SUMMARY. A central sociopolitical and psychological problem confronting Italian Americans in the United States today is the media’s relentless stereotyping of Italian Americans as criminals who are in some way connected to Mafiosi. These negative representations are controlling images because they are created and perpetuated by dominant social institutions to make the ethnic treatment of Italian Americans seem natural and normative.

Stereotypes of Italian Americans have strong negative connotations that reflect the history of this identity group in the United States and in Italy. These historically based negative stereotypes underlie representa-
tions of Italian Americans in the print and entertainment media today. Such negative representations continue to disfigure and misrepresent Italian Americans in American society.

There is now significant cross-disciplinary evidence that Italian Americans have occupied an ambiguous identity in American society as stigmatized marginalized whites. Unfortunately, research examining the psychological and social effects of ethnic racism, prejudice and stereotyping related to Italian Americans is virtually nonexistent. Italian Americans still remain conceptually invisible in psychological and psychoanalytic research literature.

This essay represents an attempt to synthesize historical, sociological, and psychoanalytic perspectives of Italian Americans with social psychological research that has examined the nature of stereotyping and prejudice. The purpose of this paper is threefold: (a) to provide a brief overview of the concepts of prejudice, stereotyping and racism in the scientific literature as they pertain to Italian Americans, (b) to review the historical roots of prejudice and stereotyping about Italian Americans during the twentieth century that have impacted media portrayals of Italian Americans today, (c) and lastly to demonstrate the ways in which Italian Americans have been made to carry America’s every sociological and psychological shadow from the early days of industrial capitalism to the postmodern era.

KEYWORDS. Italian Americans, stereotyping, media, ethnic racism, prejudice, skin privileges, Mafiosi, Italian American directors, artists

THEORY OF PREJUDICE, STEREOTYPING, AND SCAPEGOATING

As Gordon Allport (1954) noted in his groundbreaking psychological treatise on prejudice, stereotypes may not be inherently dangerous or inherently demeaning. In early experimental laboratory studies of prejudice, social psychologists encountered a powerful phenomenon: Researchers found that after the flip of a coin, participants assigned to one of two random groups displayed significant bias in favor of their group (us) and against the other group (them). This classification, in
turn, initiates bias: Once categorized, people tend to automatically value others in their own group. Moreover, research repeatedly shows that individuals tend to evaluate members of the in-group (us—we are better than they are) more positively and members of the out-group (them—they are inferior to us) more negatively.\(^5\) Prejudice outside the laboratory, however, is a more complex phenomenon. While racism reflects, in part, the universal tendency to favor the in-group, societal variables, as will be discussed shortly, transform this basic process into a more systemic insidious phenomenon.\(^6\)

Prejudice refers to “negative attitudes against certain out-groups and their members that are irrationally [emphasis is mine] based . . . accompanied by a faulty generalization or stereotypes.”\(^7\) For example, when we say an individual is prejudiced against Italian Americans, we mean that he or she is primed to feel or behave negatively toward Italian Americans, and that he or she feels justified in thinking that Italian Americans are pretty much the same.

According to Dovidio and Gaertner (1998), people’s first thoughts and impressions of others occur, spontaneously and automatically, from categorization.\(^8\) The mere classification of people into social groups allows people to understand others with regard to a few main characteristics, such as their age, gender, social role, or physical appearance. However, stereotyping goes one step beyond categorization: a stereotype is a simplistic generalization (albeit of questionable validity) about a group of people in which identical characteristics, consistent with one’s prejudices, are assigned to all members of that group (Aronson et al., 2002; Fiske, 1998). For example, media representation of Italian Americans as gangsters and criminals obscures their variability because these portrayals are not counterbalanced by positive images reflecting the diversity of the Italian American community. The media rarely, if ever, portrays Italian Americans as they truly are: a diverse subgroup of American society with its share of political leaders, scientists, writers, filmmakers, business leaders, physicians, attorneys, psychologists and psychiatrists.

A study conducted in 1999 by the Italic Studies Institute of New York analyzed 1,078 Hollywood films that featured Italian Americans from 1931 to 1998 and found that only twenty-seven percent or 152 films portrayed Italian Americans positively, while seventy-three percent or 781 films portrayed Italian Americans negatively. Social psychologist Susan Fiske (1998) observes that to the extent that a stereotype obscures individual differences and variation in a group of people it is potentially abusive. The results of this and other surveys af-
firming Americans’ perceptions of Italian Americans’ criminality demonstrate the effect of negative or potentially abusive stereotyping in action. As the Italic Studies survey demonstrates, to the millions of Americans whose principal views of Italian Americans are shaped by what they see on the television screen, negative stereotypes of Italian Americans exist as repetitive variations played upon inaccurate yet widely endorsed negative stereotypes.

These mixed and mostly negative portrayals of Italian Americans are exacerbated by the fact that such representations are rarely counterbalanced by Italian Americans characters that are cast in more positive portrayals such as expert authorities, professionals, executives, or newsmakers. Thus, rather than helping to overcome the negative image of Italian Americans fostered by entertainment programming, the media reinforces negative images by failing to counterbalance these images with more positive portrayals.

Journalism scholars Wilson and Gutierrez (1995) have pointed out two particularly pernicious features of stereotyping: (1) the vicious cycle aspect—once stereotypes are expressed and learned, they are reinforced, validated and perpetuated; (2) once validation occurs, it solidifies stereotypes into norms that suggest how certain individuals and groups should be treated.

Research also indicates that once formed, stereotypes are resistant to change. Because stereotypic information is reinforced throughout one’s life, it provides “an unconscious belief system for perceiving the world.” Socially ingrained, yet often unconscious, ethnic/racial stereotyping is so strongly socialized within United States culture that most people are not conscious of the control they exert over their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Once activated they unconsciously bias people’s perception, judgments, and intentions.

Unfortunately, stereotyping of Italian Americans as an identity group prone to criminality, violence and murder has become normative in American society. For example, surveys have shown that many citizens in the United States endorse stigmatizing attitudes about Italian Americans and their alleged connections to the Mafia today. In a recent study (2000) commissioned by Commission of Social Justice, a division of the Order of the Sons of Italy, over seventy-four percent of the respondents endorsed the belief that most Italian Americans have a connection to the Mafia. Such generalizations about Italian Americans’ criminality and violence are not based in fact: Italian Americans are involved in only two percent of all homicides, just slightly higher than the English
and Irish. Moreover, the FBI reports that less than two percent of every ten thousand Italian Americans are involved in organized crime.

Psychoanalytic and Jungian thought has much to contribute to our knowledge and understanding of group and collective life as it relates to stereotyping and prejudice. One of Jung’s greatest contributions to psychoanalytic thought is the discovery of the reality of the collective unconscious and the “presence of the unconscious in the collective and the collective in the unconscious.” In Jungian psychological terms, a scapegoat is an ancient archetype and activity (dating back to human sacrifice) that is created by projecting the darker side of life (elements of the group psyche that are unacceptable to collective consciousness) to an out-group perceived to be separate and apart from the in-group.

In the context of collective life, scapegoating activity represents the group’s push toward its own wholeness. Scapegoating “represents the transfer of negative attributions from one part of the system to another in order to fulfill what is perceived to be necessary for the system to survive as a whole.” In his book *Up from Scapegoating* (1995), Jungian psychiatrist Arthur D. Colman argues that groups, like individuals, will create scapegoats rather than “accommodate diversity with its corpus.” Groups may need to find a scapegoat to deal with the threat and tension of fragmentation and disintegration.

Italian peasants in Italy and Italian immigrants in America served as convenient scapegoats for the problems that plagued the new republic of Italy and the anxieties that plagued Americans in a rapidly changing industrial capitalist economy. Moreover, although Italian Americans in the twenty-first century have acquired power and resources unavailable to their immigrant ancestors, they continue to be receptacles of attributes unwanted in the ideal postmodern American.

As I will discuss shortly, attributes such as violence and criminality continue to be “disowned” and “split off” from the collective American psyche and projected onto Italian Americans. In turn, debasing Italian Americans alters and inflates the self-image of Americans. The “badness” of Italian Americans appears to be an ongoing and unifying organizing principle in the psychic lives of Americans evinced by the media’s stereotyping of Italian Americans as criminals and Mafiosi.

Inequities of power and history make some stereotypes worse than others. Operario and Fiske (1998) observe that stereotypes “based on power differential between groups have the most potential to harm.” *Power*, which is defined as the “ability to control the outcomes of others,” entails the power to “classify and categorize outgroups via
changing scientific standards, the power to enact race-based laws via political dominance, and the power to subordinate via social and economic control.” For several decades following the unification of Italy in 1860, in order to maintain power, privilege, and dominance, members of the elite classes (landowners, the borghesi, and the Catholic Church of the south) colluded with the northern-dominated government to promote stereotypes of peasant southerners as “Africans” and “cannibals,” disparaging both their moral character and intelligence (Verdicchio, 1994). The elite and politically powerful of Italy used their power to define southern peasants in dehumanizing terms to justify their domination and colonization of the southern peninsula. Scientific support for these stereotypes were found in the research of Italian anthropologist Cesare Lombroso and his followers, Enrico Ferri, and Alfredo Niceforo, who established the “racial inferiority” and “criminality” of southern Italians through “cranial measurements and other pseudoscientific criteria.”

Ethnicism/racism is an intractable problem that is dependent on the maintenance of a power differential that enables dominant groups to define the ‘self’ in opposition to an ‘other.’ In Italy racial positivist arguments were used to explain the

congenital inability of Southerners to accept the discipline of an organization . . . their anarchic individualism, made them disorderly, liable to rebellion, and unsuited to long term political preparation.

Viewed through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, it is reasonable to theorize that the collective ego of the post-unification Italian elite embodied the ethic of discipline, restraint and control. In order to sustain this “ideal” image, the powerfully elite unconsciously rejected “primitive” parts of themselves that were incompatible with their “civilized” self-image. The elite, in turn, projected these disowned “primitive” parts onto Italian peasants. Thus, members of the elite political hegemony of the newly formed Italian republic did not accurately perceive Italian peasants. Instead they projected onto peasants unconscious aspects of themselves that have been rejected as incompatible with their civilized self-image. As a result, the northern Italian vision of peasant Italians’ reality is mediated, obscured and obstructed by a variety of prejudicial and discriminatory projections.

Power underlies the psychological discrepancy between those who control and those who are controlled. Social psychologists theorize that racism renders members of lower-power groups vulnerable to subordination and
exploitation by those who control resources. The northern Italian government used military power to repress southern Italian rebellion against the economic injustices of the newly formed republic. Southern resistance fighters were characterized as “criminals,” and at least ten thousand southerners died and twenty thousand were imprisoned or banished by the government for their acts of rebellion (Verdicchio, 1994). Historian Donna Gabaccia (2000) observes that the criminalization of Italy’s migrants originated in Italy’s post-unification civil war between the state and peasantry. Italian peasants who fought their oppressors were stigmatized by the Italian government as violent criminals. This explanation of the etiology of the stereotyping of southern Italians as criminals contradicts popular mythology that perpetuates the false belief that southern Italians’ transplantation of the Mafia of Italy to the United States was the origin of this defaming stereotype.26 In fact, the Mafia that grew to power subsequent to the era of prohibition in the United States was not linked to the Mafia in Italy. Up until the 1920s the Irish controlled the Mafia in the United States.

OVERVIEW OF CULTURAL CATEGORIZING
OF ITALIAN AMERICANS

The tendency to treat white European Americans as a monolithic group who have uniformly enjoyed the power and privilege of their “whiteness” has been a problem in understanding American culture. Psychologists Landrine, Klonoff and Brown-Collins suggest that there are significant differences between Americans of European ancestry. Therefore, in their view, European ethnic and cultural groups should not continue to be viewed monolithically within contemporary multicultural research paradigms.27 As Hope Landrine puts it:

As long as “cultural diversity” means “how those minorities are different” (from whom?), diversity discourse eloquently eludes addressing, yet quietly maintains, existing social arrangements. Until the focus on culture regards European American cultures as being as salient and in need of analysis as the cultures of others, cultural diversity belittles culture while exploiting it. Culture will be regarded with dignity and the sociology of knowledge altered only when European American cultures are treated like all others.28

While many Italian Americans may have benefited from the economic advantages equated with the “skin privileges” of whiteness since
World War II, the emerging body of scholarly research suggests Italian Americans as a whole have not possessed the same social or political power and status of other white European ethnic groups in the United States. The editors in *In the Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* note the complexities of “whiteness” and explain:

how whites themselves are internally differentiated, how the same white skin that has facilitated the integration, assimilation, and enrichment of some does not guarantee that others . . . might not also experience . . . stigmatization and subjugation.

At the turn of the century when the social sciences were developing, researchers adopted biased macrolevel approaches to classify people into races. Social scientific racists argued that there were several European “races” and generally accepted the idea that there was a hierarchy of races with northern and western Europeans at the top, and southern and eastern Europeans at the bottom. In this tradition race-defining variables included ethnicity (e.g., German “race”), religion and language (e.g., the Jewish “race”), and geography (e.g., Mediterranean race). The Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, Teutonic and other Aryan or Nordic races were thought to be biologically and racially superior to the “new immigrants.” According to Guetrl, “old immigrants” were folded into a pan-whiteness identity which included those of “English, Dutch, and French” ancestry. Nativists asserted that “new immigrants” including Italians were *racially distinct* from Americans of northern European descent.

There was a perception among Americans nativists that the “new immigrants” were reproducing at higher rates than native-born Americans and that their greater numbers were vitiating the quality of America’s intellectual gene pool. This perception was amplified by the realities of the changing demographics in America’s urban centers. For example, by 1910 half or more of America’s largest cities, including New York, appeared to be “more foreign” in 1900 than in 1850: almost fifteen percent of the America’s urban population was of foreign birth. Moreover, at the turn of the century Italians constituted the numerically largest group of “new immigrants.”

Beginning in the 1860s, Charles Darwin’s treatise on the origin of the species and his ideas about natural selection or “survival of the fittest” provided America’s Social Darwinists with an explanation for the biological superiority of white Americans whose civilization was rooted in northern Europe. Reflecting the Darwinian thinking prevalent during
the late nineteenth century, the idea was that just as different species of animals struggled for survival and competed for superiority, so too did human races. Implicitly analogizing racial group membership to the groupings of animals, racial difference was thought to represent a “natural difference which must always exist.”

In the early part of the twentieth century, Americans cast Italian immigrants into racial idioms similar to those of their homeland. The asymmetrical social power between immigrant Italians and native-born Americans in the United States functioned to perpetuate racial prejudice and stereotypes about southern Italians similar to those made by higher power groups in Italy. As early as 1867 the New York Times commented about the Italian immigrant’s “natural inclination toward criminality.” By 1885 Italian immigrants were cast by the American press into stereotypical icons of the subhuman racially inferior “other.” Italian immigrants were portrayed as intellectually and physiologically inferior and were characterized as “ignorant, dirty, lazy, servile, superstitious, dishonest and bloodthirsty.” One journalist remarked in 1885 that

by all odds the most vicious, ignorant and degraded of all the immigrants who come to our shores are the Italian inhabitants... a seething mass of humanity, so ignorant, so vicious, so depraved that they hardly seem to belong to our species, Men and women; yet living, not like animals, but like vermin!

Such virulent racism reveals the presence and the extent of intense anti-Italian prejudice that existed prior to the mass migration of Italians to the United States during the first decade of the twentieth century.

From the standpoint of American nativists and racist “reformers,” inferior biology and “stiletto-weilding dagoes” from Italy were thought to have brought with them to the United States the “bad” blood of their race (Hooton, 1939). Ironically, racist arguments similar to those of the Italian Positivists were made by nativist Americans about “phylogenetically” inferior Italian immigrants who were perceived to be unworthy of and unprepared for American citizenship.

Italians were almost always described by the American press as “swarthy” and “kinky-haired.” According to historian Robert Orsi, the perceived physical features of the Italian “brown” “olive-skinned” newcomers did not easily adhere to racial categories of “white or black,” the only two possibilities in the domestic racial taxonomy. The genetic am-
biguity of the racial status of Italian immigrants constituted, in the words of historian John Higham, the Italian’s racial “inbetweenness.”

Social psychologist Gordon Allport (1954) observed that “dark skin implies more than pigmentation, it implies social inferiority.” Far from merely contributing to appearance, surface features pointing toward the unseen moral, intellectual, or psychological properties of race were thought to represent one’s racial essence. The Immigration Restriction League founded in 1896 by Ivy League educators and intellectuals, such as Prescott F. Hall and Henry Cabot Lodge, highlighted the notion of the “non-whiteness” of southern Europeans and Italians by suggesting there was the possibility of African blood [flowing through the veins of] . . . the dark peoples living in the Mediterranean shores . . .

Pasquale Verdicchio (1994) posits that the “whiteness” of Italian Americans was erased in American society by a socially constructed ideology that excluded Italian Americans from this racial category and considered them to have been socially “black.” Culturally Italian Americans still bear the invisible psychological stigmata of social “blackness.”

VIOLENCE AGAINST ITALIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

In the late 1880s American white southerners referred to the “uncivilized” newly arrived Sicilian immigrants as “black dagoes.” One Italian diplomat remarked that Sicilian immigrants were regarded as “white negroes.” In 1891, southern racial hatred of Sicilian Italian immigrants culminated in the largest mass lynching (as measured by the number of people illegally killed in one place at one time) in United States history. Between 1886 and 1910, Italians suffered the largest number of lynchings in the American South than any other non-black minority. Historian Clive Webb documents that although Sicilians comprised less than four percent of the white male population between 1890 and 1910, about forty percent of the white men murdered by lynch mobs were Sicilians. Yet Italian Americans are the ones who have been stereotyped as violent murderers.
EUGENICISM, ETHNIC RACISM, AND PSYCHOLOGY’S INTELLIGENCE TESTING MOVEMENT

Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution provided nativists with a powerful and allegedly scientific basis for supporting the restriction of the influx of “new immigrants” who were seen as “less fit” for the duties and responsibilities of American citizenship. Eugenists argued that studies had “proven” those members of the lower classes and non-white peoples had “inferior genes.”

Immigrant Italians were a natural target for racial purists. According to professor of Puerto Rican studies, Richie Perez, in the early 1900s American expansionists, eugenicists, scientists, and policymakers embarked on the pursuit of “racial purity” goals similar to those embraced by the Nazis. As eugenicists rose to power in America, writes Perez, politicians used “scientific claims” to justify the “sterilization of the unfit” and restriction on the “further immigration of inferior people.”

The ideas of Social Darwinism gave new impetus for restrictions on migration itself. To reduce the entry of newcomers to the United States, several legislative acts were aimed at reducing the number of Italian immigrants and other “newcomers” entering the United States.

Eugenicists and scientific racists who believed in the supremacy of the “white” race made use of invalid “scientific studies” to prove that Italians, among other “new immigrants” (Jews, Portuguese, and Eastern Europeans), had innately “inferior” intelligence and represented “races” still close to the “barbarians.” Psychologists who led the intelligence testing movement were mostly hereditarians (who believed that observed differences among individuals for a particular trait are due to genetics), eugenicists (who believed that improvement in the human race should be encouraged through selective breeding) and social reformers. Lewis Terman, Stanford University scholar, researcher, test developer (of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test), ideologue and social reformer, molded the intelligence testing movement. Terman’s value-laden idea that the intellectual level of an individual predicted their educability had significant implications for the stratification of white, minority and immigrant children in the educational system. Terman believed in the power of intelligence tests to assess and predict a child’s educability and course of study. For example, in his Measurement of Intelligence (1916) Terman discussed the cases of two Portuguese brothers with borderline intelligence (with measured IQs of 77 and 78) and predicted that each brother would “doubtless become a fairly reliable laborer at unskilled work . . . and will probably never develop beyond the 11- or 12-year
level [of intelligence] or be able to do satisfactory school work beyond the fifth or sixth grade.” Terman’s sentiments about the intelligence levels and educability of immigrants and their children were unequivocally racist.

The first mass group-administered intelligence tests (tests that could be administered to groups in one sitting) were administered to over two million army recruits during World War I. Psychologists accrued intelligence test data on 12,407 foreign-born army draftees during this time and found that draftees from Italy, Russia and Poland (who were not bilingual) scored lowest on intelligence tests while draftees from England, Scotland, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and Canada scored highest. Psychologists viewed the lower IQ scores of southern and eastern Europeans as an indication of innately inferior intellectual capacities rather than as a reflection of their socioeconomic, cultural-biological conditions and limited English proficiency.

This body of research unjustly stigmatized Italian Americans as genetically and intellectually inferior and uneducable. The army intelligence test data was later used to justify discriminatory immigration and educational policies against Italian Americans (Kamin, 1974). The initial publication of the army intelligence data in 1921 occurred during the same year in which Congress passed a temporary emergency measure placing a numerical limitation on immigration (Kamin, 1974).

In his book, *A Study of American Intelligence* (1923), Princeton University psychologist Carl Brigham argued that American intelligence was declining in direct proportion to the number of new immigrants entering the United States who possessed “inferior blood.” Brigham based his conclusions on an invalid analysis and interpretation of army intelligence test data.

Eugenicists like Carl Brigham advocated such policies as preserving “racial purity” by restricting immigration of “less developed” ethnic and racial groups (southern and eastern Europeans) and controlling the reproductive behavior of “inferior stock” individuals. In the concluding chapter of his book Brigham (1923) wrote:

The deterioration of American intelligence is not inevitable, however, immigration should not only be restrictive but highly selective. . . . The really important steps are those looking toward the prevention of the continued propagation of defective strain [emphasis added] in the present population. . . . 60
Thus, Brigham argued not only for immigration restriction but implicitly recommended controlling the reproductive behavior of immigrants possessing “inferior genes.”

On February 20th, 1923, Francis Kinnicut of the Immigration Restriction League cited Brigham’s “scientific” findings in his testimony before the United States Senate Committee on Immigration. Kinicut strongly urged Congress to:

...further restrict immigration from southern and eastern Europe... the intelligence of the Italian immigration...is of a very low grade...all rank far below the average intelligence for the whole country.61

A month earlier, in January 1923, psychologist Dr. Arthur Swee-ney’s book, Mental Tests for Immigrants, was made part of the appendix to the hearings of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization (Kamin, 1974). Testifying before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, Sweeney characterized “Latin” [Italian] immigrants as “imbeciles” who possessed primitive brain structures “scarcely superior the ox . . . who think with their spinal cord rather than the brain.”62 He, too, urged Congress to “apply the new weapons of science [intelligence tests] to protect ourselves against the degenerate horde.”63

During the 1920s “race psychologists” (a term then used for cross-cultural psychologists) also administered thousands of intelligence tests to native-born American and American-born children of Italian immigrants residing in New York, New Jersey and California (Young, 1922; Pinter, 1923; Maud, 1926; Graham, 1926; Mead, 1926; Hirsch, 1927; Kimball, 1930). Racist conclusions about the intellectual inferiority of American-born Italian children of Italian immigrants were drawn by several researchers affiliated with Ivy League academic institutions. In 1920, Katharine Murdoch, an instructor in psychology at Columbia University School of Social Work, wrote confidently in an academic journal, School and Society, that Italian children were more retarded [being overage for one’s grade level] in their intellectual development than were “Negroes or Jews.” Murdoch (1920) wrote:

On the whole the colored boys seem to be about halfway between the Hebrews and the Italians. The Italians still maintain their position at the foot of the four races...this fact shows that more retardation of the less gifted races does take place...64
For Italian American children, ability-stigmatizing stereotypes drawn by “race psychologists” virtually locked them out of the upward flow of educational and social mobility. Formal intellectual achievement was made more difficult for our ancestors in our nation’s intellectual institutions because most were regarded as not highly educable. This made it easier for the dominant white majority society to block our Italian ancestors’ access to opportunities that required institutional credentials.

Psychology’s intelligence testing’s extrascientific agenda helped Congress to pass racist immigration laws that transformed American society and the lives of Italian American immigrants and their descendants. Intelligence testing data supported the passage of racist legislation in 1921 and again in 1924 that imposed a quota on Italian emigration to the United States. The first Emergency Quota Act was passed in 1921 and permitted the admission of only three percent of the numbers of each national group reported for the census of 1910. This law favored countries of northern and western Europe, excluding those from southern and eastern countries. The second law, the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, cut the previous quota to two percent by assigning each country an annual allowable quota based on the census of 1890, prior to the massive influx of southeastern Europeans after 1900. This law once again gave comparative advantage to the peoples of northern Europe. The Johnson Reed Act of 1924 dramatically reduced the volume of Italian immigrants entering the United States to below 29,000 per year after a peak of 349,042 in 1920 coming from southern and eastern Europe. This quota was enforced for over forty years until it was repealed in 1965.

**INTELLECTUAL ABILITY STIGMATIZATION OF ITALIAN AMERICANS IN THE MEDIA**

Today network, cable television and feature films are replete with stereotypical images of Italian Americans who are intellectual ability-stigmatized. Italian American protagonists are featured as either lacking in intelligence or as intellectually unsophisticated. Examples of feature films are: *Rocky I* (1976), *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), *Married to the Mob* (1988), and *My Cousin Vinny* (1992). Each of these films features protagonists who are uneducated but “street smart.” Throughout the latter film, *My Cousin Vinny* (1992), attorney Vincent La Guardia Gambini (Joe Pesci) and girlfriend Mona Lisa Vito (Marisa Tomei) are ridiculed as vulgar, naïve, street-smart fools. Only at the penultimate moment in
the film are both characters shown to be highly intelligent and extremely competent.

On prime-time television, Vinnie Barbarino, in Welcome Back, Kotter, is cast as an academic failure, more concerned about his sexual appeal to woman than his performance in school. On Taxi the role of villain Louie DePalma’s and Carla Tortelli’s role in Cheers confirms the media’s tendency to portray Italians as uneducated individuals, occupying low status jobs and behaving in a vindictive manner. In Who’s the Boss? Tony Micelli (Tony Danza) is portrayed as an uneducated boxer turned domestic worker who is employed by a college-educated WASP female executive. More recently, in a prime-time television series, That’s Life (2000), a New Jersey working-class, Italian American female protagonist was featured struggling to overcome her college professor’s perception of her as an intellectual ability-stigmatized student who does not belong in college. This anecdotal account of intellectual ability-stigmatized Italian American characters portrayed in the media is validated by the empirical research of Lichter and Lichter, 1982, and Lichter, Lichter and Rothman, 1991.

The Center for Media and Public Affairs study found that in television prime-time programs during the period 1980-81, negative portrayals of Italian Americans outnumbered positive ones by a margin of nearly two to one. Moreover, the portrayal of Italian American criminals exceeded the portrayal of the total number of educated Italian American professional and business executives. Specifically they found that one in six Italian Americans were portrayed as professional criminals, and only one in seven were portrayed as professionals or business executives. Most characters held low status jobs, and the majority of Italian-American protagonists did not speak proper English, frequently making them the butt of jokes. Historian’s Iorizzo and Mondello (1980) traced the history of the portrayal of Italian Americans between the period of 1900-1979 in television, film, comic strips and comic books. They found that Italian American characters were depicted as comical, menacing and terrorizing.

In sum, Italian Americans are “ghettoized” in mostly negative portrayals and few, if any, Italian American characters are portrayed as prosperous, authoritative and well educated. It is indeed difficult to find examples of Italian American characters in mainstream Hollywood cinema or network television that are complex and self-determining.
SCAPEGOATING, ARCHETYPAL IMAGES OF ITALIANS AS ROGUES AND OUTLAWS

In the early part of the twentieth century Italian immigrants were valued in American society solely for their willingness to perform back-breaking physical labor that Americans were unwilling to undertake. They were seen as a cheap source of human labor to fuel the expanding industrial and economic growth of the American economy. As the largest of all immigrant groups, Italian immigrants encountered some of the most oppressive working conditions in the American labor market of industrial capitalism.

The heroic efforts of Italian laborers to survive and find meaning in a "heartless" capitalist society that was rejecting of them have, rarely, if ever, been portrayed in feature films or network television. The courage, stoicism, perseverance, resilience, and toughness of Italian laborers who rose to the challenge of transforming and even sacrificing their lives in order to ensure the survival of their families and future generations of Italian Americans still remains invisible in the entertainment media and, therefore, to the general public. Unlike the archetypal outlaw, the archetypal hero, like the protagonist featured in Pietro Di Donato’s Christ in Concrete (1939/1966), is principled, feels outraged by injustice and fights to protect society as well as for the values that are sacred to them. Rarely, if ever, are Italian Americans portrayed in the media as the upstanding and, at times, courageous citizens most Italian Americans are.

Despite the great artistic contributions of many Italian Americans to the Hollywood film industry, Italian Americans and their ancestors are continuously featured in the entertainment media as rogue outlaws who are driven by profit, greed, and competition to obtain power. These outlaws range free on the fringe of society, killing without conscience. Their drive for power outweighs any kind of moral value or sense of responsibility to the individual or to society.

For fully a century in feature films and network television, the Italian mobster/outlaw has psychologically carried America’s shadow. America’s collective disapproval of feelings, wishes and behaviors related to violence, greed, murderous rage, criminality and disregard for human life have been split off from the collective American psyche and displaced and projected onto the Italian American rogue/mobster. These are feelings, the expression of which all people are ambivalent about and deny in themselves. The most recent example of this phenomenon
is America’s ambivalent love affair with the hit HBO series *The Sopranos*.

*The Sopranos*, written and directed by third-generation Italian American David Chase (born David De Cesare), has stimulated many scholarly debates among Italian American intellectuals and other non-Italian academics. However, the debate has yet to include a psychoanalytic and social psychological perspective that might illuminate the dynamics of power and social status that perpetuate modern ethnic racism.

Late twentieth and early twenty-first century American corporate culture has bred individuals who commit “white-collar crime” with impunity, causing financial ruin for many innocent citizens by defrauding and betraying stockholders, employees and the public’s trust. The naked financial greed of these white-collar criminals, like the greed of mobster/outlaw, is unmediated by any sense of moral or social responsibility to the community. As corporate culture unravels and America’s family life is severely challenged by the voracious demands of postmodern corporate life, the nation’s attention is riveted on Sunday evenings by the Home Box Office series, *The Sopranos*. This award-winning television series has metaphorically put its finger on the psychological and social ills that currently threaten the integrity of our social fabric as a nation and a society.

*The Sopranos*, in the words of cultural critic Elaine Showalter, is a “cultural Rorschach test.” It is, observes professor of cultural journalism Ellen Willis,

> a parable of corruption and hypocrisy in the postmodern middle class, . . . But at the primal level, the inkblot is the unconscious. The murderous mobster is the predatory lust and aggression in all of us; his lies and cover-ups are ours; the therapist’s fear is our own collective terror of peeling away those lies. The problem is we can’t live with the lies, either.73

As Ellen Willis suggests, Tony Soprano is our mythical, lovable, murderous, psychopathic scapegoat. To maintain an inner sense of “goodness” and to defend against vulnerability, the viewing public develops the fantasy that “badness” is out there (in the Mafia) and can be controlled. This psychological process involves the defense mechanism of projective identification. If the viewer’s identification with the dark side of Tony Soprano remains unconscious then the viewer does not have to experience their own aggression, greed, dissimulation or emo-
tional emptiness. As a result, these unwanted parts of themselves can continue to be split off and projected onto the protagonists of The Sopranos. In turn, Italian Americans as a group can continue to be devalued. Devaluing Italian Americans as a group unconsciously permits dominant groups in American society to maintain their own sense of “goodness.”

Rather than consciously confront the political and moral crises in our society brought about by the extant corruption in our institutions, and the betrayal of the public’s trust by many of our corporate and political leaders, we prefer, as social psychological and psychoanalytic theory predict, to unconsciously locate our cultural demons in the ‘other.’ Television’s critically acclaimed, other, Tony Soprano, of The Sopranos, is our cultural other. According to Colman, the scapegoat [like Tony Soprano] is a collective creation, a symbolic compromise for many individuals’ negative projections which allows society’s denials of its own negative tendencies. Colman says:

A scapegoat is humanity’s societal vessel, for the [group’s] shadow . . . this has required sophisticated rationalizations based on what Erik Erikson (1972) has called pseudo speciation [speculation] to describe how a ruling or dominant group can justify locating the scapegoating function in its slave or any other group cast as different and lower than itself. We have many modern examples, the “greedy” Jew, the “stupid” black, the “corrupt” Italian . . . [emphasis added]

Italian Americans have served as repositories of American society’s unwanted or unacceptable feelings or impulses. Our national obsession for violence, and blood and our out-of-control appetite for wealth and power is siphoned off and projected onto Italian organized crime. Rather than consciously confront the corruption in our dominant society, we scapegoat organized crime. Arthur Colman (1995) writes:

We use victims to siphon off our darkest, guiltiest thoughts and feelings . . . we use scapegoats to carry our guilt, to assure ourselves that we are innocent victims.75

By definition unconscious material is painful because it is too painful to acknowledge: We want to be entertained and diverted from our national pain at any cost.
Stereotypical images of Italian Americans as mobsters also serve to support the maintenance of hierarchical social power arrangements in which Italian Americans retain a subordinate position to other European American whites. In a society where today’s robber barons may become tomorrow’s philanthropists, Tony Soprano, during a psychotherapy session with Dr. Melfi, concisely sums up the hypocrisy (from his perspective) of America’s capitalist system. Tony alludes to the historical experiences of Italian Americans that led him to choose an “alternate route to success.” Tony explains to Dr. Melfi:

Men like the Carnegies and the Rockefellers needed “worker bees” to build their cities and dig their subways to make them richer. But some of us refused these terms. Some of us wanted a piece of the action. We weren’t educated like Americans, but we had the balls to take what we wanted.76

Fierce, defiant, and arrogant, Tony the outlaw, like white-collar criminals (who often but not always stop short of murder), does not bow down to convention or the law. Tony’s observations also emphasize the differences between Americans and Italian Americans who did not acquire formal education (reinforcing the stereotype of intellectual ability stigmatization) in American institutions and, hence, are forced to value alternative forums of success such as lawful (and unlawful) entrepreneurship.

Carby (1987) writes that the purpose of stereotypes is not to reflect reality accurately but to serve as a disguise for societal reality. The disguise serves many purposes. It soothes the conscience of a society whose espoused ideals were blatantly contradicted by the behavior of its members. Many viewers who may be feeling trapped in their everyday conventional lives may vicariously identify with Tony’s freedom to operate successfully outside of many of today’s institutions in which power concentrated in the hands of a few increasingly trumps the values of our nation’s “meritocracy.” Tony’s success gives viewers a sense of how things could be if we were outlaws and took matters into our own hands.

The mythic Italian American “mobster kinship groups” like the “Sopranos and Corleones,” observes cultural critic Sandra Gilbert, “strike a special chord in the hearts of the heart of our country.”77 Might it be that in the spiritual wasteland of our twenty-first century, the deep and pervasive sense of loss of the value of human connection could only be confronted in the web of violence of the mythic mobster family?
On-screen portrayals of Italian American families where loyalty, honor, responsibility to the family, and preservation of kinship ties are placed above individual self-interest have always received acclaim from American audiences. However, most portrayals of the mythic Italian American family occur in the context of Mafia kinship groups or in dumbed-down network television series, such as the current Emmy award-winning series Everybody Loves Raymond (2003) (although Raymond is a professional sports writer, his career is peripheral to the central dynamics of the show which focuses on emotionally intense family relationships). In this context, Italian Americans are still regarded as an outgroup who are disrespected by the dominant majority group but are thought to possess socially redeeming qualities.78

The Sopranos perpetuate pernicious stereotypes of Italian Americans. The national and international distribution of the syndicated series has a devastating impact on Italian America: Negative stereotypes of Italian Americans are given “eternal life” by the recycling of The Sopranos and The Godfather films. This takes on added significance when we consider that social psychological studies demonstrate that when people do not have direct contact with an ethnic group, their attitudes about an ethnic group is formed by portrayals of that ethnic group in the mass media.79

Many scholars concur that The Godfather perhaps more than anything else written about Italian Americans (except perhaps for The Sopranos) has done the greatest harm to the image of Italian Americans. The 1969 publication of Mario Puzo’s novel The Godfather—which was on the New York Times bestseller list for sixty-seven weeks—and its commercially successful screen adaptations helped popularize the image of Italian Americans as gangsters. While twenty-one films featuring an Italian American main character as a mobster were produced between the end of the Second World War and the release of The Godfather in March 1972, at least 300 crime stories modeled on the saga of the Corleone family were produced between 1969 and 1975.80 Unfortunately, Mafia stereotypes of Italian Americans have been popularized by some of the most celebrated Italian American directors, Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, and writer Mario Puzo.81 These talented and creative artists may be perceived by some Italian Americans as having entered a Mephistophlean bargain of selling their souls to dominant American establishments in order to be successful. The Italian American community’s ambivalent perception of these great artists may oscillate between recognizing them as heroes and cultural role models to be
emulated and or as “Uncle Toms” who also betrayed Italian America by perpetuating negative stereotypes.

For many Italian Americans artists, like Coppola, Scorsese, and Puzo, to sustain the political sensitivity of an ethnic minority identity in the film industry may not be conducive to becoming successful players in the game of professional advancement. In the film industry (particularly during the 1970s), being a symbol or representative of all persons of Italian American ancestry could be conflictual: One can be torn between their symbolic image to their community and their own professional tasks and goals.

Italian American writers and filmmakers have employed varying methods in confronting and responding to their institutionally disadvantaged position as Italian Americans. For example, the great American filmmaker and director Frank Capra (e.g., *It Happened One Night* [1934]; *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* [1936]; *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* [1939]; *It's a Wonderful Life* [1946]) was born in Sicily in 1903 and emigrated with his family to America when he was six years of age. Not surprisingly, most of America, including Italian America, is still unaware that Capra was a first-generation Italian American!

Several years after graduating from the California Institute of Technology with a degree in engineering, he began his career as a filmmaker. While Capra’s film images and actors were as “American as apple pie,” his films were emotionally infused with humanistic Italian moral and social values including the values of compassion, patience, hard work, individualism, humility, courage in the face of adversity and self-sacrifice. Capra the immigrant, writes film critic Lee Lourdeaux, “championed Italian virtues for a greedy, profit-driven America”82 Lourdeaux observes that Capra was an idealist and a pragmatist who succeeded in Hollywood by (1) distancing himself from his ethnicity, (2) featuring “mainstream couples with Italian ideals”83 and (3) using “blonde, non-ethnic women and all-American men to put across his intensely Italian vision of the country.”84

Distancing from the Italian American community is understandable as an attempt at accommodation and survival. Despite Capra’s silence about his Italian American identity, he appeared to possess sufficiently healthy self-esteem to creatively construct a successful film career at a time in American history when anti-Italian prejudice was blatant. In order to gain credibility and support in the film industry, Capra portrayed nonvisibly Italian American characters in white skin. Although one might view Capra’s approach to success in the Hollywood film industry
as akin to “passing as a white non-Italian European,” the ethos of his films is intensely Italian.

However, one must also consider the psychological cost of “passing,” invisibility, and compartmentalizing one’s ethnic identity. The act of self-silencing represents another form of social oppression. The psychic energy a person is forced to expend to conceal important aspects of one’s life is considerable. In fact the psychological and cultural literature on people of color document the negative psychological effects of passing as a long-term mechanism for managing discrimination (Gomez, 1999; West, 1999).

MODERN ETHNIC RACISM

Social psychological research has demonstrated that since the 1970s a more subtle form of racism has developed in the United States and Europe. While discrimination and prejudice has not been eradicated, the normative principles governing the expression of blatant racist or prejudiced attitudes have changed. Specifically, people have learned to act or to appear unprejudiced while inwardly maintaining their stereotypical views—this phenomenon is called modern racism. In sum, people have learned to hide prejudice in order to avoid being labeled racist. Thus, blatant forms of racism are replaced with a modern form of objectivity that leaves the door open for subtle bias. Indeed there are many white Americans who intellectually reject racial bias and who strive to behave in fair and unbiased ways yet are unaware of their racial bias.

Social psychologists have demonstrated that subtle racism is much more insidious than overt racism because the perpetrator is unaware of his or her racial bias. For example, social psychologists Thomas Pettigrew and Roel Meertens (1995) demonstrated the existence of blatant as well as modern subtle racism in three major western European countries: France, the Netherlands and Great Britain. In all three countries, those who scored high on the blatant prejudice scale were in favor of sending immigrants back to their home countries and expressed interest in restricting the civil rights of immigrants. In contrast, those who scored high on the subtle racism scale but low on the blatant racism scale rejected immigrants in more covert and subtle ways. Specifically, while they were not in favor of sending immigrants back to their home countries, they were unwilling to do anything to improve their relations with the immigrant population nor would they go along with efforts to increase the civil rights of that population. Moreover, participants who
scored low on both blatant and subtle prejudice scales were prepared to take action to help immigrants remain in the country and were willing to proactively improve relations between immigrants and natives.

The subtlety prejudiced try not to be openly unfair but avoid meaningfully confronting targets of prejudice and their issues. The acting out of subtle prejudice toward Italian Americans is prevalent in “innocent jokes” and other cues indicating that Italian Americans are still perceived by dominant American society as an outgroup. For example, in her memoir *Were You Always an Italian?* (2000), journalist and essayist Maria Laurino writes about experiences in which her last name is frequently a target of Mafia-related “innocent jokes.” Laurino writes:

> For second and third generations and beyond being an Italian American is a deceptively difficult legacy . . . [although] organized crime represents a minuscule fraction of Italian Americans (as everyone says they know, but people actually seem not to have registered, judging from the number of Mafia comments about my Italian name). . . .87

The remarks described by Laurino make the subtlety of these forms of individual level prejudice hard to document: Italian Americans who call attention to such harassment often appear to other whites as “too sensitive.” Blatant discrimination is more easily documented.

The acting out of subtle prejudice toward Italian Americans in the public domain is also prevalent. In an interview with a journalist, former Governor Mario Cuomo related an experience regarding ethnic prejudice that he encountered with then Mayor John Lindsay. Mario Cuomo describes the encounter as follows:

> John Lindsay never understood it, he never understood it. He invited me to the [mayor’s] mansion to see *The Godfather* with Matilda. He was trying to get me to join his administration. I said, “How can you invite me to see *The Godfather*? . . . This guy who kills people, murders them, plucks their eyes out, drugs them, and he’s treated as a great guy, the whole community loves him. What are you saying with this movie?” He recalled that Lindsay replied, “Oh, it’s only a movie, you’re too sensitive.”88

Like most of the subtlety prejudiced, former Mayor John Lindsay’s subtle racism is insidious because he is blithely unaware of his ethnic bias.
Thirty years later, in October 2002, New York’s Mayor Bloomberg boycotted the Annual New York Columbus Day Parade when the parade’s organizers, the Columbus Foundation, objected to Bloomberg’s having invited Italian American actors Lorraine Bracco (Dr. Melfi) and Dominic Chianese (Carrado, Uncle Junior) to march in the parade as his guests of honor. Both actors are cast members of *The Sopranos*. The Columbus Foundation objected to the mayor’s having extended an invitation to these actors because they were cast members of a television program that openly defames Italian Americans. Mayor Bloomberg did not back down, he could not understand what the “fuss” was all about; he reasoned that he was honoring two accomplished Italian American actors; if they didn’t march, he wasn’t marching. The Columbus Foundation sought legal resolution to the conflict; the mayor withdrew from the Columbus Day parade in Manhattan and instead marched alongside both actors in the Bronx, Arthur Avenue, Columbus Day Parade. At no point in the public conflict did the mayor recognize or substantively address the issue of the defamation of Italian Americans. The mayor’s response and the media’s coverage of the conflict suggested that the parade’s sponsor’s were being “overly sensitive” about a fictive television series. The mayor and the media’s defensive response were to act as if the Columbus Foundation’s accurate perception of defamation was unwarranted. In so doing both the media and the mayor (as a representative of a government institution) failed to acknowledge their roles in perpetuating the defamation of Italian Americans. Until there is a willingness to understand that the defamation of Italian Americans is real, no resolution or reconciliation can take place.

As these anecdotes suggest, subtle ethnic racism exists not only at the level of the individual, but at the higher levels of institutions and culture. Cultural racism operates from the top-down and race prejudice operates from the bottom-up; their joint effect is institutional racism (Jones, 1998).89

**CONCLUSION**

In this essay I have argued that images of Italian Americans in the media have been determined for centuries by political, economic and historical contexts, and that these images are at variance with current and past southern Italian and Italian American realities. Negative stereotyping exerts an invisible yet psychologically powerful effect on Italian American’s psyches, our aspirations, life chances, self-image,
ethnic identity and self-esteem. Negative stereotyping of Italian Americans may also result in subtle forms of discrimination socially, professionally, and politically. Moreover, prejudice related to Italian Americans’ perceived connection to the Mafia has placed a stigma on individuals of Italian descent.

While Italian Americans may have not had to deal with everyday racism as experienced by visible persons of color, the persistence of negative stereotyping of Italian Americans is a form of subtle racism. It is essential that derogatory stereotypes of Italian Americans be understood for what they are: a reflection of subtle racism that powerful and racially dominant majority groups use to rationalize their power privilege (Banks & Eberhard, 1998). As an identity group we have yet to acquire sufficient power and influence in the social hierarchy to alter the institutional arrangements that perpetuate stereotyping of Italian Americans in the media. Professor of law David Richards (a third-generation Italian American) writes that the Italian American story has been obscured and deformed by the demands of Americanization under circumstances of injustice. In fact, Italian Americans were themselves victimized by racism, both in Italy and the United States, and have good reasons in contemporary circumstances to refuse a continuing cultural acquiescence in an American cultural racism that is as unjustly stigmatizing of them as it is of Americans of color.90

If we are to relate as equals—along with other groups in the United States then Italian Americans need to be represented fairly, honestly, and accurately in public and academic cultures. In order for this to occur, Italian Americans need to conduct a power analysis of our place in the social hierarchy. Such a power analysis can point to new arenas for action on legal, legislative, and political as well as on personal levels.

NOTES

2. C. G. Jung described ways in which individuals and cultures have shadows—qualities that are judged unacceptable and hence are hidden and denied. Cultures and individuals do not wish to acknowledge their own shadow, so they project them on to others, seeing those others as the problem.

3. Stereotypes are oversimplifications that we employ to make sense of the complex social environment that we live in. The process of stereotyping is thought to have evolutionary value in that, given our limited capacity to process constant complex stimuli in our environment, it allows us to take shortcuts and adopt certain rules of them to understand people. See Aronson et al. 2002.


11. Operario & Fiske, 42.


17. Colman, 7.

18. Colman, 5.
22. Paolo Verdicchio, 179.
23. Psychoanalyst Michael Adams Vannoy suggests that “race” or “color” will gradually become less relevant and “ethnicity” more significant as a “category” given the sheer number, diversity, and differences between cultures in the United States. Thus, problems related to becoming conscious of the “diversity of diversity” of ethnic groups is, in Vannoy’s view, best conceptualized as ethnicism. See Vannoy, Michael Adams. (1996). The multicultural imagination: Race, color, and the unconscious. New York: Routledge, 245.
26. Historian Humbert Nelli dates the origin of the Mafia in Italy to the historical period of post-unification Italy in 1860. Nelli observes that subsequent to unification the economic conditions of the masses worsened; impoverished and helpless, peasants and farmers sought a protector to look out for their interests in a time of need. A locally important person, a capo mafioso, became a patron of a large number of people. Government authorities and members of the ruling classes also exploited the Mafia as a means of controlling the peasants. For example, landowners hired mafioso to collect rents and intimidate workers. Gradually, the Mafia assumed control of large estates by paying absentee landowners and replaced many feudal owners as members of the new ruling class. While the Mafiosa engaged in noncriminal and nonviolent activities, their power inhered from the fact that they would “engage in violence and crime of any time to reach their goals” (11). Under these conditions, observes Nelli, the Mafia in Sicily “functioned and flourished as an extralegal (and parallel) form of government” (8). Moreover, in the United States, up until the 1920s, most of organized crime in America was controlled by the Irish. Italian immigrants who joined youth gangs in ethnic “colonies” in America were not, as many thought, former members of Mafia groups in Italy. According to Nelli (1976), the Black Hand [Mano Nera] gang members were common criminals, many of whom had criminal records in Italy not connected to Mafia activities. They preyed upon Italian immigrants through extortion and blackmail and were unsuccessful in extending their power outside of the Italian community (70). In the earlier part of the twentieth century, the Black Hand [Mano Nera] was neither as powerful or effective as post-prohibition Mafia groups. Italian domination of organized crime did not occur until the emergence of post-prohibition Mafia groups who formed powerful criminal syndicates, often in combination with Jewish associates. See Humbert Nelli. (1976). The business of crime. New York: Oxford University Press.


32. Native-born Americans hostile to newcomers or “new immigrants” were called “nativists.”


35. Banks & Eberhardt, 67.


44. Pasquale Verdicchio, 178.

45. The long-term psychological effects of the ambiguities of our racial status in American society are surfacing in the cultural productions of contemporary Italian American writers. For example, in her book, Taking Back My Name (1991), Italian American writer Maria Mazzotti Gillan addresses the social and psychological realities of growing up Italian American in the 1950s. In her poem, “In the Still Photograph, circa 1950,” she writes: “Even in the standard family picture/we do not look American” and in “Memory We Are Walking.” “We laugh and capture mulberries . . ./I am happy. I do not know./that in the houses neighboring the park/people have watched us. They hate/our dark skin, our immigrant clothes.” In “Growing Up Italian” she remembers how “I hoped for a miracle that would turn my dark skin light./that would make me pale and blonde and beautiful/. . . . I woke up cursing/all those who taught me to hate


47. Webb, 57.
51. Richie Perez, 146.
52. Richie Perez, 146.
53. French psychologists Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon developed the first cognitively based intelligence measure that was intended for use as a basic screening instrument to determine which children in then overcrowded public schools would benefit from a mainstream curriculum. The French Binet-Simon scale was translated and imported to America and significantly revised by Lewis Terman in 1911 and 1915. Terman standardized the revised test near Stanford, California, hence, the “Stanford-Binet” Intelligence Test. See Richard R. Valencia & Lisa A. Suzuki. (2000). In Intelligence testing in minority students: Foundation, performance, factors, and assessment issues. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.
54. Terman strongly supported the use of intelligence tests as educational tests for educational tracking via homogeneous tracking, and he also argued for tests to be used for determining one’s vocational fitness in the workforce.
56. Army Alpha and Beta tests adapted from the Binet-Simon intelligence scales assessed memory, comprehension, attention, judgment and reasoning.
59. Dr. Carl Brigham who developed the infamous Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) recanted the validity of the Army test data for use as an accurate measure of racial differences between the foreign-born and native Americans. In his words: “For purposes of comparing individuals or groups, it is apparent that tests in the vernacular [English] must be used only with individuals having equal opportunities to acquire the vernacular of the test. . . . This review has summarized some of the more recent test findings which show that comparative studies of various national and racial groups may not be made with existing tests, and which show, in particular, that one of the most pretentious of these comparative racial studies—the writer’s own—was without foundation.” Carl Brigham. (1930). Intelligence tests of immigrant groups. Psychological Review, 37, 165.
62. Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, House of Representatives, December 26, 27, and 31, 1923, and January 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 19, 1924. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924, 589-594. The most primitive part of the brain shared with all species is the brainstem surrounding the top of the spinal cord. This primitive structure regulates basic life functions such as breathing and metabolism. For Sweeney to allege that the “Latin” thinks with their spinal cord is to accord the “Latin” the same place on the evolutionary scale as that of a reptile. Sweeny’s remarks imply that the “Latin” lacks the neurological structures (the neocortex) and capacities that make us uniquely human, i.e., the human ability to think, process information, make abstractions, or learn from experience.

63. Hearings before the Committee on Immigration, 589-94.


67. Stefano Luconi, 49.


70. See Pietro Di Donato’s revolutionary and thinly disguised autobiographical novel, Christ in Concrete (1939) which immortalizes oppressed Italian immigrant laborers. Di Donato’s novel critiques the systems of capitalism and Catholicism that exploit and oppress immigrant laborers; the novel’s protagonists engage in an heroic struggle against the terrible injustices brought upon them by a “heartless” society. Di Donato was a bricklayer, novelist, playwright and short story writer. See Pietro Di Donato. (1996). Reprint. Christ in Concrete. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill.


74. Colman, 9.
75. Colman, 16.
78. Research conducted by Princeton University social psychologist Susan Fiske has shown that there are two kinds of outgroups in American culture today. The first kind of outgroup is respected but disliked; this type of outgroup is seen as competent but not sociable, e.g., Jews, Germans, Asians, militant gay men, nontraditional women (lesbians, feminists and career women) and militant African Americans. They are seen as competent but not sociable. The second type of outgroup is disrespected but liked, e.g., traditionally subordinate African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, traditional women, feminine gay men and the physically disabled. They are seen as incompetent but have some socially redeeming traits. Perceptions of Italian America as portrayed in the media clearly indicate that Italian Americans belong to the second type of outgroup, i.e., Italian Americans, like many minorities, are disrespected and viewed as incompetent but are liked because they are warm, emotional, family-oriented, artistic and interested in food. Ambivalent racism posits that an outgroup can be respected but disliked, or disrespected but not liked but not both liked and respected. See Susan T. Fiske. (1998). Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), Handbook of social psychology, Vol. 2. New York: McGraw Hill, 357-411.
80. Luconi, 49.
81. Second-generation Italian American writer Mario Puzo, born in New York City in 1920, was the son of illiterate Italian immigrants. As a critically acclaimed, but not well remunerated writer, Puzo wrote The Godfather while he was in his forties. Film director Francis Ford Coppola collaborated with Puzo on the scripts for the phenomenally successful and critically acclaimed films, The Godfather Part I (1972) and The Godfather Part II (1974). Third-generation Italian American film director Francis Ford Coppola grew up in a middle-class family and was the son of a successful symphony flutist (first flutist for Arturo Toscanini) who had always wanted recognition as a composer for films, “but his big break never came.” The Coppola family’s success ethic (to succeed in terms of money and public recognition), observes film critic Lourdeaux, would spur Coppola for years from one all-consuming project to the next.
83. Lee Lourdeaux, 132.
84. Lee Lourdeaux, 131.
85. Aronson, 492.
88. Maria Laurino, 35.
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