

*Before the Lynching:
Reconsidering the Experience of
Italians and Sicilians in Louisiana,
1870s-1890s*

By JESSICA BARBATA JACKSON*

On the morning of March 14, 1891, a mob of eight to ten thousand New Orleanians stormed the Orleans Parish Prison in search of Italians. Incensed by a local court's acquittal of nine alleged Mafia members believed responsible for killing New Orleans Police Chief David Hennessy, some Italians were shot, others hanged—within hours, eleven Italians were dead at the hands of vigilante violence, one of the largest mass lynchings in U. S. history.¹

*The author is an assistant professor of history at Colorado State University, where she specializes in immigration history and social studies teaching.

¹Police Chief David Hennessy was gunned down in the streets of New Orleans on October 15, 1890. As he lay bleeding in the street, Hennessy's friend Captain William O'Connor reportedly asked him, "Who gave it to you, Dave?" Hennessy replied, "Dagoes did it." As a result of this claim, dozens of "suspicious characters" throughout the city were indiscriminately rounded up, including a Polish Jew and a Romanian, both of whom were released when they were found to be non-Italian. Eventually, nineteen suspects were indicted and imprisoned at the Parish Prison, including a fourteen-year-old boy named Gasperi Marchesi and a "fool" named Emmanuelle Polizzi. It should be noted that O'Conner was the only one who heard Hennessy's remark, and he never took the witness stand during the ensuing trial. Additionally, although Hennessy lived for an additional eleven hours, he never suggested the specific identity of his assailants. Also relevant is the context for this accusation: in the midst of his work cracking down on violence in New Orleans, Hennessy had become entangled in a feud between two rival groups of Italians, the Matrangas who had since secured control of the citrus trade importation contracts (and employed the stevedores/dockworkers), and the

Scholarly explanations for the lynching indicate consensus: Matthew Frye Jacobson contends that a prevalent belief in "Italians' *innate* criminality not only allowed, but indeed prompted, the brutal lynching."² As Richard Gambino argues, "The cycle of fear was whirling at high speed in New Orleans in 1890 . . . [and] the *long-simmering* anti-Italian hysteria burst into an ugly frenzy."³ Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale explain that characterizations of Italians were changing during the 1880s and that these increasingly negative perceptions were "most obvious in New Orleans."⁴ Without distinguishing between regional variances in (public) discourse about Italians or analyzing the discourse about Italians from the pre-lynching era, one could reach a similar conclusion: the 1891 lynching was the result of long-standing anti-Italian sentiment and racial animosity. However, this established interpretation glosses over the fact that the lynching and ensuing anti-Italian discourse within Louisiana were something fundamentally new.

Since immigration scholars tend to concentrate on the more visible immigrant communities in the North, the narrative of Italians in Louisiana has been left largely unexplored.⁵ In fact, only one book-length study, Anthony V. Margavio and Jerome J. Salomone's *Bread and Respect*, performs a comprehensive

Provenzanos, who had previously managed the fruit-unloading contracts. After his attempted murder, Charles Matranga went on to accuse the Provenzanos, despite originally being unable to identify his assailants. When the Provenzanos were jailed and awaiting trial, Hennessy was allegedly sympathetic to their case over Matranga's accusation. Matranga and his associates were later accused of organizing the conspiracy to assassinate Hennessy. Tom Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings: The Murder of Chief Hennessy, the New Orleans "Mafia" Trials, and the Parish Prison Mob* (Guilford, Conn., 2007).

²Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 56, author's emphasis.

³Richard Gambino, *Vendetta: A True Story of the Largest Lynching in U. S. History* (Garden City, NY, 1971), 255, emphasis mine.

⁴Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale, *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience* (New York, 1992), 201.

⁵Additionally, the scholarship of Louisiana race-relations focuses on the changing racial categories of the region, defined by the 1890s in terms of whites, blacks, and mixed/mulattos, which does not account for the racial place and impact of Italians. This is a theme I focus on in my other work.

analysis of the Italians in Louisiana.⁶ Beyond the specific historiography of the 1891 lynching, when scholars do engage with the narrative of anti-Italian violence in Louisiana, they often do so as a means of providing evidence to support a master narrative of anti-Italian prejudice.⁷ Yet, these scholarly interpretations remain in large part the result of overlooking or misreading local, Louisiana sources. Consequently, reliance on this established immigration narrative, which actually represents a regionally specific northern discourse, has misrepresented this lynching as the enactment of preexisting anti-Italian sentiment in Louisiana.⁸ What happens when analyzing the experience of Italians in

⁶Anthony V. Margavio and Jerome J. Salomone, *Bread and Respect: The Italians of Louisiana* (Gretna, La., 2002). Beyond *Bread and Respect*, only two other book-length studies describe the Italian experience in Louisiana, though both are regionally and temporally specific. Vincenza Scarpaci's *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes: Recruitment, Labor Conditions, and Community Relations, 1880-1910* (New York, 1980) focuses specifically on Italians in the rural sugar parishes of the region. John V. Baiamonte Jr., *Spirit of Vengeance: Nativism and Louisiana Justice, 1921-1924* (Baton Rouge, La., 1986) focuses on the later 1920s experience of Italians in the strawberry parish of Tangipahoa.

⁷With regards to the 1891 lynching, much has been written; originally begun as an apologia in the 1940s, Italian scholars in the 1970s hypothesized various conspiracy theories in an attempt to uncover the "real" motives behind the lynching and to reclaim Italian-American identity from the imposed Mafia stereotype. Such scholars, including but not limited to Barbara Botein, Lyle Saxon, and Tom Smith readily engage with local sources in their efforts to uncover "who killa da chief." See Barbara Botein, "The Hennessy Case: An Episode in Anti-Italian Nativism," *Louisiana History*, 20 (1979): 261-79; Lyle Saxon, *Gumbo Ya-Ya* (Boston, 1945); Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings*. However, part of my historiographical qualm, upon which I will elaborate, involves those analyses of the New Orleans lynching that do not use local sources, along with those that consider the lynching evidence of the anti-Italian master narrative.

⁸My consideration that historians have used a northern perspective as a stand-in for a "national" narrative results from the manner in which the historiography of Italian immigrants has developed. The largest populations of Italians in the United States, especially at the turn of the century, resided in northern cities, United States Census Bureau; see also "Immigration Explorer," *The New York Times*, March 10, 2009. Unsurprisingly, and because of this, historians began to study Italian immigrants through regional case studies of immigrant communities in these cities, such as New York, Buffalo, and Chicago. For foundational examples, see Donna R. Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Albany, N.Y., 1984);

Louisiana *before* the lynching and from a more regional source base? What is revealed by removing the lynching teleology as the basis for explaining the treatment of Italians in Louisiana in the post-lynching era?

In this article, I counter this slippage between local and national by remaining conscious of the specifically Louisiana version of the Italian immigrant story across a broader historical moment. In so doing, I offer a revised frame that problematizes the application of a standard declension narrative upon the Italian immigrant experience in Louisiana. Through my comparative analysis of press discourse from Louisiana with that of New York and other major cities around the country, as well as a more critical assessment of New Orleans's various newspapers, I focus on the specific experience of Italians in Louisiana across a broader historical moment and describe a different trajectory.⁹ I

Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977); Rudolph John Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of The Uprooted." *The Journal of American History*, 51 (1964): 404-17; Humbert S. Nelli, *Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility* (New York, 1970). Much of the recent scholarship on Italian immigrants has continued this trend even while offering nuanced interpretations that have revised our understanding of Italian racialization and introduced new narratives such as the radicalism among Italian immigrant women; in large part, however, these new perspectives have still been collected from the experience of Italian immigrants in northern urban areas. See, for example, Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York, 2003); Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2010); Peter G. Vellon, *A Great Conspiracy against Our Race: Italian Immigrant Newspapers and the Construction of Whiteness in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York, 2014). From foundational monographs to more recent interventions, historians have culled the master narrative on Italian immigrants in large part from the stories of these immigrants in northern cities. And, because this "northern" narrative remains the prevailing means of explaining the experience of Italians in the United States, the "northern" has been used as a stand-in for "national." In this paper, I endeavor to trouble this slippage as I remain conscious of telling the specifically Louisiana-version of the Italian immigrant story.

⁹In order to establish the Louisiana discourse, in addition to citing regional newspapers from around the state, I will rely most heavily upon the New Orleans press, which I reviewed for references to Italian(s), Sicilian(s), and dago(es) between 1870 and 1900. While I subsequently quantify my methodology in this paper, I would presently like to address the history of the New Orleans press, which makes for complicated research. As many as thirty-two different dailies were published at various points during the last quarter of the nineteenth

begin with a critical analysis of the historiographical treatment of Italians/Sicilians in Louisiana.¹⁰ I then move to a review of northern/national press rhetoric concerning Italians/Sicilians in the 1870s and 1880s, which I contrast with press discourse from Louisiana regarding Italians/Sicilians from the same era. Unlike the characterization of Italian immigrants in northern cities as unassimilable, undesirable, and largely criminal, I argue that the experience of Italians in Louisiana was originally characterized by a more positive relationship between native-born New Orleanians and Italian immigrants. I reveal that the underlying significance of this distinction resulted from economic self-interest intent on solving the region's post-Civil War labor shortage. As a result, public discourse in Louisiana, at least in the 1870s and

century; editors were hired and fired and worked at competing papers, just as certain proprietors simultaneously owned multiple papers around the city. For the period in question, the main newspapers from which I quote are the *Daily Picayune*, *Times Democrat*, *Daily States*, and *New Orleans Item*. The *Daily Picayune* was the longest running daily in New Orleans; it began as a penny press in 1837 and modeled itself after the *New York Herald* and the *New York Sun*. The *Democrat*, which began as an anti-lottery and anti-Carpetbagger paper, later merged with the *Times*, which had originally been established as pro-Union press; the combined *Times Democrat* emerged in 1881. Historians (and contemporaries) credit the *Daily Picayune* and the *Times Democrat* with maintaining the greatest level of objectivity in their reporting. (These rivals merged to form the present-day *Times Picayune* in 1914.) The *Daily States* was founded as an anti-lottery paper by Maj. Henry James Hearsey, reported as a staunch bigot and known for his flagrant editorials on behalf of white supremacy. The *Daily Item* was a pro-lottery paper and was described as being more liberal and less biased than the *States*. These rival papers merged to form the *States-Item* in 1958, which later merged with the *Times Picayune* in 1980; John Wilds, *Afternoon Story: A Century of the New Orleans States-Item* (Baton Rouge, La., 1976). The *Daily Picayune*, the *Times Democrat*, and the *Daily States* were the "big three of Newspaper Row" located on Camp Street in the 1890s; the "big three" enjoyed the highest circulation rates in the city (respectively and in that order) with a combined daily circulation of 49,488 and a combined Sunday circulation of 70,680 in 1891. Richard Campanella, *Time and Place in New Orleans: Past Geographies in the Present Day* (Gretna, La., 2002), 149; Thomas Ewing Dabney, *One Hundred Great Years: The Story of the Times-Picayune from Its Founding to 1940* (Baton Rouge, La., 1944), 313-14.

¹⁰Historiographically and historically (within press rhetoric and immigration records), the terms "Italian" and "Sicilian" often were often used interchangeably; while I utilize this convention to some extent, I attempt to emphasize the fact that the immigrants under consideration here were largely Sicilian, as the vast majority of Italian immigrants in Louisiana, nearly 90 percent, were in fact Sicilian, Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 44.

1880s, encouraged Italian immigration, differentiated between the Italian and the criminal, and identified Italians as valuable and productive "fellow-citizens." Finally, I demonstrate that only later, most immediately observable after the 1891 lynching in New Orleans, did the Louisiana press discourse begin to fluctuate and to adopt the more virulently anti-Italian rhetoric commonly understood to characterize the Italian immigrant experience at the end of the nineteenth century.¹¹

The established reading of Italians in Louisiana explains that "anti-Italian racism exploded" in 1891 New Orleans, yet much of the documentation historians have used to demonstrate such sentiment derives from sources outside of Louisiana.¹² For example, while Gambino accurately associates the New Orleans incident with the development and growth of the Mafia image within public awareness, he claims that "all Italian-Americans were accused either directly or by implication of being somehow responsible [for Hennessy's murder]."¹³ Yet, Gambino appears to draw his conclusions solely from *New York Times* editorials in the post-lynching era, just as he illustrates the "extent of the fear of Italian immigrants" with an 1888 article from Buffalo, New York, that describes the arrest of "swarthy-looking, jabbering foreigners."¹⁴ Gambino goes on to offer an 1890 article entitled "What Shall We Do with the Dago?" from *Popular Science Monthly*, a New York-based magazine, as a "typical" description of Italians.¹⁵ Likewise, within the primary source documents

¹¹Just to clarify, the surge in anti-Italian rhetoric was less of a causative factor of the 1891 lynching and served instead as justification for the violence within the post-lynching aftermath.

¹²Marco Rimanelli and Sheryl L. Postman, *The 1891 New Orleans Lynching and U. S.-Italian Relations: A Look Back* (New York, 1992).

¹³Gambino, *Vendetta*, 255.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵The pejorative epithet "dago" was commonly used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to refer to Italians. According to explanations of the time, "We owe the word 'Dago' to the Spaniard, whose language furnished this slang name for the men of the Mediterranean countries who come to the United States," *Daily Picayune*, April 20, 1898) or for "dark-colored Europeans" *Daily Picayune*, July 8, 1898. The etymology of the term is believed to have thus evolved from the prevalence of confusing Italians with Spanish or Portuguese sailors, who were universally referred to as "Diego," because "all of those nationalities looked much alike and the general sound of the language they spoke was similar," *Daily*

collected by Salvatore LaGumina in *WOP!*, the vast majority of evidence included in the chapter about the "Maturation of Anti-Italianism, 1880-1890" is from the *New York Times*.¹⁶ Similarly, when Jacobson suggests that a belief in "Italians' *innate* criminality . . . prompted" the New Orleans lynching, he quotes largely from the *New York Times* to substantiate his claim.¹⁷ In so doing, he provides persuasive rhetoric: Sicilians were described as "a pest without mitigation" while editorials decried that "our own rattlesnakes are as good citizens as [the Italians]" and requested "a thousand Chinamen [rather] than one Italian."¹⁸ Yet, while accurately representing a northern depiction of Italians and providing New Yorkers' interpretation of the 1891 lynching, these sources do not accurately capture the perspective and opinions of native-born Louisianians regarding Italian immigrants.¹⁹

Not only have descriptions of the New Orleans lynching from New York-based sources been misappropriated, but historians have similarly misread Louisiana newspapers. The most glaring of these occurrences appears from Mangione and Morreale in a chapter entitled "New Orleans—Wops, Crime and Lynchings":

Caricatures of the immigrants began to appear in the New Orleans newspapers. In *The Mascot*, the Italian immigrant was drawn as a dirty, bearded, hook-nosed man carrying a battered basket filled with bananas. Italian fruit peddlers were pictured with broad thick mouths and hooked noses, cluttering up the walks with their fruit stands. They slept ten to a room in the midst of

Picayune, July 20, 1872; *Daily Picayune*, April 20, 1898. Another explanation of the term links the meaning to an abbreviated version of "dagger-wielding," as a commentary on the Italian propensity for violence, Rimanelli and Postman, *The 1891 New Orleans Lynching*, 60.

¹⁶Salvatore J. LaGumina, *Wop!: A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States* (Toronto, 1999).

¹⁷Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 56-8.

¹⁸Ibid; "The New Orleans Affair," *New York Times*, March 16, 1891; "The Lynching Justifiable," *New York Times*, March 17, 1891; "Lynch Law and the Mafia," *New York Times*, March 17, 1891.

¹⁹This is not to say that negative rhetoric regarding Italians was absent from the New Orleans press, but rather, and as I will subsequently demonstrate, this only represents a portion of a more complex story.

flight and were seen killing one another with knives. The best way of disposing of them, the next series of drawings suggested, was to drown them in batches, or at least beat them and jail them. In a series of cartoons of October 1890 entitled "The Italian Population," one panel shows a group of immigrants in a cage being lowered into the river. The caption reads: "The Way to Dispose of Them."²⁰

Firstly, the above description largely refers to only one set of cartoons printed in only one issue of *The Mascot* on September 7, 1889. (Figure 1) As I will discuss subsequently, while this depiction remains unabashedly anti-Italian, the assertion that caricatures of Italians were common occurrences in New Orleans newspapers lacks substantive textual evidence. The "dirty, bearded, hook-nosed man carrying a battered basket filled with bananas" is from a January 5, 1889, issue of *The Mascot*, but does not actually serve as a critique of Italians as a group or Italian immigration in general; rather, this caricature was intended, as explained by the accompanying editorial, to criticize Governor Nicholls for appointing an undeserving Italian to the position of "Inspector of Weights and Measures for the First District."

Secondly, Mangione and Morreale, along with Clive Webb, cite *The Mascot* as evidence of "popular prejudice" against Italians and Sicilians, yet they fail to problematize their very source material.²¹ *The Mascot* was a weekly scandal sheet that regularly ridiculed all groups in New Orleans, immigrants, prominent citizens, politicians, and law-enforcement officers alike; no one was safe from *The Mascot's* mockery, gossip, and political muckraking.²² Additionally, and in contrast to other local papers, *The Mascot* was the only paper in New Orleans to print a scathing critique of the lynch mob in the days following the 1891 attack; although intended to disparage the leaders of the strike, the

²⁰Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, 201.

²¹Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, ch. 13; Clive Webb, "The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1880-1910," in William D. Carrigan, ed., *Lynching Reconsidered: New Perspectives in the Study of Mob Violence* (New York, 2008), 175-204.

²²Historian Sally Asher is currently working on a project about the undocumented history of *The Mascot*.



Figure 1: *The Mascot*, September 7, 1889. This cartoon has often been used as an example of long-standing anti-Italian sentiment in New Orleans. However, *The Mascot's* singular anti-Italian depiction challenges the supposition of widespread anti-Italian attitudes in 1880s New Orleans.



Figure 2: *The Mascot*, April 13, 1889. While *The Mascot* made a markedly anti-immigrant appeal in this issue, the accompanying article focused its critique on "Austrian gypsies" and suggested that "honest and industrious foreigners" were welcome in New Orleans.

front-page story also served to sympathize with the lynching victims. Additionally, although Mangione and Morreale claim that "the 'dagos' did not fare well in the local papers, which called them 'dirty, lazy, ignorant and prone to violence,'" this quote appears in the same September 1889 issue of *The Mascot*, and thus again is neither characteristic nor all-encompassing of 1880s New Orleanian rhetoric.²³ Therefore, *The Mascot's* singular disparaging depiction of Italians in 1889 cannot be considered representative of widespread or common anti-Italian sentiment in 1880s Louisiana.²⁴

The Mascot does offer a marked critique of increased immigration in an April 13, 1889, issue; however, the specific immigrant group caricatured and targeted on the front page was explained as "Austrian gypsies." (Figure 2) The article goes on to admit, "Honest and industrious foreigners are always welcome and always will be, for they and their descendants make useful and respectable citizens and improve the condition of the community. We don't want the paupers."²⁵ Thus, despite certain moments and occasional misgivings, anti-Italian sentiment was far from ubiquitous in the New Orleans press in the decades leading up to the 1891 lynching.²⁶

²³Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, 203.

²⁴My intention here is not to discount *The Mascot* as unreliable or insignificant, but rather to note that, based on its history of contrarian reporting as well as its circulation numbers, *The Mascot* was not necessarily representative of New Orleans press discourse. For example, 1887 self-reported and estimated circulation numbers place *The Mascot* weekly distribution at 4,000 to 5000, while the *Daily Picayune* distributed 10,000 to 12,500 issues daily (at least 70,000 to 87,500 weekly) and the *Times Democrat* distributed 15,000 to 17,500 issues daily (at least 105,000 to 122,500 weekly). *American Newspaper Directory*, 19th ed. (New York, 1887).

²⁵Unlike the "Austrian gypsies," Louisianians considered Italians the more desirable brand of immigrants, as other discussions of immigrants within the New Orleans press, on which I will subsequently elaborate, specified Italians as "earnest," "worthy . . . highly esteemed," and "proper citizens." "Italian Immigrants," *Daily Picayune*, October 27, 1890; "Our Italian Fellow-Citizens," *Daily Picayune*, March 4, 1889; "The Italian-American Citizens Falling into Line," *Daily Picayune*, September 29, 1887.

²⁶The articles cited from *The Mascot* thus far do not represent the only disparaging depictions of Italians in the New Orleans or Louisiana press, as I will provide and analyze additional examples later in this article.

This, however, was in direct contrast to rhetoric within the national press; as shown by numerous scholars and confirmed by my own reading of the primary evidence, negative stereotypes of Italians dominated discourse in the press (outside of Louisiana) well before the lynchings.²⁷ As early as the 1870s, the *New York* press described arriving Italian immigrants as "ignorant and uneducated" "brigands from Southern Italy" who "belong to the criminal classes."²⁸ The *New York Times* described arriving

²⁷In order to present the "national" discourse, I provide comprehensive evidence from the *New York Times*, the nation's paper of record. I also cite from the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, *New York Sun*, *New York Evening World*, as well as Washington, D. C.'s *National Republican* and *National Tribune*. I include San Francisco and Los Angeles as additional evidence because, although both represented decidedly regional/western perspectives, they also reprinted various news stories from northern cities like New York, thus replicating a "northern" perspective across the nation. In terms of my choice in source material, I do acknowledge that print culture provides its own set of problems, such as representing only a literate upper/middle class and potentially government-influenced perspective. However, comparing various press sources across northern cities and around the nation allows me to track the patterns of public language and document trends in the manner in which Italian immigrants were publicly characterized.

²⁸"The Poor Italians," *New York Times*, December, 15, 1872; "Italian Immigration," *ibid.*, December, 17, 1872; "The Italians," *ibid.*, December, 11, 1872; "The Homeless Italians," *ibid.*, December 13, 1872; "The Suffering Italians," *ibid.*, December 14, 1872. As an important side note, Northern newspaper accountings of Italians were not categorically hostile. Within the *New York Times* in the 1870s, much reporting on Italians was devoted to critiquing the occurrence of forced labor and the alleged "trafficking of Italian children," "Italian Slaves," *ibid.*, January 6, 1871; "White Slavery Traffic in Children," *ibid.*, June 12, 1873; "The Italian Slaves: Arrest of a Padroni," *ibid.*, July 22, 1873. While the *Times* critically reported on Italian crime, another subset of articles, describing Italian celebrations and festivals, utilized an entirely neutral tone, "An Italian Assassinated," *ibid.*, March 14, 1875; "Felonious Assault by Italians," *ibid.*, August 12, 1876; "A Fatal Stabbing Affray: An Italian Killed By his Companion, Result of a Quarrel Over a Game of Cards," *ibid.*, December 5, 1879; "Italian Demonstrations: Proposed Celebration of Italian Unity," *ibid.*, July 30, 1871; "Italian Movements: Meeting of the Italian Benevolent Society," *ibid.*, August 14, 1871; "Italian Festivities," *ibid.*, June 2, 1874; "Eight Hundred Italians Vaccinated," *ibid.*, May 4, 1874. An additional perspective included a sympathetic tone directed at the "poor Italian" immigrants, with even the periodic positive assessment of these arrivals; of note, such positive notations were usually in conjunction with differentiating between previous immigrants made up of "industrious and honest people from Genoa and the towns of the Ligurian coast" and newer immigrants from south Italy "who are now so frequently guilty of crimes of violence . . . extremely ignorant . . . [and] miserably poor," "Our

Italian immigrants as "starving and wholly destitute," "wretchedly poor and unskilled," and "professional beggars," and "a very degraded and ignorant population"; Italian children "were utterly unfit—ragged, filthy, and verminous as they were—to be placed in the public primary schools among the decent children of American mechanics.²⁹ In the 1880s, sanitary officers pronounced foreign-born Italians who resided in "squalid huts or noisome cellars" as "links in a descending chain of evolution."³⁰ Sentiment from New York to Washington, D. C., to Chicago to San Francisco marked the arriving Italian immigrants as the "filthy, wretched, lazy, ignorant, and criminal dregs of the meanest sections of Italy."³¹ According to the *National Tribune*, Italians were "igno-

Italians," *ibid.*, November 12, 1875; "The Poor Italians," *ibid.*, December 15, 1872; "Suffering Among the Poor Italians," *ibid.*, December 16, 1873; "The Homeless Italians," *ibid.*, December 13, 1872; "The Suffering Italians," *ibid.*, December 14, 1872. Again, while the occasional article spoke of the positive impact of the "Italianization of New York," other reports paternalistically assessed the new arrivals: "It is, perhaps, hopeless to think of civilizing them, or of keeping them in order, except by the arm of the law," "Naples in New York," *ibid.*, January 4, 1873; "Our Italians," *ibid.*, November 12, 1875. This is all to say that, in contrast with the subsequent examples, there were certainly sympathetic assessments of Italian immigrants within northern newspapers, yet, generally, northern press accounts of Italian immigrants included a different focus and perspective than the southern press.

²⁹"The Italians," *New York Times*, December 11, 1872; "The Homeless Italians," *ibid.*, December 13, 1872; "The Suffering Italians," *ibid.*, December 14, 1872; "The Poor Italians," *ibid.*, December 15, 1872; "Italian Immigration," *ibid.*, December 17, 1872; "Our Future Citizens," *ibid.*, March 5, 1882; "Italian Degeneracy," *ibid.*, April 17, 1885. Similar sentiments echoed elsewhere around the nation: Italians were a "curse to themselves [and] a burden upon charity," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 8, 1888. They lived in "squalor and filth" and "contribut[ed] their quota to the filth, vice and wretchedness," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 23, 1888; *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1888. Italians were "ignorant scum," and added to the "deteriorating" state of immigration, *National Tribune*, August 2, 1888; *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 2, 1890.

³⁰"Compulsory Cleanliness," *New York Times*, July 11, 1880. A common trope described Italians as an invading parasite: They were "locusts," "vile and filthy beyond description," "living like dogs," and bringing with them "contamination [and] pollution," Washington, D. C., *National Tribune*, August 2, 1888; *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1888. Such Italian immigration, the national press reported, put the United States in danger: "The body politic is threatened with dyspepsia from overloading and overtaxing the digestive organs," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 12, 1887.

³¹"Undesirable Immigrants," *New York Times*, December 18, 1880. While a

rant scum," while the *San Francisco Chronicle* asserted that Italians contributed to the "deteriorating" state of immigration.³² Press discourse in Chicago warned that Italians did not make good citizens because they posed a "severe tax upon the assimilative powers of the Nation" and that they were a "curse to themselves [and] a burden upon charity" who lived in "squalor and filth" and "contributed[ed] their quota to the filth, vice and wretchedness."³³ Both the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Tribune* explained that the "evils of Italian immigration" were rooted in the understood impossibility of turning "hordes of ignorant paupers into intelligent, self-sustaining citizens."³⁴

Communities around the country identified Italians as the most undesirable of all immigrant groups and went on to suggest that the United States should increase its immigration restrictions, on par with Chinese Exclusion. For example, the Washington, D. C., *National Tribune* proclaimed, "We did well when we prohibited Chinese immigration. We should go farther, and at once, and put an effectual stop to our country being made the dumping-ground for the ignorance, filth and the vice of Europe."³⁵ The *Los Angeles Times* highlighted the desirability of German immigrants, in contrast to Italians, because "Germans come to America to become America," and "unlike Italians, they renounce their allegiance to their native lands and learn English."³⁶

Such perspectives around the country feared this influx of

paternalistic tone dominated much of this discourse that described the need to help, protect, aid, and "improve [the Italian] condition," the public believed the rumors that arriving Italians had been purposely sent to the United States by the Italian government "to get rid of them," *ibid.* According to the *New York Evening World*, August 2, 1888, the Italian government "secretly stimulated emigration because the immigrants, if at all prosperous in this Republic, send back their savings to their native land." The *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 12, 1888, reported that as a result of overcrowding, the Italian government was sending "paupers" to America. See also *National Republican*, March 3, 1884 and *New York Sun*, October 28, 1888.

³²*National Tribune*, August 2, 1888; *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 2, 1890.

³³*Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 12, 1887; *ibid.*, July 8, 1888; *ibid.*, July 23, 1888.

³⁴*Ibid.*, July 8 and July 23, 1888; *New York Tribune*, August 5, 1888.

³⁵*National Tribune*, August 2, 1888. Similar sentiment was also expressed in *New York Sun*, November 28, 1887.

³⁶*Los Angeles Times*, August 10, 1887.

Italian immigrants to be economically unsustainable and physically dangerous, since Italians represented a population of "paupers" who "depress wages" and went as far as suggesting that

We can no longer afford to overlook the evil of promiscuous immigration . . . [Italians] are not a class of immigrants whom we can receive without danger to ourselves. In clannishness and persistent adherence to the speech, dress and mode of life of their own country the Italian and the Chinese immigrant are on a par, though the much-abused wearers of the pigtail are more cleanly in their domestic habits. But the Chinaman very rarely gives the Police or the courts any trouble, while it is notorious that no foreigners with whom we have to deal, stab and murder on so slight provocations as the Italians.³⁷

Italians' unassimilable tendencies marked them as foreign, on par with other racialized immigrant groups like the Chinese. What set the Italian even further apart was the persistent stereotype within the national discourse that identified Italians as predisposed to violence and criminal activity.

In fact, as Jennifer Guglielmo has persuasively argued, this presumed association between Italians and criminality originated in Italy, not the United States. As part of a nation-building project at the end of the nineteenth century, a group of Italian positivist anthropologists, using skull measurements and other forms of "scientific proof," developed the field of criminology and identified a purportedly scientific difference between northern and southern Italians.³⁸ These anthropologists concluded that not only were northern Italians "racially distinct" from southern Italians, but southerners additionally possessed "inferior African blood," which predisposed them to innate criminality.³⁹

³⁷As explained by the Knights of Labor in the *National Republican*, March 3, 1884; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 23, 1888; *New York Sun*, October 28, 1888; "Undesirable Immigrants," *New York Times*, December 18, 1880.

³⁸Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, 83.

³⁹Thomas Guglielmo, "No Color Barrier: Italians, Race, and Power in the United States," in Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, eds., *Are Italians*

Beyond the construction of a racial hierarchy in Italy, the significance of the criminologists' project lies in its transnational appeal and the extent to which it informed American perceptions of southern Italians. These theories were widely disseminated across popular as well as scholarly media sources and directly influenced U. S. immigration lawmakers.⁴⁰ By 1899, the U. S. Immigration Commission had officially identified southern Italians as a race separate from northern Italians; by 1911 they characterized southern Italians as "excitable, impulsive, highly imaginative, impracticable . . . [with] little adaptability to highly organized society."⁴¹ As Edward Ross, an American social scientist, eugenics advocate, and immigration restrictionist, explained in 1914, while "northern Italians were well-fitted for citizenship, their southern counterparts certainly were not because of their horrifying 'propensity for personal violence,' 'inaptness' for teamwork, strong dose of African blood, and 'lack of mental ability.'"⁴²

White?: How Race Is Made in America (New York, 2003), 33. Offering further evidence that Southern Italians were understood as a distinct and inferior race, Louise DeSalvo reports that rampant starvation in southern Italy, which greatly motivated Italian immigration at the end of the nineteenth century, was actually "imposed" by government officials and was understood as a form of what we would now call "ethnic cleansing," "Color White/Complexion Dark," in Guglielmo and Salerno, *Are Italians White?*, 19. While this may be going too far to consider the Italian government's actions in southern Italy as "ethnic cleansing," there is abundant evidence to demonstrate the widespread suspicion of authority throughout Italy. At times, poor, southern Italians interpreted certain calamities as a sign of class warfare. For example, the 1884 cholera pandemic in Naples was understood as a poisoning campaign orchestrated by officials to kill off the poor. See Frank M. Snowden, *Naples in the Time of Cholera, 1884-1911* (Cambridge, U.K., 1995), 138. This demonstrates evidence of the great divisions between Northern and Southern Italians, variously articulated in racial terms and eventually appropriated by U. S. legislators across the Atlantic.

⁴⁰Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, 89.

⁴¹William Paul Dillingham and the United States Immigration Commission 1907-10, *Dictionary of Races of Peoples* (Washington, D. C., 1911), 83. The Commission concluded, "the Bureau of Immigration places the North Italian in the 'Keltic' division and the South Italian in the 'Iberic.'" "Comparatively little admixture has taken place between these two ethnic groups," *ibid.*

⁴²Quoted in Guglielmo, "No Color Barrier: Italians, Race, and Power in the United States," 23. These stereotypes were further augmented by the historical awareness of life in southern Italy. For example, in the late nineteenth century, Sicily was reported as having the highest homicide rate in Europe. Margavio and

In spite of this, as Thomas Guglielmo has persuasively argued, Italians were "white on arrival" and were granted the legal privileges of whiteness from their earliest ingress.⁴³ Most significant, and in contrast to Asian immigrants, Italians could naturalize as U. S. citizens. Yet, only a portion of Italians took advantage of these opportunities available to them.⁴⁴ Dubbed "birds of passage" because of their inclination towards seasonal migration, an estimated 50 percent of Italian immigrants returned to Italy between 1880 and 1920.⁴⁵ Such habits of seasonal migration contributed to the development of an anti-Italian discourse; motivated in part by economic fears, this national discourse questioned the loyalty of Italians to the United States. The 1888 Immigration Investigation Committee of

Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 188. These authors additionally conclude that this experience and familiarity with homicide may have led to the transplantation of certain immigrant sensibilities in Louisiana, such as desensitization to violence and a distrust of the law, Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 191.

⁴³Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*.

⁴⁴Why did so few Italians settle permanently in the United States and officially adopt American citizenship? Labor historians like Mark Wyman have generally attributed these low rates of naturalization to the common practice of seasonal migration and have placed greater emphasis upon economic, rather than social or legal factors in terms of such transiency. See Mark Wyman, *Round-trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1993). Cinel offered a cultural explanation for seasonal migration in Dino Cinel, *The National Integration of Italian Return Migration, 1870-1929* (New York, 1991). Cinel contends that southern Italians understood their emigration as strictly temporary and never even contemplated permanently settling in the United States. He claims that those who did choose to permanently settle in the United States did so because of a failed attempt to return to Italy. Furthermore, because most Italians understood their American sojourn as temporary, they made little effort to integrate; this contributed to the Italians' inability to integrate and increased their discriminatory treatment. Thus marked by the host country and themselves, Italians self-identified and were labeled as outsiders.

⁴⁵Wyman, *Round-Trip to America*, 10. Between 1876 and 1976, an estimated 25.8 million Italians left Italy, but since 1900 only ten million Italians are believed to have left permanently. See, Francesco Cordasco, "Bollettino Dell'Emigrazione (1902-1927): A Guide to the Chronicles of Italian Mass Migration," in Lydio F. Tomasi, Piero Gastaldo, and Thomas Row, eds., *The Columbus People: Perspectives in Italian Immigration to the America and Australia* (New York, 1994), 499. See also statistical data in Cinel, *The National Integration*, ch. 5. Seventy-two percent of Italians are believed to have returned to Italy, Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 31. Scholars concur that Italians re-migrated at a higher rate than any other immigrant group.

Congress found that Italian settlement was only temporary, and that "Italians . . . come here to make their pile [but] they prefer to spend their money in Italy."⁴⁶ Included in the committee's report was a critical description of the Italian interviewees with "unkempt" hair and "ill-fitting and slouchy" dress. The description criticized the fact that the interviewees could not speak English, could not read or write, and were not familiar with geography; the interviewers also reportedly encountered great difficulty in getting an "answer to the simplest question."⁴⁷ The description's unsympathetic and disparaging tone showed a great disregard for those who "preferred" Italy over America.

While this habit of return migration garnered Italians a certain amount of disdain in the national press, such negative tropes commonly found in national characterizations of Italians were still absent from New Orleans discourse in the 1870s and 1880s. In the course of my research and in order to provide a more direct comparison of the rhetoric before/after the Hennessy affair, I searched the digitized issues of the *Daily Picayune* for references to Italian(s), Sicilian(s), and dago(es) between 1870 and 1900. I additionally reviewed the hard copies of the entire run of *The Mascot* in search of references to Italians and immigrants, while I also reviewed the hard copies of the *Times Democrat* and *Daily States* for mention of Italian(s), Sicilian(s), and dago(es) in the months before and after the various southern lynchings of Italians in the 1880s and 1890s.⁴⁸ To be sure, I did come across certain pejorative references to Italians, which I will address below. However, these negative accountings did not occur with the frequency nor with the racialized rhetoric that was readily found within the northern/national press.

Instead, the Louisiana press conveyed a contrasting and relatively sanguine response to the practice of return migration.⁴⁹

⁴⁶"Only Birds of Passage," *New York Times*, July 29, 1888.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸As available, I also searched for those same terms in local Louisiana newspapers (outside of New Orleans) accessible through the Library of Congress's *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*.

⁴⁹This example comes specifically from the New Orleans press. Press discourse may have been less open and hospitable within the rural parishes of northern Louisiana, where the Italians' Catholicism, for example, would have been seen as

One article entitled "Homeward Bound: Members of the Italian Colony Going Back with their Savings," described the departure of an Italy-bound ship transporting Italians who had resided in Louisiana for several years and had "earned enough money to enable them to return and spend the remainder of their lives in their native land, sunny Italy."⁵⁰ Unlike the national commentary, the tone of this regional response evoked neither contempt for this eastward flow of U. S. currency, nor disdain for Italians who resided only "temporarily" in Louisiana before ultimately returning "home."⁵¹ To be certain, this more positive assessment may have been motivated by the economic need for cheap labor along with a social disinterest in more permanently integrating foreigners. However, the tone remains markedly different from northern press assessments of the same seasonal migration phenomenon.

In general, New Orleans newspapers described Italians as fitting in, contributing to the "prosperity of the city and state," "falling in line," behaving like "proper citizens," and being "industrious, honest and peaceable" people.⁵² New Orleanians went as far as acknowledging the obligation they owed to Italians

more foreign than in New Orleans. Yet rural press rhetoric was still absent of blatant anti-Italian hostility since their labor was still in such demand.

⁵⁰*Daily Picayune*, January 21, 1890.

⁵¹Meanwhile, national discourse progressively focused on return migration as economically "objectionable": "[Italians] come here in Summer, when public works are undertaken, and return for the Winter, often with a good sum of money. There are districts in Italy recognizable for what is regarded locally as wealth, derived from wages earned here and spent there," "Birds of Passage," *New York Times*, March 9, 1906. Henry Cabot Lodge, a restrictionist senator of the 1890s, regularly spoke out against the dangers of the hurtful and undesirable "birds of passage," who take money they have earned in the United States back to their home countries. "Persons who come to the United States, reduce the rate of wages by ruinous competition, and then take their savings out of the country, are not desirable. They are mere birds of passage. They form an element in the population, which regards as home a foreign country, instead of that in which they live and earn money. They have no interest or stake in the country, and they never become American citizens." Lodge, "Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration," *North American Review*, 152 (1891): 608-09. Part of the anti-seasonal migration discourse was grounded in an economic argument, while another aspect questioned Italian loyalty to the United States.

⁵²"The Italian-American Citizens Falling into Line," *Daily Picayune*, September 29, 1887; "Our Italian Fellow Citizens," *ibid.*, March 4, 1889.

for the "phenomenal growth" and "Italian enterprise and capital" that had stimulated the region's economy.⁵³ As the *Daily Picayune*, one of the main newspapers in New Orleans, went on to report, the

Italian population of this city is quite fifteen thousand, embracing among the number many prominent professional and business men and tradesmen of all sorts, representing a very large aggregate of wealth. Many of them are American citizens, but they still preserve a strong attachment to their native land and cherish a warm admiration for its king.⁵⁴

Noticeably absent from this commentary was any sort of demand for Italians to "assimilate" or "Americanize" because they were considered "an industrious and thrifty people [who] make up an important and picturesque element of our city's life."⁵⁵ Instead, the native-born New Orleanians appear to respect the Italians' cultural ties with Italy and encouraged and welcomed their immigration.⁵⁶ Rather than discouraging further immigration or advocating increased immigration restrictions, as did the national press, in a description of an arriving ship of Italian immigrants, the New Orleans press used the opportunity to speak out against an impending head tax that would effectively reduce the numbers of Italians who could immigrate: "Italians ought to be allowed to better themselves by emigrating if so desired."⁵⁷ In another report, though the arriving immigrants were pastorally described as bringing "boxes of ugly, ill-smelling cheeses" and perceived as being not "over-intelligent," they were also considered "earnest,"

⁵³*Daily Picayune*, November 12, 1890. New Orleanians specifically credited Italians with having "developed the fruit business to the point where the importation of fruits took on economic significance for the port." George E. Cunningham, "The Italian, a Hindrance to White Solidarity in Louisiana, 1890-1898," *Journal of Negro History*, 50 (1965): 22-36.

⁵⁴"The Italian Colony and Celebration," *Daily Picayune*, October 14, 1888.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶This promotion of immigration should by no means be misconstrued as unqualified altruism; economic self-interest undoubtedly influenced this more welcoming public discourse, a point on which I will subsequently elaborate.

⁵⁷"Italian Immigrants," *Daily Picayune*, December 27, 1888.



Figure 3: "From Sunny Italy, Arrival of a Shipload of Immigrants," *Times Democrat*, October 18, 1888. Although the Italians depicted in this image are represented in culturally specific attire, the traditional ethnic caricatures (common in representations of Italian immigrants in the American press outside of Louisiana) are notably absent.

"strong," and "enduring."⁵⁸ Similarly, the *Times Democrat* published several sketches along with an article entitled "From Sunny Italy, Arrival of a Shipload of Immigrants" that depicted un-caricatured versions of Italian immigrants.⁵⁹ One image in particular portrayed an Italian, in culturally-specific attire, bearing a heavy load.⁶⁰ Such representations spoke to the perception of Italians as hard-working and economically necessary laborers in Louisiana. This "friendly" depiction, which could be interpreted as a public relations campaign intent on welcoming the much-needed immigrant labor to Louisiana, was a perspective nonetheless consistently held across the New Orleans mainstream press. (Figure 3)

This is not to say that the Louisiana press wrote in an unequivocal and universally positive manner about Italians and Sicilians, nor that the article previously addressed from *The Mascot* was the sole pejorative representation of Italians and Sicilians in Louisiana newspapers during the 1870s or 1880s. In fact, Louisiana newspapers readily acknowledged and participated in perpetuating assumptions regarding the violent tendencies of Italians, as evidenced by their regular reports on the Italian or Sicilian "vendetta" and "blood vengeance," along with their occasional descriptions of "the dark dago who creeps stealthily down a black alley and buries his stiletto in the bosom of an enemy, is dark and bad all the way through."⁶¹

⁵⁸Ibid., October 27, 1890.

⁵⁹"From Sunny Italy, Arrival of a Shipload of Immigrants," *Times Democrat*, October 18, 1888.

⁶⁰ Ibid. Although the Italians depicted in this image are represented in culturally specific attire, the traditional ethnic caricatures (common in representations of Italian immigrants in the American press outside of Louisiana) are notably absent.

⁶¹*Daily Picayune*, November 4, 1888. We find another example of this similar tone in an article reprinted in the *Daily Picayune* from the New York-based *Ladies Home Journal*: "The native Sicilian who does not care if he does get a little of the juice smeared upon his countenance, takes his long, sharp knife—every Sicilian carries a long, sharp knife for family purposes as he generally has a vendetta or two on hand," "How to Eat an Orange," *Daily Picayune*, February 24, 1890. For other examples of the "vendetta" or "blood vengeance," see "The Blood Vengeance, A Sicilian Vendetta," *ibid.*, October 23, 1873; "The Vendetta," *ibid.*, May 23, 1874; "More Murder," *ibid.*, July 14, 1874; "Is it a Vendetta? A Shooting Affray Down Town," *ibid.*, April 20, 1878; "The Vendetta," *ibid.*, July 16, 1881;

Yet these types of deleterious descriptions (and press rhetoric in Louisiana about Italians and Sicilians in general) differ from similarly critical renderings of Italians and Sicilians within the northern or national press. Firstly, such mentions of the "dark dago" who is "bad all the way through" remain few and far between in the Louisiana press; in my review of Louisiana newspapers in the 1870s and 1880s, I found few of these types of negative descriptions.⁶² Secondly, critical mentions of Italians and Sicilians, even those cited from *The Mascot* earlier in this article, do not racialize Italians and Sicilians in the same manner as northern press rhetoric. Rather, while northern/national rhetoric regularly likened Italians to parasitical "scum," vermin, or "pests," characterizations of Italians and Sicilians in the Louisiana press were not on par with this type of animalistic language.⁶³ I ultimately found few efforts in the Louisiana press to apply negative "racial" characteristics to Italians and Sicilians as a group.

Thirdly, even when the press reported on "Italian-on-Italian" violence, such as the Sicilian husband whose neck was found slit and body half burned by "his wife and her paramour" in 1889, these same articles generally differentiated between the Italian community at large and the criminal element.⁶⁴ For example, while the "Sicilian vendetta" was described as "deplorable," Sicilians were still "frugal, industrious and hard-working."⁶⁵ Despite the propensity of the "dago population" to engage in

"Homicide at French Market," *ibid.*, November 1, 1884.

⁶² While impossible to comprehensively quantify given the breadth of the historical press, besides those articles that made reference to the violent tendencies of Italians (like those examples cited above), I only came across two articles in the 1880s New Orleans press that employed a distinctively pejorative assessment of Italians, *Daily Picayune*, November 4, 1888; *The Mascot*, September 7, 1889.

⁶³ *New York Tribune*, August 5, 1888; *National Tribune*, August 2, 1888; *New York Times*, March 16, 1891. There remains a long history of invoking animalistic imagery to describe African Americans, which serves to both dehumanize and racialize them; this pattern then of using similar language to describe Italians served to comparably render them as uncivilized or inhuman.

⁶⁴ "Italian Murder," *Daily Picayune*, February 28, 1889; "Our Italian Fellow-Citizens," *ibid.*, March 4, 1889.

⁶⁵ "The Vendetta," *ibid.*, May 23, 1874.

"blood vengeance," the "dagoes" were still a "respectable and hard working class of citizens."⁶⁶ On occasion, the press even wrote favorably about the violent habits of Italians and Sicilians: "We see the superior advantage of resorting to ancient and summary methods of assassination and the eminent wisdom of the Sicilian gentleman who considered it infinitely 'safer' than the chances of a duel."⁶⁷

Additionally, when such "Italian-on-Italian" crimes did headline the local newspapers, the Italian community often spoke out and held mass meetings to denounce such crimes and to protect "the good name" of the "Italian colony in this city."⁶⁸ The New Orleans press recognized this effort and in response noted that "the Italian colony embraces some of the most worthy, respectable and highly esteemed citizens of New Orleans," therefore, it would be "a gross injustice to cast reflections on their good name for the crimes of a few of their race."⁶⁹ The "evil-doers" in this case were not Italians, but instead, those who failed to differentiate between the Italian community and the criminals who happened to also be Italian.⁷⁰

Finally, the New Orleans and Louisiana press utilized the very term "dago," generally understood as a derogatory slur or moniker, in a less charged, less racially disparaging, more neutral manner than it was used elsewhere. As evidenced by the above description of the "dago population," as well as countless references to "Dago Joe," "Dago Dave," "dago fishermen," and "dago sailors," Louisiana newspapers regularly used "dago"

⁶⁶"The Blood Vengeance, A Sicilian Vendetta," *ibid.*, October 23, 1873. I will address momentarily the significance of referring to "dagoes" as "respectable citizens" in the same sentence and article.

⁶⁷"Assassination as a Lost Art," *ibid.*, December 9, 1884.

⁶⁸"Our Italian Fellow-Citizens," *ibid.*, March 4, 1889.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰On August 1, 1889, an Italian was reported to have been charged with raping a ten-year-old "colored girl," *ibid.*, August 1, 1889. Although "whiteness" was not a prerequisite for legally accessing the court system, prosecution of such crimes would have been erratic. See Ariela Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008). It is unclear whether this crime would have been similarly prosecuted if a "white" man, rather than an Italian, had committed the crime.

interchangeably with the categories of Italian and Sicilian.⁷¹ The context of these references provides evidence for the fact that "dago" was a means of racially describing or identifying, not necessarily racially slandering, at least in Louisiana in the 1870s and 1880s. Even in those cases where "dago" was used in connection with a negative description of an Italian, such as the *Daily Picayune's* description of "dago hucksters" who were noted as "reeking with odors of every vile description," this particular portrayal refers to a specific area in New Orleans and to two specific individuals, rather than the Italian "race" as a whole.⁷² Offering further evidence of "dago" as a neutral term, even positive renderings of Italians and their contributions utilized "dago" as an identifying synonym for the category of Italian: "In fact, the red-snapper, the principal of our large fish, could not be brought to market at all if it had not been for a valuable discovery made by a Dago some twenty years ago."⁷³ "Dagoes" were even written about sympathetically, such as the "young Dago" who was robbed and "cruelly" beaten by a "crowd of negro baseball players."⁷⁴ At least within Louisiana press rhetoric, Italians, Sicilians, and even "dagoes" occupied a relatively unthreatening place in the state's social landscape in the 1870s and 1880s.

New Orleans's uniquely tolerant discourse may be explained by the specific economic needs of Louisiana and settlement patterns of Italians within the region. Evidence suggests that the Italian community in New Orleans was established well before the Civil War, as the first Italian benevolent society, Societa Mutua Benevolenza Italiana, was founded in the city in 1846. In the wake of emancipation, plantation owners were in great need of agricultural labor, which they considered necessary to the economic growth of the region. As a result, Italian workers, especially Sicilians, were successfully recruited to replace slave labor on sugarcane, strawberry, and cotton plantations. In direct

⁷¹For a few of the countless examples of this, see "The City," *Daily Picayune*, February 1, 1872; "The Knife," *ibid.*, March 31, 1873; "Homicidal," *ibid.*, June 9, 1874; "Deadly Issues," *ibid.*, July 30, 1875; "Our Picayunes," *ibid.*, August 11, 1884; "Reward for Dago Pete," *Daily Advocate*, September 15, 1884.

⁷²"Levee Dens," *Daily Picayune*, January 20, 1874.

⁷³"The Fish Question," *ibid.*, June 16, 1874.

⁷⁴*Daily Advocate*, April 16, 1886.

opposition to the national discourse, opinions within the regional press around the state of Louisiana at the time advocated the "advantages of an influx of immigrants" and, as one explained, "We have room for immigrants, who will meet with a cordial reception and find a genial climate."⁷⁵ These advocates argued that increased immigration would lead to "prosperity, wealth and refinement" for Louisiana, and that "the future prosperity of our State depends to a great extent upon immigration."⁷⁶ The *Louisiana Democrat* advocated "open[ing] the doors of Louisiana wide to the best class of industrious immigrants," while the *Weekly Messenger* urged the organization of a society to advertise their region and to encourage immigration.⁷⁷ They reported that "immigration is the present need of our parish,"

⁷⁵*Richland Beacon*, June 25, 1881. The *Richland Beacon* was a staunchly Democrat paper from Northeast Louisiana focused on topics of agriculture and immigration. Of note, recruiters initially targeted Chinese workers, who were considered "good but unreliable workers." Southern planters soon turned their attention to the recruitment of European immigrant labor, to which the Sicilians responded in the greatest numbers. Italians were also credited with expanding the fruit industry and profit in New Orleans, Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 36. As late as 1905, while dominant national opinions encouraged immigration restriction, southerners expressed the unique regional necessities of the South. For example, M.V. Richards, land and industrial agent of the Southern Railway, reported, "There is abundant room for many thousand Italian families on Southern farms and in Southern mills. We have today applications from not only farmers, but manufacturers as well, for Italian laborers." "The South and Immigration," *New York Times*, July 9, 1905. As a result, the *New York Times* concluded that the Italians could not necessarily be considered "undesirable," if their labor was in fact desired in the South. In a later report on a southern conference to discuss immigration and quarantine, the *Times* did note an increased desire from southerners to restrict immigration after the recent outbreak of yellow fever, which was reportedly caused by Italians. However, the *Times* still remarked, "The Southern sentiment at the present time is adverse to immigration of all except those who can be relied on to become tillers of the soil." It went on to editorialize, "Frankly, we do not think that the best interests of the South will be served nearly as much by greater restriction of general immigration as by some rational system for the encouragement of the best immigration and for directing it where it is most needed." "Right Immigration to the South," *New York Times*, October 18, 1905.

⁷⁶*Richland Beacon*, June 26, 1880.

⁷⁷*Louisiana Democrat*, September 14, 1881, an anti-Radical Reconstruction paper out of the cotton and timber parish of Alexandria in central Louisiana; *Weekly Messenger*, March 17, 1888, March 24, 1888, August 4, 1888, the local paper for St. Martinville in South Central Louisiana.

since "thousands of acres of the most fertile land of the state is idle, anxiously waiting for the tiller's plow to break its surface, and yield luxuriant and abundant crops of all kind."⁷⁸ In stark contrast to attitudes towards immigrants found in most northern cities, advocates across Louisiana specifically encouraged immigration as a result of the unique labor demands of the region.

In addition to this specifically regional rhetoric, demographic settlement patterns of Italian immigrants in Louisiana also diverged from those in northern cities.⁷⁹ While Sicilians generally made up 25 percent of Italian arrivals at the national level, 90 percent of Italian immigrants in New Orleans were Sicilian, resulting from the existing citrus trade between New Orleans and Palermo, Sicily.⁸⁰ Moreover, unlike the situation in northern cities, there were no large-scale tenement constructions in the Crescent City, which meant that Italians in New Orleans established themselves in fairly decentralized and dispersed living patterns.⁸¹ Although they settled primarily around the French Market, subsequently dubbed "Little Palermo," they were not ethnically segregated and established ties and relationships with various parts of the community.⁸² Such settlement patterns

⁷⁸ *Weekly Messenger*, March 17, March 24, August 4, 1888.

⁷⁹ While Italians originally settled in more rural areas, by 1900 Italian settlement shifted toward urban centers like New Orleans.

⁸⁰ Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 44.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 116. Certainly, as shown by the work of Kathleen Conzen and Mary Ting Yi Lui, the northern ethnic ghetto was more a part of the imaginary, since ethnic neighborhoods were not closed off spaces of ethnic separation. While the interethnic mixing may have been more pronounced in a city like New Orleans, it still existed in the urban north as well, Kathleen N Conzen, "Immigrants, Immigrant Neighborhoods, and Ethnic Identity: Historical Issues," *The Journal of American History*, 66 (1979): 603-15; Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (Princeton, N.J., 2005).

⁸² As early as the 1830s, the "upper city" of New Orleans developed as the Anglicized part of the city, which eventually included the "American Quarter," while the "lower city," especially the Faubourg Tremé, became dominated by the Creole and free persons of color community and culture. Richard Campanella, "An Ethnic Geography of New Orleans," *Journal of American History*, 94 (2007): 704-15. Immigrants to New Orleans settled primarily in the lower city; while their settlement patterns did not develop as strict ethnic enclaves, ethnic focal points did arise: the lower French Quarter was known as Little Palermo, Faubourg

actually facilitated integration, since Italians were forced in this regard to communicate and interact with non-Italians more regularly. This meant that they were compelled to learn English, adopt non-Italian customs, and acculturate with greater immediacy than they would have had they been isolated in an "Italian ghetto."⁸³

Also, Italian immigration to New Orleans peaked well before the national apex; half of all Italian immigrants to New Orleans arrived before 1900.⁸⁴ This would have influenced the formation of a more cohesive Italian community by the turn of the century. Additionally, the region had a similar geography and climate to Sicily, which contributed to the Italians' capacity to acclimatize easily. Further influencing their ability to successfully integrate, Italians were culturally and religiously similar to the established Creole community. As Catholics who practiced culturally Mediterranean traditions, Italians were not discriminated against because of their religion, nor were they considered especially foreign by the French Creole element.⁸⁵ This directly contrasts with the experience of Italians elsewhere in the more rural Gulf South and northern, largely Protestant cities, where one of the central factors of anti-Italian sentiment was their Catholicism.

This is not to oversimplify the experience of Italians in Louisiana in the 1880s, as some anxieties certainly developed with regards to their settlement patterns. Vincenza Scarpaci cites the abundance of Italian-owned businesses in rural communities as a sure sign of Italian economic mobility.⁸⁶ Such economic advancement may have triggered a certain amount of apprehension about Italians' upward mobility; however, Scarpaci also notes the

Marigny was dubbed Little Saxony, Chinatown extended along Tulane Avenue, the Poydras and Dryades Street Markets were home to the Orthodox Jewish vendors from Russia and Poland, and portions of the riverfront were called the Irish Channel, *ibid.*, 708-09.

⁸³Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 116. See also LaGumina, *Wop!*, ch. 4.

⁸⁴Nationally, Italian immigration was at its highest from 1901 through 1914, *ibid.*, 44.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, ch. 3; LaGumina, *Wop!*, ch. 4.

⁸⁶Vincenza Scarpaci, "Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910," in Guglielmo and Salerno, *Are Italians White?*, 70.

significant number of "colored saloon licenses" held by Italians in Louisiana's sugar parishes.⁸⁷ In fact, Scarpaci explains that Italians specifically "targeted" their establishments and enterprises at African American customers for two reasons: First, opening an establishment in a "colored" neighborhood allowed Italians an available and untapped market, and second, native-born white business owners would have found such ventures less directly threatening to their own commercial pursuits.⁸⁸ Because Italian businesses were often located in African American neighborhoods, their economic advancement was not viewed, at least in its early stages, as direct competition to native-born interests.

Since the relationship between Italians and African Americans was not particularly "hostile," scholars suggest that Italians engaged with the African American community in a manner that challenged southern racial imperatives.⁸⁹ As a result, some contend, the manner in which Italians racially interacted with their community was read through a distinctly southern lens, since those who "intermingled" with blacks could be considered inferior and suspect by association.⁹⁰ Scholars concur that according to this logic, because Italians accepted "work coded as 'black' by local customs," they were perceived as a "problem population . . . [who] did not act white."⁹¹ However, at least in the 1880s, press silence with regards to the Italians' apparent defiance of the color line and racial intermingling suggests that such behavior may have been understood as less problematic than it would in later decades.

Instead, by 1890, these factors had contributed to a well-

⁸⁷Ibid., 71.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid., 63. See also Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, ch. 7, and Cunningham, "The Italian," 24-5.

⁹⁰Scarpaci, "Walking the Color Line," 63.

⁹¹Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, 11; Jacobson also notes that "free white persons' could also lose [their] status by their association with nonwhite groups" and that the lynching resulted from a violation of "local racial codes," Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 57. However, again, his primary sources for the lynching rely on evidence from the *New York Times*, not the Louisiana press. See also Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, ch.7 and Cunningham, "The Italian," 24-5.

established, distinctly Sicilian, and physically integrated community of Italians living in New Orleans, estimated at between fifteen and twenty thousand individuals, or six to eight percent of the city's population. Except for the occasional negative press mention and despite certain anxieties regarding Italians' propensity towards violence, their economic mobility, and their habits of racial intermingling, press discourse regarded Italians in 1870s and 1880s Louisiana as "fellow-citizens," whose arrival was not only welcomed and encouraged but whose contributions were praised and credited with having expanded the fruit industry and profit in New Orleans.

Regional press discourse began to shift only after Chief Hennessy was gunned down on October 15, 1890.⁹² Initially, the *Daily Picayune* still differentiated between New Orleans's Italian community and the criminal element.⁹³ To a certain degree, these early opinions criticized the city at large for having allowed itself to become a "haven of refuge [for] bandits and pirates, murderers and robbers of the worst type."⁹⁴ The warning echoed, "Let us rate every man at his proper value and while we demand punishment to the full extent of the law for the real offenders, the true criminals, let us see to it that we do nothing that may wrong the innocent."⁹⁵ New Orleanians were reminded that Italians

⁹²To be clear, this change in rhetoric, while the result of larger, long-building factors (such as a growing concern over Italian/Sicilian economic competition, resentment over their success, or ambivalence regarding their intermingling with African Americans), was most immediately evident during the trial and after the lynching.

⁹³"Our Italian Fellow-Citizens," *Daily Picayune*, October 17, 1890. In fact, when City Hall appointed a civil group to form the Committee of Fifty to aid in the investigation of Hennessy's shooting, the local press was wary that such meetings would turn into a lynch mob. While the *Daily Picayune* reported after the first meeting that the crowd of several thousand represented an "excellent class of citizens," it did note that the Committee seemed to be asking permission to possibly adopt "extra judicial and unlawful methods" in the future. The paper dismissed the plausibility of interpreting the Committee's report in such a manner by saying, "The idea of a 'vigilance' organization, committed to lynch law, holding its sessions in the Council Chamber at City Hall would be truly anomalous," *ibid.*, October 28, 1890.

⁹⁴"Our Italian Fellow-Citizens," *ibid.*, October 17, 1890.

⁹⁵*Ibid.* John Rocci, the head of the Societa Mutua Benevolenza Italiana addressed the New Orleans public in order to make a similar appeal: "I deprecate all attempts upon the part of an excited people to visit upon a mass of people,

possessed "honesty, probity, public spirit, patriotism and useful citizenship."⁹⁶ Furthermore, New Orleanians still publicly recognized "the obligation due [to] the Italians" and credited the community with developing the region's fruit industry and contributing to the region's commercial prosperity.⁹⁷ Even in the aftermath of the lynching, echoes of these proclamations noted that "some of the most respectable, orderly, order-loving and law abiding people in this city are Italians."⁹⁸ At least initially, the New Orleans press still attempted to differentiate between the "law-abiding" Italians and the criminals.

At the same time, other voices from New Orleans began to emphasize the negative potential in these immigrant Italians, since "many of them are criminals" and "paupers."⁹⁹ The tone of the *Times Democrat*, another major newspaper in New Orleans, described the accused with a clearly derogatory slant: "The little jail was crowded with Sicilians, whose low, repulsive countenances, and slavery attire, proclaimed their brutal natures. . . . They were as dumb as clams."¹⁰⁰ In contrast to descriptions from the 1880s, rhetoric began to more noticeably associate Italians with criminal activity.¹⁰¹

industrious and useful to this country, the crimes of a class who are Italians only in name and who form the one undesirable elements in the Italian colonies in the United States; it would be neither right nor reasonable to place under the same ban an entire race, who have the right to enjoy the privileges of this country, provided they obey its laws," *ibid.*, November 2, 1890. In his adamancy to distinguish Italians from the Mafia, he encouraged the Italian community to cooperate with the investigation.

⁹⁶"Our Italian Fellow Citizens," *ibid.*, October 17, 1890.

⁹⁷"The Hennessy Murder and the Italians," *ibid.*, November 9, 1890.

⁹⁸"The Italian Citizen and the Mafia," *ibid.*, March 20, 1891. See also "Responsible Italians," *Daily States*, March 14, 1891.

⁹⁹"Italian Immigrants," *Daily Picayune*, October 17, 1890.

¹⁰⁰*Times Democrat*, October 17, 1890.

¹⁰¹The intense publicity surrounding the murder and motivation behind the accompanying discursive shift may be partially explained because of the nature of the victim, who was not just a member of law enforcement, but the chief of police. As John Dittmer argues, the killing of a police officer in the South, someone considered to be the "defender of the caste system," could have been literally interpreted as an attack upon the region's racial order. Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Urbana, Ill., 1977), 139. This may have influenced southerners, who already read African Americans as innately criminal,

As the trial of the first nine defendants ran its course, these anxieties increased as a debate within the New Orleans press ensued and discourse progressively intensified. When it was reported that the Italian prisoners were being generally mistreated, Father Manoritta, the editor of New Orleans's Italian-language Catholic press the *Gazzetta Cattolica*, wrote, "I must and I am willing to give up my life, if necessary for the defense of the oppressed and outraged countrymen of mine."¹⁰² Additionally, Italian-language newspapers around the country printed daily accounts of the collections they were raising for the defense funds of the accused New Orleanian Italians, just as Italian communities around the country subsequently organized mass meetings to protest the lynching.¹⁰³ Regardless of regional differences transported from Italy or regional separation in the United States, the Italian immigrant community offered a unified response to the arrest of the Italians in New Orleans.

The perception of such Italian solidarity contributed to a growing divide between Italian and native-born communities in New Orleans, as New Orleanian discourse began to more unequivocally collapse Italian criminality with the Italian community at large. On March 4, 1891, just a week before the lynching, the *Daily States* reported:

Our gates are open to all who seek entrance, conditioned only upon their becoming Americans in the truest sense of the terms when they cast their lot among us. One—the chiefest danger to our social system—is that of engrafting upon its stem the vagaries of other nationalities. Unfortunately, the most inconsiderate of these we have found to be the Sicilian. In numbers they are a dangerous proportion among us. No people,

to apply a similar (and extant) logic to Italians.

¹⁰²"Atrocities in Parish Prison," *Daily Picayune*, November 16, 1890; Father Manoritta's Response," *ibid.*, November 16, 1890. Significantly, Father Manoritta identified Italians as his countrymen, not Americans.

¹⁰³See the issues of *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* and *Cristoforo Colombo*, March 1891. Similarly, the Italian community in Nevada expressed indignation against the New Orleans authorities, while adamantly differentiating between the Mafia and Italians in general. "The Hennessy Case Abroad," *Daily Picayune*, December 3, 1890.

probably by instinct and education are more foreign to American ideas than they. Generation after generation they live among us and to the last they remain Sicilian still. . . . Few among them are producers. They rarely follow laborious occupations . . . one can suspect that therefore, the majority who seek our shores are of the criminal class.¹⁰⁴

No longer were Italians well-meaning and contributing citizens in New Orleans. Sicilians were now described as the most "inconsiderate," resistant to "becoming American," and criminal among immigrant groups. Such perceptions would play out in the violence of the following weeks.

On March 13, 1891, the jury reached a verdict. Two of the accused Italians were acquitted by order of the judge, four others were declared not guilty, and a mistrial was ruled for the remaining three due to reasonable doubt and contradictory and insufficient evidence.¹⁰⁵ Almost immediately, accusations of bribery and jury tampering swept through the native-born community in New Orleans. As evidence that certain opinions considered this alleged bribery as a distinct sign of Italian criminality, the *Daily States* went on to publish the names and home and business addresses of all the jury members.¹⁰⁶ Officially explained as a temporary measure, the prisoners were remanded back to the Parish Prison.¹⁰⁷

The next day, the following proclamation headlined the *Daily Picayune*, *Times Democrat*, and *New Delta*: "Justice. Do the Good People of New Orleans Want It? All good citizens are invited to

¹⁰⁴"The Hennessy Assassination," *Daily States*, March 4, 1891. Although the *Daily States* had originally maintained the pretense of objectivity, by March, the editor's vituperation demonstrated the extent to which he had infused his personal, racial biases into his editorial. Wilds, *Afternoon Story*, 95.

¹⁰⁵Additionally, the jury had been taken to the actual scene of the crime to evaluate the plausibility of the eyewitness testimony, given the late hour of the attack and distances required to positively identify the perpetrators. Jurists explained that under such conditions, the lack of visibility was a key factor in finding "reasonable doubt," *Daily Picayune*, March 1891.

¹⁰⁶Wilds, *Afternoon Story*, 101.

¹⁰⁷It is unclear whether this was done for their own "protection" as claimed, or if the court was complicit with the intentions of the public's demand for "justice."

attend a mass meeting on Saturday, March 14 at 10 o'clock am at Clay Statue to take steps to remedy the failure of justice in the Hennessy Case. Come prepared for action." Far from being anonymous, the notice was signed by the Committee of Fifty, made up of New Orleans's native-born elites. Tens of thousands answered the call. Following a number of rousing speeches, the crowd made their way to the prison. Once the mob burst through the barricaded prison doors, they killed those Italians they could find—eleven in total, five of whom had already been found not guilty, the remaining six yet to have their day in court. One of the victims was discovered with forty-two bullet wounds. The mob spared the fourteen-year-old Gaspari, but dragged Antonio Bagnetto and Emmanuelle Polizzi outside to be hanged and shot in front of the crowd. (Figure 4)

In the aftermath of the lynching, while some papers like *The Mascot* were more sympathetic to the lynching victims, by and large the New Orleans press justified the Italians' lynching because of a presumed criminal element present within the "race" at large. (Figure 5) The press described the Italians as "undoubtedly guilty" since the victims were "assassins," "criminals," and members of the "Mafia."¹⁰⁸ Such arguments claimed that the lynchings resulted from a need for self-defense: "The safety of our citizens was menaced and the peace of the great city of New Orleans was in the hands of a gang of murderers—when justice fails the responsibility falls into the hands of the people, and it becomes their duty to establish law and order and the safety of themselves."¹⁰⁹

Because of these types of explanations of the lynchings, New Orleanians quickly proclaimed their incredulity when Italians organized anti-lynching protests around the country. As native-born New Orleanians understood it, because the lynching victims were "criminals" and members of the "Mafia," protests against the

¹⁰⁸See issues of the *Daily Picayune* and the *Times Democrat*, March 1891. See also, "The Lynchers Justified: Report of the Grand Jury of New Orleans," *Daily Picayune*, May 6, 1891. Similar sentiment may be seen elsewhere in the *New York Times*: "The New Orleans Affair," *New York Times*, March 16, 1891; "The Lynching Justifiable," *ibid*; "Lynch Law and the Mafia," *ibid*; "Sharp Words by Judge Cowing," *ibid*.

¹⁰⁹*Weekly Messenger*, March 21, 1891.

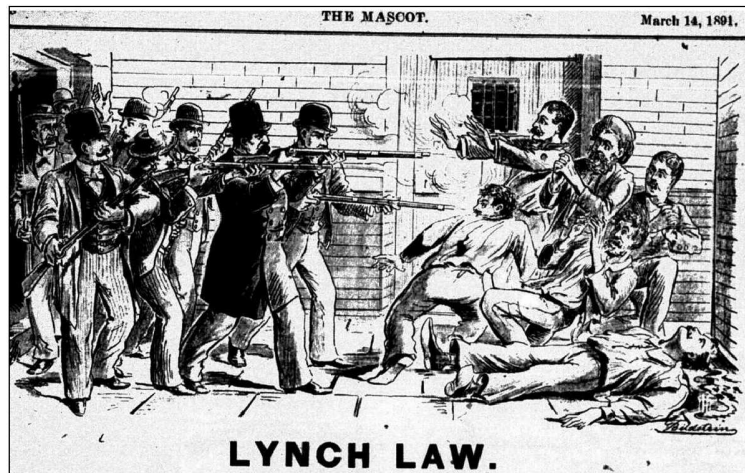


Figure 4: *The Mascot*, March 14, 1891. *The Mascot's* post-lynching reporting suggests a critique of "lynch law," as the unarmed and defenseless Italians were slaughtered by the armed mob.



Figure 5: *The Mascot*, March 29, 1891. *The Mascot*, similarly critical of the lynching in its subsequent issue, included a caption to the accompanying drawing: "A bad Easter Egg. The Bloodiest Carnival and Lent in the State of Louisiana."

lynching was a sign of the "criminal" element standing in solidarity and evidence that the Italian community "sympathize[d] deeply with the assassins."¹¹⁰ Within this new climate that collapsed the categories of Italian and criminal, the New Orleans press began to adopt a more virulent rhetoric against Italians and immigration in general.¹¹¹

New Orleanians went on to propose significant restrictions to Italian immigration, since existing immigration restrictions were now considered insufficient, because they "welcome[d]" the "worst sorts of foreign criminals. . . . Most of those [Italians] who come here are very ignorant and extremely poor, and they have brought with them their secret criminal societies, such as the Mafia, which no power, not even life in a free country, seems to be able to blot out from among these people."¹¹² The *Daily States*

¹¹⁰"The Mafia and its Friends," *Daily States*, March 16, 1891. It should be noted here that "assassins" is a reference to the lynching victims. Similar suspicion of Italian anti-lynch mobs was described in the national press: "Italian communities . . . shouldn't have a problem with this [lynching] unless they are members of criminal societies." Because the lynching was characterized as not the result of "prejudice of race or nationality . . . why should the Italian press in this country denounce even the murder of murderers because they are Italians, and why should the Italian residents in every town in which they constitute a colony assemble to pass indignant resolutions upon the subject?" As a result, anti-lynching protests were read as "unpatriotic" and evidence of widespread sympathy for the Mafia, especially since there had not been "any remonstrance from the Italians in New Orleans or elsewhere against the crimes committed in that city by the Mafia." It should also be noted that the Italian community did in fact often demonstrate against Italian violence, as has been previously discussed in this paper. See for example, "What do the Italians Want?" *New York Times*, March 18, 1891; "Italy Sheds a Tear," *Arkansas Gazette*, March 18, 1891; "They Are Not Good Citizens," *New York Times*, March 23, 1891; "Italy and the United States," *New York Times*, May 16, 1891, "The Lynchers Justified: Report of the Grand Jury of New Orleans," *New York Times*, May 6, 1891.

¹¹¹Immigration debates in New Orleans before the lynching noted that the worst types of immigrants were criminals and that existing legislation did little to prevent their arrival. While such discussions did specifically mention that proposed legislation was "intended to prevent colonization by the Mormons," criminals and Italians were not yet understood as synonymous categories. "Regulating Immigration," *Daily Picayune*, December 16, 1890. In the aftermath of the lynching, immigration discourse in New Orleans collapsed this understanding of Italians with criminal and undesirable. These depictions began to mirror the existing national discourse that defined Italians as unfit to be citizens. See "Editorial," *New York Times*, April 26, 1891, "Sifting Immigration," *ibid.*, April 27, 1891, "Restricting Immigration," *ibid.*, March 6, 1892.

¹¹²"Foreign Immigration," *Daily Picayune*, November 9, 1896.

contended that the anti-lynching protests had provided the nation with a more accurate and illuminating portrait of the Italian's true colors:

The war-like mouthing of the Italian colonists in their respective cities . . . has opened the eyes of the press of the whole country to the fact that they make poor citizens, and the result is a general demand that legislation shall be enacted at the next session of Congress to restrict if not to exclude altogether immigration from Sicily from which country the Mafia has been transplanted to our soil.¹¹³

Violence and non-assimilability were now the primary crimes attributed to Italians, which motivated these subsequent immigration restriction proposals. Instead of encouraging immigration and considering immigrants as linked to the state's future prosperity, New Orleanians now considered Italians a problematic and unassimilable immigrant group.¹¹⁴

This new 1890s rhetoric represents a change from how Italians were originally and less-prejudicially perceived in 1870s and 1880s. (Figure 6) In contrast to widespread anti-Italian sentiment found elsewhere in the United States, New Orleanians initially en-

¹¹³"The Press is With Us," *Daily States*, March 20, 1891. It should be noted that not only did New Orleanians begin to entertain and advocate for immigration restrictions, but diplomatic relations between Italy and the United States were nearly cut off in the process. Because of established treaty rights with Italy, the United States was asked to pay indemnities to families of the lynching victims for the "killing of [Italian] subjects without due process of law." As a result, investigations to evaluate which of the victims were in fact Italian subjects and which ones were naturalized American citizens dragged on for over a year and nearly resulted in a war between the United States and Italy. Indemnities were eventually paid out on three victims determined to be Italian subjects. Rimanelli and Postman, *The 1891 New Orleans Lynching*.

¹¹⁴This perception, of course, would ultimately change over time. Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 198-200, make the argument that between 1880 and 1920 there was a decreasing emphasis on crime in New Orleans newspaper articles about Italian immigrants. In addition to this representing evidence of a decrease in crime, Margavio and Salomone argue that Italians were beginning to be read more as citizens and less as foreign. While I would ultimately agree with this conclusion overall, the pattern they observe represents a later era than that which I have documented here.



Figure 6: "From Sunny Italy, Arrival of a Shipload of Immigrants," *Times Democrat*, October 18, 1888, juxtaposed with *Daily Picayune*, March 16, 1891. The image on the left, from 1888, represents an Italian immigrant bearing a heavy load, which depicts Italians as hard-working and economically necessary laborers in Louisiana. The image on the right, from 1891, represents a shift, whereby Italian immigrants were "justifiably" lynched in front of the New Orleanian mob.

couraged and welcomed Italian immigrants—the crux of this embrace resulted from Louisiana's Reconstruction-era labor shortage and the fact that immigrant labor was in such high demand. Compounded by certain anxieties over Italians' propensity for violence and observations of their economic growth, discourse began to shift in the 1890s, most notably in the aftermath of Chief Hennessy's shooting, the subsequent trial, the lynching, and especially in response to the Italian-led anti-lynching protests around the country. This discourse, motivated by regional politics, adopted the virulently anti-Italian national discourse that associated Italian-ness with innate criminality. A broader historical moment and a specifically regional lens challenges the traditional version of the Italian immigrant experience and offers new insight into the overlooked and unique trajectory of Italian settlement in Louisiana.