoccupied with ideas of nationhood *and* manhood, and were sensitive to potential threats to those still ill-defined and increasingly unstable concepts. Closely linked to nationhood and manhood was another amorphous concept, race, which was steadily acquiring a patina of scientific authority. Race theory didn't emerge full-blown in the late nineteenth century, but by then it had become a powerful, sometimes dominant discourse, stimulated by presumed empiricism, nationalism, and imperialism. By the early nineteenth century in Great Britain and the Continent, ideas about the biological basis of racial inequality stimulated a mania for the kind of racial classifications found in Cuvier's Le Regne animal, Gobineau's Essai sur l'inegalite des races humaines, and Robert Knox's The Races of Man. The work of Charles Darwin,

Herbert Spencer, and, later, the eugenicist Francis Galton helped lend a “scientific” validity to the division of races into advanced and backward, superior and inferior, us and them. The work of linguists had shown that languages might be distinct, with divisions between families of languages. If there were differences between languages, the thinking went, then there might be differences in the minds, cultures, and potentials of the language users. “Race theory, ideas about primitive origins and primitive classifications, modern decadence, the progress of civilization, the destiny of the white (or Aryan) races, the need for colonial territories---all of these were elements in the peculiar amalgam of science, politics, and culture whose drift, almost without exception, was always to raise Europe or a European race to dominion over non-European portions of mankind” (Said 232). In America also, intellectuals and ordinary citizens obsessed about the races, their differences, and, increasingly, their rankings. Samuel George Morton, the so-called father of American anthropology, had used measurements of Indian skulls to develop arguments for polygenesis, the scientific theory that claimed separate racial origins for different peoples. Morton equated differences in races with differences in species and posited the existence of “natural repugnance” between human species. Morton’s “racial rank-ordering and arguments about ‘natural repugnance’ transposes smoothly into late-century Darwinism, lent themselves as readily to eugenics, and offered ‘scientific’ evidence to popular theories that fostered racial and ethnic prejudice” (Nelson 117).

More and more toward the end of the nineteenth century, race, which was often equated with nationality, was being identified as both biological and cultural. One of the

emerging popular assumptions was that both physical and cultural characteristics were hereditary. Another was that ancestral experience made the man, that there was a link between ancestry and achievement, that heredity truly mattered. Gail Bederman and others have shown that Americans of the period obsessed over connections between manhood and racial dominance. Bederman sees this preoccupation as being played out in debates about child rearing, lynching, and the white man's imperialistic burdens -- debates, she says, that were examples of the middle class trying "to explain male supremacy in terms of white racial dominance and, conversely, to explain white supremacy in terms of white racial dominance" (4). By the end of the century, middle-class identity was being shaped by, and itself shaping, a discourse of manliness that stressed self-mastery and restraint (12). This discourse of manliness intersected with discourses on race and civilization: "Manliness was the achievement of a perfect man, just as civilization was the achievement of a perfect race" (27). At the same time there was a countervailing discourse that fretted over the possibility that excessive civilization was threatening young American men, and America itself, with weakness and neurasthenic breakdown (78). As a cure, Theodore Roosevelt and others urged, among other things, the "strenuous life." [It was Roosevelt himself who referred to the lynching of the New Orleans Italians as "a rather good thing" and boasted that he had said so publicly in the presence of "various dago diplomats" (Gambino 97)]. There were also fears that American Anglo-Saxon blood was being weakened through pollution and disease, and that the race itself was committing suicide. These concerns about national

and racial health in turn were extensions of worries about public health, cleanliness, and disease, which arose from the new “germ theory of disease” developed by Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch in the 1870s. Thus, Italians and other new immigrants found themselves plunged into a maelstrom of discourses, and all too often wearing the guise of potential or actual threat.

The turn of the century in America, then, was a complex, turbulent time, a “political fulcrum” (di Leonardo 4) during which significant “Others” -- not only the “new immigrants,” but American blacks and to a lesser extent Native Americans and women, as well -- tested American democratic ideals and notions of nationhood. Countless articles in the popular press attest to America’s soul-searching as people reacted to the “new immigrants.” Many of the articles dealt with Italians, the largest single immigrant group, most of whom were massed in New York City, the country’s communications center. *Harper’s*, *The Atlantic*, *Forum*, *The North American Review*, *The Century Magazine*, and other influential periodicals ran numerous articles with titles such as “Italian Life in New York,” “The Italians of New York,” “Italians Immigrants and Their Enslavement,” “Immigration from Italy,” “Homicides and the Italians,” and “The Black Hand Myth.” Commentators, social critics, and thought leaders asked: Were the Italians and other “new immigrant” groups polluting the American stock? Were they capable of being assimilated? And, just what did becoming an “American” entail? Some of these questions had been asked of earlier immigrant groups, but not with such urgency;

and now, some of the questions were entirely new ones, raised by the distinctiveness of the "new immigration" which was increasingly being noted by many commentators.

One overriding question emerged: Was it advisable for the country to maintain open immigration? Increasingly, beginning in the 1880s, immigration was being discussed "in terms of uncontrollable natural disasters, weakened bodies, illnesses, and quasimilitary invasions, for example, tide, stream, wave, flow, flood, torrent, tidal wave, fevers, hemorrhages, and the like" (Friedman-Kasaba 98). Not long after the Statue of Liberty was dedicated, America saw its first organized effort to restrict immigration with the founding of the Immigration Restriction League by Boston patricians in 1894. The movement had been building, and from the start targeted the new immigrants on the basis of perceived "racial" differences between them and earlier American settlers. The Immigration Restriction League's positions were essentially based on racist grounds, and throughout the writings of its members runs an evident concern with race. One of its founding members, Prescott Farnsworth Hall, drew a distinction between the "free, energetic, progressive" British/ German/Scandinavian stock and the "downtrodden, atavistic, and stagnant" Slav, Latin and Asiatic races. Hall argued that inbreeding "with the native American stock of the earlier and better immigrants who came over before 1880" would "dilute the Yankee gumption" and "pollute the Yankee blood" (qtd. in Pavalko 58). As early as 1891, in an article in *The North American Review*, Henry Cabot Lodge, the blue-blood Massachusetts congressman, was making distinctions between the common stock of older immigrants and the "new and wholly different

elements" being introduced into America ("The Restriction" 30). In the same piece, Lodge distinguishes between northern and southern Italians, depicting the Northerners as a finer population. He quotes the American consul in Rome as saying that emigrants from northern and central Italy were generally industrious, trustworthy, strong, capable, and moral, all of which could not be said of the illiterate southern Italian emigrants who came from a land of endemic brigandage (31). That same year, the economist Francis A. Walker, president of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and superintendent of the federal census from 1870-80, wrote an article titled "Immigration and Degradation," in the *Forum*, in which he blamed the "vast hordes of foreign immigrants" (643) for a reduction of America's native stock. Walker's theory -- that native-born Americans were breeding less because they didn't want their sons to socialize with or compete economically against the aliens who were willing to work for less -- was to have great currency over the next few decades. So too would his speculations concerning the distinctiveness of the new immigrants, and the two reasons he offered for the change in the nature of American immigration: First, ease of travel in the late nineteenth century required of the immigrant less "energy, courage, intelligence, and pecuniary means." Consequently, emigration tended to attract not "the more alert and enterprising" immigrants of the past, "but rather the unlucky, the thriftless, the worthless." Second, Walker said, the new immigrants came from southern and eastern Europe, where, formed by race wars and hard nature, they were least adaptable to American "political institutions and social life." Among these unadaptable immigrants Walker lists Huns, Poles,

Bohemians, Russian Jews, and *South* Italians (643-44; my italics). The patrician assault on the new immigrants continued with a May 1893 piece by Nathaniel S. Shaler, Harvard geologist and dean of the university's Lawrence Scientific School, in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Writing of "European Peasants as Immigrants," Shaler argued that the new non-Aryan, non-Germanic peasant peoples of Europe, pauperized by their armies and the (Catholic) Church, were wholly different from Americans in motives and aspirations, and represented a hardened social caste that was nearly innately impossible to Americanize on the civic front.

Edward W. Bemis, a progressive economist who lectured at various prestigious universities, had been one of the first intellectuals to propose immigration restrictions based on a perceived racial shift in immigration patterns. In a series of lectures in 1887, he called for a literacy test as a way to help native-born American wage earners by reducing the influx of the new immigrants and the low standards of living they insisted on maintaining in the New World (Higham, *Strangers* 101). Henry Cabot Lodge soon came to champion the literacy test, first as a congressman and later as a U.S. senator. For Lodge and others, the test was seen as "chiefly a means of discriminating against 'alien races' rather than of elevating American working-men" (101). In May 1891, Lodge used the lynching of the eleven Italians in New Orleans as a pretext to call for immigration restriction based on the ability to read and write a language. In a piece titled "Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration" for *The North American Review*, Lodge blamed America's open gates for the lynching. "In the present state of things, not only are we

doing nothing to protect the quality of our citizenship or the wages of our workingmen from an unrestricted flood of immigration, but we are permitting persons so ignorant and criminal to come among us that organizations like the Mafia are sure to rise in our midst," Lodge wrote. "The time has come for an intelligent restriction" (612). By 1896, Francis Walker, writing on "Restriction of Immigration" in the June *Atlantic*, characterized the immigrants from Hungary, Austria, Russia and "southern Italy" as "beaten men from beaten races." These immigrants, Walker noted, "have none of the ideas and aptitudes which fit men to take up readily and easily the problem of self-care and self-government, such as belong to those who are descended from the tribes that met under the oak-trees of old Germany to make laws and choose chieftains" (828). In January 1904, Lodge, still lobbying for a literacy test that would require all immigrants of a certain age to read the Constitution in some language, argued in *The Century Magazine* that the test would exclude large numbers of Italians, Russians and eastern Europeans, while not seriously impeding more desirable immigration from northern and western Europe. Tracing the history of America settlement, Lodge spoke of the beneficial "normal" amalgamation and blending of the primary stock of English-speaking races with Germans, Scandinavians, and French-Canadians. Having included those groups in America's native family, Lodge turns to Italian immigration, "which is one of the newest and which has advanced most rapidly." Although the Italians represent "a people with whom the English-speaking people have never before amalgamated," Lodge concedes that "even with that immigration one can say at least that they are people of the Western



civilization like our own, that there is among the northern Italians an infusion of Germanic blood, and that they present in themselves no very alarming feature" (467). If Lodge is conceding a place in Western civilization to the Italians, it is to the northern Italians only, those he would refer to as the "Teutonic Italians" (Gambino 120). It is curious that Lodge, then a member of the Senate Committee on Immigration (a designation prominently attached to his byline at the start of the article), here says nothing about the southern Italians who now comprised the bulk of Italian immigration, and whom Lodge had disparaged as inferior to their northern brethren in an article more than a decade ago. Completely passing over the southern Italians who were generally seen as a major problem -- maybe the major problem -- Lodge quickly moves on to eastern Europe, to argue that the Bohemians, Slavs and Jews were "utterly alien" both "ethnically" and "in civilization, tradition, and habits of thought" (467). In a companion piece to Lodge's article, Frank P. Sargent, commissioner-general of immigration, added this postscript: "We do not need aliens who have no regard for morality and for law and order, who in secret plan the murder of their own kindred, and whose mere presence is a menace to society" (471).

Behind these concerns about immigration, immigration restriction, and national identity lay nativist fears that mixed in fascinating ways with the Jim Crow racism of the period. During the late nineteenth century, blacks and immigrants were nearly equal victims of discrimination and violence. "Niggers" and "Dagoes" were being lynched, as was most dramatically illustrated in the 1891 lynching of the eleven Italians in New

Orleans, which was greeted with both condemnation and approbation from the American press. The New Orleans lynching was but the most dramatic involving Italians. Between 1870 and 1940, Italians were second only to blacks as victims of lynch mobs. Of the five thousand or so people lynched in American history, approximately one thousand two hundred were white, but most of those came before 1870. After 1870, Italians were the only presumptive whites to join blacks in significant numbers as lynching victims. In addition to New Orleans and other Louisiana localities, Italians were lynched in Colorado, Illinois, Mississippi, North Carolina and Florida (Gambino 135).

Being targets of nativist violence wasn't the only link between Italians and blacks during this period; there was conflation in other ways. In his article "European Peasants as Immigrants," Nathaniel Shaler drew parallels between America's failure to assimilate its African population and the likelihood that the failure would be just as complete with the new immigrants. While native-born American working men had it in them to progress up the social scale, the European peasant was a peasant by nature, who knew himself "to be by birthright a member of an inferior class, from which there is practically no chance of escaping," Shaler concludes. "He is in essentially the same state as the Southern negro" (649). Among the European peasants, the Italians were most likely to be linked with American blacks for a number of reasons. If the Italians had been considered serfs in the Old World, they were sometimes depicted as slaves with at least two masters in the New World: the American boss on the job and the Italian boss -- the *padrone* -- who played the intermediary and managed many of the immigrant's material affairs. The

*padrone* organized work gangs and obtained employment for the immigrants; he operated multi-purpose "banks" that also exchanged money, forwarded remittances to Italy, sold steamer tickets, provided notary and legal services, and dealt in jewelry and other commodities. Very often the *padroni* were unscrupulous masters, as was documented by an Italian graduate of the University of Naples who came to the United States to study the labor movement and the condition of Italian laborers. Writing in *The Forum* in April 1893, S. Merlino chooses as his subject two typical Italian immigrants -- "the peasant and his born master," the *padrone* (183). He cites a number of cases in which contract-labor bosses absconded with wages that were to be turned over to their poorer countrymen. Lost wages weren't the worst of it for some Italian laborers. Merlino writes: "There have been cases where Italian laborers have suffered actual slavery, and in trying to escape have been fired upon by the guards and murdered, as happened not long ago in the Adirondacks" (187). Additionally, because Italians took jobs that only blacks might then consider, and because Italians showed little aversion to dealing with Negroes, they consequently were classed with Negroes socially and economically. In the South, for example, Italians were the only whites to work in the fields and mills of the region's cotton and sugar plantations (Gambino 56). In some cases, Italians were sometimes seen as "black," and if not "black," then "not white." At least a few Southern schools barred Italians in an attempt to maintain the color line. In Louisiana, the Sicilians were often called "*black dagoes*," and payroll lists and other records lumped them into a separate category as neither white nor black (56-57). Italians, as we will see, also were tolerant of

blacks, even friendly with them, and occasionally fraternized with them in the evenings. The Italian's swarthy, his willingness to associate with blacks in the workplace and to some extent in social settings, and his very "in-betweenness," made him a double threat in America, one that "might endanger not only the purity of the white race but also its solidarity" (Higham, Strangers 169).

The period between 1880 and 1910, then, was one of great debate over questions of not only class, but of race and color, concepts whose definitions were in flux and the subject of intense negotiations. Obviously, questions of race and racial differences, and the assertion that they might be immutable, raised doubts about America's ability to assimilate distinctly alien races among which the new immigrants were placed. However, a countervailing theory held that race -- both as physiology and as culture -- was mutable, and that with vigorous enough Americanization efforts, the new immigrants could be successfully assimilated, absorbed by the great "melting pot" imagined in Israel Zangwell's popular play of 1908. Italians, in particular southern Italians, often found themselves near the very heart of that debate. Were Italians colored or white, or something in-between? Were the Italians (and the other southern and eastern European immigrants) separate and inferior races from the Anglo-Saxon? How did Italians compare to blacks, who themselves covered the color spectrum from the darkest ebony to "passing" white? Could Italians be assimilated, or were they like blacks inassimilable? Discussing these questions, native-born Americans in a real sense were discussing themselves and their national identity. Very much during this period, America defined itself by defining blacks and the "new immigrants." Both the state and the popular culture saw the new immigrants as belonging to races that were less than fully white. "Phrases like 'not-quite-white,' 'not-bright-white,' or perhaps 'conditionally white' more accurately describe this range of racialization" (Brodkin 60). Additionally, American

attitudes toward -- and American violence against -- blacks and foreigners raised fundamental issues with troubling questions: Was the United States truly a land of equality and opportunity for all? Just who could lay claim to being an American, and under what terms? What, finally, was an American?

It is within this cultural and historical context that I will explore how American representations of Italians and Italian Americans engaged, reflected and helped shape the United States' developing concepts of immigration, ethnicity, race and national identity during the period from 1880 to 1910. I am particularly interested in how the process of constructing the modern Italian/Italian American was part of the larger process of America constructing for itself a modern national identity for a new century. I am interested in seeing whether depictions of Italians at the turn of the century relate to the clash, beginning in the 1880s, between America's romance with Italy and the threatening reality of Italian immigrant "hordes" now pouring into New York City. The "romantic" and the "real" each had a certain power and status as reality in the discourse. In a broad sense, I will look at the American in Italy, and the romance he constructed, and engage that with the Italian in American, and the reality he imposed on that construction. While there was exchange between the two countries throughout the nineteenth century, in broad contours it expressed itself in the form of privileged Americans traveling to and writing about Italy and its people in the early and mid-century, followed by the mass immigration of Italians into the United States toward the end of the century.

This dissertation analyzes various media with a combination of so-called truthful texts and avowedly artistic, imaginative texts, including travel books, journalism, fiction, and to a lesser extent, photographs and illustrations. For the vast majority of Americans, Italy and Italians were textual constructs. As Said says, in a text “there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a *re-presence*, or a representation,” and these representations “rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects” (21, 23-24). This applies as much to a Henry James short story and travel essay as it does to a Jacob Riis report, or a pictorial representation by William Rogers or William Glackens. These various texts, working together and with others, “acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large (20). The travel accounts are important because, as William Stowe points out, American travelers used the experience of Europe (in particular Italy, I would say) to help them think about questions of race and gender, and about ways of relating to their country, to their compatriots, and to the wider world. In addition, these travel accounts were immensely popular and therefore played an important role in shaping American attitudes. The raw material of travel produced not only travel narratives and essays, but also numerous short stories, tales, and novels by artists such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Dean Howells, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Constance Fenimore Woolson, and other lesser writers. As Christopher Mulvey says, “The significance of this link between novel and travel book was not that the fictionalisation of nations and people was taking place

because the men and women writing the descriptions were novelists and short-story writers. Rather it was that mythopoesis came into place as soon as the nations and national characters were described" (8).

It will also be worthwhile to examine the literary representations of Italians in the light of corresponding images of Italians/Italian Americans found in journalistic accounts and commentary that began to appear with regularity in the late nineteenth century. The mixing of media raises issues relating to how newspapers and magazines, short stories and novels, "fact" and "fiction," contribute to the national discourse. For example, how do supposedly fictional accounts of Italians conflict with or complement supposedly factual depictions, and how does that dynamic relate to more generally-held opinions and attitudes toward Italians and Italian Americans? That question is part of a larger question concerning the origin and dissemination of racist and nativist ideologies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the role that language and different "texts" play in challenging or reproducing those ideologies.

My primary focus is on a handful of writers and reporters whose "texts" are particularly rich and charged with the questions that interest me. Taking my cue from Said, I will use close textual readings as a way to examine the dialectic between the individual text or author and "the complex collective formation to which his work is a contribution." I am motivated by the belief that "society and culture can only be understood and studied together" (23-24, 27). Chapter One looks at the reporting and



photography of the immigrant journalist Jacob A. Riis against the reporting of the immigrant journalist/academic, Edward Alfred Steiner. Chapter Two will try to take a fresh perspective on Henry James, incorporating to some extent the work of his friend and fellow Italophile, William Dean Howells. Chapter Three will deal with Samuel Langhorne Clemens/Mark Twain, and to some extent with Howells once again.

My first chapter uses Jacob Riis as a point of entry into the journalism of the period. My discussion will deal with his reportage in the classic How the Other Half Lives (1890), as well as in follow-up books such as Children of the Poor (1892) and The Battle with the Slum (1902). I will also look closely at some of the photographs associated with Riis's work. As with Henry James's work on Italians, Riis's accounts can be traced over a period of time, albeit a somewhat shorter span, as Riis transforms himself from a struggling police reporter to published author and national reformer. His own narrative of that progression, his autobiographical The Making of an American (1901), sheds light on his attitudes toward assimilation and American identity. I will read Riis against Edward A. Steiner and his On the Trail of the Immigrant, published in 1906 at the peak of the mass "new" immigration to the United States. Steiner's own autobiographies, Against the Current: Simple Chapters from a Complex Life (1910) and From Alien to Citizen: The Story of My Life in America (1914) make an excellent companion piece to Riis's The Making of an American. In Riis and Steiner, we have two men who are themselves immigrants writing about and representing other immigrants.

Both men focus to a large extent on Italians. However, and this is important, Riis, the educated Danish craftsman, was a representative of the old migration to the United States, while Steiner, a Jew from Hungary, was very much a part of the new immigration. The virile Riis found a hero in the manly Theodore Roosevelt, while the pacifist Steiner found his model of manhood in Leo Tolstoy and his Christian humanism. Both Riis and Steiner were reformers, Riis a secular preacher and Steiner an ordained minister, who spoke of Christian brotherhood, but were still imbued with the race thinking and race differentiation of their day.

Henry James, the subject of Chapter Two, has been made virtually synonymous with Italy in numerous books and articles, but the critical literature is not as extensive on James's representations of the Italians themselves. James is a particularly rich source because there is so much to choose from, both fiction and nonfiction, and much of it written over an extended period of time. My study of James will be directed primarily to The American Scene, the fascinating report on his homecoming visit to America in 1904-05. However, I will also deal fairly extensively with James's early short tales of Italy and a richly suggestive later one titled "The Real Thing"; his travel sketches from the early 1870s to nearly 1910 collected in Italian Hours; and the novel, The Golden Bowl, published in 1904, at about the time of his American visit. In these works, we encounter many Italians in Italy, an Italian prince in England who marries an American heiress, a poor Italian peasant who finds a modeling job in London, and thousands of Italian

immigrants in New York City, the New Jersey shore, Boston, and Salem, Massachusetts. James's love affair with Italy has been well documented. While he had perhaps unequaled passion for the country, his feelings and attitudes were often conflicted. We see much of that same ambivalence in his reactions toward Italians themselves. I will attempt to trace James's evolving representations of Italians, paying particular attention to shifts in those depictions when the picturesque Italian peasant on the Campagna becomes a ragpicker in the streets in the streets of New York.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens and the dualities of Mark Twain are at the center of Chapter Three. As a rising young writer, Clemens traveled through Italy with the new consumer-oriented middle-class pilgrims on the *Quaker City* cruise to the Holy Land in 1867, which he reported in dispatches to a California newspaper and later turned into The Innocents Abroad (1869). However, Clemens isn't generally acknowledged as having had much to say about Italians beyond the observations in The Innocents Abroad. And judging from both his public and private writings, we don't get a sense that immigration and nativism were uppermost among his social concerns, although there are exceptions when he does take up these themes. However, two Italian immigrants, twins no less, play what has usually been mistakenly dismissed as a tangential role in one of Twain's most curious, and certainly richer works, the hybrid Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins (1894 first American edition). If The Innocents Abroad gives us another version of Henry James's Italians in Italy, but now seen through Twain's unique

lens, Pudd'nhead Wilson gives us Angelo and Luigi Capello in Hannibal (now called Dawson's Landing), in a tale that entangles these immigrant twins with "black" and "white" infant changelings, slavery, murder, and American politics. Most critics have read Pudd'nhead Wilson from the perspective of black and white relations, and within the context of the racial discourses of the 1890s. However, the novel and the attached sketch clearly, if not consciously, engaged with the nativist discourse of the decade, the very discourse that made possible the lynching of the eleven Italians in New Orleans at about the same time that Twain was writing Pudd'nhead Wilson in the early 1890s. True to his own dual nature, Twain's treatment of the Italian twins points to various dualities in America's perceptions of and attitudes toward Italians.

James and Twain knew each other and had mutual friends, most prominently William Dean Howells. Steiner apparently was familiar with Riis's work. However, beyond these connections and perhaps others more tangential, these writers came from different class or ethnic backgrounds and had different social and literary agendas. Furthermore, their emotional and practical connections with immigrants and immigration varied greatly. However, all engaged with the immigrant issue, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, sometimes with purpose, sometimes not. Taken together, they both support and critique some of the different discourses surrounding immigrants and immigration from the period 1880 to 1910. In their depictions of Italians and Italian Americans, these writers engage with existing discourses, sometimes carve

out new positions within these discourses, and often point to some of the discursive developments of the decades to come. I do not suggest that James, Riis, Steiner, and Twain are representative of their age, but they are a relatively diverse group who left behind rich textual sources that reveal some of their and their country's cultural and personal assumptions about immigration, race, assimilation, culture, and civilization, topics that were at the very heart of the American experience around the turn of the century. As diverse as these four men were, they are connected by a complex relationship with the concept of home. Two are American immigrants and two are native-born Americans who spent much of their lives in Europe. Jacob Riis and Edward Steiner leave their native homes for good, looking for and ultimately finding new homes in America. They know, finally, where home is. Henry James's identity was in great measure shaped by the question of home. Was home America or England? Did his homecoming resolve the issue, or did he die not knowing where home really was? The intensely American Twain spent many years away from home but seems never to have forgotten that America was home, even if at times it didn't seem like much of a home. The final twist here is that many Americans, like James, found a cultural and spiritual home in Italy, while many, many more Italians came to America either to find a new home or to find the economic wherewithal to ultimately return home to Italy.

## Chapter I

Jacob Riis and Edward Steiner:

### Immigrants Old and New and the Making of Americans

“The Italian comes in at the bottom, and in the generation that came over the sea he stays there.”

-- Jacob Riis, 1890

“It was their home. They were children of the dump, literally. All of them except one were Italian.”

-- Jacob Riis, 1892

“The Italian is very fertile in inventing excuses for the purpose of evading the law, and his ethical standard in that direction is extremely low.”

-- Edward Steiner, 1906

“The Italians were from the South of Italy and had lost the romance of their native land but not the fragrance of the garlic.”

-- Edward Steiner, 1906

In his chapter, “The Italian in New York,” in How the Other Half Lives, the journalist and pioneering photographer Jacob A. Riis begins with a discussion of the

transformation of the Italian immigrant as he makes his way from the Old World to the New. Riis notes that the Italian immigrant forms a “picturesque, if not very tidy, element” in New York City’s burgeoning population. By 1890, when How the Other Half Lives was published, the stream of Italian immigration was indeed threatening to become a flood, and that flood most threatened New York City, according to Riis. The Italian, he says, “claims so large a share of public attention, partly because he keeps coming at such a tremendous rate, but chiefly because he elects to stay in New York.” Once ensconced in the tenements of New York’s Lower East Side, the Italian “promptly reproduces conditions of destitution and disorder which, set in the frame-work of Mediterranean exuberance, are the delight of the artist, but in a matter-of-fact American community become its danger and reproach” (43). According to Riis’s reasoning, the Italian is equally picturesque in both the Old World and the New, equally romantic whether in a Campagnan field or a Manhattan alley. This implies that any change in the Italian during transplantation isn’t so much of something in the Italian himself, but rather in his relationship to his environment and in how that relationship is perceived. In Italy, in “the frame-work of Mediterranean exuberance,” that is, in its “natural” environment, the Italian’s “destitution and disorder” could be naturalized, aestheticized, framed within the artist’s canvas or the travel writer’s prose sketches. Thus contained, this destitution and disorder is a fit subject for artistic delight, as it had been for the countless American writers, artists, and amateur sketchers who had traveled to Italy in the nineteenth century, including Henry James and Mark Twain. Riis himself, having not yet been to Italy, knew

of this delight only secondhand, through America's entrenched vision of picturesque Italy and the images of Italy as poor and chaotic which had been circulating in America for at least a century.

Riis, however, was more directly acquainted with Italians in New York, where transplanted into the context of American "matter-of-fact" practicality and reality, these same destitute and disorderly Italians become something other than benign. Their very picturesqueness, while still quaint, exotic and seductive, becomes both a menace and a rebuke to American character and American progress. Here in America, the Italian is still a subject for the illustrator and the sentimental travel writer who venture into New York's Lower East Side to produce colorful sketches and articles for magazines such as *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* and *The Cosmopolitan*. However, the Italian now is also a subject for the documentary photographer and the journalist and, perhaps more importantly, a "problem" for the social scientist and the reformer. In Italy, then, the Italian is the stuff of cultural romance; in New York, although still picturesque, still colorful in his dirt and disorder, he is a threatening, if provocative, reality.

Riis's dichotomy is a neat one in that it schematizes commonly-held contradictory attitudes toward the Italian at the turn of the century. For many Americans, Italy still was the land of art, history, culture and romance. However, for many of those same Americans, Italy was now the distrusted source of the hundreds of thousands of picturesque, but dirty and menacing, Italian peasants pouring into a New York City ill-equipped to handle, absorb, or assimilate them.



Riis's reaction to and interpretation of the Italian's attractive yet threatening reality are curiously contradictory, and in their contradictions are representative of large segments of American society during the decades surrounding the turn of the century. In his writing about the Italians and other immigrant groups, Riis melds stereotypes and sympathy into a seemingly straightforward, but far from simple, commentary. His written and photographic representations, journalistic in their mix of the concrete and the general, are of particular interest for a number of reasons. Riis himself was an immigrant who later in life wrote a very popular autobiography tellingly titled, The Making of an American. Riis's commentary on the new immigrants becomes even more interesting when read alongside and against the work of another immigrant journalist, Edward A. Steiner, whose On the Trail of the Immigrant appeared sixteen years after Riis's How the Other Half Lives. Steiner himself would write his own autobiography of assimilation, From Alien to Citizen: The Story of My Life in America. Broadly speaking, Riis, a Scandinavian Protestant, and Steiner, a Hungarian Jew, represent the old and the new immigration to America, a distinction that many commentators would etch into the American consciousness. The experiences of these two journalists and their writings on the new immigrants, when examined together, offer sometimes contradictory, sometimes complementary commentaries on the nature of the Italian (and other new) immigrants, the prospects for their assimilation, and what it meant to be and become an American around the turn of the century.

Jacob August Riis was both a typical and an atypical immigrant. In brief, Riis was born in 1849, in the ancient town of Ribe in southwest Denmark, into “a homogenous, family-centered, industrious Lutheran society, with only mild manifestations of class divisions” (Stein 10). Riis’s father taught Latin and Greek at a centuries-old preparatory academy and occasionally did part-time editorial work for the local newspaper. The father envisioned a literary career for his son, but the young Riis instead became a carpenter. He worked for a time in Copenhagen, where he seemed not to have noticed the poverty and overcrowding of the capital city. Finding himself unemployed, with his marital suit for a young woman rejected by her foster father, Riis, hearing of golden opportunities in America, left Denmark in 1870 on the steamer *Iowa*. According to one biographer, “The very things he loved most, the rustic simplicity, unchanging traditions, and bucolic peacefulness, conflicted with his restless spirit and thus lured him to another country where he could satisfy his drive” (Lane 14). Riis himself would say that it was James Fenimore Cooper’s novels that “first set my eyes toward the west” (qtd. in Lane 10). (Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales would also help shape Steiner’s early images of America.) Riis landed at Castle Garden in New York on June 5, where he found little of Cooper’s imagined America. In 1870, New York was half provincial capital and half world capital, a city on the brink of an incredible demographic transformation. By 1890, the year How the Other Half Lives was published, New York would have one and a half million people, forty-three percent of whom were foreign-born and one million-two hundred thousand of whom had foreign parentage.

During his first seven years in the New World, Riis, according to his The Making of an American, lived on the edge of poverty, tramping in and around New York, at one point ending up in a police lodging house. He did odd jobs and pursued odd schemes, becoming in succession a roustabout, laborer, salesman, and reporter for small newspapers. Through it all, he maintained his stubborn pride and unwavering optimism. "I had a pair of strong hands," he writes in The Making of an American, "and stubbornness enough to do for two; also a strong belief that in a free country, free from the dominion of custom, of caste, as well as of men, things would somehow come right in the end, and a man get shaken into the corner where he belonged if he took a hand in the game" (35-36). He apparently survived with the help of values that had been formed in Ribe: religious faith, moral rectitude, respect for education, reverence for the family, cleanliness, orderliness, and rationality, all with an undercurrent of rebellious anger at the world for falling short of his dreamy utopianism. In The Making of an American, Riis claims little credit for hating the slum, for who could love it. "When it comes to that, perhaps it was the open, the woods, the freedom of my Danish fields I loved, the contrast that was hateful," he writes. "I hate darkness and dirt anywhere, and naturally want to let in the light. I will have no dark corners in my own cellar; it must be whitewashed clean. Nature, I think, intended me for a cobbler, or a patch-tailor. I love to mend and make crooked things straight" (423-24). Two things happened in 1887 that would dramatically alter his fortunes. A neighbor's recommendation got him a job as a probationary reporter for the *New York Tribune* (at which time Riis also began writing for the Associated

Press). And, in the spring of that year, Riis read a four-line dispatch from Germany announcing the discovery of flashlight photography. He was unhappy at the *Tribune* and was thinking about quitting, when the paper's police reporter resigned and the beat was given to Riis. He was assigned to police headquarters on Mulberry Street, a main immigrant artery, and the rest is history worthy of Horatio Alger. Riis began making nighttime photographing forays into the tenement districts with a friend, Dr. John Nagle, an enthusiastic amateur photographer and chief of the city health department's bureau of vital statistics. On January 25, 1888, armed with one hundred slides of photos taken in New York's slums, Riis delivered a lecture, "The Other Half -- How It Lives and Dies in New York," before the Society of Amateur Photographers. He then wrote up his experiences in a news report, "Flashes from the Slums," for the February 12, 1888 *Tribune*. The next year he expanded the report into an article for *Scribner's* that included nineteen illustrations based on the photographs. Within a year, the eighteen-page magazine piece had become a book with forty-three illustrations, including fifteen halftone photographs. A critical and popular success, How the Other Half Lives launched Riis's career as a journalist, lecturer and reformer. Curiously, he stopped taking photographs nearly as abruptly as he had started taking them. "I had use for (photography), and beyond that I never went" (Making 265).

Riis tells the classic rags-to-respect story, and more, in his unorthodox autobiography, The Making of an American, which is by turns guileless and shrewd, idealistic and realistic, egotistical and disarmingly candid. In it, Riis takes most pride in

his Americanness and in his work as “a reporter of facts” who loved his fellow-man (424). The book, first published in 1901, received favorable reviews and enjoyed great popular success, selling out two editions in three weeks. Readers responded enthusiastically to the immigrant boy-makes-good saga and embraced the book’s love interest: the story of how Riis first lost but later won the hand of his wife, Elizabeth. Riis’s wife herself wrote part of the book and briefly achieved celebrity status. High schools and colleges used the autobiography as a text book. And years later, during Riis’s 1909-10 cross-country lecture tours, variations of “Making of an American” comprised one of three standard addresses in his repertory. At those lectures, Riis nearly always asked the audience to join in the singing of “My Country Tis of Thee.” “Riis wanted his autobiography to provide a lesson in how a poor immigrant could find a useful place in American society if he had a strong will, proper values, steadfast purpose, and an abundance of faith. Strong moral purpose could help the rootless newcomer conquer the certain failures which he would face” (Lane 155). Riis’s autobiography was the prototype for numerous immigrant success stories “which turned the process of assimilation into a romantic quest” (Stein 10). To this rhetorical end, The Making of an American engages in mythmaking not unlike that found in Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography, or, to cite two more contemporary immigrant autobiographies, Mary Antin’s The Promised Land (1912) and The Americanization of Edward Bok (1920), by the longtime editor of the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. These autobiographies, which can also include Steiner’s less well-known From Alien to Citizen, all “read the hardness of American life as a

vindication of American idealism, equality, and upward mobility” (Fried 19). As Riis concludes in The Making of an American, “I dreamed a beautiful dream in my youth, and I awoke and found it true” (441). In his own time, Riis became part of the American hagiography of the self-made man. Riis’s colleagues and contemporaries saw him as he saw himself, as an exemplar of the self-made immigrant (Fried 23). When Riis died in 1914, the image was embedded in the popular consciousness, even if Riis was soon forgotten until interest in him resurfaced in the late 1930s. At the time of Riis’s death, a reporter for the *Outlook* expressed the general sentiment in writing that “No man has ever more vitally and faithfully expressed and interpreted the American Spirit than Jacob A. Riis. . . .” (qtd. in Fried 23).

As drawn by himself and his biographers, Riis’s life is a morality tale of complete assimilation, unabashed patriotism, and nationalism verging on jingoism. In quick measure, Riis becomes a star police reporter, lecturer, writer, photographer, reformer, confidante of Theodore Roosevelt, and national treasure. And just like Franklin, Riis ultimately gets the girl after an initial spurning. It’s a tale, obviously, much different from the stories of those immigrants who would eventually serve as the foundation for not only Riis’s assimilation, but also for his fame and prominence. In large measure, then, Riis writes about the immigrants from the privileged perspective of a successful, fully assimilated journalist, even if memories of his rough early years in America were still fresh in his mind. Additionally, his middle-class northern European roots immediately placed him in a separate category from the masses of lower-class southern and eastern

European immigrant groups who comprised the vast majority of New York's "other half." Riis had distinct advantages over the typical "greenhorn": a solid educational background, a skilled craft, and some proficiency in English. "More superficial but no less important were his Northern European looks" (Stein 10). As James B. Lane has written, Riis's native beliefs and values had more in common with native-born Americans than with the ethnic groups that constituted the so-called new immigration from southern and eastern Europe. His rudimentary knowledge of English and skilled trade gave him tools which most of these new immigrants did not possess. Although he was an immigrant who himself experienced poverty, Riis came from a middle-class background and shared most of the values of his middle and upper class audience. It is perhaps telling that although Riis's autobiography mentions other immigrants he meets during his early years in America, in a later chapter tellingly titled "The American Made," he attributes much of his success to the friendship and inspiration accorded him by a Who's Who of the American philanthropic, religious and journalism establishment. In marked contrast, Steiner's From Alien to Citizen cites numerous other immigrants who help him and teach him lessons, both positive and negative. Riis also rarely acknowledges the distinct advantages he had over the new immigrants. Sally Stein argues that this "implies a racism which from the outset closely coincided with the nativist ideology of nineteenth-century American society" (10). But having said that, Riis's relationship to the immigrant groups he depicts in How the Other Half Lives and subsequent works is a complex one that both reflects and challenges general attitudes

then current in broad areas of American society. It is in the context of these often conflicting attitudes that I propose to examine Riis's representations of the new immigrants in general and of the Italians in particular. Riis comes at the immigrants from a number of different perspectives and for that reason serves as a particularly rich source on questions of American identity and national character, assimilation, and attitudes toward the Other at the turn-of-the-century. "He invariably asked what the character of the American city was and what the future of an American society would be. His questions implicated almost every nativist fear about the transfiguration of the American city by the immigrant and the impoverished" (Fried 13).

By the time Riis began writing about and photographing the poor and the immigrants -- and in many ways these two groups were by now nearly synonymous -- the slum dweller and the foreigner were already a topic of strong interest for police reporters, photographers, novelists, true-crime writers, muckrakers and social reformers. There already existed an established tradition of urban literature within which Riis could work. Magazines had treated urban poverty subjects but generally took their cue from "bohemian" European artists who praised the glories of the simple peasant life. Influenced by *nostalgie de la boue* -- or nostalgia for the mud -- they depicted a world of fictional, happy, picturesque urban peasants (Hales 185). William A. Rogers, an artist for *Harper's*, was a leading exponent of the picturesqueness of poverty throughout the 1880s and 1890s, producing in 1879 his iconographic *Ragpickers' Court*. Before Riis turned his attention to the subject of police lodging houses, *Harper's* had already published



illustrations of police station house lodgers in 1869, as well as sketches of station houses and opium dens by Winslow Homer in 1874 (Stange 11). *Harper's Weekly* dealt specifically with the immigrant population, undertaking a series of illustrated articles on "The 'Foreign Element' in New York City" the same year that How the Other Half Lives was published. Rogers' illustrations for the series depicted the immigrants as hard-working, proud, and self-sufficient, if somewhat down-trodden, often bent under some heavy load they carry: a large bowl in "A Wedding in the Chinese Quarter---Mott Street, N.Y.," huge layers of garment piecework in "The Slaves of the Sweaters," and loads of belongings in "In the Italian Quarter---Mulberry Street on a Winter Evening." The illustrations provided a sympathetic, humanizing counterpoint to articles that sometimes carried a more negative tone. For example, "In the Italian Quarter," which appeared on October 18, 1890 (819), shows Italian immigrants trudging through a narrow snow-covered street, presumably refugees from a tenement fire detailed in the far background. The stolid men push forward with their suitcases, satchels and bundles, framed by a fruit cart on one side and a flower seller on the other. An older man leads the march, carrying a shovel over his shoulder in rifle fashion. He could be an officer leading his men off to battle. The illustration -- at once bathetic, picturesque and persuasive -- is, as Hales says, a muted adjunct to the accompanying essay, which takes a more cold-eyed view of the Italians. The article describes the Italians as the most clannish of immigrant groups. The Italian poorer class are depicted as lacking in ambition and "destitute of the self-reliant spirit common to every American and to most all foreigners" (817). It describes two

distinct classes of Italians: the fairer complected northerners who are enterprising and “full of energy” in the French mode, and the “swarthy sort” southern Italians who are “by no means slow to anger, and who repel an insult with a thrust of the stiletto.” These Neapolitans and Sicilians are “inclined to the philosophy which finds its highest expression in loafing and lying at one’s ease.” Unlike their northern cousins, the poorest (read southern) Italians are vocational failures “simply because they are too ignorant to rise from the social slough of despond in which they find themselves” (818). While praising the poor Italians’ honesty and hard work, the article offers this faint and damning praise: “But let us do justice to these poor people . . . . The poorer class of Italians are ignorant, but they are not *all* lazy or bad. They are keenly grateful for any kindness that is shown them, and most of them are not mentally vigorous enough to be evil” (819). The comment is indicative of certain attitudes toward the Italians at this time, many of which would be echoed by Riis. By italicizing the word “all,” the article implies that *most* Italian immigrants *are* lazy and bad. This assessment is also curious in the distinction it makes between bad and evil. Most Italians are bad, it implies, but they are not evil because they are not smart enough to be evil.

In addition to magazine articles, books such as George Foster’s New York by Gaslight (circa 1850), Matthew Hale Smith’s Sunshine and Shadow in New York (1869), Edward Crapsey’s The Nether Side of New York (1872), James D. McCabe Jr.’s Lights and Shadows of New York Life; or, the Sights and Sensations of the Great City (1872), and Charles Loring Brace’s The Dangerous Classes of New York, and Twenty Years’

Work among Them (circa 1872) testify to the hungry market for glimpses of the city's other half. By the 1880s, the press and popular literature had established the literary convention of an urban landscape so fragmented, so alien, as to turn quarters of the city into "another country." Although Riis would claim that his title, How the Other Half Lives, was original, pure inspiration on his part, "'the other half' was not least among a battery of well-worn tropes evoking 'nether' regions that presented an 'excursionist' with scenes so alien, forbidding, or disgusting that they required the mediation of journalists or artists" (Stange 17). As recently as June 20, 1884, the term "the other half" had been used in a caption for a sketch that appeared on the cover of *The Daily Graphic*. The drawing by artist Fernando Miranda illustrated the widening gulf between the classes, a topic then being discussed by the 1884 New York Tenement House Commission, which Riis covered. The illustration, titled "Summer Days," depicts the bifurcated lives of two segments of American society, a small bourgeois family at a seaside resort and lower-class tenement dwellers on a filthy city street. The two scenes are divided by a diagonal line. In the upper half, a nuclear family -- mother, father, and one daughter -- is relaxing on a terrace at a Continental seaside resort. The mother reclines on a hammock, reading a book, while a servant fans her and serves the family refreshments. The father sits smoking and reading the newspaper. The child holds a basket, perhaps having come from collecting seashells. At the bottom of the orderly scene is some luggage: a hatbox, a satchel, and a steamer trunk with the word "Europe" written on it. In the lower "other half" of the illustration, we have a group of people, mostly women and children, crowded

into a tight, untidy tenement street scene, with laundry hanging from the buildings. Juxtaposed against the luggage of the upper half is an overflowing trash barrel. The caption for the illustration reads: "Summer Days. One man's joy is another man's poison, and half the world knoweth not how the other half liveth."

Increasingly, through the second half of the nineteenth century, the city was being seen as an icon, a symbol of menace, mystery, darkness and shadows, a place in need of light and reason. The city was a text to be deciphered, comprehended, demystified. The menace was found in poverty, crime, threat of insurrection, political corruption, and physical dangers such as exploding gas mains and inflammable wires. Newspapers increasingly began to explore these forbidden and threatening spaces, making spectacle of the nether "other half." Riis and other reporters increasingly began styling themselves as performers who ventured into alien territory to bring back personal tales of the dark underside. Tracts such as Brace's The Dangerous Classes of New York, Josiah Strong's Our Country: Its Possible Future and Present Crisis (1886), and Samuel L. Loomis's Modern Cities and Religious Problems (1887) focused on the malaise associated with booming, increasingly industrialized large cities such as New York, with its crowding, intricate divisions of space, and stark contrasts between rich and poor. Strong's Our Country, portions of which appeared in newspapers and magazines and sold 175,000 copies before 1916, "mirrors the thoughts and aspirations" of the dominant Anglo-Saxon Protestant segment of American society towards the close of the nineteenth century (ix). A Congregational minister, Strong ostensibly was compiling facts in support of American

home missions, but his book vigorously argues the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, while identifying alleged perils such as the city, Romanism, and immigration. Strong says of immigrants, "So immense a foreign element must have a profound influence on our national life and character. Immigration brings unquestioned benefits, but these do not concern our argument. . . . The typical immigrant is a European peasant, whose horizon has been narrow, whose moral and religious training has been meager or false, and whose ideas of life are low" (52-53). Brace, Strong and Loomis all saw the rising tide of immigration with concern and emphasized the sinful and devious aspects of urban life. The realities of the city made it "relatively easy to view New York's slum population as an uneasy mob given to violence and anarchy. American letters, often drawing upon biblical images of the fallen city or upon the hope of a New Jerusalem, made it possible and popular to see the city as divided. One half was dark, resistant to Christian virtue and unamenable to social control and order; the other half dwelt in light and was propertied, stable, virtuous, and domestic" (Fried 31). Fearful of losing touch with and control over the "other half," organizations of the privileged half sought ways to ward off the dangers. The urgency of the situation was evident in the speeches delivered at the Christian Conference, which Riis attended, in Chickering Hall in New York in early December 1888. This meeting "of all denominations of religious faith," Riis says, was held "to discuss how to lay hold of these teeming masses in the tenements with Christian influences" (Other Half 2). However, speakers "discussed how the 'foreign' element was responsible for vice and crime, how the non-Anglo-Saxon was resistant to assimilation,

how a rising Catholic populace contested the hegemony of American Protestant mores” (Fried 33).

Brace’s The Dangerous Classes best typifies the charity writing that would to some degree influence Riis’s work. It focussed on the miserable living conditions in the slums (the overcrowding, filth, extremes of heat and cold, lack of air and sunlight) and the ills of the urban poor (crime, beggary, disease, disorder, dissolution of family life). At the same time Brace proposed redeeming Protestant virtues (cleanliness, industry, order, temperance) as the solution to these social problems. Riis takes up the same subjects and employs many of the same tropes found in Brace. Like Brace, Riis combines anecdote and statistic, generalizes about ethnic and racial groups, compares immigrant groups, and invokes the immigrant homelands in contrast to the New York slums. While influenced by Brace and the religious groups that sponsored his lantern-slide lectures, Riis has usually been seen as part of a reform movement that had begun to challenge traditional moral descriptions and moral analyses that attributed poverty to individual vice (Gandal 8). This new reform movement was more apt to offer an environmental explanation for poverty and vice. Riis’s own reforming nature had expressed itself at an early age. He would later recall that as a twelve-year-old, on a Christmas Eve, he gave a poor family in his native Ribe about twenty-five cents to clean up its dirty home. Riis attributed his more mature reform impulses to his professional contacts with members of the New York Board of Health. “His genteel, reform-minded acquaintances there shared his disgust for machine politics and his fear of a burgeoning, anarchistic, contagious slum tide. Part of

the growing group of middle-class technicians who would manage the legislative fiats of the coming Progressive Era, they had a faith in science, reason, progress, and the cultural superiority of Anglo-Saxon institutions," James B. Lane writes. "Energetic, moralistic, sentimental, nationalistic, and above all optimistic, Riis was confident that the rational and scientific control would set the conditions for a world of harmony by allowing the spirit of goodness that was in all men to flower" (35, 4). This standard view of Riis sees him as an enlightened moral and social crusader, but one who didn't always rise above the racial and ethnic stereotyping of his day. "Riis justifiably could be chided for his occasional exaggerated characterization of some groups in the polyglot populations of New York," Alexander Alland Sr. writes in his admiring biography, Jacob A. Riis: Photographer & Citizen. For Riis, the Chinaman is stealthy, secretive, and scrupulously neat, the Jew is obsessively thrifty, the Negro is sensual, superstitious and loyal. Riis's stereotypes, however, carry no malice, Alland argues, including as they do traits both positive and negative. Ironically, it was the stereotypes that supplied the local color that made How the Other Half Lives readable -- and perhaps so popular (Stein 13).

Racial stereotypes, many of them plunging to the level of racial slurs to some late twentieth-century eyes, permeate Riis's assessments of the five ethnic/racial groups to which he devotes separate chapters in How the Other Half Lives: the Italians, Chinese, Jews, Bohemians, and blacks. By devoting discrete chapters to the national idiosyncracies of each ethnic neighborhood, Riis not only perpetuated racial stereotypes but also "reassured the reader by picturing the "other half" as perfectly atomized. The general

subject was not only more easily apprehended according to ready categories but also more easily contained given the evident internal divisions” (Stein 13). If the various ethnic/national groups were all subsumed under the rubric of the “other half,” it was a half that was further divided into discrete parts whose differences are played off each other. For example, Riis says that “the Teuton” is clearly the one immigrant who “resists most stubbornly [the slum’s] levelling tendency [and] knows how to drag even the barracks upward a part of the way at least toward the ideal plane of the home . . .” The Italian and the Jew, on the other hand, “rise only by compulsion,” while the Chinaman “does not rise at all” (22). Other examples of comparisons between ethnic/racial groups will become apparent in my discussion of Riis’s treatment of the Italians.

The Italians, not surprisingly, are the first group Riis treats in detail in How the Other Half Lives. The chapter, “The Italian in New York,” comes after an earlier chapter, “The Mixed Crowd,” in which Riis speaks of “this queer conglomerate mass of heterogenous elements” who have followed the Irish in settling the tenement districts of the city, where the reader will seek in vain for a “distinctively American community” (19). However, if Riis speaks of the “heterogenous” elements that make up the city’s “mixed crowd,” when looked at individually these elements are seen by Riis as homogenous. Rather than refer to the Italians, the Chinese, etc., Riis consistently deals with each group in the singular -- the Italian, the Chinaman, etc. -- thereby implying a certain homogeneity and a certain distinctness in each national/racial group. Using the



singular case allows Riis to essentially essentialize each group into a type; in essence, it serves as a shorthand for stereotyping the various groups, who can then be compared and contrasted to each other.

Riis is both attracted to and repelled by the Italian and the Italian's neighborhoods. Both the Italian and his environment is depicted as colorful and chaotic. This is crystallized in a short passage about Mulberry Bend, an Italian quarter, which conflates the Italian's picturesqueness and his violent streak. By linking these two qualities, Riis makes of the Italian the target of both the tourist and the police. "Red bandanna and yellow handkerchiefs are everywhere; so is the Italian tongue, infinitely sweeter than the harsh gutturals of the Russian Jew around the corner. So are the 'ristorantes' of innumerable Pasquales; half of the people in 'the Bend' are christened Pasquale, or get the name in some other way," Riis writes, before oddly segueing from Pasquale the restaurant owner to Pasquale the murderer. "When the police do not know the name of an escaped murderer, they guess at Pasquale and send the name out on alarm; in nine cases out of ten it fits" (52). Riis's contradictory responses to the Italian continue throughout How the Other Half Lives. Riis's Italian, if colorful, is destitute, disorderly, and dirty -- and he doesn't seem to mind his degraded condition. With regard to cleanliness, the Italian is seen as immensely inferior to the Negro but on a par with the Polish Jew, with whom he comprises "the lowest of the whites" (116). This theme of the dirty, disordered Italian echoes Charles

Loring Brace's depiction of the Italian in The Dangerous Classes. Describing an Italian neighborhood, Brace writes:

Here, in large tenement-houses, were packed hundreds of poor Italians, mostly engaged in carrying through the city and country 'the everlasting hand-organ,' or selling statuettes. In the same room I would find monkeys, children, men and women, with organs and plaster-casts, all huddled together; but the women contriving still, in the crowded rooms, to roll their dirty macaroni, and all talking excitedly; a bedlam of sounds, and a combination of odors from garlic, monkeys and the most dirty human persons. They were, without exception, the dirtiest population I had met with. (194)

Riis is influenced by this theme and expands it. The Italian gravitates naturally to such slums, according to Riis, and where he doesn't find a slum, he creates one, "if allowed to follow his natural bent, which is to come in at the bottom, and, at least in the first generation, to remain there" (43). The image of the Italian as a natural slum seeker and slum creator is emphasized elsewhere. "Gotham Court has been the entering wedge for the Italian hordes, which until recently had not attained a foothold in the Fourth Ward, but are now trailing across Chatham Street from their stronghold in 'the Bend' in ever increasing numbers, seeking, according to their wont, the lowest level" (32). The trope here is of water seeking its lowest level, but in the case of the Italians, it is *dirty* water seeking the lowest level. The size of the "Italian hordes" are such that they force the city officials to rework their standards for overcrowding. Not only are the Italians capable of surviving with less space than other slum dwellers, they don't seem to mind the cramped conditions. "Under pressure of the Italian influx the standard of breathing space required for an adult by the health officers has been cut down from six to four hundred cubic feet"

(56). The Italian, in fact, seems a negative influence wherever he goes. Rather than improve the Negro neighborhoods of New York, the advent of the Italian has little beneficial effect and in some ways only exacerbates the situation. Where the Negro, the Italian and the tramp from the Mulberry Street Bend meet on Thompson Street, "the mingling of the three elements does not seem to have wrought any change for the better." What results instead is "the aptly-named black-and-tan saloon," the "border-land where the white and the black races meet in common debauch," creating what "has always been the worst of the desperately bad. Than this commingling of the utterly depraved of both sexes, white and black, on such ground, there can be no greater abomination" (119). The depiction of the Italian as a slum-maker is intriguing in that it runs counter to Riis's environmental explanation for poverty and vice. In the case of the Italian, it is not the slum that degrades the individual and creates the abject slum dweller, as How the Other Half Lives generally argues, but rather the individual race that creates the slum, simply by following its "natural bent." This is an important distinction in that it implies that the Italian is not only different from, but also a much more fundamental problem than, the Chinaman or black. Riis seems to be saying that the latter can be taken out of the slum and be redeemed, whereas you can take the Italian out of the slum but you can't take the slum out of the Italian. However, later in the book, in the chapter "What Has Been Done," Riis qualifies this assessment, saying that tenants "are only satisfied in filthy and unwholesome surroundings because nothing better is offered them." When something better is offered, he says, we see a great improvement in both their physical and moral

health. As an example, Riis compares a new model tenement in the Mulberry Street Bend to the barracks across the way that he spoke of in the chapter on the Italian. "The Italian himself is the strongest argument of all," Riis concludes. "With his fatal contentment in the filthiest surroundings, he gives undoubted evidence of having in him the instinct of cleanliness that, properly cultivated, would work his rescue in a very little while" (218).

For all his disorderliness and degradation, the Italian is docile, Riis says. "In the slums he is welcomed as a tenant who 'makes less trouble' than the contentious Irishman or the order-loving German, that is to say: is content to live in a pig-sty and submits to robbery at the hands of the rent-collector without a murmur" (43). The Italian is, above all, an uncomplaining victim of the *padrone* system, trusting in his unscrupulous countryman "with the instinct of utter helplessness." In addition to his passivity and submission, qualities antithetical to the American values of energy, industry, and individualism that Riis admired and emulated, the Italian is a slow learner, unable to write his native language, ignorant of any English, and devoid on any instinct or desire to learn. "The man is so ignorant that, as one of the sharpers who prey upon him put it once, it 'would be downright sinful not to take him in.' His ignorance and unconquerable suspicion of strangers dig the pit into which he falls" (43). Ignorance here translates into helplessness, which in turn runs counter to the American virtues of individual strength, self-reliance, and initiative that Riis valued so much. Even more un-American is the Italian's lack of interest and faith in education, particularly in learning the English language. Here again, Riis plays the Italians off against other national/racial groups, with

interesting results. “Unlike the German, who begins learning English the day he lands as a matter of duty, or the Polish Jew, who takes it up as soon as he is able as an investment, the Italian learns slowly, if at all” (43). Encoded in this comparison are important racial/national distinctions that go beyond the ability to learn to a willingness to learn, as well as to the motivations that drive that willingness. The comparison sets up a hierarchy of learning. The Italian is at the bottom; he is lacking in both the ability and the desire to learn English. The Polish Jew begins to learn as soon as he is able because he sees the English language as an investment. He is motivated by his utilitarian business sense: learning English will help him make more money, which is a worthy American pursuit, even if the grasping Jew takes it to extremes. The German, who is most like Riis and most like the Anglo-Saxon American, has not only the most aptitude for the English language, but also the best, most American motivation. If the Polish Jew learns for commercial reasons, the German learns for civic reasons, out of a sense of duty toward his new homeland and a desire to make himself a better citizen. In this hierarchy, then, the Italian is the most un-American, far inferior to the northern European Teuton and also below his fellow “new immigrant” Polish Jew.

And yet, the Italian, docile and ignorant as he is, “applying the maxim that it is not what one makes but what he saves that makes him rich, manages to turn the very dirt of the streets into a hoard of gold.” Curiously, Riis says, the Italian, “who in his own country turns beggary into a fine art,” in New York comprises but two percent of the city’s squad of street beggars. This compares favorably to the twelve percent comprised

by the native-born American, the fifteen percent by the Irishman, and the eight percent by the German. On this score, the tenement “has no power to corrupt the Italian, who comes here in almost every instance to work” (194). In general, the Italian finds his gold in recycling the bones, rags, and tin cans of New York’s ash-barrel, which, Riis says, has become “the exclusive preserve of the Italian immigrant” (44). “Whenever the back of the sanitary police is turned, he will make his home in the filthy burrows where he works by day, sleeping and eating his meals under the dump, on the edge of slimy depths and amid surroundings full of unutterable horror” (44). However, even this example of individual Italian initiative is tainted by the fact that whereas the Italian was formerly an “independent ‘dealer,’” he is now simply a laborer in a gang controlled by the corrupt, rapacious *padrone* (44).

As we have seen, Riis’s Italian in How the Other Half Lives is docile and submissive. Generally he is quite manageable, “easily enough governed by authority,” except on the Sabbath, “when he settles down to a game of cards and lets loose all his bad passions.” He is, like the Chinaman, “a born gambler. His soul is in the game from the moment the cards are on the table, and very frequently his knife is in it too before the game is ended” (44). This is a curious characterization in that it equates bad passions with the Italian soul, both of which are directed toward gambling on the very day that should be devoted to matters of the spirit. Furthermore, these bad passions are expressed through the use of a knife that the Italian keeps concealed on his body. Just as the Negro has his “razor in his boot-leg” and the Chinaman his “knife in his sleeve,” so too the Italian has

his "stiletto in the bosom" (119). The Italian alone among the new European immigrants keeps a concealed weapon, which becomes a symbol of not only violent, but of an underhanded character characteristic of two "Other" groups, the blacks and the Chinese. Riis himself apparently had no argument with *unconcealed* weapons. Having just landed in New York, he made it his "first business to buy a navy revolver of the largest size," investing in the purchase exactly half of his capital. "I strapped the weapon on the outside of my coat and strode up Broadway, conscious that I was following the fashion of the country." A friendly policeman quickly advises Riis that the weapon was better left at home, where there was less chance of it being robbed. Riis puts the revolver away, secretly relieved to be rid of it -- because it "was quite heavy to carry around" (The Making 38-39). However, Riis needn't have worried about being attacked by an Italian immigrant. For, as he says, if the Italian is violent, his violence is directed at his own kind. Justice, too, is the Italian's alone. The Italian crime victim will not cooperate with the police, but instead "wards off all inquiries with a wicked 'I fix him myself,' and there the matter rests until he either dies or recovers. If the latter, the community hears after a while of another Italian affray, a man stabbed in a quarrel, dead or dying, and the police know that 'he' has been fixed, and the account squared" (Other Half 47). Only the Chinese, Riis says, are more adept at putting up obstacles to police investigations (82).

"With all his conspicuous faults," Riis concludes, "the swarthy Italian immigrant has his redeeming traits. He is as honest as he is hot-headed." He may have been a brigand in Italy, and his son may occasionally resort to pick-pocketing in the New World,

but generally “the ex-brigand toils peacefully with pickaxe and shovel on American ground” (47). He might murder one of his own over a card game, but his worst offense is keeping the stale-beer dives that contribute to dissolution and vice. In short, the Italian is “gay, light-hearted and, if his fur is not stroked the right way, inoffensive as a child.”

The Italian women, meanwhile, “are faithful wives and devoted mothers. Their vivid and picturesque costumes lend a tinge of color to the otherwise dull monotony of the slums they inhabit” (47). However, despite the Italian woman’s faithfulness as a wife and her devotion as a mother, the Italian family itself falls short in the domestic sphere upon which Riis attached so much importance. Dirty and degraded but devoted, docile but volatile but *not* hot-headed, ignorant but hard-working, the Italian at bottom is not one to listen to America’s siren song of upward social mobility. “Were the question raised who makes the most of life thus mortgaged, who resists most stubbornly its levelling tendency -- knows how to drag even the barracks upward a part of the way at least toward the ideal plane of the home -- the palm must be unhesitatingly awarded the Teuton,” Riis writes, echoing numerous other voices of his time. “The Italian and the poor Jew rise only by compulsion” (22). Certainly, Riis appears to have little hope for the Italian as he is presented in the text of How the Other Half Lives. The Italian’s faults and shortcomings are many, and his so-called virtues -- his docility, manageability, and lightheartedness, as well as his tendency to keep his violence strictly intramural -- aren’t the type of values that could contribute to American national character and American progress. If the Italian was a hard worker who surprisingly eschewed beggary, his



industry and the profits of his labor, his very ability to turn dirt into gold, seem pointless because they aren't translated into the American dream of social mobility. Only the Italian woman is given untainted, unqualified virtues, and these, not surprisingly, are the decidedly middle-class American values of devotion and faithfulness. However, these virtues aren't enough to make the Italian immigrant family capable of rising above the slum tide, of overcoming a natural tendency to seek and cling to the lowest level. Nearly as important as the Italian woman's faithfulness and devotion are her "vivid and picturesque costumes," the (local) color she adds to an otherwise drab scene.

Obviously, Riis's written descriptions of the Italians and other immigrant groups in How the Other Half Lives aren't his last words on the subject. That text and others are complemented by half-tone photographs and/or illustrations of photographs associated with Jacob Riis. Riis also used photographic images in the lantern-slide lectures that he delivered to church charitable groups and middle-class audiences. All three modes of communication -- written text, illustrations/photographs, oral address -- were used effectively by Riis, whether consciously or unconsciously. Separately, and together, they offered him powerful, yet flexible vehicles for diverse rhetorical strategies. How the Other Half Lives itself offered something for nearly everyone, as the *New York Evening Sun* pointed out: statistics for the social scientists, suggestions for the charitable worker, stories, anecdotes, photographs and free-hand sketches for those seeking primarily entertainment. The paper's reviewer inventoried the contents of the book "as if he were strolling through that archetypal nineteenth-century site of consumption, the department

store” (Stein 14). The photographs and lantern slides offered radically new ways to represent reality. If nothing else, as Susan Sontag has said, photographs altered and enlarged the public’s idea of what is worth looking at and what it had a right to observe, making of the photographs “a grammar and, even more importantly, an ethics of seeing” (3). How the Other Half Lives was the first American book to include snapshots of the slums, and perhaps the first book on any subject to feature a large number of half-tone reproductions from photographs (Gandal 64). In large measure it was the small grainy photos that helped make the book an instant success. The reviewers, keen to this, paid a lot of attention to the photographs (65). The *Chicago Times* called How the Other Half Lives “a book of immense, shuddering interest,” a “gallery of pictures, each one reeking with horror of its own kind” (qtd. in Stein 14), while the *Detroit Journal* ignored the content of the photos, and in a fit of hyperbole called them little more than an aesthetic feature that made the book a bibliophile’s deluxe collector’s item, “a beautiful octavo” with “original and other photographic illustrations” (qtd. in Stein 14). Only one reviewer, writing for the *Critic*, made any effort at seriously critiquing Riis’s photographic work. Riis’s book, the critic said, “is literally a photograph, and as such, has its value and lessons, but also its serious limitations. There is a lack of broad and penetrating vision, a singularly warped sense of justice at times, and a roughness of vision amounting almost to brutality. The ‘Heathen Chinee’ and the Russian Jew fleeing from persecution in his own land finds no mercy in Mr. Riis’s creed” (qtd. in Stein 15). This surprisingly harsh reviewer is on target, but only half right. The photographs generally associated with Riis

lack, as we will see, both a unifying theme and a unifying style. They are alternately rough and soft, brutal and sentimental, merciless and sympathetic.

Any study of Riis's photography is a risky endeavor because Riis the photographer is even more problematic than Riis the writer. A number of photographs attached to him were in fact taken by other people, but we do know that he experimented with the medium and made a number of images. Was he the pioneering prototypical documentary photographer that modern critics have tried to make him, or was he little more than an amateur hit-and-run shooter, as a revisionist essay by Sally Stein argues? In The Making of an American, Riis assumes the persona of a bumbling photographer, but this may have been a sly attempt to present the photos as "unrehearsed and unstaged confrontation with the raw grit of a previously hidden world" (Hales 193). Riis may have been a bumbler technically, but he seemed to have some understanding of photography's technical powers. He sensed that photographs would have a power beyond the reach of his writing, that the camera might be mightier than the pen (and the drawing) in his crusade against the overcrowded tenements and lodging houses. In The Making of an American, he recalls a midnight expedition with the sanitary police to a lodging house. "When the report was submitted to the Health Board the next day, it did not make much of an impression--- these things rarely do, put in mere words---until my negatives, still dripping from the dark-room, came to reinforce them. From them there was no appeal" (273). Riis also was aware of the gloomy expressiveness of his underexposures, as was the case with the first pictures he took at Potter's Field (271). Peter Hales argues that Riis

-- his professions of “bumbling photographer” to the contrary -- manipulated and distorted the medium to shock and terrify his middle-class Victorian audience into a complete and active commitment to social justice and economic reform. Riis knew that photographs had the power to arouse their emotions, make them uncomfortable, threaten their world view as no other medium could. Exaggerating the effects of flash, Riis’s photographs made everything dirtier, more crowded, more chaotic; using “jagged-edge” framing, Riis packed the photo with people, things, and visual details that threaten to burst from the frame and overwhelm the viewer (Hales 194, 197). “Riis’s plan -- to terrify his audience with a vision of the most apocalyptic sort of chaos, threaten their worldview, then offer them a logic which replaced their lost fantasy but demanded activism in return -- was masterfully successful” (202). One indication of this success was the reported reaction of his lecture audiences, some of whom fainted, cried, and talked back to the lantern-slide screen.

But it is obvious that Riis’s photographs, lectures, and written reports had an element of arm-chair tourism and voyeurism for the audiences. It is a telling, if not the salient feature of Riis’s photography, as Stein argues, that many of the images are of subjects “caught off guard: asleep, unaware, doped up, dead drunk, or possibly dead” (10). A newspaper reporter in Iowa, having heard Riis in December 1900, gave insight into Riis’s popularity and success. “There is in each human breast an insatiable desire to go slumming. The lecture was an opportunity to visit the holes in the great American city . . . and at the same time to be free from contamination” (qtd. Lane 152-53). Riis himself

was aware of this particular attraction, telling an interviewer in 1888, "The beauty of looking into these places without actually being present there is that the excursionist is spared the vulgar sounds and odious scents and repulsive exhibitions attendant upon such a personal examination" (qtd. in Stange 16). But, if Riis himself went slumming, he did it often with health department officials or policemen. And so some critics see a subcurrent of surveillance and control in the Riis's photographs. Marin Stange, challenging the traditional view of Riis as pioneer social documentarian who combines verisimilitude and humanitarian ideology, questions whether Riis intended to distinguish "his" photographs from the type of photographic surveillance employed by his good friend, New York police superintendent Thomas Byrnes. "The idea of photography as surveillance, the controlling gaze as a middle-class right and tool, is woven throughout Riis's lectures and writings. Not only did Riis make use of others' surveillance photography, and deploy the insiders' humor that affirmed its power, but he also, and quite consistently, valued his own images in similar terms" (Stange 23). According to Stein, "Riis was radically expanding on that already developed state practice, the criminal directory, by taking the apparatus into the street and, by implication making it a criminal offense merely to live in poverty" (14). Stein argues, too dogmatically, that Riis maintained photographic distance, collapsed individual figures into their environment, and rarely used photographs in which the subject was composed enough to return the glance of the photographer. "The subjects of his photographs had good reason to feel and look defensive. They were temporarily blinded not only by an explosion of artificial light

but also by this new form of preemptory authority against which they were completely unprepared” (14). In another twist, Keith Gandal argues that Riis offers an alternative ethic to Protestant morality. With his shameless photographs, pursuit of the exotic at the expense of privacy and cleanliness, and praise of and faith in the tough, Riis is challenging (if unwittingly), rather than extending, middle-class control (9). Gandal is correct in noting that Riis, while judging the Italian on moralistic terms and sanitary criteria in the manner of charity writers such as Charles Loring Brace, also judges them on new grounds: their appearances, customs, and colorfulness. As one of the first connoisseurs of urban filth, Riis found the Chinese too clean, too private to be attractive. “Likewise, Riis is willing to overlook the dangerous filth and crowding of the Italian streets for the sake of entertainment. What is good for traditional morals and Americanization -- cleanliness and privacy -- is bad for sight-seeing. And what is bad for Protestant virtue -- filth and crowds -- is good for viewing pleasure” (79). Obviously, the larger implications here are that Riis and other so-called Americans were attracted to the colorful, exotic Italians for the very qualities that were anti-Protestant, anti-Anglo-Saxon, and, by extension, anti-American. Some of those things that made the Italians a fit subject for spectacle -- their dirt and disorder -- at the same time disqualified them for assimilation into American society.

Critics, in their zeal to categorize Riis as a sympathetic social reformer, urban tourist, or master of surveillance, fail to note the variety of the images he took and/or used, and their differences with regard to subject matter, point of view, and stylistic and

formal qualities. Consequently, these critics fail to see that Riis, whether “bumbling photographer” or conscious manipulator of the medium, used a conflicting, often contradictory variety of photographs that reveal elements of the reformer, the voyeur, and the policeman who is both attracted to and repelled by what he sees. As Sontag says, photographs redefine reality “---as an item for exhibition, as a record for scrutiny, as a target for surveillance” (156). The Riis photographs serve all those purposes. They exhibit the camera’s capacity for both subjectivizing and objectifying reality, and for defining reality as spectacle for the masses and as object of surveillance for the rulers (178). In the case of the Riis photographs, the camera made exotic things near and intimate, and helped the audience take possession of space in which they were insecure (167, 9). The heterogeneity of the Riis photographs is one of the reasons for the “lack of broad and penetrating vision” that was criticized in the *Critic’s* early review of How the Other Half Lives. The individual photographs’ inherent chameleon-like qualities are another. Ultimately, the meaning of particular photographs is unstable, resistant to efforts to secure meaning. Looking for a consistent vision and approach, Riis’s twentieth-century critics make broad generalizations that may apply to individual photographs but simply do not do justice to the body of photography associated with Jacob Riis. Some of the photographs are sympathetic portraits, such as that of the Italian woman in “In the home of an Italian rag-picker, Jersey Street” (Dover edition of How the Other Half Lives 45), while others are little more than police mug shots, such as “Typical toughs (from the Rogue’s Gallery) [burglar and thief]” (170). Some of the human subjects are caught off-

guard and frozen at a distance, as in “Lodgers in a crowded Bayard Street tenement --- ‘five cents a spot’” (58), but others are fully cognizant of the photographer and even seem to welcome him, as in “Fighting tuberculosis on the roof” (127). Some of the photographs exaggerate the crowding and chaos, which threaten to burst through the “jagged-edge” and overwhelm the viewer, as in “Tenement-house yard” (33); however, others photos are more spare and ordered, and draw the viewer into the frame, as in “Vegetable stand in ‘the Bend’” (220). Furthermore, these images appeared in a variety of formats and in a variety of contexts, and sometimes carried different titles and captions. Each context suggests a different use and each caption provides an interpreted meaning, but neither context nor caption can secure meaning. Ultimately, these photos have “the plurality of meanings that every photograph carries” (Sontag 106, 109). If photographs cannot themselves explain anything, as Sontag says, they remain an “inexhaustible invitation to deduction, speculation, and fantasy” (23).

It is in that spirit that I will look at a few of Riis’s “Italian” photographs. Together they show some of these different approaches, as well as this instability of meaning that I have been discussing. For the purposes of this dissertation, I identify as Riis photographs any images found in the Riis Collection at the Museum of the City of New York, one hundred of which are reproduced in the 1971 Dover Publications edition of How the Other Half Lives. Unless otherwise noted, the titles I use are taken from this edition. As the editors of the edition point out, some of the titles are based on captions from the original publications in which the photos appeared, while the others are based on captions



provided by the museum. Many of the Riis photographs are of subjects linked to Italians by the American imagination: the Mulberry Bend, stale-beer dives, ragpicking, ash cans and garbage dumps. However, only four pictures in the Dover edition are clearly labeled as specifically Italian subjects. They are: “Feast of Saint Rocco, Bandit’s Roost, Mulberry Street”(42), “In the home of an Italian rag-picker, Jersey Street” (45), “Pietro learning to write: Jersey Street” (46), and “Boys from the Italian quarter with a ‘Keep off the grass’ sign” (139). A fifth photograph, “Vegetable stand in ‘the Bend’” (220), while it carries a generic title, is clearly of an Italian quarter, as the signs on the buildings make clear.

“Vegetable stand in ‘the Bend’” is interesting for several reasons. Unlike some of the dirty, dilapidated, crowded street and alley scenes, this photo has a sense of stability and order, with a clean cobblestone street and a small group of people -- men, women and children -- gathered around a modest, but relatively neat vegetable stand on a sunny day. The sidewalk vegetable stand is in front of a row of buildings housing a U.S. Post Office substation and two Italian banks, which seem to speak of stability and permanence. Judging from the impressive, attractive signs for the banks, they are not fly-by-night operation or one of the ubiquitous *padrone*-run “banks” (Riis’s quotation marks) that “hang out their shingle as tempting bait” to immigrants in search of steamship tickets, jobs, or places to save their money (Other Half 52). It is curious that the text of How the Other Half Lives makes no mention of Italians as legitimate bankers with a stake in the community, but instead identifies the Italian banker as an unscrupulous *padrone* waiting

to take advantage of the poor immigrant (43). Perhaps the two banks pictured in “Vegetable stand” are in fact *padrone*-run, but they clearly appear to be prospering. And although the text of How the Other Half Lives typically identifies Italians as rag-pickers and operators of stale-beer dives, only in passing does it say that the Italian scavenger “is fast graduating into exclusive control of the corner fruit-stands” (20), which is borne out by the photograph. “Vegetable stand” also seems to counter Riis’s revolting descriptions of Italian markets with their “frowsy weeds,” “stale tomatoes,” “oranges not above suspicions,” “slimy, odd-looking” fish, “[b]ig, awkward sausages,” and “decaying vegetables” (50). In the case of this photo, then, text and visual image are, if not directly contradictory, also not complementary. It is perhaps telling that the photograph, which was taken by an *Evening Sun* photographer identified only as Collins, apparently was never published by Riis.

If “Vegetable stand in ‘the Bend,’” absent its Italian signs and the woman in a large shawl, could be a photograph of any working-class district of New York, “Feast of Saint Rocco” is more conventionally exotic. Taken by the *Evening Sun* photographer Collins for an article, “Goodbye to the Bend,” which appeared in the newspaper on May 25, 1895, the photograph is a straight-on shot down a stone-paved alley. The viewer is funneled down the alley to a makeshift shrine resting on a table. Although it is in the background, the shrine is a commanding presence -- bathed in a shaft of sunlight, framed in white sheets and tablecloth, and fronted by tall white candles. The interior of the altar, which has what appears to be a depiction of Christ the King, is recessed, in partial

shadow, with a hint of mystery. Lining the alley, as if arranged to provide clear sight lines to the altar or even allow a passage through, are groups of people, most of them in shadow. To the right, in the middle-to-far distance, are two young girls and an older woman, the former by far more visually prominent. The girls' heads are bathed in light and the girls are turned toward the shrine. To the left of the alley are five people, three boys and a man arranged along the wall of a building and a woman sitting or standing at an open window. All are in dark shadow, the man a mere silhouette in the distance. While the woman appears to be looking toward the altar, the three boys and the man all seem to be facing the camera. One of the young boys commands the foreground, looking directly at the camera. All the people in the photograph seem to be wearing their best feast-day clothes.

Compositionally, "Feast of Saint Rocco" recalls "Bandit's Roost," which also was used in the same 1895 *Evening Sun* article. The "Bandit's Roost" image is one of the most famous of the Riis photographs. It appeared as a half-tone in How the Other Half Lives and The Making of an American, and was regularly included in Riis's lantern-slide shows. "Feast of Saint Rocco" and "Bandit's Roost" are both shot straight up an alley, with figures arranged along both sides of the passage. But where "Feast of Saint Rocco" guides the eye toward the sun-drenched shrine, "Bandit's Roost" discourages the viewer from dwelling on the far distance, which ends in a low wooden wall, beyond which there is nothing but a washed-out, almost phantasmagoric vista of hanging wash. The wash on the clotheslines can be interpreted as a shrine to cleanliness. In How the Other Half

Lives, Riis calls the clothes-line the “true line” between pauperism and “honest poverty,” and equates the “effort to be clean” with the “desire to be honest” (41). If the grainy black-and-white half-tone of “Bandit’s Roost” has an undercurrent of menace, a hand-colored lantern slide of the same image reveals bright sunlight on the alley’s cobblestones and diaphanous colorful laundry in the background, softening the scene and making it more picturesque. And yet, both the black-and-white and the colored images of “Bandit’s Roost” are less inviting than “Feast of Saint Rocco.” “Bandit’s Roost” says observe from a distance -- or proceed with care. “Feast” says come in. In “Bandit’s Roost,” the eye focusses on three groups of individuals, about a dozen people in all, and all without exception staring straight at the camera. To the left of the alley, two men stand on a stoop and a woman peers out of a window in the middle distance. Further down the alley stands a man behind what looks like a pile of dirt. Because of the perspective or the way the photo is arranged, the man appears to be freakishly small. At the right of the alley, in the middle distance, two men sit on the railing of a stoop, with what appear to be a young man and an older woman leaning out of a window. In the foreground, most imposing of all, are two men, one with a wary look in his eyes, the other holding what appears to be a beveled stick or double-barreled pipe against the ground. The people are variously dressed in a motley array of jackets and hats. The bearded man with the stick or pipe wears the clothes of a laborer, heavy baggy pants and oversized boot shoes. The smooth-faced man next to him has on a coarse three-piece suit and bowler hat. Unlike “Feast of Saint Rocco,” which draws the viewer in, inviting him to physically walk down the alley,

“Bandit’s Roost,” with its hint of menace, has the effect of keeping the viewer out or, conversely, of tempting an imaginative approach with its fascinating promise of danger. Venturing past the two sentinel-like figures, the viewer must squeeze through the gauntlet of the two stoops in the middle-distance, maneuver the dirt pile, slip past the midget-like man, and then only to arrive at a walled dead-end, rather than at a shrine. On the other hand, the sentinel in “Feast of Saint Rocco” is a small boy, hands in his pocket, with a facial expression that appears neutral, if only because his eyes and mouth are obscured by dark shadows. The two photographs both complement and contradict each other. Both are of Bandit’s Roost, but one repels (or lures in), while the other seems to attract on a more benign level, or at the very least appears neutral. One offers a motley array of figures, of seemingly mixed nationalities and races, defensively staking their territory; the other photo features an apparently decently dressed and fairly-well scrubbed homogenous group of Italians gathering for a feast day, a bit of local color that Riis would write about years later for *The Century Magazine*.

In the article, “Feast Days in Little Italy,” which appeared in the August 1899 issue of *Century*, Riis would praise the Italian’s colorful religious festivals because they symbolized hope, family, and a unified community -- even if that community was fragmented through fierce ties to one’s native village and the patron saint of that village. “To the Italian who came over the sea the saint remains the rallying-point in his civic and domestic life to the end of his days,” Riis writes. “[T]he saint means home and kindred, neighborly friendship in a strange land, and the old communal ties, which, if anything,

are tightened by distance and homesickness” (494). What Riis (and others) sometimes criticized as Italian clannishness here is more sympathetically characterized as community. The positive influence of the festival is underscored in an anecdote in which an Italian immigrant explains about the saint to Theodore Roosevelt, then president of the New York police board, who was with Riis visiting the festivities. “‘He is just-a lik’-a your St. Patrick here,’ he said, and the president of the Police Board nodded. He understood” (493). However, this fealty to village and patron saint also has its negative side. If there is bloodshed in Little Italy that doesn’t involve a card game, police detectives do not haphazardly search the Bend for “the man with the knife. They find out to what village he belonged, and . . . which other village is its pet enemy” (494). Riis is also attracted to the feast days not only for their picturesqueness, but for the initiative they show on the part of the Italians. On feast days, all the tenement sheets are stretched over the sheds and outhouses to cover their ugliness and “cheap muslin draperies, a little tinsel, and the strange artistic genius of this people” transform the tenement fire-escapes into beautiful balconies (491, 493). Riis recalls that one of his few pleasing memories of the Bend was seeing Bandit’s Roost -- “the vilest of the slum alleys” -- lighted in honor of St. Rocco. “It made a very brave show, and, oddest of it all, not a displeasing one. . . . Perhaps it was the discovery of something in the ambitions of the Bend that was not hopelessly of the gutter that did it” (495).

The photo, “Feast of Saint Rocco,” and the article, “Feast-Days in Little Italy,” can be seen as signs that perhaps some Protestant Americans were overcoming their fear

and hatred of Catholicism. If nothing else, "Feast of Saint Rocco" brings Catholicism out into the open air and out of the shadows, if not entirely. It depicts religion as not only a force for good, but religion as culture and that culture as colorful and exotic, a form of entertainment not only for the Italians themselves, but more importantly for the native American spectator. Much like the Irish Catholic immigrants who came before them, Italian Catholic immigrants were feared and distrusted by native-born American Protestants who saw them as superstitious idol-worshippers subservient to the awesome power of the Pope in Rome. However, the Italian Catholics also faced discrimination from the more established Irish-American Catholics. The Irish had little desire to share power in the church with the Italian immigrants. They saw the Italians as sinfully anticlerical because they had sided with Garibaldi against the papacy, among other reasons. While the Irish generally revered their clergy and adhered strictly to official liturgy and doctrine, Italian Catholics, especially those from the south of Italy, had little respect for priests, mixed peasant folk beliefs with formal Catholicism, and celebrated a more intimate and joyous religion. Some Irish-dominated churches "sat the Italians with blacks in rear pews. Others told worshipers bluntly that they were not wanted and even denounced them as 'Dagoes'" (Mangione 327-28). The Protestant churches, meanwhile, saw the Italian Catholics as dirty, sensual, violent sinners in need of conversion. "Every major Protestant denomination joined the battle for converts, with increasing expenditures in money, time, and energy. Wherever there were Italian settlements, they waged their evangelical mission---under tents, in settlement houses, churches, and

missionary centers” (330). Because Italian men were seen as being indifferent to all religion, most of the early efforts were directed at Italian women.

As we have seen in How the Other Half Lives, Riis’s attitudes toward Italian women were generally somewhat more positive than those toward the men. “In the home of an Italian rag-picker, Jersey Street,” another fascinating photo (attributed to A.D. Fisk), appears to follow that line. It takes the viewer inside a tenement, but the perspective -- although drastically shortened -- follows nearly the same sight lines as “Feast Day” and “Bandit’s Roost.” The photograph is shot head-on, and the walls of the room, like the walls of the buildings in the alley of Bandit’s Roost, funnel the viewer toward the back wall, at the center of which sits a woman, cradling a baby. To either side of the woman, against the back wall, are a large wooden barrel and two piles of sacks. A straw hat hangs from the otherwise bare back wall, directly above the woman’s head. Along the side walls are a door, a wood stove, large metal tubs, a wooden ladder, and a dust pan. The overall effect of the photograph seems to run counter to many of Riis’s other interiors, which are often cramped, ill-lighted, almost chaotic, with the subject matter spilling out against the frame. This one is much different. The lighting gives the room a more open feeling. There are very few obscured areas and the few shadows are not pronounced. The bareness of the floor and plaster walls balance whatever clutter there might be. The clutter, most of it behind the woman against the far wall, is contained, ordered. Are the grimy sacks filled with rags? We might presume so, but it is interesting that here, in the home of a rag-picker family, not one rag is clearly visible. And if the



room isn't clean, for how could it be with its ingrained grime, it is relatively tidy, with few signs of litter and dirt of more recent origin. The handy dust pan and the nearby scrap of litter indicate a never-ending battle against dirt, but it is a battle in which the Italian seems to be holding his -- or, to be more precise, her -- own. Compared to the numerous chaotic, crowded and dirty street scenes in the Riis collection, this room, for all its harshness, has an element of order, if not tidiness.

The woman in the photo is sitting and wears a large coarse soiled apron. She is very swarthy, as is the papoose-like child she cradles in her lap. The woman appears to look older than her presumed years. Her eyes gaze upward, away from the camera, but if she doesn't engage with the camera, neither does she recoil from it. Unlike many of Riis's subjects, she doesn't appear to be caught off guard by the photographer. She is neither asleep, unaware, nor otherwise incapacitated. What is in her look? Fatigue, resignation, the vaunted Italian fatalism? Piety, devotion, dullness? The viewer will read what he wants into the woman's look. Some critics have seen in the photo a secular slum "Madonna and Child" along the lines of the famous Renaissance versions. There is certainly some of that in the pose and in the tilt of the mother's face. Consequently the woman becomes a figure of great sympathy, even if the sympathy is of a sentimental variety, a sympathy that pities without truly attempting to understand the reality behind the woman's need for pity.

The photo's rhetorical work does not, however, end there. The title on the glass plate negative identifies the image as "Italian mother and her baby in Jersey Street." But

the caption in the December 1889 *Scribner's Magazine* article, "How the Other Half Lives," and in first edition of How the Other Half Lives, where the image appeared as an illustration by Kenyon Cox, was "In the home of an Italian rag-picker, Jersey Street." It is an important distinction. The caption focuses attention beyond the mother-and-child iconography to the idea of home, even while specifically identifying the woman as the wife of a rag-picker, the quintessential Italian occupation for Riis. This room is in a tenement building, maybe in a slum neighborhood, but despite that it is a home, not simply a room. I don't think the term is being used facetiously here. Although the family is identified as ragpickers, we see no signs of their work, other than the sacks which may contain stored rags and the big metal tubs which may be used to wash the rags. If work has invaded the home (something the middle-class Riis deplored), at least in this home it hasn't taken over, but instead is contained. It might be argued, however, that there are no visible signs of domesticity in the room, other than the woman and child, of course, and the straw hat on the wall, which can be seen as a sign of the missing husband (off at the dump?). That, I think, is the point: it is the woman, her love and her sacrifice for her child, that makes the home. That, and the order the woman has imposed on the space, serve as a counterweight to the obvious poverty. The woman is one of the "faithful wives and devoted mothers" that Riis praises in his chapter on the Italian. It is this woman, and women such as her, who makes the home a site of domestic order, a force for civilization. We are reminded that rather than exclude the Chinaman, Riis would instead force him to bring his wife to America to keep him from being "a homeless stranger among us" (Other

Half 83). In this way, Riis is making “the increasingly common suggestion that a family would lead to a *home*, an investment---literally and figuratively---in the nation, which would motivate the alien’s Americanization” (Wald 247).

Ultimately, “In the home of an Italian rag-picker” seems to express an undercurrent of optimism that was often a part of Riis’s outlook. A bit of daylight is shining into the rag-picker’s hovel. There is a door in the picture, but it is in shadow, a door that only leads to another tenement room. The real escape is up the ladder, the ladder of upward mobility, the photograph seems to imply. It is only by rising above the slum that escape is truly possible. One of the necessary first steps is to instill a sense of domestic order and devotion. But, having done that, will the Italian climb that ladder? Here Riis is more equivocal. Although the woman gazes upward, she doesn’t look directly at the ladder. In fact, she might just as well be looking heavenward, thinking of escape into the afterlife, or even imagining a return trip to Italy. Much of the family’s fate will depend on the husband, the ragpicker himself who is missing from the photo. Just as the woman who, through her devotion and domesticity, has turned herself into something more than a ragpicker’s wife, the ragpicker himself must, through industry and social mobility, make of himself more than a ragpicker content to continue picking rags. For all his admiration for women, Riis knows that in America it is the man who must have ambition and initiative. However, whether the Italian is capable of leaving the bottom behind, and how that move upward is related to the larger question of assimilation into American society, remain question marks, especially in light of Riis’s remark that the

Italian, unlike the German, rises only by compulsion. One thing is clear: to become an American is to leave the slum-like ghetto behind; and to escape the tenements means to cultivate American middle-class virtues of domesticity, self-reliance, industry, initiative, and progress. Riis himself says as much in his book, The Peril and the Preservation of the Home (1903), where he argues that “the vitality of our Republic” depends on the preservation of the home: “[U]pon the home rests our moral character; our civic and political liberties are grounded there; virtue, manhood, citizenship grow there. We forget it to our peril. For American citizenship in the long run, will be, *must be*, what the American home is” (13, 24).

“Pietro learning to write: Jersey Street” introduces the father and young son who were missing from “In the home of Italian rag-picker, Jersey Street.” Whether this man is in effect the rag-picker husband is irrelevant; as a companion piece, it completes the family introduced in “In the home.” Compositionally and rhetorically, “Pietro learning to write” appears to be a much simpler photograph. Here, a father and son fill the frame of the photograph. They are seated on wooden chairs at a small wooden table, their upper bodies framed by a white wall. To the back of the man is a dark closed window. The man and the boy face each other at one corner of the table, but they do not look at one another. The boy has both his hands resting on a notebook, with one hand holding a pencil. His hands appear to be deformed. The boy’s eyes are averted from the page, glancing off to the side of his father; his mouth and chin are pursed, giving the appearance of a boy in thought. The boy is fresh-faced and clean, but a large hole has been eaten out of the

elbow of his sweater. Like his father, he wears a vest, and also appears to be wearing a tie. The swarthy father wears a soft-brimmed hat and has a long pipe resting at the corner of his mouth. One of the man's large hands rests flat on a small dog-eared notebook, nearly covering it; his other hand is clenched on top of his knee. Like the boy, the man is bent forward, but he seems to be staring off into space, his eyes downcast, resigned, nearly blank. The corner of the room where they sit is bare and relatively uncluttered, but what look like crumpled papers lie on the floor under the table, perhaps dropped there by the boy.

The photograph, which appeared in Riis's second book, The Children of the Poor (1892), is a curious one that creates a rather ambiguous impression. It has an optimistic caption in that book: "Pietro learning to make an English letter." Thus, young Pietro is shown here presumably learning to write English, learning to use the language of America as a necessary first step toward escaping the poverty of tenement life and assimilating into American society. But Pietro is also having a hard time of it. The crumbled papers at his feet might signify false starts and missteps. He isn't actually writing now, although he has pencil in hand and at the ready just above the paper. If he is thinking about the task at hand, it is an activity that is producing little pleasure for Pietro. He sits at the edge of his chair, tensed, hunched over his notebook. His set, down-turned mouth and scrunched up chin speak of hard work, a difficult task. Will Pietro learn to write English? Is Pietro capable of becoming an American? These are the questions that the photograph poses. And what is the role of the father here? Although the father

appears fatigued, his posture and the notebook under his hand would indicate that he is not simply taking his rest at the table after a hard day of picking rags or digging ditches. His look is detached and dull, with little sign that he is engaging with his son. If the son is learning to write English, then his father most likely has nothing to teach him, since it is unlikely that the father speaks much English, much less writes in that foreign language. Given the fact that many Italian immigrants of the period were illiterate in their native language, as Riis himself points out, chances are the father cannot write even in Italian. There is the possibility that the father is actively learning to write English, just as his son is doing, but that too seems unlikely. Even if he had the inclination to learn, would he have the time or energy following his long day's work? And would he have the ability, given Riis's contention that the Italian "learns slowly, if at all"? The caption makes no mention of the father learning to write, and, more importantly, he apparently has no pencil with which to write. The photograph seems to be saying that young Pietro, and young Pietro only, will maybe rise out of abject poverty to become an American, and that he will do it through schooling, which like the home is an important tool of Americanization for Riis. Pietro's father will be at his side, but ultimately the father, rooted in the past and in Old World customs, habits and backwardness, will never complete the entire journey that his son may make. The photo can also be seen as an image that touches on how assimilation challenges, even threatens patriarchal structures and familial continuity: here the father cannot lead, much less follow.

However, this reading of the photograph is undercut by Riis himself in a brief reference to the photo, now called "Pietro and His Father," in The Peril and the Preservation of the Home. Here, Riis obscures the meaning of the work by ostensibly shedding light on it. Riis says that "not even the slum can wipe out in me the memory of little Pietro, who sat writing and writing with his maimed hand, trying to learn the letters of the alphabet and how to put them together in words, so that he might be the link of communication between his people and the old home in Italy." According to Riis, then, Pietro isn't learning to write English as a means of becoming an American, but instead is learning to write Italian to preserve the family's ties to Italy. The question then becomes, who is teaching him. In this reading, the father becomes the teacher, the one who presumably knows how to write in Italian -- and therefore someone who presumably doesn't need his son's literacy to communicate with relatives in Italy. Riis's comment becomes even more curious in light of his assessment of the two Italians. "Pietro and his father may be ignorant, may be Italians," Riis writes, "but they are here by our permission, dead set on becoming American citizens, and tremendously impressed with the privileges of citizenship." What Riis doesn't say -- but perhaps implies -- is that while the two Italians may be impressed with the privileges of citizenship that come with "permission" to be in America, they aren't nearly as impressed with citizenship's responsibilities. Otherwise Pietro would be learning to write English as an act of assimilation, rather than learning Italian writing as a way to maintain ties to the old country. This might be interpreted as a sign of divided loyalties and incomplete

commitment to the United States, problems with which Riis himself struggled and supposedly overcame. Riis concludes his anecdote with a plea for sympathy for Pietro. "He was a poor little maimed boy with a sober face, and it wrings my heart now, the recollection of the look he gave me when I plumped out: 'Pietro, do you ever laugh?' 'I did wonst,' he said" (110-11).

"Pietro learning to write" becomes even murkier when placed next to its twin image, a photo of the very same Pietro "writing" at a table, but now with his mother and a younger sister. Pietro is dressed the same and appears to have the same notebook. Again he is hunched over the notebook, but doesn't seem to be writing. Here, he appears to be thinking, but not with the pained look on his face of the other photograph. The mother (and sister) take the place of the father, complete with their own notebook. The sister, clearly too young for literacy, is looking at the notebook. The mother, like the father, seems to be staring off, as little focussed on the notebook as her husband. However, if this photograph is nearly identical to the other photo with the father, the room now is a different one -- better furnished and yet nastier. The three figures are framed by a sewing machine, a large framed picture on the wall (with what looks like a rosary hanging next to the picture), and a squat stove with a big tub on top -- all of which give a feeling of settled domesticity. But the window panes are practically opaque (from dirt and grime?), and the window frames are stuffed with rags to keep out cold drafts, giving the image a dreariness that isn't as pronounced as in the one with the father reproduced in The Children of the Poor. What are we to make of these two different versions, the choice of



the former for The Children of the Poor, and the conflicting “testimony” concerning just what it is that Pietro is trying to learn? Is he trying to learn Italian or English? Who’s teaching him? Under what conditions is he trying to learn? Will Pietro become an American? The answers change from frame to frame, and from caption to anecdote, perhaps testifying to Riis’s own ambivalence toward the Italians, the other new immigrant groups, and their prospects for assimilation.

The last of the photographs, identified by the Dover edition as “Boys from the Italian quarter with a ‘Keep off the grass’ sign,” was originally titled “The Mott St. Boys ‘Keep off the grass,’” according to documentation at the Museum of the City of New York. Clearly the subject is an Italian one, and can be seen as an extension of “Pietro learning to write.” The photograph, which apparently was not published by Riis in any text, can, however, be connected to an anecdote that Riis delivers in a later chapter of How the Other Half Lives, titled “The Problem of the Children,” a subject Riis would treat in much greater detail in The Children of the Poor. The anecdote discusses how children turn into “rough young savages” in the slum, where there is no true home or home life for them, such as Pietro might have. “Home, the greatest factor of all in the training of the young, means nothing to them but a pigeonhole in a coop along with so many other human animals” (138). And yet, rough as they are, these children have “the instinct of beauty” and “love for the ideal,” as evidenced by the effects of flower power on them. Take a handful of flowers into a tenement block and see the transformation it brings to the children, Riis tells his reader. The problem is that the youngsters have no

decent place to play, as do the children of the other “other half.” “Has a yard of turf been laid and a vine been coaxed to grow within their reach, they are banished and barred out from it as from a heaven that is not for such as they” (138). Riis then tells of an incident in an Italian section. “I came upon a couple of youngsters in a Mulberry Street yard a while ago that were chalking on the fence their first lesson in ‘writin’.’ And this is what they wrote: ‘Keeb of te Grass.’ They had it by heart, for there was not, I verily believe, a green sod within a quarter of a mile” (139-40).

The photograph itself shows two small lookalike boys who are of about the same age, chubbiness, and dress. Each wears nearly identical coarse, tight-fitting shirts, pants patched and sewn at the knees, and button-up boots. They have the appearance of men-children, with faces both cherubic and old. The young boys are standing in a dirt field, leaning against a prone ladder in front of a wooden wall. Posed slightly off center and close together, they appear to be looking at the camera, which according to portrait rhetoric signifies “solemnity, frankness, the disclosure of the subject’s essence” (Sontag 38). One boy leans casually, almost swaggeringly, against the ladder. He has what appears to be the same sort of beveled double-barreled stick or pipe held by the rough bearded man in “Bandit’s Roost.” He holds it in walking stick fashion, planted in the ground and pointing off to the side of him. The other boy, standing upright, holds a wooden stave between his legs. Both boys have rather blank facial expressions, with their eyes shadowed. In the lower right hand corner is what appears to be an unidentifiable animal with a ratlike tail.

The wall behind the boys is notched and scarred. To the right are three lines of large block lettering. Clearly visible are a "PL," a "KEE," and a "THE," presumably half of a message reading, "PLEASE KEEP OFF THE GRASS." Who wrote that sign? Obviously not the boys. The lettering is too accomplished and it appears to be in paint, not chalk. The boys' own sign is not visible, but on the evidence of Riis's anecdote, we know the boys are not great spellers. Granted that this is identified as their "first lesson in 'writin'," but contrary to what Riis says, they didn't have the message -- at least the spelling -- "by heart." Indeed, the message is right there on the wall, in large capital letters, apparently spelled correctly. Without Riis's anecdote, we wouldn't even know that the boys are spellers, good or bad. They do not hold any chalk, and their own writing -- if in fact they are the writers mentioned in the anecdote -- is nowhere to be seen. We see them only posing for the camera, looking idle and slightly rough. While Pietro is learning to write at home, these two Mulberry Street boys are getting their first lesson is "writin'" out in the slum by supposedly copying a sign that may essentially tell their future: "Keep off the grass." Stay in your place. Keep to the margins. The two boys do not appear to be of school age, although they could well be. Will one of them become the older Pietro, and perhaps learn to write as Pietro is learning? And will that education, and some grass to walk on, put them on a level with the children of the better half? Or will both boys grow up to become the two tough-looking characters in the foreground of "Bandit's Roost"? These questions are raised, but never resolved by the photograph and the accompanying text, which both complement and contradict each other. The viewer is

told that the boys were engaging in their first writing lesson and the wall with its sign serves as a sort of blackboard from which they take that lesson, but rather than being photographed in the act of writing, an act in which they were supposedly caught by Riis, they are posed, almost as idlers, holding sticks rather than chalk.

What are we to make of these varied images of Italians in How the Other Half Lives and the complementary photographs in the Riis Collection? How do these denizens of "the other half" live, and what does that life say about their ability to become assimilated Americans, and perhaps in that way to become members of the better half? What are Riis's true feelings -- if they can be ascertained? One line of approach may be to look at the verses by James Russell Lowell that Riis uses to frame the text of How the Other Half Lives. The book opens with four stanzas and concludes with a couplet from a poem titled, "A Parable." It was this parable that furnished "the text from which I preached my sermon," Riis says in The Making of an American. "They tell in a few lines all I tried to tell on three hundred pages" (307). Riis says he treasures the two letters he received from Lowell. The first granted permission to use the poem in Riis's book; the second offered Lowell's response to the book. Riis reprints a facsimile of the second letter in his autobiography. In it, Lowell writes:

I have read your book with deep & painful interest. I felt as Dante must when he looked over the edge of the abyss at the bottom of which Geryon lay in ambush. I had but a vague idea of these horrors before you brought them so feelingly home to me. I cannot conceive how such a book shall fail of doing great good, if it move other people as it has moved me. I found it hard to get to sleep the night after I had been reading it. (The Making 308)

The connection between Riis, the rough immigrant journalist, and Lowell, the genteel Brahmin poet, is interesting, if not so curious. Both were crusaders, Riis for the poor, the abolitionist Lowell for black slaves. That Lowell was genuinely concerned for the oppressed Negro speaks for itself, but whether he was motivated more by principle than real sentiment for blacks is open to debate. This is not the place to delve too deeply into Lowell's attitudes toward other races, but a brief survey shows that for all his enlightened and humanistic ideas, Lowell entertained quaint, deeply divided notions about racial matters and other races. Early in his career, in 1843, he wrote a poem, "The Fatherland," which declares that a "true man's fatherland . . . is a world-wide fatherland." And, as early as 1848 Lowell held that there was no scientific basis for believing in superior and inferior races (Wagenknecht 175). However, Lowell could also speak of the American Indians' "ancestry of filthy barbarians, who daubed themselves for ornament with a mixture of bear's-grease and soot, or colored clay," even while idealizing the West Indian natives Columbus encountered (qtd. in Wagenknecht 176). Lowell's most unusual ideas centered on Jews. He reportedly delighted in "the bizarre pastime of discovering that everyone of talent was in some way descended from Jewish ancestors, and he would play the game of 'detection' with a relish that approached monomania." Lowell respected the Jews's traditional austerity and morality, but also reacted to contemporary images of Jews as degraded immigrants, money lovers and outcasts. While deploring the conditions that oppressed the Jewish immigrants, Lowell both feared and to some extent was drawn to Jewish "domination" (Duberman 307,308). Lowell's attitudes toward Italy and

Italians, formed before and during several trips to Italy, are generally representative of those of his social and artistic class. He was generally sympathetic toward the Italian nationalist movement, as he was toward all the democratic revolutions of 1848, writing a poem, "Kossuth," in honor of the Hungarian freedom fighter. In 1848 or 1849, he wrote some verses on freedom that ended with the lines: "And rather than Fair Italy remain/A pearl beneath the feet of Austrian swine,/Welcome to me whatever breaks a chain./That surely is of God, and all divine!" Eventually, Lowell substituted "humanity" for "Fair Italy" in the verse.

Lowell first traveled to Italy in 1851-52, later writing up the journey for *Graham's* magazine in 1854 and including the material in his collection, Leaves from My Journal in Italy and Elsewhere. Lowell's responses to Italy and the Italians are both typical and atypical of privileged Americans then traveling to Italy in growing numbers. Like them, he is much taken by the idea of Italy, which offers the imaginative American "a Past at once legendary and authentic, and in which he has an equal claim with every other foreigner" (Leaves 124). In a letter to friend John Holmes from Italy, Lowell says that the American traveler -- "and I find myself more intensely American every day" -- discovers himself at home in Rome. "I cannot help believing that in some respects we represent more truly the old Roman power and sentiment than any other people," Lowell writes. "Our art, our literature, are, as theirs, in some sort exotics; but our genius for politics, for law, and, above all, for colonization, our instinct for aggrandizement and for trade, are all Roman" (qtd. in Scudder 1: 342). But, for Lowell, Italy was also the

seductive siren, the “very Witch-Venus of the Middle Ages,” with her “fatal fascination” (Leaves 125). Lowell confesses that he grew up with the notion of all Italians being either monks “who drink your health in poison” or bravos who profited by “digging your person all over with a stiletto” (178). His depictions of contemporary Italians are mixed. He praises the Italian’s ease (131), kindness and courtesy (176), individuality and eccentricity (139), and droll excitability and passion, which he claims to prefer to the Anglo-Saxon American’s dispassionate “over-intellectuality” (165-66, 170). However, the Roman’s ease is the Neapolitan’s lazy loafing (131), he says, and Italians have turned beggary into an institution (206). Withal, the Italians are not a lazy people, but “are industrious so far as they are allowed to be” (207).

It is less clear how Lowell viewed Italian immigrants or immigration in general. According to Edward Wagenknecht, Lowell “knew---or believed---that immigrants untrained in democratic processes must make the administration of democracy more difficult in American,” but he seems to have appreciated the contributions made by Irish immigrant farmers who reclaimed worn-out farms in Massachusetts (176-77). However, his political writings, with a couple exceptions, have little to say either on immigration in general or the new immigration that was gathering steam in the decade before Lowell’s death in 1891. In his address, “The Place of the Independent in Politics,” delivered on April 13, 1888, before the Reform Club of New York, Lowell wondered whether equality “may not indeed prove dangerous when interpreted and applied politically by millions of newcomers alien to our traditions, unsteadied by lifelong training and qualifying

associations." He then declares, "We have great and thus far well-warranted faith in the digestive and assimilative powers of our system; but may not these be overtaxed?" (Lowell's Works 6: 205). Earlier, in an address at the opening of the Chelsea (Massachusetts) Free Public Library, Lowell professed a belief in the power of public education and books to "make a whole of our many discordant parts, our many foreign elements . . ." He concluded, "I am happy in believing that democracy has enough vigor of constitution to assimilate these seemingly indigestible morsels and transmute them into strength of muscle and symmetry of limb" (6: 97-98). Unlike Henry Cabot Lodge and others in New England, Lowell never supported exclusionist immigration policies.

Curiously, Jacob Riis found his sermon for How the Other Half Lives in a parable written by Lowell some four decades earlier, prior to the American Civil War. In granting Riis permission to use the verses, Lowell says he is "glad they have so much life left in them after forty years" (qtd. in The Making 307). "A Parable" tells of Christ's return to Earth to see in what manner men -- "my brethren" -- believe in him. The wealthy and powerful welcome Christ "with pomp and state" befitting a secular king. "[I]n church, and palace, and judgment-hall,/He saw his own image high over all." But Christ is disconsolate when he hears the "bitter groans" of the "living foundation" on which the churches, palaces and judgment-halls have been built. Christ asks his hosts: "Have ye founded your thrones and altars, then/On the bodies and souls of living men?/And think ye that building shall endure,/Which shelters the noble and crushes the poor?" The last



two lines of that stanza serve as Riis's coda for How the Other Half Lives. Four of the poem's concluding five stanzas are used as Riis's prefatory verses. They are:

With gates of silver and bars of gold  
 Ye have fenced my sheep from their father's fold;  
 I have heard the dropping of their tears  
 In heaven these eighteen hundred years.

O Lord and Master, not ours the guilt,  
 We built but as our fathers built;  
 Behold thine images, how they stand,  
 Sovereign and sole, through our land.

Then Christ sought out an artisan,  
 A low-browed, stunted, haggard man,  
 And a motherless girl, whose fingers thin  
 Pushed from he faintly want and sin.

These set he in the midst of them,  
 And as they drew back their garment-hem,  
 For fear of defilement, "Lo, here," said he,  
 "The *images* ye have made of me."

Riis omits stanza ten, in which Christ's powerful hosts explain their work for him: "Our task is hard,---with sword and flame/To hold thine earth forever the same,/And with sharp crooks of steel to keep/Still, as thou leftest them, thy sheep." To which Christ answers by putting forth a poor oppressed artisan and motherless girl as the true images the rulers had made of him.

While the poem can conceivably be read as an anti-slavery sermon, its broader theme is the oppression of the weak and the poor. On a more literal level, it appears to be a surprisingly appropriate text for Riis's sermon. The poem can be seen to privilege

American society at the expense of Old World corruption, while at the same time serving as a warning to that very American society. When Christ asks about the thrones and altars built on the bodies and souls of living men in stanza seven, he might just as well have been talking about the monarchies and Catholic Church of southern and eastern Europe. It is curious that Riis excises that couplet and uses only the last two lines of the stanza to conclude his book. The “low-browed, stunted, haggard” artisan and the “motherless girl” might be poor Italian or Jewish immigrants from whom the American middle and upper classes draw back their garment-hem for “fear of defilement.” The poor and powerless are different because the wealthy and powerful have kept them that way, as literally oppressed sheep rather than as symbols of human brotherhood, of Christ’s flock. Christ -- and presumably Riis -- cast their lot with the poor: “The images ye have made of me.” The poor may look and act different, but they too are made in the image of Christ, which ultimately makes them part of the universal brotherhood, worthy of Christian love and compassion. Although Riis typically has a much more secular outlook than the ordained minister Edward Steiner, there is a strong undercurrent of the Protestant social gospel and Christ’s message of universal brotherhood in him. At the end of How the Other Half Lives, Riis talks of solving the dangerous gap between the classes by building a bridge “founded upon justice and built of human hearts” (229). It is a theme which he will state more forcefully in a later book, The Battle with the Slum, where he expounds on his ideal of “reform by human touch.” For now, Riis argues that the poor and oppressed must be elevated, but whether -- and how -- the poor, oppressed immigrants can or must be made

Americans he leaves unclear in How the Other Half Lives. The new immigrants might be made in the image of Christ. They might ultimately be brothers with native-born Americans. As members of the universal brotherhood, they can be objects of sympathy and pity. But, was that image of immigrants as poor and oppressed compatible with American society and American character? Here Riis seems to waver. For Riis, it is not entirely clear that membership in the human brotherhood qualifies someone for membership in America's citizenry.

Riis again takes up the case of the Italian immigrant in 1892, this time focusing on the Italian child. In March of that year, now working for the *Evening Sun*, he wrote a piece, "Real Wharf Rats," in which he portrayed Italian children living under the wharf at the city dump, surviving off the refuse they scraped together from the offal of society. Here we are a long way from "Pietro learning to write" in his home or even the two young boys chalking their first lesson in writin'. These Italian children are scarcely human, much less young boys making halting attempts at literacy. They are not only subhuman, not simply animal-like, but real (wharf) rats. At about the same time as "Real Wharf Rats," Riis began a series of articles for *Scribner's*, which were collected in the book, The Children of the Poor, in October 1892. This book received even better reviews than How the Other Half Lives, and Riis himself liked the second book better, in part because it offered more solid quantitative data. However, The Children of the Poor never commanded the great popularity of How the Other Half Lives.

In many ways, The Children of the Poor offers no different a view of Italians than How the Other Half Lives. Italians still haven't risen very much, even though How the Other Half Lives had spoken of the Italian scavenger quickly graduating into fruit stand ownership and his son taking over the boot-blackening industry. Italians still inhabit the worst of the slums, and they still are being victimized by their more advanced unscrupulous countrymen. "The worst old rookeries fall everywhere in this city to the share of the immigrants from Southern Italy, who are content to occupy them, partly, perhaps, because they are no worse than the hovels they left behind, but mainly because they are tricked or bullied into putting up with them by their smarter countrymen" (10). Here, Riis seems to have qualified his assessment of the Italian and softened his criticism. It isn't all Italians who are identified with the worst slum conditions, but specifically the southern Italians, a distinction that began to appear in the 1880s and would have increasing currency throughout the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. And now the image isn't so much of the Italian who is naturally content to live in degradation and squalor, but of the Italian as victim of his own countrymen. Again, Riis singles out the dirt and disorder, while at the same time commenting on the positive attributes of the Italian wife and mother. At least she, Riis writes, doesn't deserve the degraded character ascribed to her husband. "Dirty as *he* seems and is in the old rags that harmonize so well with his surroundings, there is that about her which suggests not only the capacity for better things, but a willingness to be clean and to look decent, if cause can be shown. . . . [W]ith it all with the swarm of

squirming youngsters that were as black as the floor they rolled upon, there was evidence of a desperate, if hopeless, groping after order, even neatness” (11-12). This instinct, Riis says, “inhabits not only the more aristocratic Genoese, but his fellow countryman from the southern hills as well, little as they resemble each other or agree in most things.” But if the southern Italian is a victim of his countrymen, there is something in him that makes him a natural, even a willing, victim. The Neapolitan “is so altogether uninviting an object” when he leaves the steamer that “he falls naturally the victim of the slum tenement, which in his keep becomes, despite the vigilance of the sanitary police, easily enough the convenient depot and half-way house between the garbage-dump and the bone-factory” (12). Riis says he has noticed, within the last year, a degradation in the quality of the children, seen even from the standard of cleanliness, at the Five Points area. He concludes: “Perhaps the exodus from Italy has worked farther south, where there seems to be an unusual supply of mud” (13). Maybe, as Riis says, the bulk of Italian immigration has worked its way to the poorer, less literate, muddier south of Italy. More likely, as will be seen, Americans were beginning to make a much clearer distinction between northern and southern Italians, while realizing that more and more of the immigrants since the 1880s had been coming from the south. The year before The Children of the Poor was published, Henry Cabot Lodge, writing in the January 1891 *North American Review*, drew a distinction between Northern/Central and Southern Italians, depicting the former as generally industrious, trustworthy, strong, capable, and

moral. The same qualities, according to Lodge, didn't apply to the illiterate southern Italian emigrants who came from a land of endemic brigandage (31).

Despite the worsening degradation of the Italian immigrant children, Riis struggles to find cause for hope in The Children of the Poor. He notes that not many years have passed since teachers watched "with regret and alarm" as "the black-eyed brigade of 'guinnies,' as they were contemptuously dubbed," crowded in ever-increasing numbers into the "ragged" schools and kindergartens. But the Italian children "had a more valuable lesson to impart than they came to learn, and it has been a salutary one." The children's "sunny temper," which no hovel or hardship can cloud, made them favorites, and the teachers learned that, despite the crowding, the school-rooms "marvelously expanded, until they embrace within their walls an unsuspected multitude, even many a slum itself, cellar, 'stoop,' attic, and all." The result is that "[e]very lesson of cleanliness, of order, and of English taught at the school is reflected into some wretched home, and rehearsed there as far as the limited opportunities will allow" (18-19). The combination of cleanliness, order and the English language is an interesting one, a kind of holy trinity of Americanization. Wash up, impose some order in your life, and learn English if you want to become an American, Riis seems to be saying. Riis's message also seems to reinforce the rhetoric of the photograph, "Pietro learning to write": that it is the child, not the father, who will lead the Italian's assimilation through education (if, in fact, the child is learning English). However, now that education includes not only learning the English language, but learning also the Anglo-Saxon Protestant virtues of cleanliness and order.

But the opportunities for such education are indeed limited, as the conclusion of the chapter, "The Italian Slum Children," indicates. This chapter ends not with the image of Italian school children perhaps learning to become Americans, but with Italian children as un-American wood-gatherers, rag-pickers, and future dagger-carriers perhaps incapable of assimilation. Of the young wood-gatherers, Riis writes: "They come, as crows scenting carrion, from every side at the first blow of the axe. Their odd old-mannish or old-womanish appearance, due more to their grotesque rags than to anything in the children themselves, betrays their race even without their chatter" (21). This is a curious passage because of the links it makes: The children, compared to scavaging crows, appear oddly old because of their rags, much like the two young boys in the photo, "Boys from the Italian quarter with a 'Keep off the grass' sign." However, the children's external appearance betrays an internal characteristic, their race. In How the Other Half Lives, Riis had also equated appearance and race, saying how the Jews' manner, dress and "unmistakable physiognomy, betray their race at every step" (85). Still, the old-looking Italian child's sunny temper serves him well, if only for a while. "[N]either poverty nor hard knocks has the power to discourage the child of Italy. His nick-name he pockets with a grin that has in it no thought of the dagger and the revenge that come to solace his after years," Riis writes, in effect condemning the Italian child to a future as a typically violent, vengeful Italian (21). The chapter ends on another pessimistic note. Riis makes a personal inspection along the Hudson and East rivers in winter and finds "the Italian crews at work there making their home in every instance among the refuse they

picked from the scows.” Among the crews are boys picking bones and sorting rags at a time when they should have been at school. The boys tell Riis they slept at their work site. “It was their home. They were children of the dump, literally. All of them except one were Italian” (27-28). Absent here are both the home and the school, perhaps the two most important institutions for Americanization, according to Riis.

In November 1896, Riis again turns to the Italian for the subject of a fictional story that appeared in *The Atlantic*. Titled “Paolo’s Awakening,” the tale was later included in a collection, Out of Mulberry Street: Stories of Tenement Life in New York, published by Riis in 1898. Most of the pieces have children as central characters, and generally the articles show more sympathy and understanding of the immigrants than did How the Other Half Lives. However, still echoing the prejudices of his time, Riis continued to slur and stereotype certain groups. However, “Paolo’s Awakening” is the story which “best combined Riis’s powers of description with his moralistic optimism” (Lane 85). The story tells of an eight-year-old Italian boy whose father drowns on his way to a *padrone*-controlled job at an island dumping ground. Paolo, his mother, and his uncle continue to live in the basement of a rear tenement, where they share two rooms, one dark as “twilight even on the brightest days,” the other “a dark little cubbyhole, where it was always midnight, and where there was just room for a bed of old boards, no more” (703). Paolo had attended an industrial school for one brief session while his father was alive, but now spends most of his days helping his mother do piecework at home for a sweatshop. For pleasure, Paolo rummages for scraps, chases rats at the city dump, and



enjoys the annual feast of St. Rocco, the patron saint of his family's ancestral village. Most of all, he loves to build castles and other things from abandoned clay, mortar or sand. A teacher notices Paolo's artistry and persuades his mother to let him attend a large school. "Paolo's slavery was at an end" (706). Soon, rich and powerful patrons find better jobs for his mother and uncle, and the family moves into a better tenement. Paolo becomes the best student at the school and wins a medal for sculpting a bust of his gentle, patient peasant mother. At graduation, the teacher praises his faithful work and "the loyal manhood that ever is the soul and badge of true genius" (706). The medal includes a traveling stipend that will allow Paolo and his mother to return to "the sunlight of his native land" where he would "hear the surf wash on the shingly beach and in the deep grottoes of which she had sung to him when a child" (707). Were Paolo and his mother returning to Italy so that Paolo could pursue his art studies in the manner of countless other American artists of the nineteenth century? Or were they returning for good, as successful birds of passage? Riis doesn't say. The question becomes moot because Paolo's dreams are short-lived: On his way home from the graduation, he is killed in a train crash. Riis, however, turns the tragedy into triumph: "Brighter skies than those of sunny Italy dawned upon him in the gloom and terror of the great crash," Riis writes. "Paolo was at home, waiting for his mother" (707).

The story, while obviously marked by sentimental moralizing, is interesting. Most telling, perhaps, is that although Paolo is cut down just as he seems to be entering into the American dream, Riis's (and the boy's) vision of heaven is favorably compared to the

romantic sunny skies of Italy, and not the sunny skies of Paolo's emerging assimilation and Americanization. Also suggestive is the fact that the vehicle for Paolo's success (and assimilation and Americanization?) is art, specifically sculpture, which had long been associated with Italy, rather than some more masculine or more American pursuit, such as business. Better that Paolo is an inspired artist and not some bootblack picking himself up by his bootstraps. And yet, Riis's tale, through the teacher's praising of Paolo at graduation, hints at an alternative ideal of manhood based not on success in the competitive arena of business, but on loyalty to mother and family, which the teacher equates with "true genius." If there was anything Riis liked about the Italians, it was the mothers and their familial feelings. Riis seems to be saying that Italians may have the right stuff in the domestic sphere. However, questions still remain about their potential for success in the public spheres of business and citizenship.

Finally, there is an extended treatment of the Italian in Riis's revisiting of the tenement districts in The Battle with the Slum, published twelve years after How the Other Half Lives. Riis was now at the height of his powers, coming off a glorious 1901 in which he celebrated both his silver wedding anniversary and the election of his friend Theodore Roosevelt to the presidency; saw Tammany's hold on New York broken by reform; and published his highly successful autobiography, The Making of an American. Riis had now authored seven books, some in several editions. His works were on school and library recommended reading lists; sociologists and reformers quoted his homespun philosophy. "During this time his religious faith, his adulation for Roosevelt, his

optimism, and his nationalism became more dominant features of his personality. . . . Jacob Riis's deep feelings of nationalism . . . encompassed his entire life style." His response to the Spanish-American War was to become an unabashed jingoist (Lane 129, 150). He was secure enough as a writer and lecturer (with some seventy lectures scheduled from January to April 1902) to give up his twenty-five year career in newspapering. With The Battle of the Slum he was ready to become a national evangelist for reform. But first he would reassess what had been accomplished in the slums of New York City.

Riis was pleased with signs that "the day of the boss and of the slum is drawing to an end" (433), that the gap between rich and poor was "no longer widening," and that Americans were "certainly coming closer together" (436). Riis said he saw "only cause for hope" (438). He invested his hope not in the work of the professional social scientist, who understandably did things by system and order, but sometimes "would reduce men and women and children to mere items in his infallible system and classify and subclassify them until they are as dried up as his theories. . ." (431). Instead, Riis's hope was in the "world-old formula of human sympathy, of human touch" (439). As the title of the book's penultimate chapter says, Riis would "Reform by Human Touch," which is an extension of the bridge "built of human hearts" that he invoked at the end of How the Other Half Lives.

Riis's depiction of the Italian in The Battle with the Slum does appear to be somewhat more sympathetic than that of How the Other Half Lives. But still the Italian is

portrayed as a problem to be addressed, an immigrant who sorely tested America's ability to embrace him, a crude lump of clay that had to be shaped to make it more American.

Riis's most extended treatment of the Italian comes in the chapter, "Pietro and the Jew."

The title itself is interesting in that it links a stereotypically named Italian to a nameless, generic Jew in a chapter in which there is no direct narrative connection between the two.

Riis begins The Battle with the Slum by arguing that "the problem of the tenement is to make homes for the people" (175), in essence equating home and nation, the family and

America. He then turns his attention to the tenement tenant in the chapter "Pietro and the

Jew" and asks: "How much of a problem is he? And how are we to go about solving it?"

Riis starts off by sounding much like the orderly, systematic social scientist who aridly

classifies and sub-classifies, the very type of reformer about whom Riis vows, "that man I will fight till I die" (431). Citing facts and figures from a government "slum inquiry,"

Riis notes that the foreign-born made up about forty-three percent of New York's general population but nearly sixty-three percent of its slum population, and that illiteracy in the

slum was nearly forty-seven percent, compared to less than eight percent in the general

population. He characterizes the slum as a predominantly foreign entity, with less than

five percent of its dwellers of native parentage. "The parents of 95.23 per cent had come over the sea, to better themselves, it may be assumed," he says (176).

Riis now turns his attention to the Italians who comprised the majority group of the city district surveyed by the government inquiry. He writes:

They were from the south of Italy, avowedly the worst of the Italian immigration, which in eleven years from 1891 to 1902 gave us nearly a million of [King] Victor Emmanuel's subjects. The exact number of Italian immigrants, as registered by the Emigration bureau, from July 1, 1891 to June 1, 1902, a month short of eleven years, was 944,345. And they come in greater numbers every year. In 1898, 58,613 came over, of whom 36,086 gave New York as their destination. In 1901 the Italian immigrants numbered 138,608, and as I write shiploads with thousands upon thousands are afloat, bound for our shores. Yet there is a gleam of promise in the showing of last year, for of the 138,608, those who came to stay in New York numbered only 67,231. Enough surely, but they were after all only one-half of the whole against two-thirds in 1898. (176-77)

Despite the overwhelming numbers and the fact that those numbers represented "the worst" of "Victor Emmanuel's subjects" (itself not a flattering term), there is room for all, Riis says, provided they are spread around the country, presumably to diffuse the overcrowding in New York City, increase the immigrant's labor value through the laws of supply and demand, and facilitate absorption into American society. "Going out to break ground, they give us more than they get. The peril lies in their being cooped up in the city" (177). Riis gives one final statistic before he makes a transition from numbers to people, but it's a statistic that "classifies and sub-classifies" people, if not reduces them to "mere items" in an "infallible system." "Of last year's intake 116,070 came from southern Italy, where they wash less, and also plot less against the peace of mankind, than they do in the north" (177).

Riis's reprise of the dirty, docile southern Italian, published in 1902, ran directly counter to events in southern Italy, specifically on the island of Sicily, where the socialist *Fasci* movement battled for social justice from 1888 to 1894, when it was brutally suppressed by the Rome-based, but northern-run national government. At its peak, the

*Fasci Siciliani* was a popular cooperative movement with a membership of about 350,000 Sicilian farmers and sulfur mine workers. "The majority of them, despite the debates and proselytizing, were peasants, apolitical and uneducated, who naively believed the *Fasci* would bring about independence of Sicily and, ultimately, social justice to all workers" (Mangione 82). The failure of the movement was blamed on the machinations of northern Socialist leaders, friction between Socialist groups, the backwardness of the Sicilian workers, and the strength of the bourgeoisie. "From this distance, however," Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale write, "two factors stand out: the thoughtlessness and cruelty of the repression, and the exodus of the most militant in the great wave of migration to America that followed soon after" (84). Riis said the Italians came because of poverty and hunger, but he is only partially right. He quotes a news report about an Italian peasant in Italy who, having had his year's grain threshed, received less than half a bushel for his efforts. To that report, Riis adds one of his own memories, an incident he had observed at the barge office where a steamer from Italy had arrived. An Italian immigrant family was detained because, as the inspecting officer explained, the father was too old to be allowed in. "Two young women and a boy of sixteen rose to their feet at once," Riis recalls. "'Are we not young enough to work for him?' they said. The boy showed his strong arms" (180-81). In the original edition of The Battle with the Slum, the anecdote is accompanied by an illustration, both sentimental and picturesque, by Thomas Fogarty. These anecdotes and the drawing are certainly designed to elicit sympathy. The latter anecdote may illustrate Italian initiative and dignity, but in Riis's anecdotes the

immigrants ultimately remain objects of pity, dirty and generally docile, with no hint that in Sicily, some of these same immigrants may have been actively involved in a struggle for political rights and social and economic justice. It is interesting that of all the news reports coming out of Italy over the last decade, including, most likely, reports about the Sicilian *Fasci* disturbing the “peace of mankind,” Riis quotes the report about the unfortunate peasant farmer who is squeezed at the mill. In his efforts to make the Italian immigrants tragic, if sympathetic victims in desperate need of America’s political, social, and economic opportunities, Riis erases complementary (and more complimentary?) images of Italians actively struggling to secure some of those very opportunities in Italy itself. Why? It may be that Riis was unaware of the *Fasci* movement, but that is unlikely. Is it simply the case that active, striving Italians simply didn’t fit into Riis’s depiction of the Italian as docile victims in need of a champion such as Riis himself?

Clearly Riis saw himself as the champion of these victimized Italians, but rather than champion them against the repressive Italian government, he takes up their case against their critics in America. Having played on the sympathies of his jury of readers in The Battle with the Slum, Riis assumes the role of defense attorney for the Italian, whom he collectively dubs “Pietro” -- which in Italian also means “rock” and which was the name of the Italian boy learning to write in the photo already discussed. “It is charged against this Italian immigrant that he is dirty, and the charge is true. He lives in the darkest of slums, and pays rent that ought to hire a decent flat” (181). “Our Italian is ignorant, it is said, and that charge is also true. I doubt if one of the family in the barge

office could read or write his own name" (183). "Complaint is made that the Italian promotes child labor. His children work at home on 'pants' and flowers at an hour when they ought to have been long in bed. Their sore eyes betray the little flower-makers when they come tardily to school" (185). "He is clannish, this Italian; he gambles and uses a knife, though rarely on anybody not of his own people; he 'takes what he can get,' wherever anything is free, as who would not, coming to the feast like a starved wolf?" (186). "Lastly, he buys fraudulent naturalization papers, and uses them. I shall plead guilty for him to every one of these counts. They are all proven" (186).

However, there are, as any good defense attorney knows, mitigating circumstances, and these Riis does not fail to mention. He remembers, he says, a poor, dingy Italian flat, "yet with signs of the instinctive groping toward orderly arrangement which I have observed so many times, and take to be evidence that in better surroundings much might be made of these people" (184). There is hope for the Italians, but it is based on better American surroundings making something of them, not on the Italians themselves making something better of themselves. And despite the abject present surroundings, Riis discerns a certain sentimental, picturesque warmth and glow in the scene. "On a corner shelf burned a night lamp before a print of the Mother of God, flanked by two green bottles, which, seen at a certain angle, made quite a festive show" (185). Again citing statistics, Riis notes that the children of the flat, despite his earlier admission that late-night work made them late for school, more likely than not do attend school. As the Tenement House Commission found in its survey of one area, of the one



hundred and ninety-six children of school age in one block, only twenty-three worked outside or inside the home, while in another block, only twenty-seven of two hundred and fifteen school-aged children worked. And to the charge that the Italian acted like a starved wolf, wasn't it because "[t]here was nothing free where he came from. Even the salt was taxed past a poor man's getting any of it" (186). Riis concludes that gambling is the Italian's "besetting sin. He is sober, industrious, frugal, enduring beyond belief; but he will gamble on Sunday and quarrel over his cards, and when he sticks his partner in the heat of the quarrel, the partner is not apt to tell." Although this is a running theme through Riis's work, Riis now sees some signs of improvement, "evidence once or twice, in the surrender of an assassin by his countrymen, that the old vendetta is being shelved and a new idea of law and justice is breaking through" (187). There remains the problem of fraudulent citizenship papers, which if nothing else proves for Riis that ignorant though the Italian may be, he is "not dull," but rather smart enough to subscribe to the "American plan." "To him it sums itself up in the statement: a dollar a day for the shovel; two dollars for the shovel with a citizen behind it. And he takes the [fake citizenship] papers and the two dollars" (187). Can the Italian be blamed, Riis asks, if he buys phony naturalization papers and sells his votes to the party machine in return for a job? "He came here for a chance to live. Of politics, social ethics, he knows nothing. Government in his old home existed only for his oppression" (187). If the Italian immigrant is a problem, where then should the blame be placed, on Pietro or on the Tammany party

politician? "And upon this showing," Riis asks, "who ought to be excluded, when it comes to that?" (191).

Riis continues with the question of exclusion in the next chapter, titled "On Whom Shall We Shut the Door?" Here he wonders "what thoughts come to the eagle that perches over the great stone gateway on Ellis Island, as he watches the procession that files through it into the United States day after day, and never ends." The eagle "looks out of his grave, unblinking eye at the motley crowd, but gives no sign. Does he ask: 'Where are the Pilgrim Fathers, the brave Huguenots, the patient Puritans, the sturdy priests, and the others that come for conscience's sake to build upon this continent a home for freedom? And these, why do they come with their strange tongues -- for gold?'" (202-03). But the eagle's worries should be dispelled by a look inside the public school, where the immigrant children speak English, salute the American flag, and give their "heads and hearts to our country" (204). "Fear not, eagle. While that gate is open let no one bar the one you guard. While the flag flies over the public school, keep it aloft over Ellis Island and have no misgivings. The school has the answer to your riddle" (204). While holding out hope that the second generation of the new immigrants can be assimilated through the public school, the passage essentially rules out the possibility that the first-generation immigrant will ever become an American.

Despite the public school's miracle of transformation, problems persist with an open-door policy. Asked whether he "would shut the door on any, and whom and how and why," Riis says that "from the point of view of the tenement and the sweat shop," he

would and should. Here he relates a report of a few years ago when police, looking for a murderer in Mulberry Street, “came upon a nest of Italian thugs who lived by blackmailing their countrymen” (204). Through investigation it was determined that the men were notorious Neapolitan criminals “who had been charged with every conceivable crime, from burglary to kidnapping and ‘maiming,’ and some not to be conceived of by the American mind. . . . When I recall that, I want to shut the door quick” (205). But then Riis thinks of Mrs. Michelangelo “in her poor mourning for one child run over and killed, wiping her tears away and going bravely to work to keep the home together for the other five until the oldest shall be old enough to take her father’s place.” And Riis thinks of the letter he received from the “Woman Doctor” of the slum (physician and settlement worker Jane Elizabeth Robbins), who was consoled by the slum children when her own father died. Robbins wrote: “The little scamps of the street have been positively pathetic; they have made such shy, boyish attempts at friendliness; one little chap offered to let me hold his top while it was spinning, in token of affection.” When Riis reads that, he has “not the heart to shut anybody out” (206). But, of course, there are exceptions.

The Italian appears again in The Battle with the Slum in a nostalgic chapter, “The Passing of Cat Alley,” where the sentimental Riis seems to mourn the disappearance of one of the very type of hell-hole alleys he had fought to abolish. “They are gone, the old alleys,” Riis writes. “Reform wiped them out. It is well” (311). And yet Riis can’t help but feel a twinge of regret for the passing of Cat Alley, which held a special place in his heart. “Cat Alley was my alley. It was mine by right of long acquaintance. We were

neighbors for twenty years. Yet I never knew why it was called Cat Alley.” Riis remembers Cat Alley as “properly cosmopolitan,” with every element but the native-born American. “The substratum was Irish, of volcanic proportions. Upon this were imposed layers of German, French, Jewish, and Italian, or, as the alley would have put it, Dutch, Sabe, Sheeny, and Dago; but to this last it did not take kindly” (314). In Cat Alley, it seems, the Italian was an outcast among outcasts, looked down upon by the western European Irish, German and French, and ranked even lower than the hated eastern European Jew. The Italian was seen as a threat to the neighborhood because Cat Alley did not want to become another Mulberry Street. “With the experience of the rest of Mulberry Street before it, it foresaw its doom if the Dago got a footing there, and within a month of the moving in of the Gio family there was an eruption of the basement volcano, reinforced by the sanitary policeman, to whom complaint had been made that there were too many ‘Ginnies’ in the Gio flat” (314). There were only four Gios, but even then the flat was too small. Still, Mrs. Gio appealed to the landlady. “‘You got-a three bambino,’ she said to housekeeper, ‘all four, lika me,’ counting the number on her fingers. ‘I no putta me broder-in-law and me sister in the street-a. Italian lika to be together.’ The housekeeper was unmoved. ‘Humph!’ she said, ‘to liken my kids to them Dagos! Out they go.’ And they went” (314-15). Riis makes no comment on the anecdote, but instead breaks into a series of picturesque sketches of the colorful, quirky individual denizens of Cat Alley, beginning with “the French couple” who in fact were a “typical, stolid German” husband and a “mercurial Parisian” wife (315).

Riis concludes the chapter with an assessment and an anecdote. Of Cat Alley he says, "It had its faults, but it can at least be said of it, in extenuation, that it was very human" (339). The anecdote comes from the last days of Cat Alley: When clearing had begun, Riis watches a troop of Irish children screaming with delight on a makeshift seesaw. "A ragged little girl from the despised 'Dago' colony watched them from the corner with hungry eyes. Big Jane, who was the leader by virtue of her thirteen years and her long reach, saw her and stopped the show. 'Here, Mame,' she said, pushing one of the smaller girls from the plank, 'you get off an' let her ride. Her mother was stabbed yesterday.' And the little Dago rode, and was made happy" (339-40). Besides expressing Riis's romantic optimism and his abiding sentimental faith in children and in females in general, the scene serves to balance and comment on the earlier incident in which the Gios are turned out. Here we have inclusion replacing exclusion, a bridge built of human hearts, reform by human touch. But what is being included is an alien from "the despised 'Dago' colony," one "with hungry eyes," one who was at least one step below the Irish girls, who were probably Catholic like the Italian girl, but unlike her, northwestern Europeans who spoke English. The Italian girl is invited into the play not for who she is, but rather for what she represents. She is an object of pity, someone whose mother was stabbed the day before. And stabbed by whom? Riis doesn't say. Perhaps it's a detail extraneous to his simple parable of charity and human kindness. However, the few details we are given, when placed in the context of Riis's writings about the Italian, point to a probable culprit: her husband, a relative, or some other Italian. The elements add up: The

victim was an Italian, the Italian's favorite weapon -- presumably a knife -- was used, and Italians often attack their own in fits of passion. This incident, then, is one that cuts two ways, as interesting for what it says as for what it implies. In its plea for human brotherhood (or, in this case, sisterhood), for reform through human touch, it humanizes and privileges one slum group, the Irish (who not long ago occupied the Italian's lowly position), while objectifying the Italian girl as victim of -- most likely -- her own kind.

It is clear from Riis's writings about and photographs of the Italians that he had deeply divided attitudes towards what he saw as the most striking of the immigrant groups. In Riis we see attraction and repulsion, praise for the good and condemnation for the bad, and both optimism and pessimism for the prospects of assimilation. In some ways, Riis is simply an ambivalent progressive social reformer who alternately affirmed middle-class privilege, played on middle-class fears, and titillated middle-class desires. His handling of the Italians and other immigrants groups contain elements of both charitable writing and urban travel literature. His is travel writing that turns inward to survey domestic problem sites such as urban slums and alien cultures and to perhaps revel in their "otherness." The publicity agent for How the Other Half Lives described the book as a good read and a good "look," announcing: "No page is uninformative, but it would be misleading to suppose the book even tinged with didacticism. It is from beginning to end as picturesque in treatment as it is in material" (qtd. in Gandal 38). Ultimately, however, Riis's urban tourism is middle-class reclamation project, an attempt to reclaim these sites for middle-class understanding and moral values.

There is no question that slumming, either in person or vicariously through Riis's articles, lantern-slide lectures, and books, was made easier and more immediate -- even more visceral -- by the presence of hundreds of thousands of poor immigrants in New York and other cities. Old World poverty and other exotica no longer required a trip to Europe but could be found only a few blocks away. And, it should be remembered, all this foreign local color appeared at about the same time that some Americans feared the disappearance of domestic local color resulting from industrialization, centralization, and homogenization. Americans could now find local color in immigrant tenements, even as distinctive social and linguistic features seemed to be vanishing in regions of the country from Maine to California, from the northern plains to the Louisiana bayous. The downside to the immigrant tenements was that, for all of the reconceptualization and confinement provided by photography, the touristic approach, or Riis's generalizations and anecdotes, the poor foreigners were spilling out of their aesthetic frames, stretching the slums, threatening the very fiber of American society. The immigrants were too numerous to remain a simple spectacle. A spectacle has a beginning and an end, and implies some control. The rising tide of immigration seemed endless, a movement that had taken on a life of its own. The middle classes could show these masses of immigrants sympathy or suspicion, intimacy or estrangement. They could turn the immigrants into pictures and tourist attractions. They could divide, schematize, tabulate, index, characterize and otherwise record the immigrants. But ultimately the immigrants had to be dealt with on more practical levels. Eventually their perceived differences, those very

differences that made them such fit subjects for tourism and spectacle, those differences that fitted immigrants to serve as a competing alter ego, would either have to be rejected outright, grudgingly condoned, or enthusiastically embraced. How native-born “Americans” and the immigrants dealt with these differences speak to ideas of American identity and American national character as those ideas were being explored and contested at the turn of the century. What, then, did Riis envision for the Italian, and by extension the other new immigrants? What were the Italian’s prospects for assimilation? What must the Italians shed, what if anything could they preserve of their native culture, and what must they acquire in order to become an American? How does Riis define assimilation and Americanization, and how do his ideas fit into concepts of Americanness around the turn of the century?

Critics have traditionally seen Riis as wanting to turn immigrants into middle-class Americans following his own model. Because he had more in common with the better classes than with the ‘other half,’ Riis measured immigrant societies in part on how well they adopted American habits and values (Lane 57). He criticized the clannishness of Italians, as well as of the Irish and eastern European Jews, as a detrimental cohesiveness that made Americanization incomplete. And he ultimately sought a “bleaching of style,” an Americanization that “should whiten an informing, particularist past when it contrasted too strongly with the color of what he believed to be the national culture” (Fried 25, 24). Other critics make of Riis somewhat of a cultural pluralist, one who didn’t want to wash out the immigrant’s cultural traditions and loyalties, but instead



to teach him values and tools requisite for American citizenship. Riis hoped that the public schools would instruct students about the contributions of foreign heroes such as Garibaldi and Kossuth. He was a member of the Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants, which provided legal aid, publicized employment opportunities, and furnished loans to the needy. "Proud of his Danish ancestry and convinced that the cultural variety of ethnic groups enriched his country, Riis praised equally the objectives of cultural pluralism and Americanization," James Lane writes. "He asked his audiences to accept hyphenated Americans as brothers and to work to create conditions that would cause them to be loyal citizens" (156, 205). But Lane elsewhere qualifies his argument nearly to the point of negation. Riis's zeal for Americanizing the immigrants, he says, "perhaps blind him into too great a desire for cultural homogeneity," and his "class and race snobbery" and condescension toward "this queer conglomerate mass" of aliens is never totally suppressed. "While not unsympathetic toward immigrants, How the Other Half Lives contained racial slurs which others could use to support nativist shibboleths and restrictionist legislation" (66-67).

In fact, Riis supported some immigration restrictions, but opposed others. Writing in The Battle with the Slum, he blamed excessive immigration not on the ignorance of the immigrants, but on fraudulent steamship lines, greedy employers, and slumlords. "He knew that the tenements to which the newcomers flocked already were dangerously overcrowded and that every new boatload of cheap labor furthered depressed wage scales in the city's sweatshops" (Allend 34). As an adviser to President Roosevelt, he convinced

the president that a policy of planned immigration was desirable. But while Riis had approved of the 1882 law barring paupers, criminals, and the insane, and also supported the 1885 law banning contract labor, he opposed legislation sponsored by Henry Cabot Lodge that attempted to impose literacy requirements in 1900 and 1902. If Riis increasingly spoke of Americanization as the triumph of mores and aspirations that neutralized undesirable folkways, competing allegiances, and radical politics, after becoming an American citizen in 1885, he himself maintained dual loyalties to Denmark and the United States. This is symbolized by the two national flags he is said to have kept. And yet, The Making of an American comes to a dramatic climax when Riis, lying sick off the coast of Denmark during a visit to his native land, sees a ship flying the American flag, "the flag of freedom, blown out of the breeze till every star in it shone bright and clear." The flag inspires in him an overwhelming realization that he was first and foremost a loyal American. It is then that this American -- and other true Americans? -- is truly made. "I knew then that it was my flag; that my children's home was mine, indeed; that I had become an American in truth" (443). It is interesting that the first-generation Riis could become just as much an American as his children, whereas with the Italians, Riis holds out little hope for the first generation and instead places nearly all his hope on the second-generation children. For Riis, then, becoming/being an American meant not only adopting Anglo-Saxon middle-class values and habits, but also becoming a citizen and professing loyalty to the American flag and the ideals it represented.

Ultimately, Riis's contradictory responses to the immigrant cannot be synthesized by generalities or labels for he expressed elements of the country's own varied responses to the new immigrants. As Lewis Fried argues: Riis's "fascination with New York's immigrants and their often ambivalent response to Americanization became a way of defining his own acculturation and lent itself to American nativism" (18). Riis's engagement with the immigrant poor was a way to define himself not only as an American, but as a particular type of American, solidly middle class and upwardly mobile. "Riis was a reformer for many reasons: moral crusades assuaged his sense of outrage at injustice, meshed well with his vocation, and brought upward mobility and prestigious status and palatable by-products" (Lane 35). In many ways, Riis longed for status and recognition more than wealth. He was able to achieve that prestige by simultaneously engaging with and disengaging himself from the new immigrants. We are reminded here that in his autobiography he rarely credits fellow immigrants. As Stein says, this omission can be interpreted as Riis having purposely avoided friendships with other foreigners or as him still denying any associations which separated him from the native American population. "Either way, it says a great deal about the price paid in the making of an American" (10). In his preface to How the Other Half Lives, Riis personally thanks the president of the New York City Board of Health, the city's registrar of vital statistics, the chief inspector of the police force, and his wife, "ever my chief helper, my wisest counsellor, and my gentlest critic." There is no mention of the people he wrote about and photographed -- those very people who willingly or unwillingly

served as the living foundation for his fame and upward mobility. Riis solidifies his position in The Battle with the Slum, which has a dignified portrait of Theodore Roosevelt on the frontispiece and portraits of a who's who of progressive reformers sprinkled throughout the text. In writing and lecturing about and photographing the poor immigrant from a detached perspective, Riis was able to enter the ranks of the privileged middle class, while at the same time providing that class a combination of reassurance, titillation, and challenge. But having entered the ranks of middle-class Americans through a combination of pluck, initiative, virility, and domestic order, Riis defines his identity and what it means to be an American in opposition to his representations of the Italians and other new immigrant groups. Riis can sympathize with these immigrants, include them in the international brotherhood, and be attracted to their color and other qualities, but ultimately that isn't enough for Riis to welcome the immigrants into the American civic, social and cultural family. The immigrant's faults, whether inherited or produced by environment, as well as some of the immigrant's more attractive qualities, are barriers. However, Riis maintains a grudging optimism that at the very least, the Italians and other European immigrant groups can in time overcome those barriers, become less different, more like him, more like his image of what is an American.

At about the same time that Jacob Riis was becoming an elder statesman in the urban reform movement and the celebrated Henry James was probing the immigrants' coloring of the American scene, a lesser known academic journalist was spending vacations trailing and documenting European emigrants to and from the New World.

Edward Steiner's research took him through Ellis Island, where James was chilled to the soul and where photographer Louis Hine was shooting a portfolio on the immigrants. Steiner reported some of his experiences in *The Outlook*, then published his On the Trail of the Immigrant in 1906, one year before the first American edition of James's The American Scene. The book documents the immigrant's story from his arrival in America ("At the Gate") to his immersion in New York's ethnic ghettos ("On the Day of Atonement") and his acculturation into American life ("In an Evening School, New York"). Steiner deals exclusively with the Slav, the Jew, the Italian, and, to a lesser extent, the Greek and the Hungarian, all of whom he classifies under the rubrics, the "new immigrant" and the "new American." Steiner treats the various immigrant groups both in their natives lands and in America. The chapters on the Italians are specifically titled "The Italian At Home" and "The Italian In America" -- as if those designations represented two entirely different categories of being. Like James and Riis and many other Americans, Steiner sees the Italian in his own environment, in Italy, as one thing, but that same Italian in America as something quite different. Steiner's conceptions of the Italian at home and abroad are a jumble of lingering romantic notions about Italy in conflict with prevailing racial discourses and less attractive ideas about Italian character, many of which were already expressed by Riis. The Italians of On the Trail of the Immigrant come across as a confusing, conflicted, contradictory lot, who ultimately reflect the confused, conflicted, contradictory -- if deeply sympathetic -- thinking of social liberals such as Edward Steiner. As we will see, Steiner, in his efforts to

deconstruct current racial discourse, very often gets caught up in that very discourse of racial differences that Riis had only begun to explore.

Whereas Riis dealt with immigrants as part of the larger problem of urban poverty, as members of an “other half” that also included blacks and other native-born Americans, Steiner focusses specifically on immigrants as immigrants. In his chapter, “The New American and the New Problem,” Steiner makes clear what was less forcefully articulated by Riis: that by the turn of the century immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were definitely being seen as a different order of being who was testing American ideas of assimilation in a way that previous immigrant groups, including the supposedly intractable Irish, hadn’t. “The miracle of assimilation wrought upon the older type of immigration, gives to many of us, at least the hope, that the Slavs, Jews, Italians, Hungarians and Greeks will blend into our life as easily as did the Germans, the Scandinavians and the Irish,” Steiner writes, glossing over the sometimes difficult experience of the Irish. “The new immigrant, or the new American, as I call him, is however in many respects, more of an alien than that older class which was related to the native stock by race, speech, or religious ties” (292).

This notion of the new immigrant was firmly entrenched in the American mind by the turn of the century, having developed during what John Higham calls the “the Nationalist Nineties,” that same period during which Riis’s nationalism intensified. By the 1890s, a period exacerbated by depression and labor strife, southern and eastern European immigrants were becoming significant targets of American nativism. Higham

writes: "An initial distrust, compounded largely out of their culture and appearance, swelled into a pressing sense of menace, into hatred, and into violence." Economic shocks discharged general anti-foreign feelings against the new immigrants, "so that each of the southeastern European groups appeared as a particularly insidious representative of the whole foreign menace." At the same time, a slower campaign began targeting "the new immigration as a unique entity, constituting in its difference from other foreign groups the essence of the nation's peril" (*Strangers* 87). This idea that Slavs, Jews and Italians constituted a collective type of "new immigration" dawned early in the 1890s and was linked to powerful traditional ideas about a loosely defined Anglo-Saxonism. "The old idea that America belongs to the Anglo-Saxon race would define the special danger of the new immigration if one assumed that northern Europeans were at least first cousins to the Anglo-Saxon" (95). That was very easily accomplished in the fluid, fermenting debates over racial differences and racial similarities that marked the period. Writers and thinkers in Britain and America had long speculated on the subject, with much of the writing and thinking centering on the racial/cultural genealogy of the Anglo-Saxon race. For generations, race thinkers had traced Anglo-Saxon ancestry back to the forests of Germany and beyond to the Caucasus mountains of western Asia. In their genealogical gymnastics, some writers brought Normans, Nordics and Celts into the Anglo-Saxon's extended family. But it was the Anglo-Saxons who were seen as "the elite of an elite" that traced its roots back through a common Germanic and Indo-European (Caucasian) heritage (Horsman 38). "In western Europe and America the Caucasian race becomes

generally recognized as the most talented branch of the Caucasians; and the Anglo-Saxons, in England and the United States, and often even in Germany, were recognized as the most gifted descendants of the Germans” (43-44). The idea that Anglo-Saxons were a vigorous branch of the sturdy Germanic tree was already current in the seventeenth century, and was transplanted to the American colonies (12, 16). There it gained impetus with the new scientific interest in racial classification and the surging Romantic interest in uniqueness, in language, and in national and racial origins (4-5). “Both directly from Germany and by transmission through England, the Americans were inspired to link their Anglo-Saxon past to its more distinct Teutonic or Aryan roots” (5). Horsman shows that these doctrines of Caucasian/Aryan/Anglo-Saxon destiny, rampant in the late nineteenth century, were already flourishing at the time of the Mexican War. By 1850, American expansion was being seen less as a victory of democratic republicanism and more as evidence of the innate superiority of American Anglo-Saxons (1). By the end of the century, Anglo-Saxon exclusion of the Negro, the Indian, the Mexican, and the Oriental would be extended to the new non-Anglo-Saxon/Germanic/Nordic immigrants. “When sentiments analogous to those already discharged against Negroes, Indians, and the Orientals spilled over into anti-European channels, a force of tremendous intensity entered the stream of American nativism” (Higham, Strangers 132).

If American race nativism had its roots in Britain, as Higham and Horsman have pointed out, there was also another strain of racism in Italy itself from which American



nativists could draw. In fact, American race nativism, whether consciously or unconsciously, borrowed northern Italian stereotypes of southern Italians as ignorant, lawless, and primitive, and used them against Italian immigrants in general. Eventually, those stereotypes would be directed specifically at southern Italian immigrants. Around the turn of the century, then, the Italians often found themselves in a very ambiguous position between people of color (Negroes, Indians and Orientals) and America's fully white European cousins (British, Germans, Scandinavians, and the now whitened Irish). If the southern Italians were considered European, then they constituted a branch so far removed from the Anglo family tree as to make the connection virtually meaningless. Often, the southern Italian would be seen as less than white, with something of the Oriental or black about him.

By 1905 or 1906, just about the time that Steiner was researching and writing On the Trail of the Immigrant, a resurgent nativism had established itself. If it didn't have the hysterical intensity of the 1890s, it was still rooted in the distinction between the old and the new immigration. "Among the score or more of nationalities funneling through Ellis Island, only Italians and Jews were commonly distinguishable in American eyes from the nameless masses who accompanied them, and the Italians and Jews continued to suffer the most resentment. The Italian still bore as vividly as ever the stigma of impassioned crime" (Higham, Strangers 160). Even during the ebbing of nativism at the beginning of the twentieth century, metropolitan newspapers "trumpeted the tale of Italian blood lust incessantly," and by 1909, "the image of a mysterious Black Hand Society, extending

from Italy into every large American city, was fixed in the public imagination” (160). That image was not an original one, having been hung on southern Italians by their northern brethren in the period following Italian national unification in 1871. As will be seen, Edward Steiner, in his depictions of the Italians and other new immigrant groups, clearly expresses some of the crosscurrents, hopes and fears of the new century’s first decade, at once contesting and reflecting the race nativism that had seeped into American thought.

Like Jacob Riis, Edward Alfred Steiner was an immigrant who, despite many early misadventures reminiscent of Riis’s, seems to have fully assimilated after arriving in the United States as a young man. Steiner’s life story is told in two autobiographical works, Against the Current: Simple Chapters from a Complex Life and From Alien to Citizen: The Story of My Life in America, which together serve as a corollary to Riis’s The Making of an American. Unlike Riis, who was born and raised in a relatively homogenous society in Ribe, Denmark, where the Lutheran Church was dominant, Steiner was born and raised a Jew in Szenica, Slovakia, in a heterogenous section of Austria-Hungary, where Slovaks and Magyars, Jews, Protestants and Catholics, lived in sometimes uneasy coexistence. “I played with the children of three distinct races and loved those best who hated my people most,” Steiner writes in Against the Current, the chronicle of his early life (7). In a chapter titled “The Period of Race Unconsciousness,” he recounts how until age five he played with Gentile friends, innocent of any differences between them, until he is beaten by his older brother for sharing the Gentiles’ Sabbath

cakes. He runs away, falls in with a group of Catholics making a pilgrimage, but on the return home a cart driver calls him a “little Jew” and throws him out of the cart. The next day he was made to begin studying the Hebrew alphabet (27-28). In the next chapter, “Dawn of Race Consciousness,” he says “the bond between me and my former playmates was broken; for I knew I was a Jew. The Gentile boys knew it, even the geese, I thought, must know it, for the ganders seemed to hiss at me: ‘*Schid, Schid*’” (31). His race consciousness deepens when, at age seven or eight, he is chosen as the Jewish children’s representative during a visit to the town by a Magyar prince. He is devastated when the prince responds to his greeting by turning to an attendant and saying, “Too bad, too bad that he is a Jew. He doesn’t look or act like one” (82).

Steiner counterbalances his childhood persecutions with images of America and American freedom. An old townsman, a veteran of the American Civil War, returns to Szenica and tells little Edward about a great man named Abraham Lincoln, who was a Christian Abraham as good as the Jewish Abraham, and who, like Moses, led a race of people out of slavery. The Union veteran reads and translates for Edward Uncle Tom’s Cabin. “So thoroughly was I imbued by its spirit,” Steiner recalls, “that I gathered a group of boys to whom I preached my first revolutionary sermon” (53). Later, a family of Hungarian-Americans comes to town and brings into his life a large illustrated German edition of James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales. “That ozone from free airs stirred my whole system and seemed to purify me of all inborn fears and littleness,” Steiner says, echoing Riis’s own childhood response to Cooper (110).

Steiner attended public schools in Vienna and Pilsen, Bohemia, earned a doctorate at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, in 1885, and that same year emigrated to America after making a pilgrimage to Russia to visit Leo Tolstoy. He arrived in America, as he relates in From Alien to Citizen, with but one personal asset, his linguistic ability and training in the philology of Slavik languages. But, he finds nothing in the newspaper want ads for such university men (50-51). In New York, he lands a succession of short-lived jobs in garment factories, a baker's shop, a feather renovating establishment, and a sausage factory. Somewhere, he reads "the advice of a famous man, 'Go West, young man'" -- and he does just that (79). En route, he works as a farm hand in New Jersey and as a steel worker and a coal miner in Pennsylvania. Caught up in a coal strike, he gets beaten and thrown in jail. Finally, like Riis, Steiner ends up a tramp. "For more than six months I was with thugs, tramps, thieves and vermin," he writes. "I was a criminal immigrant, a component element of the new immigration problem" (141). Unlike Riis, however, Steiner consistently identifies himself as an immigrant and attributes his early problems to being a problem immigrant. Although Riis's early years in America are also rocky, we rarely get the sense he is a victim of discrimination based on his immigrant status.

Steiner eventually finds factory work with the father of the girl he had loved as a child in Slovakia. The family sends him back East to become a rabbi, but instead Steiner lands in a unnamed Midwest town, where he finds a philanthropic Jewish patroness, begins writing for a free-thinking Jewish newspaper and working with immigrants, and

starts feeling the power of Christ's love. Rather than attend rabbinical school, he enters Oberlin College and graduates with a divinity degree in 1891. That same year Steiner is ordained a Congregational minister, now "No more Stranger, but Fellow-citizen with the Saints" (252). Three years later he becomes a naturalized American citizen. He would later say that although his peripatetic life had made him an alien nowhere, he became "a loyal American" through his love of liberty and his faith in America's spirit of fair play (7-8). After Oberlin, Steiner serves as pastor of various churches in Minnesota and Ohio. As a pastor he experiences his most vivid lesson in the power of Christian love to bind together in a "new blood kinship" people of different races, tongues and nations. "There, for the first time, I came in touch with the 'Melting Pot,'" he writes in From Alien to Citizen. "It was not a chafing-dish, with an alcohol lamp under it, as many, forming their conception of it from Mr. Zangwell's rather mild drama, imagine it to be; it was a real, seething cauldron, with its age-old fires of hate threatening to consume its contents. Then came the torrent of love, with its mighty power, putting out the old fire by kindling a new one" (277). In 1903, Steiner lands in the Chair of Applied Christianity at Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa, and remains there until his retirement as professor emeritus in 1941. Reflecting on his life, he praises the holy trinity, which has thrilled his whole frame with an unearthly joy: "Thank God for the Christ, Thank God for America, Thank God for humanity" (From Alien 332).

Having ministered to immigrants, Steiner had begun spending vacations on the trail of the immigrants through steerage and Ellis Island to the mills and mines of

America. He eventually made more than thirty trips abroad by boat, many of them in steerage, to study immigrant conditions and problems (National Cyclopaedia of American Biography 45: 169). In his On the Trail of the Immigrant, Steiner assumes the persona of an American and often comments on the new immigrants from the perspective of a native-born American. But Steiner catches himself late in the book, where, for rhetorical purposes, he identifies himself with the new immigrant, his so-called New American.

As I write this I realize that I am saying 'us' and 'our' as if I were not a New American myself and one of those who make up the racial problem. Yet when I recall to myself the fact that I too belong to an alien race, it comes to me like a shock; when I realize that I was born beneath another flag and that this is but my adopted country, it gives me almost a sense of shame that I have in a great degree, if not altogether, forgotten these facts, and I am so completely and absorbingly an American, that I can write 'us' and 'our,' speak of my own people as foreigners, and of my own native country as a strange land. (307-08)

He realizes that, as one no different from the other new immigrants, his case is an example of and a model for the other new immigrants. "Something has so wrought upon me that in spite of the fact that I came to this country in my young manhood, I look upon America as my Fatherland. That same power is still active; still strong enough to repeat the miracle of yesterday; for I am no better than these millions who are regarded as a menace. I came here with the same blood as theirs and the same heritage of good or ill, bequeathed by my race; yet I feel myself completely one with all of which this country possesses, that is worth living for and dying for" (308).

Steiner's is an interesting, if somewhat convoluted, rhetorical strategy. He is an American because he says he is an American. He is not just another typical American, but "completely and absorbingly an America." However, his blood -- his race -- reminds him that he is also a Slav and a racial, if not a religious, Jew. If he is the same as the Slavs/Jews who have followed him to America, then they are the same as him: They, too, can become Americans. One is an American when one comes to consider America as the Fatherland, Steiner says. His choice of the term Fatherland is doubly interesting. One doesn't become an American by simply becoming an American citizen, which is a political and civic transformation, and does represent a very important step, as the title of his autobiography emphasizes. In becoming a citizen, one ceases being an alien. However, one truly becomes an American by recognizing America as one's father and other Americans as one's brothers and sisters; one becomes an American by mixing one's blood with the American blood. This introduces a blood/family element into the idea of American citizenship. By recognizing America as the Fatherland, Slavs and Latins and other new immigrants become blood brothers with Anglo-Saxon and Germanic Americans. The idea of a Fatherland is itself a very Germanic idea, as Steiner the student of Germany would have known. Steiner's linking of America, the Fatherland, and Christian brotherhood is interesting in light of his numerous other comments about race and blood. It isn't enough, Steiner seems to be saying, that the new immigrants become blood brothers with native Americans by declaring their allegiance to the American Fatherland. Native-born Americans, in the spirit of Christian brotherhood, must not only

show sympathy toward the new immigrants, as Riis would have them do, but also accept them as Americans, as members of the American family. In Against the Current, shortly after visiting with Tolstoy, who affirms for him the oneness of all people, Steiner ruminates about the presumed primacy of race. “‘Alles ist Rasse’ was the note which dominated the teaching of History in all its multitudinous divisions. I sometimes think that the opposite is true and that there is nothing in race; for I have experienced oneness with all sorts of people, both in the lower and higher spheres of life” (211). Steiner also seeks to subvert conventional contemporary race thinking when he says that From Alien to Citizen was “not written to increase prejudice, but rather to allay it; it is not a call to a new propaganda but to a new spirit” (17). The spirit Steiner proposes is the Christian spirit of universal brotherhood. Therefore, it isn’t simply blood, but also spirit, that binds people. In essence, Steiner is trying to subvert divisive race prejudice based on blood with the unifying spirit of the Christ’s universal brotherhood, using love to reconnect the blood ties that people such as Henry Cabot Lodge and other Anglo-Saxonists would seek to sever. Steiner, like other dissident voices of the time, is arguing that we are all one race, the human race, created once and for all time by God. However, as will be seen in Steiner’s depictions of the Italians and other new immigrants, he is imbued with the race thinking of his day, which more often than not emphasized hierarchical differences rather than similarities among the world’s peoples. Consequently, Steiner vacillates between the belief that race is nothing and that race is all.



Steiner is aware that becoming an American involves much more than changing one's clothes, learning some English, and erasing what he calls "external racial characteristics." He in fact prides himself on his ability to distinguish groups through their racial features. "Give me the immigrant on board of ship, and I will distinguish without hesitation the Bulgarian from the Servian, the Slovak from the Russian, and the Northern Italian from the Sicilian" (294). It is an odd group of pairings: the first four groups identify "races" that are roughly synonymous with existing or aspiring nationalities; only the Italians, who despite presumably comprising a single nationality, are nevertheless divided by race. Under Steiner's scheme, Northern Italians and Sicilians constitute separate races, just as the Bulgarians, Serbians, Slovaks and Russians do. Here, Steiner echoes a division made official by the U.S. Bureau of Immigration, which for statistical purposes was distinguishing between northern and southern Italians. But, if Steiner makes much of external racial differences, he also tries to undercut their power. These racial characteristics "which seem to us the most ineradicable and written as if by an 'iron pen upon the rock' are in most cases but chalk marks on a blackboard, so easily are they washed away" that Steiner, despite his expertise "in detecting racial marks," is "often puzzled and mistaken" (294). These outward racial marks, "things created by long ages of neglect, hunger, prosecution and climate, are often lost within one generation," if not sooner (294). Somewhat surprisingly, Steiner appears to be arguing that physical racial features are the product of the environment rather than of blood. In the American environment, therefore, the Jew begins looking less Jewish, the Bohemian less

Bohemian, so much so that Steiner often has “the greatest difficulty” distinguishing between members of different races two or three years after the men have landed in America. “It is true that in the first generation, the old racial marks still lie in the foreground, and that even in the second generation, the blood will speak out here and there; but it will require a very sharp scrutiny to detect this, and in the most cases there will be no hint of the past” (295). And yet, in the Orientals at least, external racial differences appear hereditary, not environmental. The “racial marks are most tenacious among certain Orientals where strange strains of blood have accentuated the difference,” Steiner says. But, he adds, even the Oriental Armenians, “people bearing the mark of their race most strongly,” had lost, at the end of ten years in America, “the peculiar sharpness of their features and were in that stage of transition where the American image was being imposed upon them” (295).

Steiner concedes that looking like an American doesn't necessarily mean becoming American, that appearances don't necessarily translate into character, although they just may. Steiner says he wants to avoid the dogmatism of Prescott F. Hall of the Immigration Restriction League, who believes that America will inherit the immigrant's disagreeable racial characteristics. Steiner argues that such fears are “too early to foretell” and that “the whole question of racial characteristics is still an open one” (296). But, Steiner asks, given “the undisputed fact” that outward racial marks disappear, “may we not also believe that with them go the peculiar racial qualities which mark and mar the life of the stranger?” (296). Here Steiner offers the example of the Polish peasant, who in

the Old World “is known for his inability to distinguish between ‘mine and thine,’ and between truth and falsehood.” However, against the Polish communities in America “neither thieving nor lying is laid to their charge” (296). If there are signs that the American environment can wash out the immigrant’s defects, there are also questions about the American’s ability to replace those defects with American virtues and political ideals, and to instill in them America’s broader culture. Steiner here is more circumspect. “Whether we shall enrich this New American by our own ideals, whether we shall implant in him the broad culture of our own spiritual and intellectual heritage, is a real problem whose solving may puzzle even future generations” (300).

Also problematic is the possibility that the new immigrant may bequeath to the American some of his own degenerate traits, may in effect contaminate American blood, as Prescott and the Immigration Restriction League were warning the nervous American public. To this, Steiner answers: “The truth is, that up to this date, in spite of the fact that already Slav, Jewish and Italian blood flows in the veins of some of us: in spite of the fact that these people fill the cities almost to overflowing, there is no perceptible physical or moral degeneration visible which can be traced to the foreigner” (304). Steiner quickly turns the tables, suggesting that the main problem might be not in the new immigrant but in the native-born American himself. Steiner specifically targets the idle, perverted “over-ripe” rich Americans who “alone are the great problem which we have need to fear; for it is a problem which cannot be solved.” Steiner says: “The question which the American faces is not whether the foreigner can be assimilated, but who will do the assimilating”

(306). While old and new immigrants alike are progressing, they are leaving behind the physically, mentally and spiritually bankrupt “sons of the shrewd and inventive Yankees” who “are keeping fast company, riding in fast automobiles, and drinking strong cocktails.” Here Steiner is challenging what he implies is the less-than-pure, even somewhat corrupt, Anglo-Saxon branch of the American family tree. Steiner ends his chapter on “The New American and the New Problem” by concluding: “It does not follow that these New Americans do not present a racial problem; but the problem is largely one of assimilating power on our part. The real problem is: Whether the American is virile enough and not so much whether the foreign material is of the proper quality.” Steiner argues “that there is still remarkable assimilating power left which increases rather than decreases with the mixture of blood.” The average New American may be “like wax, hard wax sometimes, -- perhaps more like lead or steel; but he will be molded into our image and bear the marks of our characteristics whatever they may be” (307). The immigrants will be changed, will be made into Americans, but just what that means Steiner leaves unanswered. The change will be accomplished by the American environment, which can take Europe’s refuse and in one generation turn these masses into Americans. Sounding very much like Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, Steiner describes the making of Americans as “planless, involuntary, even automatic, a natural result of this New World environment” (From Alien 14). This New World environment includes the bracing ozone-rich air which stirs sluggish blood and the public school which “grinds all the grain into the same grist”; the same food, economic opportunity,

and “American standard of living” throughout the land; and the most vital force of all, the English language (72-73). Although Steiner imposes an “our” and “they” dichotomy between the native-born American and immigrant stocks, he raises the possibility that “they,” the immigrants, can add assimilating power to “our” native American blood. By not elaborating on the resulting American image and characteristics, Steiner is implying that the American is evolving with the assimilation of the new immigrant, Steiner’s New American. If so, then it is not simply the American environment, but also Old World blood and culture, that contributes to the emerging American character. At this point, at least, Steiner seems to believe in a more liberal melting pot ideal than Riis’s more one-sided assimilationist model.

Steiner politely addresses On the Trail of the Immigrant to “My Dear Lady of the First Cabin,” an obviously privileged American woman most likely returning from a tour of Europe. His tone is unlike Riis’s blunt, sometimes in-your-face approach to preaching. Steiner presumably meets his “dear lady” on a ship carrying both returning American tourists and the immigrants whom Steiner is trailing. The “Dear Lady” is representative of a broad section of her gender and class, like Riis sympathetic to the poor immigrants but concerned about their effect on American society. Steiner gently reminds her: “You pitied them all; the frowsy headed, ill clothed women, the men who looked so hungry and so greedy, and above all you pitied, you said so, -- do you remember -- you said you pitied your own country for having to receive such a conglomerate of human beings, so near to the level of beasts” (10). Despite the lady’s concerns about immigration, her

sympathy extends a long way: she says good morning to a group of Italians in their native language and they smile back on her “all the joy of their native land.” Under Steiner’s tutelage, she not only learns to distinguish Italians from Slavs, Jews and Greeks, but also “the difference between a Sicilian and a Neapolitan, between a Piedmontese and a Calabrian” (12). It is clear, despite the woman’s liberality of interest and sympathy, where her primary loyalties lie, for Steiner’s lie in the same place. “I know no fatherland but America; for after all, it matters less where one is born, than where one’s ideals had their birth; and to me, America is not the land of almighty dollars, but the land of great ideals.” Steiner says he is “not yet convinced” that the peril to those ideals come from the “crude and unfinished” immigrant. “[I]f I were, I would be the first one to call out: ‘Shut the gates,’ and not the least one to exile myself for your country’s good” (14).

Steiner’s argument is a simple one: I am an American because I believe in American ideals. But if the new immigrants are a problem, then I’m a problem. Exclude them and you’ll have to exile me, an American, an American who can’t call “your” country mine. It’s an argument one can’t imagine the Nordic Riis making -- or even having to make. But Steiner doesn’t have the worries that his dear lady (and other Americans of her status) have, and his avowed purpose is to “win a little more sympathy for the immigrant” (13) in steerage from the American in first-class, where the real problem may be. “I think that the peril lies more in the first cabin than in the steerage; more in the American colonies in Monte Carlo and Nice than in the Italian colonies in New York and Chicago,” Steiner writes to his dear lady and others of her class. Here

echoes his muted critique of the physically, mentally, and spiritually weakened “sons of the shrewd and inventive Yankees” who keep fast company, ride in fast automobiles and drink strong cocktails. It is they who, by inference, can be revitalized by an infusion of new (more vital, if more primitive) immigrant blood. “Not the least of the peril lies in the fact that there is too great a gulf between you and the steerage passenger,” Steiner tells the lady, “whose virtues you will discover as soon as you learn to know him.” Steiner offers his book “in the hope that it will mediate between the first cabin and steerage; between the hilltop and the lower town; between the fashionable West side and the Ghetto” (14). The book is also a more frontal attack on America’s race nativists best represented for Steiner by the two delegates to the Conference on Immigrations who spoke out against immigration: the Ohio gentleman who in debate announced with menacing gesture, “We don’t want you to send none of them yellow worms from Southern Europe to our state, we got too many of them now,” and the man from Rhode Island who said, “We don’t want no more iv thim durrtty furriners in this grand and glorious counthry of ourn.” No doubt the two delegates “voiced the common prejudice which rests itself entirely upon its ignorance” (75).

Despite Steiner’s goodwill and the virtues he sees in the immigrants, these new foreigners in general and the Italian in particular continue to show some of the same old vices that Jacob Riis saw in them sixteen years earlier in How the Other Half Lives. If the immigrants en masse were not the problem, individual groups such as the Italians continued to be problematic. The Italian is still the most numerous of the new arrivals and

he “comes primarily from Southern Italy, from the crowded cities with their unspeakable vices; the smallest number of immigrants come from the villages where they have all the virtues of the tillers of the soil.” The Italian is the “most volatile” and “perhaps the most clannish” of America’s immigrants, and the Italians “represent a problem recognized by their home government, which was the first to concern itself with it, to study it systematically, and to aid our government so far as possible in a rational solution” (28). But still the Italian continues to come, he and his countrymen filling the steerage of transatlantic steamers. Steiner condemns conditions in steerage and calls for its abolition by law, even while conceding: “It is true that the Italian and Polish peasant may not be accustomed to better things at home, and might not be happier in better surroundings nor know how to use them; but it is a bad introduction to our life to treat him like an animal when he is coming to us” (37). Steerage isn’t such a bad deal for the Italian and Pole, then, but it’s unflattering to America’s image and a bad first step in receiving the immigrant. And yet the picturesque steerage, much like the ghetto tenements to which the immigrants were going, has a certain allure for the privileged who can gaze on it from their higher social and spatial planes. Voyeurism didn’t get much better than this for the privileged middle and upper classes, the dear men and the dear ladies of Steiner’s America. Says Steiner: “This practice of looking down into the steerage holds all the pleasures of a slumming expedition with none of its hazards of contamination; for the barriers which keep the classes apart on a modern ocean liner are as rigid as in the most stratified society, and nowhere else are they more artificial or more obtrusive” (41).



Steiner's shipboard slumming is even more attractive than Riis's ghetto slumming because here the aliens are more tightly contained, with no threat that they will break through the aesthetic frame and invade the middle-class neighborhoods, as they threaten to do once they arrive in New York's ghettos. Steiner's steerage scene obviously brings to mind Alfred Stieglitz's well-known photograph, "The Steerage," taken one year after publication of On the Trail of the Immigrant. The photograph was itself the product of a slumming expedition on the luxury liner *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, while it steamed to Europe. On the third day out Stieglitz, depressed about financial and family problems and oppressed by the prestige and wealth (particularly the *nouveaux riches*) in first-class, escaped to the end of the first-class deck. There below him was the scene for what he would later call his best and most representative work. "I stood spellbound for a while," Stieglitz recalls. "I saw shapes related to one another --- a picture of shapes, and underlying it, a new vision that held me: simple people; the feeling of ship, ocean, sky; a sense of release that I was away from the mob called 'rich'" (qtd. in Kiefer 321). Whatever the photograph means, in one sense it was a means of psychological and spiritual escape for Stieglitz.

For Steiner, steerage has an intimate connection with the rest of the ship. In an extended metaphor, he turns the steamship into an Old World monarchy -- a Russia, Austria, Poland or Italy. The average steerage passengers are content and resigned to being peasants. "The cabin passengers are the lords and ladies, the sailors and officers are the police and the army, while the captain is the king or czar" (41). The Italians are both

peasants and clowns, whose antics are enjoyed by touristic cabin passengers. The Italian peasants performed sleight of hand tricks (“which made them appear still more uncanny than the Slavs”), Punch and Judy marionette theater, and hurdy-gurdy music. And just now here’s the hurdy-gurdy man announcing, “I have the great honour of presenting to you the national anthem of the great American country to which we are travelling,” and then breaking into the ragtime notes of “Ta--ra--ra-boom--de-a” (52). Of course there is all the dirt, one of the reasons Steiner seeks to abolish steerage, but also one of the attractions of steerage as a slumming destination. All the steerage passengers are dirty, “the Italians being easily in the lead,” Steiner writes. “The Italians were from the South of Italy and had lost the romance of their native land but not the fragrance of the garlic. They quarreled somewhat loudly and gesticulated wildly; but were good neighbors those sixteen days. They were shy and not easily lured into confidences by one who knew their language but poorly, in spite of the fact that he knew their country well and loved it.” However, during the passage, Steiner says, “the average American has a chance to discover at least one thing which he has found it hard to believe; that all Italians are not alike, that they do not look alike, and that they are not all Anarchists” (51). But, if all Italians are not *all* Anarchists, many are law-breakers. “It is true that many criminals come, especially from Italy,” Steiner says. We see here the recurring theme first voiced by Riis and later taken up by James, that out of his native element, the Italian loses some of his attractive qualities, especially his romance, while retaining some of his less attractive features, in this case his smell. Moreover, this passage in On the Trail of the

Immigrant is fraught with contradictions, on one hand individualizing and humanizing the Italian, while on the other stereotyping and exoticizing him. All Italians are not alike, they don't look alike, and yet all of them smell of garlic and as a group are easily the dirtiest of the immigrant groups. All Italians are not Anarchists, and yet all quarrel and gesticulate wildly, and many are law-breakers.

If Italians are not all alike, it's not enough to divide them simply into northern and southern Italians. They are rather a conglomeration of types, Steiner says, who are touched, influenced and formed by mixtures of other racial/national types.

Where the Slav has touched the Italian, you see his heavy finger marks in a rough exterior, a slower gait, a harsher speech, more industry and less art. Where the Austro-Germans have enthralled and governed him you will find him more governable, more sedate, more a statesman and less a revolutionist, 'a captain of industry' rather than a leader of brigands, more a businessman and less a dreamer. Where the French crossed the mountains they made a gateway for their tastes and habits, which blended quickly and easily into the Italian character, for the Italians were never very unlike the French who were their friends and enemies in turn, and often both at the same time. Where the Arabians and the Greeks touched the South with thought and thoughtfulness, with culture and vices, with rest and restlessness, these contrasts are accentuated in the Italian, who, although small in stature, is great in passion and desires. (253)

Even as Steiner purports to show the rich variety of Italians, even imagining a multi-ethnic, almost pluralist culture, the passage perpetuates stereotypes and links physical and moral qualities. Even as he distinguishes between types of Italians, he essentializes the typical Italian types: the dreamer and art lover who is not much for business and industry; the brigand and the revolutionist who destroys order; the Italian who is less governable, less rational, and less sedate than his northern cousins; the excitable, passionate, grasping

Italian. Steiner never explicitly defines the uniquely Italian character to which elements of Italy's neighbors/conquerors were added, but the stereotypes are implicit in the passage. It is also interesting to look at what the other nationalities and races have contributed. The northern European Austro-Germans who "enthralled and governed" the Italian gave him only valuable traits such as order, industry, and statesmanship. The French, those friends/enemies who can be seen as a bridge between Mediterranean/Latin Italy and Nordic northern and western Europe, add their own tastes and habits, but Steiner never specifies what those are, just as he doesn't detail the Italian character to which these French traits so quickly and easily blend. While the eastern European Slav brings unattractive physical characteristics (rough physical exterior, slow gait, harsh speech), he contributes the vital moral value of industry, which allies the Slavs (and by extension Steiner himself), as well as the "Slavic" Italians, with the Austro-Germans, and ultimately with the native-born Americans. Finally, it is the southern European Greek and the Asiatic Arabian, itself a strange pairing, who are truly a mixed blessing for the people of the South of Italy, where they had their influence. These two groups are the only ones who add moral defects to the Italian character, where they are accentuated by the Italians' innate passion and desires.

Having categorized the Italian into geographical/racial subdivisions, Steiner now proceeds to dichotomize him into polar opposites. The first image is of the Italian as the railroad builder, a man not given to alcoholic excess, inventive, easily adjusted to any task (254). This image links the Italian to America's great railroad builders, both those

unskilled laborers who wielded the pick and shovel and those captains of industry who directed the glorious enterprise. This Italian's traits are American traits, Yankee/Anglo-Saxon traits: temperance, inventiveness, enterprise. However, this Italian has a "lazier brother," and it was this lesser sibling, this "pioneer of Italian migrations" who, "with a trained monkey and a hand-organ out of tune, made his way from place to place; he also came first across the Atlantic and caused many of us to believe that he was the typical Italian" (254). This organ grinder and his Italian cousins, the beggars who besiege tourists in Naples and the "lazy Lazzaroni" stretched out on the ground," whose very rags "become picturesque as the sunlight plays upon them with its wonderful coloring," are not the typical Italian but the exceptions, numerous as they seem" (254-55) -- and, it might be added, numerous as were those images in the pages of nineteenth-century American travel writing. In this passage, the dichotomy between the Italian railroad builder and the Italian organ grinder/beggar/lazy loungeur gets transformed subtly into a dichotomy between the northern and the southern Italian. The begging or idling Italian had a long history in American accounts of Italy, from Washington Irving to Mark Twain and Henry James. The beggar and idler were usually ascribed to all of Italy, but these types were most associated with Naples and the South.

As a rule, Steiner says, the Italian at home in Italy asks for but little in life.

Steiner says the Italians have the advantage over other new immigrants in living in a country whose "inexplicable charm" makes its name "synonymous with beauty and art." Despite claims of knowing and loving Italy well, Steiner overlooks the probability

that the Italians in steerage, the ones who foolishly mistake “Ta--ra--ra-boom--de-a” for the American national anthem, have very little connection to the romantic, heroic Italy of beauty and art. Still, Italy’s charm makes its people gay. “Sombre as is the Slavic world, from which both Jew and Slav emigrate, so bright and joyous is all Italy the home of most of the Latins who come to us” (252). Satisfied as he is with his condition in Italy, the Italian “is equally unsatisfied with any restraint by authority; lawlessness has cut so deep into his life, that it may be said to be a natural condition.” If the Italian’s lawlessness is naturalized, it is not essentialized. It is not something immanent in the Italian character, but has its roots in environmental and political causes. “The root of it lies in the fact that for centuries the lawmakers were aliens and conquerors, the laws being made for the strong and not for the weak; to oppress and not to protect” (255). Consequently, “[b]rigandage and heroism often became synonymous, while murder and theft were easily excused for the sake of expediency. Much of this spirit has remained in all classes, especially in the south . . . The consequence is that many of the criminals who come to our shores are Italians who are trying to escape punishment or who are entangled in the meshes of the Maffia or Camorra, and the officials are very glad to have their room rather than their company” (255-56) Having earlier commended the Italian government for helping to control undesirable emigration to American, Steiner now says that “[e]vidences are not lacking that their way out is made easy, even if it cannot be proved that the government aids them to come” (256). As Steiner implies, if the Italian’s lawlessness was a reaction to conquest and oppression, it was the most active in the South

under Bourbon rule. This lawlessness continues in the form of the Mafia and the Camorra, Steiner says, but now it is not brigandage alloyed with heroic political resistance. What Steiner seems to be ignoring is the continuing subjugation of southern Italians after unification, but now by the dominant northerners. By highlighting southern Italian lawlessness, Steiner is essentially parroting the charges leveled by northern Italian leaders against unruly southerners in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

On balance, Steiner says, it cannot be concluded that the Italian is dishonest. However, he develops this theme to the point of nearly negating it. The Italian “compares well with the average European who comes to us, but in his ethics he is decidedly mixed, and his poetical temper does not always help him to tell the exact truth” (256). The Italian isn’t dishonest, but neither does he always tell the truth. The fault lies with one of his virtues, his passion for poetry. The Italian is also “generous, if not chivalrous toward his wife, and with proper training in America he may become a docile husband” (257). His illiteracy is high, his education poor, but the Italian “is a good business man and a good organizer, having a talent for the dollar which today makes him a new business force in Europe, and one to be reckoned with; especially if he improves his business morals, which are very poor” (258). Steiner concludes his sketch of “The Italian At Home” by exposing the curse of the Catholic Church on the Italian.

**The Italian is sick and sore because the Church which has so long been his physician, acknowledges no error, and even its humble Pope will not persuade it that it must radically change its treatment; this is not only for the sake of Italy but for the sake of America also. The most dangerous element which can come to us from any country, is that which comes smarting under real or fancied wrongs,**

committed by those who should have been its helpers and healers. Such an element Italy furnishes in a remarkably great degree, and I have no hesitation in saying that it is our most dangerous element. (261)

Steiner here is saying that as victims Italians are a dangerous lot, but that the responsibility for the remedy lies at home, with the Church, and not with the Italian government or with America. In essence, he's saying, make your masses less huddled, less yearning to breathe free before you send them to us. Not stated explicitly, but perhaps implied, is the idea that less victimization of the Italian in Italy might also relieve the necessity of their coming to America in the first place.

This "most dangerous element" now emigrating to the United States in frightening numbers began benignly enough with the first Savoyard with trained bears and the organ-grinder with his monkey, Steiner says in the chapter, "The Italian in America." But here he forgets the Italian artists, artisans, professionals and political exiles who came in small numbers during the early and mid-nineteenth century. It was the bear-trainer and organ-grinder, and not a Filippo Mazzei, who were at the "vanguard of a vast army of men who were to come; first with a push-cart, later with shovel and pickax" (262). It is with the shovel and pickax -- with his muscle, that is -- that the Italian can lay claim to contributing to American life. "While the average Italian immigrant is not regarded by any of us as a public benefactor, it is a question just how far we could have stretched our railways and ditches without him; for he now furnishes the largest percentage of the kind of labour which we call unskilled, and he is found



wherever a shovel of earth needs to be turned, or a bed of rock is to be blasted” (262). Steiner’s railroad builders are at least second cousin to the Italian ditchers and diggers on the Jersey shore who conjure up such agonizing qualms in the heart of Henry James in The American Scene, published one year after Steiner’s book.

If hard-working, the American Italians in their homes have a “‘helter-skelter, I don’t care’ sort of atmosphere about their squalor” (263) and are considered an asset by landlords and real estate businesses because they “can be crowded more than any other human being” (268). Often, the Italian immigrants are being packed in tenements by one of their own, one of the eight hundred Italians who own \$15 million worth of housing, much of it tenements of the worst sort, in New York City. “The narrow quarters he rents are invariably sublet, and he imposes upon the newcomer conditions as hard as, or harder than, those under which he began life in the land of the free” (268-69). But, the Italians prefer to be among their own, “not so much from a feeling of clannishness, although that is not absent; but because among their own, they are safe from that ridicule which borders on cruelty, and with which the average American treats nearly every stranger not of his own complexion” (263).

Steiner’s confused and confusing representations of the Italians perpetuate a couple stereotypes and qualify another. They express sympathy, struggle to get behind appearances, but end by criticizing both the Italian and the American. The Italian is made out to be naturally messy and unconcerned about his personal space, a subject on which Riis is less dogmatic and divided. Steiner gives no reason for the Italian’s natural

messiness; it just exists. However, the Italian's clannishness can be explained. He isn't as clannish as reputed (or as painted by Riis and others); he simply prefers his own kind. His isolation and apparent clannishness are not essential character traits but a shield against the average American's ridicule -- ridicule that is *almost* but not quite cruel. This ridicule is directed by the typical American toward *almost* everyone of different complexion, which implies that the average (native-born) American has a similar complexion, one that differs in some way from that of the Italian.

This admixture of sympathy, limited understanding, and subtle nativism continues throughout Steiner's representation of the Italian. Addressing the concerns of farmers who fear the Italian's incursion into rural America (an incursion that Riis promoted), Steiner cites the case of the peaceful town of Bryan, Texas, composed of "what we usually call the least desirable element, the Sicilian" (270). By 1905, this farming town had a majority population of 3,000 Sicilians, many of them successfully growing corn and cotton for the marketplace on bottomlands near the Brazos River. For native-born American farmers, if not for the average American (Steiner doesn't say), the "word 'Dago' has in it an element of dread; it carries the sound of the dagger, and the dynamite bomb" (270). But the fear of Italian violence is overblown, Steiner implies, employing the model town of Bryan, as well as some twisted and tortured logic of his own, to make his case. He claims that the statistics on Italians in prison are misleading because despite the large numbers, there are far fewer Italian criminals than the numbers would indicate. Besides, the Italian's crimes are Old World crimes. Although most Italians in prison

“have used the stiletto and the pistol too freely,” they are not real criminals motivated by gain, but some other type of criminal motivated by jealousy or affairs of honor. “The worst thing about the Italians is that they have no sense of shame or remorse” (272-73). The image of the Italian beggar, Steiner continues, is also overblown. Despite “the fact that Italy seems to be the land of beggars, the Italian immigrant is rarely a mendicant,” Steiner writes, here directly citing Jacob Riis and statistics that appeared in How the Other Half Lives. However, the Italian is mercenary and unethical, Steiner says. Now contradicting Riis on Italian child labor, Steiner claims the Italian drives the Jew out of the clothing business through the use of his children’s labor. The Italian has no educational ambitions for his children and is “a sinner above all others in the use of his children’s labour” (271). Furthermore, the Italian “is very fertile in inventing excuses for the purposes of evading the law, and his ethical standard in that direction is extremely low. This comes from his inherited hatred of all governmental restrictions” (271-72). The Italian “is not religious by nature,” but “as a rule he has no understanding for the serious and ethical side of religion” and “is a heathen who still needs to have his spiritual nature discovered and stirred . . .” (278). Having damned the Italian to the realm of the heathen, Steiner offers yet another qualification, whose faint praise is perhaps no less damning. “Nevertheless the Italian is no degenerate; he usually survives the wretched years of his infancy and then like all people who share his environment, grows up less rugged, perhaps more subtle, and hardened to some things which would prove a very serious handicap to those of us who know the value of pure air and of soap and water” (277).

The "trail of the immigrant" eventually brings Steiner back to the steamship, this one the *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, departing Hoboken, New Jersey, for the Old World. This was the same luxury liner on which Alfred Stieglitz shot "The Steerage" a few years later. Steiner says the steerage again is crammed to the limit with Jews, Slavs, Italians and Germans who settle in their congested quarters "in a somewhat closer fellowship than on the westward journey; for now they have a common experience and a few sentences of a common language to bind them to one another" (334). These same polyglot immigrants, although bound by their American experience, are separated by the most important aspect of that experience, its success or failure. They may be divided into two classes: "those who go home because they have succeeded, and those who go home because they have failed." Even the successful ones "have not yet reached the point of achievement which lifts them from steerage to the cabin, but still belong to that large class which goes back to the Fatherland for a season and then returns, to try again the road to fortune" (335). According to Steiner's reckoning, more than a quarter of America's immigrants were of this class of "birds of passage," many of whom were Italians. The class of relatively successful "birds of passage" are far from Americanized, for, most importantly, they still recognize their old country as the Fatherland. However, the relatively successful returning emigrant "has lost much of the Old World spirit and is neither so docile nor so polite as it was when it first occupied these quarters," Steiner says (335), echoing Henry James' lament that Italian immigrants in the New World lost much of their charm and

their manners. This type of immigrant commands greater civility from the ship's crew because he "has grown to be something more of a man, has more self-assertion and more dollars; all of which has power to subdue the over-officious crew" (335). It is interesting here that Steiner measures manhood on the basis of American will power, individualism and dollars, rather than on the spirit of Christian brotherhood, and rather than on loyalty to mother and family, which Riis seems to have done in "Paolo's Awakening."

Steiner does not say in which category of returning immigrant the Italian generally finds himself, but he does observe that among the much fewer immigrants who have escaped steerage and now command a cabin, are "[b]ut few Italians . . . half a dozen who had reached that degree of prosperity . . ." These came from America's South, where they had been involved in the prospering cotton business, and now were "indulging" in a trip to Europe.

They were genteel, and quiet, and so well dressed and well groomed, that it came as a surprise to most of the passengers to find that they were Italians, and that they had risen from the 'Dago' class. On them America had performed the miracle of transformation, in spite of its sordid instincts and its materialistic atmosphere; a miracle which art-filled Italy could not perform, a task before which both sculptor and painter are powerless. (354)

The change that Steiner sees in these successful Italians is a change in appearance and demeanor. Whether they have become Americans in Steiner's definition of the word,

whether they recognize in America a new Fatherland, Steiner does not say. They are no longer dirty, poorly dressed, loud and uncouth, but now solidly middle class in their well-scrubbed gentility, all of which would make Riis happy. And what has effected this miracle of transformation if not American capitalism and American money, despite the sordid instincts and materialism that characterized much of American money-making. The very things that supposedly dismay Steiner -- and the same things that Henry James saw as a blight on American society and culture and as a cancer on the American character -- effect the transformations of those few Italians in the cabins. American capitalism, not Italian culture, which is represented by the (powerless) arts of the sculptor or painter, is what makes these Italians look more American. What Americans had most valued in Italy, its art and music and poetry, was of little value in these modern times and in modern America. Art-filled Italy couldn't turn dirty, uncouth peasants into genteel folk; commercial America could and did. Artistic beauty and truth couldn't refine these lowly workers, but sordid American capitalism could. This surely would be food for thought for Henry James's "brooding analyst" in The American Scene.

**Chapter II**  
**Whose Home Is This Anyway?:**  
**Henry James, Picturesque Peasants, and Flagrant Foreigners**

**“There is generally a rabble of infantile beggars at the door, pretty enough in their dusty rags, with their fine eyes and intense Italian smile, to make you forget your individual best to make these people, whom you like so much, unlearn their old vices.”**

**-- Henry James, 1873**

**“Young Italy, preoccupied with its economical and political future, must be heartily tired of being admired for its eyelashes and its pose.”**

**-- Henry James, 1877**

**“Is not the universal sauce essentially *his* sauce, and do we not feel ourselves feeding, half the time, from the ladle, greasy as he chooses to leave it for us, that he holds out?”**

**-- Henry James, 1907**

**“The types and faces bore them out; the people before me were gross aliens to a man, and they were in serene and triumphant possession.”**

**-- Henry James, 1907**

In 1904, after a twenty-one-year absence, Henry James returned to the United States for an extended visit to his native land before returning to his adopted home in England. The trip produced a series of seismic shocks for the sixty-one-year-old James. Big ugly factories, a society grasping for dollars and goods, and swarms of urban immigrants assaulted his senses. His eyes saw much that was of a strikingly alien character, in particular the Italian and Jewish immigrants he encountered (and often sought out) in New York City and other places in the Northeast. James's reaction to this industrial growth, rampant materialism, and "new immigration" was a complex, subtly shaded one, as recorded in The American Scene (1907). However, at least one overriding theme stands out: Henry James as a stranger in a strange land, the prodigal son returned home to a country from which he has been dispossessed. In many cases, the dispossessors are the masses of foreigners with whom he finds little possibility of communication. There is little doubt that, initially, James often recoils from much of what he sees. He frets about the foreign element -- what he calls the "alien" -- and wonders what effect it will have on the country and on American national character. He speculates about America's ability to assimilate these new immigrants, so many of whom are Italians, immigrants from a land that James knew and loved so well. Of course James had seen and been acquainted with Italians for decades, but these Italian immigrants were, for James, something quite different, something entirely alien, from the picturesque *contadino* of the Roman Campagna. That these Italians should appear as alien as the



much less familiar -- or more truly alien -- Jews, Russians and Slavs, whom James hadn't known in their native lands, speaks volumes about James's complex relationship to Italians.

James describes a series of encounters with Italian immigrants in The American Scene, all of them unsettling. Along the New Jersey shore he encounters a gang of Italian laborers "of superlatively southern type." But there is no communication between James and the Italians, not even the possibility of communication, even though James must have picked up at least a smattering of Italian during extended trips to that country. The sterile, silent encounter shocks James, remembering as he does more fruitful rural excursions in Europe/Italy which had never failed to produce a "social relation with any encountered type, from whichever end of the scale proceeding" (91). What causes the failure of intercourse here, and why the different outcome in Europe/Italy? One explanation might be that in Italy, both James and the Italians had clearly defined roles. In Italy, James was the privileged traveler and artist, the Italian lower classes generally cordial and accommodating subjects. In America, James, because of his long absence, and the Italians, because of their transplantation, occupy much more equivocal positions. In fact, both, in one fashion or another, have to define themselves in terms of their assumed Americanness. This failure of brotherhood along the Jersey shore, and subsequent failures in other encounters, are for James "rather a chill, strait-way, for the heart, and rather a puzzle, not less, for the head" (91). In another scene in Boston Common, James

encounters large groups of foreigners who spoke “a rude form of Italian” or “some outland dialect,” but no “shade of American speech” strikes James’s ear. He describes the foreigners as “gross aliens to a man,” and, he adds, “they were in serene and triumphant possession” (172).

It is perhaps easy to sympathize with, if not completely understand, James’s feelings. During his absence from the United States, the country had experienced an unprecedented tide of immigration from eastern and southern Europe. Almost nine million immigrants poured into the United States from 1881 to 1900; more than six million arrived during the next decade. Between 1890 and 1910, the number of non-English speakers doubled to more than twenty percent of the population. James, caught in the maelstrom of these changes, couldn’t help but feel disoriented. For the Anglo-Saxon James, whose sphere of interest lay mostly in northwestern Europe (with the exception, interestingly enough, of Italy), most of the newcomers were truly aliens, a new type. James had never traveled in Russia and Eastern Europe and presumably had never had much personal experience with peoples of those regions. One might expect the immigrants from those alien countries to command James’s attention, and to a great extent the Jewish immigrants do. And yet, in scene after scene in The American Scene -- on the Jersey shore, in Boston Common, in Salem, and in New York City -- James ruminates on Italians who are another breed altogether from the ones he thought he knew. James seems to be saying that, for the Italians, transplantation to the New World wasn’t

simply a case of putting old wine in a new bottle. This wine had lost its color, its distinctive bouquet. James laments this change:

The Italians, who, over the land, strike us, I am afraid, as after the Negro and the Chinaman, the human value most easily produced, the Italians meet us, at every turn, only to make us ask what has become of that element of the agreeable address in *them* which has, from far back, so enhanced for the stranger the interest and the pleasure of a visit to their beautiful country. They shed it utterly, I couldn't but observe, on their advent, after a deep inhalation or two of the clear native air; shed it with a conscientious completeness which leaves one looking for any faint trace of it. 'Colour,' of that pleasant sort, was what they had appeared, among the races of the European family, most to have . . . (98)

These encounters and ruminations and other similar passages in The American Scene raise fundamental questions about James's relationships to Italy, Italians, and Italian-Americans, and how those relationships ultimately help to illuminate James's relationships to America and Americans. Prior to The American Scene, the subjects of Italy, Americans in Italy, and Italians in Italy and occasionally elsewhere in Europe, played varying roles in a significant portion of James's travel sketches, short stories and novels. In addition to his book of sketches/essays, Italian Hours, James used Italian scenes and characters in his biographical William Wetmore Story and His Friends (1903) and in fictional works such as Roderick Hudson (1875), Daisy Miller (1878), The Portrait of a Lady (1881), The Princess Casamassima (1886), The Aspern Papers (1888), The Wings of the Dove (1902), and The Golden Bowl (1904), among others. Almost always James places his Italians in an imagined Italy. However, on at least two occasions James imagines an Italian character who has ventured forth from his native land, in each case

ending up in James's own adopted home, England. The first Italian in England is Oronte, the young Italian model in James's curious tale, "The Real Thing" (1892). Oronte is followed to England by James's most elaborated Italian character, Prince Amerigo of The Golden Bowl, published just a couple months after James arrived in the United States for his American scene tour.

The Italian in America, then, was an entirely new theme for James, one that, coming as it did late in life, can be read against his earlier depictions of things and people Italian. One significant question is whether James saw the Italian in America as fundamentally different from the Italian in Italy. Had the Italian immigrant lost his color, as James suggests in The American Scene, where he also uses the trope of shedding? Or had this Italian simply taken on another less colorful color? Is it a case of the colors of romance in Italian Hours and some of the fictional works being replaced by the grimy black and white of reality in The American Scene? Were the Italians themselves so much changed, or was James simply seeing them from a different position, against a different background, and in a different light? Does The American Scene essentially turn the familiar into the foreign, the picturesque into the alien? Or, as some critics have argued more recently, do we find in James's encounters with Italian and other immigrants some tentative efforts to identify with these foreigners, to incorporate them into American scene, and in that way to imagine a new American culture and national character radically different from the essentially Anglo-Saxon society that James had known some

two decades earlier? This chapter will attempt to trace James's attitudes toward and images of Italy and Italians from a childhood saturated with romantic notions, through a young manhood and maturity filled with numerous trips to Italy, into an old age in which he is confronted with masses of Italians who have invaded his native land, forcing him to reconsider and reevaluate his earlier ideas. In its broader contours, James's life raises or reprises -- and sometimes resists -- many of America's prevailing ideas about and responses to Italy and Italians.

Of the countless American writers, artists, and intellectuals who traveled to, lived in, and professed undying love for Italy in the nineteenth century, perhaps none loved it with the passion of Henry James. His was a lifelong love affair, marked by all the intense contradictions of being in love. As biographer Leon Edel points out, in James's writing about Italy "the 'word' passion crops up at every turn, in letter, in travel impression, in story" (qtd. in *Maves* 4). His infatuation with Italy and things Italian began early in life. As a child, he remembers his elders returning from the opera, "sounding those rich Italian names, Bosio and Badiali, Ronconi and Staffanone." Later, he accompanies those elders to Castle Garden in New York City to hear "that rarest of infant phenomena, Adelina Patti . . . the most prodigious of fairies, of glittering fables." Italy also wafted into his consciousness through an amateur performance at a minor hall. Here, James says,

we were so near the improvised platform that my nose was brushed by the petticoats of the distinguished amateur who sang 'Casta Diva,' a very fine fair woman with a great heaving of bosom and flirt of crinoline, and that the ringletted Italian gentleman in black velvet and a romantic voluminous cloak who

represented, or rather who professionally and uncontrollably was, an Improvisatore, had for me the effect, as I crouched gaping, of quite bellowing down my throat. (Small Boy 114-115)

It wasn't only on the strains of music that Italy wafted into James's consciousness. There were also the lines and colors of art. James recalls the deep disappointment of seeing Bryan's Gallery of Christian Art, a "collection of worm-eaten diptychs and triptychs," later exposed as fakes. "The main disconcertment had been its ugly twist to the name of Italy, already sweet to me for all its dimness -- even could dimness have prevailed in my felt measure of the pictorial testimony of home . . ." (268-269). Testimony aplenty was found in the James home. In one room, there was an ample landscape of Florence by Thomas Cole. In the foreground, the figure of a contemplative monk on a terrace was, James says, "a constant friend of my childhood." In another room there was Italy again, "a great abundance of Italy" framed in another large landscape over the sofa and chiseled into a classic marble bust, dubbed the Bacchante, straight from an American studio in Rome. The large landscape was "a so-called 'view of Tuscany'" by a French painter, but its fidelity as a Tuscan landscape is disputed by a family friend "who in the golden age of the precursors, though we were still pretty much precursors, had lived longest in Italy." When James's father challenges those doubts, the friend speaks of Tuscany's soft colors and "certain haze in the atmosphere," prompting little Henry to pipe in: "'Why, of course,' I can hear myself now blushing but triumphantly intermingle," James recounts in his autobiographical A Small Boy and Others, "— 'the

softness and the haze of our Florence there: isn't Florence in Tuscany?" (271). Little Henry's first trip to Italy was still in the future, but already Italy was a geography, an idea, a reality for him. Florence was his Florence, something soft and hazy, something to be appropriated aesthetically.

Early in life, then, James found in Italy a variety of goods. Although Italy was initially for the young James strictly an aesthetic experience, mediated as it was for many Americans through music and art, it signified for him more than just a source of imported high culture. Here, for the sensitive and imaginative "small boy," were exoticism ("those rich Italian names"), sensuality ("great heaving bosom and flirt of crinoline," "great abundance," "softness"), and romance ("the most prodigious of fairies, of glittering fables").

James first crossed the Alps into Italy in September 1869, as a mature young man of twenty-six and the author of fourteen published short stories. In his youth he had traveled through western Europe with his family, but his first venture into the South was made alone, which perhaps explains the immediate and profound effect that actually being in Italy had on him. He would later say, in the short story "Benvolio" (1875), that "the world has nothing better to offer a man of sensibility than a first visit to Italy during those years of life when perception is at its keenest, when knowledge has arrived, and yet youth has not departed" (*Complete Tales* 3: 391). From Rome, he gushes about the Eternal City in a letter to his brother, William: "At last -- for the first time -- I live." He

staggers “reeling and moaning thro’ the streets, in a fever of enjoyment,” traversing the whole of Rome in four or five hours and gorging on the ruins and monuments. “The effect is something indescribable. For the first time I know what the picturesque is.” He concludes by telling William, “In fine I’ve seen Rome, and I shall go to bed a wiser man than I last rose---yesterday morning. . . .” (Letters 1: 24-25). Eight years later, after a visit to a now unified Italy struggling to modernize, James still feels the country’s seductions, even if his response isn’t as immediate and unqualified as it was during his first visit. In a letter to longtime friend Grace Norton, sister of Charles Eliot Norton, he writes, “Italy was still more her irresistible ineffable old self than ever . . . In spite of the ‘changes’ -- and they are very perceptible -- the old enchantment of Rome, taking its own good time, steals over you and possesses you, till it becomes really almost a nuisance and an importunity” (1: 57). Although older and presumably wiser, James still feels the enchantments of the stealthy seductress Italy and its threat of possession. The trope of possession will recur in The American Scene, but there it is Italian immigrants threatening possession while also risking being possessed. During another trip to Italy in 1881, James introduces an almost elegiac tone, describing three days in Vicenza that were “wonderfully sweet; old Italy, and the feeling of it.” He vividly recalls wandering into the Piazza. “It was so soft, so mellow, so quiet, so genial, so Italian: very little movement, only the waning of the bright day, the approach of the summer night” (Notebooks 222). In 1887, in another letter to Grace Norton, James again writes of his



continuing love affair with Italy despite his maturing years. "It was a great satisfaction to me to find that I am as fond of that dear country as I ever was -- and that its infinite charm and interest are one of the things in life to be most relied upon. I was afraid that the dryness of age . . . had reduced my old *tendresse* to a mere memory. But no -- it is really so much in my pocket, as it were, to feel that Italy is always there" (1: 126). Italy finally ends as a symbol of constancy and endurance in a world of sometimes disconcerting change. No longer a young seductress, Italy is now an old dear (female) friend, still capable of occasional surprise, toward whom the mature forty-four-year-old James feels tender.

James's initial reactions to the Italians themselves were even more equivocal than his ideas about Italy. Writing to his mother during his first trip in 1869, James complains of not having talked with anyone but hotel servants and church custodians during the six weeks he had been in Italy. Even so, James does an early dress rehearsal for the passionate cultural pilgrim role he will eventually stake out, commenting on the "incredible lack of *culture*" he sees in the common American tourist, particularly when compared to the Briton. Curiously, he discovers that the Englishmen in Italy have the advantage of being seen against the context of the Italians, an advantage which Americans for some reason do not have. "In the midst of these false and beautiful Italians," James tells his mother, the Englishmen "glow with the light of the great fact, that after all they love a bath-tub and they hate a lie" (1: 21-23). The Italians, like Italy,

are feminized into seducers/seductresses, but unlike the English, Italians are dirty and untrustworthy -- they do not love a bath-tub and do not hate a lie.

James would eventually make fourteen trips to Italy over a span of thirty-eight years. He would confess himself "the lifelong victim" of "the most beautiful country in the world," the "subtlest daughter of History," a man seduced by Italy's physical beauty and her provocatively complex and sometimes scandalous past. Italy, and to a lesser extent its people, would find their way into many of James's fictional works. But while Italian characters roam his fictional landscape, Italians themselves are surprisingly scarce in the nonfictional accounts of their homeland found in Italian Hours and William Wetmore Story and His Friends. "Real" Italians move to the foreground only when they appear in America, in The American Scene.

In what follows I want to first examine James's relation to Italy, the meaning he found there and the uses to which he put it, both personally and professionally. Then I want to look more closely at his depictions of Italians in Italy and England, before concluding with his treatment of Italians in America in The American Scene. While my discussion will range over a number of works, including a number of short stories, my main focus, along with The American Scene, will be Italian Hours, which represents James's most concentrated and extended nonfictional writings on Italy, and the late novel The Golden Bowl, which features James's most fully realized Italian character, Prince Amerigo.

Henry James, like other Americans of his gender and class, derived varied benefits from travel. For many Americans in the nineteenth century, travel to Europe was both a pilgrimage and a spiritual, intellectual and cultural homecoming, the place where the American went to define himself by reference to another, the European. Travel was a mark of social status and, for writers, a way to claim the respect of the American audience. It was a site for personal freedom and the fulfillment of a host of desires, sensual and aesthetic. Among the most important benefits of travel for James was what William Stowe calls “acquisitive cognition,” or the accumulation of cultural, aesthetic and spiritual capital. James often referred to Italy itself as perpetual capital that he wants to let slumber in his mind (Stowe 169). For James, as for so many others who came before him, Italy represented history, art, culture, and romance. “If ‘Europe’ to James meant form and style and social variety, if it meant beauty, art, and a present suffused with the past, then Italy seemed to represent for him the quintessence of Europe,” writes Alan Holder. “He thought Italy the most beautiful country in the world and his love for her is revealed in his travel sketches, a love, he said late in his career, he had never been fully able to express” (269, 270).

Aesthetically, Italy and its landscape couldn’t have been more pleasing for James. It was, as he himself said, the essence and meaning of the picturesque. But beneath Italy’s pleasing aesthetic surfaces and the practical benefits it offered, James found less pleasing images of danger, poverty, and moral bankruptcy lurking in the background. We see

these conflicting images in some of the early stories that emerged from the first two trips to Europe in 1869-70 and 1872-74. "The picture of Italy as the land of art, of passion, and of the survival of the pagan past conforms to traditional American images, and so does the undertone of social or political criticism contained in occasional allusions to the 'heavy heritage' of the past, to the profligate alliance of 'arts and vices,' and to the daily misery of common people hidden behind the holiday show of the picturesque" (Wegelen 27). James's antithetical images of Italy embody not only conventional American notions, but also typically Anglo-Saxon perceptions dating as far back as the Renaissance. On the one hand Italy was seen "as a venerable relic of the Roman Empire, as purveyor and exemplar of culture and civilization, a land of carefree sensuous enjoyment and sunny skies"; at the same time it was an Old World, Roman Catholic "sink of elegant vice and luxurious corruption, of subtle treachery with dagger and poison, of cynical sensual indulgence and Machiavellian casuistry, a moral hothouse pullulating with Jesuits, assassins, and courtesans" (Maves 5). We are reminded that if James Russell Lowell saw ancient Italy as a soulmate for America, earlier in life he believed that contemporary Italy was peopled with monks bearing poison and "bravos" wielding stilettos. James, throughout his treatments of Italy and Italians in Italy, deals with three complex motifs or broad thematic areas: romance, treachery, and sensuousness (Maves 6), which we begin to see in his early tales.

In the three years following his first visit to Italy, James wrote five tales with Italian settings. These include what may be regarded as his first truly international story, "Travelling Companions," first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in November and December 1870. This story, as well as his second Italian tale, "At Isella" (1871), are essentially fictionalized travelogues, each with narrators who are making their first trips to Italy. However, both stories begin to lay out in some concentrated fashion James's attitudes toward Italy.

In "Travelling Companions," the narrator is a Mr. Brooke, a young American who has been living in Germany, from where he had long "dreamed of this Italian pilgrimage" he is now making (2: 175). From the start, the narrator engages in the type of racial and geographical distinctions that will be more schematically laid bare by Jacob Riis, Edward Steiner, and other race-conscious observers of the late nineteenth century. The narrator says that Da Vinci's Last Supper in Milan is the "most strictly impressive picture in Italy" because it is the first Italian masterwork one encounters "in coming down from the North" and because of the "very completeness of its decay" (171). These observations by Brooke conflate Italy, high art, and decay, and implicitly contrast Germany and Italy, North and South, Anglo-Saxon/Nordic and Mediterranean/Latin. The North is where one lives, where one makes a living. The South, on the other hand, is where one visits, to satisfy the senses, both aesthetic and sensual. It is not only decayed, but warm, soft, picturesque, and romantic. The narrator loves the heat because it seems to his "Northern

senses to deepen the Italian, the Southern, the local character of things” (175). Milan has for him “a peculiar charm of temperate gayety,—the softness of the South without its laxity” (181). He tells Charlotte Evans, the American woman he meets in Milan: “It’s the South, the South . . . the South in nature, in man, in manners. . . . It’s the South. . . . Don’t you feel it in all your nerves?” (181). Brooke says that Northern Italy itself

exhaled the pure essence of romance. What words can reproduce the picture which these northern Italian towns project upon a sympathetic retina? They are shabby, deserted, dreary, decayed, unclean. In those August days the southern sun poured into them with a fierceness which might have seemed fatal to any lurking shadow of picturesque mystery. But taking them as cruel time had made them and left them, I found in them an immeasurable instruction and charm (184).

In Venice, Charlotte speaks of “this bright, sad elegance of ruin,” to which the narrator replies that Venice’s reality exceeds its romance, that it was “romance enough simply to be here” (194). But it isn’t romance enough simply to be in Italy; one must also possess it. Early on in the story we get these images of possession and appropriation. From his vista atop the cathedral in Milan, Brooke says: “To the south the long shadows fused and multiplied, and the bosky Lombard flats melted away into perfect Italy. This prospect offers a great emotion to the Northern traveller. A vague delicious impulse of conquest stirs his heart” (179). However, there is always the chance that one may be possessed by that which he seeks to possess. Italy threatens a reverse conquest. After Charlotte has rejected Mr. Brooke’s initial proposal of marriage, she tells him she hopes she will not see him in Rome, as he has suggested. “I had rather not meet you again in Italy. It

perverts our dear good old American truth” (218). Here, Italy’s romance is equated with falsity, which in turn are contrasted to the reality of American truth.

However, if Charlotte wants to draw a line between clear-eyed American truth and blinding (untruthful) Italian romance, Brooke seeks instead to dissolve the distance between the Italian reality and the Italian romantic picturesque. For him, Venice’s reality is its romance. When Charlotte and Brooke meet an Italian woman in the Milan cathedral, we see another example of the narrator trying to transform reality into romance, into the picturesque. Although the woman tells them she had been praying “such bitter, bitter tears,” the narrator tells Charlotte: “This poor woman is the genius of the Picturesque. She shows us the essential misery that lies behind it. It’s not an unwholesome lesson to receive at the outset. Look at her sweeping down the aisle. What a poise of the head! The picturesque is handsome all the same” (183). Despite the narrator’s awareness that misery is a major element of the picturesque, rather than dwell on that misery or its material causes, he instead concludes with an aesthetic appreciation of the picturesque to which that misery contributes. This fleeting awareness of the grim reality behind the picturesque is typical of James’s own response to Italy in his travel essays. And it isn’t only the poor and oppressed who are aestheticized in James’s fiction and nonfiction. Later in “Travelling Companions,” Brooke and Charlotte see a group of young Venetian gentlemen who are “splendid in dress, after the manner of their kind, and glorious with

the wondrous physical glory of the Italian race." However, the narrator says, they need only "velvet and satin and plumes" to be "subjects for Titian and Paul Veronese" (195).

For all their pleasing aesthetic qualities, the young Venetian gentlemen with their splendid dress and "wondrous physical glory" are seen as inferior to a young man, a gentleman, and a lady -- "all genuine Anglo-Saxons" -- to whom the Venetians are compared. The young Anglo-Saxon man is "not beautiful" but, rather, "handsome," Charlotte says, contrasting him to the Venetian gentlemen who are "exceedingly beautiful." Here, not only Italy but its men are gendered as feminine, pleasing to look at, but without the Anglo-Saxon's more virile "handsome" manhood. The young Anglo-Saxon's masculine handsomeness isn't the only thing that distinguishes him from the Venetians' feminine beauty. Unlike the Venetians, who are fit only as passive subjects of a picturesque painting, the young Anglo-Saxon is something altogether different. "The young man's face was full of decision and spirit; his whole figure had been moulded by action, tempered by effort. He looked simple and keen, upright, downright." When Charlotte inquires whether the young man is English or American, Brooke, like many of the Anglo-Saxonists of the late nineteenth century, dismisses any difference between the two. "He is both," Brooke tells Charlotte, "or either. He is made of that precious clay that is common to the whole English-speaking race" (196).

Charlotte's father is also characterized in contrast to the passive, picturesque Italians. Mr. Evans "bore the national stamp." He is "this perfect American" and has a



“shrewd, firm, generous face, which told of many dealings with many men, of stocks and shares and current prices” (173). Later, the narrator again says Evans is in many ways “an excellent representative American,” who although lacking taste, culture or polish, “nevertheless produced an impression of substance in character, keenness in perception, and intensity in will, which effectually redeemed him from vulgarity.” In fact, it seems to Brooke that Evans’s “good-humored tolerance and easy morality, his rank self-confidence, his nervous decision and vivacity, his fearlessness of either gods or men, combined in proportions of which the union might have been very fairly termed aristocratic” (198).

There are Italians in “Travelling Companions” who, like the Americans/Anglo-Saxons, are active, decisive, willful, but they too stand in contrast to Mr. Evans and the handsome young man who is compared to the beautiful Venetian gentlemen. In Vicenza, Brooke meets a young Italian whose family tries to persuade him to buy a painting that they try to pass off as a genuine Correggio. The narrator is attracted to the painting of a Madonna and Child because in his eyes the Madonna bears a striking resemblance to Charlotte Evans. The mother of the family plays on the narrator’s sympathies with a sad tale about her poor, ailing daughter. Looking at the painting, the narrator thinks of Charlotte and compares her to the Italian daughter. “How she seemed to glow with strength, freedom, and joy, beside this somber, fading Southern sister!” (189). The narrator buys the painting and leaves the Vicenza household “with a painful, indefinable

sadness. So beautiful they all were, so civil, so charming, and yet so mendacious and miserable!" (191). Like Mr. Evans, these Italians are shrewd dealers, but they lack his character and are essentially false in their business dealings and false in their appearances, especially the daughter, who is a pale Southern version of Charlotte and her Northern/American/Anglo-Saxon health and freedom.

Later in the story, the narrator works his way down the Italian peninsula, to Naples, where he discovers his mistaken assessment of northern Italy. What he thought had been the South was in reality something else not quite the real South. "In Naples I discovered the real South---the Southern South,---in art, in nature, in man, and the least bit in woman," he says, virtually echoing phrases he had used to describe the Italian North (220). The last Italian introduced in "Travelling Companions" is a Neapolitan lady recommended to the narrator by a German lady friend. "She assured me on my first visit that she was a 'true Neapolitan,' and I think, on the whole, she was right. She told me that I was a true German, but in this she was altogether wrong." The narrator spends four days with the woman, who remains unnamed. On the last day, she takes him to Capri, where she has an infant. Returning to Naples, the lady sings a song for the narrator. Here and now is when the narrator realizes that he has mistakenly assumed that Northern Italy could have the "softness of the South without its laxity," that it might be the true South. Now he sees that the difference between Northern Italy and Southern Italy is more fundamental. "As I looked up at Northern Italy, it seemed, in contrast, a cold, dark

hyperborean clime, a land of order, conscience, and virtue. How my heart went out to that brave, rich, compact little Verona! How there Nature seemed to have mixed her colors with potent oil, instead of as here with crystalline water, drawn though it was from the Neapolitan Bay!" (220).

This distinction between northern and southern Italy was one that many would make later in the nineteenth century as they tried to balance long-held notions of romantic, heroic Italy with negative images of Italian immigrants. The distinction allowed Americans to continue to admire Italy in its ordered, virtuous, heroic incarnation in the North, while recoiling from the disordered, dirty, morally lax southern Italy represented by Italian immigrants from the South. Whatever "Travelling Companions" lacks in literary merit as fiction is made up for by the way the short story schematizes certain attitudes concerning geography, race, and human character that would have their full flowering later in the century. The story contrasts not only America and Italy, but also Northern Europe and the "South," Northern Italy and Southern Italy, and the northern Italian and the southern Italian, even while suggesting points of contact between some of them. America is allied with Northern Europe, and eventually Northern Italy is tied, if more tenuously, to Northern Europe. Only Southern Italy, the real "South," stands alone as something truly different, exotic. The story also dichotomizes racial/national characteristics. Americans and their cousins the Northern Europeans are shrewd, firm, decisive men of action; Italians in general are civil and charming, but soft, lax,

mendacious, miserable. However, Northern Italians, seen from the perspective of the real South, look more like Americans and Northern Europeans: people of order, conscience and virtue. The woman from Naples, with her whiff of sexuality and scandal (a child living somewhere else, no mention of a husband), is, as Brooke says, a "true Neapolitan." And what of Brook himself? He demurs when the Neapolitan woman describes him as a "true German." But is the woman that far off base? The American lives in Germany, and as nativist race thinkers would point out more and more toward the turn of the century, Anglo-Saxon Americans were descendants of the Germanic race.

In "At Isella" (1871), we have another young narrator. This one is making his first descent into Italy along the Saint Gothard route and through the Simplon pass, a traditional tourist entry to the Italian peninsula. While still in Switzerland, he is already intoxicated with the romance of the Italian picturesque. In Lucerne, at the start of the Saint Gothard road, he imagines that "a great wave of Southern life rolled down this mighty channel to expire visibly in the blue lake, and ripple to its green shores" (2: 308). Climbing the mountains into Italy, he wants "to trace the soft stages by which those rugged heights melt over into Southern difference" and knows that now he can truly begin "to watch for the *symptoms* of Italy." Here, "it was not absurd to fancy a few adventurous tendrils of Southern growth might have crept and clamored upward." He fancies the village of Simplon as "tossed upward and stranded by some climbing Southern wave" (317). At Isella, the narrator rhapsodizes about "the music of an Italian

throat vibrat[ing] upon Italian air” and thanks Heaven that the inn was not “fastidiously neat, scrubbed” in Swiss fashion, but instead in need of “a wet cloth and broom” (319). Jacob Riis would echo these sentiments in How the Other Half Lives, when he says that Chinatown is “clean to distraction” and therefore disappointing as spectacle, compared to the lively, colorful “picturesque filth and poverty” found in the Italian Mulberry Bend (77).

The narrator finds romance not only in the dirt but in his encounter with a mysterious Italian lady who is fleeing her native land. “Of what romance of Italy was she the heroine?” the narrator wonders. (322). He sees the “beautiful, pale, dark-browed, sad” Signora as “an incorporate image of her native land” (327). But when he expresses his romantic notions, the lady, like Charlotte Evans in “Travelling Companions,” becomes impatient. “‘The charm of Italy!’ cried the Signora, with a slightly cynical laugh. ‘Foreigners have a great deal to say about it’” (326). The narrator certainly does. He tells the Signora he has come on pilgrimage from a land “barren of romance and grace” to “see on Italian soil the primal substance---the Platonic ‘idea’---of our consoling dreams and our richest fancies. . . . This Italy of yours, on whose threshold I stand, is the home of history, of beauty, of the arts---of all that makes life splendid and sweet. Italy, for us dull strangers, is a magic word. We cross ourselves when we pronounce it” (327-328). The preceding is an interesting passage for several reasons. It offers a conventional image of romantic, cultured, heroic Italy as an ideal land of magic worthy of worship. However,

the American response to it, as described by the narrator, is an unusual one: that of presumably Protestant Americans employing the Catholic ritual of crossing oneself. What does the gesture of making the sign of the cross imply? Is it saying that Italy's magic is a kind of religion for dull, graceless, unromantic Americans who pay homage to the country in the same fashion that Italians pay homage to their God? And yet, Italians are also known for crossing themselves as a way to ward off the devil or the *mal'occhio* (evil eye). Does this then imply that, for the Americans, Italy's magic may also have an element of evil, of black magic, in it? Italy's attractions are also its "*symptoms*." Its waves and tendrils, so alluring at a distance, can also drown or strangle you. The passage seems to be saying that Italy was both a god (or, in her case, goddess) to be revered and a she-devil to be feared. We see this same ambivalence toward Italy at the end of the tale, when the Signora ultimately flees Isella, one step ahead of her pursuing husband, and the narrator is left to ponder his first (defining) experience of Italy. "I returned along the winding footpath more slowly, a wiser, possibly a sadder man than a couple of hours before," he says, his feelings decidedly mixed. "I had entered Italy, I had tasted a sentiment, I had assisted at a drama. It was a good beginning" (338). A good beginning maybe, but in describing himself as "a wiser, possibly a sadder man," he reminds us of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown, the Puritan who emerges from his night in the evil forest as "a sad, a darkly meditative" man. If nothing else, "At Isella" conjures up conventional contrasting images of Italy as beautiful, luxurious, and alluring, but a bit

disheveled (needing a “wet cloth and broom”), mysterious and slightly sinister. Italy is the repository of history, art, grace, and beauty, and a stage for romance, fancies, and dreams.

“The Madonna of the Future” (1873) extends these conventional images of Italy. Theobald, a young artist, an American (“He must have been, to take the picturesque so prodigiously to heart”), sees Europe and Italy as a source of the type of inspiration that he, much like the narrator of “At Isella” or James himself, sees lacking in America. “‘We are the disinherited of Art!’ he cried. ‘We are condemned to be superficial! We are excluded from the magic circle. The soil of American perception is a poor little barren, artificial deposit. Yes! we are wedded to imperfection. An American, to excel, has just ten times as much to learn as a European. We lack the deeper sense. We have neither taste, not tact, nor force” (3: 14-15). His vocabulary echoes that of the narrator of “At Isella.” America is barren, Italy magical. Theobald expatiates on the ennobling and enabling charms of Florence, where for the first time he “really lived, intellectually,” and where “all profane desires, all mere worldly aims, have dropped away” from him (16). The narrator says Theobald talks of Florence much like a lover who lost his heart to her at first sight. Theobald says, “She’s the sole true woman of them all; one feels toward her as a lad in his teens feels to some beautiful older woman with a ‘history.’ It’s a sort of aspiring gallantry she creates” (24). Again the gendered language: Florence/Italy as a

woman, on one hand sacred, on the other a more secular older woman “with a ‘history’” (sexual pun intended?).

There is a second, more human, woman in Theobold’s life, one who will serve as the model for the ideal Madonna that he envisions but ultimately never paints. The artist describes her as “the most beautiful woman in Italy. ‘A beauty with a soul!’” (30). For the narrator, whose perceptions have not been distorted by Italy and art, the woman is something altogether different, an aging woman now growing stout. “The most beautiful woman in Italy was a person of a generous Italian type and of a great simplicity of demeanor. . . . A certain mild intellectual apathy belonged properly to her type of beauty, and had always seemed to round and enrich it; but this *bourgeoise* Egeria, if I viewed her right, betrayed a rather vulgar stagnation of mind. . . . She was neither haggard nor worn nor gray; she was simply coarse” (31, 33). While the woman humors Theobold in his illusions, the narrator does not, and in destroying those illusions, the narrator puts the finishing touches on the destruction of the artist that Italy herself had begun. The deceptive, sometimes destructive influence of art-laden Italy on Americans “disinherited of Art” was a theme that James would take up and extend in his novel Roderick Hudson, published two years after “The Madonna of the Future.” Roderick drinks too deeply from the cup of Italy’s experience and becomes another American artist who is figuratively and literally destroyed by the country’s seductions.



If “The Madonna of the Future” points to Roderick Hudson, “The Last of the Valerii” (1874) is a sort of early dress rehearsal for The Golden Bowl. In each, an American woman marries an Italian nobleman, with dubious results. In “The Last of the Valerii,” the narrator is initially skeptical about his goddaughter marrying any foreigner whatsoever, but the young Count Camillo Valerio strikes him as a “happy fellow . . . with a certain paternal benevolence.” More importantly, “from the picturesque point of view (she with her yellow locks and he with his dusky ones),” the union made for a “strikingly well-assorted pair” (3: 89). The Count “was extremely handsome, and with a more significant sort of beauty than is common in the handsome Roman race. . . . He was perhaps a little stupid, and I fancied that to a political or aesthetic question the response would be particularly slow” (89). The Count is stupid and dull, much like Theobold’s ersatz “Madonna” is. The narrator concedes that now and then one does encounters an honest Italian count. “Camillo was one to the core, and seemed quite content to be adored. . . . But he seemed to me to have either a strange reserve or a strange simplicity; to be fundamentally unfurnished with ‘ideas’” (95). If the Count is short on intellect, he is also short on virtues beyond that of his surprising honesty. The narrator “found it hard to picture him lending his voice to teach the lusty urchin his alphabet or his prayers, or the rudiments of infant virtue” (96). The Count “had no beliefs nor hopes nor fears,---nothing but sense, appetites, and serenely luxurious tastes.” In short, the Count is an embodiment

of “the natural man,” primitive, picturesque, and essentially harmless (94-95). Harmless, that is, until an ancient statue is discovered buried on his property.

Initially, the Count resists his wife’s desire to excavate their property in search of buried ruins. “‘Yes, by Bacchus, I am superstitious!’ he cried. ‘Too much so, perhaps! But I’m an old Italian, and you must take me as you find me. There have been things seen and done here which leave strange influences behind! They don’t touch you, doubtless, who come of another race. But they touch me, often, in the whisper of the leaves and the odor of the mouldy soil and the blank eyes of the old statues’” (98). But the Count soon takes an interest in the excavations. When a Juno is discovered and unearthed, he begins to treat the statue as a sacred deity to whom he pays solitary visits, while now ignoring his wife. This only confirms the narrator’s initial misgivings about the count. “‘I was a thousand times right,’ I cried; ‘an Italian count may be mighty fine, but he won’t *wear!* Give us some wholesome young fellow of our own blood, who’ll play us none of these dusky old-world tricks. Painter as I am, I’ll never recommend a picturesque husband!’” (106). Like the three earlier stories, this one meditates on the limits of the romantic picturesque, and the trouble one can find in pursuing it too blindly. Here, it’s a painter, no less, who learns that the picturesque is downright dangerous to practical domesticity. What’s interesting is that in the narrator’s mind, the picturesque is racialized. The picturesque Valerii, with his old-world tricks, is played off against some “wholesome” (uncorrupted) young fellow of “our own blood” (American/Anglo-Saxon). The

narrator's criticism of the Count continues with a lengthy peroration on the corrupting influences of Italian history, ancestry and race, which he blames for Valerii's cruel indifference to his wife and his worship of a pagan statue. These same corrupting influences will be identified by Prince Amerigo himself in The Golden Bowl some thirty years later. It was the Count's heritage, then, that caused him to cruelly ignore his wife and instead pay homage to a pagan deity. The narrator says:

The Count became, to my imagination, a dark efflorescence of the evil germs which had implanted in his line. No wonder he was foredoomed to be cruel. Was not cruelty a tradition in his race, and crime an example? The unholy passions of his forefathers stirred blindly in his untaught nature and clamored dumbly for an issue. What a heavy heritage it seemed to me, as I reckoned it up in my melancholy musings, the Count's interminable ancestry! Back to the profligate revival of arts and vices,---back to the bloody medley of mediaeval wars,---back through the long, fitfully glaring dusk of the early stages of its ponderous origin in the solid Roman state---back through all the darkness of history it seemed to stretch, losing every feeblest claim on my sympathies as it went." (107)

James would employ a similar diatribe about Italian racial history in The Golden Bowl, but there the words would be put into the mouth of an Italian, Prince Amerigo. However, if Prince Amerigo seeks to rise above his racial heritage, Count Valerii is mired in the ancient past. When the Count speaks of persecution, it's not of Christians by the pagans, but of pagans and their gods by Christians. Hearing this, the narrator sees the Count as "a delightfully curious phenomenon," causing him to meditate on "the strange ineffaceability of race-characteristic" and the undreamed sturdiness of the Count's sturdy Latinness (111). In the end, Valerii accedes to his wife's desires that the statue of Juno be

reburied. Yielding, the Count falls on his knees, buries his head in his wife's lap, and becomes a good dutiful husband. However, according to the narrator, Count Valerii never becomes, "if you will, a thoroughly modern man" (122). There's no reason to believe Valerii even desired any such thing, unlike the would-be modern Prince Amerigo in The Golden Bowl.

In "Adina" (1874), we encounter an American, Sam Scrope, who, unlike the narrators of the "Travelling Companions," "At Isella," and "The Last of the Valerii," is not a sentimental lover of the picturesque. "It was his fancy to pretend that he enjoyed nothing, and that what sentimental travelers call picturesqueness was a weariness of his spirit; . . . The truth was that the picturesque of Italy, both in man and in nature, fretted him, depressed him strangely" (3: 211-212). The narrator himself does not share Scrope's disdain. Scrope "considered me absurdly Byronic, and when, in the manner of the tourists of the period, I breathed poetic sighs over the subjection of Italy to the foreign foe, he used to swear that Italy had got no more than she deserved, that she was a land of vagabonds and declaimers, and that he had yet to see an Italian who he would call a man." The narrator quotes Alfieri's assertion that the "human plant" grew strongest in Italy, but Scrope retorts that "nothing grew stronger there but lying and cheating, laziness, beggary and vermin." When the narrator sees a Campagnan shepherd -- "the handsomest fellow in the world" -- whom he wants to sketch, Scrope sees only "a filthy scarecrow" and calls the narrator "a drivelling album-poet" (212).

One day in the Campagna the two men encounter a young rustic whom Scrope cheats out of a precious antique stone intaglio dug up by the young man. For the narrator, the transaction represents more than a simple commercial violation of the young Italian. "He had lost his boyish ignorance---that pastoral peace of mind which had suffered him to doze there so gracefully with his head among the flowers" (230). Adina, the woman Scrope loves, sees the imperial intaglio as polluted not by Scrope's deception, but by its association with Tiberius, "one of the bad Emperors." She tells the narrator, "It is almost a pollution to have a thing that *he* had looked at and touched coming to one in such direct descent. His image almost spoils for me the beauty of the stone and I'm very glad Mr Scrope keeps it out of sight." For the narrator, Adina's attitude "seemed a very becoming state of mind in a blonde angel of New England origin" (236).

Realizing the injustice done to him, the rustic Angelo seeks redress and is tempted to strangle Scrope. However, "that saving grace of discretion which mingles with all Italian passion had whispered to the young man to postpone his revenge" (235). When the narrator discovers Angelo skulking around Scrope's lodging like a burglar, he offers the Italian the chance to go to America to "do some honest work" in his brother-in-law's hardware business. But Angelo won't give up thoughts of revenge, won't "be treated like a dog." Instead, he sees his experience with Scrope as a form of divine intervention in his life, an indication that perhaps he had been "too simple, too stupid, too contented with being poor and shabby" (243). Angelo's revenge does bring a sort of divine satisfaction:

He steals Adina's love from the American Scrope. We aren't told whether Scrope finally has met an Italian he can consider a man. However, Angelo's theft of Adina's love only confirms the narrator's picturesque notions about him. The Italian appears "quite the proper hero of his romance," but remains a mystery, his character "as great an enigma as the method of his courtship." In the end, the narrator thinks that Angelo has already forgotten how his good fortune came to him. He sees Angelo as "basking in a sort of primitive natural, sensuous delight in being adored. It was like the warm sunshine, or like plenty of good wine." Angelo seems to take his good fortune in stride, for "at the bottom of every genuine Roman heart,---even if it beats beneath a beggar's rags,---you'll find an ineradicable belief that we are all barbarians, and made to pay them tribute," an attitude the narrator dismisses as "grotesque superstitions" (255). As for the imperial topaz, Scrope tosses it into the Tiber and the narrator is content to "let it return to the moldering underworld of the Roman past" (257).

As a revenge story, "Adina" introduces, twists and inverts a number of conventions and stereotypes. If Sam Scrope is Yankee enterprise perverted, Angelo is the injured, vengeful, yet discrete Italian. Rather than resort to the stiletto, the simple but enigmatic Italian steals the Anglo-Saxon girl, this "blonde angel of New England origin." Angelo's revenge is sexual conquest and the tribute he expects from the barbarian others. Why should he go work in a hardware store in America when there were Americans who would come to Italy to admire him? In "Adina" we also have conflicting American

notions of the Italians in general: the narrator's romantic/sentimental view that saw Italians as picturesque, even noble victims of foreign subjugation, and Scrope's more cynical view that saw them as constitutional liars, beggars, and lazy vermin. And, Adina's reaction to the Tiberian intaglio calls forth the darker side of Italy's romantic, heroic past -- the same underside that Prince Amerigo tries to escape in The Golden Bowl. It is the same bloody side that Mark Twain parodies in his prologue to Pudd'nhead Wilson, where he speaks of Dante's Beatrice buying a chunk of chestnut cake to defend herself with in case of a Ghibelline outbreak before she got to school .

It isn't until the 1890s, with "The Real Thing" (1892), that James imagines an Italian character outside of an Italian setting, a theme to which James would return a decade later with Prince Amerigo in The Golden Bowl. In both cases, the Italian character finds himself in England, James's adopted home, but there the similarity ends. Where Prince Amerigo is an expatriate, a member of Italy's fading aristocracy, Oronte is an immigrant, an itinerant Italian adventurer who has "wandered to England in search of fortune" and "embarked, with a partner and a small green handcart, on the sale of penny ices. The ices had melted away and the partner had dissolved in their train" (8: 249). Consequently, Oronte appears at the studio of a commercial illustrator, seeking work as a model.

The artist, who narrates this peculiar Jamesian tale, easily perceives Oronte to be a foreigner and soon discovers that the young man is an Italian who speaks no word of

English beyond the artist's name. The narrator considers Oronte as not "meanly constituted---what Italian is?" -- an assessment made without the benefit of the narrator's ever having been to Italy. The artist initially discourages Oronte's job request, but the Italian stands his ground "with a dumb, dog-like fidelity in his eyes which amounted to innocent impudence---the manner of a devoted servant (he might have been in the house for years), unjustly suspected." The artist immediately sees in Oronte's attitude and expression a "picture"; just as quickly he perceives "another picture" in the way the Italian obeys when told to sit and wait. Other pictures suggest themselves to the illustrator in the way that Oronte looks with wonder about the studio. "He might have been crossing himself in St. Peter's. Before I finished I said to myself: 'The fellow's a bankrupt orange-monger, but he's a treasure'" (248).

The illustrator engages Oronte as a model, adding the Italian to three others already in his employ. One is a Miss Churm, a "freckled cockney" (239) who, like Oronte, has a chameleon-like ability to assume whatever character the illustrator required. Dressed in some old clothes, Oronte "looked like an Englishman. He was as good as Miss Churm, who could look, when required, like an Italian." The narrator's other two models are a down-at-the-heels English couple, Major and Mrs. Monarch, who are hired more out of sympathy than any ability to serve the artist's professional needs. If the Monarchs' genteel sensibilities are offended by the "vulgar" Miss Churm, the couple is also puzzled by the Oronte's appearance as a model. "I thought Mrs Monarch's face



slightly convulsed when, on her coming back with her husband, she found Oronte installed. It was strange to have to recognise in a scrap of a lazzarone a competitor to her magnificent Major" (249).

When the illustrator is commissioned to do the first drawings for a series of novels, he initially uses the Monarchs as models for the hero and heroine. He soon realizes the couple just won't do, that instead they jeopardize his work and his chances of keeping the commission. The illustrator secretly begins to substitute Miss Churm and Oronte for the main characters, careful to keep that decision from the Monarchs. "If they regarded Miss Churm as little better than a snare, what would they think of the representation by a person so little the real thing as an Italian street-vendor of a protagonist formed by a public school?" (251). Convinced that they alone are "the real thing," the Monarchs at first believe that Miss Churm is modeling some low-life character and that Oronte is being done as an organ-grinder. The truth soon emerges. One day, with Oronte in the model's chair, the narrator asks the Monarchs if they wouldn't mind laying out his tea -- and offering a cup to Oronte. "Mrs Monarch brought him one where he stood, and he took it from her as if he had been a gentleman at a party, squeezing a crush-hat with an elbow" (255). The illustrator now publicly adopts Oronte as his hero for the book work. He also rejects the Major in favor of Oronte for a figure in a magazine illustration. The Major turns pale and asks: "Is *he* your idea of an English gentleman?" (256).

Undeterred, the Monarchs continue to come to the studio. On one occasion, Mrs. Monarch touches up Miss Churm's hair. The narrator describes the scene: "It was one of the most heroic personal services I have ever seen rendered. Then Mrs Monarch turned away with a low sigh and, looking about her as if for something to do, stooped to the floor with a noble humility and picked up a dirty rag that had dropped out of my paint-box" (257). The Major then begins cleaning up after the illustrator's breakfast, and together husband and wife wash the crockery and clean the scullery. "They had accepted their failure, but they couldn't accept their fate. They had bowed their heads in bewilderment to the perverse and cruel law in virtue of which the real thing could be so much less precious than the unreal; but they didn't want to starve. If my servants were my models, my models might be my servants. They would reverse the parts---the others would sit for the ladies and gentlemen, and *they* would do the work" (258). However, unable to watch the Monarchs continue to empty his slops, the narrator finally bribes them to disappear. Oronte apparently remains in the narrator's employment but we are given no hint as to his future.

Although "The Real Thing" may seem much different from the earlier stories I have discussed, in ways it is in dialogue with those stories, just as the earlier stories play off each other. Most of the earlier stories examine in one way or another the romantic picturesque approach to Italy and Italians, its attractions, limitations, and dangers. On the one hand, the picturesque perspective heightens Italy's values, its beauty, history and

culture, its softness and warmth, its magic. Seen through the romantic picturesque lens, the Italians themselves are civil, charming, sensual, innocent. At the same time there is critique of this romantic picturesque approach to Italy. It can trick and lure, threatens marriages, and may wind up destroying the very art it is seen to inspire. We see this critique most vividly in the attitude of Sam Scrope in "Adina," the practical, clear-eyed, if cynical American who sees humbug in "the picturesque of Italy, both in men and in nature." While some of the early stories seem to perpetuate conventional national/racial/social dichotomies and stereotypes, "The Real Thing" seems to be critiquing that tendency, if not subverting the categories themselves. The artist narrator has a romantic image of Italians. Having never been to Italy, and presumably having never encountered many Italians, he says that Oronte is typically Italian in being not "meanly constituted." The Monarchs feel otherwise. Although the Monarchs try to separate themselves from Oronte and Miss Churm on a class basis, they also see Oronte in racial/national terms, as a "scrap of a lazzarone" and as the perfect model for the stereotypically Italian organ-grinder, images of Italians that will later color American attitudes toward Italian immigrants. For the Monarchs, Oronte is constitutionally incapable of playing an English gentleman, disqualified by both his social and racial status. However, for the illustrator, Oronte not only can model an English gentleman, but can also act like a "gentleman at a party" when served tea by Mrs. Monarch. Obviously, James is playing around with and questioning the notion of class distinctions and any

relation they may have to “the real thing.” James seems to be asking, Why can’t Cockneys and even lower-class Italian peddlers be ladies and gentlemen, and ladies and gentlemen be servants? However, there is also a racial/national element here: Why can’t a poor young Italian be more of “the real thing” than an English gentleman major? Is James suggesting that maybe classes and races are really interchangeable? If so, are they interchangeable only through the work of art? For example, can Oronte pass for a Major Monarch outside the confines of the narrator’s studio? Finally, what does James mean by “the real thing”? The narrator speaks of the Monarchs as seeing themselves the victims of the “perverse and cruel law in virtue of which the real thing could be so much less precious than the unreal.” For the Monarchs, being “the real thing” is to be construed as being the genuine article, having, in other words, the social and racial characteristics of their class: breeding, manners, respectability. For the Monarchs, Oronte and Miss Churm represent the “unreal” thing, someone lacking their cultivation. However, for the narrator, “the unreal” elements in Oronte and Miss Churm -- their chameleon-like appearances and manner, their lack of pretensions -- make them the genuine articles, if only within the narrator’s artistic perspective. Oronte’s unreality makes him the real thing, a true inspiration for the narrator’s artistic imagination in much the same way that Italy inspires other characters in the earlier stories. However, in each case, the romance of Italy is more in the mind of the beholder than in the place itself. Oronte, venturing away from romantic Italy, where he apparently couldn’t make a living, makes a fine success of it in England,

if only as a figment of the artist's imagination and as a subject for his art -- the second-rate art of illustration at that. Prince Amerigo in The Golden Bowl has higher ambitions than Oronte, but he too will be aestheticized, albeit as a much more precious objet d'art than the young Italian model.

At about the same time that James was imagining his first fictional Italian characters in the early tales, he was also writing Italian travel essays which appeared in leading American periodicals during the 1870s and 1880s. A few of these essays were included in the collection, Transatlantic Sketches (1875), but it wasn't until 1909 that the writings on Italy were collected in Italian Hours, to which James attached a postscript of four brief essays based on more recent impressions. James is a self-confessed "picturesque" or "sentimental" traveler. He informs us early on that in his Italian travels he is collecting impressions and moments for his "mental sketch-book," and putting them into a frame. "All nature beckons you forth and murmurs to you sophisticatedly that such hours should be devoted to collecting impressions," he writes of Venice. "Afterwards, in ugly places, at unprivileged times, you can convert your impressions into prose" (14). For James, putting the impressions into prose means fitting them for a double frame, that of the essay or book itself, and that of a picture frame. "All Venice was both model and painter, and life was so pictorial that art couldn't help becoming so" (19). James talks of "the old Italian sketchability" in Genoa (114) and "the picture-making street life" of Rome. He speaks of passing "from one framed picture to another beside the open arches

of (a) crumbling aqueduct” in the Roman Campagna (156). Like a child gathering more berries than he can possibly eat, James gathers “from the hurrying hours more impressions than a mind of modest capacity quite knows how to dispose of” (157). The impression is of a frenetic artist who has neither the time nor money to frame all the paintings and sketches that pile up and clutter his studio and attic.

William Stowe notes that James’s “vacationistic prose” underlines the connection Richard H. Brodhead sees between the consumption of travel, the generation of social distinction, and the new prestige of art during the late nineteenth century. Stowe says: “James’s traveler acts out of his privileged position, then, by maintaining an aesthetic detachment from and a proud nationalistic superiority to the social and political concerns of ‘foreign’ people.” There are, to be sure, Italians in some of James’s Italian pictures, but often they are there simply as an aesthetic touch, a picturesque detail in a picturesque scene that usually conforms to conventional ideas about Italy and Italians. Stowe argues that James reaffirms the superiority of his own class, nationality, and gender by naturalizing indigenous populations as part of the scenery, or by treating them as commodified, consumable “others,” much in the way tourists typically do. James, Stowe says, is encouraging his culturally elite readers to see themselves as naturally superior to foreigners, vulgar tourists, the stay-at-homes, and those who don’t read the *Atlantic*. Stowe is right to a certain, and maybe large, extent. If James is going to consume Italians and Italian culture, he won’t do it in the gourmand manner of a vulgar tourist on a

package tour. Not for James the *Quaker City* cruise, which Mark Twain turned into The Innocents Abroad and published in 1869, the same year James made his first solo trip to the Continent. By then, with the rise of the *nouveau riche* and an expanded middle class, travel had begun to turn into tourism, but James is too subtle a writer to be a tourist, a role he consciously avoids by engaging with the finer things of Italy through a more finely tuned sensibility. As Stowe says, James does often naturalize and romanticize the Italians through the picturesque perspective. However, James also critiques these tendencies of the sentimental traveler, either through irony or in more direct fashion. We have already seen this dialogue between the picturesque and the more cold-eyed approaches to Italy in James's early tales, where the romanticizers are set against the more cynical Sam Scrope and the narrator of "The Madonna of the Future." That dialogue continues in Italian Hours, with James alternately employing and critiquing the aestheticizing, romanticizing picturesque perspective. Put another way, James's habitual use of words such as "picturesque" and "appropriation" suggests a conflicted, conscious use of the picturesque to covert travel into cultural capital, but both embracing and critiquing the tendency, making the travel pieces both acts of appropriation and subtle subversions/exposures of the act (Bailey 204).

In the essay "Roman Rides" (1873), James says that the "typical 'Italian landscape' of old-fashioned art" has not only "some white village, some gray tower," but in the foreground "a contadino in his cloak and peaked hat [jogging] solitary on his ass"

(155). Of the Campagna surrounding Rome, James writes: "It is a great neighborhood of ruins, many of which, it must be confessed, you have applauded in many an album. But station a peasant with sheepskin coat and bandaged legs in the shadow of a tomb or tower best known to drawing room art, and scatter a dozen goats on the mound above him, and the picture has a charm which has not yet been sketched away" (164). An image of romantic, picturesque poverty and misery emerges from an anecdote told to James by an unnamed friend. "The Campagna, in the colourless evening light, was more solemn and romantic than ever;" the friend recounts, "and a ragged shepherd, driving a meager struggling flock, whom we stopped to ask the way of, was a perfect type of pastoral, weather-beaten misery" (158). All these images have an element of the *nostalgie de la boue* -- or nostalgia for the mud -- which had informed "bohemian" European artists who praised the glories of the simple peasant life and later influenced American magazine illustrators such as William A. Rogers, who depicted happy, picturesque urban peasants in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

But if James is drawn to the romantic, picturesque, literary Italy of the imagination, he is not unaware of that tendency, just as he is not blind to the realities, the material conditions, of contemporary Italians. Describing the image of a cadaverous Dominican monk in white hood and gown, against a dark church, James says it was "one of those pictures which, thank the Muses, have not been reformed out of Italy. It was the exact illustration, for insertion in a text, of heaven knows how many old romantic and



conventional literary Italianisms -- plays, poems, mysteries of Udolpho" (200). This subtle, half-critique of the tendency to see Italy through the lenses of the literary and the romantic -- that is, conventionally -- is extended in James's description of the Villa Mellini. "The Villa Mellini is full of the elder Italy of one's imagination -- the villa of Boccaccio and Ariosto. . . ," James writes. "Outside the villa walls, beneath the overcrowding orange-boughs, straggled old Italy as well -- but not in Boccaccio's velvet: a row of ragged and livid contadini, some simply stupid in their squalor, but some downright brigands of romance, or of reality, with matted locks and terribly sullen eyes" (202). In the preceding passage, both romance and reality can be seen in some of the *contadini* who are genuine brigands. The others are in reality "simply stupid in their squalor." In another passage, James describes a shepherd who may have just washed his feet in a brook and now is lying under a tree. Again, James frames the picture and adds a patina of romance to it. "Lying thus in the shade, on his elbow, with his naked legs stretched out on the turf and his soft peaked hat over his long hair crushed back like the veritable bonnet of Arcady, he was exactly the figure of the background of this happy valley." But having naturalized the shepherd, James undercuts his efforts, while at the same time holding on to his knowing privileged perspective. "The poor fellow, lying there in rustic weariness and ignorance, little fancied that he was a symbol of old-world meanings to new-world eyes" (169). Whether fixing the shepherd as a figure of romance or perhaps imaging a different role for him, James, from his strategic location, contains

the rustic, representing him and speaking on his behalf. If the shepherd isn't a symbol of old-world meanings, then what is he? James never says. Neither does the shepherd have his say.

In other passages, James more clearly demarcates romance and reality, past and present, art and life. In one anecdote, James recounts seeing a young man, singing, in Genoa. James wants to make the figure "a graceful ornament to the prospect, an harmonious little figure in the middle distance," but in talking to the young man he instead discovers an "unhappy, underfed, unemployed" radical. "'Damn the prospect, damn the middle distance!' would have been all *his* philosophy. Yet but for the accident of my having gossiped with him I should have made him do service, in memory, as an example of sensuous optimism!" The "truth" here is discovered only by accident, only through a bit of gossip. And if the young radical becomes an individual in this encounter (although we never actually hear *him* talk), James concludes that the fellow is an exception in his misery and discontent. "I am bound to say however that I believe a great deal of the sensuous optimism observable in the Genoese alleys and beneath the low, crowded arcades along the port was very real" (117-118). This young man who resists James's picturesque aestheticizing is an exception in yet another way. He represents one of the few cases in Italian Hours in which we have some sense that James is actually talking to an ordinary Italian. We may not hear the young radical actually speaking, but we do learn a few personal details. However, not unlike many American travelers before

him, James seems to have passed through Italy without ever really having had much human relations with the Italians. As Van Wyck Brooks says, "Of the Italians, [James] complained, besides the washerwoman, he knew only servants in hotels and custodians in churches, and, being neither a Dickens nor a Howells, he had nothing to say about such humble types" (The Dream 172). Brooks is overstating the case. In The American Scene James himself speaks fondly, if nostalgically, of the prospect of having social encounters in nearly every rural excursion in Europe. The fact is that James did have some things to say about such humble types, especially the picturesque *contadini*, but little of it seems to spring from any social contact beyond that required by the exigencies of travel, the needs of his profession, or the idle curiosity of the traveler. It is rare in Italian Hours to hear an Italian talking, which is not the case in William Dean Howells's Venetian Life, published in 1866, some seven years before the first of James's Italian sketches. While Howells also talks of the difficulties of cracking Italian society and truly getting to know the people, his book is alive with Italian characters with whom he has interacted, including his neighbors, his barber, and his young Italian male friends. Obviously, Howells had the advantage of a long sojourn in Italy, during which he was more than a tourist/writer. Serving as the largely ceremonial American consul in Venice, Howells consequently "saw Venice as a student of people, as a householder, besides, who had encounters with chimney-sweeps, with glaziers, chair-menders, upholsterers, fishermen, milkmen" (Brooks, The Dream 150). Howells not only lets his Italians speak, but makes attempts to

capture the dialect of Italians speaking English. Howells's contacts are often on a business level, but some are more social than not. There is little of this type of interaction in James, or at least very little of it that makes its way into print. Howells could appreciate the Italian picturesque as much as James, but is more interested in politics, commerce, and everyday life and customs. Although Howells is as interested as James in the Italians' character traits, he inquires more deeply into the political, economic and social sources of those traits.

James, his friends, and his privileged readers rarely have time to truly ponder the reality behind the sensuous optimism they want to see in the Italian people. Illustrative is a tavern scene in the Campagna which James sketches in "Roman Rides." The scene is picturesque to a fault:

There is a ragged bush over the door, and within, under a dusky vault, on crooked cobble-stones, sit half-a-dozen *contadini* in their indigo jackets and goatskin breeches, and with their elbows on the table. There is generally a rabble of infantile beggars at the door, pretty enough in their dusty rags, with their fine eyes and intense Italian smile, to make you forget your private vow of doing your individual best to make these people, whom you like so much, unlearn their old vices. (160-161)

The scene incorporates many of the traditional Italian motifs found in nineteenth-century American (and British) travel writing: the classic, colorful *contadini*; the ragged beggars; Italians who are smiling, childlike, prone to certain vices. James's response is an interesting one: a case of the aesthetic tendency, the tendency ultimately to judge Italy and Italian life on aesthetic rather than ethical standards, clouding some vague

humanitarian impulses James might have toward these particular Italians. The pretty, infantile beggars are just as picturesque as the colorful *contadini*, and so whatever reforming tendency James might have toward these lowly Italians gets lost in the realization that the Italians' aesthetic virtues quite often just happen to derive from what James call "their old vices" -- their filth, their begging, their childlike acceptance of their fate. We can see this same tendency, the urge to see picturesque value in the Italians' vices, in Riis. However, much more is going on here. Having accepted the beggars for their picturesque qualities, James undercuts that acceptance with a reference to the capture of Rome in 1870, which completed Italy's unification. He asks: "Was Porta Pia bombarded three years ago that Peppino should still grow up to whine for copper? But the shells had no direct message for Peppino's stomach -- and you are going to a dinner party at a villa. So Peppino 'points' an instant for the copper in the dust and grows up a Roman beggar" (160-161). The passage is one of the few times James looks beyond Italy's poverty and misery to their potential causes. Quite rightly, as it turned out, the newly unified Italy did little to relieve conditions for the country's poorer classes. The shells used to bombard the Porta Pia, as James realized early on, had no direct message for Peppino and others of his ilk. However, it's as if, having ventured in political and social questions, James's narrator feels the need to pull back, and the excuse for that is all too conveniently provided by a dinner party at which such an issue might be an inappropriate subject. Who is the "you" of this passage who must be off to a dinner

party, and therefore lacks the time to worry too much about Peppino's immediate hunger, much less his fate as a beggar? Is it James himself, other privileged tourists who traveled through Italy, or James's privileged readers? More than likely it represents all of them, all the Americans who paid little, if any attention to the material realities of Italian life because they were too busy devouring historic, artistic, romantic, picturesque Italy. Finally, dismissal of Peppino as a future Roman beggar, while arguably a recognition of Italian "reality," closes off any possibility of change in Italy, and by inference posits a general, unspecified Italian failing as the cause of that inability to change.

A more abiding concern for Italy's dispossessed is shown by Mrs. Arthur (Katherine De Kay) Bronson of New York and Newport, an American expatriate who befriended not only the widowed Robert Browning, but foreign travelers making or renewing their acquaintance with Venice. She often entertained James at her Venetian home, Casa Alvisi, on the Grand Canal. "She loved, she had from the first enthusiastically adopted, the engaging Venetian people, whose virtues she found touching and their infirmities but such as appeal mainly to the sense of humour and the love of anecdote; and she befriended and admired, she studied and spoiled them." Mrs. Bronson wrote and staged short comedies, sometimes engaging as actors "the wonderful small offspring of humbler friends, children of the Venetian lower class, whose aptitude, teachability, drollery, were her constant delight," James writes. "It was certainly true that an impression of Venice as humanly sweet might easily found itself on the frankness and

the quickness and amiability of these little people” (81). Here we have humble Venetian children whose virtues of quickness and amiability are no more valuable than (or equally valuable to) their unnamed vices -- “infirmities,” James calls them -- which give them the virtue of drollery and make them such fit subjects for short comedies and anecdotal story telling. These children are not much different from the childlike adult peasants whose “infirmities” lend themselves to picturesque art.

In all these scenes, Italians -- *contadini*, beggars, children, the lower classes in general -- are aestheticized, made symbols of romance, elements of the picturesque, subjects of humor and anecdote, actors in small comedies. James is aware that his travel abroad was an exercise in such aestheticizing. He wrote in a *New York Daily Tribune* column on December 11, 1875, “We most of us transact our moral and spiritual affairs in our own country. . . . We wander about Europe on a sensuous and aesthetic basis” (qtd. in Holder 93). As Alan Holder says, James’s approach to Europe was to see it as spectacle, material for satisfaction of the senses, imposing no involvement with or responsibility for that which is observed (94). In that way, James has a certain kinship with the “passionless pilgrim.” “Italy, and Venice in particular, elicited from James an aesthetic response in which there was something unfeeling” (96-97). We can perhaps best see this unfeeling romantic attitude in a passage from the essay “From Venice to Strasbourg,” which appeared in Transatlantic Sketches but not in Italian Hours. On a visit to Torcello, near Venice, James encounters some begging urchins. “They were very nearly as naked as

savages, and their little bellies protruded like those of infant Abyssinians in the illustrations of books of travel," James writes. Having turned the children into near-savage Africans, James proceeds to idealize them before turning them into a rather innocent argument about innocence and poverty. As the urchins scampered and sprawled in the grass, "grinning like suddenly translated cherubs, and showing their hungry little teeth, they suggested forcibly that the best assurance of happiness in this world is to be found in the maximum of innocence and the minimum of wealth." James describes one "small urchin" who "had a smile to make Correggio sigh." Still, the little fellow was "running wild among these sea-stunted bushes, on the lonely margin of a decaying land, in prelude to how blank, or to how dark, a destiny?" James sees this ironical situation as an indication that "nature is still at odds with fortune," which is bad for the urchin but good for the picturesque-loving James. As James fears, nature and fortune pulling together spells the death of nature's picturesqueness. He offers as an example a comparison between his little Italian and an imagined American child: "An infant citizen of our own republic, straight-haired, pale-eyed, and freckled, duly darned and catechized, marching into a New England school-house, is an object often seen and soon forgotten; but I shall always remember, with infinite tender conjecture, as the years roll by, this little unlettered Eros of the Adriatic strand" (88-89). Despite James's professed preference for the Italian, at least as an object of aesthetic nostalgia, the comparison sets up a stark racial/national dualism. The American boy is a duly-darned Anglo-Saxon citizen of a



solid republic that values education; the Italian boy is ignorant, a creature of the senses, “running wild . . . on the lonely margin of a decaying land.” These two boys will reappear in different incarnations in The American Scene, but, as we will see, the “little unlettered Eros of the Adriatic” is now a young man -- “a flagrant foreigner” and “remorseless Italian” -- and the American boy is a much more appealing and memorable child who serves for James as an antidote to the disconcerting Italian.

James, however, isn't always the “passionless pilgrim.” In varying degrees, he is aware of and sometimes critiques the aestheticizing and patronizing attitude. However, only rarely does he explore it directly and at some length. An Italian Hours essay entitled “Italy Revisited,” written in 1877, draws a sharp distinction between heroic, artistic Italy and modern commercial Italy. James says that one of the most striking impressions of returning to Italy is seeing the contrast more sharply etched between

the fecundity of the great artistic period and the vulgarity there of the genius of today. . . . That the people who but three hundred years ago had the best taste in the world should now have the worst; that having produced the noblest, loveliest, costliest works, they should now be given up to the manufacture of objects at once ugly and paltry; that the race of which Michael Angelo and Raphael, Leonardo and Titian were characteristic should have no other title to distinction than third-rate *genre* pictures and catchpenny statues -- all this is a frequent perplexity to the observer of actual Italian life. (110)

But having disparaged contemporary Italy in favor of some heroic and golden past, James catches himself and returns to the present. “After thinking of Italy as historical and artistic it will do no great harm to think of her for a while as panting both for a future and

for a balance at the bank; aspirations supposedly much at variance with the Byronic, the Ruskinian, the artistic, poetic, aesthetic manner of considering our eternally attaching peninsula," James cautions, perhaps adding by implication the modifier "Jamesian" to the enumerated conventional ways of considering Italy. "He may grant -- I don't say it is absolutely necessary -- that its actual aspects and economics are ugly, prosaic, provokingly out of relation to the diary and the album; it is nevertheless true that, at the point things have come to, modern Italy in a manner imposes herself." Assailed by this truth only hours after arriving back in Italy, he says he is initially irritated by it, but then finds himself able to accept it. "For, if we think, nothing is more easy to understand than an honest ire on the part of the young Italy of to-day at being looked at by all the world as a kind of soluble pigment. Young Italy, preoccupied with its economical and political future, must be heartily tired of being admired for its eyelashes and its pose" (111). Focussing on the eyelids and pose not only aestheticizes but feminizes Italy and Italians. So, here James seems to be saying why can't we see young Italy, modern Italy, and by extension modern Italians, as masculine beings concerned with the masculine pursuits of economics and politics. As an example of this misplaced admiration of picturesque Italy, James mentions the young artist in one of Thackeray's novels who sent to the Royal Academy a picture representing "A Contadino dancing with a Trasteverina at the door of a Locanda, to the music of Pifferaro." "It is in this attitude and with these conventional accessories that the world has hitherto seen fit to represent young Italy, and one doesn't

wonder that if the youth has any spirit he should at least begin to resent our insufferable aesthetic patronage." It is interesting that now, as "young Italy," the country is a he, masculine. Turning his attention to the new tram-line in Rome, James foresees "a new Italy in the future which in many important respects will equal, if not surpass, the most enterprising sections of our native land." James does not specify what those important respects are, other than to simply say that in passing through Italian cities, "we" see a vision of the coming years which represents "Italy united and prosperous, but altogether scientific and commercial. The Italy indeed that we sentimentalise and romance about was an ardently mercantile country; though I suppose it loved not its ledgers less, but its frescoes and altar-pieces more" (112). Italy's history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries obviously proved James wrong. The result would be James's shocking encounters with Italian immigrants in a radically changed America.

Having taken what, for James, passes as a cold hard look at contemporary Italian realities, he lets these thoughts dissipate and soon finds himself in Genoa, "up to his neck in the old Italian sketchability." But even here, James ruminates a bit on the reality behind the romance, while meditating on his own artistic temperament. "To travel is, as it were, to go to the play, to attend a spectacle; and there is something heartless in stepping forth into foreign streets to feast on 'character' when character consists simply of the slightly different costume in which labour and want present themselves." James says these thoughts were forced on him as he strolled around, "but after a time they ceased to

bear me company” because, “at least to the foreign eye,” the Italians accept their “extreme and constant destitution” with “an enviable ability not to be depressed by circumstances.” These accepting Italians, supremely able to bear their degraded conditions, anticipate Riis’s docile, unambitious Italian immigrants. However, James, aware that he may be rationalizing, speaking utter nonsense, acknowledges the possibility that the Italian smile may be masking “a sullen frenzy of impatience and pain.” Finally, James concedes, as Mark Twain himself would point out, that it is presumptuous for an observer to think he can truly understand a foreign country and a foreign people: “Our observation in any foreign land is extremely superficial, and our remarks are happily not addressed to the inhabitants themselves, who would be sure to exclaim upon the impudence of the fancy-picture” (116).

Having said that, a few years later James is back at creating fancy-pictures, the fanciest of all about Venice, which for James was the most sensual of Italian cities. “The place seems to personify itself, to become human and sentient, and conscious of your affection,” James writes in the Italian Hours sketch entitled “Venice,” originally written in 1882. “You desire to embrace it, to caress it, to possess it; and finally, a soft sense of possession grows up, and your visit becomes a perpetual love affair” (6-7). This is picturesque picture-making, and more. Beyond simply framing aesthetic sights and sensations, and using Venice for artistic purposes, he now wants to embrace, caress, possess in its entirety a sensual, feminine Venice. In his perpetual love affair with a

Venice that is both aesthetic and carnal, James is not blind to the problems of the Venetian people, who as a group “have little to call their own -- little more than the bare privilege of leading their lives in the most beautiful of towns. Their habitations are decayed; their taxes heavy; their pockets light; their opportunities few.” James sees the social and political problems, many of them similar to the ones Howells had seen some two decades earlier, but again, unlike Howells, he doesn’t dwell on the causes. Instead his focus is on the Italian’s adaptability and sensuous optimism, his willingness to make do, to make the best of a bad situation. These same traits, transplanted to the New York ghettos, would be criticized by Jacob Riis as the Italian’s tendency to fall behind other immigrant groups in material progress. James says that there may not be enough to eat in Venice, but “the rich Venetian temperament may bloom upon a dog’s allowance.” The “painfully large” number of Venetians who go hungry have for sustenance the sunshine, beautiful views, leisure, and “eternal *conversazione*” -- most of which Italian immigrants won’t have much of in New York. “It takes a great deal to make a successful American, but to make a happy Venetian takes only a handful of quick sensibility,” James writes, with a rather cold-blooded patronizing tone. “Not their misery, doubtless, but the way they elude their misery, is what pleases the sentimental tourist, who is gratified by the sight of a beautiful race that lives by the aid of its imagination. The way to enjoy Venice is to follow the example of these people and make the most of simple pleasure” (3,4).

When commenting directly on the Italian character, James echoes Howells, but without Howells's urge to inquire, in more than cursory fashion, into the sources of that character. The Italian race, as exemplified by the Venetians, is gentle, polite, polished in manners, but wanting in morality, virtue, industry, or the very qualities that (for James, Riis, and many others) make an American an American. But only Howells wonders whether the Venetians' politeness and gentleness, which he contrasts with American rudeness and haste, isn't the "vice of servile people" who have a history of subjugation (260). James, on the other hand, essentializes the Venetians in a passage that needs to be quoted at length:

One grows very fond of these people, and the reason of one's fondness is the frankness and sweetness of their address. That of the Italian family at large has much to recommend it; but in the Venetian manner there is something peculiarly ingratiating. One feels that the race is old, that it has a long and rich civilization in its blood, and that if it hasn't been blessed by fortune it has at least been polished by time. It hasn't a genius for stiff morality, and indeed makes few pretensions in that direction. It scruples but scantily to represent the false as the true, and has been accused of cultivating the occasion to grasp and to overreach, and of steering a crooked course -- not to your or my advantage -- amid the sanctities of property. It has been accused further of loving if not too well at least too often, of being in fine as little austere as possible. I am not sure it is very brave, nor struck with its being very industrious. But it has an unfailing sense of the amenities of life; the poorest Venetian is a natural man of the world. He is better company than persons of his class are apt to be among the nations of industry and virtue -- where people are also sometimes perceived to lie and steal and otherwise misconduct themselves. He has a great desire to please and to be pleased" (16-17).

The preceding is a tortured passage, vague, sometimes contradictory, perhaps impossible to pin down. Venetians/Italians inspire fondness through their simplicity and

sweet, ingratiating manners; they know their place. Their identity is in their race; their blood makes them what they are. Because their blood carries strong influences of its long history and rich civilization, the Italian race, in its Venetian strain, has been polished to a high gloss. But, beneath the pleasing surfaces of manners, address, and a desire to please, the Venetian/Italian is lacking in the American/Anglo-Saxon values of bravery, industriousness, and morality. The biggest lack is "stiff morality": the race is grasping and crooked in its business dealings, loose with its love, and too sensual in its approach to life. "But it has an unfailing sense of the amenities of life; the poorest Venetian is a natural man of the world," James concludes, jumping from race to class with only a semi-colon to connect them. It is a curious sentence, and raises a question: Is the poorest Venetian -- a "natural man of the world" (and not unlike the American Indian?) -- any different from a cultured upper-class Venetian? James doesn't say. However, he does say that the poorest Venetian is better company (because he is natural, or because of his manners?) than his counterparts in "nations of industry and virtue" (presumably American and England, among others). And even in these Anglo-Saxon nations, "people" are "also sometimes perceived" to lie, steal, and misbehave, just like the Venetian/Italian. Who these "people" are, whether they represent all classes or are limited to the poor class, James doesn't say. The phrase "also sometimes perceived" is slippery. Is this perception, which is only sometimes applied to these people, the reality -- or is it a misconception? If the latter, then are the accusations of crooked dealings against the

Italian race little more than false accusations, too? Not likely, for James is unequivocal when he says the Italian race “hasn’t a genius for stiff morality.”

Having said all that, James doesn’t examine why the Italian is the way he is perceived to be. James may be interested in Italian history, but not that portion of Italian history that had helped to create a people whose virtues are associated with surface manners and social graces, a sensual approach to life, and a disregard for values such as bravery, morality, industriousness and austerity. James is not interested in contemporary political and social conditions, or in any influence they may have on the Italian people. Two decades earlier, Howells had made similar comments about the Italians, noting their indolence and loose morals. However, living among them and showing a keener interest in social history and current events, he saw the Italians’ defects not as something apparently intrinsic to the race, but rather the product of centuries of foreign oppression and other material conditions. For Howells, Italian indolence came from the enervating climate and lack of opportunity. The lying, cheating, and duplicity originated in the country’s political and religious oppression. James might be aware of these connections, but apparently doesn’t think them worth further exploration.

And yet, Sara Blair, one of the more provocative of James’s critics, reads the “deliberately aestheticized essays” of Italian Hours within the broader context of Anglo-Saxon orientalism and emerges with a subversive James who avoids both the conventional role of the dominating orientalist and that of the commodifying tourist.



Blair says that James, unlike professional orientalists who are deeply ambivalent about their identification with the so-called feminine, occult races, explores “rather more ‘queer’ forms of racial identification and response” (47). And, unlike his fellow pilgrims, James courts a “posture of passivity . . . an unmaning that puts in abeyance racialized and nationalized norms of acquisition and control.” In this way, Blair argues, James employs orientalist figures of desire and anxiety “to redirect an ethos of Anglo-Saxon manliness writ as resistance to immersion in the realm of Asiatic indolence, and as expropriation of Italian artifacts and history for the cultural education of an ascendant Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie” (48). James’s “narratives of racial masquerade” allow him to try “alternative styles of racial and national affirmation” (49-50). His “‘queer’ identification with orientalized passivity and feminization” afford him “‘peculiar’ possibilities of ‘floating,’ not only beyond conventional gender divides but across boundaries of history, nation, and race” (54). Blair argues that James’s essay on Venice explicitly redirects “Anglo-Saxon” and American styles of acquisition and response. “James works to detach the orientalizing gaze from the cultural politics of racial mastery, turning it unabashedly into the inner theater of race and nation staged in the exile’s contact with Venetian queerness,” Blair writes. “James in Venice is never intent on becoming the putative other, but rather in constructing a cultural position from which otherness can be more pleasurably and freely experienced, and against which the limits of conventional filiations -- of family, gender, nation, culture, race -- can be tested and

contested.” Ultimately, Blair argues, James is trying to “revise racial and national typologies, to construct an open-endedly modern, internationalist, self-consciously shifting style of cultural subjectivity and response” (58). As we will see, Blair carves out a very similar role for the James who appears some twenty years later in The American Scene.

Although Blair makes a painstakingly nuanced and sometimes persuasive argument, my sense is that she is giving James too much credit here. Yes, there is some of the subversive in James. He does make halting efforts at carving out a new position vis-a-vis Italy/Italians, one that goes beyond the usual aestheticizing, possessing, containing, othering, and otherwise dominating stance attributed to orientalists, tourists, and antimodernists. And from this position maybe he is critiquing Anglo-Saxon/American character and conventional notions of family, gender, nation, race, and culture. But is James the traveler really that much more than a supremely sensitive upper middle-class *flaneur*, who is in a privileged position that allows him to distance himself from America while playing the role of man-of-the-world? Susan Sontag’s description of the photographer as middle-class *flaneur* fits James nearly perfectly. “The photographer,” Sontag writes, “is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the *flaneur* finds the world ‘picturesque’” (On Photography 55). Like the photographer,

James is armed, not with a camera, but with a mental canvas; his pictures are word pictures. And what are these word pictures like? The fact remains that many of the images, tropes, ideas, and attitudes that James attaches to Venice/Venetians, Italy/Italians, in Italian Hours parallel Orientalist representations of the Orient/Orientalists. Italy, like the Orient, is seen as a place of degradation, decay and sensuousness, at best a stage for spectacle, at worst a moribund museum. Like the Orient, Italy has long ago seen its greatest days. The Italians themselves, like the Orientals or any other Others, have some attractive qualities, but generally they have low morals, are lethargic and childlike, and approach life fatalistically. Like the Orientals, the Italians are primitives (albeit sometimes graceful ones with polished manners), essentially premodern. But to give James his due, he is sympathetic enough to understand that there were some self-aware Italians who aspired to modernity, or were at least aware that such an outlook existed. Count Valerii, we'll recall, was forced to try to abjure his primitive, premodern superstitions and paganism, but, as the last of the Valerii, the count doesn't necessarily become a modern. Having renounced Juno, he buries his head in his modern wife's lap, but he doesn't become, "if you will, a thoroughly modern man," as the story's narrator says. Some thirty years later, in The Golden Bowl, another Italian nobleman aptly named Prince Amerigo will try to blaze the same path that Count Valerii approached with great reluctance.

Since its publication in 1904, The Golden Bowl has come to be considered one of James's most hermetic creations, a novel whose ambiguity is nearly legendary despite all that has been written about its meaning. The plot is a simple one: Maggie Verver, the daughter of a rich American, marries Prince Amerigo, an Italian living in London. Maggie's father, Adam, marries Maggie's friend, Charlotte Stant. The Prince and Charlotte have an adulterous affair. Maggie discovers the betrayal and tries to deal with it. Much of the critical literature about The Golden Bowl has focussed on moral assessments of the four main characters, with dichotomous, conflicting conclusions the norm. For example, Maggie Verver, arguably the most important character, is variously described as a healing "saint" and a manipulating "witch" in numerous critical essays. Other critics have focussed on the outcome of the marriage of Maggie Verver and Prince Amerigo, seeing in it either a harmonious social or cultural union, or a case of appropriation, possession and domination. While those issues are important to my discussion, my main concern in what follows will be Prince Amerigo and his relations with the Ververs and, to a lesser extent, with Charlotte Stant. As Carl Maves has pointed out, Prince Amerigo gives The Golden Bowl a unique distinction in the James oeuvre in that the "Italian Prince is the only continental European in the entire James canon who is depicted from the inside, the only character neither American nor English that James ever 'goes behind'" (125). The Prince, who after all gives his title to the title of the first half of the book, "is doubly unique in James's fiction, at once his most carefully and fully

developed European character and the most extended and profound expression of what [James] understood Italy and the Italian ethos to be” (138). But not only is Amerigo an Italian prince, he is, according to Thomas Galt Peyser, “emphatically, almost hyperbolically, an *Italian* prince.” As proof, Peyser points to Amerigo’s opening dialogue with Fanny Assingham, during which “he lives up to widely held assumptions by confessing his lack of ‘moral sense,’ assumptions underlined by Fanny’s bursting out, ‘Oh you deep Italians!’ and calling him, more succinctly, ‘Machiavelli.’” Peyser rightly connects James’s characterization of the Prince with his characterization of the Venetian race in Italian Hours, where James says, “It hasn’t a genius for stiff morality. . . . It scruples but scantily to represent the false as the true. . . . It has been accused further of loving if not too well at least too often” (51). Also of interest is the fact that Amerigo is one of the few Italians whom James imagines outside of Italy. In that way he serves as a bridge between the stay-at-home Italians of James’s Italian Hours (personified by the rustic Angelo of “Adina,” who prefers revenge to the chance to go to America to “do some honest work”) and the Italian immigrants of James’s The American Scene. And, while James places the Prince in England, just as he had Oronte of “The Real Thing,” Amerigo is more ambitious than the young model. In fact, Amerigo has dreams of going to America, to the very land that took its name from his explorer ancestor, Amerigo Vespucci.

However, beyond his self-confessed lack of moral sense, just what kind of Italian is Prince Amerigo, and just how typical an Italian is he (if there is such a creature)? In many ways, Amerigo is not very representative at all, certainly not of the type that James was to encounter in America and chronicle in The American Scene. Amerigo is, after all, a prince, a member of the Italian aristocracy, albeit a rather impoverished one. Still, Amerigo is an Italian distinctly different from the lower class Italians who had been pouring into America in the decade before James's visit. Amerigo also seems to be atypical in appearance, with a "grave" yet "radiant" face, "with its dark blue eyes, its dark brown mustache and its expression no more sharply 'foreign' to an English view than to have caused it sometimes to be observed of him with a shallow felicity that he looked like a 'refined' Irishman" (30). Unlike the Italians in America who speak no English, Amerigo not only speaks English, he sometimes thinks in English, all of which is part and parcel of his "Anglomania." In fact, his command of English is altogether too good for Maggie's liking. "Miss Verver had told him he spoke English too well -- it was his only fault, and he had not been able to speak worse even to oblige her." But if Amerigo speaks English too well, he feels he doesn't speak American well enough and "was practising his American in order to converse properly, on equal terms as it were, with Mr. Verver" (31).

Amerigo is also right at home in the English country manor, that quintessential English institution and setting. "He had paid, first and last, many an English country visit;

he had learned, even from of old, to do the English things, and to do them, all sufficiently, in the English way." And although he didn't particularly enjoy the country house activities in the manner of the English, still he was capable of going through the motions of shooting, riding, golfing, walking, billiards- and bridge-playing, and tea-drinking (247). Furthermore, there is nothing clannish about Amerigo's family, a charge that was repeatedly leveled at Italians in America. Amerigo marries the American Maggie, his younger brother had already married a woman "of Hebrew race," and his sister and her husband were "the most anglicised of Milanese" (39). Amerigo and his family are cosmopolitan Italians, people of the world, even if they found themselves in reduced circumstances.

But for all his Anglomania and surface assimilation into English society, Amerigo remains an outsider, relatively trivial and useless. During his life in England, he is often "reminded how, after all, as an outsider, a foreigner, and even as a mere representative husband and son-in-law, he was so irrelevant to the working of affairs that he could be bent on occasion to uses comparatively trivial" (264). He feels "that he was, in the last analysis, among all these so often inferior people, practically held cheap and made light of" (265). Also, "He felt at moments as if there were never anything to do for them that was worthy -- to call worthy -- of the personal relation," things such as to "plot or lie for them," or "to lie in wait with the dagger or to prepare, insidiously, the cup. These were the services that, by all romantic tradition, were consecrated to affection quite as much as

to hate. But he could amuse himself with saying -- as much as that amusement went -- that they were what he had once for all turned his back on" (238). Here we see that Amerigo is caught betwixt and between. He is not modern enough or practical enough to be of any real service to the English or to the Ververs. However, the traditional abilities that Amerigo might offer by virtue of being Italian -- lying, plotting, assassination with dagger or poison -- are the very activities that he hopes to rise above in his life outside of Italy. Having escaped his country, Amerigo now hopes to shed the stereotypes of his race, symbolized by the cup of poison and the stiletto which characterized Italy for the young James Russell Lowell and many other Americans. Of course, the image of the plotting Italian assassin had a history dating as far back as the early seventeenth century. In 1606, for example, the Englishman Thomas Palmer wrote an essay on foreign travel in which he warned his countrymen not to go to Italy unless they wanted to learn such arts as stiletto stabbing, poisoning, intriguing, and treason. As Luigi Barzini says, "The number of Italian traitors, cheats, pimps, spies, and murderers in nordic literature becomes practically endless from that time on." This parade of crafty and cowardly Italian killers begins in Elizabethan drama, proceeds through Gothic novels and nineteenth-century historical romances, and continues to this day with Sicilian gangsters (27).

Amerigo concedes that he understands neither the British nor the Ververs. With the English, although "he had lived with them, stayed with them, dined, hunted, shot and



done various other things with them,” still “the number of questions about them he couldn’t have answered had much rather grown than shrunken” (265). Amerigo’s befuddlement is never fully explained. Is his lack of understanding of the British the result of an individual failure, the product of a personal obtuseness, or is it a sign of an unbridgeable cultural/racial gulf between Italians and the British? From the Prince’s perspective, the answer appears to be the latter. He is not so obtuse that he can’t frame the questions or offer at least one possible explanation for his puzzlement. If Amerigo is sure of only one thing, it is that the English “didn’t like *les situations nettes*,” what the English themselves called, “with complacency, their wonderful spirit of compromise.” It was this predilection for complexity and compromise that “had been their national genius and their national success,” what in effect made the English English (265). Amerigo knows that much, but as a simple Italian he doesn’t profit much from that knowledge; it explains their motivation, maybe explains their behavior, but ultimately it makes it hard to really pin them down. Concerning the Ververs, Amerigo confesses to Charlotte. ““The difficulty is, and will always be, that I don’t understand them. I didn’t at first, but I thought I should learn to”” (234). He sees the Ververs as an entirely different species, thereby hinting at distinct racial differences. “Those people -- and his free synthesis lumped together capitalists and bankers, retired men of business, illustrious collectors, American fathers-in-law, American fathers, little American daughters, little American wives -- those people were of the same large lucky group, as one might say; they were

all, at least, of the same general species and had the same general instincts; they hung together, they passed each other the word, they spoke each other's language, they did each other 'turns'" (223-24). In fact, Amerigo sees himself as racially and morally the odd man out. "'You're of the same race, at any rate -- more or less; of the same general tradition and education, of the same moral paste," he tells Charlotte. "There are things you have in common with them. But I, on my side, as I've gone on trying to see if I haven't some of these things too -- I, on my side, have more and more failed. There seem at last to be none worth mentioning. I can't help seeing it -- I'm decidedly too different" (236). Oddly enough, here Amerigo sounds like the turn-of-the-century race thinkers who conflated race, education, tradition, and character in efforts to draw distinctions between racial/national groups.

Amerigo is too different -- too Italian -- not only in his presumed lack of moral sense but in his history, which forms, as he tells Maggie, but one part of him. That part is composed of his family's history, "the doings, the marriages, the crimes, the follies, the boundless *betises* of other people," things that are "written -- literally, in rows of volumes, in libraries," and "are as public as they're abominable." Part of that history includes an "infamous Pope" and Amerigo's namesake, Amerigo Vespucci, whom Fanny Assingham calls an ersatz explorer. However, Amerigo claims another part, "very much smaller doubtless, which, such as it is, represents my single self, the unknown, unimportant -- unimportant save to *you* -- personal quantity" (33). This is the part of him,

he tells Maggie, that among other things doesn't lie or dissemble or deceive. "Personally, he considered, he hadn't the vices in question -- and that was so much to the good," James writes. "His race, on the other hand, had had them handsomely enough, and he was somehow full of his race. Its presence in him was like the consciousness of some inexpugnable scent in which his clothes, his whole person, his hands and the hair on his head, might have been steeped as in some chemical bath: the effect was nowhere in particular, yet he constantly felt himself at the mercy of the cause" (37-38). Again we have here the idea of race as some combination of history and culture which gets into the bloodstream and is handed down from generation to generation, which was a popular concept at the time. This racial chemical bath in which Amerigo seems to have been steeped will be echoed in James's The American Scene, where James talks about immigrants who spread their sauce over everything and are like a sponge saturating everything. It is his history, his culture, his race, and that inexpugnable scent that Amerigo seeks to escape. He hopes that his "single self," his "personal quality," that is, his individuality, can help him rise above race, but he suspects that isn't happening. More effective may be his marriage to Maggie Verver and union with Adam Verver's millions. "What was this so important step he had just taken but the desire for some new history that should, so far as possible, contradict, and even if need be flatly dishonour, the old?" (38). In a word, Amerigo's dream is to assert his individual self, escape the past, and slip into modernity, into a "scientific" future. It was this same scientific future that James saw

Italy aspiring to in Italian Hours. Amerigo “was allying himself to science, for what was science but the absence of prejudice backed by the presence of money? His life would be full of machinery, which was the antidote to superstition, which was in its turn, too much, the consequence, or at least the exhalation, of archives” (38-39). In his desire to become modern, Amerigo is in some sense trying to become more of a modern Anglo-Saxon -- practical, individualistic, able to redirect, if not transcend his racial past -- and less of a pre-modern, primitive Italian entangled in the limitations of prejudice, superstition and that racial past. It is this very machinery of science that has the potential to transform Amerigo’s weak moral sense, or what passes for that quality in his “poor dear backward old Rome.” Amerigo says that the Italian moral sense is like a tortuous, half-ruined stone staircase in some *quattrocento* castle, while the American version is like the “lightning elevator” in one of Adam Verver’s fifteen-story buildings. “Your moral sense works by steam -- it sends you up like a rocket,” Amerigo tells Fanny Assingham. “Ours is slow and steep and unlighted, with so many of the steps missing that -- well, that it’s as short, in almost any case, to turn around and come down again” (48).

And yet, as Amerigo himself knows, he has undertaken a risky voyage. At times, he identifies himself with Edgar Allan Poe’s adventurer A. Gordon Pym, who “found at a given moment before him a thickness of white air that was like a dazzling curtain of light, concealing as a darkness conceals, yet of the colour of milk or of snow. There were moments when he felt his own boat move upon some such mystery” (42). A few pages

later, Amerigo again raises the image of a great journey across an unknown sea. Everything is ready, but there is only one problem, he tells Fanny Assingham: He can't sail alone, but needs her to show the way as his consort. "I don't in the least myself know, I assure you, the points of the compass," Amerigo says (45). As a descendant of a dubious discoverer, without compass, moral or otherwise, Amerigo places himself in the care of not only Fanny Assingham, but also of the Ververs. Amerigo tells Fanny that both he and Charlotte are in Adam Verver's boat, which keeps him afloat. "'And, pray, am I not in Mr. Verver's boat too? Why, but for Mr. Verver's boat, I should have been by this time' -- and his quick Italian gesture, an expressive direction and motion of his forefinger, pointed to deepest depths -- 'away down, down, down'" (206). And because Amerigo is in the Verver's boat, kept afloat by Adam's wealth, he repaid them, as Fanny sees, by being beautiful, "by continuing to lead the life, to breathe the air, very nearly to think the thoughts, that best suited his wife and her father . . ." (207). So, if the Prince expects the Ververs' boat to carry him to a brave new modern world, Amerigo is sadly mistaken.

Maggie, for one, desires Amerigo for the very past that he seeks to escape. If Amerigo wants to make of himself something less of a typical Italian, Maggie wants him to be even more of an Italian and what that typically represented to Americans. She is not interested in Amerigo for his "single self, the unknown, unimportant . . . personal quantity," but rather for his colorful history. "'What was it else,' Maggie Verver had also

said, 'that made me originally think of you? . . . Where therefore. . . without your archives, annals, infamies, would you have been?'" (33). The Ververs seek to appropriate Amerigo's family history much in the same way that it has been appropriated by the British Museum, where the family's archives now reside. "Similarly, the Ververs have the economic power to appropriate Amerigo's family history for their own uses, securing associations of which they can be proud for Maggie's son, and thus purchasing for him a historical identity, summed up in his name, 'the Principino'" (Jolly 171). As Carl Maves says, "Amerigo is the last in a long Jamesian series of Italians who are paid by Americans to be colorful, unusually picturesque -- in a word, romantic. . . . There is in the end hardly any other sort of Italian in Jamesian fiction, for the good reason that nearly all his Americans in Italy are both wealthy and yearning to be deluded" (132). In James's tales alone, that list of picturesque, romantically-perceived Italians includes Count Valerii, the rustic Angelo in "Adina," the fugitive wife in "At Isella," and the model Oronte in "The Real Thing." Maggie tells the Prince that, for Adam Verver, he is "a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. You're not perhaps absolutely unique, but you're so curious and eminent that there are very few others like you -- you belong to a class about which everything is known. You're what they call a *morceau de musee*" (35). In fact, precious collectibles had "so engaged all the faculties of [Adam Verver's] mind, that the instinct, the particular sharpened appetite of the collector, had fairly served as a basis for his acceptance of the Prince's suit" (121). As Peter Conn points out, Adam Verver, although

surprisingly passive and vulnerable for an American plutocrat from the “Darwinian jungle of American capitalism,” is “a calculating connoisseur of people as objects” who substitutes aesthetics for ethics. “The idea of beauty, followed by its appropriation, governed Adam’s existence. In such an ethical world, reciprocity must yield to the demands of possessorship, generosity must give way to calculation, and love to taste” (27-29). Adam Verver’s attitude toward the Prince also characterizes his relationship with his grandchild, Maggie’s and the Prince’s little boy. “In the way of precious small pieces he had handled nothing so precious as the Principino, his daughter’s first-born, whose Italian designation endlessly amused him and whom he could manipulate and dandle, already almost toss and catch again, as he couldn’t a correspondingly rare morsel of an earlier *pate tendre*” (126). If Amerigo is aestheticized, turned into a object, it is an object of worth, one that keeps on giving. The Prince himself sees this. He has a sense of Adam Verver gazing at him as he would at “the figure of a cheque received in the course of business and about to be enclosed to a banker.” Verver’s gaze “made sure of the amount - - and just so, from time to time, the amount of the Prince was made sure. He was being thus, in renewed instalments, perpetually paid in; he already reposed in the bank as a value, but subject, in this comfortable way to repeated, to infinite endorsement. The net result of all of which, moreover, was that the young man had no wish to see his value diminish. He himself, after all, had not fixed it -- the ‘figure’ was a conception all of Mr. Verver’s own” (245-46). However, if the Prince is a valuable museum piece, he is also

flesh and blood, a child of the sensual South we see figured so often in James's tales and travel essays. He is, as his illicit affair with Charlotte Stant shows, one of those Italians who are accused of "loving if not too well at least too often, of being in fine as little austere as possible" (Italian Hours 17). In Prince Amerigo, we see the limits of the aestheticizing tendency, just as we will see those limits in The American Scene.

Peyser places Adam Verver's mercantile aestheticism and museum-building -- his desire to create a "museum of museums" in American City -- within the context of late nineteenth-century American imperialism, which in turn raises questions about assimilation. "By treating his subjects as if they were exhibits in a museum, apparently shorn of their historical determinants, James manages the problem of the alien in a time that witnessed both the peak of immigration to the US and the success of American imperialist ventures in the Pacific," Peyser writes. "Far from being an escape from history, James's manner of treating the world as a museum and its inhabitants as curators and exhibits joins his artistic labor to the assimilative labor that lay ahead for his native country" (50-51). But the Italian Prince's marriage to the American Maggie raises other disturbing questions concerning imperialism, appropriation and assimilation. As Peyser points out, in The Golden Bowl, the international theme in American politics takes on the character of a marriage plot. The questions here become, who is appropriating and colonizing whom, and where will assimilation lead for those who are doing the assimilating? These questions are tied up in other questions and fears about Anglo-Saxon



superiority and purity and the threat posed by alien races. "Throughout the period, the strident faith in the superiority of Anglo-Saxon blood was shadowed at times by an almost tragic conception of racial fragility in an increasingly promiscuous population," Peyser writes. "As [Henry Cabot] Lodge had warned from the senate floor, 'If a lower race mixes with a higher in sufficient numbers, history teaches us that the lower race will prevail'" (60-61).

We see these questions dramatized in The Golden Bowl. At the very beginning of the novel, we get an image of the Prince as an imperialist fantasizing about a recaptured, imperial past, an image that balances Adam Verver's own image of himself as John Keats' "stout Cortez" on the peak in Darien, realizing that "a world was left him to conquer and that he might conquer it if he tried" (122). In the opening paragraph, we are told that the Prince was "one of the modern Romans" who "had always like his London," and who found there "a more convincing image of the truth of the ancient state than any they have left by the Tiber. . . . If it was a question of an *Imperium*, he said to himself, and if one wished, as a Roman, to recover a little the sense of that, the place to do so was on London Bridge, or even, on a fine afternoon in May, at Hyde Park Corner" (29). A few pages later, Amerigo, having told Maggie he is practicing his American to be able to converse on equal terms with Adam Verver, now adds, "Well, I'm eating your father alive -- which is the only way to taste him. I want to continue, and as it's when he talks American that he *is* most alive, so I must cultivate it, to get my pleasure. He couldn't

make one like him so much in any other language” (32). As Peyser says, “Even in the course of their playful banter this quip has a vaguely ominous ring to it, but the context of contemporary debates about the fate of northern European stock in America gives it specifically racial undertones” (60). It isn’t only Adam Verver that Amerigo threatens to consume. As Peyser points out, the Prince’s adulterous affair represents an alien challenge to Maggie’s arranged and ordered life. This is expressed in a symbolic passage at the beginning of the second volume, when Maggie ponders her betrayal by Amerigo and Charlotte. “This situation had been occupying, for months and months, the very centre of the garden of her life, but it had reared itself there like some strange, tall tower of ivory, or perhaps rather some wonderful, beautiful, but outlandish pagoda. . .” (301). Peyser says the “symbol of this particular threat, the surprising, heterogenous ivory pagoda” is an apt symbol in light of fears about the Asiaticization of America at the turn of the century. Amerigo’s Roman heritage gives the image even more resonance because the ancient Romans themselves were seen as contributing to the Asiaticization of European life. “Recalling the alien presence in The American Scene, we can see that the threatened Asiaticization of Maggie’s life is paradoxically what makes her an American, what shows her fantastically exceptional situation to be nevertheless the representative story of the US” (55). If the Prince and his adultery are imaged as a pagoda, the temptation to Maggie to respond with resentment, protest and jealousy are figured as “a wild eastern caravan, looming into view with crude colours in the sun, fierce pipes in air,

high spears against the sky” (459). Interestingly, Maggie’s encounter with the adultery -- “the horror of finding evil seated, all at its ease, where she had only dreamed of good” -- is described in language that echoes James’s encounter with the alien in The American Scene. “[I]t had met her like some bad-faced stranger surprised in one of the thick-carpeted corridors of a house of quiet on a Sunday afternoon; and yet, yes, amazingly, she had been able to look at terror and disgust only to know that she must put away from her the bitter-sweet of their freshness” (459).

However, if the Prince is a threat, he is a paradoxically mild, even bland character. He is a flexible, gallant, consummate gentleman -- in essence, one of James’s typical European Italians. As Carl Maves says, Amerigo is a hedonist who enjoys life but does not wholly trust it. “He is, in short, a classic Italian fatalist, and his fatalism renders him constitutionally incapable of initial action and constantly alert to the abyss of irony that yawns beneath all human endeavor” (146). With typical irony, he seems to accept the role imposed on him by the Ververs. “‘I like the class,’ he had laughed for this, ‘in which you place me! I shall be one of the little pieces that you unpack at the hotels, or at the worst in the hired houses, like this wonderful one, and put out with the family photographs and the new magazines’” (36). Christof Wegelin says, “The early Amerigo is irresponsible with the charming irresponsibility of a child. The fairy world of romantic innocence and literally fabulous wealth to which his alliance with the Ververs has admitted him strikes him with wide-eyed and guileless wonder. . . . Hence the benevolent

amusement with which he accepts the role which the Ververs have assigned him in their play at international marriage" (138). Despite the Prince's initial passivity, Maves sees an Amerigo who is not self-satisfied in his graceful hedonism, detachment and inaction, but rather one who has a restless curiosity and openness to new stimuli (140). Wegelin, meanwhile, arguing that The Golden Bowl is the story of Amerigo's growth, claims that the difference between the early and later Amerigo is striking. But is it, really? Wegelin himself says that Amerigo's "good faith was the good faith of the unmoral child. That is why what he finally acknowledges is not his past fault, but his new awareness of what Maggie has done for him. . . . The reason for Amerigo's passivity is that Maggie is the one who guides and rules their relationship and the moral awakening it involves for him" (139-40). But isn't that really the point? Maggie in fact may come to realize that the Prince is more than just a museum piece, more than just a stock romantic Italian. She may, a Maves argues, learn to live with Amerigo's "sensuous pessimism." But it is Maggie, and her superior Anglo-Saxon genius for order and organization, who finally controls and arranges the relationships. Where does that leave the others, especially Amerigo? Roslyn Jolly argues that Maggie ultimately encloses the others in "glass cages of consciousness" which become "the glass cases of Maggie's museum, which is the product of a fiction so powerful that it ceases to be fiction and attains the status of history." Maggie's powerful subjective vision changes reality but only at the expense of the subjectivity of the others. Ultimately, "Amerigo and Charlotte are punished for their

wish to see life from their own point of view, and it is in this punitive role that Maggie's imaginative power is expressed" (193-94). Mark Seltzer offers a twist on this interpretation. He argues that Maggie controls the resolution by fusing power and love, control and sympathy. Rather than seeing Maggie's triumph in either/or fashion -- as the triumph of a creative "sympathetic imagination" that affirms the "imaginative autonomy" of the others, or as the intelligent control of others by denying "vital interchange with others" -- Seltzer sees instead an interchangeability of the two readings. "Control and sympathy are not opposed here; in fact, Maggie controls precisely through a power of sympathy" (71). It is the same dynamic that characterized an imperialist nation's relations with its colonies, and the same dynamic that could be said to have motivated reformers such as Jacob Riis in their relations with America's poor immigrants: We are controlling you because we love you and want to help you. Peyser puts it another way: "The very fact that these peoples could be made into exhibits was precisely what required that they *be* made into exhibits for their own protection" (57).

That, in fact, appears to be exactly what happens in the final scene involving the four main characters, when the Ververs take stock of their belongings, before Adam and Charlotte depart for America. Adam Verver fixes his gaze on a picture, an early Florentine religious subject, that he had given Maggie for her wedding. Maggie interprets her father's leaving the picture behind as his "doing the most possible toward leaving her a part of his palpable self" (541). The Italian picture, of course, isn't the only thing that

Adam has purchased and left behind for his daughter. There are, in addition, the Italian Prince, who was also bought with Verver's money, as well as all the other objects in the room -- "the other pictures, the sofas, the chairs, the tables, the cabinets, the 'important' pieces." Adam's and Maggie's "eyes moved together from piece to piece, taking in the whole nobleness," which includes lastly, but not leastly, their respective wife and husband. "Mrs. Verver and the Prince fairly 'placed' themselves, however unwittingly, as high expressions of the kind of human furniture required, aesthetically, by such a scene. The fusion of their presence with the decorative elements, their contribution to the triumph of selection, was complete and admirable; though, to a lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion really demanded, they also might have figured as concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase" (541). The Prince becomes here a piece of furniture, more aesthetic than functional, which contributes to the domestic scene. Adam tells Maggie, "You've got some good things," but he might just as well have said, "We've got some good things." Maggie responds by saying, "Ah, don't they look well?" Hearing this, the Prince and Charlotte -- engaged, aestheticized, commodified, domesticated -- give the Ververs "an attention, all of gravity, that was like an ampler submission to the general duty of magnificence; sitting as still, to be thus appraised, as a pair of effigies of the contemporary great on one of the platforms of Madame Tussaud." Maggie completes the scene by telling her father, "I'm so glad -- for your last look" (542).

The Golden Bowl ends with Maggie and the Prince alone. In an attempt to put closure on the adulterous episode, Maggie pronounces the safely departed Charlotte “too splendid.” When Amerigo seconds Maggie’s assessment of Charlotte, his wife, to underscore her moral, says, “That’s our help, you see.” This is followed by James’s curious concluding paragraph: Maggie’s comment -- her moral -- keeps Amerigo before his wife, “taking in -- or trying to -- what she so wonderfully gave. He tried, too clearly, to please her -- to meet her in her own way; but with the result only that, close to her, her face kept before him, his hands holding her shoulders, his whole act enclosing her, he presently echoed: ‘“See”? I see nothing but *you*.’ And the truth of it had, with this force, after a moment, so strangely lighted his eyes that, as for pity and dread of them, she buried her own in his breast” (547). This act of reconciliation recalls the reunion of Count Valerii and his American wife in “The Last of the Valerii.” Both the Prince and the Count have been adulterous, the Count with an ancient pagan deity cast in marble, the Prince with the flesh-and-blood Charlotte. Both aristocrats are particularly Italian in their adultery, the Count motivated by superstition, the Prince by sensuality. “The Last of the Valerii” ends with the Count yielding, falling on his knees, and burying his head in his wife’s lap. In The Golden Bowl, however, it is Maggie who buries her head in the Prince’s breast. The Count’s act is obviously one of submission, a casting off of his ancient superstitions, which, however, still fails to make him a modern man. But, what about the Prince?

Several critics have interpreted Maggie's and the Prince rapprochement as a simple parable of fusion and harmony. Christof Wegelen sees it as a double conversion, a social interfusion of "the discipline of Maggie's spiritual energy by Amerigo's form, the quickening penetration of his form by her spirit -- possible only to the high intelligence on which their love is based" (140). Carl Maves argues that The Golden Bowl, as James's last extended treatment of the international theme, represents his resolution of the lover's quarrel between Europe and America. Maggie learns to live with Amerigo's "sensuous pessimism" and the Prince fathoms and tempers Maggie's "passionate moralism," thereby creating a spiritual and physical union, "a fusion of knowledge and fancy, Europe and America" (149). However, the language of the book's concluding paragraph indicates that these interpretations are too optimistic, too pat. In one sense, Amerigo is still the typical Italian of James's Italian Hours, too eager to please and to be pleasing in his attempt to accept what she is offering. As a result he sees only her. But, if Maggie ultimately controls the relationship through "a power of sympathy," as Mark Seltzer says (71), we are nevertheless left with the contradictory images of Amerigo "enclosing" Maggie and of Maggie burying her eyes in Amerigo's breast. In seeing only Maggie, Amerigo's eyes, the windows to his soul, inspire her with pity and dread of them. If, in one sense, Amerigo is a romantic aesthetic object appropriated and possessed by the Ververs, he is also now a flesh-and-blood creature who threatens to possess Maggie with pity and dread, the two conflicting emotions Americans will have when masses of



formerly picturesque Italians succeed, unlike Amerigo, in crossing the Atlantic in an effort to become modern American immigrants. Maggie's attraction to, pity for, and dread of Amerigo will be developed in James's own reaction to these Italian immigrants in The American Scene.

Henry James had completed what is traditionally known as the "master phase" of his career when, in 1904, and now in his sixties, he returned to the United States for a visit after an absence of twenty-one years. He disembarked at Hoboken, New Jersey, on August 30, for a ten-month tour, spending much of the fall in New England, then traveling extensively about the country, from New York to Florida and the West Coast. James had just published his final masterwork, The Golden Bowl, to mixed reviews. There was much praise, but also some sharp critical attacks, all of which generated interest in James's homecoming tour. James was now undoubtedly at the height of his achievement as an artist, but nevertheless there was critical debate about the value of his work (Sears ix). Still, the trip was to be a triumphant tour for James, an opportunity to enjoy his success and the recognition of his countrymen. On his itinerary were lunches and dinners with President Theodore Roosevelt, the French ambassador, and old friends such as Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and Secretary of State John Hay. Harper & Brothers honored him with a dinner whose thirty guests included Samuel Clemens. There was also a very strong personal element inscribed into the trip, as there would be with any return home by a longtime expatriate, especially one who had never stopped thinking of his

native land. The homecoming “was professedly a voyage of discovery, and James hoped it would prove a voyage of recovery as well” (Conn 31). Ultimately, it was James’s personal, interior journey -- not the triumphant professional tour -- that came to dominate The American Scene, his record of the 1904-1905 trip, which was collected in 1907 from pieces that had already been serialized in *The North American Review*.

The book, like his late fiction, received mixed reviews. Critics complained about the overly ornate rhetoric and wearisome verbiage of James’s later style, while *The North American Review* defended that same style as an expression of the subtleties of James’s thought. Some critics accused James of snobbery, of being “a novelist of the aristocracy,” a corrupted expatriate who was now looking down his nose at his countrymen (Sears xxi-xxii). *The Nation*, meanwhile, praised the book for highlighting the defects and shortcomings of American civilization, but criticized James’s inability to sympathize with the ordinary person. “Mr. James is fundamentally incapable of getting inside the skin of the average American or of realizing that the outlook to such a citizen is by no means so dreary and ‘common’ as to himself” (qtd. in Sears xxi).

The American Scene was soon relegated to a minor position in the James canon and thereafter treated as an oddity, the “eccentric travelogue of a reactionary aesthete” (Posnock vii). In recent years, however, critics have returned to the work with renewed interest, in the process revising the prevailing view that The American Scene represented the final note of a genteel aesthete whose destiny, as John Carlos Rowe said, “always

seems to end in the intricacies of his late style and its retreat from life into the palace of art” (qtd. in Posnock vii). As John Sears says, “The American Scene provides both a critical vision of America at a crucial turning point in its history and a portrait of a profound observer of the scene, whose fears and prejudices, hopes and enthusiasms are themselves a telling revelation of the complex fate of being an American” (xxii).

That James had returned to America at “a crucial turning point” in its history is incontestable. These were years of “peculiar turbulence” marked by accelerating urbanization and industrialization, revolutionary technological changes, centralization of business and politics, sometimes violent social struggles, and explosive growth of mass media (Conn 1). In the years leading up to James’s visit, the United States had experienced the assassination of President William McKinley, the last of the Indian wars, the imperialistic Spanish-American War, the bloody repression of the Filipinos, violent labor battles and sharpened class conflict, hundreds of lynchings and periodic race riots, and a wave of immigration unprecedented in American history. These events could be said to have been causing a cultural revolution that was transforming turn-of-the-century America into “a border town, a region poised between contending facts and images of past and future” (15). During the 1890s, America’s romantic idealism and unshaken belief in progress were beginning to erode. For intellectuals, “the cult of progress, stability, and materialism was becoming oppressive and suffocating. It brought restraint and uniformity into the world of thought without resolving the increasing conflicts in

society,” John Higham writes. Americans responded with two competing strategies. “One way led to pessimism, decadence, and withdrawal into art for art’s sake. The other pointed to a heightened activity and an exuberant sense of power. . . . Both the pessimists and the activists of the 1890s felt that the rational schemata of their time had become closed systems, imprisoning the human spirit. Pessimists accepted the denial of responsibility and purpose. Activists, on the other hand, attacked closed systems and created meanings from the flux of experience” (“Reorientation” 34-35). The new immigration, with its sheer numbers of polyglot peoples, was perhaps the most important factor behind this “border town” character of late nineteenth-century America. Some twelve million immigrants had arrived during James’s long absence from the United States, this in a country whose total population was just seventy-five million in 1900. By the early 1900s, Americans were startled by the realization that upwards of three-fourths of the population of New York, Boston, Chicago and Cleveland consisted of first-generation immigrants and their children, many of them living in urban slums. “Probably nothing like this more or less voluntary migration had occurred on such a scale, anywhere. Certainly nothing like it had been seen before in the United States” (Conn 6).

James’s visit also coincided with a frenetic period in the muckraking and reform movements. Almost daily, books and magazine articles exposed the political corruptions and economic disruptions of American society. This was the time of not only Jacob Riis, but also Lincoln Steffens, Ida M. Tarbell, Upton Sinclair, Eugene V. Debs, and W.E.B.

DuBois, among others. However, as Peter Conn points out, "Almost nothing of this national ferment appears in The American Scene." There is, he says, a "typical absence of politics -- of current 'topics' generally -- from his book" (37). But Conn overstates the absence of current topics in the book, for at least one social/political topic is very much on James's mind and very much present in The American Scene: the issue of immigration. The American Scene may be highly personal, highly literary journalism, but it does engage with important contemporary issues, among the most important of which were questions of race, immigration, assimilation, and their relationship to national character.

In fact, many of the "fears and prejudices, hopes and enthusiasms" expressed by James centered around the masses of immigrants who went a long way toward making the turn of the century a crucial turning point in American history. James returned to an emergent industrial nation in which "Americanization" of the immigrant had become a definitive cultural project. As masses of new immigrants threatened to mingle alien "strains of blood" with those of so-called native Americans, nativists, progressivists, and James himself struggled to define and redefine the nature of nationality and cultural filiation. "In his own extensive observation of American manners, institutions, and public life in The American Scene, the restored American absentee records numerous scenes in which the making of Americans -- of American 'race,' of American culture, of American civic fate -- is enacted" (Blair 158-59). James couldn't help but see these new immigrants

wherever he went in the Northeast; very often he made a point of seeking them out. On the other hand, James finds Philadelphia soothing because, although it might have had its share of "hordes" of "grosser aliens," there the immigrants weren't as concentrated and shockingly visible as they were in New York (American Scene 208). However, James saw immigrants aplenty in the Northeast. What were his impressions and his reactions? How does he construct them, and with what motives? Obviously there is no agreement here. What is most striking is the variety of interpretations, some of them diametrically opposed, of James's reactions to not only the American scene, but to the "aliens" who were so much a part of that scene and in great measure made that scene seem so alien.

On one side, John Sears and Peter Conn situate James in the genteel, patrician, Anglo-Saxon camp which was recoiling from the threat of the new immigration. A leading spokesman for this camp was James's Boston Brahmin friend, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, who advocated immigration restriction of alien races as a way to preserve America's Anglo-Saxon heritage and the democratic traditions that were believed to be rooted in Anglo-Saxon racial characteristics. James here is seen as a conservative, nearly nativist observer who shares the prejudices of his class and its fears of being contaminated or dispossessed by the newcomers. This dispossession is seen as being doubly disturbing to James because, in returning to America, he had sought to recapture the world of his youth. This "nativist hostility to the new immigrants can be counted as [James's] contribution to the vehement debate that engrossed the nation in the early

1900s” (Conn 44). More generally, this critical camp sees James as being overwhelmed by and despairing over the change, multiplicity, motion, materialism and modernism of America, all of which were an assault on the picturesque aesthetic through which he still looked at the world. Conn calls The American Scene a memoir whose main theme is transience, “James’s collision with and revulsion from ‘the dreadful chill of change’” (33). Sears says it is the last important work in the American picturesque tradition that began with the publication of Irving’s Sketch-Book nearly a century before. Mark Seltzer extends the Sears/Conn critique, situating James within emergent professional discourses that sought to control the poor, the criminal, and the immigrant, which were often seen as one and the same. James’s aestheticized response to American culture doesn’t resist the logic of the new social sciences, but instead The American Scene is “an aesthetic duplication and formalizing of social practices of normalization” (131). Seltzer argues that “James’s techniques of representation discreetly reproduce social modes of policing and regulation and reproduce them the more powerfully in their very direction, in the very gesture of disowning the shame of power” (139). Kevin R. McNamara sees a much more conflicted James, arguing that a doublemindedness informs every judgment in The American Scene. On one hand James welcomed signs of difference on the urban landscape and wanted to produce from the “aliens” an oppositional culture; however, he also wanted to keep his distance, unable as he was to identify with this new culture, and to preserve the margins among the various immigrant groups and between the the

immigrants and the insatiable machinery of Americanization (124). James rejected the idea that the darker new immigrants were unassimilable, but that didn't make him an assimilationist, according to McNamara, because "his apparent pluralism supports an ultimately genteel critique of market-mad America, not a social and political alternative to assimilation and exploitation." McNamara calls James a "paradoxical anti-assimilationist" who saw "the power of the margin -- the homogenous, genteel Boston and New York of his youth as well as the immigrants' cultural consciousness -- as alternatives to America's 'great gray wash'" (125).

Other revisionist critics, notably Ross Posnock and Sara Blair, posit an entirely different James. Theirs is an activist, subversive, Whitmanian James who isn't so much a representative of his class, as a critic of its exclusiveness, defensiveness, and racial anxiety. Posnock's James enthusiastically immerses himself in the polyglot American scene. He is a curious *flaneur*, a peripatetic "restless (cultural) analyst" whose text has more in common with early twentieth-century urban modernism than with the genteel lamentations of the late-Victorian cultural elite or with the liberal progressivism's cult of efficiency (146, 149). This James stands alongside the contemporary social critic Randolph Bourne in rejecting Anglo-Saxon hegemony and promoting American heterogeneity. Posnock concedes that James comes close to aestheticizing the immigrant, nearly blurring the line between identification and appropriation, but that he ultimately escapes by acknowledging that "the alien must be honored as alien, as other,



unassimilable to one's own needs" (156). Sara Blair also sees a restless, exploratory James who "engages in sometimes tense if fluent exchange with the shifting currency of nation and race," moving away from Anglo-Saxonism to a more problematic "internationalist" or "cosmopolitan" approach (9). Blair argues that James rehearses a range of racial exchanges -- identification, anxiety, desire -- and that he questions ideas of race, whiteness, national character, all the while asking himself, "What kind of face will America put on its unfolding 'history of manners and morals,' on its facts of racial difference and exchange, on its national mythologies of collective, assimilated American character" (160, 162). Blair describes James as a documentary observer who represents various sites "as a theater of nation-building, in which 'alien' forces participate in the making of a distinctly American race" (163). According to Blair, James incorporates two responses -- "'openness to otherness, anxiety about managing otherness' -- into a more sustained and performative critique of the logic of Americanization" (172).

It is in the context of the preceding that I want to examine several critical passages in which James encounters Italian immigrants, who along with the Jews made the greatest impression on him. I will look particularly at James's experiences at Ellis Island, in Central Park, in Boston, in Salem, Massachusetts, and along the New Jersey shore. These passages, like much of The American Scene, are dense, impressionistic, meditative. They are also alternately vague, contradictory, polyvocal. Here and elsewhere James routinely assumes the personae of the "mooning observer," the "lone visionary,"

the “restless analyst,” and, perhaps more tellingly, the “repentant,” “repatriated,” and “reinstated” absentee. These roles are different from the narrative stances James adopts in Italian Hours, but others -- the “pious pilgrim” and the “palpitating pilgrim” -- echo the “sentimental tourist” and the “observant stranger” of his European travel narratives.

These chameleon-like changes are one indication that James is unsure of his identity in his relation to both Europe and America. James’s role-playing goes beyond the personae to other more subtle narrative techniques involving point of view. In critical episodes with foreigners/the alien, James slips in and out of different points of view and often constructs his attitudes and impressions along an oppositional I/we versus he/they axis. Examples of this, and their importance, will become apparent as we look at the passages.

James’s experience at Ellis Island sets the stage for what follows in his writing about the aliens. James, the brooding, restless analyst, visits what Italians called the “Island of Tears” on a day of “dense raw fog” and “ice-masses” in New York harbor, an appropriate atmosphere, as he says, for witnessing a scene that ultimately puts a chill in the observer’s heart. It is here that James sees the immigrants “marshalled, herded, divided, subdivided, sorted, sifted, searched, fumigated, for longer or shorter periods -- the effect of all which prodigious process, an intendedly ‘scientific’ feeding of the mill, is again to give the earnest observer a thousand more things to think about than he can retail” (66). The accumulation of classificatory verbs and the quotation marks around the word “scientific” here seem to indicate an ironic critique of the social science approach to

the immigrants, that same approach that Jacob Riis criticized -- but sometimes employed -- in his The Battle with the Slum. However, whereas Riis sometimes engaged in the very approach he criticized, James's own approach is entirely different, as is evident when he begins to speak about the "impression of Ellis Island" on him. It is an impression he owes the privilege of having to the "liberal hospitality of the eminent Commissioner of this wonderful service," the man who oversaw the marshaling, herding, dividing, subdividing, sorting, sifting, searching and fumigating. During James's visit, "the eminent Commissioner" was William Williams, the New England patrician (Yale, Harvard) and Wall Street lawyer appointed by President Roosevelt in 1902 to bring some Progressive honesty and efficiency to the occasionally corrupt operation at Ellis Island, then in its tenth year. As commissioner of immigration for the port of New York from 1902-05 and 1909-14, Williams oversaw the process of distinguishing, categorizing, and controlling that were a necessary part of the work. However, James's impressions of the process are diffuse, general. For James, all those people passing through the gates of Ellis Island are immigrants, aliens -- not individual Italians, Jews or Slavs. These masses are part of a "poignant and unforgettable" drama, a "visible act of ingurgitation on the part of our body politic and social" as amazing as "any sword-swallowing or fire-swallowing of the circus." This ceaseless drama of ingurgitation raises for James unsettling questions, as he says it would for "any sensitive citizen" who can't help but come away from the scene a changed person. "He has eaten of the tree of knowledge, and the taste will forever be in

his mouth.” He may have known, perhaps in the abstract, that it was the American’s fate “to share the sanctity of his American consciousness, the intimacy of his American patriotism, with the inconceivable alien; but the truth has never come home to him with any such force” as in “the lurid light projected on it by those courts of dismay. . .” The shock of Ellis Island is such that James says he *has* to think of the visitor there as ever afterwards having “a new look . . . the outward sign of the new chill in his heart. So is stamped, for detection, the questionably privileged person who has had an apparition, seen a ghost in his supposedly safe old house” (66). The language here echoes that of James’s tale, “The Jolly Corner,” where the narrator, also a returning expatriate, comes face to face with an apparition or ghost who represents what the expatriate might have become had he never left America. At Ellis Island, James comes face to face with what America/Americans might become as a result of these new immigrants.

We can see that James begins the Ellis Island scene with the personal *I/eye*, from the privileged perspective of a guest of the eminent commissioner of the immigrant processing facility. The scene briefly shifts to the impersonal “one,” before talking about the feelings and impressions of “any sensitive citizen,” which presumably includes James and the reader. This persona gives James a civic relationship to America, and is much different from the persona of the “sentimental tourist” or “observant stranger” of his travel essays. It is this typical sensitive citizen who will leave Ellis Island chilled to the heart, shaken by the realization that his “American” fate is to share “the sanctity of his

American consciousness, the intimacy of his American patriotism, with the inconceivable alien.” Kevin McNamara calls James’s visit to Ellis Island his principal scene of self-enlightenment, and yet it reads more like an account of demonology, with its references to chilled hearts, ghosts and possession. But other things are also going on here. Is the word “home” here an unintended pun, with the truth hitting home not only in the individual heart, but also striking deep into the heart of James’s other home, America? And does this imply that foreigners, among them Italians (and perhaps especially Italians), were fine when they stayed at home and didn’t invade James’s presumptive American home? There’s another marvel of Jamesian ambiguity here. Why is the person “questionably privileged” to experience Ellis Island? Is this simple irony? Was seeing the ghost a questionable, unsettling privilege? Or is the person’s privileged position itself rendered questionable by the influx of aliens? It is interesting that the trip to Ellis Island begins with the narrator in a privileged position, as the guest of the facility’s commissioner, and ends with him questionably privileged in having had the experience.

Although James’s experience at Ellis Island lasted no longer than a few hours and claims little more than a page of The American Scene, James goes on to say that the “after-sense of that acute experience” would grow and grow wherever “I turned.” It is interesting that James uses the personal pronoun here, and not the impersonal third-person “he” or “one,” which James so often employs. Is this intended to signify the intensely personal nature of the experience? James writes that among other transient, less

powerful impressions, “this affirmed claim of the alien, however immeasurably alien, to share in one’s supreme relation was everywhere the fixed element, the reminder not to be dodged.” Having shifted from the personal “I” to the impersonal, but inclusive pronoun “one,” James then posits that one’s (an American’s?) “supreme relation” is one’s relation to one’s country, meaning in large measure one’s countrymen and one’s countrywomen. Given that logic, the aliens -- one’s “however immeasurably alien” future countrymen and countrywomen -- are seen as forcing a “profane overhauling” of “the idea of the country itself,” through which it (and, presumably one) “appears to suffer the indignity of change.” But, James asks, isn’t it “our instinct” to want to keep the idea of the country “simple and strong and continuous, so that it shall be perfectly sound?” However, the aliens, in their “free assault upon it,” seemed to insist on a readjustment of the idea in “*their* monstrous, presumptuous interest,” James says, completing the “we”/“they” line drawing of the passage. Describing the immigrants, James says: “The combination of their quantity and quality -- that loud primary stage of alienism which New York must offer to sight -- operates, for the native, as their note of settled possession, something they have nobody to thank for, so that *unsettled* possession is what we, on our side, seem most reduced to --- . . . We must go, in other words, *more* than half-way to meet them; which is all the difference, for us, between possession and dispossession.” Here, the impersonal “one” becomes “the native,” who quickly becomes the plural “we”: “We,” not “they,”

must make reorienting surrender; we must meet them more than half way. However, James feels this "sense of dispossession" in personal terms. He says it

"haunted me so . . . in the New York streets and in the packed projectiles to which one clingingly appeals from the streets, just as one tumbles back into the streets in appalled reaction from *them*, that the art of beguiling or duping it became an art to be cultivated -- though the fond alternative vision was never long to be obscured, the imagination, exasperated to envy, of the ideal, in the order in question; of the luxury of some such close and sweet and *whole* national consciousness as that of the Switzer and the Scot." (67)

A few sentences later, having moved on to lower Fifth Avenue between Fourteenth Street and Washington Square, a place of fond memories and happy moments where he hopes to artfully evade the unsettling question of the immigrant, James concludes, "There was no escape from the ubiquitous alien into the future, or even into the present; there was an escape but into the past" (68).

The pronoun progression in the Ellis Island passages from "I" to "one" to "our" shows a subtle transition not only in James's literary point of view, but also a shift in the writer's own position vis-a-vis Americans and the aliens. James's initially highly personal reaction to the aliens at Ellis Island eventually is subsumed into his and his American countryman's "instinct" to keep the country a certain way. It's as if there has been a circling of the wagons here, with James as the trail boss. This progression has the effect of turning the expatriate, absentee James back into an American, but just what that means remains unclear. The preceding passage raises several questions. First off, where does the dispossession come in? What causes the dispossession? If meeting the alien

*more* than half way is the difference between possession and dispossession, does James's "we" lose possession if they don't meet the alien half way, or if they go more than half way? Is the question moot in the face of the sense of dispossession that already haunts James? He tries to deal with that haunting sense of dispossession by cultivating a beguiling, but duping art, hoping in that way to find something enchanting in that state of loss, yet realizing that such a response is tantamount to duping himself. What exactly was originally possessed by James's "we" and now was being lost in the dealings with the immigrants? It is found in the "fond alternative vision" that James can't help but hold up as perhaps a better fate than the dispossession that he and his "we" are feeling. That "fond alternative vision" -- the envy of Americans -- was the ideal of the "close and sweet and *whole* national consciousness" embodied in the relatively racially pure Scots and Swiss. Faced, however, with the ubiquitous alien, James knows that Scotland and Switzerland are impossible ideals for polyglot America. And yet, what seems to be implied here is that, before the new immigration, before the arrival of Italians and other truly different nationalities/races, the ideal of a close, sweet, whole national consciousness -- America/Americans as essentially Anglo-Saxon -- was not only possible, but perhaps extant. It is the new immigrants, then, who destroy any possibility of that ideal. However, James never says what it is that made these new immigrants more alien, so different from, and so much more of a threat to, unified national consciousness



than the earlier immigrants had been. The implication is that the new immigrants are non-Anglo-Saxon, non-Germanic, non-northern European.

Sara Blair argues that James was initially drawn to Ellis Island by a voyeuristic urge for the picturesque, but ended up increasingly aware of the “need to manage otherness in the service of an inclusive social body and progressive modes of culture building” (164-165). Posnick, meanwhile, speaks of James’s “intimate response” to Ellis Island (165). There may be some truth to what they say, but both critics seem to be ignoring the language of possession, dispossession, ghosts, and chills found in the passage. It is undeniable that Ellis Island is a terribly unsettling experience for James, but whether it is ultimately a positive or negative experience is problematic. It is interesting that James mentions Ellis Island one other time in The American Scene, during a visit to Harvard Yard, which had recently been enclosed with a fence and gates. His ruminations on the enclosure and the young men passing through the Yard lead him to mention that he had not yet visited Ellis Island (itself a fence and a gate) to witness “the ceaseless process of the recruiting of our race, of the plenishing of our huge national *pot au feu*, of the introduction of fresh---of perpetually fresh so far it isn’t perpetually stale---foreign matter into our heterogenous system” (50). James concludes with a discussion of “our vast crude democracy of trade,” which is characterized by “the new, the simple, the cheap, the common, the commercial, the immediate, and, all too often, the ugly.” As an antidote, he offers “any human product,” “any creature,” “any form of suggested rarity, subtlety,

ancientry, or other pleasant perversity" (53). The implication here is that the immigrant, the alien, is of this order. This is underscored by the Ellis Island section, which, for all its shocking aspects, is no more unsettling (and perhaps less so) than the frenzied, almost apocalyptic vision of Wall Street and the financial district that immediately precedes it. At the very least then, the immigrants may be for James an antidote to the new, ugly, insolent "great commercial democracy" that he again decries after his Ellis Island visit, and from which he takes refuge in the Ascension church on Fifth Avenue, where he makes reference to an Old World Italian *piazzetta* (72).

James's most extended meditations and speculations on the alien come in a later chapter, "New York and the Hudson: A Spring Impression," which first appeared in the December 1905 *The North American Review*. He begins, again in the first person, with some observations on New York, conjuring up images of unity and continuity, of "hanging together" -- images that seem to echo the close, sweet, whole national consciousness held up as the ideal in the Ellis Island passages. Oddly enough, however, these images of stability and wholeness are being applied to what was then clearly the most heterogenous, most rapidly changing, and, some might say, most fragmenting city in the United States, if not the world. James's New York, contrary to the atomized, out-of-control city conjured up by Riis and other reformers, initially seems to hang together because of its being suffused with "the general queer sauce of New York," which is presumably a native sauce, perhaps the native character. But James quickly confesses his

inability to see “the common element in the dense Italian neighborhoods,” and wonders at his failure when he recollects “charming afternoons of early summer, in Central Park, which showed the fruit of the foreign tree as shaken down there with a force that smothered everything else.” The Italian neighborhoods were at least a fifteen-minute walk away from the park, but, still “the alien was as truly in possession, under the high ‘aristocratic’ nose, as if he had had but three steps to come.” And not only had he come, he had placed himself into the foreground, making a “singleness of impression.” When James begins speculating about the singular impression made by the alien, those speculations are attributed to the second person -- “the alien still striking you as an alien” -- in effect making James’s impressions also the reader’s. James then asks about the alien: “Is not the universal sauce essentially *his* sauce, and do we not feel ourselves feeding, half the time, from the ladle, as greasy as he chooses to leave it for us, that he holds out?” (90). Here, as in the Ellis Island passage, James’s “I” and his reader finally merge into a “we” and “us” that stands in opposition to the alien “he” and “his”: “*His* sauce” is the universal sauce, and “we” feed from the greasy ladle “he” leaves for “us.” Peter Conn, among others, has seen the “greasy” ladle as not only a symbol of revulsion on James’s part, but as an example of the vulgar stereotyping that “is unhappily typical of James’s treatment of the immigrant throughout The American Scene” (Conn 42). Other examples might include James’s reference to the “swarming” Jews’ “overdeveloped proboscis,” and his comparing them to worms, snakes, monkeys and squirrels (100, 102).

Clearly the ladle is revolting, not only dirty, unclean, but specifically greasy. The dirt and grease aren't simply a careless oversight, but the condition in which the Italian "chooses" to leave it for James's "us." The aliens not only have possession of the park, but also possession of the ladle. Their universal sauce is the alien's sauce, and greasy as it is it is becoming the American sauce, having perhaps already displaced/dispossessed the native New York sauce.

James's thoughts and questions, along with "the cheerful hum of that babel of tongues established in the vernal Park," occupy him for about an hour. He says he is reluctant to deal with his speculations "at the expense of a proper tribute, kept distinct and vivid, to the charming bosky precinct itself, the great field of recreation with which they swarmed," but the "brooding visitor," and even more so the "restored absentee," couldn't help but be "conscious of the need of mental adjustment to phenomena absolutely fresh" (90). Although James wants to keep social questions separate from his aesthetic enjoyment of Central Park, he is here unsuccessful. During a subsequent scene in Central Park, which will be discussed later, James will describe an entirely different episode involving immigrants, an encounter he seems to enjoy, perhaps because he has imposed a mastery over the scene. For now, however, this encounter with the Italians in Central Park triggers impressions of yet another experience with the alien, this one coming a few days after his arrival in the United States.

While walking with friends through a large new residential development at Deal, on the New Jersey shore, James had come across “groups of diggers and ditchers” working there. Under normal circumstances “everywhere,” the natural inclination would have been to pause out of instinctive interest in their labor, and perhaps the encounter would have led to more interaction, James says. However, “whatever *more* would have been anywhere else involved had here inevitably to lapse” (90-91). What lapses is what James calls “the element of communication with the workers,” which in Europe would have operated “as the play of mutual recognition, founded on old familiarities and heredities, and involving, for the moment, some impalpable exchange.” Here, however, the diggers and ditchers are Italians, “of superlatively southern type,” and any impalpable exchange is unthinkable, although we are never fully told why. “It was as if contact were out of the question and the sterility of the passage between us recorded, with due dryness, in our staring silence,” James continues. What follows is worth quoting at length:

This impression was for one of the party a shock -- a member of the party for whom, on the other side of the world, the imagination of the main furniture, as it might be called, of any rural excursion, of *the* rural in particular, had been, during years, the easy sense, for the excursionist, of a social relation with any encountered type, from whichever end of the scale proceeding. Had that not ever been, exactly, a part of the vague warmth, the intrinsic color, of any honest man's rural walk in his England or his Italy, his Germany or his France, and was not the effect of its so suddenly dropping out, in the land of universal brotherhood -- for I was to find it drop out again and again -- rather a chill, straightway, for the heart, and rather a puzzle, not less, for the head? (91)

In this scene, James includes the alien diggers in his "us," but only to point to the gulf in communication between them. James speaks of the "sterility of the passage between us" and of "our staring silence," but it is not clear whether these characterizations refer to the relationships between the diggers and James alone or that between the diggers and James's group, whom he never identifies. James then transforms himself into "one of the party" -- the only one who is shocked by the sterile, chilling encounter? -- who remembers different encounters in Europe. In imagining the probability of a more satisfying scenario in Europe, James assumes the role of "any honest man" who would be warmed by any social relation experienced during any rural excursion in "his" England, Italy, Germany or France. However, the absence of this social relation, its dropping out in the Jersey shore encounter, as James would "find it drop out again and again" (91), is felt by James's "I" alone.

This encounter, and James's handling of it, raises many questions that speak to James's troubled, conflicted relationship with "the alien." How important is it, for example, that the aborted encounter is with a group of Italians, whom James specifically describes as being of "superlatively southern type." The demographics of Italian immigration to America's eastern seaboard at the turn of the century make it very probable that James was right, that these manual laborers were from southern Italy. But how could James be sure, except through conversing with them or their boss, or hearing and being able to place their dialect? James gives no indication that he did either. And

what does James mean by “superlatively southern type”? Was he in fact attracted to their southern sensuousness? Was it their type, or was it something else, that made for the impossibility of an exchange? James doesn’t elaborate. He is very vague about why, as he says, the lapse in the “element of communication” is inevitable and some “impalpable exchange” (itself a strange term) impossible. It is interesting that James links into one sentence his general, yet geographically specific description of the Italians and the unthinkability of any impalpable exchange. It is almost as if we are meant to read the conjunction “and” in one of two different ways. If we accept James’s assertion that an exchange would have been natural in Europe, then the “and” would be read as “despite the fact that”; however, because the encounter takes place in America, are we to read the “and” as “because,” as cause and effect: because the diggers were “superlatively southern” Italians in America, an exchange was unthinkable? Would an exchange have been more thinkable had the workers been “superlatively northern” middle-class Italians, or, more tellingly (if not more likely), the workers had been German or Irish? And had there been an exchange, would James have recorded it in light of Peter Conn’s observation that The American Scene eradicates human speech and replaces it with monologues delivered by buildings? Interesting that we rarely hear any of the aliens talking, when not only skyscrapers and hotels, but rivers and entire cities are given voice in The American Scene. Also telling that James can engage in dialogue with buildings, but repeatedly experiences communication breakdown in his encounters with the

aliens/Italians. It is as if James at least understands all the new buildings, even if he doesn't particular like their commercial message, but he can't comprehend the aliens and what they ultimately mean to him and to America.

Speech and language are important here because, for James, they are an index of the broader culture. In his 1906 piece on "The Speech and Manners of American Women," James essentially says that speech equals manners equals morals equal civilization. "Conversation thus becomes a force for preserving the entire structure of American culture from ignorant foreigners," Kevin McNamara writes, noting that James, in his commencement address to the graduating class at Bryn Mawr, "exhorted them to become 'models and missionaries, perhaps a little even martyrs of the good cause' of protecting the tone of American speech from the destructive forces of those 'innumerable aliens [who] are sitting up (*they don't sleep!*) to work their will on their new [linguistic] inheritance and prove to us that they are without any finer feeling or more conservative instinct of consideration for it . . ." (128-129). It was in this same speech that James announced to the undergraduates that "we have simply handed over our property" -- the English language -- to, among others, "the American Dutchman and Dago" (qtd. in Peyser 50). In The American Scene, having met the Italian diggers and discoursed at length on the alien in general and the Yiddish-speaking Jew in particular, James ruminates on the fate of the English language in the United States and on the nature of the "Accent of the Future." He says: "The accent of the very ultimate future, in the States,



may be destined to become the most beautiful on the globe and the very music of humanity (here the 'ethnic' synthesis shrouds itself thicker than ever); but whatever we shall know it for, certainly, we shall not know it for English -- in any sense for which there is an existing literary measure" (106).

Recording the episode with the diggers on the Jersey shore, James uses other vague words, three notable ones being "everywhere," "anywhere," and "here." James says that to pause before the laborers would have been instinctive "everywhere," and that "anywhere else" something more might have developed from the encounter. But it hits "home" to him that "here" any such possibility had "inevitably to lapse." What does James mean by the designation "here"? Is he simply referring to the particular spot for this particular encounter, or is he talking more generally about America, James's presumptive home? Obviously included in James's "everywhere" and "anywhere" is Europe. For it is Europe -- with its "play of mutual recognition, founded on old familiarities and heredities" -- that he invokes as the direct ideal alternative to this sterile American encounter on the Jersey shore. Here, James seems to be speaking of the value of indigenous European forms, but soon James seems to be talking about his past relations with Europeans in general (and, it is to be inferred, with Italians specifically). The sterility of the encounter on the Jersey shore is a shock for James, "a member of the party" who recalled other, more satisfactory excursions in Europe, which offered the "excursionist" as "social relation with any encountered type, from whichever end of the

scale proceeding." This "social relation" was what James calls "the main furniture" of any rural excursion, and it was this social relation/main furniture that was "part of the vague warmth, the intrinsic color, of any honest man's rural walk in his England or his Italy . . ." Again, James is vague. What does he mean by a social relation, and why does he talk about it first in utilitarian and/or decorative terms ("the main furniture") before reverting to rather aesthetic terms ("the intrinsic color")? We are reminded that at the conclusion of The Golden Bowl, Prince Amerigo is figured as a piece of furniture. Is James's problem that he cannot aestheticize the Italian diggers and ditchers in his America, when it had been so much easier to aestheticize them from his privileged position in "his Italy"? In Italy, James was a bourgeois tourist in a land of established social forms; in the United States, he is a visiting native son in a fluid democratic society. He had a definite, if limited, relationship with the peasants he encountered in his rural rambles in Italy. There, the lower classes knew their place, were even content with their place, as James implies in Italian Hours. There, the *contadino* was a small detail in the picturesque landscape. However, here on the Jersey shore, James the "restored absentee" has no such established relationship with the laborers he encounters. These diggers and ditchers don't know their place; James himself doesn't know their place. Furthermore, James himself isn't even sure of his own place. This makes it hard, if not impossible, for James to aesthetically frame the laborers and the other Italians he meets. Not only do they not have an understood place, but there are simply too many of them. James obviously is

troubled that his vaguely warm “Italian hours” have been transformed into a sharply chilling “American scene.” The loss of this social relation in “the land of universal brotherhood” (the same ideal invoked by Riis and Steiner) creates for James a “chill” in the heart, the same sensation he would feel later in his trip to Ellis Island.

In the scene with the diggers, James seems to be trying, but failing, to transform a disquieting American scene into a more comforting Italian/European one. James is more successful with that imaginative effort when he describes another scene in Central Park much different from the earlier one in which he had encountered all the Italians. This time, within the frame of the park, James encounters a diverse population with “polyglot” voices. James seems to be reveling in the scene, which appears to provide him with a tour of the globe. This somewhat utopian moment, as well as James’s often sympathetic accounts of the Jewish ghetto in New York’s Lowest East Side, may be seen as proof of James’s identifying with the alien Other. However, McNamara sees no linear progressive development of James’s sympathies away from the initial recoiling at Ellis Island (137). Instead, McNamara argues that during this visit to Central Park, James is able to put the “social question” behind him by aesthetically framing the scene, by reinscribing the park’s “urban pastoral in an essentially aristocratic, European context” -- exactly what he couldn’t do in the scene with the diggers at Deal. “As James walked through the park, the summer warmth and colorful costumes were supplemented by a transferred warmth and color that transformed New York into a *European* space.” Furthermore, McNamara

writes, "James's ability in Central Park to imagine that he was looking out upon the once stable world of European manners and classes answered his social question in two ways: his waving of the authorial wand created a world that contested the dominance of money as manners and, adding a final twist to the dizzying place of aliens and alienation, effected his repatriation by producing an image of a foreign culture in which he felt at home" (144). McNamara's assessment seems to me rather astute.

Not long after his encounter with the Italian diggers, James segues into another rural encounter that leaves him even more unsatisfied. This time James is already disoriented -- geographically, if not psychologically lost in the New Hampshire hills -- and appeals for help from a young man who happened to emerge from a neighboring wood. "But his stare was blank, in answer to my inquiry, and, seeing that he failed to understand me and that he had a dark-eyed 'Latin' look, I jumped to the inference of his being a French Canadian." But asking for directions in French doesn't work, and "trying him with Italian had no better effect." Exasperated, James asks the fellow, "What *are* you then?" "I'm an Armenian,' he replied as if it were the most natural thing in the world for a wage-earning youth in the heart of New England to be . . ." (91). James's initial assumption that the man is French-Canadian is a natural one in New Hampshire. When that proves wrong, James takes his second-best guess, judging the man to be Italian, another representative of the dark-eyed Latin races. However, the man turns out to be even more alien, non-Latin and not even European James concludes that the best he

can do with the encounter is to profit from its lesson, but never specifies what the lesson might be. Did he learn the pitfalls of using physical appearance to determine nationality or race, as Edward Steiner himself realized? Was the lesson that no place in America was out of bounds for immigrants of virtually any country? Beyond whatever lesson James might have learned also came the realization that the encounter would yield nothing more. "I could have made it better, for the occasion, if, even on the Armenian basis, he had appeared to expect brotherhood; but this had been as little his seeming as it had been that of the diggers by the Jersey shore" (92). Again, questions are raised. Having mistaken the Armenian for an Italian, after having first mistaken him for a French-Canadian, James concludes by equating the alien Italian diggers with the even more alien Armenian of the north woods. In both encounters, with the Italian diggers and with the Armenian, the question for James is not who these people are, but *what* they are, and *what* they are seems to determine what their relation -- or lack of relation -- will be to James. Had the man been a French-Canadian, would the encounter have been more productive and more satisfactory for James? As a Frenchman who is also a Canadian, would the French-Canadian have appeared to James to expect brotherhood more so than the Italian or Armenian? And, would James have tended to see this French-Canadian as more of a brother, if not as more of a countryman, than the Italian or Armenian? It is interesting that this supposed Frenchman is called a French-Canadian, but the supposed Italian is not an Italian-American, just as the Armenian is not an Armenian-American, in

James's eyes. And what about James himself? He is geographically lost, but isn't he also to some extent psychologically lost. To some degree, James, having been away from America for more than two decades, also is alien, his Americanness conditional.

Invoking again the sense of "chill" produced by such encounters with the alien, James explains "that there is no claim to brotherhood with aliens in the first grossness of their alienism." They are being "dressed and prepared" for brotherhood, James says. Most won't attain that state in their lifetimes, but their children probably will because the "colossal" machinery of assimilation will see to that, he says, echoing Riis's hope for the second-generation immigrant. However, having said that, having unequivocally (for James) said that assimilation will see to it that brotherhood eventually includes even the grossest of aliens, James now enters into an extended meditation on what he calls "the great 'ethnic' question and its relation to "the cauldron of the 'American' character." What, he wants to know, will assimilation of these alien immigrants wreak or reap? "What meaning, in the presence of such impressions," James wonders, "can continue to attach to such a term as the 'American' character? -- what type, as the result of such a prodigious amalgam, such a hotch-potch of racial ingredients, is to be conceived as shaping itself?" (92). James takes "refuge" from the question and finds relief in concluding there are no answers, solutions, or conclusions, not even any possibility for them, "to which the philosophy of any really fine observation of the American spectacle must reduce itself, and the large intellectual, quite even the large aesthetic, margin

supplied by which accompanies the spectator as his one positively complete comfort” (92-93). It is apparent here that James, for the moment, is content to adopt a temporary strategy for dealing with the ethnic multiplicity, preferring to see it as spectacle, with himself as detached spectator, and making of “this accepted vision” “an absolute luxury.” And yet, James doesn’t let it rest there. Unable to define the American character in the making, James turns his thoughts to the “process of the mitigation and, still more, of the conversion of the alien” (94).

James sees the country as “the hugest thinkable organism for successful ‘assimilation,’” but one that still has to deal with a “residuum.” That, however, is of less concern for the moment than a more fundamental question: “Who and what is an alien, when it comes to that, in a country peopled from the first under the jealous eye of history? -- peopled, that is, by migrations, at once extremely recent, perfectly traceable and urgently required. . . . Which is the American, by these scant measures? --which is *not* the alien, over a large part of the country at least, and where does one put a finger on the dividing line, or, for that matter, ‘spot’ and identify any particular phase of the conversion, any one of its successive movements?” James tries to imagine seeing enacted in a immigrant group or in an individual “the dawn of the American spirit while the declining rays of the Croatian, say, or of the Calabrian, or of the Lusitanian, still linger more or less pensively in the sky.” He wonders whether there be any foreign spirit “that the American does not find an easy prey.” Those concerns, if concerns they are, seemed

to be allayed (and other concerns raised) by the crowds of foreigners who overwhelm the electric trains and cast a "sense of isolation" over the observer. "The carful, again and again, is a foreign carful; a row of faces up and down, testifying, without exception, to alienism unmistakable, alienism undisguised and unashamed. . . . It was not for this that the observer on whose behalf I more particularly write had sought to take up again the sweet sense of his natal air" (95-96). The aliens, James says, were more at home in America than they had ever been in their native countries, and as much at home (if not more so) as James himself, creating an "equality of condition" that makes things strange for him. A similar disquieting sensation assaults James in the American South, in Richmond, but now it is not the aliens but other Others, the Negroes, who are in possession. Now it is the black teamsters who emphasized for James "with every degree of violence that already-apprehended note of the negro really at home" (278). James seeks relief from the "the great equalizing pressure" by sometimes "intimate surrender to it," "getting away from one's subject by plunging into it for sweet truth's sake, still deeper" (96).

What strikes James most is that of the aliens "not being what they *had* been." Instead, they seem to have been glazed over with the "wholesale varnish of consecration" by a "huge white-washing brush." James sees as a "sizable step in the evolution of the oncoming citizen, the stage of his no longer being for you -- for any complacency of the romantic, or even verily of the fraternizing, sense in you -- the foreigner of the quality, of



the kind, that he might have been *chez lui*. Whatever he might see himself becoming, he was never to see himself that again, any more than you were ever to see him." For James, this phenomenon turns the foreigner into a "creature promptly despoiled of those 'manners' . . . by which one had best known and, on opportunity, best liked him." In fact, the foreigner appeared "as wonderingly conscious that his manners of the other world, that everything you have there known and praised him for, have been a huge mistake . . ." (97). The process of white-washing, of making the foreigner colorless, is curious in light of James's other pronouncements about the alien spreading his sauce over the American mixture.

James speaks of "categories of foreigners" who might be thought to be more resistant to this bleaching, who might require "a mechanism working with scientific force" to make them colorless. However, even the Italians do not seem immune. James describes the Italians as the group who "strike us, I am afraid, as, after the Negro and the Chinaman, the human value most easily produced" over the land. However, "the Italians meet us, at every turn, only to make us ask what has become of that element of the agreeable address in *them* which has, from far back, so enhanced for the stranger the interest and pleasure of a visit to their beautiful country," James writes. "They shed it utterly, I couldn't but observe, on their advent, after a deep inhalation or two of the clear native air; shed it with a conscientious completeness which leaves one looking for any faint trace of it. 'Colour,' of that pleasant sort, was what they had appeared, among the

races of the European family, most to have . . ." The effect, James says, is of a brightly-colored garment losing its color in a wash tub, but without its in turn coloring the rest of the clothes in the vat. "If this property that has quitted him -- the general amenity of attitude in the absence of provocation to its opposite -- could be accounted for by its having rubbed off on any number of surrounding persons, the whole process would be easier and perhaps more comforting to follow." James wonders what happens to the foreigners' "various positive properties," again giving as an example their "good manners." Are they truly extinguished, or is there the possibility of a "final efflorescence"? James doesn't say (97-99). However, in the same way that James complains about the Italian's loss of manners, later, in the South, he will lament the disappearance of mannerly service among the black porters and servants (312). The parallels between Italy and the Old South and between Italians and blacks are hinted at in a suggestive experience James has in Charleston. Searching for a friend and "some small inkling" of "the South before the War," James knocks on a wrong door and is greeted by "an elderly mulatress in an improvised wrapper" who gives him a glimpse of the past and a "vanished order." But, before James can see more, can "sound the secret of shy misfortune, of faded pretension," the mulatress shuts the door in his face. James then connects the scene and the black servant to Italy. "So, it seemed to me, had I been confronted, in Italy, under quite such a morning air and light, quite the same touch of a

tepid, odorous medium, with the ancient sallow crones who guard the locked portals and the fallen pride of provincial *palazzini*" (297).

As John Sears points out, James complains about the Italian immigrants on two, somewhat contradictory, fronts. In America, James says, Italians become both "crude" and "neutral" -- having lost the good manners and the 'colour' which made them so appealing in the Old World. "No longer related to him through established hierarchies and traditions like the peasants he was accustomed to dealing with in Italy, their new-found independence and mobility creates a chasm in his relationship to them" (xiv). But, in reality, how independent and mobile were Italians in the New World? Yes, they could be found in many cities and even in the country. And yes, the Italians could easily walk from their tenements to Central Park or to Boston Common. If that's James's measure of independence and mobility, then that itself is telling. The reality, however, was that Italians in America at this time were neither truly independent nor truly mobile. Most led dependent, rooted lives in the slums. Perhaps James isn't so much offended by the modicum of independence and mobility they enjoyed in America's democratic society, but by the fact that their limited movement, and perhaps more importantly their sheer numbers, made it just that much harder for him to fit these teeming masses into an aesthetic frame.

James has two more encounters with Italians in New England, one in Boston and one in Salem. The first finds James near Boston Common, on a "benignant" Sunday

toward the end of winter. He sees a parade of couples who appear to him to be simple laboring wage-earners in their Sunday best. James notes that "no sound of English, in a single instance, escaped their lips; the greater number spoke a rude form of Italian, the others some outland dialect unknown to me -- though I wanted and waited to catch an echo of antique refrains." James describes the people as "gross aliens to a man" who "were in serene and triumphant possession" of what James calls "'my' small homogenous Boston of the more interesting time." The scene gives James a vision of "a huge applied sponge, a sponge saturated with the foreign mixture and passed over almost everything I remembered and might still have recovered." James turns for refuge to the nearby Athenaeum, his "temple of culture," but that shrine to the mind is "rueful and snubbed," humiliated by the masses of tall buildings that had risen alongside it, just as James is overwhelmed and dispossessed by the masses of Italians who have taken over Boston Common and the waves of immigrants who threatened to take over the entire country (171-172).

Later, James is in Salem, again searching for "the New England homogenous" in general and for Nathaniel Hawthorne's House of the Seven Gables in particular. Feeling himself perhaps wandering astray, James seeks help from a stranger, as he had when lost in the New Hampshire hills. True to form, and much like his New Hampshire adventure, his appeal ends up being directed to a "flagrant foreigner," one who responds with a blank stare. "[T]he young man I had overtaken was true to his nature; he stared at me as a

remorseless Italian -- as remorseless, at least, as six months of Salem could leave him.” James is shocked and “‘put off’; though, if my young man but glared frank ignorance of the monument I named, he left me at least with the interest of wondering how the native estimate of it as a romantic ruin might strike a taste formed for such features by the landscape of Italy” (196-197). Just as with the diggers on the Jersey shore, there is no possibility for communication, but here James at the very least imagines a common ground in a shared reaction to the House of the Seven Gables as romantic ruin. If nothing else, James and the young Italian man might share a sense of the romantic picturesque, which of course had been the basis of much of James’s relationship to Italians in Italy. If James and the Italian boy can meet, it will be on an aesthetic level. However, more substantial links connect James and the “dear little harsh, intelligent, sympathetic American boy” who appears, almost as a *deus ex machina*, to rescue the excursion by taking James under his wing (away from the Italian boy) and guiding him to the House of the Seven Gables. The boy -- “who dropped straight from the hard sky for my benefit (I hadn’t seen him emerge from elsewhere)” -- was confident, knowing, “the master of his subject.” James and the boy form a close alliance on the spot. “He made up to me for my crude Italian -- the way they *become* crude over here! -- . . . he was exactly what I wanted -- a presence (and he was the only thing far or near) old enough, native and intimate enough, to reach back and understand” (200).

There is no shifting of point of view in these two important scenes involving Italians; here James's "I" reigns supreme, here the responses, impressions and attitudes are attributed to an unmediated first person. The dialect of the Italians in Boston Common was unknown to "me," no American speech "struck my ear," and "the people before me were gross aliens to a man." Here, "I" had the vision of "a sponge saturated with the foreign mixture." The same consistent point of view holds when James unsuccessfully asks directions of the young Italian man in Salem and is later attended to by the American boy. The latter "made up for my crude Italian" and "was exactly what I wanted." This scene is the flip-side of the one we encountered on the strand in Venice in Transatlantic Sketches, in which James aesthetically transforms a wild Italian urchin into a "little unlettered Eros of the Adriatic strand." James had said of that Italian boy that he was memorable in his picturesqueness, unlike a better dressed, better educated "infant citizen of our own republic" marching into a New England school-house. But now, the Italian boy becomes a "a flagrant foreigner" and "my crude Italian," while the forgettable American youth becomes a memorable confident, knowing "master of his subject" who bonds with James and rescues him from the alien, with whom there is little hope of any communion, aesthetic or otherwise. In Italy, the Italian can be aestheticized, romanticized, be made an object of "infinite tender conjecture." In America, that same Italian is simply a very real ignorant, crude urchin -- a flagrant foreigner.

These shifting and/or consistent points of view serve different purposes. In some cases, by virtue of James's perspective gymnastics, the narrator is linked to a normalizing identity ("any honest man" or "any sensitive citizen" or "the native"), which in turn merges into an exclusive "we" set in opposition to a "them." But who comprises this "we" -- all "Americans" (whoever they may be), a particular segment of America, or simply James's privileged readers? Is James trying to identify with some vague, yet relatively inclusive notion of an American or with a more exclusive stratum of American society? And having identified himself in opposition to the foreigner, what are we to make of James's shifting back and forth between the personal pronouns "I" and "we," and between those two pronouns and the impersonal "one"? Does the use of "one" imply some distance between the narrator and the thoughts being expressed? Are we to take the reactions and attitudes expressed by the "I" as more fully those of James himself?

What's interesting in all these encounters with the aliens, in particular the Italians (as well as the Jews who are the subject of James's most extended treatment of the foreigner), is James's shifting attitude as it is expressed in his image making. The preceding passages and meditations represent classic Jamesian ambiguity and subtlety so refined that it is as if James is speaking with multi-forked tongue. In one scene, the Italians are spreading their sauce over the New York scene, imparting to it its distinctive flavor, but leaving the native-born Americans to eat from a greasy ladle, and doing it not carelessly but consciously. In another episode, the alien/Italian sponge is saturating everything James "remembered and might have recovered." Later, the foreigners, even the so pungent, pervasive and colorful Italians, are being bleached of their color, threatened with American white-washing and uniformity. In some passages, James longs for homogeneity and order, but in others he speaks of maintaining margins and distinctions, resisting America's leveling tendencies toward the "common mean" (325) and the "great grey wash" (335). On the one hand, James praises the Italians and other foreigners for refusing to be what Americans thought they were or want them to be; on the other hand, he criticizes them for losing their Old World charm and becoming, in the New World, crude and gross. James tells Americans don't expect the foreigners to be as they were in their native lands, don't expect the Italian immigrants to be the romantic, picturesque Italians-in-Italy that I myself helped to construct in my travel narratives. Here, James seems to be renouncing his earlier aestheticizing tendencies. He seems to



imply that Italians and other immigrants, by throwing off American perceptions of them, take a significant step toward citizenship, if not brotherhood, with American natives. But having said that, James immediately regrets that the Italians-in-America are not what he imagines Italians-in-Italy to be: mannerly, courteous, agreeable in their address, romantic and picturesque. Finally, there are James's images of possession and dispossession. In one sense, the aliens are triumphantly taking possession, in the process dispossessing James and other native-born Americans. What will the aliens make of us? James wonders. Then it is the aliens being possessed. James now asks: What is America making of the aliens? It is as if James is offering up two diametrically opposed forces: alienism and assimilation. Both are ubiquitous, voracious, almost inexorable. Assimilation is a singleminded machine or a giant organism. Alienism is gross and crude, if sometimes colorful and vital. What is it that makes the aliens so gross and crude and threatening? Is there anything besides their native color, their native manners, and their vitality that is worth saving from assimilation? Are the aliens overwhelming American society, or is it the other way around? The eternally ambiguous James won't be pinned down.

Nor surprisingly, what can be said with any degree of certainty is that James has deeply conflicted attitudes toward the Italians and other new immigrants. He both recoils from and is attracted to them. He seems to have little doubt that they can eventually be assimilated, but doubts the wisdom of that goal. Does that, however, make him a cultural pluralist or an internationalist rejecting Anglo-Saxon hegemony, as Posnock and Blair

argue? Posnock claims that “James’s questions insist on honoring the dynamic reality of American heterogeneity that is muffled by that fabled ideological instrument of pseudounity, the ‘American character,’ so dear to the identity logic of progressivism” (153). Blair says: “‘Beguiling’ and ‘duping’ his own anxiety of dispossession -- his own capacity, we might say, for racial distaste -- James relocated assimilation as a social act from the corporate to the individual body, figuring a newly American ‘being’ in whom the requirements of American citizenship -- active incorporation of difference as the grounds of culture-building -- will contend with the ‘universal will’ of capitalist assimilation and its ‘appetite at any price’” (174). However, James is thus left with a question, which he himself poses, for which he has no answer: “What meaning . . . can continue to attach to such a term as the ‘American’ character?---what type, as the result of such a prodigious amalgam, such a hotch-potch of racial ingredients, is to be conceived as shaping itself?” (92). There is some validity in what Posnock and Blair argue, but they are overstating their cases. We cannot say with any certainty just what it is that James wants America and the American character to become, and the role the alien may play in that process. The ground becomes a little more firm when we look at James’s attitudes toward what America and the American character *has* become, and the alien’s position vis-a-vis that.

Ultimately, I think, James’s quarrel is with American capitalism and American democracy, which he often conflates. Throughout The American Scene, James rails

against America's passion for change, growth, size, and money-making, all of which are most apparent in New York, which he calls his "terrible town" (57) and the "miscellaneous monster" (40). He speaks disparagingly of "the monstrous form of Democracy" and "the huge democratic broom" (44), of the "great commercial democracy" (72) and "our vast crude democracy of trade" (53). He says America's energy and commercial spirit and its mania for change fail to create beauty (328) and account for the "great grey wash" that dissolves color and results in bourgeois uniformity and sameness of type (335). In opposition to commerce, James offers beauty, taste, manners, distinctions. The tall commercial buildings of New York are ugly; Giotto's bell-tower in Florence is beautiful.

The aliens/Italians and Europe/Italy become, in part, pawns in James's quarrel with commercial democracy. Ideally, their heterogeneity, their picturesqueness, taste and manners, and sense of the past make them an antidote to what James sees happening in America and the American character. But to be an effective antidote, the immigrants have to stay the same, have to bring Europe with them to America. As Kevin McNamara says, James wanted to preserve the aliens' pleasing diversity from "ingurgitation" by the machinery of Americanization. "But he was put off balance by the mobility of the aliens, who seemed out of context and troubled his view as they would not were they still European peasants with whom the American on tour delights to chat, and he often treated them as objects of unadulterated, unchanging culture, his seeming pluralism relaxing into

a 'soft focus' appreciation of exotic poverty" (137). The Italians and many of the other new immigrants came to American to escape their exotic poverty. They came to do what James perhaps hated most about modern Americans -- make money, and as much of it as possible. Beyond that, the Italians and other new immigrants, as an antidote to American uniformity, were alien and gross and threatening. They -- and industrialism, capitalism and materialism -- threatened not only his already tenuous position in American society, but more importantly his American past, his American memories and associations, that is, those very things that might help make the expatriate James an American.

**Chapter III**  
**Those Extraordinarily Italian Twins:**  
**Racism, Nativism, and the Twinning of Italianness**

**“She is to-day one vast museum of magnificence and misery. . . . It is the wretchedest, princeliest land on earth.”**

**-- Mark Twain, The Innocents Abroad, 1869**

**“My long-cherished judgment was confirmed. I always did think those frowsy, romantic, unwashed peasant girls I had read so much about in poetry were a glaring fraud.”**

**-- Mark Twain, The Innocents Abroad, 1869**

**“Italians! How romantic! Just think, ma---there’s never been one in this town, and everybody will be dying to see them, and they’re all *ours*! Think of that!”**

**-- Rowena, in Pudd’nhead Wilson, 1894**

**“Judge Driscoll, an old and respected citizen, was assassinated here about midnight by a profligate Italian nobleman or barber on account of a quarrel growing out of the recent election. The assassin will probably be lynched.”**

**-- newspaper notice, Pudd’nhead Wilson, 1894**

**If we are foolish enough to believe Mark Twain, it was a simple “kind of literary Caesarean operation” that he performed on the unruly tale of Siamese twins that was**

botching up his latest literary effort in the early 1890s. Dr. Twain saw the procedure as a simple one: Remove the farce involving Aunt Patsy Cooper, Rowena, and the Italian Siamese twins from the main story line. Keep the tragedy of Roxana, Tom Driscoll, and David “Pudd’neath” Wilson. Deliver, through this editorial surgery, literary Siamese twins: The Tragedy of Pudd’neath Wilson and the Comedy of Those Extraordinary Twins (1894), a “tragic” novel and a “comic” short story that are separate and yet linked. Critics have since argued over the success of the operation, which Twain himself called, in typical self-deprecating fashion, the performance of a “jack-leg” author. Many critics have too readily agreed, criticizing Twain as a sloppy obstetrician who botched the operation by leaving remnants of the Italian twins in The Tragedy of Pudd’neath Wilson, in much the same way a surgeon might leave a gauze wipe inside a patient. Twain explains it thus: “Also I took those twins apart and made two separate men of them . They had no occasion to have foreign names now, but it was too much trouble to remove them all through, so I left them christened as they were and made no explanation.” In this standard reading, the twins’ presence in the “tragic” novel becomes little more than an annoying vestige from Twain’s original goal of writing a farcical tale reportedly inspired by an exhibition of the Tocci brothers Siamese twins in the United States in 1891. Robert A. Wiggins, George Feinstein, and Robert Rowlette are among the critics who have seen the twins as undermining the unity of Pudd’neath Wilson.

Seeing the twins as a bit of afterbirth that was never entirely cleaned up, critics have read the tale of the Italian twins in Pudd'nhead Wilson as little more than parody, dismissing the twins themselves as nothing but freaks/grotesques who destroy the unity of the novel. In this reading, the fact that the twins are Italians named Luigi and Angelo Capello means nothing. As Twain himself insinuates, after the literary Caesarian operation, the twins "had no occasion to have foreign names now" -- much less specifically Italian ones. Luigi and Angelo Capello might just as well have been named Frank and John Smith, or, if foreigners, Chang and Eng, as they were in an earlier Twain tale, "Personal Habits of the Siamese Twins," based on Chinese Siamese twins who were slave owners in North Carolina earlier in the century. Traditional critical wisdom about the twins was established in an early English review in *The Idler*, which was among the first to see literary merits in Twain's troubled novel. Having praised the book for its construction and characterizations, the review notes but "one false note" in the introduction of "the two alleged Italian noblemen" who "are as little like Italians as they are like Apaches." Another tempered and thoughtful English review said "the Twins altogether seem to have very little *raison d'etre* in the book" (qtd. in Pudd'nhead Wilson 290-291). Nearly seventy years later, critic Robert A. Wiggins repeated those charges, arguing that the twins are not only "irrelevant" but "distracting," their "exotic personalities" representing a "jarring note on the landscape of Dawson's Landing" (Wiggins 109). More recent critics have seen the Italian twins as frauds who contribute to

the work's irony (Williams 40); as Twain's burlesque characterization of contrary wills (Howe 511); as symbols of man's lack of brotherhood (Exley 10); and as an emblem of both continuity and discontinuity, and identity and difference, hovering over Twain's text, foreclosing closure (Fredricks 499). Critics who have noticed the Capello brothers' Italian antecedents have failed to explore their Italianness in any depth. For most critics, the twin's twinness is their salient feature, not their nationality or race, which is often overlooked, or, if noted, never explored in depth.

However, I will argue that the twin's race/nationality is as important as the fact that they are twins. I will further argue that Twain's "extraordinary twins" are extraordinarily Italian, that Luigi and Angelo Capello are as intensely Italian as Henry James's Prince Amerigo or the Italian immigrants who filled Edward Steiner's steerage and Jacob Riis's tenements. That Twain should downplay the twins' race/nationality in comments about them should alert us to its significance. Whether or not Twain truly wanted to banish the twins from the work that became Pudd'nhead Wilson is irrelevant; the fact is that he couldn't shed the Italian twins and all they represented, just as Twain's countrymen couldn't shake the reality of the Italian presence in America in the 1890s. Despite Twain's contentions that the twins didn't have any occasion to be Italian in their more limited role in the novel, Angelo and Luigi in fact become more Italian (and consequently more important) as they move from the farcical tale to the tragic novel. Building on criticism by Eric Sundquist, I will argue that taken together The Tragedy of



Pudd'nhead Wilson and the Comedy of Those Extraordinary Twins engages with the period's unsettled discourses on immigration, race, ethnicity, and assimilation. In this reading, the twins serve as the locus for America's bifurcated attitudes toward Italy, representing as they do a number of dualities then current or emerging in the national discourse: northern Italians versus southern Italians, old Italian immigrants versus "new" Italian immigrants, romantic visions of a timeless, idealized Italy versus realistic fears of the Italian immigrants pouring in from "modern" Italy. As we will see, Twain's representations of Italy/Italians in both Pudd'nhead Wilson and in his travel writing sometimes reflect, sometimes refract, and often resist prevailing American attitudes and depictions by his contemporaries, Jacob Riis, Edward Steiner, Henry James and William Dean Howells. Consciously or unconsciously, Twain somehow touches on nearly all the themes introduced thus far, not only the dualities listed above, but more specifically the limitations of the picturesque aesthetic, the connections between Italians and blacks, and notions of brotherhood invoked at various times by Riis, Steiner, and James.

Eric Sundquist appears to be the first critic to pay close attention to the twin's ethnicity, touching on their Italianness in his broader examination of racial themes in Pudd'nhead Wilson. In his essay, "Mark Twain and Homer Plessy," Sundquist historicizes Pudd'nhead Wilson in the context of late nineteenth-century racial problems, particularly lynching, Jim Crow laws, and the Supreme Court's "separate-but-equal" ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). Arguing that it is not unimportant that the twins are

Italian, Sundquist links the tale of these “immigrants” to the main story of the racial changelings, Tom Driscoll and Chambers. Sundquist says that critics looking for artistic unity typically miss how Pudd’nhead Wilson and the attached tale of the twins mirrored both the “dilemma over national discrimination against blacks” and “the equally volatile issue of anti-immigrant nativism” (47). In passing, Sundquist makes some other interesting connections between the Italian twins and the social, historical, and biographical context within which Twain was working. Sundquist links the twins to anti-immigrant and anti-Italian thought and action, in particular the lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans in 1891. He further argues that the twins, coming from a non-Anglo immigrant race, blur the color line already blurred by the nearly white mulatto Roxy and her changeling “white” son, Tom. “The Italian twins, in their Siamese version, define the conjunction of black and white that Twain located in the bodies of Roxy and Tom,” Sundquist writes. “As immigrant figures they simultaneously bridge the gaps between white and black, and between North and South, further segregating one pair while unifying the other” (69). Sundquist makes a persuasive claim that Twain, who worked on Pudd’nhead Wilson while living in a villa in Italy, not only would have heard of, but would have been impressed and influenced by the lynching of the New Orleans Italians in 1891 and the brief, yet intense Italo-American diplomatic crisis that had ensued. The Italian government’s condemnation of the incident and the ill-will it caused between the two countries certainly would have been the talk of Italy. The Italian twins are threatened

with lynching in Pudd'nhead Wilson and are in fact lynched in the accompanying tale of Those Extraordinary Twins; and at about the same time that Twain was imagining these lynchings, the solid citizens of New Orleans were following through on the idea, lynching eleven Italian immigrants. It was, as we have seen, a defining moment in American-Italians relations, a culmination of building anti-Italian sentiment, when negative attitudes finally expressed themselves in physical violence promoted by a large segment of the native-born American population. The New Orleans lynchings not only dealt a serious blow to America's picturesque notions of a romantic, heroic Italy, but threatened, if only briefly, the usually warm social and political relations between the United States and Italy. In the lynching we see the ultimate clash between the "romantic" and the "real," the picturesque and the menacing, Italian. It was a clash that first appears in Italy, when American travelers encountered romantic, picturesque Italians and dirty, degraded, dishonest Italians, sometimes within the same body. The clash intensified as waves of these degenerate, if sometimes still picturesque, Italians swarmed into America, now becoming more of a threat, and exploded when the people of New Orleans decided that the Italians were a menace no better than blacks and lynched eleven of them. With that in mind, this chapter will explore questions raised by Sundquist and attempt a deeper contextualization of Twain and Pudd'nhead Wilson than was possible in his perceptive essay. I will argue that although there is little hard evidence that Twain was interested in the "new immigration," many of the discourses surrounding immigration and assimilation

percolate through Pudd'nhead Wilson and the attached tale of the twins. Consciously or unconsciously, these combined texts speak to American perceptions of Italians and frame many of the issues directly related to Italian immigrants, themes Twain began to explore in The Innocents Abroad (1869). Twain, as a reporter like Riis and Steiner and a travel writer and novelist like Henry James, seems particularly suited to bring together some of the themes that I have been examining.

Twain wrote much of what was to become Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins while living in a 28-room villa, with a staff of never less than five servants, in the village of Settignano, a few miles from Florence. From the Villa Viviani, he had "the most charming view to be found in this planet," as he says in "A Whisper to the Reader" at the start of Pudd'nhead Wilson (2). In an autobiographical writing from 1904, Twain speaks fondly of "that pleasantly remembered year" in Florence, with its incomparable view, in equally rapturous language, calling the scene "the fairest picture on our planet" (Autobiography 314). However, his memories of his first trip to Florence with the *Quaker City* cruise in 1867 were more forgettable, as depicted in The Innocents Abroad. He and his fellow pilgrims "wandered through the endless collections and statues of the Pitti and Uffizi galleries" and "indolently tried to recollect something about the Guelphs and Ghibellines and the other historical cutthroats whose quarrels and assassinations make up so large a share of Florentine history." In Florence, they admired the Arno, which "would be a very plausible river if they would pump some water into it."

One night Twain gets lost, is misunderstood by soldiers guarding a city gate, and finds himself taken into custody (the same fate that awaited the immigrants Riis and Steiner in America). "They took me into the guardhouse and searched me, but they found no sedition on me," Twain writes. "They found a small piece of soap (we carry soap with us now), and I made them a present of it, seeing that they regarded it as a curiosity." With that anecdote, he abruptly concludes: "My experiences of Florence were chiefly unpleasant. I will change the subject" (177-181). Obviously, from remarks such as these it is difficult to get a fix on Twain's personal attitudes toward Italy, much less toward the Italians themselves. What we have on record includes little more than a few pages of nostalgic reminiscences in Twain's autobiographical writings and the more extensive Italian reports of Twain's chameleon-like pilgrim/narrator in The Innocents Abroad. There are, however, scattered mentions of Italy and Italians in Twain's letters and notebooks. From these and other occasional comments about foreigners, we can put together a circumstantial case that Twain was in fact interested in race beyond issues of black and white.

Twain's most extended treatment of Italy and Italians comes early in his life, in The Innocents Abroad or The New Pilgrims' Progress, based on travel letters he had published in a California newspaper. As one of the pilgrims on the "Holy Land Pleasures Excursion" organized by Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church in 1867, Twain immediately saw he was part of a larger social movement, the American middle-class's

discovery of Europe. The tour reportedly was one of the first, if not the first, organized transatlantic pleasure parties from American. Many Americans had traveled to Europe throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, but they were a different breed of traveler, the educated, cultivated artists, writers, and intellectuals who stimulated middle-class interest in things European. Now, some of these same middle classes, blessed by post-war prosperity and increased leisure time, were leaving their arm-chair traveling behind and streaming to Europe for their own version of the Grand Tour. If the earlier travelers had gone to Europe to absorb its culture and observe its customs and manners, sketching and journalizing their way through the Old World, the new tourists went to consume it and in that way to affirm the respectability of their class and race. Here was "a new American middle class trying out its wealth and leisure and about to put its homegrown culture to a kind of test among the monuments of the Old World" (Kaplan 42). Twain had mixed emotions about his fellow pilgrims, but delighted in his membership in the movement in a way that Henry James would have found distasteful. Twain both mocked the pilgrimage and expressed true pilgrimhood. "I basked in the happiness of being for once in my life drifting with the tide of a great popular movement," he writes. Twain was both of this new middle-class (the same middle class to which Jacob Riis aspired) and outside it. "He both entertained and mocked these people; sometimes he alienated them, but often he showed his eagerness to take on their social coloration." The *Quaker City* pilgrims and Twain himself, as represented in his

narrator, are a contradictory lot, both “innocents” and “vandals.” They are parochial, chauvinistic, vulgar, acquisitive, and skeptical, but also gullible; they “responded docilely and with awe if not understanding to high European culture” (Kaplan 42). The narrator himself speaks in a variety of narrative voices: innocent, vandal, humorist, satirist, realist, romantic -- often indignant, sometimes sentimental. Although he often ridicules his fellow tourists, “he began to convert some of their baser attitudes---their outrage at bureaucracy and beggars, at the wealth of the Church, at superstition and the veneration of relics, their raucous irreverence and impatience with the past, their conviction that Europe was a sell, a swindle, a fraud---into a flexible, joyously inconsistent view that was wholly his own” (Kaplan 48). As William W. Stowe has shown, Twain, like many other nineteenth-century writers, found in travel writing “an established, respectable, and relatively undemanding literary genre” that “offered aspiring authors a ready-made form, a surefire subject, and the opportunity to adopt one of several widely respected cultural roles” (11). Early in the cruise, many of Twain’s fellow pilgrims aspired to record their impressions for a homebound audience, but unlike Twain soon ran out of steam.

Twain uses his polyvocal personae and constantly shifting tones on Italy and Italians in The Innocents Abroad. While not altogether ignorant or unappreciative of Italy’s attractions, he sees the country as “one vast museum of magnificence and misery” and “the wretchedest, princeliest land on earth” (188-89). Very often he burlesques the old gushing guidebooks, but more than once his own “guidebook” is sentimental and

romantic. Like many of the travelers who went before him, including Henry James, he seems to reserve his greatest admiration for the Italian arcadian landscape. He may disparage the Arno as a river short on water and characterize Lake Como as “a bedizened little courtier in [the] August presence” of Nevada’s Lake Tahoe (145), but he often rhapsodizes, with apparent sincerity, over the enchantments of certain Italian landscapes. Here he sounds like the later Twain looking out from his Tuscan villa. The same second-best Lake Como is the subject of a passage which, with its sense of wonder, echoes Twain’s writing about the Mississippi River in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn:

A mile away, a grove-plumed promontory juts far into the lake and glasses its palace in the blue depths; in midstream a boat is cutting the shining surface and leaving a long track behind, like a ray of light; the mountains beyond are veiled in a dreamy purple haze; far in the opposite direction a tumbled mass of domes and verdant slopes and valleys bars the lake, and here, indeed, does distance lend enchantment to the view---for on this broad canvas, sun and clouds and the richest of the atmospheres have blended a thousand tints together, and over its surface the filmy lights and shadows drit, hour after hour, and glorify it with a beauty that seems reflected out of Heaven itself. Beyond all question, this is the most voluptuous scene we have yet looked upon. (143)

However, like many another American traveler to Italy, Twain’s narrator is both attracted to and repelled by Italy. Much of the attraction comes from the Italian picturesque, which Twain tries to dissociate from the romantic. Outside of Milan, for example, “Troops of picturesque peasant-girls, coming from work, hooted at us, shouted at us, made all manner of game of us, and entirely delighted me,” the narrator writes. “My long-cherished judgment was confirmed. I always did think those frowsy, romantic, unwashed peasant girls I had read so much about in poetry were a glaring fraud” (139).



The peasant girls are picturesque, pleasing to look at, but not romantic. Behind their romance is the reality of poverty and dirt. The narrator is also enchanted by the Venetian gondolier despite his initial disenchantment with a “caterwauling . . . mangy, barefooted guttersnipe” of a gondolier named Roderigo Gonzales Michael Angelo and his “inky, rusty old canoe with a sable hearse-body clapped onto the middle of it” (155). For all his degeneration, the gondolier still has value. “The gondolier *is* a picturesque rascal for all he wears no satin harness, no plumed bonnet, no silken tights,” the narrator says. “His attitude is stately; he is lithe and supple; all his movements are full of grace. When his long cane, and his fine figure, towering from its high perch on the stern, are cut against the evening sky, they make a picture that is very novel and striking to a foreign eye” (166). Here, despite Twain’s efforts to distinguish between the picturesque and the romantic, the narrator romanticizes the picturesque nature of the gondolier despite his less-than-romantic material reality.

However, when the narrator looks closer into the broad picturesque canvas, he sees decay, degeneration, poverty, uncleanliness, sloth, and superstition, most of it blamed on the Catholic Church, an attitude representative of many Protestant Americans who equated Catholicism with Italy and Italianness, blamed it for many of the Italians’ character flaws, and saw it as a threat to American ideals such as individualism, democracy, and republicanism. On the way to Bergamo, during a “delightful” carriage ride through the Italian interior, the narrators thinks, “We were in the heart and home of

priestcraft---of a happy, cheerful, contented ignorance, superstition, degradation, poverty, indolence, and everlasting uninspiring worthlessness. And we said fervently, It suits these people precisely; let them enjoy it, along with the other animals, and heaven forbid that they be molested. *We feel no menace toward these fumigators*" (148). These same images of Italians as childlike and content in their ignorance and poverty appear and reappear, as we have seen, in the representations of Italians by earlier travelers, as well as in later depictions by Henry James and Jacob Riis. The decay is everywhere, and becomes the symbol of a fallen culture, a once glorious people in declension. We see this same attitude -- that Italy and Italians long ago rose and fell -- in the attitudes of Europeans both toward Italy and toward the Orient. For Twain, the decay is perhaps most noticeable in the paintings of the old masters, whose faded and weathered works are now less handsome than those of the ubiquitous copyists. The Italian cities also have deteriorated. Genoa has "degenerated into an unostentatious commerce in velvets and silver filigree work" (118). Venice, the "haughty, invincible, magnificent Republic for nearly fourteen hundred years," now "is fallen a prey to poverty, neglect, and melancholy decay," now is but "a peddler of glass beads for women, and trifling toys and trinkets for school-girls and children" (154). Venice's only poetry is nocturnal, when its realities aren't laid bare by the "glare of day" and "treacherous sunlight" (157-58). If Venice is best seen in moonlight, Naples is only beautiful from a great distance. Only then did the maxim "See Naples and die" truly apply. "To see Naples as we saw it in the early dawn from far up on

the side of Vesuvius, is to see a picture of wonderful beauty. . . . But do not go within the walls and look at it in detail. That takes away some of the romance of the thing. The people are filthy in their habits, and this makes filthy streets and breeds disagreeable sights and smells." The dirt makes cholera epidemics more virulent because "before the doctor can dig through the dirt and get at the disease the man dies" (236). It is in Naples where "the contrasts between opulence and poverty, and magnificence and misery, are more frequent and more striking . . . than in Paris even" (237). Another city of the *Mezzogiorno*, the Roman port of Civita Vecchia, is barely European. It "is the finest nest of dirt, vermin, and ignorance we have found yet, except that African perdition they call Tangier, which is just like it" (191).

Finally, the people themselves, with some exceptions, have degenerated and degraded, just as their cities and art have. The same dirty peasant girls who furnished picturesque delight are members of the same lower classes who "had rather die than wash, but the fumigation of strangers causes them no pain." The accusation becomes more generalized when the narrator reaches Civita Vecchia and the Papal States. "They are very uncleanly---these people---in face, in person, and in dress. When they see anybody with a clean shirt on, it arouses their scorn" (192). This image of the dirty Italian is a trope that runs through much American writing about Italians in Italy and Italians in America. Both Jacob Riis and Edward Steiner seemed obsessed with the image, and their obsession mirrors the American's general preoccupation with the dirty Italian/immigrant

and his threat to Anglo-Saxon cleanliness and order. For Twain's narrator, the Italian's obsession with fumigating and quarantining foreign visitors is misdirected: It is the Italians themselves who need fumigating. This becomes an even more pressing need when the Italians are the foreigners coming to the United States, bringing with them the threat of infection. Still, Twain's narrator says he will try to pray for these dirty "fumigating, macaroni-stuffing organ-grinders" (141), who elsewhere in The Innocents Abroad are described as tobacco "stub-hunters" (113) and "garlic-exterminating" mouths (129). In the interior, the Italians are depicted as content in their ignorance and "wedded to the customs and steeped in the dreams of the elder ages, and perfectly unaware that the world turns round! . . . *They* have nothing to do but eat and sleep and sleep and eat, and toil a little when they can get a friend to stand by and keep them awake. *They* are not paid for thinking---*they* are not paid to fret about the world's concerns. . . . How can men, calling themselves men, consent to be so degraded and happy?" (148).

If the Italians of The Innocents Abroad lack American initiative and ambition, they are not indifferent to the lure of money. In the town of Annunciation, near Mount Vesuvius, the narrator encounters Italians that are not only dirty but grasping for money for every service imposed on the tourist, even while carrying a subtle threat of disease and infection. "They crowd you---infest you---swarm about you, and sweat and smell offensively, and look sneaking and mean, and obsequious. There is no office too degrading for them to perform, for money" (231). In one shape or another the money-

grubbing charge was be linked to Italians throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Early travel accounts of Italy often speak of carriage drivers, cicerones, guides, and small tradespeople always on the alert for an opportunity to squeeze the traveler. Twain extends the image to now include charging for other unwanted services and courtesies. Here, in Annunciation, in the south of Italy, acts such as the opening and closing of doors, the volunteering of information, and the bestowing of a smile become part of a monetary exchange system. In time, these same grasping Italians from the south of Italy would be transformed in the grasping Italian immigrants who will do anything for a wage. Of Italy's upper classes, Twain's narrator has little to say, and that not laudatory. "I have had no opportunity to find out anything about the upper classes by my own observation, but from what I hear said about them I judge that what they lack in one or two of the bad traits the *canaille* have they make up in one or two others that are worse. How the people beg!--many of them very well dressed, too" (231). The narrator never says from whom he takes this assessment of the upper classes. Is it from Italy's common classes, from other tourists who have had access to the Italian upper classes, or from written accounts?

Twain, like his acquaintance Henry James but unlike his good friend William Dean Howells, rarely stops to examine the causes behind the decay, degeneration and degradation. He professes the same ignorance about Italy in general as he does for its art. "There are a good many things about this Italy which I do not understand---," the

narrators begins. He specifically cites the curious fact that such a financially bankrupt nation, in the throes of unification, can afford “palatial railroad depots and such marvels of turnpikes” -- something that’s more impressive to the Yankee than “Italy’s hundred galleries of priceless art treasures.” But unlike France, whose genuine material prosperity supports her public projects and improvements, Italy has no real financial foundation for her great works:

The prosperity they would seem to indicate is a pretense. There is no money in the treasury, and so they enfeeble her instead of strengthening. Italy has achieved the dearest wish of her heart and become an independent state---and in so doing she has drawn an elephant in the political lottery. She has nothing to feed it on. Inexperienced in government, she plunged into all manner of useless expenditure, and swamped her treasury almost in a day. She squandered millions of francs on a navy which she did not need, and the first time she took her new toy into action she got it knocked higher than Gilderoy’s kite---to use the language of the Pilgrims.” (186-87)

In the above passage, Italy is seen as a vain, profligate woman who overextends her credit on impractical toys and luxuries even while her children go hungry and shoeless. With no other recourse, the government “in effect” confiscated the church’s domains, those immense riches that had been lying idle while the people were “ground to death with taxation to uphold a perishing government” (188). It’s a measure the narrator heartily applauds. “As far as I can see, Italy, for fifteen hundred years, has turned all her energies, all her finances, and all her industry to building up of a vast array of wonderful church edifices, and starving half her citizens to accomplish it.” Every American beggar is matched by one hundred Italian ones. Finally, it is the Catholic Church that has made

Italy “one vast museum of magnificence and misery” and the “wretchedest, princeliest land on earth” (188-89). The narrator’s tirade against the church is partially motivated by his sense that the church (an emasculating female?) has stripped the people of their manhood, sapped them of those very qualities that America and Americans such as Samuel Clemens valued so much. Like the cultural pilgrims who came before, the narrator had prostrated himself before the Duomo in Florence and “worshiped it, but when the filthy beggars swarmed around me the contrast was too striking, too suggestive, and I said, ‘Oh, sons of classic Italy, *is* the spirit of enterprise, of self reliance, of noble endeavor, utterly dead within yea? Curse your indolent worthlessness, why don’t you rob your churches?’” (189). The narrator’s peroration is cut short, appropriately enough, by one of these very beggars. “And now---However, another beggar approaches. I will go out and destroy him, and then come back and write another chapter of vituperation.” But, now, “[h]aving eaten the friendless orphan---having driven away his comrades---having grown calm and reflective at length---,” the narrator returns in a “kindlier mood,” with a bit of praise for the priesthood, especially the devotion of the mendicant orders to the people during a recent cholera epidemic (190-191).

As we can see, the picture of Italy and Italians that emerges from The Innocents Abroad is a typically Twainian mixed-bag that deflates, exaggerates and often denigrates in humorous fashion, making it all but impossible to cut through to Twain’s real feelings about the land and her people. There is some sincere appreciation for the land itself, but

Twain's narrator feels compelled to qualify that praise with chauvinistic comparisons to American scenery. For the most part, the country itself -- its art and commerce and people -- is seen as a degenerate shell of its former self, a culture which long ago experienced its glory days. All is decay and deterioration, from the faded Old Masters paintings to the once powerful cities. Heroic Italy is in the past, while newly independent Italy is a land stuck in that past, oppressed by superstitious relic-revering religion, held back by foolish, foolhardy, impotent leaders, and endured by a dirty, ignorant, unambitious people. When the people do show initiative, it expresses itself either in beggary or in grasping attempts to fleece tourists. Twain's Italy in The Innocents Abroad retains some of its picturesqueness, but has been shorn of much of its romance and heroism. Negative images that were more muted in earlier travel accounts become, in Twain, more pronounced, more exaggerated as they are filtered through Twain's less-than-reliable narrator. Stripping Italy and Italians of their romance, Twain is as much having a go at America's romantic notions of Italy/Europe as he is providing an exaggeratedly cold-eyed "realistic" view of the country and its people.

Following the publication of The Innocents Abroad, Twain's writings have little to say about Italians. There are a few brief chapters on Italy in A Tramp Abroad (1880), but they add little to what had appeared in The Innocents Abroad. In general, A Tramp Abroad rarely engages in the type of national and racial generalities found in Twain's earlier travel book. One striking example, however, relates to Italians, and is all the more



striking becomes it seems to come out of nowhere. Describing a “rafting” trip down the Neckar in Germany, Twain recounts how the excursionists are bombarded by Italian workers blasting away at the hillside for a new rail bed. Twain reports that Italians handled most of the heavy work in quarries and on the new railway gradings. “That was a revelation,” he writes. “We have the notion in our country that Italians never do heavy work at all, but confine themselves to the lighter arts, like organ-grinding, operatic singing, and assassination. We have blundered, that is plain” (99-100). Twain here compactly captures a strain of mid-nineteenth-century American thinking that saw Italians as either feminized artists of both high and low culture (organ-grinding, opera), or masculine assassins (not unlike the twin, Luigi Capello). However, “the multitude of Italian laborers” in Germany (most likely immigrants blazing a migratory trail that eventually led to America) give the lie to America’s “notion” that Italians shun heavy work. In the years immediately following publication of A Tramp Abroad, Americans would see more graphic evidence that Italians were certainly capable of heavy work.

If Twain’s post-Innocents writings speak little about Italians, general ideas about race and racial differences that went beyond black and white seemed to be on Twain’s mind, beginning in the 1880s, just as the new immigration was starting to make itself felt. A notebook entry of August 15, 1885, finds Twain making simple stereotypical assessments of various nationalities and races of Europe. Twain here conflates not only race and nationality, but also religion. He provides no context for the entry, which is a

straightforward listing of the various groups and their presumed traits. The English are the “arrogant nation,” the French the “volatile nation,” the Germans the “patient nation,” and the Irish the “nation of chaste women.” For Twain, the Americans were the “material nation” (the same “material” nation that distresses James in The American Scene). Finally, Twain lumps together as the “ignorant nations” the Roman Catholic countries of Europe, including of course Italy. Under Twain’s crude taxonomy, Italians and other Catholic peoples are “hot-blooded, kind-hearted” (Notebooks 3: 173). It is interesting that Twain identifies these countries by religion and not race, does not differentiate them by people or nationality, and consigns them all -- because of their religion? -- to ignorance, with its connotations of superstition, degradation, powerlessness, and primitivism. Three years later finds Twain again playing with these national/racial traits in his notebooks. He attaches traits to several nationalities (Italians excluded) and then imagines them as animals: the American as peacock, Frenchman as polecat, Russian as wombat, etc. (3: 405-406). It is difficult to say what Twain had in mind here or what his motivations are, especially in light of an essay and a sketch, both written some seven years later in the mid-1890s, in which he satirizes this very tendency to categorize, subdivide and label people according to race or national character. (I will look more closely at these two writings later in the chapter.)

There are some sporadic mentions of Italy and Italians at this time. In the late 1880s, Twain’s notebooks make several references to various projects he has concocted

for honoring the remains of the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus. "August 31, 1886. Revealed to Livy my project of buying the remains of Christopher Columbus and placing them in the base of the Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World in New York Harbor. No---rotunda of the Capitol at Washington." "October 4, 1887. If in 1891 I find myself not rich enough to carry out my scheme of buying Christopher Columbus' bones and burying them under the Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World, I will give the idea to somebody who *is* rich enough." "October 13, 1889. Proposed my idea (of buying the remains of Columbus and bringing them over to the fair of '92) to the N.Y. World Committee on ideas---but shan't *name* the idea until I hear from them." (Notebook 190, 192, 209). A few years later, Columbus again is on Twain's mind, when in the conclusion to Pudd'nhead Wilson, he offers this classic maxim from Pudd'nhead's Calender: "October 12, the Discovery. It was wonderful to find America, but it would have been more wonderful to miss it" (113).

Twain's notebooks also speak of the family's move to Italy in the spring of 1892. The entry for April 30 speaks of his hotel, reputedly the best in Florence, as "a vast confusion of halls and sleeping-holes, a huge congeries of rats' nest, furnished with rubbish, probably bought at pauper auctions. The cook *is* the best in Florence, no doubt. He is first class; the rest of the hotel is fortieth class." The same entry recounts a tale heard in Rome of the adventure of two young Englishmen in the Campagna, in which "two terrific dogs came for them, and their peasant guide put up a prayer to the Virgin

and she vouchsafed a miracle which saved them” (Notebook 225). There is only slightly more insight to be found in Twain’s autobiographical writings. Here he says of one Italian servant, “The contadino is middle-aged and like the rest of the peasants -- that is to say, brown, handsome, good-natured, courteous and entirely independent without making any inoffensive show of it” (Autobiography 315). This image of the Italian contadino is not original, speaking of a type of colorful Italian peasant who had long held such a fascination for American lovers of the picturesque. In great measure, Twain, like his narrator in The Innocents Abroad, here both apes and parodies this picturesque approach to Italy and Italians. It may suffice to say for now that Twain’s attitudes towards Italians, like those toward blacks, were apparently contradictory and fluid, and often in the process of negotiation. With regard to blacks, Twain has been seen as both a racist and as a true friend of the Negro, with Guy Cardwell and Shelley Fisher Fishkin representative of the opposite ends of the spectrum, as well as everything in between. And at one time or another, Twain probably fulfilled all those roles. Guy Cardwell argues that the young Twain was by some standards a racist and somewhat of a nativist, sharing mildly in the Know-Nothing suspicion of foreigners (188, 186). In editorials for the *Buffalo Express* in 1869 and 1870, shortly after lampooning the Italians in The Innocents Abroad, he made his first public indictment of violence against the Negro in the South. Twain also began to concede virtues in the enfranchisement of blacks, while at the same time writing crude sketches that focussed on the Negro’s ignorance and superstition, two qualities his

narrator attributes to Italians in The Innocents Abroad. Other inconsistencies abound in Twain's relationship with blacks. "In life and in death, Samuel Clemens has displayed multiple selves," says Guy Cardwell, arguing there can be no definitive life of the author (26). The same multiplicity of selves might also be attributed to Henry James and Jacob Riis, but perhaps not to the extent or the variety with which it applies to Twain.

By the time Twain came to write Pudd'nhead Wilson, both he and the country were in a state of flux, disorientation, and anxiety. If Twain found Villa Viviani a congenial spot for writing, with its gardens of roses, laurel and ilex, the place's serenity was not mirrored in Twain's personal life at the time. His A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court had a mixed reception in England in 1889. The next year both his mother and his wife's mother died. There were the usual money problems, but now becoming more grave, as Twain's heavy investments in both the Paige typesetter and in his publishing company were starting to prove to be real financial drains.

The United States wasn't in much better shape than Twain, as the author himself well knew. Although Twain spent much of his time in Europe during the early 1890s, he kept in touch through regular transatlantic crossings to attend to business in the United States. As Sundquist argues, Twain would have been aware of race relations and immigration as two issues uppermost in America's national consciousness. Twain's friend, the Southern writer George Washington Cable, was now living in Northampton, Massachusetts, and still publicly agitating for equal civil and political rights for blacks

who were becoming more disenfranchised. In 1890, Cable issued his last major polemic on civil rights in a Washington' Birthday address in Boston, and that speech, "The Southern Struggle for Pure Government," was included later in the year in his second collection of civil rights writings, The Negro Question. America's concerns went beyond worsening white-black relations. By the 1890s, many journalists, academicians, and politicians began publicly arguing that the new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were undesirable and should be barred from America. In 1891, two years before Pudd'nhead Wilson began serialization in *The Century*, Richard Watson Gilder's magazine had published Henry Cabot Lodge's piece, "The Distribution of Ability in the United States." Lodge's statistical analysis purportedly showed "the enormous predominance" of the English racial strain in contributions to America's development, while suggesting the inferiority of all non-English groups. "[T]hereafter Lodge concentrated his fire on the new immigration, arguing that it presented a supreme danger transcending political or economic considerations: it threatened 'a great and perilous change in the very fabric of our race'" (Higham, Strangers 141-42) Also in 1891, Lodge wrote two pieces for *The North American Review*: "The Restriction of Immigration" and "Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration." The second piece directly engaged with the lynching of the eleven New Orleans Italians that year and concluded that America's open gates, as much as the mob, caused the killings. Although the Immigration Restriction League wouldn't be founded until 1894, the same year Pudd'nhead Wilson came out in

book form, restrictionist ideas were already circulating. The group's organizing Boston Brahmins were prestigious, socially and politically active intellectuals, commercial leaders, politicians, clergymen and literary figures whose writings were carried by the most influential magazines and newspapers of the time. Twain would have noticed that much of the public discourse centered on questions of race, ethnicity, and national identity.

Nervous about his own life, Twain would have been tuned into America's nervousness over burgeoning cities, dizzying technological change, labor strife, social unrest, and economic recessions. He would have detected the varied concerns about American national character, its Anglo-Saxon racial purity, and the threats to that ideal from not only blacks, but new immigrant groups such as the Italians. For blacks, the early 1890s meant intensified race hatred and segregation built on white supremacy, Jim Crow laws, and control through violence. For Italian and other immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, the early 1890s meant calls for immigration restriction and attacks, sometimes physical, from nativists. Lodge and other influential leaders regarded the new immigrants as not much different from Negroes, saw them as other "Others" who couldn't be assimilated and thereby threatened America's racial purity and Anglo-Saxon-based national character. As we shall see later, the links between Italians and blacks went beyond perceived similarities in the threat they seemed to pose. In the minds of some Americans, Italians and other new immigrants were seen as less than white, but it was

generally the Italian (and the Jew) among the new immigrants who was most likely to be perceived as colored.

According to some historians, Higham being the most prominent, these “new” Italian immigrants suffered discrimination and racism second only to blacks in America. Even before mass Italian immigration, Italians were often considered to be less advanced and more bizarre looking than western Europeans. These attitudes were, however, tempered by the Italians’ small numbers and an American mania for Italian culture. But the waves of new immigrants in the 1880s and 1890s focussed nativist criticisms on the Italian’s negative stereotypes and pushed him closer to the hated Negro. “The Italians were often thought to be the most degraded of the European newcomers. They were swarthy, more than half of them were illiterate, and almost all were the victims of a standard of living lower than that of any of the other prominent nationalities” (Higham Strangers 66). Italians were ragpickers (as Riis so vividly depicted them) and common laborers who sometimes earned forty percent less than the general slum-dwellers in the North. Often they were paid less than blacks. Because Italians would work for next to nothing and were perceived to be controlled by the ruthless *padrone* (a latter-day overseer?), some commentators compared their status to a form of “slavery.” The slavery metaphor wasn’t always exaggerated. In April 1893, *The Forum* ran a piece by S. Merlino, an Italian researcher, titled “Italian Immigrants and Their Enslavement,” in which he wrote: “There have been cases where Italian laborers have suffered actual



slavery, and in trying to escape have been fired upon by the guards and murdered, as happened not long ago in the Adirondacks” (187). Furthermore, in the American imagination, Italian immigrants often bore the mark of Cain (just as blacks bore the mark of Ham), suggesting as they did the stiletto, violence, and the Mafia. “That stereotype conditioned every major outburst of anti-Italian sentiment in the 1890s” (Higham, Strangers 90).

If the Italians and other new immigrants had their attackers, they also had their defenders -- sometimes under the same roof. This was the case with *The Century* magazine, where Twain’s Pudd’nhead Wilson: A Tale began serialization in December 1893. Five years earlier, the magazine had published a bitter denunciation of the new immigrants by Theodore T. Munger, a Congregational minister from Twain’s adopted state of Connecticut. Munger wrote his piece in 1886, in the year of the Haymarket riots, but he equated race with labor/civil unrest in such blunt terms that he withdrew the article. In 1888, he apparently decided that America was ready for his article’s extreme opinions. In “Immigration by Passport,” Munger blames immigrants for crime, anarchy, political corruption, pauperism, the degradation of labor, and the spread of atheism. He concludes, “There is not an evil thing among us, not a vice, nor crime, nor disturbing element, which is not for the most part of foreign origin. Mobs, murder, burglary, ruffianism, boycottism, drunkenness, lawlessness, political corruption and intrigue,---it is a simple fact that the largest element in each member of this fearful category is mainly

composed of foreigners” (796). Munger’s article also touches on other subthemes from the nation’s racial discourse: the disastrous physical and moral results of “mingling” not only humankind’s main three color families, but also “remote branches of the same family” (792); the physiological threat of degeneration from inferior stocks to the fine, ascendant physical strain (793); and the ability of America to “digest” the “heterogenous masses” of foreigners despite the great assimilating power of the country’s institutions, education, climate, food and “moral effort” (793). Running through Munger’s argument is the distinction he makes between the old immigration and the new, between the English, Teutonic, and Scandinavian immigrants who were racially in line with “with our own” and whose blood “reinforces the national type,” and the new immigrants who are “of blood outside of the national strain or defective in political ability” (795). Munger ends his peroration by calling indiscriminate immigration “a great public evil” second only to the “negro problem” (798). He says: “It is the foreign element that poisons politics, blocks the wheels of industry, fills our prisons and hospitals and poor-houses, defies law, perplexes our schemes of education, lowers the grade of public virtue, atheizes the state, confuses labor, supplants the caucus by the saloon, feeds the drink-evil, and turns municipal government into a farce of sham” (798). Prior to publication of Pudd’ nhead Wilson, *The Century* also ran editorials on the Haymarket and Homestead riots, as well as a feature article, “The Chicago Anarchists of 1886.” And Henry Cabot Lodge’s piece on immigration restriction appeared in *The Century* in September 1893,

three months before the first installment of Pudd'nhead Wilson. Many of *The Century's* contributors saw immigration as bringing political, economic and social ills, specifically industrial strife such as the Haymarket bombing. One writer called for restrictions, citing statistics that revealed inordinate numbers of paupers and criminals among the immigrant classes.

However, *The Century's* editorials were less doctrinaire. They tended to blame anarchism and industrial violence on alien elements, but also criticized the American Protective Association, a nativist movement that began in Iowa, not far from the Missouri setting of Pudd'nhead Wilson. In August 1894, two months after the concluding installment of Pudd'nhead Wilson, an editorial, while not entirely negative, recommended withholding the vote from immigrants until one year after their naturalization. And in May 1896, the magazine ran an editorial condemning nativism.

Despite some of the moderating influences, certain segments of the native-born American population saw Italians as little better, if not worse, than blacks. Italians found themselves twinned with Negroes in tangled Siamese bonds of slavery, savagery, and social control through violence.

Italians were mixed up with blacks in social relations, in the political maneuverings of the North and South, and in the public imagination. The most graphic of the similarities between Italians and blacks was that Italians, like blacks, were dismissed as a group worthy of lynching. The 1890s saw repeated lynchings of both Italians and blacks.

During the decade, more than 25 Italians would be lynched or murdered by mobs in Colorado, West Virginia, Mississippi, and Louisiana (Iorizzo 223). The worst incident -- the New Orleans lynching of eleven Italians in March 1891 -- took place in a city and state that Twain knew well through his steamboating days. The lynching of the eleven Italians who had been cleared of murdering the city's popular superintendent of police, although extreme, is a locus for exploring links between Italians and blacks in the public discourse, and how those links relate to themes I am pursuing in Pudd'nhead Wilson.

In "Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration," Henry Cabot Lodge absolved the New Orleans lynch mob of racism. "The killing of the eleven prisoners had in it no race feeling whatever," Lodge wrote. "There has been no hostility to the Italians in America, as such" (604).

The facts indicate otherwise. When Police Superintendent David C. Hennessy was shot several times at the corner of Girod and Basin on the dreary night of October 19, 1890, the city's mayor called out the predominantly Irish police force and ordered the arrest of every Italian the officers could find. More than a hundred Italians were arrested and the jail filled with what a newspaper identified as "Sicilians, whose low, receding foreheads, repulsive countenances and slovenly attire, proclaimed their brutal natures." Newspapers called for speedy justice in order to preserve the American way of life (Mangione 205-06). The *Daily Picayune* ran a timely in-depth piece on Sicilian bandits, the mafia, and mysterious crimes committed in the Italian community. When Italian

communities around the country raised funds for the legal defense, the action was denounced as a “mafia” conspiracy. Newspaper distributor Tom Duffy, a friend of Hennessy, told a guard at the parish prison that he could identify one of the Italian prisoners as the police commissioner’s killer. When Duffy reached the prisoner’s cell, he pulled out a revolver and shot the man, Antonio Scaffidi. The Italian survived, only to die more brutally in the lynching. By most accounts, the lynch mob went about its task with zest after battering down one of the parish prison entrances. “They hunted through the corridors and corners and found six of the acquitted men in a small courtyard used for exercise. There, men dressed in frock coats and derby hats from close range of 20 feet pumped over a hundred rifle shots and gunshots blasts into the six men, tearing their bodies apart while others cheered” (209). Scaffidi and two others were found hiding in the women’s section of the prison and their heads were blown off. Two Italians were hanged, and citizens either beat or took target practice with the swinging bodies. In one case the crowd roared out, “Kill the fuckin’ Dago, kill him!” (209-10). Although there was some condemnation of the lynchings, the New Orleans newspapers and others around the country either condoned or applauded the vigilante justice. In New Orleans, *The Mascot* ran a lurid account that seemed to revel in the gruesome details, and the *Times-Democrat* had a front page one-word headline, “AVENGED.” The article justified the paper’s support of the lynchings with the argument that “Desperate diseases required desperate remedies.” *The New York Times*, then a respected newspaper, rationalized the

killings in two editorials, saying that the Sicilians were “sneaking and cowardly . . . the descendants of bandits and assassins, who have transported to this country the lawless passions, the cut-throat practices and oath-bound societies of their native country, [who] are to us a pest without mitigation” (qtd. in Mangione 209-11). Condemnation also came from workers and politicians. In West Virginia, miners demanded that their fellow Italian workers be fired, and went on strike when the mine operator refused. In Congress and throughout the country, there were reinvigorated calls to curtail immigration from Italy and from other “non-Aryan” nations.

Lodge’s piece “Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration” barely refrained from condoning the action of the lynch mob. Lodge said it “acted on the belief that these men were guilty of the crime with which they were charged; that the crime was the work of a secret society known as the Mafia; and that the failure of the jury to convict was due either to terror of this secret organization or to bribery by its agents” (602). Dismissing any signs of racial motivation in the killings, Lodge argued that on the contrary, Italian immigrants had “generally been regarded hitherto as an industrious people, prone to fierce quarrels among themselves, but, in the main, thrifty, hardworking, and well behaved” (604). In one paragraph, Lodge dissociates race from criminal societies such as the Mafia, saying such unlawful organizations “come not from race peculiarities, but from the quality of certain classes of immigrants from all races.” However, in the next paragraph, he speaks of the decline in immigration of “those races which had thus far

built up the United States, and which are related to each other by blood or language or both,” while noting the increase in immigration of “races totally alien to them” (605-606). He concludes: “In the present state of things, not only are we doing nothing to protect the quality of our citizenship or the wages of our workingmen from an unrestricted flood of immigration, but we are permitting persons so ignorant and criminal to come among us that organizations like the Mafia are sure to rise in our midst. The time has come for an intelligent restriction” (612). If lynching was used as a form of social control against both blacks and Italians, the rhetoric surrounding the lynching of blacks and Italians was both similar and different. In both cases, the victims were depicted as subhuman, animal-like, but while blacks were often represented as a sexual threat to American womanhood, the Italians were usually seen as a threat to the American working man and to American society and national character.

When President Harrison denounced the lynchings as “an offense against law and humanity,” there was talk of impeaching him. The lynchings, and the Italian government’s demand for indemnity payments to the families of the three victims who were Italian nationals, touched off a brief, but intense diplomatic crisis between the United States and Italy. This added a layer of jingoism to American racism, spread new fear and loathing of Italians, and, according to at least one historian, was used by politicians to unify America’s North and South against a common foreign enemy. War fever raged in some extreme quarters of the United States, and Italian-Americans were

seen as a potential fifth column. The Portland *Oregonian* poeticized, “In the spring the dago fancy/Fiercely turns to thoughts of war,” a reference perhaps to the Italians’ recent revolutionary and anarchist national history (qtd. in Karlin, “Italo-American Incident” 243). The situation in Louisiana is particularly instructive in its tangle of relations between nativist white supremacists, blacks, and Italians -- tangles not unlike those running through the subtexts of Pudd’ nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins. Italians and blacks had mixed in New York City in the 1880s. Jacob Riis, writing in How the Other Half Lives, noticed the contacts between blacks and Italians in the area of Thompson Street, where Italians and Mulberry Bend tramps had begun sharing urban space with the blacks in a neighborhood notorious for what Riis called the “aptly-named black-and-tan saloon.” Riis didn’t like what he saw, pronouncing the mingling of black, Italian and tramp a total failure. “The moral turpitude of Thompson Street has been notorious for years, and the mingling of the three elements does not seem to have wrought any change for the better,” Riis writes. “Than this commingling of the utterly depraved of both sexes, white and black, on such ground, there can be no greater abomination” (119). Riis does not elaborate on this theme, other than to equate this mingling with “common debauch” and to summarily conclude that it is immoral. Relationships between blacks and Italians in New Orleans, rural Louisiana, and the South in general were as problematic as they were in northeastern cities such as Riis’s New York. In Louisiana at least, contacts between Italians and blacks went back further and



often were more extensive and intensive than in the North. Louisiana had become one of the first southern states to encourage Italian immigration as a solution to the labor shortage caused by migration of ex-slaves to the North. The state placed advertisements throughout southern Italy describing the state as a land of plentiful jobs and Mediterranean climate (Mangione 181). Initially, only small numbers of Italian immigrants responded to the ads, but by 1890 that began to change, in part because of the unsuccessful *Fasci Siciliani* cooperative movement in Sicily, when many of the lower classes in southern Italy despaired of any improvement in their conditions. In 1890, Italians comprised nearly two-thirds of the nearly four thousand immigrants who arrived in New Orleans. The following year, nearly three thousand Italians arrived, all but thirty-five from Sicily (Cunningham 23). Most congregated in a neighborhood dubbed "Little Palermo." In New Orleans, Italians had started by peddling fruit on the street, but quickly had developed a fruit industry important to the local economy. The Italians had a heavy presence both at the city's market and on the docks where the fruit came in. It was this Italian presence in the city's fruit trade, and a suspected rivalry between the dock Italians and the market Italians, that were blamed as the cause of David Hennessey's death. Italians fared less well economically in the cotton fields, where, because of their reputation as good, but desperate farmers, they were recruited to displace the "allegedly shiftless, immoral, and unreliable black farm workers" (Shankman, "Menacing Influx" 68).

Even before large numbers of Italian immigrants began arriving in the 1890s, Italians already living in Louisiana and the rest of the South were becoming targets of racism and bigotry in the 1880s, contrary to Lodge's assertion that Americans exhibited no hostility toward the Italians. Nowhere was this the most apparent than in New Orleans and the rest of the Bayou State. Caricatures of the Italian immigrants began appearing in local newspapers. *The Mascot*, the same paper that would later describe the New Orleans lynchings in delightful detail, drew the Italian as a dirty, bearded, hook-nosed man carrying a battered basket filled with bananas. Italian fruit peddlers were pictured with thick broad mouths and hooked noses, a caricature that seems to incorporate facial elements from caricatures of blacks and Jews. A series of cartoons, titled "The Italian Population," ran in October 1890. One panel, captioned "The Way to Dispose of Them," depicted a group of immigrants in a cage being lowered into the river, the same river on which Twain's Huck and Jim the runaway slave find a sort of brotherhood. In the decade before the New Orleans lynchings, Italians were increasingly being linked to murder and the stiletto not only in the popular imagination but in police work (Mangione 201). By the 1880s, a wave of anti-Italian bigotry prompted the police to unfairly attribute most murders to Sicilians. In a few instances the police resorted to dishonestly Italianizing the names of the killers. On June 14, 1885, the murder of "Juan Martini" was reported as having the "appearance of a mafia killing," even though a coroner's report said that the

victim was John Martin, born in Germany. “If a murder went unsolved, it was attributed to ‘unknown Sicilians’” (203).

The exact nature of the relationship between Italians and blacks in the South is not entirely clear, but historians such as George E. Cunningham, Arnold Shankman and Jean Ann Scarpacci believe that initially Italians and blacks treated each other with a degree of mutual respect and tolerance in the workplace, if not in the social sphere. Relations were cordial, if not warm. Italian peddlers sold their goods to blacks in the countryside, and in several cities Italians opened saloons that attracted a black clientele. Cunningham says that apparently the Italian newcomers “were not so sensitive about color that they could not begin at the bottom and work up. Their comparative lack of prejudice and their economic status fitted them for Populism, which was proposing that both whites and Negroes look with less prejudice at their mutual problem of making a living” (24-25). Shankman says evidence suggests that southern Italians did not immediately manifest signs of race prejudice. “Although Sicilians and African-Americans did not mix socially, there was relatively little friction between the two in Dixie’s sugar fields and plantations” (“Menacing Influx” 83).

This apparent lack of prejudice on the part of Italians toward blacks is in line with Mark Twain’s depiction of cordial Italian-black relations in Italy in The Innocents Abroad. It takes the form of an anecdote in which Twain’s narrator is again bemoaning his ignorance and ineptitude in the face of Italy’s “old masters” artists. The narrator’s

helplessness is contrasted with the cultivation and learning of his surprising Venetian guide -- a young American black who just happened to be the son of a South Carolina slave. "I could not bear to be ignorant before a cultivated Negro, the offspring of a South Carolina slave," the narrator says. "The guide I have spoken of is the only one we have had yet who knew anything." The young man's parents brought him to Venice as a child. He is fluent in English, French, Spanish, and Italian; "is a worshiper of art and thoroughly conversant with it"; has a passion for Venetian history; dresses better than the pilgrims, and is "daintily polite" (175). Having said that, the narrator concludes: "Negroes are deemed as good as white people, in Venice, and so this man feels no desire to go back to his native land. His judgment is correct" (175) In Louisiana, however, both Italians and blacks were deemed not as good as white people. If the two groups were inclined to have relations in the American South, the general contours of those relations show a tension between competition and cooperation. Some black leaders saw the Italian workers as an economic threat and fought back. By 1895 Booker T. Washington would use that very reason to argue against immigration. Whatever the relationship between blacks and Italians, it alarmed white supremacists who were trying to consolidate their power in Louisiana. "In the South, the newcomer's 'in-betweenness' seemed a double threat. He might endanger not only the purity of the white race but also its solidarity. . . ." (Higham Strangers 169).

The South sent mixed messages to the Italians. Some Southerners classed Italians with blacks because they did work that only blacks would do. The New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, describing the Sicilians accused of Hennessy's murder, referred to their "low, repulsive countenances," "brutal natures," and "slavery attire" -- a conflation of Italians and Negroes with epithets traditionally hurled at blacks. One locality tried to maintain the color line by barring Italians from white schools. Other communities reportedly lynched Italians for associating with blacks on terms of near equality and thereby violating the white man's code. Three Italians accused of murdering white native-born American were lynched in Hahnville, Louisiana, in August 1896. "If they were to be punished at all," explained the Hahnville *Times-Democrat*, 'they had to be punished extra-judicially, as their trial surely would surely prove a slip in the courts.' The lynchers received further justification for their action when the press reported that a large number of blacks, sympathizing with the Italian community, were present at the burial of the victims" (Mangione 212). The "large number" of blacks at the funeral raised white fears that Negroes would help the Italians to seek revenge (Cunningham 26, 32). Five more lynchings of Italians occurred in Tallulah, Louisiana, in 1899. The victims were Italian storekeepers who, unaware of racial prejudice, had aroused the resentment of the local whites by their friendly attitude toward blacks. However, it should be noted that some blacks took part in the Hahnville lynchings (Mangione 212).

Still, one historian argues that there was in fact potential for a Populist solidarity between Italians and blacks, but that the lynchings of Italians -- whites resorting to violence against whites in a move for white solidarity and white supremacy -- put an end to thoughts of camaraderie between the Italians and the blacks. The late 1880s and 1890s were dark days for the Southern Negro. Even as the South saw an upsurge of agrarian resentment, state after state was enacting disenfranchisement laws. The white conservatives' shameless manipulation of the black vote in opposition to the Farmers Alliances and Populists increased the Southern rural whites' determination to bar Negroes from public office. "The wrangle over disenfranchising Negroes in Louisiana left a lesson for the Italians. They had better adopt the customs, prejudices, and the way of life of white Louisiana as soon as possible. They must look with loathing upon everything that the native whites loathed. Once they did so, the Italians could gain acceptance among native whites, though not at first on a basis of complete equality" (Cunningham 25-26, 36). Much of the rationale for disenfranchising blacks argued that the move was necessary to eliminate political corruption and ensure clean government. Because the Negro couldn't vote intelligently, he must be disqualified as a way to eliminate bribery and other corruption. Many Northerners were sympathetic to the argument because they, too, saw political corruption as a burning issue. In the North, it was bloc voting by immigrants, not blacks, that was seen as the threat to good government. Concern over political corruption wasn't the only connection between North

and South during this period. The 1891 lynchings of the New Orleans Italians and the ensuing diplomatic conflict between the United States and Italy may have further isolated blacks, even while putting Italians on a par with them. According to one historian, the war fever sparked by the Italo-American crisis was fanned by those hoping to patch sectional differences and pave the road to reunion for Northern and Southern whites (Karlín, "Italo-American Incident" 244).

Certainly, as Sundquist says, Twain must have known about the New Orleans lynchings and their aftermath. The incident combined two subjects that Twain was interested in and knew quite well, New Orleans and lynching, with another subject, Italians, which he had encountered and written about in the travel book that made him famous and in many ways established him as a writer. As early as 1869 Twain was criticizing lynching among other atrocities committed against blacks. That year, in an article titled "Only a Nigger" for the *Buffalo Express*, he satirized the lynching of a black man in Memphis who was accused of raping a white woman. The black man was eventually declared innocent -- after he was hanged. Twain said the blunder would not be regretted as long as Southerners could still sleep at night after hanging, roasting and beating black men to death. Unless the atrocities led to insomnia, Twain said, the best way to preserve law and order and to nourish the "knightly hearts" of Southern gentlemen was to keep "the brand and the faggots in waiting" for other suspicious niggers (qtd. in Pettit 43). The following year, in another piece for the *Buffalo Express*, Twain attacked

incidents of racial violence both outside and inside the United States. In Panama, a “light-fingered gentleman of color” was sentenced to fourteen years of chain-gang labor for petty theft. When he tried to escape, he was rewarded with a hundred-and-fifty-pound anchor. The second incident, which took place in hometown Buffalo, involved the arrest of a slightly drunk, noisy Negro. When “Mr. Negro” didn’t step lively enough for the policeman, the officer coolly “persuaded him to go by jabbing his bayonet into the poor wretch’s head with all his force, and then as the blood streamed over his face, striking him on the skull with the barrel of his musket.” Twain adds: “I believe there was a darkey buried . . . the next day” (qtd. in Pettit 43). As Twain’s indignation grew in the 1880s and 1890s, he began collecting incidents for a book on lynching, with special emphasis on those that took place in his home state of Missouri (Pettit 135). Twain abominated the practice of lynching as an act of moral cowardice, which he dramatizes in the failed lynching of Colonel Sherburn in Huckleberry Finn. Although Sherburn, a Southern gentleman, cold-bloodedly kills the drunk old fool Boggs, Twain reserves most of his venom for the lynch mob, “a-whooping and raging like Injuns” as it came to exact justice from the colonel. Sherburn calls the lynchers’ manhood into question, says a “a mob without any *man* at the head of it is *beneath* pitifulness,” and concludes by telling his wouldbe killers: “Now the thing for *you* to do is to drop your tails and go home and crawl in a hole. If any real lynching’s going to be done it will be done in the dark, Southern



fashion; and when they come they'll bring their masks, and fetch a *man* along." (116-118).

At the time of the New Orleans lynchings in 1891 and during the writing of Pudd'nhead Wilson, lynchings were reaching epidemic proportions. More than one thousand-five hundred Negroes and whites were lynched in the 1890s, and another one hundred and forty-five more occurred in the first two years of the next century, prompting Twain to observe in September 1901, "In ten years this will be *habit*, on these terms." The most recent incident had occurred in southwest Missouri, Twain's "native" state. The citizens of Pierce City had lynched three Negroes, burned five homes, and driven thirty families into the woods. Outraged, Twain spent that summer at Saranac on two related projects. The first was an article, "The United States of Lyncherdom" (1901), intended for the *The North American Review* but not published until after Twain's death. Twain argues in the piece that the moral disease of lynching spreads through imitation and that it can only be fought by brave men taking a stand against the "Moral Cowardice" that pervades society. Making the same point that Colonel Sherburn makes to the Arkansas lynch mob, Twain says that "no mob has any sand in the presence of a man known to be splendidly brave. Besides, a lynching mob would *like* to be scattered, for of a certainty there are never ten men in it who would not prefer to be somewhere else---and would be, if they but had the courage to go" (The Writings 28: 245). Twain's second project was a proposed subscription-book historical anthology of lynching in America for

which he would write the introduction. He figured on including maybe three thousand lynchings in all, and one has to wonder whether the Hennessy lynchings, with eleven dead, wasn't high on Twain's list. Twain saw the book as both a tool for reform and a good commercial venture. "Nothing but such a book can rouse up the sheriffs to put down the mobs and the lynchings," he told publisher Frank Bliss. Additionally, "No book is so marketable as this one--the field is fresh, untrodden, and of the strongest interest" (qtd. in Kaplan 364). Later that year, Twain complained that the Southerners were up to their old tricks and urged a federal law banning the lynching of blacks on Christmas Day (Pettit 136). But Twain eventually accepted Bliss's advice and set the project aside as dangerous to the sales of his other works in the South. Twain conceded that if he undertook the project he would not have "even half a friend left" in the South" (qtd. in Pettit 136). Also setting aside "The United States of Lyncherdom," Twain said, "There is plenty of vitriol in it and that will keep it from spoiling" (qtd. in Kaplan 365).

How much more Twain knew about the contemporary racist/nativist climate in the South, particularly in Louisiana, in the late 1880s and early 1890s is open to debate. Twain had a close, sometimes bristly, friendship with the Southern writer George Washington Cable, who, we know, took an intense interest in social and political relations in his home state of Louisiana. Cable was keenly aware of issues related to race, and was deeply committed to political and economic equity for America's blacks. Like Twain, however, Cable also has invited charges of racism (Cleman 119) But it is obvious

that, as much as any white man and more than most, Cable championed the black man in the dark times of the turn of the century. When students suspected of having African ancestry were forcibly removed by angry whites from a New Orleans high school in 1875, Cable wrote an outraged letter, signed "A Southern White Man," to the New Orleans *Bulletin*, criticizing the act of segregation and in turn being roundly criticized by his fellow Southern men. In January 1885, he published in the *The Century* his famous essay, "The Freedman's Case in Equity," written in response to a U.S. Supreme Court decision that upheld the emerging pattern of segregation in the South. Southerners misread the piece as advocating intermarriage of whites and blacks, when in fact it was nothing more or less than a demand for full civil equality for the Negro. Southerners vilified Cable as a traitor to his homeland, and he soon left the South for Northampton, Massachusetts. "At the peak of Cable's friendship with Clemens, no man was more hated in the South" (Pettit 131). Interestingly, Cable's article for *The Century* was part of a blockbuster issue that also featured an installment of Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Four years later, in a short article in the *Chicago America* titled "What Makes the Color Line?," Cable attacked the idea that there was any natural, instinctive antagonism between the white and black races (Rubin 204). Cable also attacked in speeches Southern moves to disenfranchise the blacks. He incorporated his talks into an address, "The Southern Struggle for Pure Government," on Washington's Birthday in 1890 in Boston. Cable denied that blacks neither knew nor cared about good government and blamed the

failure of Reconstruction governments on recalcitrant, aggressive whites. Although the majority of Negroes in the South remained illiterate, reckless, and degraded, Cable said, these same arguments against giving the Negro the vote had been wrongly applied barely a century ago against millions of white men. They were based, he said, “on the same specious assumption, that the ignorant, unintelligent, and unmoneyed man is virtually in all cases dangerous to society and government, and most dangerous when invested with civil and political liberty (qtd. in Rubin 207). Ultimately, Cable would speak out in favor of renewed Federal intervention in the South, in essence lending his support to the so-called “Force Bill” if the South continued to refuse civil rights to Negroes (210). The bill would have allowed federal supervision and intervention in Southern election districts where black voters were being unfairly disqualified. The measure was introduced by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, the same legislator who sought to impose a literacy test on immigrants seeking to enter the United States. The “Force Bill” never made it out of the Senate, but Lodge would eventually be more successful with his immigrant literacy test. Finally, in 1892, Cable would write several more essays on the Negro in the South, but with those works he ended his public agitation of the Negro question (211).

Cable also incorporated race issue into his fiction. In The Grandissimes (1880), he explored Louisiana’s shifting color lines during the transition from Spanish/French colonial rule to American law and custom in the early nineteenth century. As a student of race issues and a keen observer of race mixing in the Creole Louisiana, Cable most likely

would have been alert not only to the black question but to the question of new immigrants toward the end of the century. In his concern with the Negro, Cable couldn't help but notice the Italian next to the black on the Bayou State's landscape. A few immigrants, among them an Italian, appear in Cable's novel, Dr. Sevier (1884), which chronicles the fortunes of a young couple settling in New Orleans with the Civil War looming on the horizon. "Consistent with Cable's focus on the economic developments immediately before and after the Civil War, the more important minor characters are German, Italian, and Irish immigrants, each narrowly stereotyped." Among them are a resourceful Italian named Raphael Ristofalo, whose courtship of a good-hearted Irish housekeeper is depicted with "a good deal of comic condescension" (Cleman 108). Biographer John Cleman concludes that in all Cable's writing he is "clearly ethnocentric, stereotyping and in some cases denigrating" immigrants, Native Americans and Catholics, while "placing Protestant Anglo-Saxon values and culture above all others." At the same time, Cleman argues, Cable implicitly eliminates the boundaries of race in his treatment of individuals. "Hence he is skeptical of the existence of a natural 'race instinct,' but even allowing its existence, he derides the use of instinct for moral authority and points out that those who believe in a race instinct should trust it to keep the races apart without the aid of law" (120-121). Much of that assessment, as we will see, could be applied to Mark Twain.

During the 1880s Twain spent a fair amount of time with Cable. In late April and early May 1882, Cable hosted Twain and Joel Chandler Harris in his home city of New Orleans. Cable would also help with the New Orleans chapters of Twain's Life on the Mississippi. As an ex-Confederate who would soon go into Northern exile for his heretical beliefs, Cable "was in an excellent position to give Clemens an up-to-date liberal view of conditions in the postbellum South" (Pettit 131). In 1884, Cable visited Twain in Hartford. The two writers "had in common a passionate interest in the shadings of spoken vernacular, a histrionic talent, a deep-grained but liberalized Southernness, and an outspoken humanitarianism" (Kaplan 254). They talked for hours, much of the time discussing race relations, a "deep subject" on which Twain proclaimed Cable "a marvellous talker." Twain thought that the fellow southern man Cable had developed a refined perspective on race issues (Hoffman 308). Later, the two were on the road together during a successful reading tour that took them to some seventy cities from November 1884 through February 1885. Twain and Cable were billed the "Twins of Genius" (reason enough, along with their contrasting appearances and personalities, for one critic to read Pudd'nhead Wilson's Italian twins as representative of Cable and Twain). Despite the frictions of the tour and their sometimes strained friendship, Twain had great admiration for Cable, both as a writer and a social thinker. "The differences between the men---Cable religious, delicate, refined; Mark Twain heretical, ill-kempt, and unpredictable---faded in the light of the fundamental twinship they presented on the

thorny issue of race” (Hoffman 317). In a letter to his wife, Livy, Twain wrote, “Cable is a great man” whose “greatness will be recognized” if he continued to fight for the Negro (Kaplan 265). Twain was less impressed with Cable’s religiosity. “Though Cable did not persuade Sam to accept religion---Cable’s social consciousness relied on his belief in each person’s equal access to God’s grace---he did convert him to a faith in the fundamental equality of all people” (Hoffman 314). During the reading tour with Cable, in the same month that saw the publication of Huckleberry Finn, Twain recorded in his notebook the germ for a story set a century into the future: “America in 1985. (Negro supremacy---the whites under foot.)” (Notebooks 3: 88). In 1885, as Twain would have seen, other American writers were figuratively beginning to compose their own story, “America in 1985. (Foreign supremacy---the Anglo-Saxon under foot.”).

Twain also would have been exposed to the attitudes of William Dean Howells concerning Italians, immigrants and anarchists. On November 18, 1878, in a letter to Howells, Twain touched on the subject of blacks and immigrants in reference to something that had appeared in *Harper’s*. A writer, responding to a previous article that had extolled education as the remedy for dangerous tendencies in American life, had proposed as two other remedies, disenfranchising blacks and stopping immigration, thereby linking blacks and immigrants as threats to America. Writing to Howells, Twain argued that the man had “said a mighty sound and sensible thing” (Twain-Howells Letters 1: 241). However, as the editors of the Twain-Howells letters say, it is unlikely

that Twain entirely meant what he wrote. At this stage in his life he was not hostile toward Negroes or, apparently, toward foreigners. In a letter to Howells five months later, on April 5, 1879, Twain opposes shutting off immigration of Chinese. "I knew the President would veto that infamous Chinese bill," Twain writes, referring to a move that would have barred shipmasters from bringing to America more than fifteen Chinese at any one time (1: 262). Seven years earlier, in the essay "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy," Twain had vented his indignation at the mistreatment of the Chinese in California. The satirical piece deals with an real incident in which a well-dressed American boy stoned a Chinaman on his way to church. Twain criticizes the state for imposing a mining tax on John the Mongol foreigner, while letting Patrick the Celtic foreigner dig for free (Complete Essays 7). He speaks of the Pacific coast's system of justice where the typical response to any secret, mysterious crime was: "'Let justice be done, though the heavens fall,' and go straightaway and swing a Chinaman" -- yet another Twainian reference to lynching. Referring to the Chinese as "humble strangers," Twain protests that the ten-dollar vaccination for entering Chinese was the equivalent of a "disabling admission fee" imposed on "the poor and oppressed who fly to our shelter," the "asylum for the poor and the oppressed of all nations" created by the Constitution (8). Also, two years earlier, Twain had written for *The Galaxy* an epistolary essay from a hopeful Chinese immigrant shamefully abused in San Francisco ("Goldsmith's Friend Abroad Again").



Despite his attacks on racial prejudice and nativism, Twain didn't hold much hope for improvement. We see this in his 1899 essay, "Concerning the Jews," which offers a point-by-point defense of that oppressed group. In the essay, Twain disclaims any prejudice. "I am quite sure that (bar one) I have no race prejudices, and I think I have no color prejudices nor caste prejudices nor creed prejudices," he writes. "Indeed, I know it. I can stand any society. All that I care to know is that a man is a human being---that is enough for me; he can't be any worse" (Complete Essays 236). In asserting his own blindness with regard to color, race, class and religion, Twain is dissociating himself from Americans who at this time were increasingly dividing humankind according to racial differences. On one hand this might be seen as substantiating his claim that the Pudd'nhead Wilson twins' Italianness was of no account. However, for the race-conscious Americans of the period that Twain is criticizing, the fact that the twins are Italian is of great importance. In his 1899 essay, Twain says that although religious persecution of the Jews has ended, race prejudice against the group would continue. "I suppose the race prejudice cannot be removed; but he can stand that; it is no particular matter. By his make and ways he is substantially a foreigner wherever he may be, and even the angels dislike a foreigner." Twain uses the term foreigner in the German sense to mean stranger (and both terms, as we shall see, are applied to the Italian twins in Pudd'nhead Wilson). "The German dictionary seems to make no distinction between a stranger and a foreigner; in its view a stranger *is* a foreigner--a sound position, I think,"

Twain continues, before directly addressing the Jews. “You will always be by ways and habits and predilections substantially strangers--foreigners--wherever you are, and that will probably keep the race prejudice against you alive” (248). Here Twain is underscoring the intensity of the period’s race thinking, even while acknowledging the cultural and social differences that were often being equated with racial differences. And it should be remembered that at this time, not only Jews but Italians were being seen as the most pervasive and the most foreign of the European new immigrant groups who were second only to the Chinese as targets of nativism.

Twain also greatly admired two of Howells’s books that dealt with Italians: the travel book Venetian Life and the novel of New York, A Hazard of New Fortunes. In a 1906 essay on Howells, Twain says of Venetian Life (1866), “I read his Venetian Days (sic) about forty years ago. I compare it with his paper on Machiavelli in a late number of Harper’s, and I cannot find that his English has suffered any impairment” (Complete Essays 400). Twain must have also been struck by the book’s subject matter and language, and with its generally sympathetic account of the Italians. Although Howells’s relationship with the Italians in Italy was entirely different from that of Twain’s narrator in The Innocents Abroad, the young Mark Twain couldn’t help but come away from Venetian Life with a greater appreciation for Italy and its people. Twain also praised Howells’s A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890), calling it “a great book” because of the “high art by which it is made to preach its great sermon” (Twain-Howells Letters 2:579).

In A Hazard of New Fortunes, Twain would have encountered numerous Italian immigrants as seen through the eyes of Basil and Isabel March, the transplanted Bostonians who venture through polyglot New York City in the 1880s, where Basil has taken an editing job with a new magazine. Early in their apartment hunting, they walk over to the area of Washington Square. “The *primo tenore* statue of Garibaldi had not yet taken possession of the place in the name of Latin progress,” but the Marches “met the familiar picturesque raggedness of southern Europe with the old kindly illusion that somehow it existed for their appreciation and that it found adequate compensation for poverty in this” (48). Basil March indulges his liberal sympathies by “letting a little Neapolitan put a superfluous shine on his boots,” while he and his wife chat in desultory fashion about the relative merits of the surroundings. Their conversation wanders “with equal esteem to the old-fashioned American respectability which keeps the north side of the square in vast mansions of red brick, and the international shabbiness which has invaded the southern border, and broken it up into lodging houses, shops, beer, gardens, and studios” (48). Later, when the house-hunting has lost its novelty, they find themselves being driven through a tenement district -- “not the abode of the extremest poverty, but of a poverty as hopeless as any in the world.” At one point in their lives, the Marches “would have taken a purely aesthetic view of the facts as they glimpse them in this street of tenement houses, when they would have contended themselves with saying that it was as picturesque as a street in Naples or Florence and with wondering why

nobody came to paint it." But the odor makes Isabel pull up the window of their coupe and demand: "Why does he take us through such a disgusting street?" Basil responds with "dreamy irony" that maybe the driver is a "philanthropist" who wants the Marches to respond to the discomfort of the poor. Basil suggests that the tenement dwellers don't seem to mind the hopelessness of their situation and that he has "never seen a jollier crowd anywhere in New York." Although Isabel seems to have had problems aestheticizing the scene, she now proposes that Basil do that very thing, suggesting that her husband "work some of these New York sights up" for the magazine," something Basil says he has already considered (56-57).

But if Basil never does write about these poor, picturesque, mostly immigrant quarters, he ruminates about them. "Now and then he had found himself in a car mostly filled with Neapolitans from the constructions far up the line, where he had read that they are worked and fed and housed like beasts; and listening to the jargon of their unintelligible dialect, he had occasion for pensive questions within himself as to what notion these poor animals formed of a free republic from their experience of life under its conditions; and whether they found them practically very different from those of the immemorial brigandage and enforced complicity with rapine under which they had been born." March comments on the changing face of the city: the Irish were presumed to be in control, but observers couldn't help but see "the numerical subordination of the dominant race" of Celts by the Germanic, Slavonic, Pelagic and Mongolian stocks." The

Slav's and the Chinese's facial features and "cue-filleted skulls," the German's "blond dullness," the Scandinavian's "cold quiet," and the Italian's "furtive glitter" all "were aspects that he identified and that gave him abundant suggestions for the personal histories he constructed, and for the more public-spirited reveries in which he dealt with the future economy of our heterogenous commonwealth." But, March "did not take much trouble" thinking about the private individual lives of the immigrants. "These were the matters of his waking dreams as he stared hard at them, while the train raced further into the gay ugliness---the shapeless, graceless, reckless picturesqueness of the Bowery" (158-159).

Usually the Marches are little more than tourists among the city's immigrants, enjoying their foreigners' foreignness and appropriating the immigrant culture, perhaps as a way to distance themselves from, or in some way to contain, what Amy Kaplan calls the "unreal city" of New York. They spend much time and money in an Italian grocery, "where they found all the patriotic comestibles and potables and renewed their faded Italian with the friendly family in charge" (256). This is a far cry from Riis's descriptions of disgusting Italian food in How the Other Half Lives or the Italian's greasy ladle that James finds so revolting in The American Scene. The Marches go to ethnic restaurants, including Italian ones, and to get away from it all and from themselves, they often sit "among the infants and dotards of Latin extraction in Washington Square, safe from all who ever knew them . . ." Here, "The small Italian children raced up and down the

asphalt paths, playing American games of tag and hide-and-whoop . . ." (257). On Sundays, Basil March liked walking around nearby Greenwich Village. The area still had for him "a lingering quality of pure Americanism," but "[t]he rear of the tenement houses showed him the picturesqueness of clotheslines fluttering far aloft, as in Florence; and the new apartment houses, breaking the old skyline with their towering stories, implied a life as alien to the American manner as anything in continental Europe." In fact, Greenwich Village's prevailing faces and tongues are foreign, "but no longer German or even Irish tongues or faces." Now they are Italian.

The eyes and earrings of Italians twinkled in and out of the alleyways and basements, and they seemed to abound even in the streets, where long ranks of trucks drawn up in Sunday rest along the curbstones suggested the presence of a race of sturdier strength than theirs. March liked the swarthy, strange visages; he found nothing menacing for the future in them; for wickedness he had to satisfy himself as he could with the sneering, insolent, clean-shaven mug of some rare American of the b'hoy type, now almost as extinct in New York as the dodo or the volunteer fireman. (259)

Here, too, we have a marked contrast to Riis's Italians, who spend their Sabbath gambling, arguing and often resorting to intramural violence.

In reading A Hazard of New Fortunes, Twain would have read about Italians who were becoming more and more numerous in New York City. They are raggedly picturesque and seemingly content with their rather mean lives in the tenement districts, images that are similar to, if not as stark as, the ones we get in Riis's How the Other Half Lives, published the same year as A Hazard of New Fortunes. But while Riis sought to

shock, titillate and ultimately reassure, Basil March thinks more of working up the sights “very nicely,” as his wife suggests, for a feature not unlike a long touristic piece, “The Italians of New York,” which appeared in the January 1888 *The Cosmopolitan*. These Italians might stink, may be mildly disturbing in their foreignness, and can be construed as the “Other,” but they offer no real menace, while providing the usual picturesque charm. Like James’s and Twain’s *contadinos* in Italy, Basil March’s Italians in New York are figures for aesthetic treatment. Basil, like Howells himself, is broadly sympathetic toward the Italians and other new immigrant groups, but he doesn’t stop long to examine the cause of the Italians’ condition, as Howells the American consul did in Venetian Life. Basil’s is essentially a touristic approach to the Italians/immigrants, elements of which we have seen in Riis and Steiner. Riis and Basil March see the Italians/immigrants as both a problem and a picturesque sight, but for Riis the problem predominates, while Basil subordinates the problem to the picturesque. Basil is drawn not only to their picturesqueness, but to their energy, their gaiety, and their freedom from the strictures of respectability. He generally sees more of the Italian’s positive attributes than does Riis. Still, Basil March wonders vaguely what effect the Italians and other immigrant groups will have on “the economy of our heterogenous commonwealth.” However, he sees Italian children playing American games, which seems to represent an equally vague sense that these groups will be assimilated.

The true menace in A Hazard of New Fortunes comes from the old German immigrant Berthold Lindau and others, immigrant and native-born, who threaten labor violence and organized social revolt, threats that bothered many Americans, among them *The Century's* Richard Watson Gilder and his contributor, the Reverend Theodore Munger of Hartford. And yet, Howells's Lindau exposes New York and America as a social battle ground, giving the lie to America's rhetoric of unity when he declares, "What iss Amerigan? Dere iss no Ameriga anymore!" (276). March's dreaminess with regard to the immigrant question may indicate that in the 1880s, for some people, the immigrant question hadn't yet turned into the immigrant problem. Whatever the cause, March's sentimental and superficial reaction to what he sees stands in contrast with Howells's more penetrating treatment of the Italian in his travel book, Venetian Life, which is one of the few accounts of the nineteenth century that puts the Italian's character and conditions in a historical, political, and sociological context. It is hard to imagine that Howells's interest in and perceptiveness about the Italian in Italy wouldn't have continued with the Italian in America. More likely, Howells is critiquing the tendency of Basil March and other Americans to aestheticize and sentimentalize the Italian in America. In broad contours, Howells seems to reverse the experience of Henry James, who seemed content to aestheticize the Italian in Italy, but, unlike Basil March, is much more preoccupied with problems posed by the new immigrants in America. Of course, to James, early 1900s New York and Boston were much more alien than Howell's/Basil's



1880s New York. If Lindau forces “the other half” into America’s class consciousness in the 1880s, there to be picked up and documented by Jacob Riis, the growing new immigrant presence in 1890s will force “the other half” into America’s racial/national consciousness, there to be examined by Henry James in The American Scene. Although A Hazard of New Fortunes presents the main conflict as one between socio-economic classes, between producers and laborers, between the “haves” and the “have-nots,” it touches on the new immigration as an emerging problem. And Twain, as an admirer of the book, couldn’t have failed to notice that.

The connection between Twain and Howells extends beyond Venetian Life and A Hazard of New Fortunes. Both men “were immensely stirred by the social and political ferment of the day --- the fall of the Brazilian monarchy, the growth of the Knights of Labor, the C.B.&Q. railroad strike, and the efforts of Stepniak, the Russian Nihilist, to gain American support in dethroning the Czar” (Henry Nash Smith and William M. Gibson, Twain-Howells Letters 2: 579). During the late 1880s, both writers were attracted to theoretical socialism. Howells harbored no illusions here, writing to his father in 1890 that he and Mark Twain were “theoretical socialists, and practical aristocrats.” However, he added: “[I]t is a comfort to be right theoretically, and to be ashamed of one’s self practically” (Selected Letters 3: 271). Howells’ passion for Tolstoy (a passion shared by Edward Steiner and Jane Addams) now reached its peak. Twain, meanwhile, was attracted to Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward 2000-1887 (1888), which he

called "the latest and best of all Bibles" (Twain-Howells Letters 2: 579). Howells never went as far as affiliating permanently with the American section of the Socialist Labor Party, finding instead his soulmates in Tolstoy and the Christian Socialists. However, he took an extreme interest in the Haymarket Riots of May 1886 and was a staunch crusader on behalf of the anarchists who were convicted of inciting the incident. Writing to the New York lawyer who was handling the appeal to the Supreme Court, Howells says the men were not guilty of murder, "or of anything but their opinions" (Selected Letters 3:197). When the Supreme Court upheld the convictions in November 1887, Howells petitioned the governor of Illinois for clemency and wrote a letter to the New York *Tribune* in which he urged others to join in the plea. The day after four of the anarchists were hanged on November 11, Howells wrote an angry screed to the *Tribune*, which, along with other newspaper and magazines, had been attacking him by name and by implication for his defense of the anarchists. Saying he had borne with patience being called an "imbecile and bad citizen," he now asked the paper to have some patience with him. There follows a long letter in which Howells refers to the hangings as a "political execution" of men who died for their opinion's sake. It was, Howells says, a "perversion of law" which could just as well have been used against William Lloyd Garrison, Emerson, Thoreau and others who encouraged the war against slavery. "We have committed an atrocious and irreparable wrong," Howells wrote. "We have been undergoing one of those spasms of paroxysmal righteousness to which our Anglo-Saxon

race is peculiarly subject, and in which, let us hope, we are not more responsible for our actions than the victim of *petit mal*” (Selected Letters 201). Although the *Tribune* may have refused to print the letter, Howells probably never sent it, according to the editors of Howells’s Selected Letters (Robert C. Leitz III, Selected Letters 205).

The editors of the Howells-Twain letters say there is no direct evidence that Twain shared Howells’s intense interest in the Haymarket Riots of May 1886 or his concern with the fate of the anarchists (Henry Nash Smith and William M. Gibson 2:581). However, in March 1888 Twain received from Howells and presumably read pamphlets about the Haymarket trial. On March 31, Twain wrote to Howells: “I’ll return the Anarchist pamphlets by & by. But if you should need them, hurry me up” (2: 597). Henry Nash Smith and William M. Gibson speculate that two of the pamphlets may have been William M. Salter’s Cure for Anarchy and a pamphlet by the Rev. John C. Kimball, pastor of the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Twain’s hometown of Hartford (2:599). Salter, a Unitarian minister and lecturer of the Chicago Ethical Society, had in 1887 published a lecture, “What Shall Be Done with the Anarchists,” in which he concluded “that the anarchists were tried for murder and are to be hanged for anarchy” (qtd. in Selected Letters 199). Howells had sent that paper to John Greenleaf Whittier in an unsuccessful attempt to enlist him to the cause. Kimball, meanwhile, in late 1887 had preached a “clemency” sermon in which he compared the hanging of the Haymarket anarchists to the crucifixion of Christ, and was roundly criticized by some in Hartford. In

a letter to Twain on April 5, 1888, Howells says, "By the way have you seen Rev. Kimball yet? When you do, give him my regards" (Twain-Howells Letters 2: 599). In all probability, Twain wasn't nearly as committed as Howells to the cause of the anarchists. However, he must have had an interest in the Haymarket events, what John Higham calls the defining moment in late nineteenth-century nativism. A few years earlier Twain jotted down in his notebook: "Club Subject. Anarchists --- the formidable feature of it is organization --- in *that* is strength -- no underlying principle needed" (Notebooks 3:92).

Twain also had some more first-hand experience of the Italian immigrant in the Northeast. He lived briefly around New York State (New York City, Buffalo and Elmira), before beginning a twenty-one year residence in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1871. His publishing company, Webster and Company, eventually had offices on New York's Union Square, not far from the Lower East Side which was filling up to bursting with new immigrants. In fact, one of the biggest coups for his fledgling publishing company was Father Bernard O'Reilly's Life of Pope Leo XIII, which the publisher trumpeted as "the greatest book of the age," written with the Pope's "Encouragement, Approbation, and Blessing" (Kaplan 289). Although Twain left the United States in June 1891 and lived in Europe for most of the next decade, he continued to maintain his house in Hartford for a while. He made numerous trips back to the United States, usually to New York City, in frantic attempts to shore up his troubled business interests, which at this

time encompassed his refractory writing, his unstable publishing company, and his maddening major investment in the printer's holy grail, the Paige typesetter.

Although Twain lived but briefly in New York City and felt it was too big a city, he had extensive ties with it. Twain had moved to the city in 1867. As a correspondent for the *Alta California*, he came "as a miner staking out a claim and beginning to work at it" (Kaplan 20). During this time, Twain's claim to fame was found in journalism, humor, entertainment and popular interest. In search of copy for the San Francisco newspaper, he visited the Blind Asylum, Bible House, the A.S.P.C.A., the Academy of Design, and Central Park. He also made a tour of the Five Points and the city's worst slums, areas that would figure so heavily in Jacob Riis's career. Twain's biggest coup in New York City, a public lecture on the Sandwich Islands, survived a challenge from an Italian actress and America's continuing mania for things Italian. A friend of Twain had promoted the Sandwich Islands lecture and hired out the Great Hall at Cooper Union, only to learn that the scheduled date was loaded with stiff competition for the city's entertainment dollar. Booked at competing halls that same May 6, 1867, were U.S. Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax; a troupe of Japanese acrobats, jugglers and contortionists; and the Italian tragedienne, Adelaide Ristori. The Italian actress, despite a repertory that was exclusively in her native tongue, had filled houses across the country, which Twain found amazing. "It beats me entirely," Twain confessed; "I believe the newspapers can do anything now" (qtd. in Kaplan 33). That evening Ristori was giving her farewell

performance, and Twain must have wondered if he could compete in the face of his countrymen's Italophilia. We are reminded here of Pudd'nhead Wilson's Italian twins and how they charmed and dazzled the townsfolk of Dawson's Landing with their prodigious musical talents.

Despite Twain's numerous contacts with the sociological, political and economic conditions of American blacks and foreigners, at least one critic argues that Twain took little or no interest in those matters. "He seems to have learned little or nothing of the problems of class and caste in the postwar South from his return to the Mississippi, from Cable, from Edward King's 'The Great South' series in *Scribner's Monthly Magazine*, or from the numerous sociologically oriented articles on the New South and 'the Negro Question' that appeared in northern periodicals in the late 1870s and early 1880s," Guy Cardwell writes, entirely forgetting any culturally-oriented discourse related to blacks and immigrants. "He made no effort in his notebooks to set down a taxonomy of southern society or to develop a democratic ethos. He had almost nothing to say about poor-whites, yeomen, the urban middle class, intellectuals, or social forces" (194, 199). Or, Cardwell might have added, about immigrants in general and Italian immigrants in particular. However, Cardwell himself notes that Twain read Francis Galton's work on fingerprinting while writing Pudd'nhead Wilson, and also may have read some of Galton's earlier writings on eugenics. "He could hardly have avoided knowing what Galton and other eugenicists had to say about race and evolution; and he must have read

articles on the avoidance or containment of bad traits. The periodical literature on inherited capacities usually reinforced notions concerning the inferiority of blacks, Indians, Jews, and South Europeans” (193) -- all of them groups about whom Twain had written in sketches, novels and travel writings.

Twain himself was interested in the idea of national/racial types, as we have seen from his notebooks, where, in the 1880s, he attached not only human traits but animal personae to Americans and various European peoples. Yet, by the 1890s, when he was struggling with Pudd'nhead Wilson and Italian twins, he seemed to be turning his back on the tendency to categorize different peoples. Now, we see Twain satirizing this approach to race in an essay criticizing the French novelist, critic and journalist Paul Bourget, who coincidentally was a very close friend of Henry James. Bourget had written about Americans, and Twain responded with his 1895 essay, “What Paul Bourget Thinks of Us,” in which the Frenchman is compared to a specimen-collecting naturalist who groups, subdivides and labels for study different species. It’s “a pleasant System,” Twain writes, “but subject to error”-- especially when applied to humans. “The Observer of Peoples has to be a Classifier, a Grouper, a Deducer, a Generalizer, a Psychologizer; and, first and last, a Thinker.” At home, among his own people, this “Observer of Peoples” may prove competent to the task, Twain suggests. “But history has shown that when he is abroad observing unfamiliar peoples the chances are heavily against him. He is then a naturalist observing a bug, with no more than a naturalist’s chance of being able to tell

the bug anything new about itself, and no more than a naturalist's chance of being able to teach it any new ways which it will prefer to its own" (Complete Essays 167). Obviously, this passage resonates with anti-imperialist sentiment. Additionally, it is Twain trying to subvert a segregationist, differentiating approach to nationality/race that was currently popular and showing signs of being employed in the service of racism and race nativism. It was an approach that Riis (and Steiner also) criticized but often employed. Needless to say Twain himself engaged in that same type of classifying, grouping, deducing, generalizing, psychologizing, and thinking about foreign peoples not only in his travel books, but also in his other writings. However, while many commentators saw racial differences as immutable, impervious to the influences of education, religion, and environment, and while many commentators arranged races/nationalities according to hierarchical rankings, Twain, like Cable, saw the shortcomings and the perils of such approaches to humankind.

As Shelley Fisher Fishkin argues, Twain rejected racial determinism and the hierarchy of race/color, even if he didn't launch full frontal attacks on racism in the manner of peers such as George Washington Cable. Fishkin cites a passage (ultimately deleted) from Pudd'nhead Wilson which shows that Twain went further than his white contemporaries, including Cable, in imaginatively subverting those racial beliefs. In this passage, the mulatto Tom ruminates over the realization that he is little more than a piece of property because of his 1/32-part black blood. These few paragraphs of pondering



express the notion that although human beings have varying degrees of virtue and talent, race itself is irrelevant. Fishkin also cites an unpublished sketch, probably dating from the 1890s, that shows Twain again parodying the racial discourse of the day. In this fantasy, "The Quarrel in the Strong-Box," different denominations of money, which represent the hierarchy of color (and I would add, race/nationality), get into a nasty dispute over "matters of right & privilege." The matter ends up in court, where it is resolved by a judge. The jurist asserts that despite differences in physical and intellectual attributes, denomination (e.g. color/race) doesn't matter, for all denominations, the "Copper" as well as the "Thousand Dollar Bond," earn the same interest rate. I very much agree with Fishkin when she says that although Twain's writings on race are complex and ambiguous, it is untenable to conclude, along with Cardwell, that Twain assumed a natural racial hierarchy or the biological inferiority of blacks -- or for that matter the biological inferiority of other non-Anglo-Saxon races (Was Huck Black 122-126). As the product of a slave culture, Mark Twain by training and custom probably grew up believing that skin color differences equated with caste and fundamental rights, but he certainly had begun to question those beliefs by the time he wrote Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. As Andrew Hoffman says, few subjects energized Twain more than outrage over injustice. "His indictments of politicians who betrayed the public trust and his defense of oppressed minorities vitally informed his vision" (290). Hoffman says that by the 1880s, Twain had a confirmed faith in human equality and a growing progressive

belief in the effects of training (340). Mark Twain may have alternately loved and loathed the human race, but ultimately he seemed to believe in its essential unity as a brotherhood of man, a faith that both Riis and Steiner, if not Henry James, professed.

It can be strongly argued, then, that in the early 1890s, blacks, Italians and Italian immigrants, and lynching in one form or another were very much in/on Twain's mind, and that consequently they consciously or subconsciously helped shape, admittedly in sometimes contradictory, unresolvable ways, Twain's writing of Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins. Lynching is but one link that ties together Twain's tragedy and farce -- the two stories he claims had "no connection between them, no interdependence, no kinship" (Pudd'nhead Wilson 170). In the short tale Those Extraordinary Twins, the Siamese twins Angelo and Luigi are in fact lynched, hanged from a tree. Pudd'nhead Wilson, the novel, ultimately accords them a happier fate, but for a time the specter of lynching hangs over their now separate heads and bodies. How are we to read all this stuff about lynching, which, I will argue, is related to another American blood sport, dueling? Is this just Twain having some grim fun? To some extent, yes. But seeing only parody and burlesque closes off other interesting avenues.

An example: Murial B. Williams sees the twins as little more than an Italian Duke and the Dauphin who parody romantic notions of Italy and serve as sham counterparts to the equally pretentious First Families of Dawson's Landing -- Twain having a go at both

Old World and New World aristocratic pretensions. She reads Angelo's preposterous life story of oppression and exile as nothing more than two confidence men playing their game with the local yokels. Williams offers as proof Pudd'nhead Wilson's chronology, which purportedly shows that Angelo is lying about the alleged European war that supposedly destroyed the twins' noble family fortunes (42-43). According to this chronology, the twins arrive in Dawson's Landing in 1853, claim they are twenty-two years old, and date their misfortunes to the age of ten, when their father was on the losing side of a war that left the family paupers and exiles in Germany. That would make 1839 the year of the war. Angelo's tale, told to a rapt audience of locals, certainly has all the hallmarks of parody and satire, but read in another way it simply relates, albeit in inflated language, the lamentable Italian history of war, foreign domination, degradation, and immigration. Twice Angelo speaks of his and Luigi's "slavery" when forced to work as freak attractions in a cheap museum in Berlin to pay off their parents' debts (28). If we look beyond parody, we see that the twin's "slavery" under foreign powers does indeed connect to Italy's "slavery" under foreign (and internal) oppression, which in turn has parallels to the American Colonies' "slavery" under Britain and the slavery of blacks under white America.

This type of slavery discourse would have been available as early as the late 1840s, when Samuel Clemens was just entering his teenage years in Missouri. Margaret Fuller, in her dispatches from Italy for Horace Greeley's *New-York Tribune*, specifically

links America's "horrible cancer of Slavery," and the "wicked" Mexican-American War it caused, to the foreign oppression of European peoples such as the Italians and Poles. "I listen to the same arguments against the emancipation of Italy, that are used against the emancipation of our blacks; the same arguments in favor of the spoliation of Poland as for the conquest of Mexico" (165). Fuller wrote of the corrupting influence on Italy of its invasions, "first of the Goths, then of trampling emperors and kings, then of sightseeing foreigners," which, along with "bloody tyranny" and "incubus of priestcraft," helped turn Italians from "a sincere, hopeful, and fruitful life." Though much corrupted, the Italians are a "fine race," Fuller says. (169). When Italians revolted against their Hapsburg and Bourbon rulers in 1848, Fuller, her editor Greeley, and large segments of the American population rallied behind the revolutionaries. In editorials, Greeley described the struggle as one of liberty fighting tyranny and despotism, the same images that dominated American discourse during the American revolution. Jane Addams' father was typical of his class in his devotion to the Italian nationalist, "Joseph" Mazzini. Many Americans were similarly enthusiastic when the Italians successfully threw off foreign rule and achieved unification during the Risorgimento of the 1860s. Karl Marx wrote in the *New-York Tribune* in May 1860 that "in all of human history no country or no people have suffered such terrible slavery, conquest and foreign oppression and no people have struggled so strenuously for their emancipation as Sicily and Sicilians' (qtd. in Mangione 58). William Dean Howells, while in Venice from 1862-1865, when the Veneto region

was still under Austrian rule, wrote of the “slavery” of the Venetians in his Venetian Life, a book Twain admired. “The Venetians desire now, and first of all things, Liberty, knowing that in slavery men can learn no virtues; and I think them fit, with all their errors and defects, to be free now, because men are never fit to be slaves” (292). The linking of Italians and slavery assumed a new form after boatloads of Italian laborers began arriving in America in the 1880s. As has been noted, by 1893, just about the time Twain would be writing Pudd’nhead Wilson, *The Forum* would run an article titled, “Italian Immigrants and Their Enslavement,” which featured not only metaphorical but literal examples of Italian immigrants enslaved in America.

Angelo’s tale of enslavement, woe and emigration -- with its talk of friendless strangers experiencing poverty and hardship -- also takes on a new light if we juxtapose it with a passage Twain wrote earlier in The Innocents Abroad, where the narrator imagines for himself a series of personal transformations in which he tries on different racial/national roles. The narrator begins with the conventional complaint of the travel writer who feels not only the anxiety of influence from earlier travel writers, but also labors under the dismal burden of having to react to and write about places and sites already picked over by countless earlier cultural pilgrims to Europe. In this case, Twain’s narrator is trying to deal with Rome, a worn-out destination if ever there was one for Americans of the nineteenth century. “What can I discover? Nothing. Nothing whatsoever. One charm of travel dies here,” the narrator laments. There’s hope, however,

and the narrator immediately latches onto it. "But if I were only a Roman!" he imagines. "If, added to my own, I could be gifted with modern Roman sloth, modern Roman superstition, and modern Roman boundlessness of ignorance, what bewildering worlds of unsuspected wonder I would discover! Ah, if only I were an inhabitant of the Campagna five and twenty miles from Rome? *Then I would travel*" (195).

However, becoming a Roman, and acquiring the Roman's attractive sloth, superstition, and ignorance, is but a transitional identity. Soon the narrator is imagining and impersonating a plucky Italian immigrant/discoverer from the rural Campagna. "*I would go to America, and see, and learn, and return to the Campagna and stand before my countrymen an illustrious discoverer*" (195). This assumed character's ramblings on the New World serve to lampoon both Italy and the United States, the Italians as well as the Americans, but underneath all the fun it captures, in sympathetic fashion, some of the wonders and tensions of the immigrant experience. The immigrant/discoverer says that while it is the Americans whose dress is "laughably grotesque" and "fantastic," it is *they* who laughed "at *my* costume" (196). After recounting other marvels and oddities of the New World, Twain's narrator-turned-Italian rhapsodizes about the equal treatment accorded Jewish immigrants in the United States. "Jews, there, are treated just like human beings, instead of dogs," he says. Jews, there, can pursue the trade of their choice, own land and houses, associate with Christians, vote and hold office, and criticize the government. There, Jews "never have had to run races naked through the public streets,

against jackasses, to please the people in carnival time; there they never have been driven by soldiers into a church every Sunday for hundreds of years to hear themselves and their religion especially and particularly cursed," he continues before concluding: "Ah, it is wonderful. The common people there know a great deal; they even have the effrontery to complain if they are not properly governed, and to take hold and help conduct the government themselves. . ." (197). But this and other tales from the New World are too fantastic for the people of the Campagna to countenance. Twain's sketch ends with the returned traveler discovering that his Italian countrymen simply don't believe his accounts of America.

As an Italian reporting on America, Twain's imagined immigrant/discoverer has turned the tables on the countless Americans who had reported on Italy and helped make the job of Twain's American narrator so hard. But unlike the American travel writers who found a receptive audience among their countrymen for their narratives of romantic, picturesque, cultured Italy, Twain's Italian immigrant/discoverer finds resistance to his confused and fantastic, yet often realistic observations on America. It wouldn't be long, however, before many of the returned Italian traveler's incredulous countrymen would make the same trip, going to the New World to personally test his wondrous picture of America. There is parody both in Twain's Innocents Abroad sketch and in the narrative of the twins' personal histories in Pudd'nhead Wilson, but there is also something in addition to parody going on here. The twins generally represent Italian immigration to

America and a flight from political and/or economic oppression in the Old World. The setting of Pudd'nhead Wilson would make the twins part of the early, mostly northern Italian immigration to America that included political exiles and artists, categories to which the Florentine twins belong. But I will argue that concurrently the twins also represent the "new" Italian immigration of mostly poorer southern Italians in the late nineteenth century.

As Eric Sundquist, Susan Gillman and others have convincingly shown, the themes of twinning, duality, and identity in Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins engage not only with American turn-of-the century racism and nativism, but also with legal and scientific discourses on blood, race, ethnicity, and gender; Jim Crow laws and mob violence; and ideologies of Darwinism and imperialism. The twins, as Sundquist says, mimic the dilemma of the mulatto and of the South, and by their very Italianness blur the color line. I would argue further that the twins incorporate a host of other dualities: the cleavages between northern and southern Italy, the changes from old immigration to new immigration, and the clash between the idealized Italian and the degraded one. If, as Barbara Ladd argues, the twins can be seen as representing America's North and South, then it is an American North and South with strong social, economic and political parallels to the Italian North and the Italian South. It's interesting that the Italians were governed by the Bourbons, a term often used to describe the South's aristocratic social and political structure. Ladd reads "the personal history of the twins in



terms of the romance of the American Revolution” because “they are freed and come to a new, ‘free’ world where they attempt to start over again.” But, if the twin’s personal history “recapitulates the nationalistic romance of the United States,” Ladd writes, “in their own constitution, the twins are perfectly constructed to function as tools for the anatomizing of U.S. pretensions toward a redemptive national unity.” In Ladd’s reading, Angelo is “the de facto Puritan devoted to keeping his corporate body on the road to salvation,” while Luigi is “a Cavalier devoted to the Cavalier virtues of honor and bravery and to the Cavalier pleasures of drink and carousing.” Seen within the context of post-war reunification ideology, the twins give the lie to thoughts of social or moral progress, Ladd writes. “The unity, or the coherence, of national, racial, and even municipal ‘selves’ is shown to be a delusion; and the nationalist narrative of reunion and progress is strategically unwritten by the effect on the progressive Angelo of the hanging of his recalcitrant brother Luigi” (107-108).

What Ladd doesn’t say is that the narrative of American North-South reunion is paralleled by another narrative of national unification, that of the Italian North and South during the period of the Risorgimento and its aftermath. If the twins are anatomizing tools that disassemble American pretensions toward reunion and reconciliation, so too do they help anatomize Italian pretensions toward those same hopes, while also critiquing Italy’s nationalist romance of the Risorgimento. The recalcitrant Luigi stymies the progressive Angelo, just as America’s South stymies its North, but also just as Italy’s

recalcitrant *Mezzogiorno* stymies the progressive North of Italy. And much in the same way that American Northerners ascribed cultural, social and moral inferiority to Southerners, so too did Italian Northerners stereotype Southerners as an inferior breed. If anything, Italian sectional differences were more fundamentally ingrained among the people than American differences were in the United States. While the American North saw Southerners as inferior, those vices were usually attributed to the debilitating effects of the institution of slavery, as Harriet Beecher Stowe and other writers showed. For the most part, Southerners were seen as lapsed Americans, capable of rehabilitation, as the end of Reconstruction makes clear. The Italian North, however, saw their Southerners as an alien race, as something not quite Italian, as a people who needed to be assimilated, but might not be capable of it. The Italian South was often seen as a foreign land, even a foreign continent. As the old (northern) Italian adage goes, "South of Rome is Africa."

Northern Italian stereotypes of southern Italians were constructed on attitudes informed to some extent by scientific racism, which would eventually form the basis of American attitudes toward Italian and other new immigrants. From the northern view, the *Mezzogiorno* was seen as "the other half" of Italy, the degenerate twin to Italy's more privileged North, which controlled the government following unification in the 1860s. Like Luigi, the *Mezzogiorno* was recalcitrant and unruly, as the *Fasci Siciliani* uprisings clearly show. The North studied its Southern problem, even while imposing heavy taxes and a heavy-handed military draft on the South. Ultimately, the reports of northern

government officials served only to confirm the general impression of southern Italians as particularly rooted to their native soil, apathetic, hopelessly fatalistic, not the sort to stray from what they saw as their preordained way of life. "The leadership of the new regime tended to assume that since the southerners seemed either incapable or reluctant to accept the 'more modern and enlightened' northerners as liberators who were willing to bring to them the benefits of democracy, they must be an inferior people, and should be dealt with accordingly. They should not be allowed to impede the rapid economic development of the rest of Italy." It was about this same time that "the image of the mafia was created in order to justify the government's policies in the South. Crime was attributed to the mafia and exaggerated" (Mangione 73). The Italian government's tactic of dismissing resistance and rebellion as mafia banditry would be employed by Americans who conflated immigrant anarchists and criminals during the labor wars (247-48). Many of the stereotypes that Americans would come to apply to Italians immigrants in general had their roots, then, in stereotypes developed by northern Italians against southern Italians. It is here that we get early images of Italians as apathetic, fatalistic, and lacking industry, when not causing trouble. These northern Italian images of southern Italians as primitive, overly passionate, dirty and ignorant first found expression in American depictions of Italian immigrants in general, and, increasingly, in representations of *southern* Italian immigrants in particular. We have seen these images in the writings of Jacob Riis, Edward Steiner, Henry Cabot Lodge, and other commentators. In time, this distinction

between North Italy and South Italy, between northern Italians and southern Italians, would be explained “scientifically” and be codified in a dictionary of American immigrant races compiled by a government commission on immigration. The Dictionary of Races or Peoples (1911), which would speak of impulsive, impractical South Italians and cool, practical North Italians, made official the types of distinctions anticipated some four decades earlier by Henry James in his Italian tales. Moving southward, James’s narrators see not only a change in landscape and climate, but also fundamental differences in the people. In a further irony, northern Italians carried their resentments and prejudices against their countrymen to America. Many northern Italian immigrants tended to see the southern Italian immigrants as a distinctly inferior lot, largely illiterate, incapable of speaking proper Italian, and generally peasantlike, which in fact many were. Their presence in America “was an embarrassment that might prejudice the American establishment against Italians. In turn, the southern immigrants disparaged the northerners’ aloofness, but among themselves envied their ease in communicating with Americans, earning their livelihood with jobs that did not require manual labor, and, in many instances, being able to keep their children in school for a longer time. Seldom did the two groups meet on a social basis” (Mangione 147).

On one level, then, the twins Angelo and Luigi can simply represent America’s perceived differences between Northern (Nordic) Italy and Southern (Mediterranean) Italy, the former white, the latter swarthy. When they are first introduced to the townsfolk

of Dawson's Landing, the natives see the twins as "the handsomest, the best dressed, the most distinguished-looking pair of young fellows the West had ever seen. One was a little fairer than the other, but otherwise they were exact duplicates" (222). This is Twain having a bit of fun, but it can also be seen to indicate the American's initial tendency to see Italians as being essentially alike, a tendency that would be tested and transformed by the masses of southern Italian immigrants who stood in stark contrast to the Italian artists, artisans, and political refugees of the earlier Italian emigrations to America. However, as the people of Dawson's Landing become acquainted with the twins they begin to differentiate between these "exact duplicates." The differences go beyond a slight shading of pigmentation. Both physically and morally, the twins become very different, if not polar opposites. Angelo, the slightly fairer of the twins, is the angelic one, the blond northern Italian with "kind blue eyes," "curly copper hair and fresh complexion," and "delicate pink" cravat. Luigi (a nice stereotypical Italian peasant name) is darker-skinned, with a "violent scarlet" cravat (125-127). Angelo is a teetotaler who drinks tea; Luigi takes stimulating liquor and coffee. Angelo is a Methodist who reads Whole Duty of Man; Luigi is a Freethinker who reads Paine's Age of Reason, a volume to which Twain traced his own moral and religious sensibility (Hoffman 255). Angelo shows his moral fiber by being baptized a Baptist, while Luigi shows his bravery in a duel. Angelo is a reform-minded Whig, Luigi one of the brawling, immigrant-loving Democrats. On one level, the twins can represent American geographical differences between the antebellum

South and the West on one hand, and the North on the other (Camfield 191). However, each of these descriptives for Angelo and Luigi are culturally and politically charged to the point of suggesting dualities within dualities for the twins. In the twins we also get the dualities of Northern and Southern Italy, and of the old and new Italian immigrant, which in turn correspond to the broader duality of America's bifurcated views of Italy, one romantic, a product of the imagination, the other racist, a reaction to real conditions in America's slums and on her plantations. As representatives of the relatively modest Italian immigration before 1880, Angelo and Luigi are "musical prodigies" -- educated, cultivated, polite. As symbols of Italian romance, they are noble, artistic, exotic, but not menacingly alien. However, mixed into their personality are stereotypes of the new Italian immigrant of the late nineteenth century. Luigi is an assassin, carries a knife, and impulsively avenges an insult by assaulting Tom Driscoll.

Twain begins playing with these dualities from the start. In "A Whisper to the Reader" at the beginning of Pudd'nhead Wilson, he invokes Italy's glory with references to the ancient Roman republic, the artists Dante and Giotto, and the incomparable arcadian landscape that surrounds his Tuscan villa outside Florence. Twain is writing inside his villa, legalizing his manuscript -- "Given under my hand this second day of January, 1893, at the Villa Viviani.." He sits under "the busts of Cerretani senators and other grandees of this line" who look "approvingly down upon me as they used to look down upon Dante, and mutely [ask] me to adopt them into my family, which I do with

pleasure, for my remotest ancestors are but spring chickens compared with these robed and stately antiques, and it will be a great and satisfying lift for me, that six hundred years will" (2). This act of merger with the aristocratic Italian of history echoes Twain's earlier imagining of himself as a contemporary Italian peasant traveling to America in The Innocents Abroad. In both cases, Twain breaks down barriers between his narrator and the Italian, on one hand becoming an Italian of romance and culture, on the other becoming an "real" peasant traveler/immigrant. However, Twain's ready adoption of the Cerretani senators also mimics the nineteenth-century American's readiness to appropriate Italy's stately culture and history. Twain's persona, like James's Maggie Verver and countless other Americans, seeks to absorb Italy's romantic and heroic past and traditions, the very past that Prince Amerigo wants to shed as representing little more than a series of follies and atrocities. But if Twain's "Whisper" conjures up an idealized, high-brow Italy that represents the pinnacle of civilization, it also slips in a couple of jarring notes with its reference to "Macaroni Vermicelli's horse-feed shed which is up the back alley as you turn around the corner out of the Piazza del Duomo just beyond the house where that stone that Dante used to sit on to be watching them build Giotto's campanile and yet always got tired looking as soon as Beatrice passed along on her way to get a chunk of chestnut cake to defend herself with in case of a Ghibelline outbreak before she got to school . . ." (1). Here, linked to Italy's art and romance (Piazza del Duomo, Giotto, Dante) is a hint of Italian folly and violence (the protracted wars between

the Guelphs and Ghibellines). These are the kind of historical events that Prince Amerigo is so sensitive about in his Italian past. Still, the Guelphs and Ghibellines retain a certain heroic stature, which certainly can't be said about a horse-feed shed owned by an Italian with the carnivalesque culinary name of Macaroni Vermicelli. This is low-brow humor of the highest order: feeding the city's horses is an Italian named after two varieties of the (southern?) Italian's "national" dish, pasta.

The highbrow-lowbrow imagery continues in Twain's early description of Dawson's Landing, when he mentions the town's barber pole. "The candy-striped pole which indicates nobility proud and ancient along the palace-bordered canals of Venice, indicated merely the humble barber-shop along the main street of Dawson's Landing" (3). This alludes to the degeneration of the Italian as he is transplanted from Italy to America, a theme that also runs through the work of James and Riis. In Italy, a man with a "barber pole" (in this case a hitching post for his gondola) is a man of old Italy, of "nobility proud and ancient." In America, however, the man with the barber pole is in fact a barber, one of the stereotypical trades that some new Italian immigrants were using as a stepping stone to upward mobility. The barber motif appears twice more in Pudd'nhead Wilson, first when Judge Driscoll refers to the twins as "back-alley barbers" (83) during his nativist stump speech, and later when a newspaper notice identifies the judge's suspected assassin as "a profligate Italian nobleman or barber" (95). What begins as an image of America's humble Italian barber, one presumably not unlike the



(presumably) American barber who has his establishment on Dawson's Landing's main street, becomes, in Judge Driscoll's racist rhetoric, a vengeful razor-wielding "back-alley" barber who is a threat to the town. The circle is closed in the public notice's description of the killer as a "nobleman or barber," which conflates the two categories of Italians -- the nobleman and the barber -- into one stereotype, the vengeful assassin. Joined by their association with the candy-striped pole, the Italian nobleman and the Italian barber are also ultimately linked by their violent natures. As we will see, during the course of Pudd'nhead Wilson the twins alternate -- sometimes together, at other times in opposition -- between being "noble" men and back-alley assassin-barbers. On one hand they personify an idealized conception of Italy, while on the other they serve as the more "realistic" picture of Italians in the eyes of many native-born Americans. The townsfolk's perceptions of the twins take radical turns, thereby speaking satirically to not only America's fickle public opinion, but also to its shifting, often conflicting attitudes toward Italy and Italians during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

The twins are introduced into the plot when the widow Cooper finally gets news in a letter of not one, but two prospective lodgers for her large spare room. "[H]er year-worn advertisement had been answered; and not by a village applicant, oh, no! --- this letter was from away off yonder in the dim great world to the North: it was from St. Louis." This passage situates Dawson's Landing in the South, but it also makes of the twins migrants from the North, as well as emigrants from Italy. The widow's boys rush

“to spread the great news, for it was matter of public interest, and the public would wonder and not be pleased if not informed” (25-26). The public interest goes beyond the addition of two young, presumably able-bodied and able-minded men to the town’s population rolls. It signals the arrival in Dawson’s Landing of something truly extraordinary: a pair of Italians. “Italians! How romantic!” the widow’s daughter, Rowena, gushes. “Just think, ma --- there’s never been one in this town, and everybody will be dying to see them, and they’re all *ours!* Think of that! . . . Think --- they’ve been in Europe and everywhere! There’s never been a traveler in this town before. Ma, I shouldn’t wonder if they’ve seen kings! . . . Luigi --- Angelo. They’re lovely names; and so grand and foreign --- not like Jones and Robinson and such” (26). Of course, one of the townsfolk who congratulates the widow on her good fortune, and the town’s, is a judge named Robinson, one of the prosaic names Rowena disparages in favor of the “so grand and foreign” names of Luigi and Angelo. The twin’s letter is read, reread and discussed, and “everybody admired its courtly and gracious tone, and smooth and practiced style” (26). In one sense, Twain is satirizing a dominant strain in American attitudes toward Italy/Europe that idealized the country/continent. These same Americans embraced (and, some might argue, appropriated wholesale) Italian high culture and Italy’s romantic past both as a means of self-definition and self-elevation, and as a kind of ready-made cultural capital. Rowena’s act of possession, if giddy and slightly vulgar, is no more starry-eyed and no less utilitarian than Henry James’s possession of his

Italians and the impressions of them he so assiduously collects for his “mental sketch-book.” Rowena’s reactions to the imminent arrival of the twins recapitulates a typical American response to things Italian during the nineteenth century. Her act of appropriation -- “and they’re all *ours!* Think of that!” -- was an act repeated not only by the thousands of American travelers who went to Italy during the nineteenth-century, but also by those Americans who stayed at home, reading about Italy in countless newspaper and magazine articles and travel books that “followed and further stimulated the public interest with countless articles on Italian literature, art, society and customs” (Baker 1). Twain himself was both part of that tradition, as well as its critic, in The Innocents Abroad, which if it critiqued American fawning over Italian culture, also engages in transports not entirely different from those of Rowena. As we have seen, Italy’s hold on America’s imagination is well documented. And it was not restricted to the intellectuals and polite American society that is best represented by Henry James, whose childhood home was filled with things Italian, but also applied to the American middle classes who were trying to bolster their pretensions to gentility. We can count among their number the widow Cooper and Rowena. In this context, Rowena’s response to the arrival of the twins may be parody, but the distortion she represents contains the reality for a segment of the American population in the nineteenth-century.

However, these two Italians who arrive in Dawson’s Landing also have a negative, darker streak. It is soon revealed that Luigi assassinated a man “because he

needed killing," and to save his brother's (and his own) life. Angelo calls it a "noble" act, but the townsfolk will come to see it another way. Luigi's "southern" Italian blood again asserts itself when he kicks Tom Driscoll during a raucous meeting of the Sons of Liberty. Tom, the mulatto slave child substituted after birth for the master's son, responds by referring to Luigi as a "miserable hound," "murderous devil," and "that derved Italian savage" (60-62), epithets that had been hurled at Italian immigrants by nativists, and insults little different from those used by racists against blacks. We are reminded that New Orleans newspapers identified David Hennessy's alleged Sicilian killers as having "low, receding foreheads, repulsive countenances and slovenly attire" which "proclaimed their brutal natures." By turning the twins into the Other and distancing himself from them, Tom tries to solidify his tenuous position within the town's ruling white structure. In much the same way, Italians in the American South and elsewhere, as well as the contemporaneous Jewish immigrants and the earlier Irish ones, found they had to distance themselves from American blacks, the quintessential American Other, if they were to have any chance for acceptance and assimilation into American society.

The contentious relationship between Tom and the twins is a curious one. It begins as a rivalry for the affections of Rowena, who dumps Tom for the twins because they are more romantic and superior in their European nobility. However, that is soon forgotten and the relationship becomes more complex, especially as it develops within the context of the concept of honor and the duel that it precipitates between Luigi and

Judge Driscoll, Tom's presumptive uncle and guardian. In their first meeting with Tom Driscoll at Pudd'nhead Wilson's place, the twins see a "rather handsome" and "graceful" young man. However, where Angelo notes "a good eye" and "a pleasant free-and-easy way of talking" in Tom, Luigi sees "something veiled and sly" in the eye and something "more so than was agreeable" in Tom's manner. "Angelo thought he was a sufficiently nice young man, Luigi reserved his decision" (48). Angelo's attitude toward Tom reflects that of the Louisiana Italian immigrants who for a time had positive relations with American blacks. Luigi, however, is more wary of Tom Driscoll because despite their obvious differences, and despite Tom's racial imposture, Luigi sees some of himself in the black man passing as the white foster-son of the town's leading citizen. At that first meeting, Pudd'nhead Wilson takes the twins' fingerprints, as he did with all he encountered. Then Tom talks Wilson into reading Luigi's palm, which reveals that Luigi has killed a man. Luigi expresses no shame or regret for his act, saying the man needed killing in order to save Angelo's life, and by extension, his own life. When Pudd'nhead Wilson then attempts to read Tom Driscoll's palm, Tom snatches it away in confusion. Luigi comments on Tom's blushing reaction, to which Tom responds: "Well, if I am, it ain't because I'm a murderer!" Seeing Luigi's "dark face" flushing, Tom adds with anxious haste, "Oh, I beg a thousand pardons, I didn't mean that, it was out before I thought, and I'm very, very sorry---you must forgive me!" (53). The exchange underscores Luigi's volatile nature in the face of dishonor. The insult here is that Tom

degrades as simple murder an act that Luigi sees as having been noble. As the narrative progresses, Luigi the “murderer” is turned into Luigi the assassin, with its more sinister echoes of stealth, lawlessness, and disorder.

Following the encounter at Pudd’head Wilson’s place, the twins are invited to a mass rally of the local pro-rum faction, and Tom follows uninvited. These raucous Sons of Liberty greet the twins with “a prodigious explosion of welcome,” and the chairman of the meeting quickly proposes that “our illustrious guests be at once elevated, by complimentary acclamation, to membership in our glorious organization, the paradise of the free and the perdition of the slave” (54). Having just assimilated the twins into one portion of Dawson’s Landing society, the chairman begins a speech but is interrupted by Tom, who tries to undo what has been accomplished by pointing to the twins’ freakishness. Tom, noticing the “extraordinarily close resemblance of the brothers to each other,” publicly -- and to his mind, very wittily -- makes note of the uncanny resemblance by calling the twins “a human philopena.” “Luigi’s southern blood leaped to the boiling-point in a moment under the sharp humiliation of this insult delivered in the presence of four hundred strangers. It was not in the young man’s nature to let the matter pass, or to delay the squaring of the account.” Luigi gives Tom “a kick of such titanic vigor that it lifted Tom clear over the footlights and landed him on the heads of the front row of the Sons of Liberty” (56). The meeting ends in a chaos of fighting and fire.

Tom becomes an social outcast when he turns to the law rather than to the gentleman's duel as a way to defend his honor against the assault it has suffered from Luigi's southern Italian foot. Tom's act violates both the town's codes and the honor of the "noble" First Families of Virginia, to which Tom is "heir." Consequently, he is condemned by all: the first citizen Judge Driscoll, the outsider David "Pudd'nhead" Wilson, and Tom's true mother, the Negro Roxana. Tom tries to defend himself by characterizing Luigi as a "miserable hound," a "murderous devil," and "that derved Italian savage." However, Tom's mother uses the "hound" epithet on Tom himself. Roxy says that by refusing the duel and showing his cowardice, Tom has betrayed his own noble pedigree, including his white First Family father "Cunnel" Cecil Burleigh Essex and other ancestors including Cap'n John Smith, Pocahontas, and "a nigger king outen Africa" (70). Roxy tells Tom that it's "de nigger" in him that has turned him into "a ornery low-down hound," made him something little more than a "nigger" (70). Of course, as we're told, the "nigger" in Tom -- his black blood -- amounts to one part in thirty-two. Tom tries to bolster his standing by turning the rival twins into murderous animal-like Others, but is in turn turned into an animal-like "nigger" by his own mother. Throughout the plot, Tom and the twins compete for acceptance and assimilation in much the same fashion that blacks and new immigrant did at the turn of the century. As we will see, the fortunes of Tom and the twins usually go in opposite directions. It is as if the citizenry and social structure of Dawson's Landing can accommodate either blacks or

immigrants, but not both at the same time. Later, when Roxy recounts for her son Tom the duel between Luigi and Judge Driscoll, she refers to Luigi as “de brown one,” which would presumably make Luigi darker than both Roxy and Tom, blacks whose skins are as white as that of many, if not most, of the town’s whites. The differences in skin coloration between Angelo and Luigi, given their associations with both Americans and Italians North and South, suggest a different racial makeup. “Here Twain’s image plays with the ideas of filial connection between races, a central component of the culture’s debate over race” (Camfield 191). All this talk about First Families, bloodlines, heredity and color becomes more compelling when seen within the discourses of the late nineteenth century. As Michael Kammen has shown, American-style ancestor worship and a “strident belief in Anglo-Saxon supremacy” reached its apogee after 1885, manifesting itself as “more comprehensively racist than merely Negrophobic.” Kammen says many Americans, including the eminent Harvard geologist Nathaniel S. Shaler, really did believe in the biological implications of bloodlines. Shaler meant it literally in 1888 when he said that “a man is what his ancestral experience has made him.” This led to the perception of a direct link between ancestry and achievement. As Kammen says, for these people, heredity truly mattered (220-221). It is clear that Twain is playing with ideas of nature versus nurture, heredity versus environment, in ways that maybe cannot be resolved. Ultimately, however, Twain seems to be saying that racial categories are frauds that disguise fundamental commonality between races (Camfield 189).



Despite his color, Luigi, by accepting Judge Driscoll's challenge to a duel, establishes himself as a man of honor whose conduct is in marked contrast to the cowardly Tom's. Luigi, as a southern Italian for whom the northern-dominated government and law are the enemy, is not about to seek legal resolution of differences and grievances, as Tom does. Luigi recalls Riis's Italian immigrants, all those Pasquales who argue over cards on the Sabbath, then use revenge and the vendetta -- a sort of petty assassination -- to square their intramural disputes. However, Luigi also connects to assassination as an act of rebellion by the oppressed underdog against an outside oppressor, a relationship that has parallels with the downtrodden Italians and their oppressive Bourbon and Austrian rulers. The link goes even further back in Italian history when we think of the ancient assassinations that Prince Amerigo, the would-be modern, seeks to disavow. Luigi and Judge Driscoll each has his code, much like Amerigo's murderous ancestors. For Luigi, assassination, which he distinguishes from murder, is "noble," the honorable thing to do. He kills his brother's tormentor because he simply needed killing. Both the southern Italian twin and the southern American judge, each of them sham aristocrats in their own way, have little regard for lawful justice in matters of honor. When the judge's friend Pembroke Howard delivers the news of Luigi's taking up the gauntlet, the two prominent citizens shower the foreigner with encomiums that stress his manhood. (Earlier, we'll remember, Roxy had showered Tom with epithets -- "ornery low-down hound" and "nigger" -- that called his manhood into question.) Pembroke

Howard pronounces Luigi admirable. “Admirable?” Driscoll replies. “He’s a darling! Why, it’s an honor as well as a pleasure to stand up before such a man. . . . A rare fellow, indeed; an admirable fellow, as you have said!” (66).

News of the duel affects the town no less dramatically than the initial arrival of the twins in Dawson’s Landing. “The people took more pride in the duel than in all the other events put together, perhaps. It was a glory to their town to have such a thing happen there. In their eyes the principals had reached the summit of human honor. Everybody paid homage to their names; their praises were in all mouths” (74). It is interesting that the duel, considered noble by both Judge Driscoll and Luigi, brings glory to the town when, in fact, it seeks to do nothing more than honorably resolve individual differences between the duelists. Twain’s slapstick depiction of the duel anticipates his description of French dueling as “comedy” and “monkeyshines” in his essay “Dueling,” written in 1898 in Vienna. If, for Twain, dueling is a farce in France, it is deadly serious in Austria and also in Italy, where its vogue had spread. This same contrast between the deadly serious duel and the sham ritualistic duel appears in a passage deleted from Life on the Mississippi, where Twain remarks that the duel hadn’t quite disappeared from the aristocratic South but had been “hopefully modified.” New Orleans’ duelists might draw blood now and again, but in that city it was more ritual and pretense. Twain again speaks of different styles of dueling in A Tramp Abroad, where he differentiates between the sham political duels of the French and the genuinely bloody duels of German university

students. In the essay "Dueling," Twain writes that the real victims of the tragedy of dueling are the families of the duelists. He suggests that the challenger be made to summon the offender's "old gray mother" and to say to her, "You have done me no harm, but I am the meek slave of a custom which requires me to crush the happiness out of your hearts and condemn you to years of pain and grief, in order that I may wash clean with your tears a stain which has been put upon me by another person" (The Writings 29: 229). Twain himself claims he once came close to engaging in a duel in Nevada. Although a part of him might admire the courage of the duelists, it appears that Twain saw dueling not only as a vestige of the cult of Southern aristocracy, but as a ritual in much the same light as lynching: Both involved a perverted code. Both were violent customs followed slavishly by cowardly people. And both were undertaken by unmanly men who mistakenly thought they were expressing their manhood.

However, Luigi, by undertaking the duel and avoiding recourse to the law, shows his solidarity with the town's gentry, and with the common townsfolk as well. And by giving up the concealed stiletto of the southern Italian vendetta for the visible pistol of the southern American duel, Luigi assimilates into Dawson's Landing's aristocratic code of chivalry, a code we see operating to some extent in Howells's A Hazard of New Fortunes and in the work of Jacob Riis. Now, the twins are accepted not only as romantic heroes, but embraced as (Italian) Americans. "The twins were prodigiously great, now; the town took them to its bosom with enthusiasm. Day after day, and night after night, they

went dining and visiting from house to house, making friends, enlarging and solidifying their popularity, and charming and surprising all with their musical prodigies, and now and then heightening the effects with samples of what they could do in other directions, out of their stock of rare and curious accomplishments” (74). As their popularity grows, so too does their romantic Italianness -- their incomparable charm, artistic talents, and other rare accomplishments. Even as they become more intensely idealized as Italian, the twins move closer to America. They are so pleased with the townfolks’ attentions that they give notice of their intention to apply for citizenship, to become naturalized (made “natural,” no longer freaks). They resolve to end their wanderings and “to finish their days” in Dawson’s Landing. “That was the climax. The delighted community rose as one man and applauded; and when the twins were asked to stand for seats in the forthcoming aldermanic board, and consented, the public contentment was rounded and complete” (74). It is interesting that even before officially becoming newly minted citizens, the twins are quickly incorporated into the democratic system, not simply as franchised voters but as nominated candidates for public service in the newly incorporated town of Dawson’s Landing. Should we dismiss this as Twain simply satirizing the flighty, gullible townsfolk? Is this more than a jab at Americans who quickly give the vote to foreigners who aren’t even citizens while denying that same vote to American blacks? Or can the twins’ rapid assimilation into the town’s social and civic life be seen as an admittedly exaggerated representation of mid-nineteenth-century America’s relatively

more open approach to immigrants? We might even see it as a comment on -- and critique of -- the move for more restrictive immigration policies that characterized the 1890s, when Twain was writing Pudd'nhead Wilson. It would not be the first time Twain uses 1850s Missouri to comment on turn-of-the-century America in the novel.

It is Tom, the outcast, who turns the twins into outcasts by dredging up Luigi's assassin past and in other ways scheming to besmirch the Italian's honor. As an assassin, with its intimations of anarchism, Luigi would be disqualified from Americanization. The honorable face-to-face duel is American enough for the people of Dawson's Landing; furtive assassination or outright murder is not. Much of Tom's skullduggery revolves around a knife that Luigi had used to kill the man who needed killing. Tom steals the knife, which is no Italian stiletto, but something just as good -- an heirloom reportedly given to Luigi by a "great Indian prince, the Gaikowar of Baroda," which connects Luigi to Orientals (52). When a reward is offered and no one comes forward with any information about the missing knife, Tom uses the situation to plant seeds of doubt against the twins. In a meeting with Pudd'nhead Wilson and the detective Blake, Tom suggests to Wilson that the knife either never existed or was still in Luigi's possession. Pudd'nhead, now wondering whether "he had been played upon by those strangers," asks what the twins stood to gain by their charade. "Gain? Oh, nothing that you would value, maybe," Tom replies. "But they are strangers making their way in a new community. Is it nothing to them to appear as pets of an Oriental prince---at no expense? Is it nothing to

them to be able to dazzle this poor little town with thousand-dollar rewards---at no expense?" This all speaks to the idea of twins as strangers -- that is, foreigners -- trying to establish themselves in a new world, but they are both saddled with questions about their veracity and linked to the dagger, which in turn connects them the dark Orient.

Overjoyed at having "taken the hated Twins down a peg with the community," Tom pursues his attack later in the day with Judge Driscoll. He tells the judge that he had refused to fight Luigi -- "that Italian adventurer" -- not because of cowardice but because he had secret knowledge that Luigi was "a confessed assassin." Tom informs his uncle that he had given the twins his word of honor that he would guard the secret if the Italians promised to "lead straight lives" in Dawson's Landing. Tom's "confession" and his honorable behavior in keeping Luigi's dark past a secret restore him to his uncle's good graces and to his good standing in the community. Judge Driscoll, now turning against the twins, vows to get his revenge. Assassination, an act Luigi calls "noble," is for Driscoll an ignoble act, and tantamount to premeditated murder -- malicious, often sneaky, ungentlemanly, and un-American in the manner of the Italians' suspected killing of New Orleans police superintendent David Hennessy. "That this assassin should have put the affront upon me of letting me meet him on the field of honor as if he were a gentleman is a matter which I will presently settle---but not now." Here, Driscoll sounds very much like the European duelist who tells Twain in "Dueling" that any act of dishonesty, such as cheating at cards, would disqualify a would-be duelist from fighting a

gentleman in the field of honor. "You see what a solemn thing it is;" Twain writes in the essay, "you see how particular they are; any little careless speech can lose you your privilege of getting yourself shot, here" (The Writings 29: 227-228). Driscoll is very particular. No more duels with the lying Luigi. The judge says he will instead shoot Luigi, presumably in forthright, gentlemanly, American fashion outside the field of honor, but he won't do it until after the election, not until he can ruin both the twins. Having made great progress at poisoning the town against the twins, Tom is ecstatic: "Another point scored against the detested Twins! Really it was a great day for Tom" (77-79).

Tom also has an ally in the fickle minds of the townsfolk. Although the twins throw themselves "with their whole heart" into the political campaign -- "for their self-love was engaged" -- they no longer command the acclaim they enjoyed after the duel, much less the popularity they had as newly arrived novelties in Dawson's Landing. "Their popularity, so general at first, had suffered afterward; mainly because they had been *too* popular, and so a natural reaction had followed." The townsfolk had turned skeptical, and now were whispering about the wonderful ivory-handled knife and its failure to turn up -- "*if* it was so valuable, or *if* it ever existed. And with these whisperings went chucklings and nudgings and winks, and such things have an effect." Meanwhile, the twins "considered that success in the election would reinstate them, and that defeat would work them irreparable damage" (83). Success in the election would obviously

solidify the twin's civil standing in Dawson's Landing, as well as give them power, and perhaps restore their popularity. When the townsfolk begin turning against the twins, it is the Judge, the voice of supreme authority in Dawson's Landing, who vents the people's adjusted attitudes in a mud-slinging stump speech against "both of the foreigners." On one level, Driscoll's classic campaign oration is simply a parody of standard election rhetoric. However, the message here is a nativist one and the invective is colored with not only anti-immigrant, but anti-Italian sentiments. The twins aren't simply bad guys, they are bad Italian foreigners. The speech, which drowns the twins in "rivers of ridicule," proves "disastrously effective." Driscoll "scoffed at them as adventurers, mountebanks, side-show riff-raff, dime-museum freaks; he assailed their showy titles with measureless derision; he said they were back-alley barbers disguised as nobilities, peanut peddlers masquerading as gentlemen, organ-grinders bereft of their brother-monkey." Worst of all, he implies after a long pregnant pause, they are liars and assassins. Driscoll delivered his "deadliest shot" with "ice-cold seriousness and deliberation," dismissing the reward for the knife as humbug and suggesting that the owner could easily find it "whenever he should have occasion to *assassinate somebody*." The judge delivered his closing words with "a significant emphasis" (83).

Judge Driscoll's speech turns the twins into stereotypical "low" Italians, freaks who expose the humbug of romantic old Italy, which is as much of a sham as the heirloom knife and the "reward" offered for its return. The judge's accusations are a



double blow, at once destroying the idealized Italian that Americans loved so well and wanted to appropriate/assimilate, while essentializing the pathetic, if menacing Italian who now threatened the character and order of American society, and should be excluded. According to the judge, the Italian gentleman and the Italian nobleman are a sham, little more than back-alley barbers, peanut peddlers and organ-grinders. They are not only organ-grinders, but organ-grinders *manques*, "bereft of their brother-monkey." They are, then, subhuman, brother to the monkey, and brother, it is to be inferred, to the "monkey"-like black man, and as such inassimilable. Stripped of their glory, the twins, much like the masses of new Italian immigrants in the late nineteenth century, become not only outcasts but a threat to the social order of Dawson's Landing and the country. The twins, "defeated---crushed" (and this even before the election), "withdrew entirely from society, and nursed their humiliation in privacy." However, rumors swirl that Luigi plans to challenge the judge to a new duel as soon as the town's leading citizen has recovered enough from the prostrations of his campaign labors.

As "back-alley" barber-assassins, the twins are now disqualified from assimilating into the town's social structure. They are, in effect, assassinated socially and politically. Their new status also disqualifies Luigi from engaging in a second duel with Judge Driscoll, who "declined to fight with an assassin---'that is,' he added significantly, 'in the field of honor'" (92). The town's nativist fears are fed when Judge Driscoll, after dismissing Luigi's challenge, is murdered by Tom during a botched burglary, and the

twins are accused of the heinous crime. "The town was bitter against the unfortunates, and for the first few days after the murder they were in constant danger of being lynched" (97). Having briefly become heroes and Americans-in-the-making through one form of extralegal conflict resolution (the duel), the twins, now having been stripped of any claim to honor (deformed as that honor was), find themselves potential victims of a more contemporary American mode of extralegal conflict resolution: lynching. Tom, having fled to St. Louis, reads in the papers a brief telegram about the murder in Dawson's Landing. "Judge Driscoll, an old and respected citizen, was assassinated here about midnight by a profligate Italian nobleman or barber on account of a quarrel growing out of the recent election. The assassin will probably be lynched" (95-96). In proceeding quickly from a duel to talk of lynching, Pudd'nhead Wilson draws parallels between those two forms of conflict resolution and a third, assassination. Being an assassin disqualifies Luigi from dueling, but makes him a fit subject for lynching, just as it did for the Italians suspected of being the assassins of New Orleans police superintendent David Hennessy. If dueling is a noble, honorable practice for both Judge Driscoll and Luigi, lynching is a noble, honorable expedient for the townsfolk of Dawson's Landing and New Orleans. It is a relatively easy transition from dueling to lynching because lynching is dueling's dark double or twin. The former is a means of defending one's individual purity, honor, and manhood; the latter helps defend the community's collective civic purity, honor, and patriarchal structure. We are reminded of Teddy Roosevelt's comment

that the lynching of the eleven New Orleans Italians was “a rather good thing.” Of course, as we have seen, Twain questions the manhood and honor of lynching both in Huckleberry Finn and in other writings.

As potential lynching targets, the twins have few friends. Only two of the townsfolk remain loyal to them. One is the outsider Pudd'nhead Wilson, who serves as Luigi's attorney. From the start there had been a certain rapport between the twins and Wilson, all three of them outsiders in one way or another. Twain “implies a parallel between the Twins---ostensibly freakish, natural outcasts who had traded notoriety for distinction---and Wilson” (Camfield 187). The twins' other loyal friend is their “poor old sorrowing landlady,” Aunt Patsy Cooper, the eternal romantic still caught up in the romance of Italy. Roxy, the realist, feels differently about the twins. Sitting in the “nigger corner” of the courtroom, she remembers that the old judge “had treated her child a thousand times better than he deserved,” and therefore “she hated these outlandish devils for killing him and shouldn't ever sleep satisfied till she saw them hanged for it” (99-100). During the trial, Pembroke Howard, the prosecutor, refers to the twins' alleged crime as not simply murder, but assassination “conceived by the blackest of hearts and consummated by the cowardliest of hands” (100). Pudd'nhead Wilson counters by referring to the twins as “those unfortunate strangers” (107) -- an echo of the German conflation of the terms stranger and foreigner that Twain mentions in his sympathetic 1899 essay on the Jews. Wilson's depiction of the twins ultimately prevails when his

detective work identifies Tom Driscoll as the judge's assassin. In carrying the day, David "Pudd'nhead" Wilson has his day. Long the social outsider in Dawson's Landing, he is fully embraced by the town and finally overcomes his "pudd'nhead" remark about having half a dog on his first day in town. "Troop after troop of citizens came to serenade Wilson, and require a speech, and shout themselves hoarse over every sentence that fell from his lips---for all his sentences were golden, now, all were marvelous. His long fight against hard luck and prejudice was ended; he was a made man for good" (113-14). Pudd'nhead Wilson here becomes Horatio Alger, a self-made man (and now a real man) who, through pluck and native ingenuity, overcomes hard luck and prejudice. Like Jacob Riis, Pudd'nhead Wilson becomes an insider, rises on the social scale, through his defense of the poor, defenseless foreigners. Of course, if many townsfolk had thought Pudd'nhead somewhat eccentric and slow, if he too was a stranger/foreigner, he was never a racial/ethnic outsider in Dawson's Landing in the manner of the twins. His last name is Wilson, one of those names "like Jones and Robinson and such," which might be boring and lacking grandeur to Rowena, but which still represented the town's dominant Anglo-Saxon strain.

However, if Pudd'nhead Wilson's is the typical American success story of the social outsider rising to the top, its flip side is the corresponding failure of the novel's racial/ethnic characters to fully integrate into the social fabric of Dawson's Landing.

Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins can be read, then, as an allegory of

failed assimilation for both the twins and for Tom Driscoll, a trio who in many ways are twins. The mulatto Tom, now exposed as a slave changeling, is sold back into slavery to satisfy creditors despite his being 31/32s white. There is clearly no assimilation possible for blacks, even for those with but a drop of black blood, as long as they are still seen as slaves and "niggers." The Italian twins present a more problematic case. Acquitted of being back-alley barber assassins, Luigi and Angelo, like Pudd'nhead Wilson, are turned into heroes. But, if Wilson "was a made man for good," a real American hero who will reap real material benefits, the twins essentially revert to being story-book heroes of the American imagination. "The Twins were heroes of romance, now, and with rehabilitated reputations." However, "weary of Western adventure" -- weary, presumably, of the vicissitudes of American attitudes and opinions, tired of their roles as symbols of romantic Italy, and perhaps despairing of achieving the kind of assimilation and success open to Pudd'nhead Wilson, an outsider and a stranger, but a native-born Anglo-Saxon American, not a foreigner -- the twins, both strangers and foreigners, "straightway retired to Europe" (114). It was a return route taken by many Italian immigrants who voluntarily repatriated in numbers generally greater than most immigrant groups, which American commentators seized on as a general lack of loyalty to America and used against those Italian immigrants who chose to stay.

The twins' fates are less happy in Those Extraordinary Twins. Here, Luigi the Democrat and member in good standing in the town's liquor interest, is elected an alderman but can't take his seat because of his physical attachment to his siamese brother, Angelo, the teetotaler who is not an elected member of the board. This throws a monkey-wrench into the town's legal and civic workings. As siamese twins and literal freaks of nature, Angelo and Luigi threaten the democratic process, drain the town's treasury, and make a mockery of municipal government, all problems associated with the arrival of masses of Italian and other new immigrants into America in the late nineteenth century. The twins' disastrous effects on Dawson's Landing recall many of the problems the Rev. Theodore Munger leveled against the new immigrants in *The Century*. Like Munger's foreigners, the twins, singly or in unison, poison the local politics, block the wheels of industry and progress, feed the "drink-evil," and turn municipal government into "a farce and a shame" (Munger 798). The town's dilemma is handed over to the courts, and the case is set for a hearing. "In the meantime the city government had been in a standstill, because without Luigi there was a tie in the board of aldermen, whereas with him the liquor interest---the richest in the political field---would have one majority." The court fails to resolve the issue, arguing that "Angelo could not sit on the board, either in executive or public sessions, but forbidding the board to deny Luigi his rightful place." The case is pursued through the legal system, but the higher courts simply confirm the untenable original decision. "As a result, the city government not only stood still, with its

hands tied, but everything it was created to protect and care for went a steady gait toward rack and ruin." Taxes could not be levied and minor officials resigned rather than starve. Good old American capitalism, in the form of the liquor interest, was threatened. Private subscription was needed to defray the enormous legal expenses of the case. The townsfolk finally realize they should have listened to Pudd'nhead Wilson's original advice and hired Luigi to resign his post. However, now the town doesn't even have anything with which to do the hiring (read, bribery). Or does it? What the town does have is a halter with which to hire Luigi into resigning by hanging him.

The town, having despaired of a legal solution and financially incapable of resorting to bribery, turns to lynching as the only solution to its dilemma. "That's the ticket," as many of the townsfolk shout. And what about the innocent siamese twin, Angelo? Nobody said anything about hanging him; only Luigi will be hanged. "And so they hanged Luigi" (169) as a threat to the town's political, social and economic well-being, which could also be said of the lynchings of real Italian immigrants around the turn of the century. Just as lynching is the dark twin of dueling, so too is lynching the dark, violent, desperate twin of other more socially-acceptable forms of social control used on immigrants by writers, progressive reformers, and nativists. If Henry James wanted to aestheticize the Italian immigrants and make them more like his happy, courteous Italians in Italy, Jacob Riis and other reformers wanted to wash them up and turn them into middle-class patriotic Americans. But when all else fails, lynch them. With

Luigi disposed of, Angelo, or what remains of him ("Nobody said anything about hanging him.") presumably lives on, at least in the imaginations of Americans who preserved a romantic, heroic conception of Italy from earlier times. Either way, the twins do not find a proper, satisfactory place in the town. Ultimately, they are comfortable with neither of the constructed identities that Dawson's Landing imposes on them. Being treated as idealized figures of romance finally proves wearying, a constant struggle to fit into an unrealistic image. And there is no guarantee that racist nativism wouldn't threaten them once again as it had during the dark days of the political campaign and the subsequent murder trial. Conversely, even when they are allowed to stay in America, and voluntarily do so, with Angelo now firmly entrenched in local Democratic Party politics, they remain foreigners who threaten the social order with their difference. Ultimately, they become targets of animosity, racism, and lynching.

Earlier in the nineteenth century, American writers and travelers and the American consciousness had begun constructing a story-book Italy characterized by an enchanting pastoral landscape, glorious republicanism, and high art and music. When American observers looked closer at contemporary Italy, they saw little more than a degraded people of lost glory. The twin images of grandeur and degradation, of romance and "reality," had managed to coexist relatively peacefully in the American mind as long as Americans could bask in the warmth and splendor of a far-off Italy, while keeping the degraded Italians in Europe. But once the degradation arrived on American shores in the



form of mass immigration by dark, dirty, and ignorant Italians in the late-nineteenth century, these contradictory images clashed in the streets of New York's Lower East Side, the mines of West Virginia and Colorado, and the docks and plantations of the South. Before 1880, real Italian immigrants were too few to claim a great deal of space in the American consciousness and the public discourse. After 1880, Italians and other threatening new immigrant groups seized hold of a public mind that often twinned foreigners with the "black problem." In the 1880s and 1890s, socially-constructed twin images of both Italians and blacks became frozen in a portion of the American mind, blinding many native-born Americans to more realistic perceptions of Italians and blacks, and precluding a more productive relationship with these two groups of Others. The blacks were feared as savage, violent and socially inferior, but at the same time were often romanticized as loyal, docile, and sympathetic. Italians were feared for many of the same reasons as blacks, while being romanticized as either noble, artistic, and cultivated, or as simple and picturesque. Twain, himself a twin, must have been attuned to America's twinned perceptions of blacks and immigrants. As other critics have reasonably argued, Twain's own attitudes combined sympathy for blacks and foreigners with some of the prejudices of his times. I suspect Twain struggled with the dichotomy, just as his country would, in the succeeding troubled decades of the early twentieth century. In one sense, theirs would be an effort to construct newer, more complex and richer identities for blacks and foreigners, identities that would help native-born Americans to bridge the gap

between romance and racist xenophobia. In the case of the Italians, this meant finding an image of Italy that went beyond Twain's simple binary notions of "magnificence and misery."

Epilogue  
Notes of an (un)Native Son

“South of Rome is Africa.”

-- (northern) Italian saying

“An Italian sociologist . . . describes the South Italian as excitable, impulsive, highly imaginative, impracticable; and as an individualist having little adaptability to highly organized society.”

-- U.S. Immigration Commission’s Dictionary of Races or People, 1911

“Steerage passengers from a Naples boat show a distressing frequency of low foreheads, open mouths, weak chins, poor features, skew faces, small or knobby crania, and backless heads.”

-- Edward Allsworth Ross, professor of sociology, 1914

This dissertation has been an attempt to look at American ideologies concerning Italy, Italians and Italian immigrants during the decades from 1880 to 1910. My goal was to examine how those ideologies were represented, and to ask what those representations say not about Italy, Italians and Italian immigrants, but rather to explore what they may tell us about America and Americans. Consequently, I didn’t inquire too deeply about the “historical truth” or the “material reality” of Italians in Italy or Italians in America. And I have said very little about the Italians themselves, how they contributed to or resisted American representations of them, or what their own attitudes were toward immigration,

assimilation and Americanization may have been. If nothing else, this helped me avoid the risk of transmuting lived reality into the stuff of a text.

I hope the dissertation shows some of my passion for the subject without being too much a representation of my own material or imaginative reality. I should say here that ideas about race and nationality, and to a lesser extent class, shaped my childhood nearly as much as did my growing up an Italian immigrant in a small American town, haunting the woods and baseball diamonds with my friends, and watching late 1950s-early 1960s television with my brother. Race and nationality generated some of my most painfully puzzling childhood memories. I remember playing war with my best American friend, a white Presbyterian, and being told by him that in World War II the Italians were the enemy. As a dark child, more brown than olive, I wasn't entirely convinced that I was White, and a part of me feared, with a dreadful childish fear, that I just might be Black, a Negro, an African -- or at the very least a Puerto Rican. Once, when the grown-ups were sitting around outside and the topic of my dark skin came up, a friend of the family jokingly called me "Puerto Rican Joe" -- much to my extreme mortification. Another "Other" alter ego of mine was "Old Black Joe" from the eponymous Stephen Foster folk song. I remember studying Foster and singing his songs in grammar school, being aware of the song that shared my first name, and hoping beyond hope that the embarrassing song title would not come up in class. Surely, all my classmates would make the connection. And just as surely one of the guys would make a joke about it that I would never be able to live down. Later, in high school, my biggest nemesis was "Stosh," the bully Stanley Lupinski, who made it part of his formal schooling to remind me as frequently as possible that I was a "Greasy Guinea Wop." My only rejoinder was quite predictable: "Dumb Pollack." This was by no means simple good-natured teasing. "Stosh" had the advantage, both in size and having been born in America, but I like to think that I held my own in these ethnic "discussions." But both "Stosh" and I were equally ignorant of the fact that at the edge of town, where the woods and dairy farms

began, some two hundred years earlier there had lived a gentleman farmer who had more thoughtfully pondered the same kinds of questions about race and national identity that “Stosh” and I were still debating in rather more visceral fashion. That gentleman farmer was one of the first to ask a question to which we are still seeking an answer: “What is an America?”

I would eventually discover Hector St. John de Crevecoeur (or Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur, if you prefer), just as I would finally realize that I was not a Puerto Rican or a Black. And yet, having been conceived in Southern Italy, there is no guarantee that I have no African blood. As the Italian saying goes, “South of Rome is Africa.” Just as likely is my having traces of Greek, Norman or Spanish blood. I can live with that, even take pride in those possibilities. More problematic in the ensuing years has been the American/Italian duality of my life and identity. I still find myself wondering: How far have we come from Crevecoeur? How far have we come from the turn of the last century? Who and what is an American as we approach the turn of our own century? And who decides that?

My own family’s immigrant experience has been as typical and as unique as any other. By the time that we had arrived in New York in 1953, there was no detour through Ellis Island. We had no *Isola dell lagrime*, no Island of Tears, to fear. We came not so much for economic survival, as had my maternal grandfather and so many Italians at the beginning of the century, but for education and opportunities for my brother and me. There is an old southern Italian proverb that says, “Stupid and contemptible is he who makes his children better than himself.” My parents clearly disproved that stereotype. For their sons alone, they had initiative and ambition, and a desire to improve their lives. By the time we arrived, Italian immigrants had become Italian-Americans, assimilated if not melted into American society. New York had already elected a popular Italian-American as mayor. One of the greatest American baseball players was the son of an Italian fisherman from San Francisco who played for the mighty New York Yankees. A tough-

talking Italian-American crooner from nearby Hoboken was one of America's heartthrobs. Shoemakers like my father and seamstresses like my mother could easily find work in establishments run by Italians, *paisani* from the Old Country who were a new breed of more scrupulous latter-day *padroni*. By the 1950s, then, Italians had clearly become White in America, just as the Irish before them had. In my home town in the mid-Hudson Valley, Italians now owned the truck farms that the earlier Irish settlers had developed from uncultivated muckland. The Italian farmers now employed Puerto Rican migrants to help work the rich "black dirt." In 1950s America, negative Italian stereotypes still had plenty of life, many of them related to organized crime, the Mafia, and greasy Italians, but most of America's racism and hard-core bigotry was now being directed at restive American blacks. For all the anxiety that race and nationality caused me in my childhood, I cannot say exactly when I myself became White, when this American was "made" (as Riis puts it), or when (and if) I stopped being an Italian or an Italian-American. However, my father can tell you exactly when I/we were transformed "from alien to citizen" (as Steiner phrases it). I know it was the earliest possible date allowed by American naturalization law. For us, there was never any intention of going back -- even if my mother threatened it more than once as a solution to America's disquieting freedom and its negative effect on her two sons. Obviously, all of the preceding plays a subtle role in how I have handled this dissertation.

As Antonio Gramsci says in his Prison Notebooks (and here I'm stealing a page from Edward Said), the starting point for criticism is being fully conscious of what you really are and knowing yourself as the product of a historical process "which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory." With that in mind, Gramsci says, it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory. I confess I have just only begun to compile that inventory. Responsible for many of those traces is the Italian immigrant Giuseppe Frustaci, my mother's father and the grandfather whose first name I was given. It was he who came to New York City around 1912, and it was

because of that brave move that my mother was born in America. But hers was a shortlived childhood in America. Her mother died a few years later, and the family was split in two: my mother and two sisters shipped back to Italy to their grandmother, the three other children remaining in America. Many years later, my father convinced my mother to return to America. My mother's family in America made the big move easier and her American birth made the move possible in the face of America's tight immigration quotas for Italians. Giuseppe Frustaci was not among those who had gathered at the pier to greet us. He had made a living pushing a fruit cart in the Lower East Side, struggled to raise a truncated family, and now had slipped into history -- one of the hundreds of thousands of Italian immigrants who hadn't exactly prospered, but had made a life of it and died, in *LaMerica*.

Having followed the trail of the immigrant blazed for me by Giuseppe Frustaci, I try to imagine what kind of world he found in New York City around 1912 and the kind of life he would end up living there. No doubt he knew that the streets were not paved with gold. By then, that myth had been swept away by letters from America or returning "birds of passage." Yet he must have seen America as a land of economic opportunity, with its golden gates still open to immigrants such as he. Giuseppe was not an idiot or otherwise insane or diseased. He was not a criminal or an anarchist. He apparently hadn't committed any crime of moral turpitude. He was able-bodied and didn't show signs of becoming a beggar or a financial drain on the state. Consequently, he would make it through Ellis Island. As a newly-arrived Italian in New York City, he certainly found strength in numbers and comfort among some of his countrymen in the tenements of the Lower East Side. But, in many ways, America must have seemed a threatening place to a poor uneducated young man from Calabria in Italy's *Mezzogiorno*, "the land that time forgot." In many ways, America circa 1912 was not much different from America of the three previous decades. Industrialization, urbanization, and disruptive change continued apace. Great clashes still characterized America's class, race, labor and ideological

relations. Nativism was again rearing its ugly head. Questions of national identity and assimilation still raged. Calls for immigration restriction were intensifying. And Italians like Giuseppe Frustaci still found themselves at the center of these events and debates, whose nerve center was still New York City.

Writing about "The Italians in the United States" in the January 1911 *Forum*, Alberto Pecorini said that "the Italian problem---if, indeed, an Italian problem exists---" could be said to be centered in New York City, where more than a quarter of America's two million Italians lived. Pecorini acknowledges some continuing problems -- illiteracy, tenement overcrowding, the "Black Handers" -- but says he is encouraged about "the Italian outlook" in the United States. "First of all, Italian immigration is improving. The day of the organ-grinder, once the only representative of his race, has passed forever, and that of the ignorant peasant is rapidly passing," he wrote. "Illiteracy is diminishing, and with it the evils of which it has been the principal cause" (21). But if Italian immigration was improving and illiteracy diminishing, not so ignorance about those supposed changes on the part of many native-born Americans both ignorant and educated. America's obsession with racial thinking, racial classification, and racial ranking showed no signs of receding. In the previous three decades, nativism itself had waxed and waned, but by 1914 xenophobia again showed signs of the hysteria and violence that characterized its peak years in the 1890s. In 1914, for example, the Supreme Court ruled that unnaturalized Italian immigrants could be discharged from working on the New York subway, while in the country's mining camps Italians were being lynched. In southern Illinois, after an Italian and two native Americans were killed in a street brawl, a surviving Italian was quickly lynched, with apparent collusion from the local mayor. A few months later, an Italian, arrested on faint suspicion of conspiring to assassinate a mine superintendent, was dragged from the jail and hanged (Higham, *Strangers* 183-184). Social control of the Italians wasn't always violent, however. It also took the form of education and social work, among other initiatives. In Connecticut, the Daughters of the



American Revolution hired John Foster Carr in 1911 to write a Guide For The Italian Immigrant In The United States. While the guide urged Italians to settle on farms away from the urban centers of the Northeast, it acknowledged that many of the immigrants would probably remain in the cities. Consequently, the guide was heavy on medical advice, preached “public hygiene” in the urban setting, and made a connection between cleanliness, wellness, and material prosperity. Included in the advice was the maxim, “A working man’s capital is a strong, well body” (Kraut, Silent Travelers 120-121). However, less enlightened commentators still attributed the Italians’ supposedly sickly bodies to their race. In 1914, Edward Alsworth Ross, a professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin, published The Old World in the New, in which he warned that subcommon immigrants would cripple the American population if allowed continued unrestricted entry (Kraut, Huddled Masses 152). Of southern Italian immigrants, he wrote: “Steerage passengers from a Naples boat show a distressing frequency of low foreheads, open mouths, weak chins, poor features, skew faces, small or knobby crania, and backless heads. Such people lack the power to take rational care of themselves; hence their death-rate in New York is twice the general death-rate and thrice that of Germans” (qtd. in Kraut, Silent Travelers 109). Although mortality studies would later prove Ross wrong (109), many Americans of the period were willing to believe Ross and others who made sweeping statements about race, turning details in generalizations and generalizations into immutable laws.

The mania for racial classification that we saw in Riis and Steiner and others, and the race nativism that had been evolving over the decades, came together in the decade’s leading nativist, Madison Grant. It should be pointed out that Grant -- a successful corporation lawyer, staunch conservationist, trustee of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and powerful secretary of the New York Zoological Society -- was neither a quack nor an extremist. Rather, Grant “represented a band of progressive opinion, one terrified of the consequences of unregulated monopoly capitalism, including

the failure to regulate the importation of nonwhite (which included Jewish and southern European) working classes who invariably had more prolific women than the 'old American stock'" (Haraway 282). By 1910, Grant had clearly formulated and articulated America's hatred for the new immigration. Six years later, he published his masterful, widely read polemic, The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History. In it Grant argues that heredity, more than environment, shapes humankind, that race mixing produces lower hybrids, and that "race pure and simple, the physical and psychical structure of man, is something entirely distinct from either nationality or language" (xxi). Dividing Europeans into Nordics, Alpines and Mediterraneans, the same general breakdown made earlier by economist William Z. Ripley in his The Races of Europe (1899), Grant exalts the Nordic race in general, and the Anglo-Saxon branch in particular. The Nordic race, as the "Great Race," represents "the white man par excellence" (27); the Nordics are "a race of soldiers, sailors, adventurers and explorers, but above all, of rulers, organizers and aristocrats . . . domineering, individualistic, self-reliant and jealous of their personal freedom both in political and religious systems and as a result they are usually Protestant" (228). Grant calls miscegenation "a social and racial crime of the first magnitude" (60), and says that the danger comes from immigrants who willingly come to America, just as it had come from unwilling slaves in the past. As an example of the latter "catastrophe," Grant offers the declining days of the ancient Roman Republic. "[T]he south Italians of to-day are very largely descendants of the nondescript slaves of all races, chiefly from the southern and eastern coasts of the Mediterranean, who were imported by the Romans under the Empire to work their vast estates," Grant writes. "The latter is occurring to-day in many parts of America, especially in New England" (71-72). Having dismissed southern (or Mediterranean) Italians as a mongrel race of slaves, Grant proceeds to make them less than white, saying they are racially identical to the Berbers of North Africa. Northern Italians are altogether different, he argues. "In northern Italy there is a large amount of Nordic blood. In Lombardy, Venice

and elsewhere throughout the country the aristocracy is blonder and taller than the peasantry, but the Nordic element in Italy has declined noticeably since the Middle Ages” (189). Still, he argues, Nordic blood accounts for Rome’s enduring political organizations and ideals. “[T]he traditions of the Eternal City, its love of organization, of law and military efficiency, as well as the Roman ideals of family life, of loyalty and truth, point clearly to a northern rather than to a Mediterranean origin . . . The indications on the whole point to a Nordic aristocracy in Rome with some Alpine elements. The Plebs, on the other hand, was largely Mediterranean and Oriental and finally in the last days of the Republic ceased to contain any purely Roman blood” (153-54). If the chief men of classical times were Nordic, Grant argues, so were the Gothic and Lombard artists of the Cinque Cento and the preceding century, whose busts and portraits show Nordic qualities. “Dante, Raphael, Titian, Michael Angelo, Leonardo da Vinci were all of Nordic type” (215). Finally, Grant says, the “backbone of modern Italy” resulted from the Gothic and Lombard’s mixture with Nordic elements (157).

In 1920, Lothrop Stoddard, a New England attorney with training in history, echoed Grant’s claims in *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*, which featured an introduction by Grant. In his introduction, Grant claims that the “great hope of the future here in America lies in the realization of the working class that competition of the Nordic with the alien is fatal, whether the latter be the lowly immigrants from southern or eastern Europe or whether he be the more obviously dangerous Oriental against whose standards of living the white man cannot compete” (xxx-xxxi). Stoddard, meanwhile, warned that racially-inferior yellow and brown-skinned races sought to undermine Nordic/Anglo-Saxon civilization. If Grant had spoken of “the folly of the ‘Melting Pot’ theory” (*Passing* xxviii), Stoddard attacked the “shibboleth of the melting-pot” (165). “Each type possesses a special set of characters: not merely the physical characters visible to the naked eye, but moral, intellectual, and spiritual characters as well. All these characters are transmitted substantially unchanged from

generation to generation" (165). Stoddard contrasts the mid-nineteenth century immigration of "kindred stocks" with the deluge of "truly alien hordes of the European east and south of the last thirty years (263), then warns of the even greater dangers of immigration by even darker peoples. "If the white immigrant can gravely disorder the national life, it is not too much to say that the colored immigrant would doom it to certain death" (268).

There were, of course, dissenters. One of the most prominent was Franz Boas, the Columbia University professor of anthropology. His The Mind of Primitive Man (1911) refuted racial nativism by trying to demonstrate that America's environment was modifying the "racial characteristics" that nativists found detestable. Studying and measuring the slope of crania, Boas concluded that nutrition and other living conditions determined "racial characteristics" more than heredity. Boas had trouble convincing the nativists, but his ideas surely must have appealed to someone like Edward Steiner, who also spoke of the mollifying influence of America. Boas's study purported to show that head form -- traditionally considered stable and permanent -- underwent significant change after immigrants moved to America from Europe. If bodily features changed, Boas concluded, the whole bodily and mental make-up of immigrants might change. Challenging the naive desire for American racial purity, Boas's report argues that racial purity had never existed for any considerable time in Europe and denies that intermixture of types there had shown any degrading effects upon any European nationality. Boas's findings and conclusions were included in a 42-volume report issued in 1911 by the U.S. Immigration Commission, which was appointed four years earlier under the chairmanship of Senator William P. Dillingham of Pennsylvania. The Boas report was widely quoted and figured prominently in the immigration debates surrounding the Immigration Commission's work.

However, Boas's ideas were directly contradicted by the Dillingham Commission's own Dictionary of Races or Peoples, which also was included in its

reports. Overall, the Commission took a moderately restrictionist position on immigration, endorsing the literacy test that Henry Cabot Lodge had proposed years before. But, as Higham says, the report cast its social and economic data in “the form of an invidious contrast between the northwestern and southeastern Europeans in the United States at the time” (*Strangers* 189). The commission’s dictionary was a classificatory compendium that exemplified the use made of racial nativism. Although the commission acknowledged that physical and cultural racial characteristics might change in America’s new social and climatic environment, especially if efforts were made to heat and stir the melting pot, the underlying objective of its reports was to show that certain races were hereditarily incapable of Americanization because of immutable, biologically-determined physical and cultural characteristics (Friedman-Kasaba 99). To that end, the dictionary provided a taxonomy of apparently immutable differences among various races or peoples. The dictionary included “more than six hundred subjects,” according to its writers/editors, “covering all the important and many of the obscure branches or divisions of the human family” then furnishing America’s immigrants or likely to do so in the future (1). Conceding that ethnography was still an imperfect science, the dictionary generally followed the then-popular classification system which divided humankind into five general categories: Caucasian, Ethiopian, Mongolian, Malay, and American -- more familiarly known as the white, black, yellow, brown, and red races. The dictionary then generally used federal census data language and classifications to make finer distinctions among the five grand divisions. It paid particular attention to categories of races/peoples used for statistical purposes by the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, as well as some of the ethnic or political terms commonly used to designate immigrants (8).

In its section on Italians, the dictionary says that “Italian immigration to the United States is perhaps of more significance than any other at the present time,” not only because it far outpaced that of other races, but even more significantly because it threatened to continue without relief. Italy still had a huge reservoir of potential

American immigrants, the dictionary said, with a larger population than any of the dozen other races ranking highest in the rate of immigration (84). Italy's dominance of the immigration rate is interestingly shown in a Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization chart that identifies America's top immigration sources for a twelve-year period ending June 30, 1910. At the top of the list is "Italian, South," with nearly two million immigrants, or almost twice the number for second-place "Hebrew." In ninth place is "Italian, North," with almost 375,000 immigrants. It is interesting that while the immigration bureau figures combined some smaller races and peoples into single categories, the Italians are the only ancient race that is divided not only geographically, but physically and psychically as well. Italians, North and South, the dictionary claims, "differ from each other materially in language, physique, and character, as well as in geographical distribution." North Italians include those natives (and their descendants) of the Po River basin (Piedmontese, Lombards, Venetians, and Emelians) and the Italian districts of France, Switzerland, and Austria. All the people of the peninsula proper and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia are South Italians, the dictionary says, adding: "Even Genoa is South Italian" (81). Madison Grant, too, would specifically exclude Genoa and the surrounding coast of Liguria from Nordic North Italy, saying it is the only area in "northern Italy" occupied by the Mediterranean race (157). The dictionary emphasizes that physically the Italians are far from homogenous. The North Italian is of a "very broad-headed ('Alpine') and tallish race," while South Italy is inhabited by a "long-headed, dark, 'Mediterranean' race of short stature." Speaking of South Italians, the dictionary cites an Italian ethnologist who traces their origins to the Hamitic stock of North Africa. However, the dictionary reminds its readers that the Hamites "are not true Negritic or true African, although there may be some traces of an infusion of African blood in this stock in certain communities of Sicily and Sardinia, as well as in northern Africa" (82). Continuing to rely on Italian sources (in a bid for authority?), the dictionary then cites an Italian sociologist who had pointed out that North Italians and South Italians

also differ radically in their “psychic character.” The South Italian is represented as “excitable, impulsive, highly imaginative, impracticable; as an individualist having little adaptability to highly organized society.” The North Italian, conversely, is pictured as “cool, deliberate, patient, practical, and as capable of great progress in the political and social organization of modern civilization.” In general, Italians, North and South, are “devoted to their families, are benevolent, religious, artistic, and industrious” (82). But having said that, the dictionary cites an Italian statistician who “admits” that Italy still has the highest rate of crimes against the person among countries sending immigrants to America. Another Italian expert, the dictionary notes, had shown that all crimes, but especially violent offenses, are several times more numerous among South Italians than among North Italians. “The secret organizations of the Mafia (see *Sicilian*) and Comorra, institutions of great influence among the people, which take the law into their own hands and which are responsible for much of the crime, flourish throughout southern Italy” (82-83).

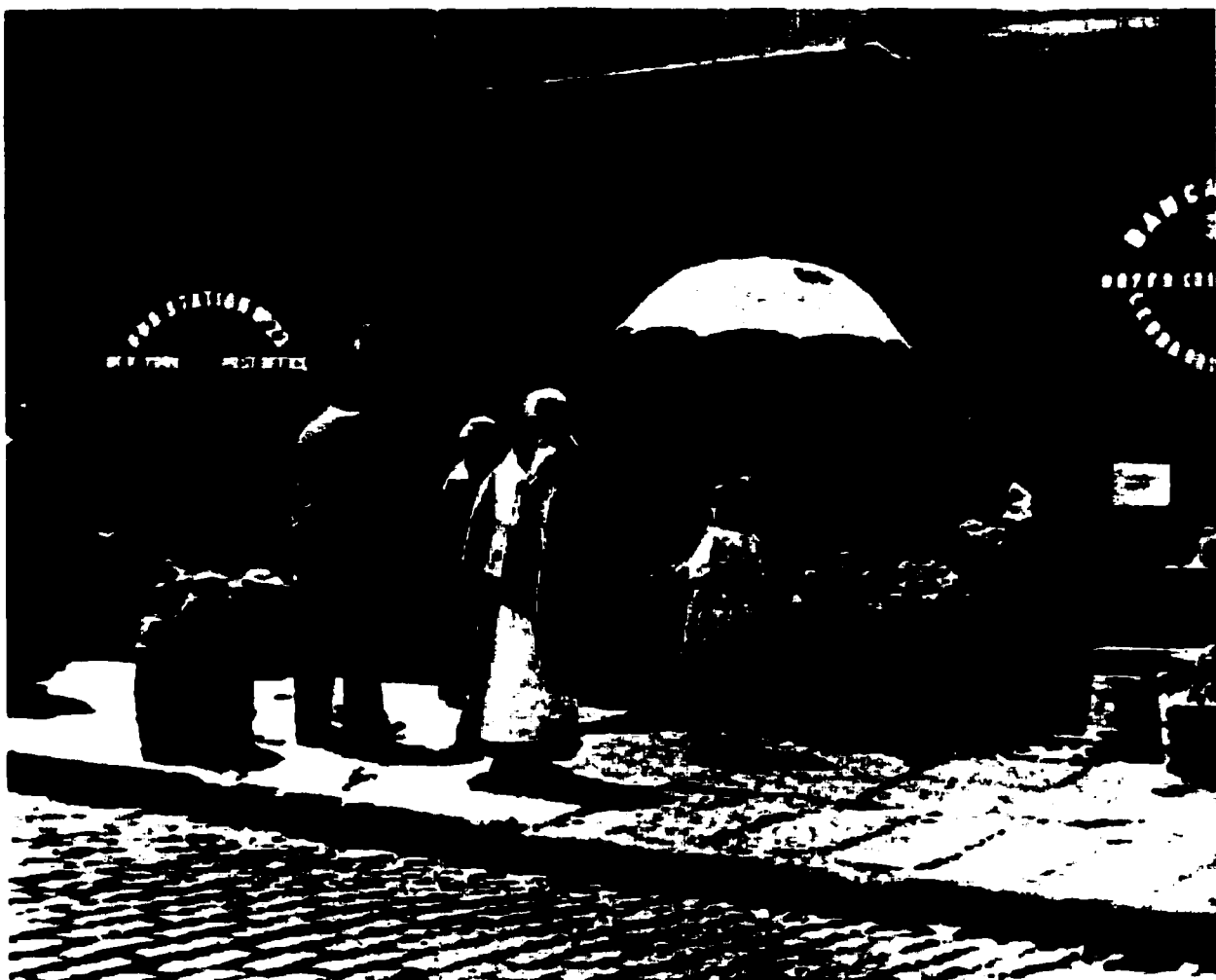
The dictionary simply codified, or made official, representations of Italians and Italian immigrants that had been circulating for decades. What is interesting is that forty years after Italian political unification had been achieved, the American government was dividing the country’s people in two. Perhaps this racial bifurcation of Italy did indeed reflect a political, social, and cultural reality in Italy. What I find more provocative is America’s need to set up this duality of North Italy and South Italy. My suspicion, and what this dissertation has intimated, is that in sundering both Italy and Italians, a sometimes large and always powerful segment of the American public could have its cake and eat it, too. They could have glorious, romantic, cultured, picturesque Italy and Italians, and at the same time they could find in Italy and Italians a degraded, menacing, and at the same time alluring “Other.” In broad terms, Nordic northern Italy and Italians furnished the former, while Mediterranean southern Italy and Italians provided the latter.

Six years after the Immigration Commission issued its voluminous reports and dictionary, and three years after Madison Grant published his polemic masquerading as a treatise, Congress passed a comprehensive immigration act over a presidential veto. Approved in 1917, in the midst of World War I, the act imposed a literacy requirement aimed at new immigrants, a move which historians now typically see as a thinly veiled act of discrimination against those groups. Four years later, America passed its first immigration quota law. When that failed to stem the flow of “new immigrants,” another act was passed in 1924 and went into law five years later.

By then, however, the cows were already *in* the barn, so to speak. Among the Italians in the barn, some would quickly prosper, some would simply lay a foundation for the second generation, and some would return to Italy. Giuseppe Frustaci found enough in America to keep him here. In 1937, one of the daughters he had sent back to Italy returned to the United States for good. In 1953, another daughter -- my mother -- reluctantly returned with her husband and two sons to the country where she had been born. Only Giuseppe Frustaci's oldest daughter would never go back to America, the only one of his six children who would live and die in Italy. None of Giuseppe Frustaci's American children became college graduates; most never even finished high school. They married, formed solid working or middle class families, and sent some of their children to college. They and their children would continue to hear some of the racial epithets and negative stereotypes of Italians that had developed during the nineteenth century and hardened around the turn of the century. But in time, these would become less frequent (although the image of Italian-Americans as *mafiosi* seems as if it will never disappear from the American culture and consciousness). In time, Americans would turn their attention to a new “new immigration” of Hispanics and Asians, finding there the foreign “Other” that each generation of America seems to need and create. Today, Italy itself retains some of the romance that Americans had attached to it over the years. It is still sometimes praised for its classical tradition, medieval and Renaissance art, opera, and



picturesque beauty. Just as powerful, however -- and perhaps just as "romantic" -- are the images of Italian food, fashion and *dolce far niente* that seem to play such important roles in today's construction of Italy and Italians. And judging from a slew of recent bestsellers, it seems as if everyone wants to buy and live in a villa in Tuscany. Complementing these "positive" images of Italians are the less complimentary images, including those depictions of working-class and better-off Italian-Americans as "philistines, tasteless boobs, Guidos, and Big Hair girls, the kind of people who would have mashed potatoes dyed blue to match their bridesmaids' dresses," as Micaela di Leonardo puts it (109). Versions of two Guidos, John Gotti the Teflon Don and Joey Buttafuoco the "Long Island Lolita's" Latin Humbert Humbert, too often are the media's "representation" of contemporary Italian-Americans. The latest contribution to that image was reportedly made by Spike Lee's movie, "Summer of Sam," which looks at New York City during the heyday of its most notorious serial killer. An (Italian-American) friend of mine, having read about but not seen the film, was already condemning the African-American Lee for all the New York Guidos in the movie. Still, we have come a long way from the turn of the century. At least we're not being lynched anymore.



Vegetable stand in "the Bend"



**Feast of Saint Rocco, Bandit's Roost, Mulberry Street**



**Bandit's Roost**



**In the home of an Italian rag-picker, Jersey Street**



**Pietro learning to write: Jersey Street**



**Boys from the Italian quarter with a "Keep off the grass" sign**

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## VITA

**Joseph Peter Cosco**

**The writer was born in San Giovanni d'Albi, Calabria, Italy, on 10 June, 1949. A graduate of Chester (N.Y.) High School, he holds an A.B. in English from Dartmouth College (1971), a certificate in Anglo-Irish Literature from Trinity College, Dublin (1973), and an M.A. in English Literature from Columbia University (1974). He is a Ph.D. candidate in American Studies, with a concentration on nineteenth-century American literature, journalism, and immigration.**

**The author worked as a newspaper reporter and freelance writer before beginning as an adjunct instructor of journalism at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1994. Currently on the faculty of the Department of English at Old Dominion, he teaches journalism and American literature.**