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## Tampa's 1910 Lynching: The Italian-American Perspective and Its Implications

By Stefano Luconi

On 20 September 1910, law enforcement officers in Tampa arrested two Sicilian immigrants, Angelo Albano and Castenge (alias Castenzio and Costanzo) Ficarotta. They were charged with complicity in what ultimately turned out to be the fatal shooting of J. Frank Esterling, an accountant for the Bustillo Brothers and Diaz Cigar Company, a large cigar manufacture that employed some 600 workers in West Tampa. While Albano and Ficarotta were being taken to the county jail, at a time when Esterling was still alive though hospitalized in critical condition, a crowd of twenty-five to thirty people stopped the horse-drawn hack by which the two suspects were being moved, seized the two prisoners, transported them to a nearby grove, and lynched them. As a desecrating insult to the corpses, a pipe was placed in Ficarotta's mouth and a notice was pinned to Albano's belt. Written in black ink, the notice read "Beware! Others take

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note or go the same way. We know seven more. We are watching you. If any more citizens are molested, look out—Justice.”<sup>1</sup>

Albano and Ficarotta were members of the local Italian-American community that initially took shape in the 1890s when Sicilian immigrants left sugar cane plantations in St. Cloud, Florida, to pursue a better life and job opportunities in Tampa. This ethnic minority, a group of about 3,500 people, clustered in the Ybor City district and found employment primarily with the burgeoning cigar manufactures, in which Cuban and Spanish workers predominated.<sup>2</sup> The tobacco industry was the backbone of the city's economy, as Tampa was the world's leading supplier of the clear Havana cigars in the early twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> In 1910, Italian immigrants accounted for nearly twenty percent of the labor force in cigar factories, although they lagged behind Spaniards and Cubans; seventy percent of the gainfully employed members of Ybor City's "Little Italy" held jobs in this field. Most tobacco workers were women, who managed to advance to high-paying positions. Italian men had a less stable presence in the industry because many of them worked only until they had saved enough money from their wages as cigarmakers to open their own businesses, often groceries or dairies.<sup>4</sup>

The lynching of Albano and Ficarotta was not unprecedented. Indeed, it was not the first time Italian newcomers—and Sicilians in particular—fell prey to mob justice. Nor was it the last such event.<sup>5</sup> Overall, according to data collected by historian Patrizia Salvetti and based on research into the records of Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at least thirty-four people of Italian birth were lynched throughout the United States between the mid 1880s and the early 1910s. In the same decades, there were also several

1. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 21 September 1910; *La Tribuna Italiana d'America*, 1 October 1910.
2. Giacomo Fara Forni, "Gli italiani nel distretto consolare di Nuova Orleans," in *Emigrazione e colonie: Raccolta di rapporti dei RR. Agenti diplomatici e consolari*, 3 vols. (Rome: Tipografia dell'Unione Editrice, 1909), 3:217.
3. Archer Stuart Campbell, *The Cigar Industry of Tampa, Florida* (Gainesville: Bureau of Economics and Business Research, 1939); Robert P. Ingalls and Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Tampa Cigar Workers: A Pictorial History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), esp. 1-10.
4. Gary Ross Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 106-7.
5. Clyde Weed, "The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910," *American Nineteenth Century History* 3 (March 2002), 45-76.



attempted lynchings of Italian immigrants. Salvetti found evidence for eleven additional episodes in which the lives of more than twenty people were threatened. Her figures, however, likely underestimate the actual number of both Italian-American dead and potential casualties because they may not include some immigrants who eventually became U.S. citizens and the U.S.-born children of the Italian newcomers. Moreover, killings in small towns without Italian consular agents sometimes went unreported.<sup>6</sup> For instance, unnoticed by Salvetti's study, an Italian grocer, John Ginocchio, narrowly escaped lynching in Petersburg, Virginia, in 1860.<sup>7</sup>

The first official Italian victim of the "lynch law" was Federico Villarosa in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1886. Accused of attempted rape of the thirteen-year old daughter of the local postmaster, Villarosa was awaiting trial on 29 March, when a blood-thirsty mob grabbed him from his prison cell and hanged him.<sup>8</sup>

After Villarosa, nineteen Italians were lynched in Louisiana, including three victims at Hahnville in 1896 and five at Tallulah in 1899.<sup>9</sup> Louisiana's most notorious lynching, however, took place in New Orleans in 1891. It followed the assassination of the local police superintendent, David Hennessey, during a prolonged conflict between rival Sicilian crime organizations. According to scholar John V. Baiamonte, Jr., both organizations had Hennessey on the payroll. Following his murder, a mob broke into the city's jail and killed eleven Italian prisoners, who had just been cleared of charges of murder in court but were still being held on related charges. As the police forces remained idle, the men were dragged from their hideouts in the jail building and shot. The corpses of the dead and the bodies of the still-living were later hung from the lampposts in the square the penitentiary overlooked. Asked who

6. Patrizia Salvetti, *Corda e sapone: Storie di linciaggi degli italiani negli Stati Uniti* (Rome: Donzelli, 2003).

7. Bénédicte Deschamps, *La presse italo-américaine du Risorgimento au fascisme* (Paris: Harmattan, forthcoming).

8. *New York Times*, 30 March 1886.

9. "The Italian Lynchings," *Outlook*, 5 August 1899, 735; "The Lynching Affair at Tallulah," *Christian Advocate*, 17 August 1899, 1294; Andrew F. Rolle, *The Immigrant Upraised: Italian Adventurers and Colonists in an Expanding America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 104-5; Edward F. Haas, "Guns, Goats, and Italians: The Tallulah Lynching of 1899," *North Louisiana Historical Association Journal* 13 (Spring-Summer 1982), 45-58; Salvetti, *Corda e sapone*, 49-58.

## TAMPA'S 1910 LYNCHING

33

had shot him, the dying Hennessey had answered "Dagoes," a notorious epithet that referred to Italians. When the court failed to convict, native citizens of New Orleans took their own revenge.<sup>10</sup>

Other lynchings of Italian Americans occurred throughout the South, including Erwin, Mississippi, and Ashdown, Arkansas, both in 1901.<sup>11</sup> Italians were also lynched outside the former Confederacy as happened in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1889, in Davis, West Virginia, in 1903, and in the state of Colorado, respectively in Gunnison in 1890, in Denver in 1893, and in Walsenburg in 1895.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Joseph Strando was lynched in Johnston City, Illinois, in 1915.<sup>13</sup>

In all these incidents, which had different motivations, it was the national origin of the victims that incited the anger of the crowd. As in the case of Daniel Arata, who was shot and strung up

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10. Herbert Asbury, *The French Quarter: An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1936), 403-16; John E. Coxe, "The New Orleans Mafia Incident," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 20 (October 1937), 1067-1110; John S. Kendall, "Who Killa De Chief?," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 22 (April 1939), 492-530; Barbara Botein, "The Hennessey Case: An Episode of Anti-Italian Nativism," *Louisiana History* 20 (Summer 1979), 261-79; Rolle, *The Immigrant Upraised*, 102-4; John V. Baiamonte, Jr., "Who Killa de Chief Revisited: The Hennessey Assassination and Its Aftermath, 1890-1991," *Louisiana History* 33 (Spring 1992): 117-46; Richard Gambino, *Vendetta: A True Story of the Worst Lynching in America: The Mass Murder of Italian Americans in New Orleans in 1891, the Vicious Motivations Behind It, and the Tragic Repercussions That Linger to This Day* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977); Liborio Casilli, "Un drammatico episodio dell'emigrazione italiana: Il linciaggio di New Orleans del 14 marzo 1891," *Studi Storici Meridionali* 11 (May-August 1991), 125-39; Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale, *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian-American Experience* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1992), 202-13; Giose Rimanelli, "The 1891 New Orleans Lynching: Southern Politics, Mafia, Immigration, and the American Press," in Marco Rimanelli and Sheryl Lynn Postman, eds., *The 1891 Lynching and U.S.-Italian Relations: A Look Back* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1992), 53-105; Tom Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings: The Murder of Chief Hennessey, the New Orleans "Mafia" Trials, and the Parish Prison Mob* (Guilford, Conn.: Lyons Press, 2007).
  11. Salvetti, *Corda e sapone*, 67-69, 84-87.
  12. George A. Root, "Gunnison in the Early 'Eighties,'" *Colorado Magazine* 9 (November 1932), 204-5; Rolle, *The Immigrant Upraised*, 174-75; Conrad Woodall, "The Italian Massacre at Walsenburg, Colorado, 1895," in Dominic Candeloro, Fred L. Gardaphe, and Paolo Giordano, eds., *Italian Ethnic: Their Languages, Literature and Lives: Proceedings of the 20th Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association* (Staten Island, N.Y.: American Italian Historical Association, 1990), 297-317; Salvetti, *Corda e sapone*, 9-10, 41-48, 86-87.
  13. Thomas A. Guglielmo, "'No Color Barrier': Italians, Race, and Power in the United States," in Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, eds., *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 35.



on a telegraph pole in Detroit in 1893 after he had murdered a patron of his saloon, bigoted shouts of "Kill the Dago" or "Hang the Dago" were the war cries of the mob.<sup>14</sup>

Previous studies have dealt with the lynching in Tampa, but have drawn primarily on the local English-language newspapers and Italy's diplomatic sources.<sup>15</sup> The former overemphasized the alleged criminal record of the two victims. In particular, the mainstream press reported that Ficarotta had been accused of murdering Giuseppe Ficarotta, a cousin of the accused and a former mayor of West Tampa. News sources also maintained that Albano had fled from New Orleans in the aftermath of Hennessey's slaying and alleged his involvement in several attempts at poisoning a girl and in a conspiracy to dynamite the house of her parents.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, the *Tampa Morning Tribune* accused Albano and Ficarotta of being hired murderers who had operated as "tools of anarchists in the city."<sup>17</sup> However, although at least Ficarotta had an infamous reputation in his own community as even Italian diplomatic sources pointed out,<sup>18</sup> these rumors were only one side of the picture. In fact, Ficarotta's trial had eventually resulted in his acquittal, while Albano had landed in New Orleans not earlier than 1895 as a nine-year-old child and, therefore, could not have been involved in any crime syndicate in late nineteenth-century Louisiana, let alone the assassination of Hennessey in 1891 as the

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14. Janet E. Worrall, "Adjustment and Integration: The Italian Experience in Colorado," in Richard N. Juliani and Sandra P. Juliani, eds., *New Explorations in Italian-American Studies: Proceedings of the 25th Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association* (Staten Island, N.Y.: American Italian Historical Association, 1994), 205-6. See also the more popularizing account by Randy Perkins, "The Lynching of Danny Arata," *True West* 35 (July 1988), 37-39.
15. Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 120; Robert P. Ingalls, "Lynching and Establishment Violence in Tampa, 1858-1935," *Journal of Southern History* 53 (November 1987), 626-28 later expanded in Robert P. Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa, 1882-1936* (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 95-99; Salvetti, *Corda e sapone*, 101-19; Gary R. Mormino, "Italians in Florida," in Gary R. Mormino and Ilaria Serra, *Italian Americans & Florida* (Boca Raton, Fla.: Center for Interdisciplinary Studies at Florida Atlantic University, 2003), 14; Ingalls and Pérez, Jr., *Tampa Cigar Workers*, 100-1.
16. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 21 September 1910.
17. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 22 September 1910.
18. Gerolamo Moroni to Carlo Papini, New Orleans, 5 October 1910, Records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, series Z, box 33, folder 646 27/2, Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome, Italy.

*Tampa Morning Tribune* conversely implied.<sup>19</sup> It is more reasonable to assume that Albano was one of the many Sicilian immigrants who left New Orleans fearing for their lives in the wake of the outburst of anti-Italian sentiments resulting in the 1891 lynching.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, diplomatic dispatches were concerned almost exclusively as to whether or not Albano and Ficarotta were Italian citizens, a status that entitled consular officials to ask the U.S. government for compensation on behalf of their families under international laws that committed the United States to the protection of Italian immigrants and other nationals. Specifically, Italian authorities were interested in assessing a statement by Florida's Governor Albert W. Gilchrist to the effect that Albano had been born in the United States and Ficarotta was a naturalized U.S. citizen.<sup>21</sup>

As a result, current scholarship overlooked the ways the Italian-American community perceived the murder of two of its members. Yet such an approach helps place the lynching within a broader context, offering insights into both the labor militancy of workers from Italian background and their racial standing in their adoptive country.

Moreover, earlier studies have sometimes misunderstood what actually happened in Tampa. For instance, Elisabetta Vezosi has maintained that Albano and Ficarotta were lynched for beating Esterling rather than shooting at him.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, Alessandra Lorini and Gian Antonio Stella have contended that the mob killed the two Italian Americans because they had been strike breakers during a walkout of cigarmakers that had been in effect for roughly twelve weeks by the time the two Italian Americans were hanged.<sup>23</sup>

19. *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 1 October 1910.

20. Ilaria Serra, "A Story Never Told: An Italian Immigrant in South Florida," in Mormino and Serra, *Italian Americans & Florida*, 27.

21. *New York Times*, 24 September 1910; Laura Pilotti, "La serie 'Z-Contentioso' dell'Archivio Storico-diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri," *Il Veltro: Rivista della Civiltà Italiana* 34 (January-April 1990), 104-8.

22. Elisabetta Vezosi, *Il socialismo indifferente: Immigrati italiani e Socialist Party negli Stati Uniti del primo Novecento* (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1991), 114.

23. Alessandra Lorini, "Cartoline dall'inferno: Storia e memoria pubblica dei linciaggi negli Stati Uniti," *Passato e Presente* 55 (January-April 2002), 123, 138; Gian Antonio Stella, *L'orda: Quando gli albanesi eravamo noi* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002), 20.



The cigarmakers' strike did provide the background for the lynching of Albano and Ficarotta, but—contrary to Lorini's and Stella's perfunctory and unsubstantiated claim—the perpetrators of such a crime were on the other side of the picket line. Esterling—the victim of the assassination that led to the arrest of the two Sicilian immigrants—was a recruiter of scabs in the fruitless effort to break the walkout and was shot after being caught in the act of hiring them.<sup>24</sup> Those who shot at him and murdered him intended to punish an enemy of the unions and an instrument of the local entrepreneurs' anti-labor backlash on the payroll of one of the major cigar manufactures in Tampa.

While the *Tampa Morning Tribune* made a point of stressing that “neither Ficarotta nor Albano were directly connected with the strike of cigarmakers,” it also contended that “the conclusion is irresistible that they were acting as the agents of a certain element of the strikers in the attempt to end the life of Mr. Esterling.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, though from an opposite perspective, a relationship between the walkout and the lynching did exist and could be easily established. Actually, the link was so manifest that both commercial and radical Italian-language periodicals agreed on it. *L'Italia*—a conservative weekly published in Chicago that was “read from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico”—and *La Parola dei Socialisti*—the mouthpiece of the Socialist Party of America—stated in the early aftermath of the killing that both Albano and Ficarotta were labor activists involved in the walkout.<sup>26</sup> So did a Milan newspaper, the *Corriere della Sera*, the most authoritative daily in Italy. This journal even contended that Albano and Ficarotta were “the leaders of the strike.”<sup>27</sup> In fact, the two Sicilian Americans were not union militants, let alone leaders, at the time of the lynching, although Albano had been a tobac-

24. *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 27 September 1910.

25. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 22 September 1910.

26. *L'Italia*, 24 September 1910; *La Parola dei Socialisti*, 15 October 1910. For *L'Italia*, see Humbert S. Nelli, *Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 78, 158-60 (quote 160). For *La Parola dei Socialisti*, see Annamaria Tasca, “Italians,” in Dirk Hoerder, ed., *The Immigrant Labor Press in North America, 1840s-1970s: An Annotated Bibliography*, 3 vols. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1987), 3:97.

27. *Corriere della Sera*, 22 September 1910. The *Corriere della Sera* mistakenly renamed Ficarotta as “Picarotta.”



co worker and a member of Local 462 of the Cigar Makers International Union, which was affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, before turning to selling insurance.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the murder of Albano and Ficarotta must be placed against the backdrop of the strike.

According to William Fitzhugh Brundage, lynching was also a means to punish whites who held "unorthodox moral, social, or political beliefs." Radicalism could be easily included among such deviations "from community standards of behavior."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck have shown that lynching was among the mechanisms used to curb labor organizing and workers' collective bargaining in southern states. Such actions were not limited to the South. Indeed, the most infamous case—the 1917 murder of Frank Little, an organizer and national officer for the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World—occurred in Butte, Montana, in an effort to quell strikes in the mines during wartime.<sup>30</sup> In another example, it has been suggested that Italian Americans' role as labor agitators in Colorado's coalfields contributed to the lynching of five of them in Walsenburg in 1895.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, another Sicilian immigrant, Anthony Capraro, was kidnapped, brutally beaten, and escaped lynching by a close shave because he was a prominent member of the General Strike Committee and an organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America during a 1919 walkout in the woolen mills in

28. *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 30 September 1910. For an insider's sketchy account of the Cigar Makers International Union, see Giovanni Vaccaro, "International Cigar Makers Union," in Girolamo Valenti, ed., *Almanacco Sociale Italo-Americano* (New York: s.n., 1924), 85.

29. William Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 86-87 (quote 87).

30. Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 143-44; Arnon Gutfield, "The Murder of Frank Little: Radical Labor Agitator in Butte, Montana, 1917," *Labor History* 10 (January 1969), 177-92.

31. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1981; first published by Rutgers University Press, 1955), 90; Vincent N. Parillo, *Strangers to These Shores: Race and Ethnic Relations in the United States* (New York: Wiley Press, 1985; first published by Houghton-Mifflin, 1980), 98-99; Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of the Italian Americans* (Toronto: Guernica, 2000; first published by Doubleday, 1974), 118.

Lawrence, Massachusetts.<sup>32</sup> The killing of Albano and Ficarotta, also fits this pattern of anti-labor extralegal violence. For example, the radical journal *Mother Earth* related their case to the threatened lynching of some fifty jailed members of the Industrial Workers of the World in Fresno, California.<sup>33</sup>

On 26 June 1910, after a group of entrepreneurs belonging to the Clear Havana Cigar Manufacturers Association dismissed laborers holding union cards, workers in the tobacco industry went on strike to force employer recognition of the Cigar Makers International Union, to discontinue their open shop policy, and to comply with a plan of equalization that aimed at preventing plant owners from cutting wage rates.<sup>34</sup> The confrontation became violent almost immediately. The manufacturers resorted to a lockout, placing almost twelve thousand male and female employees out of work, and later hired strikebreakers whom union members systematically threatened and attacked—actions that provoked random shooting as well. Tampanans feared that the turmoil produced by the walkout would result in a relocation of cigar manufactures to some other center in Florida, a step that would ensure the collapse of the city's economy. Acting on their fears, a number of the city's residents joined forces with the entrepreneurs and established a Citizens' Committee in a replica of what had occurred during a previous strike in 1901. This organization recruited squads of vigilantes from the adjoining rural areas to patrol the streets, protect the scabs, assault the union members on the pickets lines, and to disrupt any other activity in support of the strike.<sup>35</sup>

32. Anthony Capraro, "How the Lawrence Ku-Klux Gang Taught Me American Democracy," *New York Call*, 27 May 1919; Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Anthony Capraro and the Lawrence Strike of 1919," in Pozzetta, ed., *Pane e Lavoro*, 16-17. For the context of the strike, see J.M. Budish and George Soule, *The New Unionism in the Clothing Industry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920), 254-69; Robert W. Dunn and Jack Hardy, *Labor and Textile* (New York: International Publishers, 1931), 218-20. See also Anthony Capraro Papers, boxes 2 and 9, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

33. "Observations and Comments," *Mother Earth* 5 (January 1911), 338-39.

34. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 27 January 1910; Campbell, *The Cigar Industry of Tampa*, 49.

35. George E. Pozzetta, "Italians and the Tampa General Strike of 1910," in George E. Pozzetta, ed., *Pane e Lavoro, The Italian American Working Class: Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association* (Toronto: Multicultural Historical Society of Ontario, 1980), 29-46; Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South*, 55-115.



The 1910 Citizens' Committee was officially established only as late as 4 October.<sup>36</sup> But, according to Giovanni Vaccaro, the Tampa-based correspondent for *La Parola dei Socialisti*, the vigilantes who abducted Albano and Ficarotta were associated with this organization.<sup>37</sup> To both the Socialist weekly and the conservative New York-based *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, the largest and most authoritative Italian-language daily in the United States, the lynching was part of a broader scheme to intimidate the strikers and to bring the resulting cowered cigarmakers back to work. In this view, the notice hanging on Albano's belt offered an ominous warning for the organizers of the strike and for all the workers involved in the walkout. As *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* put it, the plan of the manufacturers could be summarized as follows: "Let's arrest a few Italians; let's pretend to jail them; in fact let's lynch them afterwards; then let's threaten the surviving lot so that we can spread the panic and win the match by means of terror."<sup>38</sup>

Letters to both newspapers from anonymous Italian-American readers in Tampa restated the same point, while stressing the connivance of law-enforcement officers with the lynchers and the employers who operated in the latter's background. A subscriber to *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* wrote that "the police themselves wanted the massacre in order to scare striking workers."<sup>39</sup> Indeed, only two agents were dispatched to escort Albano and Ficarotta, raising reasonable suspicion of "official complicity" in the lynching.<sup>40</sup> Not unlike *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, *La Parola dei Socialisti* quoted another Italian American as contending that the laborers "face the municipal and state authorities that arrest, persecute, proscribe, and lynch all those who do not think that it is suitable for cigarmakers to bow their heads to the factory owners' orders."<sup>41</sup>

Actually, Albano and Ficarotta were tailor-made for such a role. They were both of Sicilian origin and, therefore, belonged to the regional group that figured prominently within Tampa's

36. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 5 October 1910.

37. *La Parola dei Socialisti*, 1 October 1910.

38. *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 28 September 1910. For *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, see Samuel L. Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870 to 1914* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press., 1999), 182-84.

39. *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 28 September 1910.

40. Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South*, 96.

41. *La Parola dei Socialisti*, 29 October 1910.

Italian community.<sup>42</sup> Specifically, more than 60 percent of the Italian newcomers—including Albano himself—were natives of Santo Stefano Quisquina and many of the remaining immigrants had arrived from nearby villages in the Sicilian province of Agrigento.<sup>43</sup>

In order to emphasize the anti-strike purpose of Albano's and Ficarotta's lynching, *La Parola dei Socialisti* reported that other likely victims—this time individuals who were openly associated with workers' organizations—were next in line to fall prey to the manufacturers' violence. According to the weekly, Giovanni Vaccaro was forced to flee Tampa and seek sanctuary in New York City to save his own life. In his case, as he was a radical militant who had been active as a recruiter for the Cigar Makers International Union since 1901 and had established Socialist locals in West Tampa and Ybor City, the deliberate use of violence as a means intended to break up the strike was clear and undisputable. It was not by chance that Vaccaro's replacement as the correspondent for *La Parola dei Socialisti* from Tampa only initialed his articles and did not sign his name in full.<sup>44</sup> After all, even before the killing of Esterling, the *Tampa Morning Tribune* endeavored to fan the flames of anti-Italian feelings by stressing the potentially violent behavior of the Italian-American workers involved in the strike as in the case of Vincenzo Marchetta and Francesco Talle, who were arrested in mid September on charges of carrying concealed weapons on the picket line.<sup>45</sup> The daily also immediately pointed to Italian and Cuban immigrants as those responsible for shooting at Easterling.<sup>46</sup>

For similar reasons, when José de la Campa—the chairperson of the Joint Advisory Board of the Cigar Makers International Union—was arrested on charges that he, too, was involved in the killing of Esterling, a letter to *La Parola dei Socialisti* by Salvatore Leone, Domenico Albano, Salvatore Giunta and Calogero Mistella,

42. Forni, "Gli italiani nel distretto consolare di Nuova Orleans," 217.

43. Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 9. For Albano's birthplace, see *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 28 September 1910.

44. *La Parola dei Socialisti*, 22 October 1910. For biographical information about Vaccaro, see Donna R. Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants: Rural Sicilians Become American Workers* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 125-27; Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 122-23; Vezzosi, *Il socialismo indifferente*, 78, 80-81.

45. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 14 September 1910.

46. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 15 September 1910.



on behalf of Ybor City's local of the Socialist Party of America, proclaimed that his life was in danger because he was in the hands of the same thugs who had previously lynched the two Sicilian immigrants. The letter also warned that this time workers would not remain idle in the face of violent actions by the manufacturers and hinted that they would repay them in kind.<sup>47</sup>

The contents of the letter were less alarmist than it may seem. In the aftermath of the lynching, members of the Joint Advisory Board received threats that they would receive "the same treatment as accorded the two Italians."<sup>48</sup> Consequently, following de la Campa's arrest, groups of roughly two hundred armed members of the Cigar Makers International Union began to take turns camping outside the county jail in order to prevent, in the words of *La Parola dei Socialisti*, "a replica of such a manifestation of all-American heroism as that of the previous lynching."<sup>49</sup> This sarcastic definition was clearly a reference to an editorial of the *Tampa Morning Tribune*, to which the killing of Albano and Ficarotta meant that "the better sentiment of Tampa citizenship has asserted itself."<sup>50</sup> These deterring initiatives by the Cigar Makers International Union gained momentum after another wave of arrests among the strike leaders.<sup>51</sup>

After all, the behavior of Tampa's cigar manufacturers revealed an established tradition of violent anti-union methods. For instance, in order to speed up the end of the 1901 walkout, the Citizens' Committee abducted thirteen union leaders and placed them on a boat heading for Honduras after threatening them with death if they dared return to Tampa. The following year, something similar happened to Francisco Milián, the mayor of West Tampa and a revered *lector* at the Bustillo Brothers and Diaz Cigar Company. A peculiar institution in cigar factories, the *lector* was paid by the workers to read to them and was an instrument for the latter's politicization. Accused of reading inflammatory materials aimed at pitting the cigarmakers against the plant management and owners, with the complicity of the police, Milián was kidnapped, beaten and forced to leave Tampa on a steamer on its way

47. *La Parola dei Socialisti*, 29 October 1910.

48. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 23 September 1910.

49. *La Parola dei Socialisti*, 29 October 1910.

50. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 23 September 1910.

51. *La Parola dei Socialisti*, 3 December 1910.

to Cuba. Both the union leaders and Milián eventually returned to Tampa but their experiences offered evidence of manufacturers' resort to violence in fighting radicalism and workers' organizations.<sup>52</sup>

Not even the Italian vice-consul at New Orleans, Gerolamo Moroni, failed to realize that the intimidation of the workers was the main purpose of Albano's and Ficarotta's lynching. Notwithstanding a conservative judgment about the walkout, in his report to the Italian ambassador in Washington about the killing of the two Sicilian immigrants, Moroni pointed out that the aim of the double hanging was to teach "an awful lesson to the strikers of the cigar factories who had passed from quiet protest to acts of violence against the manufacturers."<sup>53</sup> After all, the postcards made out of the photographs of Albano's and Ficarotta's hanging corpses included captions reading "labor agitators lynched during the cigar makers' strike."<sup>54</sup>

A perusal of the Italian-language press reveals an additional dimension of the events. The ethnic newspapers stressed the climate of violence within which the lynching of the two immigrants took place in order to underscore that Italian-American workers stuck to the decisions of the Cigar Makers International Union and did not yield to the heavy-handed pressures for their return to the factories.

The emphasis on Italian Americans' unyielding adherence to the Tampa strike was neither redundant nor a form of self-gratification. It was primarily a consequence of the immigrants' troubled relations with unions.

Italian mass immigration to the United States started in the late 1870s.<sup>55</sup> As latecomers to the country, Italian workers faced a number of difficulties in securing accommodation within the U.S. labor movement and were subject nationwide to prejudices and

52. Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 98, 117; Armando Mendez, *Ciudad de Cigars, West Tampa* (Tampa: Florida Historical Society, 1994), 49, 93-94. For the figure of the *lector*, see Gary Ross Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, "The Reader Lights the Candle: Cuban and Florida Cigar Workers' Oral Tradition," *Labor's Heritage* 5 (Spring 1993), 4-26.

53. Gaetano Moroni to Cusani Confalonieri, 11 October 1910, as quoted in Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 120.

54. James Allen et al., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms, 2000), 76.

55. Humbert S. Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnic: The Italian Americans* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 40-41.



biases. In particular, they were often accused of lacking class consciousness and being potential strike breakers prone to entrepreneurs' exploitation, especially when it came to accepting lower wages than the standard negotiated by the unions. As a labor activist remarked, "they worked for cheap. They didn't like me because I was no good for them, because I wanted a union shop. I didn't like how they worked there, they were slaves."<sup>56</sup>

For this reason, as early as 1893, President Samuel Gompers of the American Federation of Labor sponsored a literacy test bill that would bar illiterate foreigners from the United States in the hope that the measure would disqualify most Italians due to their high illiteracy rate in their native country. The American Federation of Labor also significantly increased membership dues in order to keep underpaid Italian newcomers out of the unions.<sup>57</sup>

Italian immigrants to Tampa, however, were generally an exception to that bad reputation, though they were not completely impervious to such charges and innuendos. In the words of Angelo Massari, a cigarmaker who arrived there from Santo Stefano Quisquina in 1902, the city was "a world of radicals."<sup>58</sup> Many of them had been militants in the Socialist-oriented mass movement of the *fasci dei lavoratori* in Sicily in 1892-1893, or the children of those activists, and left for the United States after the authoritarian government of Prime Minister Francesco Crispi brutally suppressed these workers' leagues in December of the latter year. Drawing upon their pre-emigration radicalism, the veterans of those fights easily elaborated a common Latin labor culture, superseding national divisions, with their Cuban and Spanish fellow cigarmakers in Tampa and were ready to plunge headfirst into their adoptive city's ferocious class struggle and unrest. Though too young for active participation in the early 1890s social unrest, a follower of *fasci* leader Lorenzo Panepinto in Sicily, Vaccaro himself stood out among Ybor City's Italian-American radicals who had undergone a process of politicization before leaving their country of birth.<sup>59</sup>

56. Susan A. Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 192.

57. Catherine Collomp, *Entre Classe et Nation: Mouvement Ouvrier et Immigration aux Etats-Unis, 1880-1920* (Paris: Belin, 1998).

58. Angelo Massari, *The Wonderful Life of Angelo Massari* (New York: Exposition Press, 1965), 56. For Massari, see Ilaria Serra, *The Value of Worthless Lives: Writing Italian American Immigrant Autobiographies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 149-50.

Another, Alfonso Coniglio, was a promoter of the short-lived "Socialist-Anarchist periodical," as its subtitle read, *L'Alba Sociale*, which was published between June and August 1901, while Pietro Calcagno was the editor of the bilingual (Italian and Spanish) journal *La Voce dello Schiavo*, which briefly came out between August 1900 and March 1901.<sup>60</sup> Tampa's Italian-American radicals retained ties to Sicily and invited prominent agitators, including Panepinto as well as Anarchist Errico Malatesta and Luigi Galleani, to speak in Ybor City. They also read Socialist newspapers published in their ancestral island such as *Il Risveglio*, which was printed in Catania. All these connections contributed to keeping alive and strengthening labor militancy in their community.<sup>61</sup>

In other U.S. centers, Italian women were accused of being unreceptive of unionism. As a Jewish garment worker from New York City pointed out, her female fellow laborers from Italy were "the oppressed of the race, absolutely under the dominance of men of their family, and heavily shackled by old costumes and tra-

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59. Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants*, 123-27; Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 97-126, 143-53; Bruno Cartosio, "Sicilian Radicals in Two Worlds," in Marianne Debouzy, ed., *In the Shadow of the Statue of Liberty: Immigrants, Workers, and Citizens in the American Republic, 1880-1920* (Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1988), 133-34. For the *fasci*, see Francesco Renda, *I fasci siciliani* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977). For their perception in the United States, see Lucia Ducci, "An American View of the Italian Crisis at the End of the Century (1890-1900)," *VIA: Voices in Italian Americana* 17 (Fall 2006), 44-51. For Panepinto, see Francesco Renda, "Panepinto, Lorenzo," in Franco Andreucci and Tommaso Detti, eds., *Il movimento operaio italiano: Dizionario biografico, 1853-1943*, 5 vols. (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1978), 4:41-43; Salvatore Lupo, *Quando la mafia trovò l'America: Storia di un intreccio intercontinentale, 1888-2008* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008), 35.
60. Tasca, "Italians," 37, 127; Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 116; Augusta Molinari, "I giornali delle comunità anarchiche italo-americane," *Movimento Operaio e Socialista* 4 (January-June 1981), 129.
61. Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Italian Immigrants in the United States Labor Movement from 1880 to 1929," in Bruno Bezza, ed., *Gli italiani fuori d'Italia: Gli emigrati italiani nei movimenti operai dei paesi d'adozione (1880-1940)* (Milan: Angeli, 1983), 281-82. For Malatesta, see Armando Borghi, *Errico Malatesta* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1947); Giampietro Berti, *Errico Malatesta e il movimento anarchico italiano e internazionale, 1872-1932* (Milan: Angeli, 2003). For Galleani, see Nunzio Pernicone, "Luigi Galleani and Italian Anarchist Terrorism in the United States," *Studi Emigrazione* 30 (September 1993), 469-89; Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in Its First Age of Terror* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 207-11. For one of Panepinto's speeches in Tampa, see Lorenzo Panepinto, "Ai compagni di Tampa, Fla.," in Calogero Messina, ed., *In giro per la Sicilia con la "Plebe" (1902-1905)* (Palermo: Herbita, 1985), 379-81.



ditions. They are much afraid of trade unions."<sup>62</sup> Mary Dreier of the Women's Trade Union League similarly argued that "these girls listened to speeches but when the chips were down they didn't stay out on strike, so we concluded there is no point in trying to attract them into something."<sup>63</sup> But Ybor City offered a completely different picture of Italian-American women's labor activism. To quote from the *Tampa Morning Tribune* during the 1910 strike, "at the factory of Arguelles, Lopez and Bros., nine Italian women gave an entertainment [...]. The misguided ones, armed with clubs, paraded the streets about the factory. Their weapons they brandished and their tongues they did wag, giving vent to threats that they would beat to death all who would work."<sup>64</sup> Similarly, when the Cuban, Puerto Rican and African-American wives of three of the kidnapped union leaders called on Governor William S. Jennings to investigate their husbands' 1901 abduction, roughly twenty percent of the signers of their petition were Italian-American fellow workers.<sup>65</sup>

Nonetheless, cigar manufacturers considered Italian Americans the weakest component of the multiethnic and multinational labor force in their factories. Rumor had it that scabs of Italian origins had been employed during the 1901 walkout.<sup>66</sup> Attempts at breaking the 1910 strike, therefore, primarily targeted workers of Italian descent. First, in November, the factory owners threatened Italians with blacklisting; those who would not report to work would no longer be employed by any plant. The following month, a phony manifest circulated that supposedly had been signed by workers with Italian-sounding names who committed themselves resuming work on the manufacturers' terms by 2 January 1911.<sup>67</sup>

62. Nancy Schrom Dye, *As Equals and as Sisters: Feminism, Unionism, and the Women's Trade Union League of New York* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1980), 112.

63. Women's Trade Union League, *Proceedings of the Fifth Biennial Convention* (St. Louis, Mo.: Women's Trade Union League, 1913), 203-4.

64. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 10 November 1910.

65. Nancy A. Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 128-29.

66. Durward Long, "La Resistencia: Tampa's Immigrant Labor Union," *Labor History* 6 (Fall 1965), 212; Campbell, *The Cigar Industry*, 49.

67. *El Internacional*, 18 November and 30 December 1910; Pozzetta, "Italians and the Tampa General Strike of 1910," 39.

Against this backdrop, the Italian-language press—especially the radical weekly *La Parola dei Socialisti*—made a point of stressing that, in spite of escalating violence that had reached a climax with the lynching of their fellow ethnics Albano and Ficarotta, Italian-American workers did not fit the stereotypes about their alleged lack of class consciousness and, therefore, refused to yield to the manufacturers' pressures.<sup>68</sup> In particular, *La Parola dei Socialisti* was glad to report that cigarmakers of Italian ancestry were resolved not to give in even in the face of further threats of lynching resulting from charges of their supposed involvement in the attempted shooting of one of the co-owners of the Bustillo Brothers and Diaz Cigar Company.<sup>69</sup> The newspaper also took pride in the fact that, after the Cigar Makers International Union had decided to call off the walkout in late January 1911 following the depletion of funds to subsidize the strikers, the Italian Americans were the last cohort of workers to return to the factories, while the scabs were not workers of Italian origins but black newcomers from Cuba.<sup>70</sup>

On the one hand, the Italian-language press used the lynching as a device to point to Italian Americans' commitment to class warfare in Tampa. On the other hand, however, in the long run the crime committed against the two Sicilian immigrants contributed to undermining trans-ethnic and trans-national solidarity within Tampa's cigarmakers because it questioned the racial standing of Italian Americans.

According to *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* the murderers resorted to lynching because the designated targets were of Italian extraction. As the daily remarked, "those who know statistics about lynching are aware that the victims are Black people. Europeans have not been lynched except for Italians only. In fact, a white person—probably a Bulgarian—was lynched in Baton Rouge in 1907. Yet it was a misunderstanding. The thugs there attacked a group of workers from Macedonia. But they actually intended to give chase to Italian laborers living nearby."<sup>71</sup>

The newspaper's assertion of white lynchings as specific to Italians was incorrect. Between 1880 and 1930, 723 whites were

68. *La Parola dei Socialisti*, 12 November 1910. For Italian Americans' resistance, see also *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 10 November 1910.

69. *La Parola dei Socialisti*, 31 December 1910.

70. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 24, 25, and 26 January 1911; *La Parola dei Socialisti*, 4 February 1911.

71. *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 25 September 1910.



lynched in the United States and the thirty-four identified as Italian immigrants were obviously a minority among them even if Salvetti's list of victims is shorter than the actual number.<sup>72</sup> In any case, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano's* belief in the supposed Italian monopoly of the white victims of mob violence is revealing of Italian Americans' insecurity in their racial standing in their adoptive land. While attempting to account for the allegedly "systematic lynching" of Italian newcomers, the daily pointed out that "only racial hatred can explain it."<sup>73</sup> At that time the word "race" was a rather ambiguous term in the Italian-American press. Many newspapers used it as a synonym for ethnicity. In this case, however, we can reasonably take the meaning of such expression at face value.

Indeed, an "inbetween" racial status often characterized Italian immigrants from the southern regions of their motherland, particularly Sicilians, upon landing in the United States in the late nineteenth century. In the eyes of the broader American society, the generally dark-skinned newcomers from the *Meridione* looked more similar to African Americans than to white Europeans. That they worshipped black Madonnas and saints such as Benedict the Moor without rejecting the informal participation of people of color in religious processions in honor of their patrons only added to the perception.<sup>74</sup>

Italian travelers to the states of the former Confederacy often complained that their fellow countrymen were usually treated as if

72. Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 259.

73. *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 25 September 1910.

74. Robert Orsi, "The Religious Boundaries of an Inbetween People: Street *Feste* and the Problem of the Dark-Skinned Other in Italian Harlem, 1920-1990," *American Quarterly* 44 (September 1992), 313-47; Bénédicte Deschamps, "Le racisme anti-italien aux États-Unis (1880-1940)," in Michel Prum, ed., *Exclure au nom de la race (États-Unis, Irlande, Grande-Bretagne)* (Paris: Sylleps, 2000), 61-66; David R. Roediger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 34-37, 142-44, 163, 167; Ferdinando Fasce, "Gente di mezzo: Gli italiani e gli altri," in Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina, eds., *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana: Arrivi* (Rome: Donzelli, 2002), 235-43. For Black Madonnas, see Lucia Chiavola Birbaum, *Black Madonnas: Feminism, Religion and Politics in Italy* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993). For Saint Benedict the Moor, see Anthony D'Angelo, "Italian Harlem's Saint Benedict the Moor," in Mary Jo Bona and Anthony Julian Tamburri, eds., *Through the Looking Glass: Italian & Italian/American Images in the Media: Selected Essays from the Twenty-Seventh Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association* (Staten Island, N.Y.: American Italian Historical Association, 1996), 235-40.

they were blacks.<sup>75</sup> Common conditions of peonage and agricultural work side-by-side with African Americans on the sugar cane, cotton, and rice plantations further blurred the difference between Italian Americans and African Americans.<sup>76</sup> Significantly, as late as 1922, a court in Alabama cleared an African-American man, Jim Rollins, of miscegenation charges on the grounds that it could not be proved that his Sicilian partner, Edith Labue, was white.<sup>77</sup> In 1911, several members of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization of the U.S. House of Representatives doubted that southern Italians were “full-blooded Caucasian” and the report of a senatorial commission investigating immigration pointed to a likely “infusion of African blood” among Sicilians and Sardinians.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, testifying before a Congressional committee on immigration in 1890, a railroad construction boss contended that an Italian was not a white man but a “Dago.”<sup>79</sup> In the early twentieth century, the Italian ambassador in Washington himself—Edmondo Mayor des Planches—acknowledged that newcomers from Italy “hold a racial middle ground between whites and Blacks.”<sup>80</sup>

Italian Americans voluntarily associated themselves with people of color from time to time at an early stage of their stay in their host land. This happened especially in southern states. In New Orleans, for instance, Italian immigrants and African Americans shared a common experience of rejection by people of northern European extraction that brought them together. Besides com-

75. Matteo Sanfilippo, *Problemi di storiografia dell'emigrazione italiana* (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2002), 69-70.

76. Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 94, 103, 152. For a case study, see Ernesto R. Milani, “Peonage at Sunny Side and the Reaction of the Italian Government,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 45 (Spring 1991), 30-39.

77. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 4.

78. U.S. House of Representatives, 62nd Congress, 2nd Session, Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Hearings Relative to the Further Restriction of Immigration* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1912), 77-78; U.S. Senate, 61st Congress, 3rd Session, *Abstracts of the Reports of the Immigration Commission: With Conclusions and Recommendations and Views of the Minority*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1911), 1:250.

79. George J. Manson, “The ‘Foreign Element’ in New York City,” *Harper's Weekly*, 18 October 1890, 817.

80. Edmondo Mayor des Planches, *Attraverso gli Stati Uniti: Per l'emigrazione italiana* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1913), 144.



plexions that—albeit different—contrasted with the full-fledged whiteness of the local Wasp establishment, Italian Americans' supposed connections with organized crime and the legacy of African Americans' antebellum slavery were similar social stigmas that led both ethnic groups to develop ties to each other.<sup>81</sup> In addition, Sicilians—who made up the great bulk of Italian newcomers to Louisiana in general and to New Orleans in particular—were tolerant of blacks and even friendly toward them as a consequence of the roughly two centuries of Arab domination over their native island. For the most part, Italian Americans dealt with African Americans on equal terms and revealed little bigotry against them. Such social intimacy generally led Italian immigrants, even unconsciously, to challenge the segregationist practices of white supremacists and, as historian George E. Cunningham has argued, made Italian Americans “a hindrance to white solidarity.”<sup>82</sup>

Yet late-nineteenth-century southern society was not only unprepared for interracial relations but actively opposed them. As Grace Elizabeth Hale has suggested, for decades lynchings were a means of not only intimidating blacks but also drawing racial lines and consolidating whiteness in postbellum southern society. To this effect, namely to strengthen the cultural scaffolding of segregation, lynchings were turned into public spectacles, while postcards and other souvenirs were created so that participants and onlookers could have a keepsake to remind them which side on the color divide they were on.<sup>83</sup>

Tampa's 1910 lynching stuck to this pattern, too. Albano's and Ficarotta's corpses were left hanging all night long as people went to the site where the two Sicilian immigrants had been murdered by any means available. The crowd that gathered there reached two thousand people by midnight.<sup>84</sup>

Against this backdrop, since the lynchers were almost exclusively white and the lynched were generally African Americans, interaction with black people could make individuals with dubious

81. Dino Cinel, “Sicilians in the Deep South: The Ironic Outcome of Isolation,” *Studi Emigrazione* 27 (March 1990), 55-86; Anna Maria Martellone, “Italian Mass Emigration to the United States, 1876-1930: A Historical Survey,” *Perspectives in American History* 1 (1984), 415-18.

82. George E. Cunningham, “The Italian: A Hindrance to White Solidarity in Louisiana, 1890-1898,” *Journal of Negro History* 50 (January 1965), 22-36.

83. Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 199-239.

84. *New York Times*, 21 September 1910.

complexion subject to the same public lynchings. It was hardly by a chance that Italian immigrants shared peonage conditions with African Americans especially in places such as Tallulah, Louisiana, where they also fell victims to lynching.<sup>85</sup>

Consequently, Italian Americans no longer felt safe in defying the racial order and befriending African Americans. Remarkably, for example, Louisiana's Italian Americans became so eager to distance themselves from people of color that, at the turn of the twentieth century, they gave up working in the sugar cane fields in order to avoid being associated with the state's black labor force.<sup>86</sup> Likewise, after realizing the social benefits of being characterized by a white identity, Baltimore's Italian Americans embraced the racist premises of the local political leadership in the early twentieth century. For instance, they joined two campaigns that unsuccessfully aimed at disenfranchising African Americans in 1905 and 1909 by amending the state constitution to the effect that local officials would have been enabled to prevent blacks from registering to vote by surreptitious means.<sup>87</sup> Consequently, this image as white people was primarily the outcome of racial expediency on the part of individuals of Italian descent. As such, it let Italian Americans retain a multiple self-perception, notwithstanding their eventual categorization in a group different from that of blacks, especially in northern cities, where immigrants from Italy did not face restrictions on naturalization, property ownership, and access to material resources that, conversely, were denied to African Americans.<sup>88</sup>

One can reasonably suggest that, besides endeavoring to break the strike, the lynching of Albano and Ficarotta also aimed at restraining Italian Americans' trans-ethnic class solidarity by preventing them from reaching out to other cohorts of Tampa's cigar-making labor force such as the Afro-Cuban immigrants, who held a growing number of jobs in this sector while working "side by side

85. Gerolamo Moroni, "Il peonage nel Sud degli Stati Uniti," *Bollettino dell'Emigrazione* 5 (1910), 97-114.

86. Vincenza J. Scarpaci, "Italians in Louisiana's Sugar Parish, 1880-1910," in Franca Assante, ed., *Il movimento migratorio italiano dall'Unità ai giorni nostri*, 2 vols. (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1978), 2:197-216.

87. Gordon H. Shufelt, "Jim Crow among Strangers: The Growth of Baltimore's Little Italy and Maryland's Disfranchising Campaigns," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 19 (Summer 2000), 49-78.

88. Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).



with Cuban and Italian workers" in the tobacco plants.<sup>89</sup> The Anglos had already managed to drive a wedge between white and Afro Cubans by the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>90</sup> Although radicals were more tolerant toward blacks in Tampa than elsewhere in the United States,<sup>91</sup> they did not intend to challenge southern racial practices overtly in order to prevent further backlash against their organizations and unions by the local white establishment. Socialism and anarchism were subversive enough per se even without adding an open and direct attack on Jim Crow attitudes.<sup>92</sup> Consequently, for instance, few Italian Americans joined the 1905 boycott of public transportations after the Tampa Electric Company had introduced segregation on streetcars three years earlier.<sup>93</sup>

However, as in Ybor City's factories Afro Cubans rolled cigars alongside with Italian Americans and mixed with them in public. The position of the latter along the racial divide was so dubious that a few decades later, as the son of a Sicilian newcomer recalled, "Tampa Anglos didn't understand that Spanish-speaking Blacks never walked into my home" and "thought we were all one potluck dinner of Cuban niggers, and that was what Tampa Anglos called us."<sup>94</sup> Yet the color line had already been drawn on the eve of World War I and Italian Americans were called on to take an uncompromising stand. After all, in the eyes of the Anglo establishment that held them or their ethnic minority responsible for the assault on Esterling, the greatest sin of Albano and Ficarotta was that members of a group of outsiders had taken up arms against an insider because, according to the *Tampa Morning Tribune*, they had "the temerity to assault an American who happens to incur their displeasure."<sup>95</sup>

89. Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration, *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 79, 285.

90. Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 186.

91. See, e.g., Salvatore Salerno, "Odio di Razza? (Race Hatred?): The Beginnings of Racial Discourse in the Italian-American Anarchist Community," in Jerome Kruse, Philip V. Cannistraro, and Joseph V. Scelsa, eds., *Italian-American Politics: Local, Global/Cultural, Personal: Selected Essays from the 31st Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association* (Chicago Heights, Ill.: American Italian Historical Association, 2005), 13-27.

92. Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 152-53.

93. Nancy A. Hewitt, "Introduction," in Stephanie Cole and Alison M. Parker, eds., *Beyond Black and White: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the U.S. South and Southwest* (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), xvii-xviii.

94. Frank Urso, *A Stranger in the Barrio: Memoir of a Tampa Sicilian* (New York: iUniverse, 2005), 2.

95. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 15 September 1910.

David A. J. Richards has argued that the acquisition of the features underlying a white identity was a key component of the Americanization process for Italian immigrants and their offspring.<sup>96</sup> If fears of being lynched had induced Italian newcomers to distance themselves from African Americans in Louisiana, such a threat also caused them to keep their distance from black fellow cigarmakers in Tampa. This strategy eventually seemed to work effectively. Invited to address Italian, Spanish, and Cuban Anarchist and Socialist workers in Ybor City on May Day 1914, labor agitator Elizabeth Gurley Flynn noted that "there were no Negroes in the audience" and that the local committee of immigrants that had asked her to speak was not at ease when she stopped to talk with a few Blacks she met after the rally.<sup>97</sup> Even more revealing was what happened in 1936. A report from a local group of Italian-American anarchists denounced the employers' resort to the use of black scabs during another walkout in such racist overtones that the editorial staff of the newspaper that published the article, *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*, felt obliged to point out in a footnote that there was nothing wrong in hiring African-American workers providing that they were not strikebreakers.<sup>98</sup> Race relations further worsened following the Americanization of the immigrants' children circa World War II. As the second-generation Sicilian American cited earlier has written, "Cuban Negroes [...] never were welcomed in Sicilian homes."<sup>99</sup>

In conclusion, according to the Italian-language press of different political orientations, the lynching of Albano and Ficarotta was a demonstration of Italian-American cigarmakers' unabashed and unqualified commitment to both the strike in particular and to the values of labor solidarity in general. However, that kind of color-provoked violence also contributed to reminding first- and second-generation immigrants of their uncertain racial status between white and black people, urging them to consolidate their affiliation with the former. After all, such defensive embracing of

96. David A. J. Richards, *Italian American: The Racializing of an Ethnic Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

97. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *I Speak My Own Piece: Autobiography of "The Rebel Girl"* (New York: Masses & Mainstream, 1955), 172. For Flynn, see Helen Camp, *Iron in Her Soul: Elizabeth Gurley Flynn* (Pullman, Wash.: WSU Press, 1995).

98. *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*, 4 April 1936. For *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*, see Tasca, "Italians," 34-35.

99. Urso, *A Stranger in the Barrio*, 2.



whiteness characterized other ethnic groups holding borderline position in Florida. To this respect, decades later, the case of Albano and Ficarotta had parallels to the lynching of Nicholas Romey, an immigrant from Syria who fell victim to extralegal violence in Lake City on May 17, 1929. Though legally white, as Mediterranean people Syrians joined Italians in sharing a racial middle ground in the eyes of southern public opinion. Following Romey's killing, Syrians, too, realized their precarious status in the U.S. hierarchy of color, feared that they were perceived as surrogate blacks in their adoptive society and, consequently, endeavored to affirm their own whiteness.<sup>100</sup> By the same token, a few years earlier, within the context of the post World War I resurgence of nativism, Greek Americans in Florida hurried to distance themselves from other southern- and eastern-European ethnic groups, by claiming that they were heirs to the ancient culture that had been the cradle of western civilization, after a member of their community did escape lynching but was nonetheless brutally whipped for dating a white woman in Palatka in 1922.<sup>101</sup> In any case, the overlapping labor and racial dimensions of the lynching of Albano and Ficarotta offers additional evidence of the multifaceted and complex intertwining between class consciousness and racial identity that whiteness studies have repeatedly stressed.<sup>102</sup>

100. Sarah Gualtieri, "Strange Fruit? Syrian Immigrants, Extralegal Violence, and Racial Formation in the Jim Crow South," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 26 (Summer 2004), 63-85.

101. Yiorgos Anagnostou, "Forget the Past, Remember the Ancestors! Modernity, 'Whiteness,' American Hellenism, and the Politics of Memory in Early Greek America," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 22 (May 2004), 35-36.

102. See, e.g., Judith Stein, ed., "Scholarly Controversy: Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (Fall 2001), 1-92.