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Immigrants in the Far West

HISTORICAL IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES

EDITED BY
JESSIE L. EMBRY AND BRIAN Q. CANNON

A PROJECT OF THE CHARLES REDD CENTER
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The Frontier Thesis in Transnational Migration

The U.S. West in the Making of Italy Abroad

Mark I. Choate

Mark Choate addresses the significance of the American Far West in the Italian diaspora that occurred between the 1880s and World War I. He shows that the West figured prominently as both a destination for migrants and a fanciful image in Italian culture. As millions of Italians embarked for the Americas, the Italian state sought to cultivate ties to those migrants by subsidizing Italian language schools for immigrants' children, facilitating remittances to the motherland through the Bank of Naples, and organizing expositions in Italy to showcase and celebrate Italian immigrants' accomplishments. Moreover, hundreds of Italian societies abroad ranging from literary clubs to sports clubs and self-help groups flourished, often with the blessing and guidance of the Italian state.

Choate's essay shows the ways that a transnational or global focus and "bringing the state back in," or considering the role of government policy in immigration, can enrich our understanding of migration. Choate adopts a global perspective by linking centers of power and influence, including European capitals (the "metropole" or core) to geopolitical "peripheries" like the American frontier. This approach enables him to demonstrate how the American West figured in the Italian government's ideas about Italian expansion. Moreover, Choate shows concrete ways that the language, culture, and politics of Italy remained salient in the lives of Italians in the West. The Italian case supports the transnational hypothesis that many immigrants retain substantial ties to their homelands following emigration, occupying transnational space. This was particularly true for Italian emigrants, over half of whom eventually returned to Italy.

In 1879, a young postal worker in the small town of Lendinara, Italy, decided to emigrate. Adolfo Rossi, twenty-two years old, was discouraged with his prospects in his small town near Venice. Adolfo lived at home

with his mother in the heavily populated Polesine valley. Although he had a steady job, he wanted to become a journalist. In Adolfo's words, while taking a walk along the Adige river one night,

a strange idea struck my mind like a bolt of lightning. I reflected only a moment and committed myself to an audacious resolution. "No, I will not stay vegetating here," I thought. "The world is big, there's America, and New York is a vast metropolis. I will go there, I will study those famous Americans, I will learn English. I will begin as a manual laborer there but, in the land of action and liberty I will learn to better understand life and men and one day I will return to Italy, rich at least with experience. Then it will be easier to dedicate myself to journalism.

I had read some books about the United States the previous month and had fallen in love with North America: this was the only reason I picked New York instead of Sydney or Buenos Aires. My determination and my choice were irrevocable.¹

As Adolfo Rossi described in his memoir, *Un italiano in America* (1891), he traveled not only to New York City, where he worked as a pastry-maker and hotel doorman and waiter, but on through the Rocky Mountains to Breckenridge, Colorado, where he worked at a restaurant, and to Denver, where he was an administrator for a mining company. He returned to New York to work for the leading Italian-American newspaper, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, then returned to Italy as planned after five years in the United States. Rossi then became an important newspaper correspondent for Italy's top newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, reporting on assignment from the Italian colonies of East Africa. Before his death in 1921 in Buenos Aires, where he was serving as plenipotentiary diplomatic minister in the Italian embassy to Argentina, Rossi had returned to Denver, Colorado, as the Italian consul.

Why, among all the places in the world, did Rossi spend so much time in Colorado? In the global network of Italians abroad, the American West represented freedom and opportunity. New York City was the gateway to the vast continent of North America, but transatlantic migration reached all the way to the Pacific in California and Washington State. Like other immigrant groups, many Italians became trapped in the crowded, high-cost slums of the eastern cityscape. From the Italian perspective of emigration, migration to the American West represented the outside limit of Italian expansion, reach, and influence, more promising than many other destinations in North and South America and more appealing to a dramatic sense of imagination.

Like "manifest destiny" and expansionism in the United States, mass migration for Italy carried symbolic weight beyond its practical economic,

social, and demographic consequences. For the Italian state, emigration represented not just physical movement beyond the Italian peninsula, but a cultural and economic enlargement of Italy worldwide. In contrast to the massive Irish, Polish, and Jewish immigrations from multinational empires before the First World War, Italians emigrated from a new nation-state eager to establish its global reputation. At the high point of Italian migration, from 1880 to World War I, the Italian state viewed migration as a form of colonialism, described emigration as irredentism, and developed the economics of remittances and expatriate trade to reach out to emigrants.²

Adolfo Rossi is a good example of how individual experiences added up to regional, national, and global trends. In many ways he was a typical Italian emigrant. He was single, male, and from the Veneto region near Venice, which experienced the highest emigration rates of any Italian region. Most strikingly, he never intended to stay in America, and viewed his emigration in terms of his planned career in Italy following his return. Many immigrants saw their plans change, and because of marriage or other reasons, millions did not return home. Nonetheless, more than half of all Italian emigrants returned to Italy within several years, making their emigration temporary rather than permanent. Because of the high rate of return migration, Italy saw migration not only in international terms but as an issue of foreign policy, through the perspective of domestic politics and nationalism.³

Looking from Italy outward, the Western United States offered the final frontier of freedom, the most wide open and the most American territory in terms of liberty and raw possibilities. A moralizing, progressive coalition in the United States and in Italy aimed to steer Italian migration away from cities on the northeastern seaboard, due to fears not only of a growing, possibly revolutionary proletariat, but also of tuberculosis, organized crime, exploitation, and failed opportunities eventually sent back to Italy. The fears of urban problems returning home to Italy were concrete, not abstract. In 1901 Gaetano Bresci, an Italian anarchist living in Paterson, New Jersey, returned to Italy and assassinated King Umberto in Monza. Italian anarchists celebrated this murderous triumph worldwide. The southern United States was less crowded than the Northeast, but receded as an emigrant destination thanks to widely distributed reports of endemic malaria and the lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans in 1891.⁴ The American West shone in comparison. The many successes of Italian Californians, in banking, arts and architecture, wine production and marketing, and cinema, achieved an enduring fame. Italian writers hailed the expatriate communities in California as the best of the best, because of the extra expense, planning, and organization required for individuals to travel across North America to the Pacific coast. As in Rossi's eureka moment on the banks of

the Adige River, emigrant destinations took on a mythical, larger-than-life quality, as maps and geography seemed to shape the challenges and possibilities of a migrant's future.

Viewing migration as both emigration and immigration is one approach to placing regional history in the context of world history. As a nation-state with mass emigration, Italy hoped to link all the scattered Little Italy communities together into a Greater Italy, with the Italian peninsula as the hub of spokes reaching across the world. The vineyards, orchards, fields, mines, and cities of the Rockies and the Pacific coast emerged as destinations connected to a web of personal, social, national, and commercial interests tying North America to the emigrants' *madre patria* (literally the mother-fatherland). The western frontier thus played a significant role in ideas of the expansion of Italy, not just the expansion of the United States.

Italy's Special Mission in the World: Empire, Irredentism, and Italians Abroad

The ancient nation of Italy became a state only in the nineteenth century. Since the time of Dante and Petrarch, leading Italian philosophers, poets, and intellectuals had called for the reunification of Italy, divided ever since the breakup of Rome. In the nineteenth century, after the nationalism of the Napoleonic era, many intellectuals began to call for Italy's "resurgence" (*Risorgimento*), as "renaissance" had already been claimed as a moniker for a previous epoch of Italian rebirth. Vincenzo Gioberti, a Catholic priest and politician, called for a reunited Italy to regain its "primacy" in politics, society, and the arts. Before the seven separate regional governments could be united, however, Italian politics faced sharp divisions over religious issues. The anticlerical, visionary republican conspirator Giuseppe Mazzini called for the unification of Italy within her "natural frontiers" ordained by God, in the entire peninsula up to the Alps:

Italy therefore will be one. Her geographical conditions, language, and literature; the necessities of defense, and of political power; the desire of the populations, the democratic instincts innate in our people, the presentiment of a progress in which all the forces and faculties of the country must concur, the consciousness of an initiative in Europe, and of great things yet to be achieved by Italy for the world; all point to this aim.⁵

Mazzini urged for Italy to stand up against the political rule of the papacy and of the multinational, traditionalist Austrian Empire. As such, Italy would play a world-historical role for the good of everyone: "Italy cannot live, unless she lives for all. We can only live a European life, and can

only free ourselves by freeing others. We must be great or perish. . . . What for others may simply be a moral duty, is a law of life for us. . . . The destiny of Italy is that of the world.”⁶

Mazzini’s visionary and religious appeals echoed the traditions of exceptionalism in the United States. He boldly called for an Italian national mission as unique and universal as the civilization of the ancient Roman Empire.

What actually happened in Italy did not follow Mazzini’s republican plans. During the 1848–1849 revolutions, which stretched from Venice to Palermo, Italians fought for unification under a green-white-red flag, in honor of the French Republican and Napoleonic tricolor. The popular revolutions of 1848 were defeated, and Mazzini’s Republic of Rome fell to French forces supporting the pope in 1849. Instead of a republic uniting Italy, the king of Piedmont-Sardinia named himself as the king of Italy, unifying Italian regions under his rule in 1859, 1860, 1866, and 1870. The Italian regions of Lombardy and Veneto were torn from the Austrian Empire, as Mazzini had hoped. But this process was abruptly cut short by Bismarck’s formation of the Triple Alliance in 1882, linking Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary. Italians remained under Austro-Hungarian rule outside the Kingdom of Italy’s northern and eastern borders, in Trentino, Istria, and Trieste. Unification was postponed indefinitely, creating a seething discontent underneath the Italian political order.

Italy’s truncated national territory created a new political movement of irredentism, named for the unredeemed territories, “*le terre irredente*,” on the Italian frontier. The aim for religious redemption by secular unification was explicit, as the unfinished unification of Italy took on mystical resonance. Trent and Trieste were valuable not only for their symbolism, population, and wealth, but also because of their strategic location: in 1915, Italy controversially entered World War I against Austria-Hungary to win Trent and Trieste in the “third war of Unification.” Until this bloody resolution, irredentism was a source of trouble and contradiction. Invested with the legacy of ancient Rome, the Kingdom of Italy struggled to meet the high expectations set by Gioberti and Mazzini, who had predicted that Italy’s unification would mean an end to emigration. Beyond the lost territories themselves, irredentism came to apply to all Italians outside of Italy, from California to Australia.

Irredentism carried so much weight because it captured the essence of Mazzini’s republican, unifying vision for a strong Italy of the future. The Italians who were not yet even part of Italy promised the best resolution of the kingdom’s lingering social and economic problems. Paradoxically, the fringe of Italy was the center of the country’s imagined future. The romantic and visionary appeal of irredentism bears a strong resemblance

to Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis several decades later, which aimed to explain the core of American history through the history of its periphery.⁷

Political necessity forced a flexible application of irredentist dogmas inside and outside the kingdom. The first irredentist group, *Italia Irredenta* ("Unredeemed Italy"), had been founded in Italy by republican leaders in 1877. Their radical call to unite all Italians as a nation threatened to undermine the narrow foundations of Italy's Liberal government, and the state responded by banning all irredentist organizations. In their place, in 1889 Ruggero Bonghi founded the "Dante Alighieri Society for Italian Language and Culture outside the Kingdom." Only unofficially irredentist, the society was and counted many Liberal politicians and ministers among its members. The society chose to name itself after Dante to symbolize the international strength of Italian culture. Under a cultural and literary cover, the society practiced not "political irredentism," but "multiform action." Subsidized by the Foreign Ministry, Bonghi's group publicized the plight of Italians in Trent and Trieste, outside the Italian frontier, and mobilized support and contributions for Italian schools abroad. Bonghi hoped to keep the unredeemed regions within the reach of Italian culture, while waiting for revisions of Italy's political borders.

The society's second president, Senator Pasquale Villari, was a Dante scholar from Naples, who had written influential articles on the social and economic backwardness of Southern Italy relative to Northern Italy. Villari successfully reoriented the society's geographical focus, from the Austrian Alps and the Adriatic to the transatlantic "colonies" of the Americas. Emigrants speaking Italian dialects around the world needed to learn standard Italian, "the language of Dante." Villari asked, "Are not these also unredeemed lands? Are not these our brothers?" He tied emigration to irredentism with a compelling, emotional plea for the future of Italians everywhere. Under his leadership, the Dante Alighieri Society supported the passage of Italy's new Emigration Law of 1901, which created an Emigration Commissariat and an Emigration Fund to subsidize Italian activities abroad, such as Italian schools, hospitals, and charities. Besides 214 committees inside the Kingdom of Italy, 73 Dante Alighieri committees were founded abroad, including in San Francisco, California, and in Washington State, with the express support of the local Italian consuls. Local committees organized and subsidized schools teaching the Italian language to adult emigrants and their children, and sponsored lending libraries aboard emigrant ships. Tying expatriates to Dante's legacy expanded the reach of Italy.

The rhetoric of irredentism attached a powerful symbolism to the cultural status of all Italians outside Italy, even if born abroad. They became

adjuncts to Italian culture, politics, and trade. The Italian Foreign Ministry aimed to develop Italy's economic and political interests abroad, by maintaining the Italian cultural identity of its emigrants. If Italy's "economic exiles" could remain loyal Italians, redeemed by political, cultural, and social support from the metropole, Italy would reap the benefits of a worldwide network of Italian-speaking enclaves on every continent, buying and selling Italian goods and promoting Italian political interests. Italy thus attempted a strategic opposition to the assimilationist pressures and politics of host nations in Europe and the Americas.

Like the American mission of expanding its culture through westward expansion, Italians across the world were invested with a mix of political, cultural, and social missions as they traveled abroad. Even those who opposed the royal, secular government of Italy carried their ideologies abroad with a missionary zeal. The anarchist Errico Malatesta spread international revolution in Italy but also in France, Switzerland, and Argentina.⁸ At the opposite end of the political spectrum, the Catholic Church hierarchy in Rome stubbornly regarded the United States as religiously undeveloped, in need of missionary support. Until 1908 Canada and the United States remained "missionary fields," under the jurisdiction of the prefect of Propaganda Fide in Rome. Struggling against Protestant nativists, American Catholics labored to define themselves as "Americans," not alien imports in a Protestant country.⁹

The secular apostle of nationalism, Giuseppe Mazzini, had thought unification would end emigration and all other problems.¹⁰ But in the end, the geographical basis for nationality, posited as axiomatic by Mazzini, was subverted by emigration. Italy's clearly defined, boot-shaped peninsula became irrelevant to the international meaning of Italy, as Italians spread across both hemispheres, across the interior to the coasts. The different categories of unredeemed Italians, emigrants, exiles, and expatriates blended together under the banner of "Italians abroad." Whether emigrants were aware of this or not, they were invested with the task of representing Italy. Optimistic writers depicted Italian emigration in a narrative of strength, not as an abject failure. Emigration could be the basis for building enduring connections and influence abroad.

Italian Institutions of Culture and Commerce in the American West

The idea of "Italy abroad" was not just talk. With a mix of public and private initiatives, subsidized by the Italian state or supported in kind with books and supplies, regional and local organizations solidified the Italian communities around common interests of commerce, education, and media. The U.S. West provides a good example of the strength and variety of

Italian institutions in their global context. Political initiatives by the Italian government were blocked in the United States as unwanted foreign interference. How could Italy promote and solidify an Italian American community? Cultural identity and economic incentives likely proved more tangible and influential than diplomatic maneuvers in the long run.

The foundation of Italy's outreach to emigrant communities lay in language and culture. As was noted by Leone Carpi in the first study of Italian colonialism, published in 1874, the word *colonia* in the Italian language is used both for settlements of emigrants and for overseas possessions.¹¹ Both emigration and African colonialism were under the purview of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The powerful prime minister Francesco Crispi declared in parliament in 1887 that emigration would be crucial to the future of Italy's international influence and reach:

The [Italian] Government . . . must never lose sight of [emigrants] in their new home. . . . Colonies must be like arms which the country extends far away in foreign districts, to bring them within the orbit of its relations of labor and exchange; they must be like an enlargement of the boundaries of its action and its economic power.¹²

Crispi presented to parliament a bold mix of domestic and foreign policy motivations, combining emigration with empire, the Americas with Italian Africa. He envisioned Italy expanding through its emigration, strengthening at the core and at the periphery.

Yet in the countries where Italians settled abroad, whether in Brazil, Argentina, or the United States, immigrants were expected to fuse into their new countries and abandon ties to Italian nationality. Italy responded to assimilationist and nativist pressures with a range of strategic cultural programs. The Italian government relied on culture and religion to brand Italian-speaking emigrants as "Italian." The success of any expatriate colonialism depended upon an enduring ethnic identity, even if subsidized and somewhat artificial. The peninsula, politically divided for a thousand years, was culturally divided into a dozen separate languages. Italian politicians searched for the essence of *italianità*, which would not dissolve in any immigrant melting pot no matter what pressures were applied. The Italian language became the main ingredient in a theoretically insoluble Italianism. As Giuseppe Prato wrote, "Language is the most solid defense of threatened nationalities, the only salvation and hope of oppressed peoples, the most effective means of expansion for the strongest races and superior peoples." In the words of Ferdinando Martini, "The soul of the fatherland is in language." If first-generation migrants speaking dialects

learned standard Italian, the Italian community could unite instead of falling into regional divisions. If second-generation Italians also learned “the language of Dante,” they would be moored to Italian culture and society no matter where they lived. The key element to maintaining a “Greater Italy” was reaching this second generation, born abroad. Governmental and semiprivate organizations collaborated in the campaign of the *madre patria* (mother-fatherland) to reclaim her/his lost children. The Dante Alighieri Society’s committees all over the world coordinated local Italian patriotic and educational activities, subsidized by the Italian Foreign Ministry.

The careful cultivation of Italian identities abroad aimed to develop a set of comparable Italian ethnic environments, replicated in locations scattered across the globe, under careful guidance from Italy. Italian cultural groups usually made the local Italian consul a president or chairman *ex officio*, guaranteeing the groups’ political loyalty and permitting their use of Italian royal symbols. The hundreds of expatriate Italian mutual aid societies worked at concrete, local, practical self-improvement, but Italian literary societies and competitive athletic groups aimed to build their reputations as Italians abroad. Speaking Italian and naming their societies “Italian” took on a political meaning outside the cultural frame of their statutory constitution. The Italian National Target Shooting Society of New York refused to join the (United States) National Rifle Association until the NRA made membership a requirement to participate in competitions in the 1890s. The Italians then joined the NRA only after their Italian consul gave permission.¹³ With plenty of support from Italy, many Italian patriotic groups in this period attempted to remain as un-American and unassimilated as possible.

The Catholic hierarchy in Italy also wanted to support emigrants in their new environments. The Vatican worried that Italians would lose their religion on the frontier or in remote mining towns because of neglect, or become Protestants in the United States. Coordinated through the Emigration Fund, the Italian state could enlist the open support of Catholic clergy who had no other connections with the normally anticlerical, Liberal state. Italian bishops wanted to redeem their emigrants from these pressures, and collaborated with the Italian state in building schools, hospices, and hospitals for Italian emigrants abroad. Many of the schools subsidized by the Italian state were operated by priests or nuns, although humanitarian organizations organized by reformist Socialists also drew upon the Emigration Fund. The government official in charge of the state’s program for Italian Schools Abroad, Angelo Scalabrini, was the brother of Monsignor G. B. Scalabrini, bishop of Piacenza. Monsignor Scalabrini, who favored reconciliation between the papacy and the Italian government, pioneered missionary work among Italians in the Americas, while Monsignor Geremia

Bonomelli, bishop of Cremona, organized a similar effort among Italians in Europe. Both groups of missionaries attempted to keep emigrants speaking Italian, attending Catholic services in Italian, and thinking of their families and friends in Italy. While not sharing the Italian government's political and economic goals for emigration, the bishops accepted government funds to work with similar means toward different ends. Scalabrini defended Italian emigrants' culture and argued that a rapid assimilation would destroy their religion. He called for Italians to resist against the melting pot:

Not many years ago, in the United States there were enormous efforts to Americanize . . . the emigrants of the various European nations. Religion and Fatherland mourned for millions of their lost children. Only one people knew how to resist this violent attempt at assimilation: the people with this motto on their flag: our church, our school, our language. Let us not forget this fact. Let us also work, each according to his strength, so that all Italians abroad wear the same uniform, with the same steadfastness, the same courage: for Religion and for the Fatherland.¹⁴

Scalabrini argued for a continuity in the emigrant's intimate relations with God, family, and culture. He argued that being Italian was synonymous with being Catholic, and his missionaries coordinated clerical and lay efforts to support religious, educational, and charitable institutions for Italian Catholic emigrants abroad.

Documenting such efforts encouraged their continuation and inspired imitation. To measure and encourage the success of Italian emigrants, the Italian government subsidized expositions and congresses inside Italy to display the achievements of Italians abroad, including the 1892 Columbus Exposition in Genoa, the 1898 Exposition in Torino, the 1906 Exposition of Italians Abroad in Milan, and the Italian Colonial Institute's First and Second Congresses of Italians Abroad, held in 1908 and 1911 in Turin and Rome. The conjunction between Italian irredentism and emigration strengthened the symbolic and political weight of both movements.

The public display in Italy of each colony's achievements abroad led naturally to comparisons and competition. In the Expositions of Italians Abroad, the Italian community of San Francisco vied with New York City Italians in terms of prestige, wealth, regional influence, and culture. For example, the Italian Chamber of Commerce of San Francisco was very proud that they organized and chartered their group in 1885, two years before the Italian Chamber of New York.¹⁵ Although perhaps the two leading

American coastal Italian communities might have achieved more by working together rather than as rivals, Italians arrived in the United States from a tradition of regional and provincial competition. The continental distances between America's major metropolitan outposts perhaps precluded meaningful cooperation between California and New York; even American Express and Wells Fargo split apart over the vast distances. As a result, the Italians of San Francisco measured themselves against New York as a yardstick, hoping to surpass all other immigrant communities in cohesiveness and achievements.¹⁶

For the fiftieth anniversary of Italian unification in 1911, the Italian Colonial Institute published an inventory of all Italian community organizations, including those subsidized by the Italian government and those who refused a subsidy. The organizations throughout the American West demonstrated the range, depth, and priorities of Italians abroad organized and linked to the *madre patria*. Holding pride of place were Italian schools, charged with teaching the second generation of Italians abroad to maintain their Italian language and culture. The Italian government subsidized five schools in California: three in Los Angeles, one in Sacramento, and one in San Francisco; four in Denver, Colorado; one in Portland, Oregon; and two in Seattle, Washington. Many of these were religious schools, for example the orphanages of the Missionary Nuns of the Sacred Heart; but others were secular, as in San Francisco's "Italian school directed by the Committee of the colony." In addition, the Italian Colonial Institute listed the Italian School of the Jesuits in Portland, Oregon, as teaching Italian but not accepting the Italian government subsidy.¹⁷

Most important for temporary emigrants was a solid and secure method of sending money to family and friends at home. In 1902 the Italian state organized a secure channel for remittances to Italy, administered by the nonprofit Banco di Napoli.¹⁸ The Bank of Naples established a network of correspondent banks, who collected remittances locally and transmitted the money internationally through the Bank of Naples at very low fees. This system not only protected Italian migrants from the abuses and exploitation of unregulated banks, but gave the Italian government a measurement of how much money came into Italy from emigration each year. In the American West, the Bank of Naples correspondents were the Spokane & Eastern Trust Co., in Washington and Oregon; the German American Trust Co. in Denver; Jachetta & Nigro in Pueblo, Colorado; and the Banca Italo Americana San Francisco.¹⁹ When A. P. Giannini began to build his Bank of Italy, later the Bank of America, one of his first goals was to acquire the Banca Italo Americana and its remittances business.²⁰

The large number of Italian newspapers and periodicals in the U.S. West not only represented the solid representation of the Italian language,

but also the economic and social interests that held the community together. Local advertisers included importers and exporters, lawyers, doctors, and pharmacists, all catering to Italian audiences and all invested in the continuation of a stable Italian community. The wide variety in the names of the periodicals represents the editors' political priorities and their audiences. Three daily newspapers represented the most challenging logistical success of Italian American publishing in the West: *L'Italia* and *La Voce del Popolo* [The Voice of the People] in San Francisco, and *La Nazione* [The Nation] in Denver. Weekly newspapers were published throughout Colorado: *Corriere di Trinidad* in the mining town of Trinidad; *L'Unione* [Union] and *Il Vindice* [The Vindicator] in Pueblo; and *Roma*, *La Nazione*, *La Capitale*, and *Il Risveglio* [The Reawakening] in the capital city of Denver. In California, editors in Los Angeles published a weekly, *La Colonia Italiana* [The Italian Colony]; Sacramento produced two weeklies, *La Stella d'Italia* [The Star of Italy] and *La Capitale*; and San Francisco produced four weeklies, representing its hegemony in Italian California: *Il Secolo Nuovo* [The New Century], *Il Topo* [The Mouse], *La Tribuna* [The Tribune], and *La Nuova Elvezia* [New Switzerland]. Two twice-weekly cultural and social magazines were published: *Le Maschere* [The Masks], in Pueblo, and *La Colonia Svizzera* [The Swiss Colony], in Los Angeles. A twice-monthly magazine, *L'Imparziale*, was published in San Francisco; and finally, a monthly commercial magazine, *Rassegna Commerciale: Bollettino mensile della Camera di Commercio di California*, was distributed throughout California by the Italian Chamber of Commerce.²¹

The Italian Colonial Institute also tabulated separately the individual Italian community groups. One network of religious groups serving Italian emigrants, *Italica Gens*, was coordinated by a prominent lay Catholic organization in Turin, the National Association for Italian Missionaries. In the western United States, several local congregations had joined the *Italica Gens*: the Jesuits of Portland, Oregon, and Spokane, Washington, at Gonzaga College; the Servite fathers of Denver, Colorado; the Salesians and the Jesuits of San Francisco; the local parishes of Chico and Sacramento, California; and the Salesians of Oakland, California. Beyond local service, these congregations sought an international and transnational tie binding together Italian emigrants around the world. In contrast, the Sister Missionaries of the Sacred Heart did not join the *Italica Gens* (which had not been sanctioned by the pope), but operated orphanages and schools assisting Italians in Denver, Los Angeles, and Seattle. Two Catholic parishes in San Francisco also listed themselves as serving Italian neighborhoods.²²

Self-help groups remained the most populist and widespread form of local community organization. In the Italian consular district of Denver,

twenty-two Italian mutual-aid societies [società di mutuo soccorso] had been established. Besides groups in Walsenburg and Trinidad, Colorado, seven were formed in Denver alone. Although these seven might have pooled resources and combined into one organization, the Italians preferred to divide themselves among regional, religious, and political lines. Three separate groups were formed in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and four in Kansas, in the towns of Corona, Frontenac, Chicopee, and Weir City. Other Italian mutual-aid groups had been established in Lead, South Dakota; Sunrise and Rock Springs, Wyoming; Coalgate, Oklahoma; Omaha, Nebraska; and Butte, Montana. Based upon subscriptions and contributions, these groups provided insurance and death benefits for their working-class members.²³

Along the West Coast, sixty Italian organizations showed a much broader range of goals and possibilities. Two Dante Society chapters, in San Francisco and in the state of Washington, demonstrated a cultural and educational focus beyond the hard-scrabble life of mining towns in the mountain West. In addition to many mutual-aid societies, for example, San Francisco proudly displayed a well-rounded roster of organizations, including the Italian Chamber of Commerce, Scholastic Committee for education, and a beneficent committee for charitable works. Italians in Los Angeles also promoted a recreational club and beneficent societies. The sheer number of groups, however, betrayed the deep divisions in Italian society. For example, the Italian mutual-aid societies in San Francisco were divided along religious, royalist, republican, and regional lines: the Circolo Regina Margherita, in loyalty to Queen Margherita, namesake of the mozzarella pizza; the Compagnia Garibaldina, volunteers honoring the great Republican anticlerical war hero; the Società Piemontese, for Piedmontese and other northerners; the Società Meridionale, for all Italian southerners; the Volta and Roma Masonic Lodges; the Giuseppe La Masa Society of Republicans; and the Galileo Grove, Monteverde Grove, Aurora Grove, and Verdi Grove of the United Ancient Order of Druids. Very few causes or movements could unite all the Italians of the West.²⁴

Visions of the Western Frontier: *La Fanciulla del West*

Beyond the reality of Italian organizations throughout the American West, the cultural representation of the West influenced continued migration patterns and long-lasting self-perceptions. The West served as the setting for the most prominent depiction of migration in Italian opera: *La fanciulla del West* (1910), by Giacomo Puccini.

One feature of this opera is its outsider's perspective. Although *La Fanciulla* was Puccini's last full-length realist opera, and followed the contemporary standards of verismo, Puccini never visited California, and the opera was produced in New York rather than in California where the

fictional story takes place. The opera premiered in 1910 at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, which had commissioned the work as New York City's first operatic world premiere. The opera represented New York City's coming of age as a major cultural center to rival European capitals. The famed tenor Enrico Caruso starred as the bandit Johnson in the world premiere at the Met, and the opera went on to premiere in other cities, several with strong ties to Italian migration: London (1911), Rome (1911), Buenos Aires (1911), Melbourne (1912), and Berlin (1913), before the First World War. The opera was revived at the Met for its centennial in 2010, yet *La Fanciulla* is performed much less frequently than Puccini's other operas, in part because of its liminal status between American and Italian shores.²⁵

In this opera, Giacomo Puccini and his librettists explored the pathos of emigration both directly and indirectly. *La fanciulla del West* (1910) includes important changes from the original source material, David Belasco's play *The Girl of the Golden West* (1905). Unlike the play, the libretto by Carlo Zangarini and Guelfo Civinini opens with a poignant focus on an emigrant's plight. The libretto's printed preface (not performed on stage) quotes Belasco, to emphasize the theme of immigration:

In those strange days, people coming from God knows where joined forces in that far Western land, and, according to the rude custom of the camp, their very names were soon lost and unrecorded, and here they struggled, laughed, gambled, cursed, killed, loved, and worked out their strange destinies in a manner incredible to us of to-day. Of one thing only we are sure—they lived!

In the first scene, set in a raucous frontier saloon in the Sierra Nevada, a minstrel's nostalgic song on the banjo turns all the miners away from their poker game to thoughts of home, as they sing along with the refrains. The character Jim Larkens breaks down:

I can't stand it anymore,
I can't stand it boys! I'm sick,
I don't know with what. . . . Send me,
ah, send me home! I'm ruined!
I'm tired of the pick and the mine!
I want the plow, I want my mamma!

The miners quickly gather donations as a group to pay for Jim's passage home; Jim thanks them and leaves. In the play, Jim returns home to Pennsylvania; in the opera, however, he returns home to Cornwall, his

home across the ocean on the Celtic Sea. This opera of Puccini, Zangarini, and Civinini should be understood as a tale of transatlantic migration, set not in Italy but nevertheless informed by the Italian migrant experience.

At the end of the opera, the main character, Minnie, and her captured bandit lover are set free, redeemed by Minnie's love and forgiveness. They leave the camp to move far away to start a new life together. The drama of emigration, for the individual and the group, is captured in the final lines of the opera, where the California homeland might as well be Italy:

MINNIE and DICK JOHNSON: Adieu, my sweet land, adieu,
my California! Beautiful mountains of the Sierra, o snows, adieu!
(Exit scene.) (The crowd is dejected . . . filled with sadness—others
sadly wave farewell to Minnie moving further away)

The voices of MINNIE and DICK JOHNSON: (backstage,
becoming more distant): Adieu, my California, adieu!

The CROWD: (sobbing) You will never return . . .
never . . . never!

Puccini's *Fanciulla* is not considered his best work, and is less known than many of his other operas. Like the Italian emigrants, *La fanciulla del West* had a transient existence. Writing about emigrants for an American audience limited the legacy of this opera by Puccini, and the work became a stranger in a strange land, remembered well neither in the United States nor in Italy. Life on the frontier presented a nontraditional topic for a metropolitan opera and for contemporary and future opera audiences. Nonetheless, the opera presented a memorable and exotic U.S. West, with all the individual pathos, human tragedy, and historic drama of frontier migration on a grand scale. Still today, the cowboys and vast spaces of the American West hold an outsized place in the Italian cultural imagination, and Italian tourists continue to flock to the western national parks.

Conclusion

The future first elected president of the Republic of Italy, Luigi Einaudi, established his reputation in 1900 with an economics book about emigration. Einaudi chose one industrialist, Enrico Dell'Acqua, as the title character of his work *A Merchant Prince: Study on the Colonial Expansion of Italy*. Einaudi refuted accusations that Italians lack initiative or a sense of solidarity abroad. He also concluded that Italy must not fear competition from established expatriates, for example, from Italian vineyards in California or Dell'Acqua's textile factory in Brazil:

It is the logic of little minds to believe that every factory established by our compatriots, every piece of cultivated land, every hill planted with vines in America represents a subtraction from our activity, a net loss for Italian exports. In reality, those local products accredit Italian brands and awaken latent desires, and as tastes become more refined the market turns from imitations made by Italians to genuine Italian products.²⁶

Einaudi asserted that the California vineyards had aroused a taste in Italian wines “which otherwise would not exist”; likewise, pasta made in New York City cultivated an appetite for real Italian pastas, cheeses, tomatoes, and olive oils.²⁷ True to his Liberal principles, Einaudi saw no need for economic divisions within “greater Italy.” Rather, the Italian government needed to act resolutely to establish trade treaties in the Americas and use diplomacy to bolster the Italian language in the schools, and perhaps in an Italian university abroad. Most urgently, Italy had to build connections to support its expatriates abroad on the expanding frontier, wherever they might be. The logic and sensibleness of Einaudi’s appeal strongly influenced Italian legislation, and by extension all other countries who modeled their policies upon Italy’s successes.²⁸

Not just the broad rhetoric, but the concrete specifics of Italian programs abroad offer a presage to migrants’ enduring international connections in culture, economics, and society in an era of international peace. In 1906, before the Great War, Gino Speranza described the transnational context of Italians abroad:

Commercial interests, the “annihilation of time and space” by improved methods of transportation and the ebb and flow of travel, will render the old distinctions of nationalities and the parochial character of present-day patriotism, more and more an anachronism. The conception of citizenship itself is rapidly changing and we may have to recognize a sort of world or international citizenship as more logical than the present peripatetic kind, which makes a man an American while here, and an Italian while in Italy.²⁹

The ease of international connections made new migrant identities not only possible, but attractive, subsidized, and institutionalized. International migration became doubly complicated by the ongoing viewpoint of emigration—people leaving—and of immigration—people coming in. The individual migrants and their families attracted assimilationist and

antiassimilationist pressures from near and far, in a contest over which political center would link to the migrant periphery.

The web of connections and interests defied the distances of geography. Emigrants on the Pacific coast of North America, or in the Rocky Mountains, never seemed very distant from Italy due to high rates of return migration. Since so many eventually came home again from mining and agriculture, migration could never be “out of sight, out of mind.” Even when Italians abroad adopted foreign citizenship, Italy counted them as responsible for conscripted military service in World War I. Emigrants automatically regained their Italian citizenship after they returned to Italy.³⁰ Nonetheless, mass emigration remained controversial in Italy, and controversial abroad. What lay in Italy’s long-term political interests might not match the interests of immigrant polities, or of the immigrants themselves. While individual migrants created new lives abroad, assimilating to some degree into their local societies, Italy as a sending state could not let go of emigrants as a lost cause. Mass emigration was too important for Italy’s economic development and international image.

The Italian institutions created in the American West remain relevant and exemplary for migration in the twenty-first century. Unlike the Poles, Jews, and Irish who came to the Americas a century ago, the Italians emigrated from an established state. This state had every interest in encouraging its citizens to send money back to their families and return home after a profitable career abroad. The Italian state became directly and indirectly involved in the lives of Italian expatriates, through establishing banking channels for remittances, subsidies for cultural and social institutions, and coordination of language education. In these ways, Italy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was like India, China, and Mexico today in the twenty-first century. Mexico encourages its emigrants to send money home in remittances, to buy Mexican goods and maintain their Mexican culture and heritage, and to return home after earning money abroad. Italy did the same thing, encouraging Italians to send money home, to buy Italian agricultural and industrial products, and to return home after working in the Americas.

International state involvement adds more dimensions to the ongoing history of migration. Mexico has been particularly successful in its creative outreach; recent studies have documented in detail the many issues of dual nationality, and the significant intervention of sending states in the lives of migrants.³¹ Thanks to migration, American history is not just for Americans, and foreign states continue to shape the fabric of the American West.

Notes

1. Adolfo Rossi, *Un italiano in America* (Milano: Casa Editrice La Cisalpina, 1899), 4.
2. Compare Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995); Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansion in American History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1935).
3. Mark Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Dino Cinel, *The National Integration of Italian Return Immigration 1870–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
4. Richard Gambino, *Vendetta* (New York: Doubleday, 1977); Marco Rimaneli, and Sheryl L. Postman, eds., *The 1891 New Orleans Lynching and U.S.-Italian Relations: A Look Back* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992); David A. Smith, “From the Mississippi to the Mediterranean: The 1891 New Orleans Lynching and Its Effects on United States Diplomacy and the American Navy,” *The Southern Historian* 19 (April 1998): 60–85.
5. Giuseppe Mazzini, “On the Unity of Italy,” in *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini* (London: Smith and Elder, 1891), 1:290.
6. Cited by Gaetano Salvemini, *Mazzini*, trans. I. M. Rawson (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957), 81–82.
7. Compare Frederick Jackson Turner and John Mack Faragher, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: The Significance of the Frontier in American History, and Other Essays* (New York: H. Holt, 1994).
8. Giampietro D. Berti, *Errico Malatesta e il movimento anarchico italiano e internazionale: 1872–1932* (Milan: F. Angeli, 2003); Vittorio Giacomini, *Non ho bisogno di stare tranquillo. Errico Malatesta, vita straordinaria del rivoluzionario più temuto da tutti i governi e le questure del regno* (Milan: Elèuthera, 2012); Peter H. Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010).
9. Peter R. D’Agostino, “The Scalabrini Fathers, the Italian Emigrant Church and Ethnic Nationalism in America,” *Religion and American Culture* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 125–26; Robert J. Wishes, “The Establishment of the Apostolic Delegation in the United States of America” (PhD diss., Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1981); Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
10. Giuseppe Mazzini, *The Duties of Man* (1907; London: Everyman, 1966), 9, 53.
11. Leone Carpi, *Delle colonie e delle emigrazioni d’italiani all’estero sotto l’aspetto dell’industria, commercio, agricoltura e con trattazione d’importanti questioni sociali*, 4 vols. (Milano: Tip. Editrice Lombarda, 1874).
12. Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, Leg. XVI, 2a sessione 1887, Documenti n. 85, December 15, 1887, p. 9. See also “Il progetto di legge sull’emigrazione,” *Rivista della Beneficenza Pubblica e delle Istituzioni di Previdenza* 16 (1888).
13. *Gli italiani negli Stati Uniti d’America* (New York, 1906), 438.
14. Giovanni Battista Scalabrini, “L’Italia all’estero,” in *Gli italiani all’estero*, ed. Esposizione Generale Italiana (Turin, 1899), 39.
15. *Nel Cinquantenario della Camera di Commercio Italiana in New York*.

- 1887–1937–XVI (New York: Italian Chamber of Commerce in New York, 1937), preface.
16. Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); Vittorio Soldaini, “La raccolta delle rimesse degli emigrati italiani e l’opera del Banco di Napoli: 1902–1913,” *Revue internationale d’histoire de la banque* 2 (1969): 137–88.
 17. Istituto Coloniale Italiano, *Annuario dell’Italia all’estero e delle sue colonie* (Rome: Tip. Unione Editrice, 1911), 407–22.
 18. Francesco Balletta, *Il Banco di Napoli e le rimesse degli emigrati, 1914–1925* (Napoli: Institut International d’histoire de la Banque, 1972); Luigi De Rosa, *Emigranti, capitali e banche (1896–1906)* (Napoli: Edizione del Banco di Napoli, 1980); Soldaini, “La raccolta delle rimesse degli emigrati italiani,” 137–88.
 19. Istituto Coloniale Italiano, *Annuario*, 390–91.
 20. Felice A. Bonadio, *A. P. Giannini, Banker of America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Gerald D. Nash, *A. P. Giannini and the Bank of America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).
 21. Istituto Coloniale Italiano, *Annuario*, 461–63.
 22. *Ibid.*, 511–14, 518–19, 527.
 23. *Ibid.*, 496.
 24. *Ibid.*, 496, 500–501.
 25. John Russo, “Puccini, the Immigrants, and the Golden West,” *Opera Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 4–27; Mark I. Choate, “Italy at Home and Abroad after 150 Years: The Legacy of Emigration and the Future of *Italianità*,” *Italian Culture* 30, no. 1 (May 2012): 51–67.
 26. Luigi Einaudi, *Un principe mercante; Studio sulla espansione coloniale italiana* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1900), 146, 160.
 27. *Ibid.*, 146, 166–68.
 28. See Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, ed., *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
 29. Gino C. Speranza, “Political Representation of Italo-American Colonies in the Italian Parliament,” in *The Italians: Social Backgrounds of an American Group*, ed. Francesco Cordasco and Eugene Bucchioni (Clifton, NJ: Augustus M. Kelly Publishers, 1974), 310.
 30. Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 203–17.
 31. David Cook-Martin, *The Scramble for Citizens: Dual Nationality and State Competition for Immigrants* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); David Fitzgerald, *A Nation of Emigrants: How Mexico Manages Its Migration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Michael Snodgrass, “Patronage and Progress: The Bracero Program from the Perspective of Mexico,” in *Workers Across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History*, ed. Leon Fink (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).