

The Italian Immigrants' Assimilation into American Culture and the Subsequent Impact  
on Food, Language and Last Names

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**Abstract**

The objective of this study is to examine the assimilation process of first, second, and third, generation Italian-Americans had on three facets of their culture's everyday life, specifically: food, language, and last names. As Italians immigrated and assimilated into America, so did their culture and native traditions. Over time, the Italian culture has turned into a staple of American life and can be seen integrated into communities across the United States. A culture originally the subject of mockery, ridicule, and discrimination, the Italian culture endured decades, and generations, of change to become praised and appreciated. Although aspects of all cultures' traditions change over time, the core of the Italian-American tradition has stayed intact for nearly 100 years.

As educators, it's vital to teach our students the importance of culture. The research found in this study on the direct impact the Italian immigrants assimilation into American culture had on the food, language, and last names of Italian immigrants, can be applied to create a culturally educational curriculum in the classroom. To that end, this study includes ways to incorporate the Italian-American culture into the classroom with different websites, learning opportunities, and educational reading pertaining to food, language, and last names. Students will be able to gain a better understanding of the Italian-American culture and can hopefully relate this information to their own cultures.

### **Background Reading**

While considering the notion of ethnicity and culture, it's next to impossible not to think of America during the early 1900's and the mass immigration that occurred during that time. For a 100-year stretch from 1830-1930, nearly 32 million people from all parts of Europe left their home country and began a new life in the United States.<sup>1</sup> This huge melting pot of immigrants from countries all over the world began to form the identity of America. One of the countries that gave America most of its immigrants and future citizens was Italy. Between the years of 1881-1940 nearly 4,600,000 came from Italy,<sup>2</sup> and with the millions that came from Italy, also came their culture and ethnicity with them. The Italian culture in America has been an ever-changing one, especially with the "Americanization" process that millions of second and third generation Italian-Americans went through as a result of being the children of Italian immigrants. In an effort to become more American, many second and third generation Italian-Americans lost this rich heritage that was brought over on the many boats that came from Italy. Studying this change is important to understand why many Italian-Americans lost some of their heritage, but to also chronicle why immigrants and the children of immigrants opted to change the culture of their ancestors and become more American. This choice was not an easy one that Italians had to make and with losing their heritage, also forced them to cut ties with the home country that millions wanted to preserve in America. But the idea of change and new opportunities was just too important to pass up for many Italian-Americans. Looking at the many books, articles, and films about this change gives us as historians a first hand look at not just why this change occurred, but how it happened. It's impossible to pinpoint the exact moment when Italians decided they

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<sup>1</sup> Alba, *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight*, 20. (1985)

<sup>2</sup> Cavaioli, "Patterns of Italian Immigrants," 220. (2008)

wanted to forgo certain aspects of their culture and lifestyle to fit into an American society that would hopefully accept them. What can be studied and analyzed is why they decided to do this. Questions such as what traditions were lost when second and third generation children and grandchildren opted to become more American? Why was there such a demand to become as American as possible in order to succeed in this new world? Or what was the reaction of Italian immigrant parents and grandparents when they saw their children and grandchildren conforming to the American society and forgetting their Italian roots? All of these questions are important to keep in mind when examining the prompt; how did culture and tradition continue among the Italian-American population including what steps did first, second, and third generation Italian-Americans take to better become more Americanized and why was there such a demand to do this in the early 1900's? Reading and examining different articles, books, and documentaries detailing the history of Italian-Americans and their Americanization process, the movement that second and third generation Italian-Americans set forth for future generations and the culture and Italian-American identity that they set up for many years to come, become clearer.

A source that contained authentic information was The Italian in America by Lydio Tomasi. This book contained mostly articles that were written between the years of 1894 and 1913 and is valuable because of the time period in which most of the Italians immigrated to America, and when most Italian-Americans were looking to become more Americanized. It really studies the function that families had on second and third generation Italian-Americans and the expectations that were put on the children and

grandchildren of Italian immigrants.<sup>3</sup> This book seemed to have a theme that pushed Italian immigrant children to really strive to become more American. While some sources convey a message to keep the roots of one's ancestors, the book The Italian in America does not. It was common for many first generation Italian immigrants wanted the second and third generations to retain the "Italian-ness" that came with being born into an Italian family. However, because of the conditions and ways in which so many of the early Italian immigrants were treated, the articles implied they wanted a better future for the second and third generations. Obviously all-Italian families wanted what was best for their family, but Tomasi's book and the articles that were in it really exemplified this idea. For example, one of the articles in the book highlights the issue of Italian-Americans in the work force and the labor abuse that was seen everyday. "Labor Abuse Among Italians" was one of many articles that chronicled the daily struggle that Italians saw in America and their desire to reach a better life.<sup>4</sup> A limitation with this source however was the insufficient information dedicated to the actual Americanization process of Italian immigrants was somewhat low. This was caused by how early many of the articles were published (having been published between 1894-1913). This doesn't allow ample time to see how the second and third generation would have adapted to life in America. The articles primary focus was on the immediate impacts that were seen among Italian immigrants, not as much of the impacts seen from their children or grandchildren. Although this isn't particularly a negative of the book, because you can't fault a source for information it had no way of gaining, it's still important to understand when using as a secondary source. Overall, this is a source that allows the reader an in depth look and first hand accounts of Italian immigrants and their initial attempt of trying to become

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<sup>3</sup> Tomasi, *The Italian in America*, (1972)

<sup>4</sup> Tomasi, *The Italian in America*, 78. (1972)

more Americanized. It's time period and usage of early 1900's articles gives it a certain authenticity that many other sources lack.

Examining the book The Italians; Social Backgrounds of an American Group by Eugene Bucchioni and Francesco Cordasco proved to be difficult, not because of the book lacking information, but because of the abundance of information it offered and the organization of it's material. This source offers a lot of valuable information in terms of culture and the lifestyle that Italian-Americans lived. This book was similar in layout to The Italian in America as it had many different sources and a unique style of relaying the information to the reader rather than just the conventional chapter layout. It was broken into several parts, with different articles and stories going along with each part. For example, there was a chapter labeled "*Responses to American Life*" which chronicled stories that corresponded to Italians adjusting to American life. One of which was "*How it Feels to be a Problem*"<sup>5</sup> by Gino Speranza. This makes it very easy for a historian to easily track down a particular story or topic about Italian-American culture when examining this book. The years in which the articles were published also make for a reliable source. Many of which are very time relevant (early 1900's-1920's) so it gives first hand accounts of what life was truly like for Italian-Americans and Italian immigrants. This is valuable because it offers a raw account of life and what daily interactions were actually like for so many Italian people. Articles that are time relevant (published in the early 1900's) are so valuable because articles written in the late 1900's are typically written by authors or scholars who never lived or experienced the discrimination and culture change that was relevant in the early 1900's. That's why these

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<sup>5</sup> Cordasco and Bucchioni, *The Italians; Social Background*, 289. (1974)

articles can provide so much valuable information. Another aspect of this book that made it so easy to use as a source was how easy it is to pick and choose what articles you want to extract information from because of the open layout. This book also offered letters and first hand accounts of the culture and what life was like for Italians looking to become more American. Lastly, the inclusion of health, education, and employment for Italians in America really made this source elite.<sup>6</sup> Similar to the previous book, The Italian in America, with so many first hand accounts, it's difficult to pinpoint when the "Americanization" process really took place for many of the immigrants. When a lot of the articles in this book were published, the only information we had was that of first generation immigrants, and not of the second and third generation children who would look to change the identify of the Italian-American.

An article that offers a good in-depth look at one exclusive group of people with Italian-American roots is John Roche's *Suburban Ethnicity: Ethnic Attitude and Behavior among Italian Americans in two Suburban Communities*. This comparative analysis of two predominantly Italian-American communities in Rhode Island focus primarily on "looking at ethnicity among suburban populations of a common nationality."<sup>7</sup> The article analyzes different culturally normal behaviors that first and second generation Italian-Americans would partake in for example; listening to Italian radio stations, shopping at Italian supermarkets, spending time with other Italian-Americans, the amount of education received, etc.<sup>8</sup> In the sense of the article examining individuals of Italian-American culture, it is an extremely valuable source. The article shows how a group of

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<sup>6</sup> Cordasco and Bucchioni, *The Italians; Social Background*, 369. (1974)

<sup>7</sup> Roche, "Suburban Ethnicity: Ethnic Attitudes," 145. (1982)

<sup>8</sup> Roche, "Suburban Ethnicity: Ethnic Attitudes," 150. (1982)

second and third generation Italian-Americans had adjusted to American society, and what they were doing in the present day to continue their ethnicity in America. This source does however have limitations. For one, the time period in which the study is conducted does not really pertain to how early immigrants assimilated into the United States. Having been set in the 1970's it doesn't relate to Italian-Americans in the early 1900's. Another limitation of this study was it's narrowing to only first and second generation Italian-Americans. It did mention some facts, which related to third generation Italian-Americans, but a majority of the findings directly related to first and second-generation family members. One reason for this could have been the fact that there was not a third generation, as the article was done in the 1970's. Lastly, the study only focuses on two suburban communities in Rhode Island, which is a very broad generalization in regards to all second or third generation Italian-Americans. The community used for the study was comprised of "almost 25 percent of its population is composed of first and second generation Italian-Americans."<sup>9</sup> Although that is a large amount, the study still needs to reflect the other cultures that make up the rest of the community. The study also fails to gather information from nearby Italian-American communities that would back up the claims they make in this study.

An extremely strong source because of the information that it presented and the amount of differing topics it covered with Italian-Americans and their assimilation into American society was Italian Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity by Richard Alba. This book offered information regarding nearly every facet of Italian-American life, and the process that many first, second, and third generation Italian-Americans went through

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<sup>9</sup> Roche, "Suburban Ethnicity: Ethnic Attitudes," 146. (1982)

in order to assimilate into American culture. What is often missing from other sources was covered in Alba's book in great detail. He was able to touch on language, marriage, fertility, the use of cuisine as a cultural medium, and crime among many other Italian-American cultural facets. It goes into great detail how each of these things, as important as they all were to Italian culture, went about their own change. "They have left a definite imprint on the American consciousness- of close-knit families, tidy and stable working-class neighborhoods, tasty food, and sadly of organized crime."<sup>10</sup> Another focal point that Alba hits on, that was not prevalent in other sources is the struggle that occurred between the first and second generation Italians as they assimilated into America.<sup>11</sup> It was well understood that the first generation of Italians that immigrated to America did not want to forgo a part of their ancestry and assimilate into the American culture. It was the second and third generations that felt in order to best succeed in America they needed to become more "American." Alba touches on this in length and examines why both sides struggled so badly in their attempt to persuade their family members who thought otherwise. Some limitations to this source is that not the entire book is especially relevant to the topic of "Italian-Americans were assimilating to American culture" as he does talk about the immigration process and the settlement process that took place in the late 1800's and early 1900's<sup>12</sup>. Its date is also extremely useful for considering the Americanization process that many of these Italian-Americans underwent. Having been published in 1985, Alba is able to examine nearly 100 years of changing culture and the assimilation process Italian-Americans went through He can fully examine the "Americanization" process as far into some third or fourth generation Italian-Americans.

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<sup>10</sup> Alba, *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight*, viii. (1985)

<sup>11</sup> Alba, *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight*, 76. (1985)

<sup>12</sup> Alba, *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight*, 20. (1985)

When studying fertility and age of marriage for first and second generation Italians and Italian-Americans, John W. Briggs's article "*Fertility and Cultural Change among Families in Italy and America*"<sup>13</sup> does an excellent job of capturing the rates and changes that were seen from those born in Italy, compared to those born and raised in America and the impacts both of these factors had on fertility and age of marriage. One drawback to his study however is his focus on only one group of immigrants and their subsequent generations. He only studies the marriage rates and fertility rates of immigrants coming from the southern Italian farming village of Belmonte.<sup>14</sup> Although a broad generalization can be made of the data that he finds from this village and apply it to all farming families from Southern Italy, there is no way to prove that data valid. We also cannot use this data as an average for all Italian born families. Again, his use of only one farming village in southern Italy does not help us determine the fertility rates from areas outside of southern Italy. It is safe to assume however that the information presented in his article does provide a valid idea of fertility rates and marriage tendencies for immigrant families with ties to south Italy. This article also provides an accurate interpretation of this data, as the research and publication of the article was done in 2001. This is important for this particular topic of study because of the amount of time it takes to reach the age of fertility and marriage. If a child was born in 1940, they won't typically be getting married or having children until at least the 1960's. Equally important to note, is their childbearing years may last until at least the 1980's. This said, waiting until many years have passed to examine both first generation and second-generation data is

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<sup>13</sup> Briggs, "Fertility and Cultural Change," (1986)

<sup>14</sup> Briggs, "Fertility and Cultural Change," 1132. (1986)

extremely important to the validity of the data. Brigg's use of data graphs<sup>15</sup> and numbers really emphasize the difference between Italian born, and Italian-American born individuals and the impact that "Americanization" has on their fertility and the amount of children they give birth to. Most importantly, this article examines the cultural tendencies that southern Italian-Americans kept in America compared to the ones they left behind in their attempt to assimilate in America. Although first generation Italians had predominantly larger "farm-like" families, their children and the subsequent second generation Italian-Americans did not keep these same cultural identities. In an attempt to fit in with the American society, they only had 2-3 children compared to the 9-10 that the first generation would normally have.<sup>16</sup>

Reading memoir's can be a fantastic way of entering into the culture of the author through his/her very own eyes and seeing the lifestyle they lived first hand. Jerre Mangione's Mount Allegro: A Memoir of Italian American Life is an extremely useful source that allows the reader to read first hand accounts of growing up in an Italian-American household. His book really goes into detail about the traditions and culture that comes with growing up with an Italian-American family. What makes this source different from the other sources I have gathered is its first hand account of Italian-American life. It touched on most everyday life topics that Italian-American families lived in the early 1900's. One facet of Italian-American life that got explained in great detail by Mangione was the role that religion played for the Italian- American family. Just looking at different snippets from the book prove just how important religion is to some Italian-American families. "In return for all this, my mother and my aunt Giovanna

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<sup>15</sup> Briggs, "Fertility and Cultural Change," 1140. (1986)

<sup>16</sup> Briggs, "Fertility and Cultural Change," 1144. (1986)

promised Virrorio they would say a dozen prayers apiece to Saint Joseph.”<sup>17</sup> This was in reference to a family friend assisting the Mangione family with a task. He even chronicles the difficulties he has with growing up with religion and the reservations he has about some of the traditions his parents were passing down to him like; “To my parents *Destino* was the magic in the map drawn by God which charted the course of every human being. To us *Destino* never seemed to have any connection with God.”<sup>18</sup> The author lived out what he was writing about and this can prove to be valuable for comparing how certain groups of people adapted to assimilating into American life. Another major theme that this book hits on that has been seen in some of the other sources from this is the interaction that Jerre has with his immigrant parents. As he is a first generation Italian-American, he lived a lot of the struggles that first and second generation Italian-Americans had to go through. One of which was his desire to become more American but his parent’s desire to pass on the Italian culture they once lived. It’s another great first hand account of the ways some first, second, and third generation Italian-Americans clashed in both sides attempts to either keep the Italian tradition alive, or to better assimilate into American culture and forgo this Italian identity. One limitation to using this as a primary source however, is the singularity of the information that is being presented. Because it is a memoir, it only chronicles the life and interactions of a single person. Also, because of his Sicilian background, it only chronicles one portion of Italian-American life and how a certain group lived. Regardless of this limitation, this source offers a rare look into exactly how Italian-Americans lived in the early 1900’s. Articles and books that depict life are valuable, but sometimes might miss that authentic piece that a memoir or biography has.

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<sup>17</sup> Mangione, *Mount Allegro: A Memoir*, 33. (1989)

<sup>18</sup> Mangione, *Mount Allegro: A Memoir*, 81. (1989)

When examining a documentary as a source, it's important to keep in mind the audience that the film is trying to capture with its information. The "A&E Television Special" "*Italians in America*" that was aired on the History Channel, offers a different perspective that a book, memoir, or other written source can't replicate. Often times, when portrayed in popular media, the Italian-American image is one of mob bosses or crime, but this informational documentary explored Italian-American life in other areas like family life, religion, the conflicts and discrimination that Italian-Americans faced, work life, etc.<sup>19</sup> What is also convenient when watching films to gather information is how easy it is to retain what is being said to the audience. With this film in particular, it is very digestible and entirely engaging. The information was also very relevant and having been published in 1998, contains over 100 years of Italian-American history and the means by which the culture has adapted to American society. One major theme that the movie covered that I felt was especially important was the conflicts that occurred between first and second-generation Italian-American families. This occurred because the first generation Italian immigrants wanted to keep old traditions and family lifestyles but the second and third generation children and grandchildren looked to become more Americanized and adapt to the new culture that they are now living in. This movie put this conflict into a different perspective and was able to hit on why both of these groups struggled with the other groups choice. Overall, the film *Italians in America* is a great source and provides really important information on the exact ways that many Italian-Americans became more Americanized.

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<sup>19</sup> *Italians in America*. (1998)

One major obstacle that nearly every ethnic group faces upon immigration to a new country is the constant harassment and “hatred” that comes with being different from the people who lived in the country before hand (or at least the oldest of the immigrants). In Roland Merullo’s article “*Hatred and it’s Sly Legacy*” he examines the overall idea of discrimination of a group of people and the root of some of the hatred that comes from a new ethnic group arriving in America. Merullo is able to examine this topic with his Italian heritage as a background. He really emphasizes the fact that many groups of people change themselves entirely in order to adapt to the new country or environment they are in. For his ancestors, they were to become as American as possible, as quickly as possible. “The choice was simple; make your children as American as possible, as quickly as possible, or subject them to harassment, continued economic hardship, and even violence.”<sup>20</sup> This point was true for many Italian-Americans that had two choices; either keep the tradition of your homeland alive but be subjected to ridicule from others, or conform to the idea of becoming an “American” but to lose one’s sense of ethnicity. A major point in this article is his want for the reader to understand that these discriminations still occur to this day.<sup>21</sup> One limitation of Merullo’s piece was the time period he was alive for, and the time period he wrote this article. Having been published in 2000 means that he was most likely not alive during the early 1900’s when the hatred and discrimination was at it’s most prominent. It’s hard to compare a 1900’s New York City Italian ghetto, to a 2000’s Little Italy because of the vast differences 100 years can make. Still, he provides a crucial element that authors in the 1900’s could not, and that is the hindsight of understanding the discrimination of the early 1900’s and how it continued and is still affecting Italian-Americans today. Overall, Merullo’s article shows

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<sup>20</sup> Merullo, "Hatred and It's Sly Legacy," 1. (2000)

<sup>21</sup> Merullo, "Hatred and It's Sly Legacy," 4. (2000)

that discrimination is still very much alive today and not just for Italian-Americans. It's difficult to directly relate the discrimination that current Italian-Americans face today to that of what was seen for first generation immigrants in the early 1900's, but it's still very important to note "the struggle is still very real for Italian-Americans."<sup>22</sup>

One of the sources that really looked in depth about the food that Italian immigrants and Italian-American people ate was the book Feeling Italian: The Art of Ethnicity in America by Thomas J. Ferraro. Italian food is very popular and has almost created it's own culture in America. However, the pizza and pasta that is so popular today, is totally different than the food that was originally consumed by Italian immigrants in the early 1900's. Going over the food of one's culture is vital because of the impact that it has and had on the people who ate it when they first immigrated, especially in the Italian community where food is considered pivotal to family and cultural life.<sup>23</sup> This book, having been published in 2005 offers a great look at all things culturally in the lives of Italian-Americans. It does however deviate more to the pop culture realm of Italian-American life, which while important, did not occur until later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when second, third, and fourth generation Italian-Americans were more present. When studying older generations of Italian-Americans, it's hard to see when the actual assimilation process has happened (because they are most likely already assimilated into American culture). With this being said, this source is great to look at the end result of a lot of these Italian-Americans and what their life was like, as they grew older.

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<sup>22</sup> Merullo, "Hatred and It's Sly Legacy," 5. (2000)

<sup>23</sup> Ferraro, *Feeling Italian: The Art of Ethnicity*, 34. (2005)

What is important to compare is the “Americanization” process that occurred not only in the early in 1900’s, but also how it is happening to this day with the Italian immigrants that are coming to America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the article “*Patterns of Italian Immigration to the United States*” by Frank Cavaoli, the comparing and contrasting of today’s immigrants to the immigrants of the early 1900’s is important to note. A lot of this article is devoted to looking at the sheer numbers of immigrants that came over from Italy to America throughout the past 100 years, as well as touch on how these recent immigrants have adapted to American lifestyle, and most importantly how they have retained their Italian ancestry.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to the early immigrants that came from Italy, many of today’s immigrants “arrive by jet plane, are better educated, retain their language, and are proud of their national heritage.”<sup>25</sup> While they are becoming Americanized, they also work to retain the features of their ancestry that they feel are very important, something that was not done with early 1900’s immigrants. It’s important to insert this into the conversation of “keeping culture among ethnic groups” because ethnicity did not end after the major waves of immigration occurred in the early-mid 1900’s. Although it’s not as pertinent and discrimination is lessening with education and more diversity in our nation, the major idea of “Americanization” must be looked at and studied during all time periods. Again, this article only highlights the differences that the two groups of immigrants faced, and is solely devoted to studying the mass number of immigrants who came over. But the fact that it compares the two makes it important nonetheless.

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<sup>24</sup> Cavaoli, "Patterns of Italian Immigrants," (2008)

<sup>25</sup> Cavaoli, "Patterns of Italian Immigrants," 214. (2008)

Religion is especially important to keep in mind when considering the culture that many Italians came from in Italy, and brought to America. First, second, and third generation Italian-Americans all rely on their religious beliefs and in the process of becoming more American, religion was constantly at the forefront as something that was either continued or forgotten for Italian-Americans. The article by Linda Mercadante; "*Italian-American Immigrants and Religious Conversions*" explains the reasons for many Italians converting to different religions amidst much of the discrimination that was going on in the early 1900's.<sup>26</sup> What makes this article especially valuable is it's ability to touch on all of the religions that Italian-Americans practiced. Many assume that most Italians and Italian-Americans practiced Catholicism, but this article shows that religions like Judaism and other Christian sects such as Protestant were also popular in Italian-American communities and that they also struggled in America. One reason for this article's importance is that it ties in all of these religions and how they relate in the sense that nearly all Italian-Americans were discriminated, no matter what their religion.<sup>27</sup> As seen with several other of the articles that have been studied for this thesis, they only focus on one group of immigrants from a certain area, or that practice a certain cultural ritual only pertaining to them, but Mercadante broadens the horizon by bringing in every major religion that an Italian-American might practice. She also touches base on a topic that is extremely important because of its significance on Italian life. Religion is one of the more important aspects of life for an Italian-American. Second and third generation children may be ostracized from their families for abandoning of the religion their family practices. She emphasizes just how important being Americanized was to many Italian-Americans as seen through the amount that converted their religion. Lastly, her inclusion

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<sup>26</sup> Mercadante, "Italian-American Immigrants and Religious," 552. (2001)

<sup>27</sup> Mercadante, "Italian-American Immigrants and Religious," 555. (2001)

of exactly how the religions got Italian-Americans to convert was extremely insightful. This provides us with a way of understanding some of the ways in which organizations (such as these organized religions) reached out and assisted immigrants, and second generation Italians.<sup>28</sup> Overall, this article was a reliable source because of the sheer importance of the topic that it talks about. Because religion was such an important aspect of life for Italian-Americans, its relevance is very high.

Although many Italian immigrants looked to reconstruct their identities to better fit that of an American, many Italian-Americans worked to create their own separate identity that better illustrated their Italian roots as well as the new American characteristics they were gaining. The article "*Discrimination and Identity Construction: The Case of Italian Immigrants and their Offspring in the USA*" by Stefano Luconi presents this idea. Although it's true that millions of Italians succumbed to the idea of becoming more American, there were also a great deal of Italians that came to America, and created their own identity and culture for their family. This viewpoint is valuable because it offers the middle ground of what many Italian-Americans were doing in America. On one hand, there was the group that wanted nothing to do with the American culture and only wanted to be associated with Italians from the same area of Italy as them. But on the contrary, there was the group of Italians that just as easily threw away their Italian heritage in order to become a better American and to fit into American society. It most importantly shows the middle of these two groups; those who embraced and formed the Italian-American culture we see today. They would take aspects of the Italian culture they knew growing up and the new culture they were assimilating into in

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<sup>28</sup> Mercadante, "Italian-American Immigrants and Religious," 554. (2001)

America.<sup>29</sup> This article shows that although some Italians worked to become American, they also retained some of the culture and lifestyle of their Italian ancestors. Having been written in 2011 also gives a large time frame for the author to look and see exactly how one group may have panned out in America. Rather than just looking at only a first and second-generation family, he can look at a long line of Italian-Americans and how they all adapted to the new identity that was being formed.

Possibly one of the biggest reasons many Italian immigrants looked to become more Americanized after World War II was because of the growing threat of communism during the Cold War. Obviously Italy wasn't the threat that the Soviet Union was to America during this time, but Italy still supported a fascist government and many Italian-Americans looked to desperately shake the mantra of being considered a communist in America. Because of the PCI's<sup>30</sup> (Italian Communist Party) large contingency in Western Europe, different groups were brought about to look to change how Italians were viewed, especially as not being those who support communism. Danielle Battisti does a great job of highlighting exactly how Italian-Americans went about creating a better image of Italians in America during the Cold War with respects to communism in her article "*The American Committee on Italian Migration, Anti-Communism, and Immigration Reform.*" What's important to keep in mind when breaking down this article, is to remember how it impacted the life of Italian-Americans, and the want for Italian immigrants to become more Americanized. With so many people in America actively backing up the idea of democracy and "anti-communism", it would have been just another reason for millions of people to discriminate against Italians. I feel like this article is important in the sense of

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<sup>29</sup> Luconi, "Discrimination and Identity Construction," 294. (2011)

<sup>30</sup> Battisti, "The American Committee on Italian," 11. (2012)

understanding that Italian immigrants needed to assimilate into the American culture for reasons that were sometimes out of their control, like World War II. Every aspect of their life was scrutinized and something like their homeland's government could be fuel for discriminating actions. The date of which it was published (2012) also lets us look at the issue historically and see exactly how it played out over the timeframe of 60+ years. It examines how relations with Italy were repaired after the war and it also looked at the impact that Italian-Americans had on trying to reshape the way Italy's government was viewed by Americans. Italian-Americans wanted to do whatever it took to better assimilate and be a part of an America that was collectively against communism. With the process of millions of Italians who came from Italy all turning their back on the government of their home country, this was just another way that they could become as Americanized as possible.<sup>31</sup>

For the better part of the past century, Italian-Americans have not only immigrated to America, but have also asserted themselves into the culture and lifestyle of being American. From the early 1900's until now, Italian-Americans have become an integral part of American culture and this is clear by just looking at American culture and all of the advancements that are attributable to Italian-Americans. All of these things would not be here without the help of millions of first, second, and third generation Italian-Americans and them assimilating into American culture. Its unfortunate that so many young Italian-Americans had to give up many of the aspects of Italian life from their home country to better fit in with the American culture, but that is the unfortunate price many immigrants had to pay to avoid the discrimination and ridicule of other

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<sup>31</sup> Battisti, "The American Committee on Italian," 16. (2012)

ethnicities in the new country they were in. But with losing their original culture they created a new one in America, and were able to create the Italian-American culture we see today.

### **Original Research**

Many immigrants to America came with the singular focus to become immersed in the new culture and, in doing so, cast off their traditions, customs, and even languages. As groups emigrated from European countries during the great migration, a time period roughly from 1880-1920, America turned into a melting pot with hundreds of different cultures and ethnicities not only co-existing, but becoming a united culture. Many of these immigrant groups wanted to retain some of the qualities and traditions from their home countries, but felt it necessary to sacrifice their native cultures in order to fully assimilate into American culture. Italian immigrants were no exception. The process of blending into American culture caused many first, second, and third generation Italian-Americans to lose their cultural ties to their ethnicity, but ultimately created an America in which a new culture was created, and that is the Italian-American culture.

Many Italian families felt the key to success in the land where the streets were “paved with gold”, largely depended on whether or not they could become culturally American. Immigrant Italian-Americans cast off their native culture to avoid discrimination, but in shaking off the old world, the community created an Americanized version of their heritage.

To this day, many Americans are honored of their Italian heritage. The rich food, beautiful language, and meaningful last names are just some of the things this proud group of people have so much to be thankful for. Three facets of the native Italian culture exemplify for many Italian-Americans what it means to have blood ties to Italia. Those three cultural pillars being: the food that they ate, the language they spoke, and pride in their last names, regardless of discrimination. These three aspects lay the groundwork for how many Italian-Americans adapted to American culture. Some decided to forgo their Italian identity altogether, while others embraced a mix of the Italian heritage they grew up with and the American culture they were thrust into. This mixture created wonderful neighborhoods where the food, community, and families all embraced one another and lived together.

Many Italian-Americans congregated in the Rochester, New York area to create a new home. Every Italian-American's relationship to their mother culture and their American culture is unique, but one thing remains true for all who share the identity of being an Italian-American; it shaped who they were and how they and their family lived in America.

Interviews with Italian restaurant owners, Italian-American families, and Italian-American groups, studied neighborhoods inside and outside of the Rochester area, and historical research of Italian in the Rochester area provided both context and support for this research.

A century ago, last names like Coppola would have elicited discrimination and harassment, but today these are few traces of such bigotry. Even though many groups of immigrants were doing their best to become as American as possible, Italian-Americans sought a way to preserve the culture they cared about so much. Even while becoming American, they were able to create a sub-culture that is still alive to this day. All too often, immigrants are asked whether they are ashamed of their heritage they came to America with, and they sometimes are. This couldn't be further from the case for many Italian immigrants and children of Italian immigrants, especially Ross Cottone of the Sons of Italy. "There was no shame in our heritage, we weren't ashamed of being Italian. We were just bridging the cultures of American and Italian to create Italian-American."<sup>32</sup> The history of being an Italian-American has not always been an easy one. Prejudice, discrimination, and hate have filled the history of the individuals who were proud to call themselves Italian-American.<sup>33</sup> Despite these racial and cultural hardships, the Italian-American community united to create a beautiful and long lasting heritage, which has been passed down for many generations.

As Italian immigrants arrived in Ellis Island and moved to different places around the country, the Italian-American culture we see today was cultivated based on the immigration patterns of arriving Italians. Many Italians stayed amongst the five boroughs in New York City, some moved to surrounding states like Rhode Island, Connecticut, or New Jersey. Others even moved down south in an attempt to find work and jobs.<sup>34</sup> Many Italians ended up migrating to the city of Rochester, New York. It's clear looking at

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<sup>32</sup> Cottone, interview by the author.

<sup>33</sup> Merullo, "Hatred and It's Sly Legacy,"

<sup>34</sup> Alba, *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight*,

suburbs like Gates, East Rochester, and Seneca Falls that there is a lasting impact from generations of Italian-Americans calling these places their home. Just looking at the restaurants, Italian communities, residents, and groups that co-exist in these areas is a testament to how proud the Italian-American culture and heritage is in this area. One example of Italian-American culture having a lasting and profound impact on a particular area can be seen driving down Lyell Avenue in the Rochester suburb of Gates. Homes with Italian flags draped off of their porch, deli's and bakeries lining right next to each other, and statues of prominent religious figures guarding their homes all indicate that Italian-Americans dwell in these homes. Rochester has been home to Italian-Americans for many generations and offers a rich tapestry of historical sources for studying the Italian-American culture and traditions.

It's important to understand exactly who Rochester's Italian immigrants were and why they left their native land. Many who settled in the Rochester area were laborers and masons.<sup>35</sup> Many of the professionals who immigrated to the United States typically stayed in areas where there were high populations and a demand for lawyers or doctors. Those same areas, like New York City, were already established and didn't have a huge demand for physical labor. Rochester on the other hand was a new and developing economy that required skilled laborers who didn't mind working in Rochester's the harsh winter climate.<sup>36</sup> During the late 1800's and into the early 1900's these were the kinds of Italians that were moving to Rochester.

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<sup>35</sup> Salamone, *Italians in Rochester, NY 1900-1940*,

<sup>36</sup> Salamone, *Italians in Rochester, NY 1900-1940*,

As with any area, people will stay depending on whether or not they can find jobs and create a suitable living environment. “The people who stayed did what they had to do to stay. They had more faith in the new land than those who left.”<sup>37</sup> Among the Italian immigrants who came to Rochester, many were hard working, blue-collar individuals. That’s not to say that those who lived in Rochester didn’t become the professionals, which immigrants strived to be. “By 1940, there were university professors, respected attorneys, doctors, nurses, teachers, professional businessmen and women, dentists, priests, nuns, ministers and members of virtually every profession in Rochester.”<sup>38</sup>

## **I. Food**

Food is a never dying art form that generations of families pass on. An immediate picture comes to mind when thinking Italian food in America. Whether that image is of a plate of pasta, a large slice of pizza, or a delicious cannoli; Italian-Americans are extremely proud of the food they create and consume. For many generations, parents and grandparents have passed down cooking to their children and grandchildren in Italian-American families. In nearly every major city, there are dozens of authentic Italian restaurants that have their own special way of making Italian dishes. The city of Rochester is no different in this sense. Driving down Lyell Ave, Jay Street, or Fall Street in Seneca Falls bears witness to the authentic Italian-American culture Italians have worked to preserve. As with so many other aspects of their culture, food changed as Italians assimilated into American culture. Taking some aspects of their Italian life as

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<sup>37</sup> Salamone, *Italians in Rochester, NY 1900-1940*, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Salamone, *Italians in Rochester, NY 1900-1940*, 20.

well as aspects of American life created a culture and food that people still enjoy to this day. Families used mealtimes as an opportunity to sit down, eat, talk, laugh, and be together. It was a place where grandparents and grandchildren could sit down and enjoy one another's presence. Walking into an Italian restaurant or bakery is a unique experience that changes with each restaurant, but offers this same sense of family and togetherness. While they share many of the same qualities, the bakeries and restaurants in the Rochester area pride themselves for their differences as well. Going into these restaurants, trying their food, and talking with the owners and employees allows a fantastic insight as to the differences that each of the restaurants offers, but also of the one major underlying similarity they share; a passion and commitment to serving Italian food for the Rochester community. Most importantly, the processes of how Italian-American food has in turn assimilated into American culture just as the people have. What has gone from cooking and baking true Italian dishes to variations with American themed ingredients can be noted just by looking at the histories and menus of many of these Italian-American restaurants.

Italian food is one of the most popular ethnic foods in America today. It's important to understand the difference between authentic Italian food and the Italian-American food that was created from those who assimilated into American culture and passed on a style of cooking to younger generations.<sup>39</sup> What has gone from mock and ridicule from other ethnic groups because of the strangeness of their food has turned into appreciation and admiration.<sup>40</sup> Grocery stores all across America are stocked with Italian

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<sup>39</sup> Ferraro, *Feeling Italian: The Art of Ethnicity*,

<sup>40</sup> Rolle, *The Italian Americans: Troubled*,

goods because of the demand from the American population.<sup>41</sup> Many immigrant families came from Italy as poor farmers who didn't always have very much to eat or provide for their families.<sup>42</sup> When immigrants came to America and were able to prosper, they were able to afford and eat food that was a tad more extravagant. "Italians, for example, invented new dishes that used ingredients they had always associated with the wealthy. Italian food in America became 'richer and more complicated' than ordinary meals had been in the old country."<sup>43</sup> The change from authentic Italian food to the hybrid Italian-American food wasn't drastic, but it was enough of a change that it took on its own identity. For example, the custom of eating meatballs with pasta, usually spaghetti is a tradition that became "American". Because it was customary to usually eat pasta with a meat sauce in Italy, this transformed into eating pasta with meatballs. This change wasn't drastic enough that it caused a huge shift in what Italians ate, but it was enough of a change that it ushered in a new culture.<sup>44</sup>

Even the presence of Little Italy's that began to pop up in many cities across America is another example of Italian-Americans coming together to create a culture they could live in and preserve the qualities of Italian life.<sup>45</sup> Although these Little Italy's are hardly what they used to be many decades ago, places like New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and most large cities still have pockets of areas that are devoted to the preservation of the Italian culture. Even smaller cities like Rochester, which may be small in overall population, but still has an abundance of Italian-American

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<sup>41</sup> Ferraro, *Feeling Italian: The Art of Ethnicity*,

<sup>42</sup> Mercadante, "Italian-American Immigrants and Religious,"

<sup>43</sup> Levine, "Hungering for America: Italian,"

<sup>44</sup> Gvion and Trostler, "From Spaghetti and Meatballs,"

<sup>45</sup> Amfitheatrof, *The Children of Columbus*,

individuals who are devoted to preserving the culture. The food that is present in many of these Little Italy's is what keeps so many people coming back to be part of the Italian-American experience. Just looking at New York City's Little Italy, there are dozens of restaurants lining the street, shops with Italian related cuisine, and pizzerias for a quick fix of pizza. Thinking that people would travel just to experience the food and culture of Italians would have been an impossible thought 60-70 years ago, but is now extremely popular.<sup>46</sup> An example of this in Rochester is located in Gates. Although many of the restaurants have either moved or closed due to business reasons, there is still a pocket on Lyell Avenue that is home to several Italian-American bakeries and delis. Etna's Pastry Shop<sup>47</sup>, Martusciello's Bakery<sup>48</sup>, and C&C's Deli are three shops that preserve Italian-American culture in Gates. Although they differ in terms of the food they provide, all three share the same unique distinction of longevity in the Gates community and providing the people of Gates with an authentic Italian-American food experience.

Examining the Italian cuisine in Rochester is a testament to the Italian-American tradition in the area. There are countless restaurants and bakeries in and around the city that continue to cook and serve the Italian food that made them famous 40, 50, or even 60 years ago. Rocky's restaurant,<sup>49</sup> located on Jay Street in downtown Rochester, is one of the fixtures of Italian-American food in the Rochester area. Opening in 1949 by Joseph and Louise Mastrella,<sup>50</sup> Rocky's has prided itself on continuing a family tradition of authentic Italian cuisine that anyone can enjoy. Its involvement in the Rochester

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<sup>46</sup> Amfitheatrof, *The Children of Columbus*,

<sup>47</sup> Etna's Pastry Shop.

<sup>48</sup> Martusciellos Bakery.

<sup>49</sup> Rocky's Restaurant.

<sup>50</sup> Deyle, *Rochester Eats: 75 Years*,

community has been vital as well. As it has been opened and operating for the better part of 60 years, individuals can rely on Rocky's to be a stable and traditional restaurant for Italian-American food. Rocky's is a perfect example of the importance of food as a means of tradition for Italian-American families. "Today's menu features the same original family recipes including customer favorites like the ravioli with giant meatballs, the gnocchi, and the tripe."<sup>51</sup> Another Rochester based restaurant that has prided itself on years of quality food and superb customer service is Antonetta's, which is also located on Jay Street. Dating back to 1970, Antonetta's is known for its reasonable prices and fantastic quality of food.<sup>52</sup> Lastly, Gruttadauria's<sup>53</sup> is a Rochester based bakery that has been in the Rochester community since 1914. As another Italian establishment calling Jay Street it's home, Salvatore Gruttadauria began the rich culture of Italian restaurants and bakeries on the street. Gruttadauria's is famed not only for its delicious pastries and cookies, but also for the rich family tradition that goes along with the business. Being passed down from Salvatore Sr. to his son Salvatore Jr. and then on to his four sons makes Gruttadauria's a true family business that has been in Rochester for the better part of 90 years.<sup>54</sup> "Four generations of master bakers make Gruttadauria one of the longest running family-owned bakeries in the nation."<sup>55</sup> Although the bakery has since moved its location from Jay Street to West Ridge Road,<sup>56</sup> it still offers an authentic Italian-American atmosphere. What makes these restaurants and bakeries different from many others is their commitment to providing the Rochester area with fine Italian cuisine, but also staying true to its original customers. Many restaurants and bakeries now do all they can

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<sup>51</sup> Deyle, *Rochester Eats: 75 Years*, 56.

<sup>52</sup> Deyle, *Rochester Eats: 75 Years*,

<sup>53</sup> Gruttadauria's Bakery.

<sup>54</sup> Deyle, *Rochester Eats: 75 Years*,

<sup>55</sup> Deyle, *Rochester Eats: 75 Years*, 105.

<sup>56</sup> Deyle, *Rochester Eats: 75 Years*, 105.

to optimize profits and make the most money possible. Antonetta's, Gruttadauria's and Rocky's all achieve success in the Rochester community, but by ensuring their customers stay loyal and come back on a weekly basis. These businesses are family owned and have been passed down from mother/father to children for several generations. Keeping restaurants and bakeries in families adds a special designation to the establishment. Customers stay loyal because of the familiarity and dedication that only a family owned bakery or restaurant could produce.

The food culture in Italian-American families goes even further than restaurants or bakeries. The very meaning of food in these families holds a high place and is considered one of the major staples of interaction between individuals. When asked what dinner meant to her and her family, Renee Onorato replied: "It was a way to bring everyone together. Every Sunday, we would go to my grandparent's house to eat and spend time with one another."<sup>57</sup> Food was the perfect medium for Italian-Americans to pass on traditions, have an opportunity to enjoy one another's presence, and put a focus on several prominent holidays. "Eating was the sacrament of the home, and the Sunday meal was more important to the immigrants than regular attendance at mass."<sup>58</sup> As generations grew older, they kept the traditions of food and meals alive by passing them on to their children and grandchildren. Food was especially passed on from generation to generation in restaurants, as first or second generation Italian-Americans would open restaurants or bakeries and their children would inherit the running of these businesses. Any ethnic group takes comfort from being with one another and spending time with

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<sup>57</sup> Onorato, interview by the author.

<sup>58</sup> Ferraro, *Feeling Italian: The Art of Ethnicity*, 184.

family or people of the same ethnicity as them.<sup>59</sup> “Slow cooking time was also time for families to spend with each other, reinforcing ties that could withstand the harsh realities of the outside world.”<sup>60</sup>

There are several holidays of prominence for Italian-Americans where food plays a focal point, one of which is Christmas Eve. Some Italian-Americans partake in the tradition of the Feast of the Seven Fishes or its original name, La Vigilia. The Feast of the Seven Fishes is meant to commemorate the wait until midnight of Christmas when Jesus Christ was born. Italian-Americans indulge in a feast of different seafood dishes throughout the evening. Although the holiday has been popularized primarily in America,<sup>61</sup> many Italian-American families partake in the feast. The holiday is different for each family celebrating it depending on what part of Italy they come from. Some families from Southern Italy may prefer to prepare a dish or serve a certain type of seafood entirely different than a family from another Southern Italian area. This is the Americanization that has occurred to this holiday. As families have emigrated from Italy and have assimilated into the American culture, some of the traditions they held in one part of Italy are now being mixed with other Italian traditions. “But just as no two iterations of the same ritual are ever alike in practice, no two families’ Christmas Eve feast exactly resembles the other; plates often vary depending on the southern Italian region from which the family came.”<sup>62</sup> Fish was always a revered source of food for Southern Italians in Italy, thus making La Vigilia a revered and honored holiday. It’s clear that some Italian traditions and cultural norms were lost in the process of millions of

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<sup>59</sup> Freedman, "Sunday Gravy."

<sup>60</sup> Freedman, "Sunday Gravy."

<sup>61</sup> Zamora, "La Vigilia: Where to Celebrate," Los Angeles Magazine.

<sup>62</sup> Di Giovine, "La Vigilia Italo-Americana: Revitalizing," 185.

Italian immigrants assimilating into American culture. One that was not lost was the appreciation of food and taste. This is very clear in the preparation and appreciation of this feast every Christmas Eve. “In the face of extreme cultural change, Italian-Americans nevertheless maintained some link between their heritage and their culinary taste, which manifested itself in ritual settings such as the Vigilia.”<sup>63</sup> Some of the more popular dishes are: Baccala (salt cod), baked cod, fried smelts, deep fried shrimp, linguini with clam sauce, and oyster shooters among many others. The feast also includes food like pasta, vegetables, wine, and baked goods.<sup>64</sup> When studying holidays like the Feast of the Seven Fishes, along with getting together to eat and spend time with family, the whole idea of tradition and continuing of old family values is just as important. The notion of getting together once a year to catch up and be with family members is enough to keep a tradition like La Vigilia alive. As generations get older and families grow bigger, some of these traditions unfortunately get thrown to the wayside and don’t hold the importance they once held. Some Italian-Americans either don’t want the burden of keeping family traditions alive or they just don’t see the need to anymore. It’s unfortunate that many families that once held the feast every year don’t anymore just because they no longer see the need to keep the tradition alive. The worst part of this is that people outside of the Italian-American culture won’t be able to witness this tradition and see generations of Italian-American history every Christmas Eve.<sup>65</sup> Other holidays, especially religious holidays, like Christmas, Easter and the Feast of Saint Joseph all have different meaning and importance in the Italian-American culture. For some, the most important aspect of each of these holidays is the religious meanings they are grounded in. Others however,

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<sup>63</sup> Di Giovine, "La Vigilia Italo-Americana: Revitalizing," 189.

<sup>64</sup> Phillips, "La Vigilia Napoletana," About.com.

<sup>65</sup> Di Giovine, "La Vigilia Italo-Americana: Revitalizing," 191.

may see food playing a more important role. The Feast of St. Joseph is a holiday, which in similarity to the Feast of the Seven Fishes that has fizzled out of popularity among Italian-American communities but still holds a special importance for many with Italian heritage, especially those who are active in the Catholic Church. One of the major focuses of the feast of St. Joseph is the food and how Italians use food to honor Jesus Christ, his mother the Blessed Virgin, and his father Joseph. St. Joseph's feast day is held on March 19<sup>th</sup> but often the celebration would be moved to a weekend after or before this date as to make sure everyone could be in attendance.<sup>66</sup> On the feast day, many Catholic parishes open their doors and provide people with Easter bread as a way of honoring Joseph on his feast day.<sup>67</sup> The food would often be prepared weeks in advance and a special emphasis was put on baking the bread.<sup>68</sup> Some churches also provide St. Joseph feast tables and decorate the statue of Joseph with oranges for members of the congregation to take. Feasting with family and friends and using food as a singular means of reverence were ways that Italian-Americans were able to come together to worship as one.<sup>69</sup>

Food wasn't just something to eat for Italian-Americans, but was a way people interacted and remained together. When so much emphasis is placed on holidays, feasts, restaurants, and dinnertime, it's no surprise that food was the connector for all of these events. "The three generations...are tied up and kept together by their Italian customs and ideals. They celebrate the same feasts and eat the same type of food. In short, they're Italians; they live in the Italian manner, and they will die and be buried in the Italian

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<sup>66</sup> Salamone, *Italians in Rochester, NY 1940-1960*, 56.

<sup>67</sup> Fornieri, "The Good Father," 13.

<sup>68</sup> Lindsley, "A Feast Table Fit for a Saint,"

<sup>69</sup> Fornieri, "The Good Father," 13.

manner.”<sup>70</sup> Many Italian-Americans who grow up in households that really put an emphasis on food usually grow up to enforce these same values in their own families.<sup>71</sup> This was many Italian families’ way of creating their own culture and they were able to let it grow into a lifestyle that was passed down from generation to generation.

## **II. Last Names**

Another cornerstone aspect of Italian-American life that was changed as a result of assimilation into American society was their actual names, in particular last names. Last names hold a very dear meaning to the people that they are attached to. They are often the last line that connects younger generations to their culture and heritage. Just looking at my own Italian-American family genealogy I see last names like Rozzi, Pozzangerha, and Diguglielmo, all of which have a very special place in my family’s history. Talking to Italian-Americans in the Rochester community, researching the impact and legacy of last names, and understanding why some Italian-Americans felt the need to change their names are all extremely important factors to consider when examining the assimilation process that generations of Italian-Americans went through to better fit the mold set in America.

My own family history can be used as an example of Italian-Americans altering their last name to become better assimilated into American culture. After speaking and interviewing my uncle, Michael Williams and grandfather, Roger Williams I was able to gain an understanding of why my great grandfather, Michael Diguglielmo, needed to

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<sup>70</sup> Cinotto, "Leonard Covello, the Covello,"

<sup>71</sup> Cinotto, "Leonard Covello, the Covello,"

change his families last name from Diguglielmo to Williams. Asking Roger Williams, why he felt Italians needed to change their last names in the 1940's is important to understanding why my family did it. "Growing up in a post World War II, Italians were often discriminated against when trying to apply for jobs or college."<sup>72</sup> It was clear that many Americans still harbored ill feelings toward some Italian-Americans because of the fascist led country that Italy was during World War II.<sup>73</sup> Although many Italians were trying to shed that image and show a united support for America, there was still discrimination and prejudice. Roger's son, Michael, also understands the reasons why many Italian-Americans needed to go through the process of changing names. "After my uncles Johnny and Vincent tried applying for college at the University of Rochester and were denied, they felt that prejudice was a major factor as to why they were not granted admission into the university."<sup>74</sup> It wasn't uncommon for Italian-Americans to face discrimination in the work force or when attempting to apply for schools. In the decades leading up to the 1940's, Italian-Americans often took jobs that required manual labor and not a need for a formal education. Because of this stigmatization, it was sometimes hard for Italian-American men to break this stereotype.<sup>75</sup> Looking for a way to get past this discrimination, my great grandfather opted to change his last name from Diguglielmo to Williams. It wasn't a choice he made without talking to his family first. "He had told his wife and sons that if they were to change the last name, there was no going back. If we change it to Williams, we become American and adapt the mantra of being American."<sup>76</sup> This unfortunately was not a rare occurrence for many Italian-Americans in

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<sup>72</sup> Williams, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>73</sup> Battisti, "The American Committee on Italian,"

<sup>74</sup> Williams, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>75</sup> Salamone, *Italians in Rochester, NY 1900-1940*,

<sup>76</sup> Williams, telephone interview by the author.

America. The change of my grandpa's last name didn't come without him harboring hard feelings as to why they needed to change the name. When asked if he had any of these feelings towards the changing of his last name he answered: "I very much understood why they changed our families last name. I was just a baby at the time, so I had no understanding of what was going on. Looking back on it though, I wish that we could have kept that name."<sup>77</sup> This is just an example of one family's quest to assimilating into American culture and adopting the persona of being American. It 's unfortunate that some families needed to let go of a part of their ethnicity that meant a great deal to them, but it was the truth of what millions of Italians needed to go through in America.

The last name and genealogy records for many Italian-American families had two major points in which they changed. One, when Italians first came to the United States and went through the immigration process at Ellis Island. Many of the individuals with difficult to spell last names were given new names when they came over.<sup>78</sup> Often times the clerks at the offices at Ellis Island that were in charge of transcribing the names of new immigrants to the country didn't take the time to properly write out the names of the individuals coming over. This resulted in Italians being given a new name with documentation.<sup>79</sup> The other major point for many Italians changing their last name was later in their lives as they attempted to assimilate into American culture. Some felt the need to change their last name to avoid discrimination and wanted a better opportunity for their family.<sup>80</sup> "Pressure to change family names by eliminating vowels or shortening

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<sup>77</sup> Williams, interview by the author.

<sup>78</sup> Alley-Young, "A New Language, a New World,"

<sup>79</sup> Rolle, *The Italian Americans: Troubled*,

<sup>80</sup> Alley-Young, "A New Language, a New World,"

them also grew. Tomassini became Thomas and Lombardi was changed to Lombard.”<sup>81</sup> The importance of last names to Italians is also important to remember when examining why Italian-Americans decided to change their last names. Lucas Longo plays this out perfectly in a passage from the book Family on Vendetta Street.<sup>82</sup> He writes about a young man who is just about to receive his doctorate after completing school. His Italian born father who immigrated to America and had worked tirelessly for years to help his young son pay for school, could not be more proud of his son for this accomplishment. When it’s time for the son to receive his diploma, he had changed his last name from Bentolinardo to Bentley. The news of this change absolutely devastates the father and he can’t bear to look at his son in the eye anymore. Although the son did this to better his chances of success in his firm, he had to forgo a part of his Italian culture in the process. This story may illustrate what many Italian-American families went through on their quest to not only become more American, but to also achieve more success in America.

Especially after World War II, many Italians in America looked to assimilate totally into American culture because of the ramifications of the war. Those who were Japanese, German, and Italian or especially had those culture’s last names were heavily scrutinized, as that was whom America was fighting during the war. It should come to no surprise that Italians with Italian sounding last names didn’t necessarily fit in with the “American norm.” “I began to feel different. My name was foreign, not American; did that make me not American?”<sup>83</sup> Even looking at today’s culture and some of the unnecessary negativity that comes with an Italian surname. Movies like *Goodfellas*, *The*

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<sup>81</sup> Rolle, *The Italian Americans: Troubled*, 40.

<sup>82</sup> Rolle, *The Italian Americans: Troubled*, 41.

<sup>83</sup> Barolini, "Making My Bones,"

*Godfather*, and acclaimed television program *The Sopranos* all give the idea that Italian-Americans are part of the mafia. Having an Italian sounding last name may give someone the impression that they are mob related or might have a family member who is part of the mafia. It's what draws an audience to shows that highlight Italian members. Seeing them as gangsters or a member of the mob is the norm for Hollywood.<sup>84</sup> Ed Grozewski of the Sons of Italy in Rochester knows of the implications that movies like the *Godfather* and *The Sopranos* has on the image of Italian-Americans. When asking him whether or not these kinds of movies or TV shows puts a negative connotation on the Italian-American image, he replied "absolutely it does."<sup>85</sup> It's unfortunate that movies have to put such a negative spin on people who are of Italian-American descent. Obviously not every Italian-American is a member of the mob or is part of the mafia. They have and continue to contribute great things to our society. The Italian-American culture is one of hard working, and honest individuals.<sup>86</sup>

While looking at the reasons why Italian-Americans sought to change their names to avoid persecution or the prospect of gaining employment is important, it's also vital to look at how Italian-Americans sought to preserve their last name. One reason why so many Italian-Americans to this day are so proud of their heritage is mostly in part of their last name and the meaning that comes with it. Studying the meaning and longevity of last names is something all cultures can do. Going to places like churches, state census, local records, or even websites like ancestry.com all can provide the starting place to tracking

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<sup>84</sup> DeStefano, "Ungood Fellas,"

<sup>85</sup> Grozewski, interview by the author.

<sup>86</sup> Grozewski, interview by the author.

down one's family and especially the meaning behind one's last name.<sup>87</sup> One of the great things that the Sons of Italy has also done for the Rochester community is their commitment to genealogy. Joseph Rube, a former president of the group spoke of this when asked of the importance of genealogy for Italian-Americans. There was a time when people just weren't interested in finding their roots and their family's history. But nowadays people are looking for their roots and how far their families go back. It's important for people to go looking for their history in the information and records.<sup>88</sup>

### **III. Language**

Lastly, the importance of language is a pivotal aspect of culture for any group of people. Language has always had an immeasurable impact on people's social, cultural, and personal relationships. Speaking to another person is as genuine of communication there is and is often taken for granted once we lose the ability to do so.<sup>89</sup> As immigrants came to this country, one of the biggest hurdles many had to face was communication with English speaking people and whether or not to discontinue using their native language. This trend has continued to this day with immigrants who continue to immigrate to America. This was no different for Italian immigrants coming to America and has had lasting impacts on the generations of Italian-Americans that came after them. Many immigrants saw the need to forgo their Italian language and better integrate into

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<sup>87</sup> Colletta, *Finding Italian Roots*,

<sup>88</sup> Rube', interview by the author.

<sup>89</sup> Alley-Young, "A New Language, a New World,"

American culture by learning the English language. If their children were to ever succeed in America, immigrants felt the need to only use the English language in the household. Asking a first generation Italian American what language was spoken in his home while growing up is a testament to many parent's desire to have English speaking children. "My parents would sometimes speak in Italian to each other when my brother and I went to bed, but for the most part English was the only language spoken in the house."<sup>90</sup> In general, many Italian speaking parents and grandparents felt the need to teach their children the English language because of the growing need to have mastered that language while living in America. As Italian was not a popular language in America, it didn't seem important to have children growing up and trying to learn that language. With Italian-Americans no longer taking the time and effort to learn the Italian language, it's no surprise that the language has been mostly forgotten. Something many Italian-Americans have come to regret looking back on their lives. Asking Nick DiStacio the question of 'do you ever regret not learning the Italian language' yielded the answer many Italian-Americans most likely answer today. "I really wish I would have taken the time to learn the Italian language growing up."<sup>91</sup> Even though it was more popular for Italian-Americans to assimilate into the American culture and learn the English language, that doesn't mean that all Italian-Americans passed over their Italian roots and neglected their original language. Many attempted to teach both the English and Italian language to their children but that came with mixed results. Difficulties in school or harassment from peers were just some of the negative ramifications of continuing to speak Italian in America.

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<sup>90</sup> DiStacio, interview by the author.

<sup>91</sup> DiStacio, interview by the author.

For some Italian-Americans, it was a means of acceptance to be able to speak the English language without a heavy accent or through broken English. Because Italians were now in America, many felt the need to fully immerse into the American culture and totally forgo the Italian language they were brought up on.<sup>92</sup> For some Italian-American families, one or two of the family members had actually come from Italy and had grown up speaking Italian. Upon coming to America, they would have a difficult time not only speaking English but also understanding the English language. Speaking English in the home and forgoing the Italian language served as a way to assist those family members who needed support with their English language.<sup>93</sup> Many fathers were the breadwinners of households but were usually the member of the family who had emigrated from Italy and typically spoke the Italian language.<sup>94</sup> Giving them the tools to speak English was imperative, as they needed to know how to work and speak English in America.<sup>95</sup> In losing one aspect of their identity (which was the Italian language) they were gaining another aspect, the American culture.<sup>96</sup> This idea also pushed families to adopt the idea that “now we are in America, we will become American and learn the English language.” Some Italian-Americans can remember older family members deciding this for their families like Ross Cottone of the Sons of Italy of Rochester. When asking him whether or not his family continued to speak the Italian language when moving to America he replied: “my grandfather had said: ‘were in America now, we speak English.’”<sup>97</sup> This doesn’t assume that families were ashamed of the Italian heritage they had. Many families were still extremely prideful of the ethnicity and culture they brought from Italy.

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<sup>92</sup> Rolle, *The Italian Americans: Troubled*,

<sup>93</sup> DiStacio, interview by the author.

<sup>94</sup> DiStacio, interview by the author.

<sup>95</sup> Carnevale, "Lingua.,"

<sup>96</sup> Rube', interview by the author.

<sup>97</sup> Cottone, interview by the author.

This was just one way among many in which some families needed to better become American and assimilate into the culture in which they now lived in.<sup>98</sup>

Language also cannot be hidden or covered up very easily. If a non-English speaking person is in America, they may have a difficult time being understood or understanding others. As Italian immigrants weren't able to sometimes understand simple words, it may have been difficult to hold a job, buy a house, or interact with their peers. As language is typically the first impression individuals have of one another, this first impression could be ruined due to the fact of a very heavy accent or no English speaking skills at all.<sup>99</sup> Because of these factors, many parents and grandparents did all they could to not only teach themselves the English language, but to also make sure their children and grandchildren were learning it as well.

Despite the reasons for forgoing their primary language for English, some Italian-Americans still embraced their Italian language. They did however see the ramifications that speaking Italian had on not only themselves, but also their family. During World War II, many Italian-Americans were heavily persecuted due to their connections to Italy. World War II became a test for many Italian-Americans because of the allegiance they may have still had to Italy compared to the patriotism they were expected to have for America.<sup>100</sup> Because America was fighting Italy in the war, most Italian that was spoken in America was seen as a threat against the country.<sup>101</sup> Even things like Italian language newspapers, radio stations/broadcasts, and letters/documents that were written in Italian

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<sup>98</sup> Cottone, interview by the author.

<sup>99</sup> Rolle, *The Italian Americans: Troubled*,

<sup>100</sup> *Italians in America*.

<sup>101</sup> Carnevale, "No Italian Spoken for the Duration,"

were seen as a concern and dubbed a threat by the FBI.<sup>102</sup> On the contrary, articles that were written, spoken, or broadcast in the English language was seen as patriotic.<sup>103</sup> Millions of Italian-Americans were now put in the middle of a crossroad; continue to embrace their Italian ethnicity in full or to fully assimilate into American culture to avoid possible discrimination. The timing of the war and the desire for many first and second generation Italians to assimilate into American culture unfortunately created the perfect opportunity for Italian language to be mostly abandoned by the growing culture of Italian-Americans. “The war played a significant part in the decreasing use of the Italian language.”<sup>104</sup>

Another negative consequence of speaking Italian in the home was for children growing up in America and going to school. Classroom teachers scrutinized this practice because they felt students who grew up around two different languages would be unsuccessful in both languages and should rather focus on one.<sup>105</sup> English speaking teachers obviously favored the idea of students practicing and becoming fluent in the English language.<sup>106</sup> Some teachers even told parents of their students to no longer speak Italian in the home. “The teacher met with my parents and told them not to speak to me in their language, that it was confusing to me.”<sup>107</sup> With the pressure of school, many families decided to make the switch to speaking English full time in the household, or whenever children were around. Schools also added extra pressure of trying their best to “Americanize” students of immigrant parents. They did this by providing lessons in only

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<sup>102</sup> Carnevale, "No Italian Spoken for the Duration,"

<sup>103</sup> Carnevale, "No Italian Spoken for the Duration,"

<sup>104</sup> Carnevale, "No Italian Spoken for the Duration,"

<sup>105</sup> Carnevale, "Lingua.,"

<sup>106</sup> Carnevale, "Lingua.,"

<sup>107</sup> Carnevale, "Lingua.," 93.

the English language, but also teaching students about patriotism in America, American hygiene tips, and values that were considered important in America.<sup>108</sup> This abandonment of the Italian language meant future generations would no longer have the opportunity to listen and absorb the language and pass it on to their children. Italian-Americans were then forced to decide what to do with their Italian language. They didn't want to have to abandon one of the more sacred elements of their culture but desperately wanted to assimilate into the American culture they now lived in. "The loss of one's self was nowhere more obvious than in the adaption of a new language."<sup>109</sup>

The process of assimilating Italians into American culture was one that left the Italian language out of many households. It's unfortunate to see that it almost made the language non-existent as families saw the need to become more American and really push the importance of the English language. The reassurance of the language in today's society is something that Italian-Americans can get behind to recreate another important aspect of their culture and learn to embrace it. The Italian language is one that is considered very beautiful and scholarly to learn. Although many didn't consider the language of much importance in the early-mid 1900's, it has grown in prominence since then. "When a grade school teacher once remarked to me on the beauty of the Italian language, I assumed she had made a mistake. There was nothing beautiful about the Italian I knew."<sup>110</sup> Even during the time when Italian was looked down upon, some Italian-American organizations knew of the importance of preserving the language they had grown up on. Groups like the Italian Cultural Club was founded in 1939 in order to

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<sup>108</sup> Cinotto, "Leonard Covello, the Covello,"

<sup>109</sup> Rolle, *The Italian Americans: Troubled*, 39.

<sup>110</sup> Carnevale, "Lingua.," 94.

help preserve the language<sup>111</sup> and groups today still work towards the preservation of the language. Just in Rochester, the Italian American Community Center and the Sons of Italy both reiterate the importance of learning and passing on the Italian language to younger generations. When asked what the number one thing individuals can do today to better preserve Italian-American culture, Matthew Grosodonia of the Sons of Italy responded quickly with “learn the language.”<sup>112</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion**

One community that has worked to preserve Italian-American culture is Seneca Falls, which is located just an hour outside of Rochester, New York. The small village has Italian restaurants that have been fixtures of the community for several generations and offers a St. Anthony’s festival every Labor Day weekend in honor of St. Anthony. Just passing through the town, you see some of the Italian-American restaurants that help preserve the proud culture in this town. Places like Little Italy and Aviccoli’s New York Style Restaurant are both great examples of Italian-Americans doing their best to preserve Italian food. The St. Anthony’s festival, which was founded in 1980, was started to raise money for a Southern Italian town that was destroyed by an earthquake.<sup>113</sup> The town came together to raise money and send it to help rebuild churches that had been destroyed. To this day, the festival continues and provides the people of Seneca Falls with different Italian-American themed foods and entertainment. Some of the main

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<sup>111</sup> Zissler, "Rochester's Claim to Italian,"

<sup>112</sup> Grosodonia, interview by the author.

<sup>113</sup> St. Anthony Italian Festival.

fixtures of the festival include: rides, games, food, a 5K race, bocce ball tournament, and the naming of The Father Beatini Memorial Award each year.<sup>114</sup> The best aspect of the festival is the continuation of culture from those who live in Seneca Falls. Third and fourth generation Italian-Americans have come together to celebrate St. Anthony. This shows a commitment to the Italian-American culture that goes past the first or second generation. “It was the second and third generation Italians that wanted to honor St. Anthony and their Italian roots with this festival.”<sup>115</sup>

Up to this day, organizations and clubs have helped to preserve the Italian-American culture that was created in the early 1900’s. Groups like the Sons of Italy, which isn’t just Rochester based but has branches around the country, do what they can to provide communities with Italian-American culture and ethnicity. The Sons of Italy was founded in 1905 and is currently the oldest and largest organization for men and women of Italian heritage in the United States.<sup>116</sup> The Rochester chapter of the group, which is located in East Rochester, works diligently to preserve Italian-American culture in today’s society. They believe in preserving and maintaining the Italian heritage to the best of their ability so their culture and traditions stay alive. Just asking the Sons of Italy current president, Vincent Giannantonio, why preserving our Italian heritage is so important, he replied: “it’s our heritage, it’s our culture and it’s something we don’t want to lose.”<sup>117</sup> One of the main missions the Sons of Italy has is to encourage the study of the Italian language and culture in American schools and universities. Promoting the Italian

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<sup>114</sup> St. Anthony Italian Festival.

<sup>115</sup> St. Anthony Italian Festival.

<sup>116</sup> Rube', interview by the author.

<sup>117</sup> Giannantonio, interview by the author.

language is something that is extremely important to us and to the Sons of Italy overall.<sup>118</sup> One drawback that has happened is many schools are dropping the Italian language in favor of other languages. Something the Sons of Italy is doing to combat this is trying to push these schools to get the Italian language back in their curriculum again.<sup>119</sup> Especially in Rochester areas like Greece, Gates, or East Rochester, where the Italian-American population is particularly high. Joseph Rube added “we as a group support the idea of keeping the language in these schools so we have gotten the national Sons of Italy group to back us in the attempt to try and keep Italian in these schools.”<sup>120</sup> Attempts from groups like the Sons of Italy to preserve things like language and heritage as a whole is huge for any community that has Italian-American ties. It’s the dedication of these groups that enables traditions to be passed down from generation-to-generation. When asking Rube why it’s important to pass on traditions of Italian culture he didn’t hesitate to answer about older generations. “If we don’t make an effort to educate and teach our children and grandchildren of the importance of things like Italian-American culture and the Italian language then we lose these things when we die.”<sup>121</sup> It’s not just through the preservation of language that the Sons of Italy is keeping the Italian heritage alive in the Rochester area. They routinely hold dances, cookouts, dinners, barbeques, and parties to celebrate their heritage for all who wish to attend.<sup>122</sup> They also show how committed they are to the Rochester area with the awarding of a scholarship to several students of Italian ancestry who are going to college each year. “Just this year we are giving away eight

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118 Meleca, interview by the author.

119 Rube', interview by the author.

120 Rube', interview by the author.

121 Rube', interview by the author.

122 Meleca, interview by the author.

scholarships to students.”<sup>123</sup> This commitment to the Rochester area and the preservation of Italian-American culture proves why the Sons of Italy, or any other Italian-American group, is crucial. They are able to keep the traditions alive that were around 40, 50, or 60 years ago and can help pass them down to younger generations.

When studying the Italian-American culture, it’s impossible not to include food, language, and last names. All three of these aspects have extreme importance to the Italian-American culture and ethnicity for many different reasons. Although at first, it was very difficult for many Italian-Americans to assert their culture into American life without harassment, this has changed over time. With food, language, and last names changing to better fit the mold in America, Italian-Americans have created their own culture from the demands they saw to assimilate into American culture, but to also keep their heritage and ethnicity intact. All three have also undergone extreme transformations as a result of Italian immigrants coming to America, assimilating into American culture, and passing down the traditions of their culture down to each generation. Looking at historical sources, talking to members of the Italian-American community, and gaining a better understanding of the impact certain Italian-American neighborhoods and groups have on the Rochester community has proved of the ever-changing culture that is the Italian-American lifestyle. The Italian-American culture will continue to change based on the people who keep it alive and pass on its traditions.

### **Application to Teaching**

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<sup>123</sup> Giannantonio, interview by the author.

<http://italiancultureinamerica.wordpress.com/>

For educators, researching and coming up with new material is of the utmost importance. To always be perfecting one's craft is essential for the learning-community as a whole and enables scholars and students to always be acquiring knowledge. Considering the most wonderful thing about learning is it can never be perfected and people always yearn to gain more knowledge of a particular topic. What are rooted at the heart of learning are educational theories and the theorists who created, crafted, and continue to use them in the classroom to this day. After researching the impacts of Italian culture and the changes that were seen as first, second, third, and fourth generation Italian-Americans assimilated into this country it's obvious that we as educators will never stop learning about this topic. Yes, we are able to look at the past and decipher the meanings of certain events. But as events change and as we progress as a society, especially the Italian-American culture, we constantly continue to learn and come to new conclusions of this history. Using the information gathered from studying this topic, it can be transformed into a learning opportunity for teachers to teach their students with. Using educational theories such as: theory of multiple intelligences and the theory of educational relevance are both crucial for teaching students effectively.

First, looking at exactly what the website offers and what it is are crucial before moving on to examining the effects and theories that should be implemented before teaching the material on the site. The website (which is <http://italiancultureinamerica.wordpress.com/>) offers students, teachers, and educators an opportunity to learn about and live Italian-American culture and ethnicity. The site offers a plethora of material directly related to the food that Italian-Americans eat, the Italian

language, and the genealogy of Italian last names. Each of these three topics has a main-page and thus sub-pages that informs the reader on many different variations of the topic. For example in the food category, there is a sub-page dedicated to television shows that are devoted solely to educating and teaching people how to prepare authentic Italian and Italian-American cuisine. Having access to this information is great for students and teachers because it informs them on a topic that may not be covered in normal class discussion. When going over Italian history or the importance of culture in our society in a social studies classroom, the importance of Italian-American ethnicity is often overlooked and is not a crucial component to the curriculum. Having a website like this however, gives students an opportunity to learn about this topic and the importance of Italian-American culture in this country. Overall, this site is mainly for students who wish to research and better understand Italian-American culture. Of course teachers can use this as a resource, but students will really be able to extract information from the site and apply it to projects they may be working on in the classroom. What makes this site stand out from others is the uniqueness of the material that is presented on it. Other sites may only offer one component of what this site offers. Obviously there are positives and negatives that go with any site of this kind. A positive to combining all three components (food, language, and last names) is it makes it extremely easy to use and only have to rely on one site. Rather than having to jump back and forth from site to site, all of the information is presented on this site. With one centralized location of all the information, students will be able to go that site and relay that info to whatever requires the information (an essay, project, etc.). However, there are negative ramifications to combining three of the major facets of Italian-American lifestyle onto one website. One is the difficulty that is posed to having three, rather large, topics all condensed onto one.

Just looking at the food that comes from the Italian-American community, it's nearly impossible to combine all of the information of that topic onto one site. Because there is so much information relating to Italian-American food on the web, breaking up this information keeps from overwhelming the student who is researching the topic. It's also difficult to find all of the relevant information that pertains to Italian-American food. With the website listed above, much of the information is typically the most popular and relevant info relating to food, language, and last names. Obviously there is much more information out there, but near impossible to find it all and combine it all on this single site.

Using proven educational theories is extremely beneficial to students when creating educational resources such as this website. When consulting with these theories, teachers can provide students with the best possible teaching environment possible. These theories are often created, used in the classroom, and then critically examined and reviewed for their legitimacy and production in the classroom. Constantly adjusting and evaluating educational theories is critical to ensure their effectiveness in the classroom. Theories like theory of multiple intelligences and theory of educational relevance both can provide valid information and relevant teaching strategies. Especially when using this website, where all three of these theories are particularly utilized. What all of these theories have in common is their use of visual learning as a means of educating. It's important to understand that not all students will succeed with just a lecture lesson, reading straight from a textbook. Some students need the hands on, visual component to truly affirm their understanding of the material. First, while examining Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences it's clear that visual learning is of the utmost importance for

some classrooms, learning tools, and websites. It's important to first narrow down what about Gardner's theory is prudent to include in your classroom instruction. With the above mentioned website, the idea of visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, and interpersonal intelligences<sup>124</sup> provide the best method for using educational opportunities like; cooking Italian-American food, interacting with Italian-Americans, and learning the Italian language. "In his Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Gardner expanded the concept of intelligence to also include such areas as music, spacial relations and interpersonal knowledge in addition to mathematical and linguistic ability."<sup>125</sup> Another reason for the importance of this theory in relation to he website and what it can teach students is the emphasis it puts on authentic assessment. By no means does the site conform to the typical "classroom" model of teaching or instruction. It was put together by interpersonal skills of seeking out people and customs that are pertinent to the Italian-American culture. "Supporters of Gardner's theory claim that a better approach to assessment is to allow students to explain the material in their own ways using the different intelligences."<sup>126</sup> When it comes to explaining one's culture, there is usually never one set way that things are done because every family and every culture is different. This meaning that each person's culture it different then someone else's. Therefore, there cannot be a set rubric or grading scale to interpret whether or not the information is right or wrong.

Another educational theory that's relevant to the website and how it can assist students in learning is John Dewey's theory of educational relevance. With much of the

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<sup>124</sup> Wilford and Karas, "Understanding Gardner's Theory of Multiple,"

<sup>125</sup> Brualdi, "Gardner's Theory.," 16.

<sup>126</sup> Wilford and Karas, "Understanding Gardner's Theory of Multiple," 19.

content that is on the website, it is related directly to the ethnicity and culture of Italian-Americans. The food that is eaten, the language that is spoken, and the last names all encompass an interpretation of the culture. Student's interpretations of these same staples of Italian-American life (food, language, and last names) all become relevant when students are able to interpret them in real life. This meaning, when students see an Italian-American food television show, they can possibly relate it to their own culture or ethnicity. For example, a Jewish student can relate it to Jewish food, a Chinese student relating it to Chinese food, etc. While examining this website, students are not only learning about a new culture (the Italian-American one), possibly reaffirming the knowledge they had already had of the Italian-American culture, or relating the information to a culture that is more familiar to them (usually their own culture). What is best about the last two that can happen with students is the background knowledge that clicks automatically from just seeing information about a culture. They may see an ingredient that is used in an Italian-American dish and unconsciously relate it to an ingredient in a dish they are more familiar with.<sup>127</sup> This background information is vital to the success for students, because when using background knowledge, students are able to insert knowledge in and outside of the classroom, and apply information they know to new topics.

Overall, the use of websites as educational material can be extremely useful to any teacher. Collecting information from the Internet and compiling it onto one site can be beneficial and convenient for students to use. In the case of the website on Italian-American culture and the impacts that it has had on language, food, and last names, this

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<sup>127</sup> Garrison, "Some Remarks on Dewey's," 89.

information can be crucial not just for its importance on Italian-American culture, but because of the impact other cultures can have from it. Looking at the educational strategies; educational relevance from John Dewey and the theory of multiple intelligence by Howard Gardner, they both provide assistance when implementing the use of this site in a classroom.

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