

## Culture or Propaganda? Fascism and Italian Culture in the United States\*

### Introduction

Culture should be conceived as a means to encourage reciprocal exchanges and friendship among peoples. But it often ends up falling a prey to diplomatic maneuverings to such extent that it sometimes becomes a political device in the hands of single governments. In the latter case, “cultural propaganda” is not an unusual category<sup>1</sup>. In this essay, the expression “cultural propaganda” refers to the exploitation of culture as a political tool in pursuit of national interests. As J.M. Mitchell has pointed out, «*Cultural propaganda is at one end of a scale that passes through cultural diplomacy to cultural relations at the other end; the progression is from the use of culture as a force to advance national ends, through the association of culture with current diplomatic aims, to an open collaborative relationship. But at any point on the scale there may be an element, greater or smaller, of propaganda*»<sup>2</sup>.

“Cultural diplomacy” was a key feature of the Fascist foreign policy concerning the United States in the 1930s. Mussolini’s regime thought of culture as a tool to improve the political and diplomatic relations between Italy and the United States, to win consensus among the American elites, and to preserve the *italianità* (Italianness) of the Italian communities abroad primarily by means of the spread of the Italian language. Such a strategy involved forging new Italian-American generations that were legally speaking American but “spiritually” tied to their ancestral country and fascism by linguistic bonds. This policy

\* Translated by Stefano Luconi.

<sup>1</sup> PENDERGAST, William R., *The Political Uses of Cultural Relations*, «Il Politico», (38), 4, 1973, p. 682.

<sup>2</sup> MITCHELL, J.M., *International Cultural Relations*. London, The British Council, 1986, pp. 28-29.

was strictly connected to another plan of the Fascist regime, which Stefano Luconi has examined<sup>3</sup>, namely the attempts at encouraging Italian immigrants to get naturalized in the United States since the early 1930s so that they could secure the right to vote and influence the decisions of the U.S. government and Congress to the benefit of Mussolini's Italy in their new capacity as U.S. citizens.

Fascist cultural propaganda in the United States has not been the focus of in-depth and systematic analyses. This essay intends to fill in this gap in historiography. It highlights an uncharted feature of Mussolini's foreign policy for the United States and examines the response of the new generations in the Italian-American community in the interwar years while they were subjected to both a ceaseless process of Americanization and the political stimuli from their native country.

### **Cultural Fascist propaganda in a historiographical context**

Italian dictator Benito Mussolini regarded propaganda as a key means to win consensus among the Italian people and to promote his own image abroad. Nonetheless there is no comprehensive study of Fascist propaganda either in Italy or abroad<sup>4</sup>.

Within the context of his imperialistic foreign policy, Mussolini considered Italian immigrants living abroad as an integral part of the Italian nation. They represented a cohort of people large enough to deserve Fascist attention. Indeed, some 16.6 million Italians had emigrated abroad, especially to the United States, between 1861 (the year the Italian kingdom was established) and the outbreak of the World War I<sup>5</sup>. Mussolini tried to secure control of the Italian "Diaspora", the worldwide network of economic, social, and family ties that linked the emigrants and their offspring to their motherland. Transnationalism defined Italian emigrants' lives. In other words, Italians abroad eliminated every border and lived in a "globalized" world while keeping in

<sup>3</sup> LUCONI, Stefano, *La "Diplomazia Parallela". Il regime fascista e la mobilitazione politica degli italo-americani*. Milano, Angeli, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> MIGNEMI, Adolfo, *Immagini e retorica della propaganda fascista*, «Italia Contemporanea», 231, 2003, pp. 337-340. The most wide-ranging study on Fascist propaganda is still CANNISTRARO, Philip V., *La fabbrica del consenso. Fascismo e mass media*. Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1975. For Fascist propaganda abroad, see especially GARZARELLI, Benedetta, *Fascismo e propaganda all'estero: le origini della Direzione Generale per la Propaganda (1933-1934)*, «Studi Storici», (43), 2, 2002, pp. 477-520.

<sup>5</sup> MARTELLONE, Anna Maria, *Italian Mass Emigration to the United States, 1876-1930: A Historical Survey*, «Perspectives in American History», 1, 1984, pp. 379-423; GABACCIA, Donna R., *Italy's Many Diasporas*. Seattle, WA, University of Washington Press, 2000, p. 68.

touch with their relatives and friends in their native country. *Il Duce* was fully aware of the relevance of this mass of people and endeavoured to create a sort of “nationalism of the Diaspora”, which involved stressing the Italian emigrants’ tie to the Italian state and extolling the secular mission of Italian civilization<sup>6</sup>. Brazilian scholar João Fábio Bertonha has compared the different Fascist strategies worldwide and has highlighted how Italians abroad responded to Mussolini’s plans in three culturally homogeneous areas: Anglo-Saxon countries, Latin nations, and Germanic regions<sup>7</sup>.

Mussolini was confident that, if he managed to build up large support for fascism in the “Little Italies”, he could exploit it in order to mobilize their members to the benefit of Italy’s foreign policy. To this aim, he encouraged the spreading of the *fasci* (the branches of the Italian National Fascist Party) abroad and relied on them in the effort to control the Italian communities. For the same reason, the Fascist regime promoted the diffusion abroad of the branches of the *Dopolavoro* (After-Work) and the *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio all’Esterio* (Italian Lictor Youth Abroad, GILE). Both organizations aimed at shaping the social activities of the emigrants and their children. Italian schools abroad were another important tool to disseminate Fascist propaganda within the “Little Italies”.

Mussolini’s regime also organized Summer camps in Italy for young Italians living abroad and provided funds to support trips to the ancestral country for those who wanted to attend them<sup>8</sup>. *Il Duce* envisaged a scenario in which Italians abroad loved Fascist Italy and defeated antifascist militants while foreign public opinions admired his regime.

The last few years have witnessed a significant increase in research into the relations between the Italian communities abroad and Mussolini’s regime<sup>9</sup>. But, once again, this scholarship has not included a comprehensive study on fascist propaganda among Italians abroad. Remarkably, for example, this recent historiography has neglected an analysis of the *Direzione Generale degli Italiani all’Esterio* (Italians Abroad Bureau, DGIE), which coordinated all Fascist policies concerning the Italians abroad and was the more fascistized agency of Italy’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Many studies have addressed various aspects of the ties that linked U.S. “Little Italies” to Fascist Italy<sup>10</sup>. In

<sup>6</sup> GABACCIA, D.R., *Italy’s Many Diasporas*, op. cit., pp. 211, 224.

<sup>7</sup> BERTONHA, João F., *Italiani nel mondo anglofono, latino e germanico. Diverse prospettive sul fascismo italiano?*, «Altretalia», 26, 2003, pp. 40-62.

<sup>8</sup> FRANZINA, Emilio; SANFILIPPO, Matteo (a cura di), *Il fascismo e gli emigrati*. Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> SANFILIPPO, Matteo, *Emigrazione italiana: il dibattito storiografico del nuovo millennio*, «Studi Emigrazione», 150, 2003, pp. 388-390.

<sup>10</sup> There is an extensive bibliography on Fascist activities in the United States, both in English and in Italian. Among English-language titles, see, e.g., DIGGINS, John P., *Mussolini and fascism. The view from America*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton

particular, they have suggested that Italian Americans' widespread allegiance to Mussolini resulted from the perception that *Il Duce* had allegedly created an influential "new" Italy that inspired the respect of international powers. To Italians in the United States, the "greatness" of their Fascist native country played an important role as a form of compensation for the social alienation they had experienced in everyday life because of Anglo-Saxon prejudices. These ethnic biases often implied that people of Italian ancestry were "inferior", cruel, violent, and inassimilable within their host society<sup>11</sup>. Consequently, Italian Americans' pro-fascist sentiments hardly reflected ideological implications. Rather, as John P. Diggins has suggested, such feelings were «*more a socially conditioned reflex than a politically conscious response*»<sup>12</sup>.

The *fasci* were the first vehicles to elicit support for fascism among Italian Americans. They were established in the early 1920s, but Mussolini ordered them disbanded in 1929 because he did not want to antagonize Washington after the U.S. government had resented the presence of political organizations operating on behalf of foreign countries on American soil<sup>13</sup>. As a result, Mussolini decided to rely on Italian culture as a new and more moderate form of propaganda in order to reach out to Italian Americans.

Through this approach, fascism intended to promote Italian culture abroad and, at the same time, to link it to the aims of the regime itself as the mobilization of intellectuals was part of the construction of Mussolini's totalitarian State<sup>14</sup>. The experience of Professor Bruno Averardi offers a case in point. When a few U.S. universities invited

University Press, 1972; SALVEMINI, Gaetano. *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States*. New York, Center for Migration Studies, 1977.

<sup>11</sup> CANNISTRARO, Philip V., *Fascism and Italian Americans*. In: TOMASI Silvano M. (ed.), *Perspectives in Italian immigration and ethnicity*. New York, Center for Migration Studies, 1977, pp. 51-66. On anti-Italian stereotypes in the United States see LAGUMINA, Salvatore J. (ed.), *Wop! A documentary history of anti-Italian discrimination*. San Francisco, Straight Arrow Books, 1973; DESCHAMPS, Bénédicte, *Le racisme anti-italien aux Etas-Unis (1880-1940)*. In: PRUM, Michel (éd.), *Exclure au nom de la race (Etas-Unis, Irlande, Grande-Bretagne)*. Paris, Syllepse, 2000, pp. 59-81. For the Fascist response to anti-Italian prejudices, see PRETELLI, Matteo, *La risposta del fascismo agli stereotipi degli italiani all'estero*, «Altreitalia», 28, 2004, pp. 48-65.

<sup>12</sup> DIGGINS, J.P., *Mussolini and Fascism*, op. cit., pp. 78-81.

<sup>13</sup> GOODMAN, Madeline J., *The evolution of ethnicity: Fascism and anti-fascism in the Italian-American community, 1914-1945*. Ph.D. diss., Carnegie Mellon University, 1993, pp. 70-101; CANNISTRARO, Philip V., *Blackshirts in Little Italy. Italian Americans and Fascism, 1921-1929*. West Lafayette, IN, Bordighera, 1999, pp. 102- 109; PRETELLI, Matteo, *I Fasci negli Stati Uniti: gli anni Venti*. In: FRANZINA, E.; SANFILIPPO, M. (a cura di), *Il fascismo e gli emigrati*, op. cit., pp. 115-127; ID., *Fasci italiani e comunità italo-americane: un rapporto difficile, 1921-1929*. In: SANFILIPPO, Matteo (a cura di), *Emigrazione e storia d'Italia*. Cosenza, Pellegrini, 2003, pp. 209-242.

<sup>14</sup> GENTILE, Emilio, *La via italiana al totalitarismo. Il partito e lo Stato nel regime fascista*. Roma, Carocci, 2002, p. 251.

him to the United States for a series of lectures on Italian literature, Mussolini urged him to discuss this topic without forgetting to remind his American audiences the achievements of the “new” Fascist Italy. As a result, Averardi often intertwined his scholarly talks with political statements that extolled *Il Duce*’s work for the general “renovation” of Italy<sup>15</sup>. In this way, cultural propaganda became a tool to promote fascism mainly among those U.S. intellectual and political elites that traditionally cherished Italian culture. Even Italian art exhibits abroad became opportunities to spread propaganda since they offered further pretexts to praise Fascist Italy and her accomplishments<sup>16</sup>. For instance, these exhibits usually included documentation that highlighted the undertakings of Mussolini’s Italy<sup>17</sup>.

However, culture had another important aim. It intended to preserve the *italianità* of the immigrants and to curb their tendency to lose their ties to the mother country and to become assimilated within foreign societies day after day. In particular, language maintenance was a means to curb the emigrants’ tendency to give up their Italian citizenship<sup>18</sup>. According to a volume published by the General Bureau of the *fasci* abroad, language was «*a sacred attribute of a people, the unmistakable privilege of a race, [language] is what we learnt to babble on our mothers’ knees... Forgetting or disavowing it is an ignominy*»<sup>19</sup>. In order to encourage the retention of the Italian language abroad, the Fascist regime relied in particular on the Italian schools, the *fasci*, and the various cultural associations that operated outside Italian borders. The purpose of all these organizations was to promote the Italian language and culture.

Regrettably, scholarship has overlooked the analysis of Italian “cultural diplomacy” and propaganda abroad in the interwar years<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> B. Averardi to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5 January 1932, Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Roma (ASMAE), Serie Affari Politici, Stati Uniti (SAP), 1931-1945, box 13, folder «Rapporti Culturali. Pos. 88/2».

<sup>16</sup> E. Ventura to A. Colonna, 8 March 1940, Archivio Centrale di Stato, Roma (ACS), Fondo Ministero della Cultura Popolare (MCP), Direzione Generale dei Servizi Propaganda (DGSP), box 229, folder «Stati Uniti. San Francisco. Seconda Parte», subfolder «New York-Esposizione d’arte italiana».

<sup>17</sup> «Relazione sull’attività svolta dalla Direzione per i Servizi della Propaganda durante l’anno 1937-XVI», Roma, 22 December 1937, ACS, MCP, Gabinetto, box 95, folder «Relazioni sull’attività della Direzione Generale della Propaganda», subfolder «Relazioni sull’attività svolta dalla Direzione Generale della Propaganda per gli anni 1935; 1937; 1938; 1939».

<sup>18</sup> PARINI, Piero, *La Cultura Italiana e gli Italiani all’Estero*, «Il Legionario», 29 April 1933.

<sup>19</sup> SEGRETERIA GENERALE DEI FASCI ALL’ESTERO, *Norme di Vita Fascista all’Estero*. Verona, Mondadori, 1937, p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> PETRICIOLI, Marta, *Diplomazia e Politica Culturale*. In: PELLEGRINI, Vincenzo (a cura di), *Amministrazione centrale e diplomazia italiana (1919-1943): Fonti e problemi*. Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1998, pp. 123-134. See also

Yet historians have dealt with some aspects of Italian culture within a broader examination of Fascist propaganda and diplomacy in different areas such as Eastern Europe<sup>21</sup>, Switzerland<sup>22</sup>, Brazil<sup>23</sup>, and Argentina<sup>24</sup>. Specific studies have analyzed the 1938 cultural agreement between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany<sup>25</sup> and the role that the French-Italian committees, which had been established before Mussolini's rise to power, played in facilitating cultural exchanges between the two "sister" countries<sup>26</sup>. Marta Petricioli has researched how Italian archaeology operated as a tool of foreign policy especially in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions<sup>27</sup>. Attention has

Id., *Culture et politique étrangère au tournant du siècle*. In: *L'Europe et la Méditerranée. Stratégies et itinéraires politiques et culturels en Méditerranée. France et Italie, XIX-XX siècles. Une approche comparative*. Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999, pp. 121-132; CARRERA, Alessandro, *Gli strumenti istituzionali per la promozione della cultura italiana all'estero*. In: MALATO, Enrico (a cura di), *Storia della Letteratura Italiana*, XII. Roma, Salerno, 2002, pp. 1073-1109.

<sup>21</sup> BOREJSZA, Jerzy W., *Il Fascismo e l'Europa Orientale. Dalla propaganda all'aggressione*. Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1981; PETRACCHI, Giorgio, *Un modello di diplomazia culturale: l'Istituto Italiano di Cultura per l'Ungheria, 1935-1943*, «Storia Contemporanea», (26), 3, 1995, pp. 377-402; SANTORO, Stefano, *Cultura e propaganda nell'Italia fascista: l'Istituto per l'Europa Orientale*, «Passato e Presente», (17), 48, 1999, pp. 55-78; ID., *Penetrazione culturale in Europa Orientale 1918-1939. Le grandi potenze occidentali a confronto*, «Passato e Presente», 56, 2002, pp. 85-114; ID., *The cultural penetration of Fascist Italy abroad and in Eastern Europe*, «Journal of Modern Italian Studies», (8), 1, 2003, 36-66; ID., *La diplomazia culturale italiana in Jugoslavia durante il fascismo*, «Annales. Series Historia et Sociologia», (13), 1, 2003, pp. 125-148; ID., *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale. Diplomazia culturale e propaganda 1918-1943*. Milano, Angeli, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> CODIROLI, Pierre, *Appunti riguardanti la politica culturale dell'Italia fascista nel Cantone Ticino: 1922-1930*, «Cenobio», (36), 2, 1987, pp. 127-147; ID., *L'Ombra del Duce. Lineamenti di politica culturale del fascismo nel Cantone Ticino, 1922-1943*. Milano, Franco Angeli, 1988; ID., *Il Canton Ticino fra Fascio e Balestra, 1922-1945: storia di una penetrazione culturale*, «Nuova Antologia», (564), 2175, 1990, pp. 301-311; ID., *Tra fascio e balestra*. Locarno, Armando Dadò Editore, 1992.

<sup>23</sup> CERVO, Amado L., *Le relazioni diplomatiche fra Italia e Brasile dal 1861 ad oggi*. Torino, Edizioni della Fondazione Agnelli, 1991, pp. 138-140; BERTONHA, João F., *Fascismo e os imigrantes italianos no Brasil*. Porto Alegre, Edipucrs, 2001, pp. 289-300.

<sup>24</sup> GENTILE, Emilio, *L'emigrazione italiana in Argentina nella politica di espansione del nazionalismo e del fascismo 1900-1930*, «Storia Contemporanea», (17), 3, 1986, pp. 393-394; SCARZANELLA, Eugenia, *Italiani malagente. Immigrazione, criminalità, razzismo in Argentina, 1890-1940*. Milano, Angeli, 1999, pp. 141-151.

<sup>25</sup> PETERSEN, Jan, *L'accordo culturale fra l'Italia e la Germania del 23 novembre 1938*. In: DIETRICH BRACHER, Karl; VALIANI, Leo (a cura di), *Fascismo e nazionalismo*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 1986, pp. 331-387.

<sup>26</sup> DECLEVA, Enrico, *Relazioni culturali e propaganda negli anni Trenta: I comitati 'France-Italie' e 'Italia-Francia'*. In: DUROSELLE, Jean B.; SERRA, Enrico (a cura di), *Il vincolo culturale fra Italia e Francia negli anni Trenta e Quaranta*. Milano, Angeli, 1986, pp. 108-157.

<sup>27</sup> PETRICIOLI, Marta, *Archeologia e politica estera fra le due guerre*. Firenze, Leadercomp., 1988; ID., *Archeologia e Mare Nostrum. Le missioni archeologiche nella politica mediterranea dell'Italia, 1898-1943*. Roma, Levi, 1990.



also been paid to some influential cultural institutes that were active in the interwar years. Such organizations included the *Società Nazionale Dante Alighieri* (Dante Alighieri Society), which was established in 1889 to spread Italian language abroad<sup>28</sup>; the *Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale* (Institute of International Politics Studies), which supported the imperialistic goals of Mussolini's foreign policy<sup>29</sup>; and the Italian schools abroad<sup>30</sup>, with specific or partial reference to the cases of Tunisia<sup>31</sup>, Egypt<sup>32</sup>, Brazil<sup>33</sup> and Great Britain<sup>34</sup>.

### Cultural propaganda in the United States

Scholars have hardly analyzed the role of cultural propaganda in the United States either. The main contributions to this subject have focused on two cultural organizations based in New York City: the

<sup>28</sup> PISA, Beatrice, *Nazione e politica nella Società «Dante Alighieri»*. Roma, Bonacci, 1995, pp. 390-441; SALVETTI, Patrizia, *Immagine nazionale ed emigrazione nella Società «Dante Alighieri»*. Roma, Bonacci, 1995, pp. 202-266; PRETELLI, Matteo, *Società Dante Alighieri*. In: *Dizionario del fascismo*, II, Torino, Einaudi, 2002, pp. 642-643.

<sup>29</sup> MONTENEGRO, Angelo, *Politica estera e organizzazione del consenso. Note sull'Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 1933-1943*, «Studi Storici», 4, 1978, pp. 777-817; DECLEVA, Enrico, *Politica estera, storia, propaganda: l'Ispi di Milano e la Francia (1934-1943)*. In: DUROSELLE, Jean B.; SERRA, Enrico (a cura di), *Italia e Francia (1939-1945)*. Milano, Angeli, 1984, pp. 295-356; BAIONI, Massimo, *Istituto per la Scienza Politica Internazionale (Ispi)*. In: DE GRAZIA, Victoria; LUZZATTO, Sergio (a cura di), *Dizionario del fascismo*, I, op. cit., p. 698.

<sup>30</sup> FLORIANI, Giorgio, *Scuole italiane all'estero. Cento anni di storia*. Roma, Armando Editore, 1974, pp. 58-95; CIAMPI, Gabriella, *Le scuole italiane all'estero*. In: PELLEGRINI, V. (a cura di), *Amministrazione centrale e diplomazia italiana*, op. cit., pp. 115-122; SALVETTI, Patrizia, *Le scuole italiane all'estero*. In: BEVILACQUA, Piero; DE CLEMENTI, Andreina; FRANZINA, Emilio (a cura di), *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, I, *Arrivi*. Roma, Donzelli, 2002, pp. 547-548.

<sup>31</sup> RAINERO, Romain H., *Presenza culturale e scuole italiane in Tunisia negli anni '30*. In: DUROSELLE, J.B.; SERRA, E. (a cura di), *Il vincolo culturale*, op. cit., pp. 220-233; BESSIS, Juliette, *La Méditerranée fasciste. L'Italie mussolinienne et la Tunisie*. Paris, Karthala, 1981, pp. 62-65.

<sup>32</sup> PETRICIOLI, Marta, *Italian Schools in Egypt*, «British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies», (24), 2, 1997, pp. 179-191.

<sup>33</sup> PETRONE, Pasquale, *Italiani e discendenti di italiani in Brasile: le scuole e la lingua*. In: COSTA, Rovilio; DE BONI, Luis Alberto (a cura di), *La presenza italiana nella storia e nella cultura del Brasile*. Torino, Edizioni della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1987, pp. 301-328; ROSOLI, Gianfausto, *Chiesa ed emigrati italiani in Brasile: 1880-1940*, «Studi Emigrazione», 66, 1982, pp. 242-244; TRENTO, Angelo, *Là dov'è la raccolta del caffè. L'emigrazione italiana in Brasile, 1875-1940*. Padova, Editrice Antenone, 1994, pp. 272-277; ID., *In Brasile*. In: BEVILACQUA, P.; DE CLEMENTI, A.; FRANZINA, E. (a cura di), *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, I, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>34</sup> BALDOLI, Claudia, *Exporting Fascism. Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s*. Oxford, Berg, 2003, pp. 13-14, 142-143.

Casa Italiana (Italian House) of Columbia University – whose director in the 1930s was a well-known intellectual, Giuseppe Prezzolini<sup>35</sup> – and the Italy-America Society, which had branches in other U.S. cities as well<sup>36</sup>. Madeline J. Goodman has in part examined the role of the Educational Bureau at the Casa Italiana, which was established to spread the Italian language in the New York metropolitan area and was headed by Italian-American educator Leonard Covello<sup>37</sup>. Nancy C. Carnevale has conducted further research into this topic and has studied the relationship between the Italian language and the Italian-American community in the interwar period<sup>38</sup>.

Cultural propaganda was the only strategy the Fascist regime could eventually develop in the United States. The experience of the *fasci* turned out to be a failure because their extremist militancy and ideological radicalism scared rather than luring Italian Americans. As their members were used to parading clad in black shirts and to attack anti-Fascists in street clashes, the *fasci* became a cause of concern for U.S. public opinion and jeopardized the export of fascism to the United States. Their radicalism worried many Italian Americans, too. Furthermore the *fasci* leadership urged immigrants to the United States to retain their Italian citizenship. As a result, Americans feared that these organizations could hinder immigrants' Americanization and interfere with the paradigm of the melting pot. Mussolini had been aware since the early 1930s that the only effective way to exploit Italian Americans for political purposes was to mobilize them as a lobby. He, therefore, encouraged them to become U.S. citizens so that they would be eligible for the suffrage and, as U.S. voters, could pressure

<sup>35</sup> FREZZA BIOCCHI, Daria, *Propaganda fascista e comunità italiane in U.S.A.: la Casa Italiana della Columbia University*, «Studi Storici», (11), 4, 1970, pp. 661-697. For a history of the Casa Italiana, see also RAGUSA, Olga, *Quando gli archivi parlano*. In: BETOCCHI, Silvia (ed.), *Giuseppe Prezzolini: The American Years, 1929-1962*. New York-Firenze, S.F. Vanni, 1994, pp. 39-61; ID., *Italian Department and Casa Italiana at Columbia University: The Prezzolini Years*, «Italian Americana», 13, 1995, pp. 60-74; ID., *Casa Italiana of Columbia University*. In: LAGUMINA, Salvatore J. (ed.), *The Italian American Experience. An Enciclopedia*. New York-London, Garland, 2000, pp. 100-101; ID., *Gli anni americani di Giuseppe Prezzolini. Il Dipartimento d'Italiano e la Casa Italiana della Columbia University*. Firenze, Le Monnier, 2001.

<sup>36</sup> SANTORO, Stefano, *La propaganda fascista negli Stati Uniti. L'Italy America Society*, «Contemporanea», (6), 1, 2003, pp. 63-92.

<sup>37</sup> GOODMAN, M., *The evolution of ethnicity*, op. cit., pp. 164-177, 298-306.

<sup>38</sup> CARNEVALE, Nancy C., *Living in Translation: Italian Immigrants and Language in the U.S., 1890-1945*. Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 2000, esp. chapters 4-5; ID., "No Italian Spoken for the Duration of the War": *Language, Italian-American Identity, and Cultural Pluralism in the World War II Years*, «Journal of American Ethnic History», (22), 3, 2003, pp. 3-33.



American political institutions such as Congress and the Presidency into adopting policies that benefited Italy and Fascist interests. This strategy reached a climax during the Italo-Ethiopian War, when the “Little Italies” supported Mussolini’s war efforts and lobbied Congress to prevent the passing of a neutrality legislation that would have granted the U.S. president the power to impose economic sanctions on Italy<sup>39</sup>. In 1927 the Italian ambassador in Washington, Giacomo De Martino, reported to Mussolini that Italian Americans needed U.S. citizenship to cope better with everyday problems and hardships. But he also suggested that, if naturalization came hand in hand with love for Italy, Italian Americans could become an influential ethnic group to the benefit of the Fascist regime<sup>40</sup>.

De Martino’s stand was quite anomalous because the United States was the only country where fascism let immigrants renounce their Italian citizenship, which was otherwise regarded as a fundamental expression of *italianità*. For example, in Tunisia and France, Mussolini’s regime even encouraged immigrants to live in self-segregated communities and to gather together around the consulate and the *Casa d’Italia* (House of Italy), a building that housed pro-Fascist Italian associations. Even in South America, where fascism was less optimistic about its hold of Italian immigrants because their assimilation within their host societies was almost taken for granted<sup>41</sup>, the branches of the *Dopolavoro* worked actively to curb immigrants’ efforts to become naturalized<sup>42</sup>. Conversely, in the case of the United States, Mussolini thought that Italian communities would be more useful if they turned into American electoral lobbies. In his view, Italian Americans could be loyal U.S. citizens providing that they maintained strong spiritual ties to their mother country, which involved promoting Italy’s interests in the United States. In the Spring of 1932, *Il Duce* officially stated to German journalist Emil Ludwig: «*We consider it a matter of principle to ask our fellow countrymen [Italian Americans] to be loyal to the State in which they live. If they acquire full citizenship in the spiritual sense as well as in the material, they count for something; but if they hold themselves aloof from their adoptive land, they remain helots.*»

<sup>39</sup> LUCONI, S., *La “Diplomazia Parallela”*, op. cit., pp. 85-111.

<sup>40</sup> G. De Martino to B. Mussolini, 11 August 1927, ASMAE. Ambasciata Washington (AW), Pos. St. 5, box 62, folder 620 «Fascismo miscellanea, 1927-28».

<sup>41</sup> BERTONHA, João F., *Emigrazione e politica estera: la “diplomazia sovversiva” di Mussolini e la questione degli italiani all’estero, 1922-1945*, «Altreitalie», 23, 2001, p. 46.

<sup>42</sup> GUERRINI, Irene; PLUVIANO, Marco, *L’Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro in Sud America: 1926-1941*, «Studi Emigrazione», 119, 1995, pp. 522-523; ID., *L’organizzazione del tempo libero nelle comunità italiane in America Latina: l’Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*. In: BLENGINO, Vanni; FRANZINA, Emilio; PEPE, Adolfo (a cura di), *La Riscoperta dell’America. Lavoratori e sindacato nell’emigrazione italiana in America Latina 1870-1970*. Milano, Teti, 1996, pp. 383-385.

*Since we began to advocate the policy of assimilation, many Italian-born citizens have attained high positions over there»<sup>43</sup>.*

Indeed, in the 1930s, Italian Americans acquired growing political influence and made progressive inroads into the political establishment, at least at the local level. Two of them, Fiorello H. La Guardia and Angelo Rossi, became mayors of such large cities as New York and San Francisco. Furthermore, in the same decade, voter turnout and naturalization rates quickly increased in Italian-American communities<sup>44</sup>. The number of Republican and Democratic political clubs also mushroomed. Fascism became aware of the Italian-American rise in political participation and endeavoured to profit from it. At the same time, however, Mussolini's regime had to preserve the *italianità* of the communities, namely their own peculiarities as an expression of what Fascist activists improperly called the "Latin race". The Italian language, which fewer and fewer Italian Americans were able to master one generation after the other, became the tool to safeguard and enhance Italian Americans' sense of belonging to their motherland. The director of the Bureau for Italians Abroad, Piero Parini, stated that the Italian language was the expression of the Italian "genius" and civilization as well as "a vivid and active expression of a people" that connected their past glories and future "potentialities"<sup>45</sup>. Therefore, spreading Italian became a major Fascist goal in the United States. Anything went in order to fulfill that aim. However, fascism relied especially on Italian parochial primary school that Italian Catholic priests managed. The Catholic Church was a very good ally of fascism in the United States because it regarded Mussolini as a fierce anti-Communist who had restored order in Italy<sup>46</sup>. Consequently, with few exceptions such as the case of Joseph Ciarrocchi in Detroit, especially after the 1929 Lateran Pacts, Catholic priests became major vehicles of Fascist propaganda in the Italian-American communities where they had long played an important social function<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> LUDWIG, Emil, *Talks with Mussolini*. Boston, Little, Brown, and Co., 1933, p. 74.

<sup>44</sup> LUCONI, Stefano, *La partecipazione politica in America del Nord*. In: BEVILACQUA, P.; DE CLEMENTI, A.; FRANZINA, E. (a cura di), *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, I, op. cit., pp. 492-496; GAMM, Gerald H., *The Making of New Deal Democrats. Voting Behavior and Realignment in Boston, 1920-1940*. Chicago-London, The University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 77-89.

<sup>45</sup> *La Diffusione della Lingua e della Cultura Italiana nel Mondo*, «Il Legionario», 7, October 1933.

<sup>46</sup> D'AGOSTINO, Peter R., *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism*. Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press, 2004, pp. 158-193.

<sup>47</sup> CANNISTRARO, Philip V., *Fascism and Italian Americans in Detroit, 1933-35*, «International Migration Review», (9), 1, 1975, pp. 35-36; D'AGOSTINO, P.R., *Rome in America*, op. cit., pp. 251-257.

Italian schools represented an ideal environment where children could learn Italian, study Italian culture, and receive Fascist indoctrination through Italian history classes that praised the supposed achievements of Mussolini's government. The Fascist regime tried to develop these schools as much as possible, providing either funds or textbooks published in Italy. After 1934, following Piero Parini's journey to the United States to survey the status of Italian culture in America, the Italian government also began to send a few teachers to the main Italian consulates in the United States in order to promote further Italian studies and schools in this country. Fascism constantly monitored both Italian culture and schools henceforth<sup>48</sup>.

At the same time, *Il Duce's* regime endeavored to introduce Italian language courses in U.S. high schools and universities in order to reach out to even much larger number of both American and Italian-American students and to induce them to appreciate Italy and her culture. To this end, it mobilized every pro-Fascist agent or organization. Pro-Fascist Italian ethnic journals in the "Little Italies" promoted the study of Italian. In particular, they invited their readers to enroll their children in Italian-language classes and to lobby their respective education and academic boards for the inclusion of Italian in the curricula of local high schools and universities<sup>49</sup>. So did the *prominenti*. These ethnic leaders generally had pro-Fascist feelings and seconded the purposes of Mussolini's regime to the best of their endeavours in the interwar years. The ethnic associations they headed supported the establishment of new schools as well as courses in Italian and urged their members to participate in such lobbying campaigns. This attitude did not necessarily mean an ideological persuasion. Actually, in most cases, the *prominenti's* support for fascism resulted from opportunism. Their "proud nationalism" was often an expedient to retain control of the "Little Italies". The spreading of the Italian language was a tool to gain access to second- and third-generation Italian Americans who

<sup>48</sup> Records relating to the activities of the educational teachers are in the holdings of the Archivio Scuole (AS) in the ASMAE. For example, see the activities of Mario Giani, educational teacher in New York (ASMAE, AS, 1929-1935, classe III, sf. 1-45, box 836, folder «New York, 1934-1935»).

<sup>49</sup> I systematically examined several Italian-American newspapers, such as the «Gazzetta del Massachusetts» and «Italian News» of Boston, «The Italian Echo» of Providence, the «Corriere del Connecticut» of New Haven, and the New York City-based Fascist review «Giovinezza», then renamed «Impero». Similar campaigns were promoted by «L'Italia» of San Francisco and the «Gazzetta d'Italia» of Seattle (see G. Parentini to the general director of Italian schools abroad, 28 June 1935, ASMAE, AS, 1929-1935, classe III, sf. 1-45, box 836, folder «S. Francisco, III 10», subfolder «Scuole della California»; ASMAE, Italian consulate in Seattle to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 May 1935, *ibid.*, box 837, folder «Seattle, 1934-1935»).

had been severing their ties to their ethnic community under the pressure of Americanization and the lure of the American way of life. The *prominenti* tried to encourage the younger generations to join the traditional mutual-aid societies. For example, in the 1930s, the Order Sons of Italy in America – the largest and most influential Italian-American ethnic organization in the country – chartered a number of new youth lodges. The Italian language was considered as the epitome of the *italianità* that young Italian Americans were spurred to preserve. Fascism backed the *prominenti*'s campaign and operated to unify the Italian-American communities in the United States. In particular, Mussolini's regime promoted ethnic educational committees that lobbied for the diffusion of the Italian language and encouraged the establishment of Italian students' clubs in high schools and universities<sup>50</sup>.

*Il Duce*'s main purpose was to forge a new Italian-American generation that was spiritually bound to Fascist Italy while living in the United States. In the interwar years, young Italian Americans experienced generational clashes with their parents. The latter lived according to Italian traditions and rejected the American-style behaviour of their children who regarded Italy as a far and away country that existed only in their parents' and grandparents' recollections<sup>51</sup>. Mussolini's regime planned to change this attitude. As a Fascist agent who operated in the United States reported to Rome in 1933, «*Our purpose is to shape within a decade a large Italian-American cohort, made up of citizens loyal to the United States but aware and proud of our language, our culture, and our civilization to such an extent that will bequeath this tradition on to their children [...]. The first and main step is to spread our language*»<sup>52</sup>.

Fascism intended to redefine the identity of the immigrants' children and make them proud of their Italian ancestry so that they would spearhead the interests of their motherland in the United States. For this reason, Mussolini's regime not only promoted new Italian schools,

<sup>50</sup> See the Order Sons of Italy in America Papers and especially the George Spatuzza Papers and the Giovanni Di Silvestro Papers, held by the Immigration Historical Research Center, University of Minnesota, Andersen Library, Minneapolis, MN, and «Ordine Nuovo», the mouthpiece of the Pennsylvania Grand Lodge of the Order Sons of Italy in America.

<sup>51</sup> COVELLO, Leonard, *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child*. Leiden, Brill, 1967; ALBA, Richard D., *Italian Americans. Into the Twilight of Ethnicity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1985, pp. 56-58, 75; ORSI, Robert A., *The Fault of Memory: "Southern Italy" in the Imagination of Immigrants and the Lives of Their Children in Italian Harlem, 1920-1945*, «Journal of Family History», (15), 2, 1990, pp. 134, 139.

<sup>52</sup> SABATELLO, Dario, «Considerazioni Generali sull'Espansione Generale Italiana negli Stati Uniti», [1933], MCP, Direzione Generale Servizi Propaganda (DGSP), 1930-1943, box 218, folder «Stati Uniti, 1934. Prima Parte», subfolder «Esposizione di arte moderna in California», ACS.

but offered free or discounted journeys to Italy as well as educational exchanges to the best students of Italian in parochial schools, high schools, and universities. The same benefits were granted to the best teachers, priests and cultural promoters, who could also receive official awards and honours from Rome<sup>53</sup>. The best young students were sent to Summer camps to Italy. These journeys were a prize but also offered opportunities to experience the so-called *bagni d'italianità* (full immersion in Italianness). Mussolini's officers hoped that, after visiting Italy, all these people would go back to the United States "reinvigorated in body and spirit" and would be instruments in propagandizing the alleged achievements of fascism. At Summer camps, the emigrants' children wore Fascist uniforms, received military training, lived side by side as comrades, and learnt how to hail the Italian flag, the King of Italy, and Mussolini. Meeting Mussolini was the crowning of their visits to Italy<sup>54</sup>.

A 1934 order by Undersecretary for Press and Propaganda Galeazzo Ciano reevaluated the role of the *Società Dante Alighieri* and turned it into one of the leading organizations that disseminated cultural propaganda in the United States. The purpose of the Society was to enlist prominent American and Italian-American members and to promote Italian culture by means of lectures, art exhibits, concerts, and Italian-language courses<sup>55</sup>. Although it aimed at making Americans into admirers of Fascist Italy, it also operated as a political tool. Indeed, on the eve of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, the national president of the *Società Dante Alighieri*, Felice Felicioni, urged the presidents of each local committee to launch a propaganda campaign of lecturers, letters to newspapers, debates, and the like to argue for Italy's imperialistic "right" to establish a colonial empire in Eastern Africa. He also authorized the local presidents to use the funds of their committee for this purpose and, if they lacked money, he encouraged them to apply for subsidies from the headquarters in Rome<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, ASMAE, AS, 1929-1935, classe IV, 11, box 864, folder «riduzioni 30% agli insegnanti di italiano negli Stati Uniti», and folder «Viaggio premio in Italia di studenti italo-americani»; Il Duce ha ricevuto un gruppo di studenti americani vincitori del concorso di lingua italiana, «Lavoro Fascista», 7 August 1934.

<sup>54</sup> BALDOLI, Claudia, *Le Navi. Fascismo e vacanze in una colonia estiva per i figli degli italiani all'estero*, «Memoria e Ricerca», 6, 2000, pp. 163-176; *168 Children Sail To Camps in Italy*, «New York Times», 6 July 1929; *Four Orient Heights Boys Depart Today as Guests of Italian Gov't*, «Italian News», 28 June 1935; *Intellettuali italo-americani a Roma*, «Il Legionario», 1 August 1938; ASMAE, Fondo Consolato Cleveland, C. 48 (1934-1940), box 21, folder «Campeggi degli allievi delle scuole parrocchiali italiane e scuole parrocchiali italiane».

<sup>55</sup> ACS, MCP, DGSP, 1930-1943, box 220, folder «Stati Uniti, 1935. Seconda Parte», subfolder «La "Dante Alighieri" negli Stati Uniti».

<sup>56</sup> F. Felicioni to the Dante Alighieri abroad committees' presidents, memo # 452, 31 October 1935, ACS, MCP, DGSP, box 220, folder «Stati Uniti, 1936. Prima Parte», subfolder «La "Dante Alighieri" negli Stati Uniti».

Culture was instrumental to diplomatic relations too. The *Istituto Nazionale di Cultura Fascista* (National Institute of Fascist Culture) set up connections with such prestigious U.S. universities as Columbia University in New York City, Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, and Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts<sup>57</sup>. Italian universities did the same, while the regime stimulated academic exchanges as well as visits of Italian university students and professors to the United States and vice versa. All these efforts and activities aimed at showing off the “magnificent” work that Mussolini had done in Italy. In this view, foreign guests were to become Fascist propagandists once they went back home. In addition, the Italian government usually honored and hosted U.S. intellectuals who promoted Italian culture<sup>58</sup>. For instance, this was the case of George J. Ryan, the president of New York City’s Board of Education. As an admirer of Mussolini, Ryan made a point of spreading Italian-language courses in New York City’s schools. Therefore, he was officially invited to visit Italy and was received with great ceremony<sup>59</sup>. In general, the Fascist government helped as much as possible those personalities in the fields of U.S. economy, politics, and culture who wished to pay visit in Italy<sup>60</sup>.

### Which model for Fascist propaganda in the United States?

Unlike the Fascist policy in other countries, Mussolini’s strategy for the United States was far from being aggressive. After the disbandment

<sup>57</sup> G. Gentile to G. Ciano, 29 July 1935, ACS, MCP, DGSP, box 219, folder «Stati Uniti, 1935. Prima Parte», subfolder «Propaganda politica nel mondo culturale nordamericano».

<sup>58</sup> *La Cultura Italiana all’Università di Virginia*, «Il Legionario», 21 March 1931; *Festose accoglienze ai goliardi italiani a New York*, «Il Progresso Italo-Americano», 21 September 1934; *Il Presidente della Yale University James Rowland Angell, nominato Grande Ufficiale della Corona d’Italia*, «Corriere del Connecticut», 8 February 1935; ASMAE, SAP, 1931-1945, box 13, folder «Rapporti Culturali. Pos. 88/3», subfolder «Studenti italiani alla Williamstown»; *ibidem*, box 19, folder «Rapporti culturali»; M. M. Jonson to F. Forte, 8 April 1937, ASMAE, AS, DGIE (1925-1945), Direzione Generale delle Relazioni Culturali (1941-1942), box 44, folder «Boston (Massachusetts [sic] – Maine – N. Hampshire, Rhode [sic] Island – Vermont)», subfolder «Boston University. Prof. Forte Felice»; A. Rosso to the Italian consulates in the U.S., 11 May 1935, as quoted in the “Memorandum” by J.E. Hoover to L.M.C. Smith, 4 June 1942, National Archives (US), RG 60, *Department of Justice Records*, Classified Subject File, 146-6-95, box 53.

<sup>59</sup> *L’ammirazione per l’Italia e per il Duce*, «Corriere della Sera», 15 November 1934; ASMAE, AS, 1929-1935, classe IV, 11, box 873, folder «Board of Education City N.Y.», subfolder «Ryan Giuseppe».

<sup>60</sup> “Pro-Memoria per S.E. il Ministro”, 25 April 1931, ASMAE, SAP, 1931-1945, box 13, folder «Rapporti Culturali. Pos. 88/1».



of the *fasci*, the political extremism of *Il Duce's* henchmen was confined to a handful of insignificant Fascist clubs that Italian diplomats themselves distrusted<sup>61</sup>. While the GILE had no branches overseas, consular agents in the United States created some youth groups similar to their Fascist version in Italy. Analogous organizations were established in some parochial schools as well<sup>62</sup>. Yet, unlike their seditious and aggressive counterparts in other countries, these groups hardly revealed any trace of subversive plans in their activities in the United States. Instead, especially in the Mediterranean area, where Mussolini pursued imperialistic aims, the *fasci* pressured Italians into becoming potential spies and fifth columnists on behalf of their native country<sup>63</sup>. In Tunisia and Egypt, many young Italians joined the GILE, while Italian schools adopted a most uncompromising approach to Fascist indoctrination and wanted Italian students to identify their own real country with Italy. This policy was replicated in Great Britain, Switzerland, and Brazil, where young Italians were educated to love Fascist Italy.

Such an approach shaped only in part the U.S. experience. In this country, there was no school that was directly financed or managed by the Italian government. All schools were operated and supported by the Catholic parishes or the ethnic associations. Nor did the Italian government create any *Istituto di Cultura Italiana all'Estero* (Italian Culture Institute Abroad) in the United States. Mussolini established these agencies in 1926 and placed them under the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the purpose of spreading Italian culture abroad and promoting cultural relationships between Italy and foreign countries. In the case of the United States, however, Ambassador De Martino warned Fascist officers against creating any institute that was officially subordinate to the Italian government in Rome because such an organization would otherwise be most likely to appear as a vehicle of Fascist propaganda in the American eyes<sup>64</sup>. For the same reason, Mussolini's regime did not extend the worldwide network of the *Nuclei di Propaganda in Italia e all'Estero* (Propaganda nuclei in Italy

<sup>61</sup> PRETELLI, Matteo, *Tra estremismo e moderazione. Il ruolo dei circoli fascisti italo-americani nella politica estera italiana degli anni Trenta*, «Studi Emigrazione», 150, 2003, pp. 315-323.

<sup>62</sup> *Affermazioni italiane*, «Il Legionario», 16 July 1932; C. Forty to P. Parini, 10 June 1935, ASMAE, AS, 1929-1935, classe III, sf. 1-45, box 835, folder «New Orleans»; «Gruppo giovanile italo-americano di Filadelfia Pa», ASMAE, AS, Relazioni Culturali, 1936-1945, box 119, f. «Filadelfia»; G. Parentini, «Relazione al Direttore Generale degli Italiani all'Estero, Roma», 15 April 1935, ASMAE, AS, 1929-35, classe III, sf. 1-45, box 836, folder «San Francisco III 10».

<sup>63</sup> BERTONHA, J.F., *Emigrazione e politica estera*, op. cit., pp. 39-60.

<sup>64</sup> G. De Martino to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 March 1927, ASMAE, AW, Pos. B 54, box 51, folder 455 «Insegnamento dell'italiano negli Stati Uniti, 1925-1928».

and Abroad) to the United States during the Italo-Ethiopian War. In this country, the functions of such selected groups of propagandists that stood by Italian interests abroad were transferred to the *Unione Italiana d'America* (Italian-American Union). This New York-based umbrella coalition coordinated a number of pro-fascist Italian-American organizations and pursued the same purposes of the *Nuclei* under a U.S. façade of cultural promoters<sup>65</sup>. The loyalty to the United States was also required from the Italian Americans who attended Summer camps in Italy. *Il Duce* himself urged them to be faithful to their adoptive country and extolled the importance of U.S. citizenship. At the same time, however, Mussolini encouraged Italian Americans to cherish their ancestral land. Indeed, as mentioned above, the very purpose of such journeys was to strengthen and nourish Italian Americans' spiritual ties to Italy<sup>66</sup>.

The Italian consulates usually provided Italian-language schools in the United States with textbooks published by the DGIE. The Fascist regime had required primary schools in Italy to use a single set of textbooks (the so-called *testo unico di Stato*) since 1929 in the hope that a single educational voice could indoctrinate students more effectively. This policy was replicated abroad, as books for primary schools were authored by Clementina Bagagli<sup>67</sup>. The common features of these and other books that the DGIE published and sent to the United States were the celebration of the "greatness" of the Roman Empire, the outstanding role of some Italian personalities over the centuries, Italian emigrants' efforts to improve the foreign countries where they settled, the Italian people's military pride and courage as well as their "incomparable" contribution to the world civilization by means of art, work, science, and the like<sup>68</sup>. These nationalistic passages eventually re-

<sup>65</sup> DELLA VOLPE, Nicola, *Esercito e propaganda fra le due guerre, 1919-1939*. Roma, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, 1992, p. 50. The *Unione Italiana d'America* was subsequently turned into the Italian Library of Information. See TINTORI, Guido, *L'Italian Library of Information: la centrale della propaganda fascista negli Stati Uniti*. In: LUCONI, Stefano; TINTORI, Guido, *L'ombra lunga del fascio: canali di propaganda fascista per gli "italiani d'America"*. Milano, M&B Publishing, 2004, pp. 33-60.

<sup>66</sup> *Il Duce Tells Hub Boys To Be Loyal Americans*, «Italian News», 30 August 1935.

<sup>67</sup> BAGAGLI, Clementina, *Lecture* (grades I-III). Roma, Scuole Italiane all'Estero, 1932-1933; DGIE, *Lecture classe quarta*. Roma, Scuole Italiane all'Estero, 1933. These books are in the holdings of the Immigration Historical Research Center, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>68</sup> VERGANI, Orio, *Bella Italia, Amate Sponde*. Roma, Fondazione Nazionale Figli del Littorio, 1930; *Quando il mondo era Roma. Breve quadro di un più grande passato dedicato ai bimbi italiani che vivono all'estero*. Roma, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1931; FANCIULLI, Giuseppe, *I grandi navigatori italiani*. Roma, Libreria dello Stato, 1931; ID., *Il duce del popolo italiano*. [...], Segreteria Generale Fasci all'Estero, 1928; SAVORGNAN DI BRAZZA, Francesco, *Da Leonardo a Marconi*. Roma, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1932.

sulted in the extolment of the Fascist regime, which was presented as the heir to both the power of the Roman empire and the virtues of the leading fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian explorers (most notably, Christopher Columbus), scientists, artists, and humanists. Such books also sang the praises of the large-scale public works as well as the social and political “achievements” of fascism. Italy’s victory in World War I was celebrated, too. This event was considered as a turning point in recent Italian history because it marked the emergence of new values that eventually led to the Fascist “revolution”. Even child stories had pro-Fascist implications. Tales of kids dreaming to “fly” to their ancestral land were nothing more than pretexts to lure young readers living abroad into visiting Italy and setting their eyes on the supposed accomplishments of fascism.

However, the effect of this kind of textbooks on young readers of Italian descent in the United States was questionable. To many observers, such readings were inadequate because Italian-American kids did not need strong nationalistic passages. Their U.S. upbringing made them unable to understand reference to Italy’s past. Conversely, in such critics’ views, the introduction of some elements of U.S. history would make these books more attractive to Italian Americans<sup>69</sup>. Furthermore, U.S. authorities criticized the Italian nationalistic contents of those textbooks and an official protest of the Department of State persuaded the Italian government to delete the more controversial references in 1935<sup>70</sup>. Against this backdrop, in 1937, Clementina Bagagli published a book that was to be used only in Italian primary schools in the United States<sup>71</sup>. Her volume was conceived to target exclusively an Italian-American readership, as it stressed the Italian contribution to U.S. history and the friendship between Italy and the United States. Bagagli’s book is the sole example of a Fascist textbook for Italian abroad that was adjusted to the need of a single country. Textbooks for Italian courses in high schools and universities were not free from criticism either. Volumes by Antonio Marinoni and Luigi A. Passarelli, both pro-Fascist professors at the University of Wisconsin, or by Ginevra Capocelli, who taught at De Witt Clinton High School in New York City, included blatantly nationalistic passages<sup>72</sup>. For this reason, they were banned from schools by education boards<sup>73</sup>.

<sup>69</sup> GIANI, Mario, “Come dovrebbero essere redatti i libri per le scuole italiane del Nord America”, March 1935, ASMAE, AS, Relazioni Culturali, 1936-1945, box 117, folder «Stati Uniti. Libri di testo per le scuole italiane negli Stati Uniti».

<sup>70</sup> NA, RG 59, DS, 1930-1939, 811.00F, box 4728.

<sup>71</sup> BAGAGLI, Clementina, *Voci d’Italia*. Milano, Alfieri & Lacroix, 1937.

<sup>72</sup> MARINONI, Antonio; PASSARELLI, Luigi A., *Andiamo in Italia*. New York, Holt, 1935; CAPOCELLI, Ginevra, *L’Italia nel passato e nel presente*. New York, Holt, 1930.

<sup>73</sup> *Two Italian Textbooks in Schools To Be Barred for Fascist ‘Slant’*, «New York Times», 18 January 1941.

In spite of these concerns, an analysis of some educational programs shows Italian schools in the United States were free from Fascist subversive propaganda. Readings and classes undoubtedly extolled the figure of Mussolini, the role of fascism in Italy, and the greatness of Italian civilization. But neither the encouragement nor the apology of the violent overthrow of the U.S. government was part of the curricula. In 1926 Domenico Lombardi, the pro-Fascist director of the “Dante Alighieri” Italian school in Providence, Rhode Island, reported to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that his school taught Italian-American children the Italian language and the “glorious deeds” of their Italian ancestors in order to make them good citizens of the “great Republic” America<sup>74</sup>. In 1939 the Italian *Doposcuola* (After-Schools) in California were charged with disseminating (un)-American Fascist propaganda within their Italian courses, but the local teacher reported that «*we had done nothing to justify this charge*»<sup>75</sup>. On the contrary, many programs had specific references to U.S. history and linked U.S. events to the lives of Italians in America. This feature also characterized a great deal of books about the United States that came out in Italy. In particular, all these volumes drew a compelling parallel between the civilizing mission of the Italian explorers of the past and the lives of contemporary Italian emigrants, who offered their work as a sacrifice to many foreign countries, especially the United States. Rhetoric went to such extremes that a work by Ugo E. Imperatori even contended that «*every skyscraper in New York is wet by Italian blood that was shed for the growth and development of the main city of this country*»<sup>76</sup>. Mussolini’s regime considered itself as the heir to these heroic emigrants who rose to “martyrdom” in Fascist narratives.

### **The response of the Italian-American new generations to the fascism**

Fascism sought the support of the new Italian-American generations but achievement of their backing was not an easy task at all. Italian immigrants’ U.S.-born children had outnumbered their foreign-born first-generation parents by the early 1920s. In 1940, the former accounted for roughly 2,900,000 people, while the latter were over

<sup>74</sup> D. Lombardi to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 May 1926, ASMAE, AS, 1923-28, Classe III, sc. 2-45, box 657, folder «Stati Uniti. Providence».

<sup>75</sup> “Doposcuola italiani in California. Relazione finale. Anno 1938-39”, ASMAE, AS, Relazioni Culturali, 1936-1945, box 118, folder «S. Francisco».

<sup>76</sup> IMPERATORI, Ugo E., *Italia Madre. Gente nostra per il mondo*. Roma, Sapienza, 1929, pp. 72-73.

1,600,000. The U.S. census did not include data on third-generation Italian Americans for that year. But an educated guess is that they were a smaller cohort of a few hundred thousand people. Overall, therefore, Italian Americans and Italians residing in the United States were about six millions. The members of the second generation grew up during the years of Mussolini's regime and experienced a harsh conflict with their parents. Young Italian Americans usually refused to speak Italian in public and were even ashamed of their ancestry. They also thought of Italy as an unknown country. Few were aware of what fascism was. To most of them, it was just an obscure ideology that was very distant from their democratic values. Some observers and scholars have held that young Italian Americans did not even accept fascism<sup>77</sup>. In particular, anti-Fascist exiles who had sought sanctuary in the United States, such as Gaetano Salvemini and Max Salvadori argued that Italian Americans did adhere to fascism but that their allegiance resulted primarily from a sort of ethnic redress in the face of anti-Italian prejudices<sup>78</sup>. Historian Rudolph J. Vecoli has maintained that fascism was part of the multi-faceted identity of an emerging Italian-American generation<sup>79</sup>.

Many Fascist observers who visited the United States reported to Rome that the young Italian Americans had begun to identify themselves with fascism because it appealed to their sense of "racial pride". Mussolini's agents endeavoured to capitalize on such feelings. For instance, they had Italian and Italian-American newspapers publish stories or letters of young readers who explained how glad they were for the opportunity to attend Summer camps in Italy or to study Italian in the Italian schools abroad. These pieces were usually forgeries for propaganda purposes. Only few Italian kids were able to attend Italian schools, which often had financial and organizational problems, too. Furthermore even Luigi Villari, a notorious Fascist propagandist who long operated in the United States, argued that Italians living in this country, and above all their children, were inevitably bound to forget the Italian language and that Italian schools were unable to curb this trend<sup>80</sup>. Federal Bureau of In-

<sup>77</sup> ROUCEK, Joseph S., *Italo-Americans and World War II*, «Sociology and Social Research», (29), 6, 1945, p. 467; IORIZZO, Luciano J.; MONDELLO, Salvatore, *The Italian-Americans*. New York, Twayne, 1971, p. 196; DE CONDE, Alexander, *Half Bitter, Half Sweet. An Excursion into Italian-American History*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971, pp. 239-240.

<sup>78</sup> SALVADORI, Max, *Antifascisti italiani negli Stati Uniti*. In: *Italia e Stati Uniti dall'indipendenza americana ad oggi, 1776-1976*. Genova, Tilgher, 1978, p. 272; SALVEMINI, Gaetano, *L'Italia vista dall'America*. Milano, Feltrinelli, 1965, p. 25.

<sup>79</sup> VECOLI, Rudolph J., *Etnicità: ancora l'invenzione della tradizione?*, «Prometeo», 28, 1989, pp. 120-121.

<sup>80</sup> VILLARI, Lucio, *Negli Stati Uniti*. Roma, Società Nazionale Dante Alighieri, 1939, p. 11.

vestigation reports, too, detailed the failures of the Fascist propaganda. According to these sources, Fascist propaganda did not affect young Italians from Boston and Newark, New Jersey, who had visited Italy free of charge. Similarly, in Birmingham, Alabama, the local Italian consulate had been unsuccessful in establishing a youth organization because young Italian Americans thought of themselves as Americans and refused to obey the Italian government<sup>81</sup>.

When Italy declared war on France and Great Britain on June 10, 1940, the Italian ambassador in Washington, Ascanio Colonna, reported to Rome that, in the United States, fascism could only rely on the support of the Italian veterans of World War I. Conversely, the attitude of second-generation Italian Americans was most disappointing. As he put it:

*«It's a disgraceful generation made up primarily of individuals from southern proletarian background. They have heard from their parents nothing else than stories of a miserable and poor Italy. As they think of themselves as being handicapped in the struggle for life with Anglo-Saxon America for some heinous mental perversion, they try to distance themselves from the Italian environment and to repudiate their ancestry.*

*Yet, rejected by the American milieu, at least until it rose to economical prosperity or secured decent professional jobs, this generation took refuge in a spiritual world of its own, which is as distant from the American world as it is from the Italian one, and created a peculiar folklore [...] made up of spaghetti and baseball as well as its own mythology, whose heroes are mayor Fiorello La Guardia, baseball player Joe Di Maggio and prizefighter Tony Galento.*

*Once fascism came to power and as long as it was held in high esteem in America, it seemed for a while that this Italian-American generation was ready to let Il Duce and fascism become part of its mythology. Although Italian Americans did not understand the moral and spiritual values of the Fascist Revolution, it seemed in their eyes that the renewed prestige of Italy offset the vexations and abuses they and their parents had faced upon entering American life.*

*But when fascism became the target of the daily hammering of anti-totalitarian propaganda [...] they rushed to disavow any kind of not only political but also moral and sentimental solidarity with their ancestral country»<sup>82</sup>.*

<sup>81</sup> NA, FBI report, 10 March 1944, RG 59, DS, 865.20211/236, box 5664; NA, FBI report, 18 February 1943, *ibid.*, 865.20211 Gallerano Antonio/2, box 5668; NA, FBI report, 16 July 1941, *ibid.*, 865.20211 Firpo Giuseppe/3, box 5668.

<sup>82</sup> A. Colonna to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5 July 1940, as quoted in CANNISTRARO, Philip V., *Gli Italo-Americani di fronte all'ingresso dell'Italia nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale*, «Storia Contemporanea», (7), 4, 1976, p. 862.



## Conclusion

The Americanization of the U.S.-born Italian-American generations had gone too far to let Fascist propaganda shape the “Little Italies”. These latter had been changing, too, and had been losing their ethnic identity day by day. Likewise, Italian-American workers, who made the great bulk of the foreign-born generation, developed strong ties to other ethnic groups with which they shared militancy in the labor movement, especially within the ranks of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. The U.S. entry in World War II speeded up the Americanization process because Italian Americans had to show off their allegiance to their adoptive country at wartime. Consequently, between 1940 and 1945, roughly 281,000 Italians became U.S. citizens. Naturalizations were about 106,000 in 1944 only. In addition, half a million Italian Americans served in the U.S. armed forces. Such an experience let them share the same values of other ethnic groups and made them realize the Italian-American contribution to the U.S. war efforts. Such awareness erased their dual identity to the benefit of their American self-perception and was instrumental to their accommodation within the mainstream culture from which traditional ethnic discrimination had theretofore excluded them<sup>83</sup>.

The war also changed the identity of the “Little Italies”. English, for example, became the official language in the ethnic communities. Italian schools were ordered closed, the use of Italian language banned, and Italian culture iced, while thousands of unnaturalized Italian immigrants were subject to restrictions in their private liberty that included curfew, advanced notification of travel outside their residential areas, as well as prohibition to hold firearms and short-wave radios. Furthermore, a very small minority was taken into custody by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, interned in concentration camps, or relocated from some areas designated for national defense<sup>84</sup>. In the postwar years, it took a long time for the Italian culture to reassert itself in the United States and to regain the status of a glorious feature of the *italianità* in the American perception of both Italy and the Italian people.

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<sup>83</sup> COVELLO, Leonard, “Adolescents in War”, [1942], The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Leonard Covello Papers, box 15, folder «Adolescents in Wartime, Feb 3, 1943»; IDEM, “Italo-American Youth in the War Crisis”, [March

## Abstract

This essay analyzes a neglected historiographical topic, that is the Fascist “cultural diplomacy”. After outlining the historiographical framework, this essay focuses on the United States as a case study. The political action of the *fasci* (the branches of the Italian National Fascist Party) in the United States had turned out to be a failure by the late 1920s. As a result, during the following decade, the Fascist regime promoted to the full extent the spread of the Italian language and culture in the “Little Italies” as tools to preserve the Italianness of the Italian immigrant communities. The purpose of this Fascist project was to shape the new Italian-American generations, whose members were American by citizenship but spiritually tied to Fascist Italy by linguistic bonds. Such a strategy was carried out in cooperation with the Italian-American press, the *prominenti* (ethnic leaders), the Italian schools in the United States, and cultural associations such as the Dante Alighieri Society. At the same time, the Fascist regime, supported by the Italian-American lobby, endeavored to create Italian language and culture courses in U.S. educational institutions spanning from high schools to universities. Furthermore Mussolini encouraged prominent U.S. citizens, Italian Americans, and mostly youngsters of Italian ancestry, who were often guests of the Fascist summer camps, to visit Italy on propagandistic trips in order to show them the “achievements” of *Il Duce’s* regime. Finally, this essay examines the response of the new Italian-American generations to the Fascist propagandistic message.

1943], *ibidem*, folder «Speakers File “Italo-American Youth in War Crisis” (United Nationalities Council) March 28, 1943»; CORSI, Edward, *Italian Immigrants and their Children* (1942). In: CORDASCO, Francesco; BUCCHIONI, Eugene (eds.), *The Italians. Social Backgrounds of an American Group*. Clifton, NJ, Kelley, 1974, pp. 218-221; ID., *Our Italian Yellow-Americans*, «The American Mercury», August 1942; POZZETTA, George E., “My Children Are My Jewels”. *Italian-American Generations during World War II*. In: O'BRIEN, Kenneth P.; HUDSON PARSON, Lynn (eds.), *The Home-Front War. World War II and American Society*. Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1995, pp. 63-82.

<sup>84</sup> DI STASI, Lawrence (ed.), *Una Storia Segreta. The Secret History of Italian American Evacuation and Internment during World War II*. Berkeley, CA, Heyday Books, 2001; CARNEVALE, N.C., *No Italian Spoken*, op. cit.