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Ghost Stories: Race, Immigration and Radicalism in Barre, Vermont

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GHOST STORIES:
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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates *Men Against Granite,* an oral history project undertaken by the Writers' Program in Barre, Vermont in the late 1930s and 40s. Thirty years earlier, Barre was an important site in the transnational Italian Left, but the *Men Against Granite* interviews present a curiously depoliticized place. The following pages explore national and local rhetoric that formed a composite "radical Italian," a racialized identity that set Italian immigrants apart and legitimized state repression. In response, second-generation immigrants, including project writer Mari Tomasi, used the interviews to reshape themselves and their pasts as "American," in part by eschewing subversive politics and conforming to regionalist narratives of the period.

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Introduction

It was March when I traveled to Barre, a small city in central Vermont. The weather changed quickly from cloudy to sunny and then again threatening rain on the day I went to see Elia Corti. When the sun disappeared, everything was gray, the sky, the landscape, and the granite. Corti's large monument is in the center of the oldest section of Hope Cemetery, the stunning and strangely beautiful burial ground for immigrant granite workers. I pulled my car to the side of the narrow road that snakes through the plots, careful not to go too far onto the grass, fearful of disrespecting the dead.

There he was: astonishingly lifelike, sweet and thoughtful. It's a beautiful memorial and it reminded me of the Latin word *animus*, meaning soul or courage, but more literally "to have breath." But this is only his statue of course. Corti the man was six feet under ground and 110 years gone, ashes and dust now.

I reached out to touch his gray granite face, cold under my fingers, and I gasped when a spider ran out from under his nose, scared from its hiding place in his stone nostril. And what was I doing here in Vermont? Trying to resurrect the dead? This artist of a man who'd lived not much longer than I, whose death reverberated across the Atlantic, who had never been forgotten in Barre, was perhaps in no need of resurrection.

I was first acquainted with Elia Corti in a graduate school class when we were assigned a series of oral history interviews of working men and women living in Barre. This collection, conducted by the Writers' Program, the successor to the Federal Writers' Project of the 1930s, came to be known as *Men Against Granite.*

The interviews were a great surprise. Despite almost a lifetime in New England and an undergraduate degree in American cultural studies, I was unfamiliar with Vermont's industrial past, and in particular its immigrant past, though, as I discovered in my studies, some of my Lebanese immigrant ancestors lived for a time in Barre.

For decades, my family has lived in Massachusetts and vacationed "north of Boston." In my childhood this region came to mean "vacationland," a place removed from the troubles of modernity and the rush of capitalism. I imbibed the national imaginary's idealized, nostalgic version of a quaint northern New England, crafted in the fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett, the children's books by Robert McCloskey, the popularized poetry of Robert Frost, the pages of *Yankee Magazine*, Currier and Ives, and more. In the 1930s in particular, just before the *Men Against Granite* oral histories were recorded, popular culture branded the region a bucolic yeoman paradise.

In the midst of the catastrophe and trauma of the Great Depression, images of a place removed from tumult achieved a particular potency. Regionalism in

general gained cachet during that time, and northern New England specifically developed new cultural meanings. As Michael Steiner argues, "regionalism seemed to become an American preoccupation during the great depression of the 1930s" satisfying "the need for a sense of place amid the stress and dislocation of the depression."[1] The rendering of northern New England as a distinct region, apart from national issues of the early twentieth century like modernism, urbanization and immigration, began in the 1920s and gained momentum during the Depression. Robert Frost's role as ambassador of the yeoman Yankee to both the middle-brow American public and the urban sophisticates who vacationed in northern New England played a large part in defining the region's identity. To do so, Frost expunged immigrants and ethnics from the pastoral world created in his poetry.[2] In the 20s and 30s, the writing of Dorothy Canfield Fisher, the images of Wallace Nutting in the States Beautiful series, *Nation's* State Series, and *Yankee Magazine* contributed to the image of Northern New England as quaint, white, pastoral, and unharmed by modernity.[3]

The state-sponsored "Unspoiled Vermont" campaign portrayed the state as a refuge from the problems of industrialization, heterogeneous immigration, and rapid urbanization plaguing southern New England. The Vermont Bureau of

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[1] Michael Steiner, "Regionalism in the Great Depression," *Geography Review* (1983): 430, 432-3.
[2] Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 267-280.
[3] Conforti, *Imagining New England,* 277-280.

Publicity officially adopted the word "unspoiled" in 1931 to capture the state's "chastity," as Charles Edward Crane, author of *Let Me Show You Vermont* (1937) put it.[4] President Calvin Coolidge capitalized on and solidified Vermont's reputation as pastoral ideal and American heartland. In an essay on Coolidge, *National Geographic* described Vermont as "the most truly American of our states" where "people have hardly changed in their essential elements in a century."[5] In 1935 *Yankee Magazine* appeared, and its readership expanded rapidly to nearly 30,000 in the early 1940s. The primary visual narrative of the magazine showed the old New England countryside and the traditionalism and simplicity of the Yankee folk, with no signs of modern life or mass culture.[6]

On one hand, the Federal Writers' Project, a division of the Works Progress Administration created in 1935 to ease unemployment among white-collar workers, provided a challenging counter-narrative to such conservative definitions of America and Northern New England. Not long after its inception, the FWP came under fire because of its challenge to the status quo and was ultimately dismantled by conservatives. The definition and parameters of national identity, representation, and power of speech were at the heart of the well-publicized ideological debate to preserve or destroy the FWP. For FWP officials,

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[4] Blake Harrison, *The View From Vermont: Tourism and the Making of an American Rural Landscape* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2006), 89.
[5] Conforti, *Imagining New England*, 283.
[6] Conforti, *Imagining New England,* 295.

American identity was broad, inclusive, and constantly evolving.[7] FWP texts venerated the "common man" and challenged narrow definitions of American culture by portraying and giving voice to diverse and marginalized peoples. FWP writers were encouraged to focus on everyday life and ordinary people. Refusing to document only the famous and influential, folklore editor Benjamin Botkin wanted to collect "a history of the whole people…in which the people are the historians as well as the history, telling their own story in their own words."[8] Upon diverse and often under-represented people Botkin conferred the power to create history and control narrative. Opponents of the FWP, like Texas Congressman Martin Dies and his constituents, saw this celebration of diversity as subversive, alien, and unpatriotic -- as Others trying to "possess" America and appropriate the power to define and discover it.

For national FWP officials, the Italian stonecutters of Barre, Vermont were exactly the kind of hard-working, working-class people the project wanted to introduce to America and celebrate. The skill and diversity of the Barre people was a source of patriotic pride and a way to distinguish a broad-minded American ethos from the intolerance of European fascism.

On the other hand, to some extent, even the liberal and expansive New Deal was involved with the quaint regionalism of the 1930s and the representation

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[7]Jerrold Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1, 19.
[8] Benjamin Botkin quoted in Hirsch, *Portrait of America,* 121.

of Yankee folk. In state guides especially, the FWP depicted what was purported to be a local, authentic culture in America, which dovetailed with more conservative portrayals of the Northern New England Yankee. FWP documents celebrated a master-narrative of American progress – and sometimes affirmed the popular images of Northern New England as a place removed. In these projects, "federally-employed writers … search[ed] for a true America … [for a] heroic tradition to reclaim … [and] forgotten heroes to follow."[9] Especially late in the 1930s, New Deal writers and photographers were complicit in portraying northern New England as a place unspoiled by modernity. As Joseph Conforti argues, "there are striking parallels between *Yankee's* uplifting images of the real New England during the depression and the work of the photographic division of the New Deal's Farm Security Administration." Roy Stryker, manager of the FSA's photodocumentary project, famously told Jack Delano in 1940 to take "autumn pictures …[of] cornfields, pumpkins … emphasize the idea of abundance – the

[9] Steiner, "Regionalism in the Great Depression," 431.

'horn of plenty' – and pour maple syrup over it – you know mix well with white clouds and put on a sky blue platter."[10]

Above: "Children Gathering Potatoes on a Large Farm" by Jack Delano. [11]

But *Men Against Granite*, at least on first examination, falls into the former category – WPA as resistance. When I encountered *MAG* in graduate school, the oral histories had finally been published, but only in 2004. From 1940 when the interviews were completed until that year, the written record of these sessions had merely occupied a box somewhere in the Library of Congress, accessed only occasionally by historians like Ann Banks. I was desperately curious: why hadn't these oral histories been published? It was my first

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[10]Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: the Politics of Documentary* (London: Verso, 1994), 43.

[11] Jack Delano. Children gathering potatoes on a large farm. Vicinity of Caribou, Aroostook County, Maine, October 1940. Reproduction from color slide. LC-USF351-63. LC-DIG-fsac-1a33844. FSA/OWI Collection. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

assumption that the non-publication of *Men Against Granite* had something to do with its contrary nature, with its evidence that northern New England was not what it seemed. The interviews portrayed immigrant and industrial workers, part of a global economy tied to the machine of capitalism and to the machine of its opposition: labor. In this way, *Men Against Granite* directly contested the idealized pastoral heartland of Dunnet Landing and "Birches." The stonecutters of Barre – unionized, Italian, socialist – dispute the regionalist image represented by the self-reliant-old-Yankee "who ain't leanin' on nothin'" on the cover of *Yankee Magazine* in August of 1939.[12] Although they were not avant-garde like James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, I guessed that the tales of life and work recorded in *Men Against Granite* exposed too challenging a counter-narrative to regional portrayals in the 1930s. In a way, that's true – it *was* the cultural challenged posed by *Men Against Granite* that kept it buried. But regionalism and Northern New England identity is only a small part of the story.

In part, *Men Against Granite* was not published because it – and all of the FWP oral histories, which documented immigrants, the working poor, ethnic enclaves and ex-slaves – challenged the idea that American identity is static, Anglo, prosperous and homogeneous. On the other hand, what I began to discover was that even if the oral histories had been published, they conceal much more than they reveal. As they are written, the interviews present a cultural challenge

[12] Conforti, *Imagining New England,* 305.

by giving voice to women, ethnically diverse recent immigrants, labor activists, and industrial workers. They break down the mythic vision of the region "north of Boston." But these interviews are curiously vague about the fascinating political and racial history of Barre, a story in many ways a microcosm of the entire country on the brink of modernity. There is a pervasive silence even in their speech.

As we'll explore in the pages that follow, the reasons for the silence are multifold, and some are easy to guess. By 1939, systematic state repression of immigration and of the political Left made both subjects taboo. To those who remembered the violent acts of suppression enacted in the First Red Scare, silence must have seemed the safest policy. Viewing this omission as merely a submissive reaction to the state, however, would miss the complexities of the interplay of immigration, race and political norms in this story. As the tale unfolds, we'll find that children of immigrants, stepping away from the shadows of Otherness in a new land, are not mute, but instead are changing the narrative. The second generation speaks in *Men Against Granite* – and their voices shape a new story.

In one sense, this thesis is a local history about a little town in Vermont. In another sense, the story of Barre illuminates the process by which popular history is created. Here, on a small scale, we can see the mechanisms of narrative at

work, creating and shaping race, region, ethnicity, and political norms. As Ann Banks remarks,

> Remembering is a process of creative construction…we don't retrieve our memories…we make them up…a storyteller is not the sole author of his tale: he collaborates with his audience in shaping the story. Every story … is a conversation, even when only one person does the talking.[13]

Banks here is talking about oral history, but she could as well be talking about the construction of the standard historical narrative itself. Remembering "New England," "Italian," "immigrant," and "anarchist" is also "a process of creative construction," labored on by many voices, from Robert Frost, to the local paper, to the WPA, to modern historians.

In the chapters ahead, we'll listen to the polyphonic storytelling surrounding Barre, trying to glean from the spoken that which is left unsaid.

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[13] Ann Banks, editor, *First Person America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991), i-ii.

Chapter 1: The Ghost of Barre's Radical Past

In 1940, an employee of the Vermont Writers' Program named John Lynch interviewed a grocer from Barre, Vermont. The informant remains anonymous, referred to by Lynch only as "The Old Italian." Sitting on a park bench, puffing on a pipe, the Old Italian points to an exquisite granite sculpture of the poet Robert Burns. The man's memories are awakened. He tells a story from the past – a ghost story – about the shooting of an Italian-American immigrant named Elia Corti. Corti was an artist, he says, a stonecutter trained in Milan, and it was he who carved that monument to Burns. With sadness the Old Italian reveals the circumstances of Corti's death: socialists and anarchists at a political rally, the emotional fervor of the crowd, shots fired by a man named Garetto, and Corti, an innocent observer, fatally wounded. He describes the beautiful memorial, an almost life-size likeness of Corti, carved by the grieving brother to mark the dead man's grave. Then, hesitantly, the Old Italian tells us about the Christmas after Corti's death, saying, "now I will tell you something maybe you won't believe. I don't blame you. Sometimes I don't believe it myself." It was late at night and he was walking from his store past the Burn's monument. There, standing by the statue, was the murdered man – or rather his ghost:

> It was Corti, plain as day I saw him. Just standing there, his head down a little, and looking at those panels he carved. Sad, he looked, standing there in

the snow… I wanted to say something but he was gone -- just like that![1]

* * *

The interview with "The Old Italian," entitled "Corti's Last Christmas," is one of more than fifty intended for an oral history collection called *Men Against Granite.* While "Corti" addresses some of the same topics as the other *Men Against Granite* oral histories, such as Italian-American immigration, stone-cutting, and the artistry of the Barre carvers, in many ways it stands out from all the other interviews, which are intimately personal, gritty retellings of labor, illness, love and family. "Corti's Last Christmas" is the only narrative in the collection that focuses almost completely on someone other than the narrator, and the only tale to employ the supernatural and the fantastic. Not coincidentally, it is also one of *Men Against Granite's* rare mentions of the political Left that thrived in Barre in the early twentieth century.

Although The Old Italian's tale focuses on the tragic death of a well-loved artist, in the background of this cryptic ghost story is a glimpse into a special moment in Vermont's history, both industrially and politically, a moment that is hard to discern from the *Men Against Granite* oral histories. "Corti's Last

[1] "Corti's Last Christmas." Interview by John Lynch, Edited by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: AUG 23 1940, *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?wpa:16:./temp/~ammem_Yuas::. (accessed November, 2012).

Christmas" takes us back to 1903, to the height of the granite boom in Barre when the town's population, and especially its immigrant population, was expanding rapidly. In 1903 and for the decade or so after that, Barre was a key location in the Italian-American radical movement. On the night Elia Corti died, two revolutionary Italian ideologues and their followers clashed in Barre, and what transpired there had wide ramifications among a transnational movement of Italian Leftists.

But Corti's peculiar tale, as told in *Men Against Granite*, is enigmatic in its discussion of the past. Constructed as an eerie ghost story, it is distanced from the present and from reality. By 1940, both Corti and Barre's radical history are described to the world as nothing more than ghosts: ephemeral, fleeting and now gone. The central question of this thesis is: why? Why is radicalism a mere ghost in *Men Against Granite*? And how could I, for example, a person who has lived in New England almost all her life and studied American history for years, be so completely ignorant about immigrant radicalism in Vermont?

* * *

In part I open my thesis with "Corti's Last Christmas" because of its alluring, sad strangeness. It was Corti and the Old Italian's tale that first drew me to Barre. Who was this man, this handsome, gifted artist and anarchist murdered at thirty-four, with a spirit powerful enough to haunt the living? But that was just

the first question; the Old Italian's story raises many others that extend past a small town in central Vermont to probe the nature of the immigrant experience and American political life. These questions, raised in part by a little ghost story, drive this project.

Since the 1960s, significant work has been done by scholars to investigate both immigrant history and the history of the Left in the United States. Works like the *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, *The Immigrant Left in the United States, The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism,* and *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture* offer readers detailed examinations of these fields.[2] In popular memory, however, the Italian-American Left is "a zone of profound silence," as Phillip Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer argue. Buried under conservative Mafioso stereotypes perpetuated in popular culture by movies like *The Godfather* or television shows like the *Sopranos*, or portrayals of Italians as insularly family- and food-oriented and non-political, the Italian-American Left disappears.[3] Especially in Vermont the radical immigrant past is obscured. Magazines, tourism brochures, film, television, and literature cultivate images of Northern New England as a quaint, Anglo-Yankee land of yeoman farmers, stone walls, white

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[2] See Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, ed. *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, ed., *The Immigrant Left in the United States* (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), Philip Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer, ed., *The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), Marcella Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture: The Idealism of the Sovversivi in the United States, 1890-1940* (NY: New York University Press, 2011).

[3] "Introduction," by Philip Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer, ed., *The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 2.

steeples, maple syrup, and crisp fall apples – a place without industry or politics, urbanization or diversity.

In 1939 there was a moment when the history of Barre might have come into public view and become part of American popular memory. The Vermont Writers' Program, which conducted the interviews for the *Men Against Granite* collection, was an off-shoot of the Federal Writers' Project, a division of the New Deal's Works Progress Administration. FWP supervisors intended to give voice to marginalized Americans and so compiled life stories of ethnic groups, the working-class, and former slaves. During the Left-leaning 1930s, *Men Against Granite* could have provided an opportunity for an important piece of Italian-American political history and Vermont ethnic history to be incorporated into the canon of public knowledge. But this did not happen. For a number of different reasons, the *Men Against Granite* interviews were not a moment of speech about a radical history, but a moment of silence.

In the following chapters, I examine the strange case of Barre, Vermont: both the vibrant political history of this town, and the oral history interviews that work to depoliticize it. I interpret the waning Left in Barre and the silence surrounding radicalism in the *Men Against Granite* interviews not just as a result of top-down repression from the state, but also as a form of self-silencing on the part of second-generation immigrants. Responding to pressure to conform to American cultural and political norms, children of immigrants shunned their

parents' radicalism as a vestige of foreignness and the Old World. Because of nativist conflations of ethnic difference, radicalism and criminality, and having different opportunities and aspirations than their parents, the second generation put behind them the immigrant community's involvement in Leftist politics. In particular, Mari Tomasi, a second-generation Italian and writer for the Project, plays an important role in shaping the non-political identity of Barre, Vermont. In many ways, Barre, Vermont offers a microcosm of radical and ethnic history lost from public memory, and a case study of immigration, dislocation, and the intersection of race, culture, politics and hegemony in the United States.

* * *

Men Against Granite was one of many oral history projects undertaken by the Writers' Program, the successor to the Federal Writers' Project. The FWP was a branch of the Work Progress Administration, established in 1935 to ease unemployment among professional workers. Although writers engaged in a variety of projects like *Men Against Granite,* the FWP is best known for its state guides. Something like a Baedeker, the guides contained essays, general descriptions of major cities, and auto tours. The guides had commercial as well as cultural aims and were intended to stimulate tourism. As cultural historian Jerrold Hirsch notes, in the midst of an economic depression the guides showed a mythic America of hope and recovery. They were, he argues, "paeans to progress" that

contributed to a master narrative of American growth and advancement. [4] Similarly, historian Richard Pells argues that the FWP guides are a representation of "the average American's ability to endure and triumph over calamity." According to Pells, this celebration of American spirit was an emotional reaction to crisis, in which "many men yearned … not for conflict but for community."[5]

While completing the state guide series, FWP employees also worked on a number of side-projects that responded to domestic and international events by championing diversity and the "common man" in America. Project writers collected oral histories describing life amidst a Depression; narratives told by ex-slaves about life in bondage; ethnic studies investigating the social customs of various groups; and rural and urban folklore. Among the materials published or intended for publication are anthologies like *America Eats, Men at Work, Hands That Build America, From These Strains, Lexicon of Trade Jargon*, and *Pockets in America*.[6] In these works the FWP compiled life histories and personal narratives from people of different regions, ethnicities, and occupations to suggest a nation that, while diverse, was unified by common themes.

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[4] Jerrold Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 65-7.
[5] Richard Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 315. Quoted in Hirsch, *Portrait of America,* 198.
[6] See "About the Federal Writers' Project," Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://lcweb2.loc.gov/wpaintro/wpafwp.html (accessed November, 2012).

Like other media from the decade, the anthologies were shaped by the Great Depression - an economic collapse that called unrestrained capitalism into question. Their response was to celebrate the proletarian working class. As William Stott observes, most FWP narratives featured neither the unemployed nor the middle-class, but focused on the "resourceful, unembittered men and women coping with social disaster."[7]

Despite their hopeful and often patriotic tone, FWP writings were not meekly conformist. They challenge narrow definitions of American culture by portraying, representing, and giving voice to diverse and marginalized peoples. According to historian Ann Banks, by compiling oral histories of people of various races, ethnicities, regions and occupations into anthologies as they did, the FWP intended "to instruct as well as describe." The Project pursued a specific social and cultural agenda: to portray a plural society. Anthologies did not propose a melting pot of Americanization, but "individuals joined together in a nation of nations." [8] Project officials presented this portrait of America with a purpose specific to the moment: their aim was to foster tolerance and democracy to prevent European fascist attitudes from reaching the United States.[9] Refusing to document only the famous and influential, Benjamin Botkin, the project's folklore editor, wanted to collect "a history of the whole people…in which the people are

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[7] William Stott quoted in Ann Banks, *First Person America* (New York: Norton, 1991), xii.
[8] Banks, *First Person America,* xvi.
[9] See Banks, *First Person America*, xvi.

the historians as well as the history, telling their own story in their own words."[10] In oral histories like *Men Against Granite*, in slave narratives, in collections of local and diverse foodways like *America Eats*, the FWP provided immigrants, ethnic enclaves, African-Americans, and the rural poor a platform for speech and a position in American culture. Upon diverse and often under-represented people Botkin conferred the power to create history and control narrative.

* * *

Like other FWP undertakings, *Men Against Granite* adds to a body of work that is both liberally inclusive of diversity and sympathetic to class, and at the same time conforms to a master narrative of American progress that celebrates hard work, ingenuity, and the contributions of the individual laborer. True to 1930s folklore projects, *Men Against Granite* is a study of working class and ethnic Americans that focuses on their common connection to the granite mining and carving industry in Barre, Vermont. In just over a year, from 1939 to early 1941, Roaldus Richmond, the supervisor of the Vermont Writers' Project, John Lynch, and Montpelier native Mari Tomasi conducted the majority of the interviews. Tomasi and Richmond wrote and edited the life stories. Tomasi in particular became an interpreter and voice for Barre's Italian-American community not only through *Men Against Granite* but also through her later

[10] Benjamin Botkin quoted in Hirsch, *Portrait of America,* 121.

writing. She used her experiences growing up in Montpelier – herself the child of immigrants from Turin, Italy – and the information collected in her interviews to write both fictional and non-fictional accounts of "The Granite City."[11]

In the *Men Against Granite* collection, Richmond, Tomasi and Lynch interviewed first and second generation Italians, Scots, French-Canadians, Irish, Spaniards, Syrians and Swedes, and a handful of Anglo Americans. All of the informants are tied to or affected by the granite industry in some capacity. Some are quarrymen, who extract the granite from the earth, or cutters and carvers who refine the stone. About forty percent of the informants are women, and many of these are wives or widows of granite-workers. Some are children of stonecutters. A few of the informants, such as the women in "After All These Years" and "Father Says" are office workers. The Mayor of Barre is also interviewed. Of the interviewees, Italians represent the largest ethnic group; thirty percent of the informants identify themselves or are described by the writers as Italian-Americans. The next-largest ethnic groups are Scottish and French Canadian, each comprising about fourteen percent of interviewees.[12] The narratives address a number of recurring themes and common topics, especially the dangerousness

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[11] For more biographical information on Mari Tomasi, see Paul Heller, "Mari Tomasi," unpublished paper, from the Aldrich Public Library, Barre, Vermont, and Alfred F. Rosa, "The Novels of Mari Tomasi," in *American Woman, Italian Style: Italian Americana's Best Writings on Women*, ed. Carol Bonomo Albright and Christine Palamidessi Moore (NY: Fordham University Press, 2011).

[12] *Men Against Granite* oral histories, Library of Congress American Memory Website, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/d?wpa:0:./temp/~ammem_stkm: (accessed October, 2013).

of industrial work, the plight of widowed women, the resiliency of common people, ethnic life, and the experience of immigration.

* * *

With poetry and poignancy the oral histories depict the sacrifices made by working men and women to granite labor, and demonstrate the contributions of ethnic Americans to the country's industrial and material progress. From Richmond and Tomasi's interviews we learn that the granite-workers of Barre were skilled carvers and quarrymen; they took pride in their talent; it offered them a measure of immortality; and the relationship between craftsman and craft was complicated by the inherently dangerous nature of the work. Like coal miners, granite workers are exposed to dust that destroys their lungs and makes them susceptible to pulmonary disease. Silica dust is released when granite is cut and carved, and those who are most highly skilled and do the most intricate carving are most exposed. The workers call this malady "stonecutter's T.B." It affects all granite-cutters, and before suction hoses to remove the dust were required by law in carving sheds in the late 1930s, men typically died very prematurely – many of them before the age of fifty.[13] In Tomasi's interviews especially the paradox of workers' love of their craft and fear of its deadly effects surfaces repeatedly.

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[13] Wendy Richarson, "'The Curse of Our Trade': Occupational Disease in a Vermont Granite Town," *Vermont History* Vol. 60, No. 1 (Winter 1992): 5.

Just as Corti was transformed to stone by the beautiful monument his brother carves, workers merge with granite in the figurative language of many of the interviews, symbolizing both their skill and sacrifice for their work. For example, a "Scotch Quarryman's Widow" from the interview entitled "Four Women" says:

> Have you ever watched a good quarryman climb up and down those granite walls? It's worth your time. I used to hold my breath watching them; I still do. I know one old man, a Frenchman, who's been here, he says, since 1892, he swings a couple of 5-ft. iron bars across a shoulder, and steps down those dangerous walls without so much as laying a finger to the granite for support. He works in a small quarry. Sometimes his hat, face and clothes are so grey with dust that he looks like a loosened piece of the stone wall, rolling to the bottom.[14]

Like "The Old Italian" who tells Corti's tale, this woman expresses awe at the expertise associated with granite work. The Frenchman's feats of strength, skill and daring put him at one with the granite: he looks like a "loosened piece of the stone wall." Work done artfully offers a sense of pride and collective experience, not just for the worker, but for his wife as well. And for good workers, stonecutting is a way to become a part of something lasting, something greater than self. In this way, labor and laborer are romanticized, as is the

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[14] "Four Women," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: SEPT 3, 1940, *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002728/; (accessed April 2014).

contribution of the working-class. On the other hand, the worker loses himself – his physical body – to the granite.

It is this ambivalence that makes the narratives so poignant. In part, granite-cutting is a source of dignity and identity, but, moreover, it is a necessity – to live one must work. This very work, that offers both the immortality of art and a necessary livelihood, is also a constant reminder of mortality and a solemn bearer of death. Work in the quarries is dangerous: men are maimed or die in industrial accidents. In the sheds it is worse: "stonecutter's tuberculosis" inevitably kills carvers in their middle-age. Ironically, creating lasting monuments kills the carvers. They are, in a sense, constantly crafting their own tombstones. As one of the widows interviewed says, "it was like burying yourself in a stone grave and hardly knowing there was a world and sun around you."[15] Or, as Mary, an informant in "Odd Job Man" says, "a stonecutter spends hours working on a memorial for the dead, and every one of these hours is shortening his own life."[16]

Just as the danger of work forms a common theme in the interviews, so does the plight of women widowed after the early deaths of their husbands. Women often speak of granite work with respect but bitterness, and, after the premature loss of their husbands, many widows understandably do not want their

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[15] "Four Women," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: SEPT 3, 1940, *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002728/; (accessed April 2014).
[16] "Odd Job Man," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: AUG 20, 1940, *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002747/; (accessed April 2014).

sons to be granite workers, nor want their daughters to marry granite workers. While men speak of the danger with bravado, female informants, perhaps because they do not have to go to work each day in the quarries, speak more readily of the destruction wrought by the granite industry. As a French letterer's widow says of her husband:

> He made good money, but I wasn't happy having him in the sheds. It's bad, especially for a man with a family, and most of the French stonecutters around here have large families. Sometimes I think granite isn't worth all the sorrow it brings, but it's there in the earth, it's worth money to the owners, and if a man works there, well--there's no one to blame but himself. My husband used to say so, he still said so when he was flat on his back. You'd think it would have made him bitter. It didn't. He was resigned to it. He accepted it as something he had expected all along. He didn't mind talking to me about it, but when his friends visited him--other stonecutters--neither he nor they would mention the sickness that takes so many of them.[17]

Read in the context of the Federal Writers Project and the Great Depression, *Men Against Granite's* focus on the great human toll of granite work is an expression of concern over exploitation of the proletarian, and the great shared sense of just how hard it is to make ends meet.

While concerned about the effects of industry, the stories are also a celebration of the pluck, ingenuity and productivity of the ethnic working-class.

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[17] "Four Women," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: SEPT 3, 1940, *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002728/; (accessed April 2014).

Everyone in *Men Against Granite* is working hard to eke out a living and getting by without charity: from artists like Corti, to those who have risen from stonecutters to shed owners, like Mr. Tornazzi in "An Italian Shed Owner," to "Umbrella Pat" and "Peddler Jenny," the poor wanderers who, respectively, mend umbrellas and sell thread.[18]

Tomasi in particular depicts women's ability to overcome hardship and the effects of the granite industry on women. Without job experience or marketable skills and with households and children to support, widows resourcefully find ways to make ends meet. Some take in roomers or boarders, or trade on their cooking skills and host "Italian Feeds" for non-Italian Americans, or sell alcohol illegally. One Spanish widow, who learned to crochet from the nuns in Spain, makes clothing for a living.[19]

As the Scottish store clerk in "Speaking of Credit" says, there are "very few who take charity" in Barre.[20] In fact, the only really non-productive members of Barre society are show-cased in "Country Club Crowd" by Roaldus Richmond.

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[18] All *Men Against Granite* oral histories mentioned in this paper can be accessed at the Library of Congress American Memory Website: http://www.loc.gov/collections/federal-writers-project/?q=men+against+granite&sb=title_s&c=50. See "An Italian Shed Owner," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: AUG 12, 1940, *Men Against Granite*. "Umbrella Pat," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: SEPT 21, 1940, *Men Against Granite*. "Peddler Jenny," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: AUG 12, 1940, *Men Against Granite*.

[19] See especially "Four Women," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: SEPT 3, 1940, *Men Against Granite*, and "Italian Feed," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: SEPT 21, 1940, *Men Against Granite*.

[20] "Speaking of Credit," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: SEPT 30, 1940, *Men Against Granite*.

He derisively portrays these upper-middle-class socialites as consumers, symbolized by their trite conversations and strong martinis. Here he offers what is perhaps the least veiled commentary in the entire collection. His narration reads, "The beautiful cemeteries of Barre were filled with the men, prematurely dead, who had drilled and chiseled and carved the granite, that these people might live in ease and luxury."[21]

In addition to celebrating the common man, like other FWP folklore projects, *Men Against Granite* contributes to a master narrative of American progress through immigrant success stories and themes of the American dream. For example, in "A Barre Family" – a title suggesting wholesome normality – Joanna Loeti, the owner of a flower shop, tells her family story:

> "The first Leoti to come to Barre was great-uncle Pietro. Around 1880. It was not only a better living he was after, he was young and eager for travel and new sights… He heard stories of the hills of Vermont, the white winters and pleasant summers like those of his northern home …the next year he managed to go to Barre. He found his own people congenial, and the town in the boom days of its granite activities, ideal for a business venture. And beyond the town limits, green stretches, forests, and the quiet he loved."[22]

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[21] "Country Club Crowd," Interview by Roaldus Richmond, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: AUG 20, 1940, *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002683/; (accessed April 2014).

[22] "A Barre Family," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: AUG 23, 1940, *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002743/; (accessed April 2014).

Pietro, joining in the collective American-immigrant success narrative, comes to the U.S. for a better life and for adventure. He finds not only commercial prosperity but unspoiled nature. Now his great-niece, Joanna, is a successful businesswoman in Barre. She continues: "For the most part these stone-working immigrants give their children a good education. Some prepare for colleges and universities; most of them take commercial courses." In this narrative, the immigrant generations' hard work is translated into a better life for their children in the American land of opportunity.

Similarly, the Irish-immigrant stonecutter in "Something Better for My Boy" says:

> My boy wants to take up aviation now… I'm glad he don't want to cut stone. Not that I'm ashamed of my trade. I'm proud of it. But for my boy I want something better, you know, the way any man does for his son. That's why I don't mind the hard work…[23]

Even amidst a Great Depression, both Joanna and the Irish stonecutter depict America as a place of social mobility and economic possibility.

Despite these narratives of progress and prosperity, *Men Against Granite* and the Tomasi interviews in particular also deal with the hardships of immigration and assimilation. For example, in the narrative "I Can Skate Loops

[23] "Something Better For My Boy," Interview by Roaldus Richmond, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: AUG 5, 1940, *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002656/; (accessed April 2014).

Around That Guy," second-generation Gabriella, a junior in high-school, tells Tomasi that she prefers to go by the nickname Gay:

> '[It's] Gabriella, really,' she confided, 'but I don't like it. It's too foreign sounding. Everybody calls me Gay except my mother and father…Gabriella Pasquanelli, that's a name for you! It doesn't sound like me at all, does it? If I ever suggested changing my last name my father'd raise the roof off the house. There was a family lived next door to us with the name Mondocani. It means world of dogs. When the kids got grown up they changed their name to Mondi. I don't blame then any. Father thought it was disgraceful, I mean changing the name. He said he was ashamed to own them as Italians.'[24]

While Gay's parents hold tight to the traditions of the Old Country and fear losing their cultural identity, Gay, a second-generation immigrant, born and public-school educated in the U.S., is embarrassed by her parents' foreignness. Her identity is not Italian, but American; even her own name is foreign to her.

Likewise the interview "Teacher – Retired" reveals assimilative pressure felt by children of immigrants, especially at school. Teacher Alice Boardman relates a story about a second-generation Italian-American girl named Monica who refuses to go to school wearing the gold earrings traditional for Italian women because she is teased about them by her classmates. Initially her mother will not let her take them off, but eventually she relents. Alice says, "in Monica's young mind the discarding of these earrings must have been the final step towards

[24] "I Can Skate Loops Around That Guy," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: OCT 14, 1940, *Men Against Granite*.

Americanization. She lost her shyness and self-consciousness. At recess she left her corner and played with the rest of the children." Alice also describes Barre as a "melting pot," where years ago "some of the children dressed in the old country style" but now "you're hardly able to distinguish one nationality from the other."[25]

Read together, the *Men Against Granite* interviews present a portrait of a diverse town united by its association with a common industry. The narratives are full of powerful ironies and contradictions: although great carvers are venerated, stone-cutters and their wives wish for something better for their children. Worker's health issues are exposed, but labor is also romanticized: hard work is a source of pride, and even dying for that work – instead of taking charity or relying on mutual aid – is ennobled. Ethnic heritage is showcased, but as a contribution to a unified America of progress and opportunity.

As beautifully as Barre is captured in *Men Against Granite,* and although ethnic life and immigrant experience is a focus of the oral histories, there is very little discussion of the Leftist politics that were an important part of both the intellectual and social experience of many new Italian-American immigrants. Also not mentioned are the cultural institutions that reinforced political life within the ethnic enclave, such as the Mutua Soccorso (Mutual Aid) society or the events at the Socialist Labor Party Hall. In the rare instances that the Left is mentioned, it

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[25] "Teacher – Retired," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: AUG 12, 1940, *Men Against Granite*.

is either in a ghost story (in Corti's case), in a string of misinformation, or denigrated as a crazy time in the history of the Italian-American community.

Within the context of the other interviews, "Corti's Last Christmas," the narrative that opens this chapter, is symbolic of the attitude toward radicalism in *Men Against Granite*. By 1940, the Left is nothing more than a ghost. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, the movement was nurtured and flourished in this small town in central Vermont.

* * *

In recounting the death of Elia Corti, who was beloved in Barre and recalled as one of its best artists, "The Old Italian" describes an incident in October, 1903 when political sentiment ran strong and, in this one instance, boiled over into violence. He describes the night this way:

> The trouble started between the socialists and anarchists. It was an old feud that started when the socialists built a block on Granite Street for their meetings. Garetto was a socialist. A man named Serrati owned a socialist newspaper - Il Proletario - in New York. He called the anarchists some bad names. Anyway, one Saturday night in 1903 Serrati was coming to give a speech in this socialist building. He didn't get there at 7 o'clock sharp, so some of the men they began to holler and yell. There were lots of anarchists at the meeting, too. It was advertised for every laboring man to come. The noise got worse, and some of the men got mad. The excitement was at a mad point. Then this Garetto, he pulled out a gun -- a .32. The men told him to stop. Corti was standing by the door. Not yelling, not even talking, they say. Anyway, Garetto fired

> two shots. One hit a man named Vochini under the arm. Not a bad wound. The other hit Corti in the stomach. The doctors couldn't find the bullet, and Corti died at midnight. Only thirty-four years old.

This moment is a startling one, and in "The Old Italian's" telling the artistry of Corti and his tragic death become the focus of the story. Behind this dramatic tale, however, is the less sensational but truly fascinating history of the Italian-American Left in Barre.

In 1875, twenty-eight years before Elia Corti died, the railroad reached Barre and for the first time the subterranean wealth of this village in central Vermont could be transported and commodified. The quality and purity of Barre granite is exceptional: composed of mica, feldspar and quartz, it is almost as hard as sapphire and nearly free of impurities like iron that degrade with exposure and time. The feldspar gives the granite its gray color, called "Barre gray." Crystallized grains create an unusually uniform texture, making it a desirable material both for building and for intricate carving. The quantity of granite in central Vermont is also noteworthy: Barre sits on a deposit approximately three miles long and one mile wide, allowing for the extraction of enormous solid blocks.[26] International experts describe Barre as the "greatest concentrated deposit of high quality gray granite in the world."[27]

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[26] Rod Clarke, *Carved in Stone: A History of the Barre Granite Industry* (Barre, VT: Rock of Ages Corporation, 1989), 4.
[27] Clarke, *Carved in Stone*, from the preface by Kurt M. Swenson, no page number.

So, in the 1880s and 90s, after the railroad line connected with Barre, quarrymen and carvers were hailed from around the world to work this exceptional granite. They came first from Aberdeen, Scotland, and then from Northern Italy. The men that came from Italy had been schooled in the working of Carrera marble. Some of them were artists, trained in the fine arts academies of Milan. They brought with them their tools and their skill, their language, their culture, and their politics.[28]

Elia Corti was among this wave of Italian immigrants. Corti was born in Viggiu, Italy in 1869. He immigrated to the U.S. and settled in Barre in the early 1890s, and on May 1, 1894 married Ernesta Maria Comi.[29] A highly trained and skilled carver when he reached the United States, Corti was first employed by the Barclay Brothers firm. Corti's most famous work, completed in 1899, is the Robert Burns Memorial that stands in front of what is now the Vermont History Center on Washington Street in Barre. The Memorial was commissioned by the Robert Burns Society, designed by a Scotsman named J. Massey Rhind, and carved by Corti and Samuel Novelli. Novelli carved the body of the statue, while Corti carved the intricate and precise panel details on the base.

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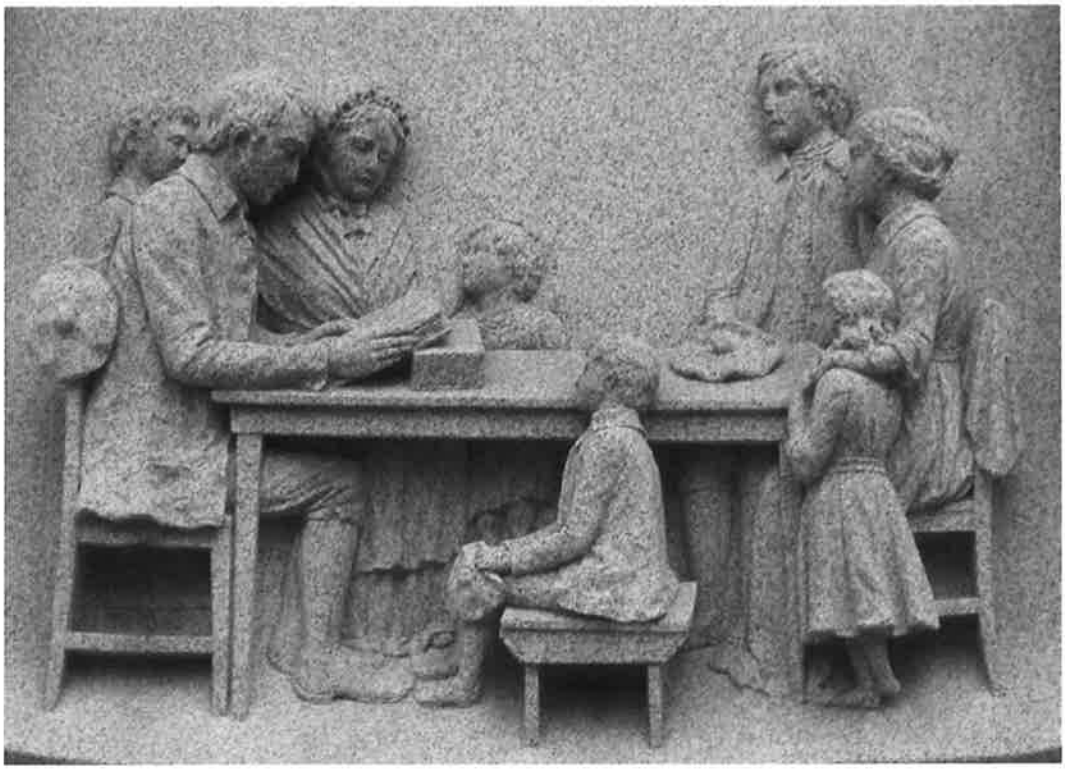
[28] Carol Maurer, "A More Perfect Union Hall," *Preservation: The Magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation* Vol. 53, Issue 5 (September, 2001): 54.

[29] Marriage certificate and Ellis Island immigration records for Elia Corti and Ernesta Maria Comi, family documents in the Lelia Corti Comolli Papers, Aldrich Public Library, Barre, Vermont. Also see *Barre Evening Telegram*, "Eli Corti," October 5, 1903.

After carving the Burns Memorial, Corti and Novelli went into partnership and opened their own business.[30]



Above: "The Cotter's Saturday Night" carved by Eli Corti. Below: Robert Burns carved by Samuel Novelli.[31]

[30] *Barre Evening Telegram*, "Eli Corti," October 5, 1903.
[31] All pictures by author.

The Burns statue is charismatic and handsome, an informal portrayal of the poet in his shirt-sleeves in mid-stride, his coat tossed over his arm, his eyes down, lost in thought. The high-relief panels below depict Burns' life and work in

exquisite detail: his cottage in Ayr, Scotland, and scenes from "The Cotter's Saturday Night," "To a Mountain Daisy," and "Tam O'Shanter's Ride." The

sculpture is dynamic, alive – a work of art. In only a decade in the United States, Elia Corti flourished as a talented artist and prosperous merchant – a traditional "immigrant success story." And, like many other Italian-Americans in Barre and across the country, Corti was also a political radical.

Corti and his Italian peers emigrated from a nation in transition. For centuries, foreign rule and political and economic oppression had fostered distrust of institutionalized power and government among Italian working people.[32] In Northern Italy, peasants were subjugated by the Catholic Church and the *padroni*, a class of wealthy landowners.[33] National unification in 1861 was projected to bring stability to the country and prosperity to the people, but this was not the case. In part because of the expansion of the American economy, Italy experienced a severe agrarian crisis in the 1860s and 1870s. The newly formed government instituted a flour tax in 1868, inspiring protests and demonstrations in the North that were brutally suppressed. The repressive conditions of that era radicalized republicans who had favored unification, and encouraged the transmission of new political ideologies: anarchism and socialism. Russian

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[32] Marcella Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture: The Idealism of the Sovversivi in the United States, 1890-1940* (NY: New York University Press, 2011), 9-10.

[33] Paul Heller, *Granite City Tales: Writings on the History of Barre, Vermont* (2012), 156. See also: Paul Heller, "Preaching the Gospel to Anarchists and Socialists: Baptist Missionaries in Barre, 1899-1916," *Vermont History*, 2010.

collective-anarchist Mikhail Bakunin was especially influential to Italian political thought.[34]

As Northern Italians immigrated to the United States, Elia Corti among them, they brought with them their leftist political views, forming a transnational radical movement in which political ideologies were reinforced by cultural and social experiences, and concretized by immigrant life in the New World. Although adherents represented a spectrum of left-leaning beliefs, they shared the same basic goals: to end capitalism, emancipate workers, and build a socially and economically egalitarian society. While Italians encountered these views in their home country, it was their experience as immigrants, facing racism, ethnic discrimination and poor economic conditions, that solidified their radicalism. Political views merged with and were bolstered by other social aspects of immigrant culture like the press, drama, clubs, festivals and concerts. Traditions and institutions such as mutual aid societies and food cooperatives both provided physical and emotional sustenance to Italian immigrant groups, and transmitted and reinforced anarchist and socialist beliefs.[35]

Between the time Elia Corti arrived in Barre in the mid-1890s and the time of his death in 1903, the Italian immigrant community there had become well-established, and the town had become a thriving hub of radical thought and activity. Marble workers from Carrara, Massa and Tuscany who had come to

[34] Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture,* 7-12.
[35] Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture,* 1-2, 51.

Vermont to cut granite established an "anarchist haven" in Barre in 1894.[36] As a symbol of this, the Socialist Labor Party Hall on Granite Street, built by Italian stoneworkers, was completed in 1900. (Insert pictures.) Seven hundred Italians attended its opening ceremony.[37] The Hall quickly became a center of Italian life in Barre. It not only hosted political lectures, but also was a site for social gatherings, dances and weddings; it operated a cooperative store; and English lessons were given there. It hosted weekly balls, most of them fundraisers for the families of stonecutters who had died of silicosis. In later years, the store supported workers through long-term labor strikes in the 1920s and 30s.[38]

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, at the same time carvers were drawn to Barre for work and wages, radical leaders from Italy immigrated to the New World to flee political persecution. One of these refugees was idealist and ultra-activist Luigi Galleani, a charismatic, internationally influential leader of the Italian anarchist movement. Galleani arrived in the U.S. in 1901 and settled first in Patterson, New Jersey. While there he edited the Italian-language anarchist newspaper *La Question Sociale* and worked as a labor activist, and in 1902 he was charged with inciting riots among striking silk

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[36] Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture,* 16.
[37] *Nature Transformed: Edward Burtynsky's Vermont Quarry Photographs in Context*. Ed. Juliette Bianco and Pieter Broucke. Hanover. University Press of New England. 2012. 32
[38] Heller *Granite City Tales,* 90, and *Nature Transformed*, Ed. Bianco and Broucke, 32.

workers.[39] In the aftermath of the 1901 assassinations of King Umberto of Italy and U.S. President William McKinley by anarchists, strong anti-radical sentiment was widespread in the United States, making Galleani the subject of special scrutiny. With an outstanding arrest warrant in New Jersey, Galleani fled first to Canada and then to Barre because of the town's by then ardent and well-established anarchist community.[40]

In Barre, Galleani began publication of the newspaper *Cronaca Sovversiva*. Italian-American scholar Marcella Bencivenni calls this paper "the most influential organ of Italian anarchism in America." *Cronaca* was distributed in the U.S., Europe, South America and Australia, and included articles from international radical intellectuals such as Peter Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin, Errico Malatesta.[41] *Cronaca* was published in Barre from 1903-1912.[42] Carlo Abate, a talented local artist who contributed illustrations and designed the paper's masthead, was listed as the publisher of the paper to conceal Galleani's identity and whereabouts.[43]

Galleani viewed capitalism as a system of exploitation that was fundamentally flawed and could not be reformed from within. In his newspaper

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[39] Paul Heller, "Luigi Galleani and the Anarchists of Barre" in *The Barre-Montpelier Times Argus*, April 30,2010. http://www.timesargus.com/article/20100430/THISJUSTIN/100429957 (accessed September, 2013).
[40] Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture,* 16-17.
[41] Heller, "Luigi Galleani and the Anarchists of Barre."
[42] Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture,* 16, 241.
[43] Heller, "Luigi Galleani and the Anarchists of Barre."

and in lectures he preached "propaganda of the deed," or the overthrow of capitalism by violence and insurrection in order to create a just world. He and his adherents, the "Galleanisti" (who would include the famous Sacco and Vanzetti) rejected all forms of organization and hierarchical authority, including the government, the church, and even labor unions. Their motto was "neither God nor master."[44] From his home in Vermont, Galleani became the "de facto leader of American anarchism."[45]

Within the Italian colony in Barre, there was also a distinct socialist faction. While both anarchists and socialists sought a just society through alternatives to capitalism, they argued bitterly over the methods for achieving this goal. Anarchist followers of Galleani rejected all forms of authority and all attempts at reform; Italian socialists argued for the appropriation of state power by a workers' party.

Among the prominent leaders of the socialist movement in America was Italian immigrant Giacinto Menotti Serrati, who founded the Italian Socialist Federation in 1902. As editor of *Il Proletario*, Serrati was largely responsible for the spread of revolutionary socialism in the United States.[46] In October of 1903, Serrati travelled to Barre to give a lecture at the Socialist Labor Party Hall, a building constructed by his followers. Despite their shared opposition to

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[44] Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture,* 16-17.
[45] Heller, *Granite City Tales,* 39
[46] Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture,* 22.

capitalism, Serrati and Galleani were adversaries whose feud began in Italy and continued in the United States, largely carried on through their newspapers. Before coming to Barre, they had argued over strike tactics in New Jersey, both in person and in the press. Tensions were particularly high in October of 1903 because recently Serrati had, intentionally or not, disclosed Galleani's whereabouts in *Il Proletario*.[47] It is this moment – socialist leader Serrati's trip to anarchist leader Galleani's hometown to lecture at the Socialist Labor Party Hall – that is recorded in "Corti's Last Christmas."

On the night Elia Corti died, two revolutionary Italian ideologues and their followers clashed in Barre, Vermont, and what transpired there had wide ramifications among a transnational movement of Italian Leftists. Serrati was held by the Barre police for complicity in the murder, and, shaken by the experience, left the U.S. for Italy soon after.[48] After Corti's death in 1903, Barre continued to be one of the most militant and energetic hubs of radicalism in America.[49] Luigi Galleani remained in Barre and published the *Cronaca* from there until 1912. In the same year Barre supported workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts by hosting

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[47] See Michael Miller Topp, "The Italian-American Left: Transnationalism and the Quest for Unity," in *The Immigrant Left in the United States,* ed. Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 119-120.
[48] Topp, "The Italian-American Left," 121.
[49] Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture,* 50.

thirty five children sent north to protect them from the violence and privations of the prolonged "Bread and Roses" strike.[50]

To the horror of conservative Vermont, Barre put itself on the Red map in the early twentieth century. By the 1940 *Men Against Granite* interviews, though, Barre comes into view as a largely depoliticized place. The radical Left is mostly gone, reduced to one dramatic tale and ever after a ghost. A closer look at the circumstances of the intervening years – and particularly at new racial theories arising in response to industrialization and immigration – will help to explain this pronounced depoliticization.

[50] See Heller, *Granite City Tales*, pp. 106-114 and Maurer, "A More Perfect Union Hall," 55.

Chapter 2: The Assassination of Chief Brown

In December, 1900, three years before Corti's last Christmas and forty years before the *Men Against Granite* interviews, a violent, confusing incident in Barre aroused fear and antipathy between Vermont natives and Italian immigrants. On the morning of the 27th of December the streets were quiet, but recently appointed Chief of Police Patrick Brown was still at work. He was keeping an eye on a dance at the newly-built Socialist Labor Party Hall. Had he been called to quell a fight? Or was it procedure to watch over a late-night dance, especially one attended by the still-new and unfamiliar Italian immigrants? Whatever his reason for going there in the first place, Chief Brown found the dance quiet, and continued his rounds. He turned right from the Hall and walked the short length of Granite Street to North Main in the Italian section of town. Suddenly he heard noises and he investigated. From the darkness, shots rang out – three men shot at him a dozen or more times. He fell to the ground. The Chief of Police had been assassinated.

A tangle of tales surrounds the shooting of Chief Patrick Brown. The news spread fast, as did the accusations. The local newspaper, the *Barre Evening Telegram,* reported the event in dramatic language, although the article admits

"exact details are hard to get."[1] Nevertheless, the story of the shooting – or at least some version of it – was repeated in the *New York Times* and picked up by smaller papers across the Northeast. Some Barre residents, however, tell a different story from the one in the presses.

While it is impossible to know the exact truth, public reaction and the rhetoric defining this incident give us important clues about the silence surrounding the Left in the *Men Against Granite* interviews.

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In the late nineteenth century, long-time residents watched as Barre was transformed almost overnight from Yankee village to polyglot immigrant city and industrial center.[2] Until 1875, when the railroad was extended from the mainline to downtown Barre, there was little to distinguish it from other small Vermont towns. Farms surrounded a sleepy Main Street. As in other rural areas of Northern New England, most people supported themselves through agriculture, small mills, and the lumber business. In 1880 the population was only 2,060. According to the U.S. Census of that year, ninety-five percent of the town was native-born, and no one living in Barre had been born in Italy.

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[1] See "Chief of Police Shot" *Barre Evening Telegram*, December 27, 1900, and "Chief of Police of Barre Shot This Morning" *Montpelier Evening Argus*, December 27, 1900 from Russell Belding, "Labor Hall Chronicle," Transcription of *Barre Evening Telegram* and *Montpelier Evening Argus,* 1900-1940. Aldrich Public Library, Barre, Vermont.

[2] *Barre, Vermont: An Annotated Bibliography.* Compiled by Daniel Beavin, Alice Blachly, Richard Hathaway, and Andrew Sacher. For Aldrich Public Library, Barre, Vermont. 1979.

The granite business, which would later boom and make Barre famous, was at that time a small-scale local industry that employed only 100 people.[3] Although the railroad ran straight into downtown, granite blocks still had to be transported from "the hill," where the quarries were, to the city. Blocks were quarried by hand with chisels and hammers, patience and brute force, and were then hauled on sleds or rollers by teams of horses or oxen. As many as thirty or forty animals might be needed for large blocks, and had to be borrowed from owners in Barre and the surrounding area. Massive blocks, some weighing as much as fifty tons, were hauled from the quarries to the downtown depot at the rate of one mile per week.[4] Granite extraction was a slow, exhausting, inefficient process. But in the 1880s all of that changed with the introduction of new technologies and transportation that made the industry more efficient and economically viable. Electricity became available in Barre, allowing for new equipment like polishing machines and pneumatic drills that made granite production more efficient.[5] Overhead cranes and heavy derricks were introduced. A few years later, the railroad was extended to serve the quarries directly.

Suddenly, granite was a viable industry. Wages were among the highest for skilled workers in New England and good pay drew migrants from other parts

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[3] Rod Clarke, *Carved in Stone: A History of the Barre Granite Industry* (Barre, Vermont: Rock of Ages Corporation, 1989), 38.
[4] Clarke, *Carved in Stone,* 13.
[5] Kristina Bielenberg, *Granite Artists and Their Work* (Barre, Vermont: Northlight Studio Press and Barre Ethnic Heritage Studies Project, 1978), 2.

of the U.S., Canada, Europe, and eventually the Middle East. Barre's economy and population boomed and changed.[6]

In the last decade of the century, Barre's population was nearly 10,000, a five hundred percent increase in fourteen years. By 1910, almost forty percent of residents were foreign-born, and the granite industry was employing over three thousand people. The landscape changed, too, not just the demographics of the city. From 1881 to 1893, 625 houses were built in Barre.[7]

Political, economic, social and cultural life in Barre evolved along with industry and immigration. The early immigrants in Barre were more accurately migrants, sojourners in the U.S. who hoped to find work, save money, and return home. Some of the first workers needed by the granite business were paving stone cutters, migratory workers who traveled the Eastern seaboard looking for contracts. Male workers lived in boarding houses. Unlike the stable native population that owned property in town, early granite employees thought of themselves as temporary residents. As in larger urban areas at the time, rapid growth left housing in Barre scarce and sanitation inadequate.[8]

Initially the immigrant population in Barre was ghettoized, separated both geographically and occupationally from the native Vermonters. Immigrants, and especially the large group of Italians, settled in the town's North End, while the

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[6] Paul Heller, *Granite City Tales: Writings on the History of Barre, Vermont* (Copyright 2012 Paul Heller), 167.
[7] Clarke, *Carved in Stone,* 29-38.
[8] Clarke, *Carved in Stone,* 37-8.

native population lived to the south. Most of the foreign-born in Barre were employed in the granite industry, while only twenty-eight percent of natives worked in granite. At least at first, natives tended to dominate non-granite businesses and professional occupations.[9] As in larger cities, Italians in Barre created a segregated social and economic life that remained distinct but matched or surpassed native institutions in size and patronage. For example, the first Italian cooperative store in New England opened in *1901??* in the Socialist Labor Party Hall, and within a few years was the largest grocery in the city.[10]

Trade unions, familiar to European granite workers, were quickly transferred to Barre, where, according to local historian Marjorie Strong, "organized labor became a way of life." The Barre branch of the Granite Cutters' National Union formed in 1886, and by 1900 it was the largest local in the United States, with more than a thousand members.[11] In 1890, a union request for a workday shortened to nine hours was denied by management, prompting the first strike in Barre, a three-day walkout. Between 1890 and 1933, there were a dozen strikes in the granite industry in Barre, some of them months long. For example, in 1892, a strike of more than a thousand workers lasted for five months.[12]

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[9] Clarke, *Carved in Stone,* 32.
[10] Heller, *Granite City Tales,* 168-9.
[11] *Guide to the Manuscript Holdings of the Archives of Barre History.* Preface by Karen Lane, Introduction by Marjorie Strong. (Published by the Aldrich Public Library, Barre, Vermont with Support from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1997), 3 and Clarke, *Carved in Stone* 42.
[12] Clarke, *Carved in Stone,* 42-43, 55.

In many ways, Barre formed a microcosm of industrial and immigrant history in the United States, and changes there mirrored national events in the late nineteenth century.[13] The quick expansion of industrial capitalism in the United States, with concomitant economic fluctuations, income disparity, class entrenchment and labor unrest, was combined with unprecedented immigration from new regions. The anxiety produced by these changes found an outlet in nativist anti-immigrant sentiment. New academic and public discourses of inherited traits, race and racial hierarchy arose to order the new landscape and justify the economic, social, and cultural hegemony of Anglo-Americans.[14] In these great tides of change, immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe in particular found themselves in the crosshairs of national debates about the value or detriment of relatively unrestricted white immigration, who or what was "white," and the role of race in "fitness" for citizenship.

As cultural arbiters, powerholders, and opinion-makers looked about them in the late nineteenth century, they saw the world as they knew it crumbling, and labor agitation and its supposed challenge to the social order was easily blamed for the changes. By the 1870s, not only had labor tensions attracted national attention, but immigrants were increasingly held responsible for the disturbances. The idea that foreign influence might spur labor revolution solidified during the

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[13] *Guide to Manuscript Holdings of the Archives of Barre History,* 2.
[14] For a lengthy look at this topic, see the classic *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* by John Higham. (New York: Atheneum, 1972).

violent Great Railroad Strike of 1877. Following the Panic of 1873, railroad workers brought the trains to a halt in response to repeated wage cuts. After over a month of riots and skirmishes, President Hayes eventually called in federal troops to put down the strike. From the halls of Congress to newspapers like the *New York Herald*, the trouble between capital and labor was attributed to foreign radicalism.[15]

The problems of the late 1870s were exacerbated in the following decade. As John Higham points out, the 1880s brought the "long-germinating problems" of an unregulated industrial economy "into sharp focus," creating a "general mood of crisis."[16] As industrial systems grew in the United States, so did wealth disparity. Classes became more stratified and the so-called Robber Baron capitalist class emerged. Workers in growing industries with complex management hierarchies were increasingly cut off from capital and ownership, and felt a growing sense of powerlessness. In response, the first mass labor movement in America began. The Knights of Labor, more expansive than previous trade-specific organizations, made itself publicly known in 1881.

Then, in May of 1886 a confluence of roiling currents met explosively in Chicago. The combination of economic depression, unprecedented strikes and mass boycotts, class cleavage and social disruption led to an eruption of xenophobic nationalism and virulent anti-radicalism. At the height of this

[15] Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 30-31.
[16] Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 43.

discontent and in the midst of widespread strikes for an eight hour workday, an anarchist meeting was held in Chicago. Police circled in on the peaceful crowd, and a bomb was thrown at the police. This event cemented fears of immigrant radicalism and fomented nationalist hysteria. While the bomb-thrower was never identified, seven people, six of them immigrants, were sentenced to death.[17] As historian John Higham writes, "for years the memory of Haymarket and the dread of imported anarchy haunted the American consciousness. No nativist image prevailed more widely than that of the immigrant as a lawless creature, given over to violence and disorder." This image was crystallized in the rhetoric of prominent newspapers of the period, and served to distinguish the immigrant – and disorder itself – as un-American. Papers depicted immigrants as "long-haired, wild-eyed, bad-smelling, atheistic, reckless foreign wretches who never did an honest hour's work in their lives." This identity, which conflated foreignness, disorder, and radicalism, was then directly opposed to Americanism: "There is no such thing as an American anarchist," the papers claimed. Immigrants, they asserted, were not new members of the nation, but "a danger that threatens the destruction of our national edifice."[18]

Influential opinion-makers like the minister Josiah Strong blamed immigrants for a long list of social problems beyond political agitation, such as the deterioration of conditions in city neighborhoods. Poverty, crime, urban

[17] Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 53-4.
[18] Quoted in Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 55.

squalor and foreignness were linked in public imagination. Even the efforts of reformers like Jacob Riis, whose photography captured the desolation of life in New York's crowded tenements, aroused not just sympathy but anti-immigrant sentiment.[19]

As industrial revolution wrought great changes on the economic, social and physical landscape of the United States, and concerns about immigration became more acute, a new discourse, underpinned by advances in science and the social sciences, began to form amongst the elite in Europe and the U.S. New ideas about the importance of heredity translated into the belief that race determined a wide variety of characteristics, from appearance and intelligence to poverty to the ability to govern. Although no biological evidence could be found to codify racial difference, and though even the term race was amorphous, doctrines of racism were solidified in scholarly and popular thinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the late nineteenth century, theories of Anglo-Saxon superiority took hold. This doctrine posited that Anglo-Saxons possess characteristics that make them fit to lead, and are naturally predisposed to civilized, organized, well-governed societies. On the other hand, new immigrant groups, possessing less Anglo-Saxon stock, were prone to dullness and disorder. Concerns about a changing social order were most dramatically expressed through

[19] Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 35-40.

fears of Anglo-Saxon race suicide, or the notion that the old American race would be overwhelmed by new immigration.[20]

Because race itself is a social construct, racial doctrines are always changeable and fluid, and around the turn of the twentieth century race in the United States underwent a significant revision.[21] During the great wave of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe "whiteness" split into a hierarchy of scientifically determined races. Only certain of these races – those from Northwestern Europe – were deemed fit for self-government and able to assimilate into Anglo-American society.[22] Racial ideologies were adapted to suit the moment – and redefined to establish identity, control and power.[23] As historian Thomas Gossett writes, "the fact that race has no precise meaning has made it a powerful tool for the most diverse purposes."[24] At the turn of the century, race doctrines were employed to prove the need for immigration restriction, and the problem of immigration was increasingly described in terms of racial difference and assimilability.[25]

In national discourses – and in Barre too – Italians in particular were suspected of immutable "racial" difference from Anglo-Americans. As whiteness

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[20] See Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants*, 82-102, for an extended discussion of this topic.
[21] See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), esp. p. 6
[22] Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color,* 7-8.
[23] See especially Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 2-13.
[24]Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Shocken Books, 1977), 118.
[25] Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color,* 118.

fractured into a distinct hierarchy of races, Italians were often thought to be the most primitive and unassimilable European immigrants, possessed of a racial tendency to impassioned violence.[26] *The Baltimore News* described Italians as a people with "the disposition to assassinate," and, cementing the idea in popular opinion, papers sensationalized stories of minor violence among Italians.[27] Nativist restrictionists of the era welcomed such accounts, as they supported the idea that new immigrants brought disorder to the United States and threatened organized Anglo-Saxon society.[28]

Beliefs about Italians' inferiority and aggressive tendencies (ironically) justified acts of violence against Italian immigrants. In public formats, Italians were positioned as racially distinct, exotic Others. For example, *Harper's Magazine* featured a guided tour of "Italian Life in New York" that read like an African safari, describing the midday sighting of "some swarthy Italian…resting and dining from his tin kettle, while his brown-skinned wife is by his side." Such Othering of Italians and a belief in their "innate criminality," allowed for inhumane treatment and a withdrawal of the protective umbrella of the legal system.[29] Italians were repeatedly the victims of lynch mobs, including the largest mass-lynching in U.S. history in New Orleans in 1891. In that case, a group of

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[26] Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 66.
[27] Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 90-91.
[28] Barbara Miller Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 110.
[29] Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color,* 56.

men were accused of conspiring to murder the Chief of Police. Their guilt was presumed, and when they were acquitted, it was believed that the Mafia had tampered with the jury's verdict. In retribution, the eleven men were pulled from the jailhouse and lynched by members of the White League, an organization similar to the Klan, led by the district attorney and other prominent citizens. Dominant public response blamed the victims in racialized terms and praised the lynchers. The *New York Times* described the mob as the city's "best element," and in an editorial the *Times* exhorted Italians across the country to defend the lynching or risk being lumped in with "the criminals" and the Mafia.[30] Teddy Roosevelt famously called the lynchings "rather a good thing."[31]

This event – which bears some similarities to the Chief Brown shooting in Barre – was a nationally well-known event. Not only was it covered in major newspapers, but it was fictionalized for public consumption, too. For example, the racially charged novel *The New Orleans Mafia, or Chief of Police Hennessey Avenged* was published just months after the incident. Its title clearly states its position, absolving the lynch mob and calling for immigration restriction.[32]

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[30] See Marcella Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture: The Idealism of the* Sovversivi *in the United States, 1890-1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 8, Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 90-91 and Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color,* 56-59.
[31] Theodore Roosevelt to Anna Roosevelt Cowles, 21 March 1891, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Harvard University. Quoted in *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America* by Lars Schoultz (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 418.
[32] See Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color,* 60-61.

Discourses of racial hierarchy and the idea that immigrants were disruptive to society would of course find its way to central Vermont, and Italian immigrants in Barre were, like Italians elsewhere, suspected of insurmountable difference from native Anglo-Americans. To many native Vermonters, Italians were at first, as Sarah Orne Jewett says, "figures merely. They ain't *folks*, they're nothin' but a parcel of images."[33] Depictions of Italians, from academe to popular fiction, portrayed their innate criminality, radical and violent tendencies, and exotic Otherness. By the 1900 shooting of Chief Patrick Brown, Barre's press would join the rhetorical fray.

As historian Barbara Miller Solomon writes, nativist and racist ideologies took hold in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries among "human beings trying to adjust to the disruptive consequences of change."[34] The same process of adjustment is seen in Barre at the same time. As native Vermonters tried to come to terms with change and new populations in town, and as immigrants tried to determine their role and lifestyle in their new home, the group identity "Italian" was forming; however Italian immigrants to Barre did not necessarily think of themselves as cohesive or unified, especially on first arrival to the United States. Further, political beliefs, supposedly an inherited racial trait, divided the immigrants more than united them – and even within groups like the anarchists, political commitment could vary greatly.

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[33] Quoted in Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants*, 175.
[34] Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants,* xv.

While most immigrants to Barre were from Northern Italy, a region culturally, economically and politically distinct from Southern Italy, even Northern Italians would have affiliated more specifically with their native town. The majority of Italian immigrants and migrants to the United States did not think of themselves as "Italian." Italy was only unified as a nation in 1861, and many were resentful of the national state. Mainly they did not speak standard Italian, but a regional dialect. Loyalties were local – to family or village.[35] Italians in Barre came from towns in different provinces all over Northern Italy. Corti and others, for example, came from Viggiu. Some were from Varese. The twelve stonecutters who in 1906 founded the *Mutuo Soccorso*, the mutual aid society, came from Brenno Uresia in Northern Lombardy. Other immigrants were from Carrara or Pavullo in Modena, 300 km away, closer to Florence.[36] Some were from Verona. Luigi Galleani, for example, was from Vercelli, between Milan and Turin.[37]

Language, too, divided the immigrants. In a 1997 interview, Barre resident Delta Zorzi Dalton explains that her parents, both immigrants from Italy, could not speak the same language. Her father was from Verona, where the Veronase dialect was spoken, and her mother was from Brenno Uresia, where the Lombardy dialect was spoken. Delta's mother also spoke "real" Italian, she says, which was

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[35] Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, Editors, *Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 10.
[36] See Mary Fregosi and Arthur Ristau, *Mutuo Soccorso: 100th Anniversary.* (Barre, Vermont: Hull Printing Inc., 2006).
[37] Heller, *Granite City Tales*, 31.

not common among new arrivals to Barre. Her mother was often called upon to translate and read aloud newspapers written in Italian.[38] As many as eight Italian-language political newspapers were published in Barre to meet the needs of the diverse group of immigrants.[39]

Other elements of social and economic life also showed differences and divisions among Italians in Barre. Resident Edo Perantoni recalled that his parents, who were from Verona, belonged to the Verona Club instead of belonging to the *Mutuo*, which was founded by men from Lombardy.[40] Even after residing in Barre for a generation, the group was by no means monolithic. In addition to different newspapers and social clubs, different parts of town had different reputations. By the early 20th century, Italians were no longer only living in the North End. Barre natives Enea Cecchini Lavoie and Nelia Spinelli recalled the economic and social distinction between the South End and Center of Barre, and the North End of town, the latter home to "the tough North Barre gang."[41] Italians in Barre represented a full spectrum of economic success, from laborers who boarded in others' houses, to businessmen who owned blocks on Main Street.

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[38] From *They Came to Work: Oral Histories of the Vermont Granite Industry During the 1920s and 1930s*. Interviews Conducted by Marjorie J. Strong, Archivist at Aldrich Public Library in Barre and Greg Sharrow PhD, of the Vermont Folklife Center in Middlebury. Edited by Kim Chase. A Publication of the Franglais Cultural Center, 1997. See pages 32 and 63.
[39] *Guide to Manuscript Holdings of the Archives of Barre History*, 3-4.
[40] *They Came to Work,* 48.
[41] *They Came to Work,* 10.

The backgrounds of Italians who came to Barre were diverse as well. Unlike many industrial towns in the U.S. which required only unskilled or semi-skilled manual labor, the granite industry required quarriers, cutters and carvers. Not only laborers and skilled craftsman came to Barre, but also highly educated artists. Among the immigrants were sculptors trained extensively in anatomy and art history.[42] Corti, for example, was reputed to have studied at the fine arts academy in Milan.[43] Similarly, Carlo Abate, the award-winning artist who created the masthead for *Cronaca*, grew up in Milan and studied and taught fine art.

On the other hand, many Barre immigrants were laborers, who arrived in the U.S. without higher education or artisanal training. Among the latter group, for example, was Angelo Scampini, according to local reputation the first Italian immigrant to Barre. His story helps to illustrate the diversity of life experience of the Barre immigrants. Scampini was born in Samarate, Italy, but had lived in Paris before coming to the United States. Unlike many immigrants to Barre, however, Scampini did not learn the carving trade in Italy. He learned to cut paving stones in New Hampshire and when he moved to Barre in the 1880s he worked as a tool sharpener – or a blacksmith – in the sheds. Also unlike many early migrants to

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[42] Bielenberg, *Granite Artists and Their Work*, 3.
[43] See "Corti's Last Christmas." Interview by John Lynch, Edited by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: AUG 23 1940, *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?wpa:16:./temp/~ammem_Yuas::. (accessed November, 2012).

Barre, Scampini spoke English and was often called upon to translate.[44] On the other side of the spectrum was Luigi Galleani, who went to university and studied law before devoting his life to radical politics.[45]

Political beliefs and levels of ideological and practical commitment to political goals also differed widely within the immigrant community in town. The most vocal political groups among Italians were the socialist and anarchist factions, who were often at odds with one another. For example, the socialists reputedly used the shooting of Chief Patrick Brown to discredit the anarchists and curry public favor for themselves. Two days after the shooting, socialists visited the Chief of Police in his hospital bed and later delivered a list containing the names of anarchists in the area to the police. At least in this case, political loyalty and attempts at legitimacy trumped ethnic unity.[46]

Even within Leftist groups, commitment varied. The controversy surrounding Elia Corti's politics at the time of his death provides a good example of the mixed level of political engagement at the turn of the century. Stories from Corti's friends, family and witnesses at the Garetto trial conflict about the fervency of Corti's anarchist beliefs. As local historian John S. Bellamy notes about Corti's death, "there is nothing murkier in the Corti tragedy than the role of

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[44] Heller, *Granite City Tales*, 130-1.
[45] Heller, *Granite City Tales*, 31.
[46] John Stark Bellamy II, *Vintage Vermont Villainies: True Tales of Murder and Mystery from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Woodstock, Vermont: The Countryman Press, 2007), 177.

its central victim."[47] Some of Corti's friends described him as completely apolitical, and explained his presence at a political lecture as social and even obligatory: other members of his family were there. Others described him as an active anarchist, and he was for a time the secretary of the Barre anarchist organization. Some supposed that his political interests waned as his carving business became more successful. The Reverend Bellondi, who publicly defended Garetto, argued that Corti "went to a few of their [anarchists'] meetings, but he was not one of them. If he sometimes went with them, it was only because he liked everybody."[48] The controversy over Corti's political engagement shows that, in practice, anarchism could imply many different things, from participation in a social group to serious activism.

Despite differences in birthplace, language, background, economic status, and political affiliation and commitment, local and national images of a monolithic Italian and Italian Left reduced this diverse group to a stereotyped sameness. In public perception, a cohesive group was brought into being. "Immigration engenders ethnicity," sociologists Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut argue. In the United States, perceived as culturally and "racially" different by themselves and others, Italian ethnic identity formed.[49]

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[47] Bellamy, *Vintage Vermont Villainies*, 182.
[48] Bellamy, *Vintage Vermont Villainies*, 182-3, and Heller, *Granite City Tales*, 156. Quotes from Heller, *Granite City Tales*, 156.
[49] Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), xvi, 124, 126.

Just like elsewhere in the United States, Italian immigrants in Barre were defined by nationality and discriminated against on the basis of supposed race traits. In comparison with French Canadian immigrants, resident Cynthia Rouleau says, "when Italians came to Barre they had a much harder time being accepted," and they were isolated, or self-isolated, in the North End.[50] In an essay for the WPA, Roberto Burratini wrote that geographical separation from the Anglo community in town prevented mutual understanding.[51] Academic research supports Burratini's experience. Immigrants are in a peculiar position: "in the society, but not yet of it."[52] Their foreignness and ghettoization created space for speculation about their habits and behaviors, and lack of familiarity generated extreme fear and a sense of frenzy surrounding immigrant issues.[53] According to local author John Bellamy, in the late 19th century, "established Vermonters, predominantly of Anglo-Saxon stock, lumped all the new Italian arrivals together as quaintly picturesque, if sometimes threatening, foreigners of unintelligible speech and inferior culture." He points to the "habitually garbled" spelling of Italian names in the local papers and frequent misidentification even of well-

[50] *They Came to Work*, 8.
[51] Roberto Burrattini, "Italians and Italo-Americans in Vermont," Unpublished Manuscript, Vermont Historical Society (Barre, Vermont: Works Progress Administration, 193?), 1, 33.
[52] Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America,* 119.
[53] Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America,* 119.

known members of the immigrant community as evidence of native disregard of individual immigrant identity.[54]

As new demographics transformed Barre and recent immigrants began to have a serious impact on the cultural and physical landscape of the town, the local community increasingly defined a diverse population simply as "Italian," a term that came to imply certain conceived race traits. In part such definitions were delineated through the rhetoric of the local papers. For example, consider the case of Chief Patrick Brown.

Patrick Brown was appointed Chief of Police in Barre in 1900 in the midst of this radical growth and change. Ethnic neighborhoods, so unusual in Vermont at the time, were expanding and lending an air of exoticism to Barre. Unlike towns still operating on the agrarian schedule, mills and sheds were open for evening shifts, and a polyglot nightlife developed in.[55] In 1900, the Socialist Party Labor Hall, an important center of Italian social and cultural life, opened to a packed house of 700 people.[56] But it is quite possible that until the shooting of Chief Brown, natives viewed the Italian immigrants as interesting exotics more than as a threat, and may have been mostly uninterested or unaware of their

[54] Bellamy, *Vintage Vermont Villainies*, 174-5.
[55] Heller, *Granite City Tales*, 170.
[56] Bellamy, *Vintage Vermont Villainies*, 175-6.

political affiliations.[57] The shooting, however, ended whatever neutrality there was, and drew attention not only to the Italian immigrants but to Leftist politics.

In the *Barre Evening Telegram* on December 27, the shooting of Chief Patrick Brown was described in this way:

> A thrill of horror ran through the populace of the Granite City this morning when a rumor went creeping around that Chief of Police Patrick Brown had been assassinated by an Italian anarchist. A little later it was learned that the Chief was still alive, although he had three bullets in his anatomy … there is no more popular or better police officer in the state than Chief Brown, and threats of dire vengeance to be wreaked on the cowardly assassin were heard from the lips of stern faced, resolute men.[58]

The sensationalized language of the passage – the "thrill of horror" in the Granite City, the description of the shooter as an anarchist "assassin," and most likely even the very idea that Chief Brown would be a political target – calls attention to anxiety surrounding change, immigration, race and radicalism in Barre and nationwide at the turn of the century. In the final sentence, "threats of dire vengeance" triggered by a "rumor" portend ominously of unrestrained vigilante violence. The depiction of the "cowardly" Italian anarchist contrasted with the "stern faced, resolute" Yankees relies on Anglo-Saxon racial theories then reaching popularity: of unreasoning, inferior Italians and rational, unemotional Anglo-Americans.

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[57] See Bellamy, *Vintage Vermont Villainies*, 176.
[58] "Chief of Police Shot," *Barre Evening Telegram*, December 27, 1900, from Belding, "Labor Hall Chronicle."

Placing this event not only within Barre's local history but within a larger context helps to explain town reaction to the shooting as well. Chief Brown was shot only a few months after the assassination of Italy's King Umberto by an Italian-American immigrant named Gaetano Bresci. (Bresci was avenging the deaths of demonstrators killed by their own government in the Bava-Beccaris massacre.)[59] Umberto's assassination had inspired international panic about anarchism and especially "propaganda of the deed." The *Telegram* reflects this sense of panic. The rhetoric in the paper also harkens back to the incident in New Orleans only nine years earlier, which had received international attention and certainly would have been known in Barre. In that incident, Italians had been accused of killing the Chief of Police, their guilt had been immediately presumed, and the vigilantes who hanged them had been celebrated.

At the trial of Arturo Bernacci, one of the accused shooters, lawyer Frank Laird argued that his client had simply been drunk and had not intended to kill Brown.[60] As mentioned above, it might have been the Italian socialists who gave credence to the paper's quick accusations. Playing on native fears of anarchism, the socialists may have pointed the finger at the anarchists to manipulate public opinion against their political rivals.

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[59] The massacre is named after General Bava-Beccaris, who ordered the use of military cannons to suppress a demonstration in Milan protesting the high price of bread in 1898. It is estimated that 1000 were wounded and hundreds killed. King Umberto congratulated and decorated the general.
[60] Bellamy, *Vintage Vermont Villainies*, 176.

Among the Italian-American community, memory of this incident is quite different than those initial accounts in the paper. Lifelong Barre resident C.O. Granai claims that Brown yelled at the shooter, and the shooter, fearing that Brown was after him, pulled out a small pistol and fired off a few shots. Granai goes on to say he "doubts whether Brown was hit at all, even if he was … 'all that would have come out of him was red wine and Italian sausage.'"[61] Barre resident Peter Pironi calls the police officers in Barre the "Keystone variety elderly policemen," hardly likely targets of a political assassination. Pironi also explains that Italy at that time "was a combination of a democracy and a police-state" and "immigrants assumed the American establishment was the same." For this reason, Italian immigrants were wary and distrustful of institutionalized authority, perhaps explaining the shooter's extreme fear of apprehension by Chief Brown.[62]

While the details of what happened that night remain elusive and the motive of the shooter is uncertain, the language of the Barre papers was clear. All Italians – especially any assumed to hold anarchic beliefs –were immediately under suspicion. State and local officials "stop[ped] all Italians" and made sure "things were fixed so that it would be difficult for an Italian to travel in this part of the state for a few days." According to the paper, when suspects were brought to the police station, "there were cries of 'get a rope'" from the crowd, another

[61] Interview notes from interview with C.O. Granai by Benjamin Collins, 1975, Benjamin Collins Papers, Aldrich Public Library, Barre, Vermont.
[62] Letter from Peter Pironi to Benjamin Collins, February 26, 1975, Benjamin Collins Papers, Aldrich Public Library, Barre, Vermont.

unmistakable parallel to New Orleans. Within twelve hours, at least a dozen Italian-American men had been arrested, most with no evidence against them and although supposedly only three people were involved in the crime in the first place.

In the rhetoric of the papers the men were quickly tried and found guilty. The *Montpelier Evening Argus* reported the shooting as a "brutal crime" and "a murderous assault on an officer of the law by an outraged mob."[63] Revealing the supposed threat Italian immigrants posed, the paper accounted, "Barre was thrown into the highest state of excitement when it was learned that Chief of Police Patrick Brown had been shot by Italians." Although the *Barre Times* asserted that it was an anarchist that attempted to assassinate Chief Brown, there is no following evidence in the article explaining why the suspects were thought to be anarchists, or if there was any political or ideological motivation for the shooting. In comparison with other violent acts committed by "propaganda of the deed" anarchists, the Barre shooters made no attempt to explain the shooting as political. In this regard, they might be contrasted with the King of Italy and President McKinley's killers, who were quick to claim the assassination and clear in explaining their reasons.

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[63] "Chief of Police of Barre Shot this Morning." *Montpelier Evening Argus*, December 27, 1900, from Belding, "Labor Hall Chronicle." It should be noted that the Barre and Montpelier papers are not equal in their treatment of Italian-Americans. The Montpelier paper is much quicker to condemn the entire ethnic group, while the Barre paper sometimes distinguishes a "better class" of Italians, i.e. so-called productive citizens, not anarchists.

In the coverage of this incident, certain notions of "Italian" were not only revealed, but concretized. To those that held them, racial suspicions were confirmed. A discourse of racial typology and concern over immigration occurring nationwide echoed in Barre in these articles. Reciprocally, the story of Chief Brown was picked up by newspapers across the Northeast and gained sensationalist steam, and so Barre became a participant in that national dialogue. For example, the *New York Times* covered the incident in its December 28 paper. Although the *Barre Evening Telegram* reported that Chief Brown found the dance at the socialist hall quiet, the New York paper had a different version to recount. The local paper said Chief Brown and another officer arrived at the dance around midnight, and there was "no disturbance and everything was quieting down and people going home." Chief Brown did take a pickaxe handle away from a man who "was flourishing it a little, but there was no resistance."[64] The *New York Times* tells the story this way: "Anarchists appeared at the hall. Almost immediately there was trouble. The row increased until fists, clubs, and even revolvers were used…after considerable difficulty the combatants were separated and disarmed, and the anarchists were dispelled."[65] Fictionalized in this way, the story certainly confirms stereotypes of racially inherited tendencies to violence and radicalism. As Barbara Miller Solomon observes, opponents of immigration

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[64] Labor Hall Chronicles, "Chief of Police Shot," *Barre Evening Telegram.* December 27, 1900.
[65] "Shoot a Chief of Police." *New York Times.* December 28, 1900. http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F20C14FC3F5B11738DDDA10A94DA415B808CF1D3. Accessed 3.1.2014

"welcomed flagrant acts of violence and radical activities among immigrants," so they could be publicized in the newspaper to support the restrictionist cause.[66] In this case, not only public perception but the acts themselves are manipulated to paint a picture of Italian immigrants as a dangerous element in society.

A few years later, in the coverage of the 1903 Corti shooting, similar rhetoric conflating Italians, radicalism and violence appeared again. By this time, national concern over anarchism had only grown, since the 1901 assassination of President McKinley by Leon Czolgosz.[67] Tied to fears of anarchy was the mounting notion that immigrants were bringing disorder to the United States, and discussions of the Corti trial in the paper reveal such fears. Locally, after the shooting of Chief Brown and its coverage, natives in Barre were more wary of Italians in town, and especially their exotic and foreign Leftist beliefs. In the *Montpelier Argus*, the Corti incident was referred to as an "anarchist riot," even though it was the anarchist who was the victim of the shooting. In subsequent articles, as the grand jury investigation progressed, the political affiliations of all Italians arrested in connection with the dispute were printed. On the stand, witnesses were asked to declare their politics. According to the Barre paper, the first question to witness Emilio Vochini was "are you an anarchist?"[68] Political

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[66] Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants* 110.
[67] See Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 111.
[68] See "How Rizzi Escaped," *Montpelier Evening Argus*, Friday, November 6, 1903 and "Tragedy's Portrayal," *Barre Evening Telegram*, Thursday, December 17, 1903, from Belding, "Labor Hall Chronicle."

beliefs were used to discredit Italian witnesses. On December 17, 1903, an *Argus* article ran titled "Vochini on the Stand in Garetto Murder Case" with the subtitle "Admitted That He Is an Anarchist."

Around the same time, Galleani's paper, *Cronaca Sovversiva,* drew local and national scrutiny. The newspaper drew attention because of general panic surrounding immigrants and radicalism, but public scrutiny also worked to harden suspicion into fear. (Italian-Americans in Barre apparently questioned this suspicion of *Cronaca* when the local English papers could advocate lynch law with impunity, a reference to the coverage of the Chief Brown case.)[69] In a 1903 article titled "Barre Anarchist Paper Thought Dangerous," the local paper reported the U.S. State Department's concern over the *Cronaca.* The State Department warned the governor of Vermont that the paper was deemed "revolutionary and anarchistic." The governor then asked the state attorney in Montpelier to "take such measures and adopt such means in the premises as the laws warrant, to investigate the character of the sheet and if the laws justify to suppress the same."[70] In 1905, radical activity in Barre drew the attention of the federal government, which investigated the town and sent spies to infiltrate the

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[69] "Barre Anarchist Paper Thought Dangerous," *Barre Evening Telegram,* Wednesday, August 26, 1903, from Belding, "Labor Hall Chronicle."
[70] "Barre Anarchist Paper Thought Dangerous," *Barre Evening Telegram,* Wednesday, August 26, 1903, from Belding, "Labor Hall Chronicle."

Italian-American community.[71] Sensationalized, racist articles about Barre's radical community appeared in Boston papers around the same time, further giving definition to the Barre Italians.[72]

Coverage of stories like the shooting of Chief Brown or Elia Corti, or news of the *Cronaca,* both locally in Barre and more widely through papers like the *New York Times*, became a part of a national discourse that set Italians apart from Anglo-Americans and portrayed them as a threat to American society. In the first decades of the twentieth century, such a discourse translated not only into narrowly defining "American" on racial grounds, but also into a powerful and popular nationalistic argument for immigration restriction and suppression of the Left.

In the early twentieth century, rhetorical and anecdotal expressions of difference or of implied race traits, as in the narration of the Brown shooting, evolved into a full-blown "science" of race. Ideologies that had been evolving since the nineteenth century were codified and validated in the twentieth century by eugenics. First developed by Francis Galton, eugenics tried to prove that genius and success on the one hand and "feeblemindedness, criminality, and pauperism" on the other were largely determined by heredity.[73] As Thomas

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[71] See "Newpaper Burned Out" *Barre Evening Telegram* January 14, 1905 and "Interview was False, Says Chief Brown," March 7, 1906, *Barre Evening Telegram,* from Belding, "Labor Hall Chronicle."
[72] Heller, *Granite City Tales,* 42 and 186-190.
[73] Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America,* 155.

Gossett succinctly says, "eugenics was the scientific answer for racists."[74] Further, eugenics was not just an academic pursuit – it became a part of public thinking, appearing in the fiction of Owen Wister and Jack London, the reformist literature of Jacob Riis, public political debates, and even discussions of actor Rudolph Valentino as a vaguely dangerous exotic.[75]

During World War I, years of racial theorizing, the new science of eugenics, and the nationalism of war combined into a popular notion of "100 Percent Americanism" that placed new immigrants from Southeastern Europe, including Italians, outside the boundaries of American nationality. Wartime anti-German sentiment transformed into a vague hostility toward all hyphenated Americans. Teddy Roosevelt became the popular mouthpiece for the "America for Americans" crusade against divided loyalty.[76] Also during World War I, scientists developed and administered intelligence tests and personality profiles that seemed to objectively prove theories of race hierarchy and eugenics.[77]

By the 1920s, with the "science" of eugenics and intelligence testing, and the nationalistic fervor of 100 Percent Americanism, immigrants from Southeastern Europe were defined as entirely distinct from true Americans, and

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[74] Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America,* 150. See also Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants* 150-1. As Barbara Miller Solomon argues, eugenics showed that "the immigrants from Southeastern Europe had hereditary passions which were unalterable." She continues: "eugenics transformed the ambiguous xenophobia of Brahmin restrictionists into a formidable racist ideology."
[75] See Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color,* 82-90.
[76] See Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 198.
[77] Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 370-7.

were not only believed but "proven" to threaten American self-government and prosperity. Racist thinking was made policy with the Immigration Quota of 1924, which, in the words of the immigration commissioner, would ensure that immigrants "looked exactly like Americans." In creating that law, eugenicists like Harry Laughlin were called upon to testify before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization about the "social inadequacy" of inferior races.[78] The result of this rhetoric and "science" was not only to literally bar Italian immigrants from coming to the United States, but to cast Italians arrivals outside the scope of American society.

Threatened from within, Anglo-Americans from Vermont and surrounding states formed hundreds of historical societies, house museums, and organizations like the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, all dedicated to preserving and celebrating "Old New England." Among these new associations was the Barre Historical Society, established in 1915 at the height of immigration to the town. Historian Marjorie Strong describes the "schism between 'old' inhabitants of Barre, the Yankee farmers and merchants, and the 'new' immigrant population." Facing significant change and cultural pressure, the Society preserved and documented the old Yankee past to establish Anglo Barre as the

[78] Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color,* 78-82.

real Barre, positioning immigrants (and by 1915, the second generation) as outsiders and usurpers.[79]

One hundred percent Americanism and the backlash against immigration left a difficult choice for second generation Italian-Americans like Mari Tomasi and the *Men Against Granite* informants. To claim all of Barre's history – including its political radicalism – seemed to be an embrasure not only of the past but of the constructed identity "Italian," which by World War I was defined in opposition to "American." In response to this false dichotomy, *Men Against Granite* takes the middle way: celebrating some aspects of Italian life while remaining curiously silent about others.

[79] *Guide to Manuscript Holdings of the Archives of Barre History,* 4.

Chapter 3: Beyond Silence: Reshaping Ethnic Identity

The small granite gravestone of Innocente Belli stands in Hope Cemetery, not far from the beautiful, contemplative memorial to Elia Corti. Belli, one of the men arrested in connection with the shooting of Chief Patrick Brown, was born in Italy, resided on Granite Street in Barre's North End, and worked as a stone polisher. His wife stayed in Italy, and perhaps he hoped to return to her one day. He did not. He died in 1909 at the age of 46 of dust-induced pneumonia. Written on his gravestone is one word: "anarchist."[1]

Innocente Belli was proud to proclaim his radical political affiliation despite its popular association with "racial" disorder. In the early twentieth century, new Italian immigrants like Belli found meaning, identity and belonging in anarchism and anarchist groups, counteracting the dislocation of immigration and feelings of inferiority provoked by racism in America.[2] While anarchism inspired moral and intellectual confidence in first generation immigrants who were part of the political and labor movements of the early twentieth century, by 1939 the Left had taken on a different meaning among Italians in Barre.

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[1] See Paul Heller, *Granite City Tales: Writings on the History of Barre, Vermont* (Copyright 2012 Paul Heller), 35, 178.
[2] Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale, *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 297.

Only three *Men Against Granite* interviews out of more than fifty make any mention of Barre's role in the Italian-American Left at all. The first, of course, is "Corti's Last Christmas," in which the town is haunted by the specter of the radical past. The second, "Just Another Guy Working," an interview with a Scottish immigrant stone polisher conducted by Roaldus Richmond, is a long string of misinformation about the radical past, including the informant's erroneous supposition that Galleani is now in Italy working for Mussolini. The narrator also claims complete non-involvement: "I don't know much about it. I don't even know the difference between [anarchists and socialists]."[3] In the third, a Tomasi interview with an eighty-year-old "Veteran Italian Carver," Barre is called "a mad place, dangerous," during its political heyday.[4] None of these informants claim any association with the Left, or speak of that time with pride. They all place radicalism in the past, not as something on-going.

Just thirty years after the death of Innocente Belli, the radical Left was little more than a haunting ghost story and specter of a past best forgotten. How did this change come about? Why did the Left virtually disappear from the historical narrative told by *Men Against Granite*?

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[3] "Just Another Guy Working," Interview by Roaldus Richmond, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: SEPT 14, 1940, *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002693/. (Accessed April 16, 2015.)
[4] "Veteran Italian Carver," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: SEPT 14, 1940, *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002730/. (Accessed April 16, 2015.)

Certainly there were obviously pragmatic reasons to disassociate with the immigrant Left by 1939. In the then-recent past, violence and trauma surrounded radicalism, and silence was a matter of safety. The storytelling in *Men Against Granite,* however, does more than protect informants and writers from the authorities. These oral histories also respond to racial doctrines of difference and work to reshape Italian ethnic identity. As radicalism became increasingly criminalized and taboo after World War II, it was a part of ethnic immigrant life that had to be jettisoned.

In the years between Elia Corti's death and the *Men Against Granite* interviews, views of immigrants as prone to disorder and outside of the scope of American democracy led to systematic state repression both of immigration and of the Left. In particular, the post-World War I First Red Scare drove Leftist communities underground, fractured Italian anarchist and socialist movements in the United States, and equated the Left with foreignness and mayhem. During this period, the U.S. government engaged in an unprecedented repression of civil liberties. The "foreign element" and Italians in particular were targeted as "seditious enemies of the state."[5] In 1917 and 1918 the Espionage and Sedition Acts were passed, which prohibited criticism of the war and the draft, and allowed the Postmaster General to refuse to mail publications that violated the Acts. These

[5] Paola A. Sensi-Isolani, "Italian Radicals and Union Activists in San Francisco, 1900-1920," in *The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism,* ed. Philip Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 189.

new laws were used to persecute suspected Leftists. Also in 1918, the Anarchist Exclusion Act, which had had limited impact, was amended to target labor and the radical Left. Called the Immigration Act of 1918, the new legislation broadened the definition of "anarchist," circumvented due process, and made it easier for the government to deport suspected radicals. The simultaneous passage of these laws makes clear the conflation of ethnic immigrants, labor movements, radicals, and treasonous activity. Further, it reveals a belief that immigrants, racially distinct from Americans, need not be protected by its civil liberties.

The positioning of Italians and the Italian Left in particular outside the boundaries of American society allowed for the civil rights violations of the First Red Scare that actively suppressed Leftist politics. In response to strikes, business owners took advantage of the long-standing identification of class conflict with immigrant radicals. After the Bolshevik Revolutions in Russia in 1917 it was easy to tie labor activism to actual revolution in the public imagination, which held the "impression that radicalism permeated the foreign-born population, [and] that it flourished among immigrants generally and appealed to hardly anyone else." It was in this atmosphere that the anti-radical nativism of the World War I era took hold.[6]

In the Federal Bureau of Investigation's so-called Palmer Raids, conducted in November 1919 and January 1920, federal agents relied on political

[6] John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 226-7.

membership rolls, undercover informants and unwarranted wiretaps – authorized by the Sedition Act – to identify and arrest suspected radicals. The U.S. government censored and refused to mail radical papers, presses were destroyed, libraries seized, lectures interrupted, people beaten, and thousands of Italian-Americans arrested.[7] As scholar Rudolph Vecoli argues, "federal and state agencies instituted a reign of terror against the *sovversivi.*"[8] *Cronaca* was a particular target not only because of its militancy, but also because of its adamant antiwar and anti-conscription stance.[9] Political leaders were imprisoned or expelled.[10] In 1919, Luigi Galleani, who had been so influential in Barre, was deported for his and his followers' resolute opposition to the war.[11] It was during this time that Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested, and Andrea Salsedo, their comrade, was jailed and committed suicide – or was killed – after being tortured into admitting crimes he had not perpetrated. Violent repression of the Left caused widespread fear in Italian communities and persuaded many to abandon or

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[7] Marcella Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture: The Idealism of the* Sovversivi *in the United States, 1890-1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 70, also see Paul Avrich, "Sacco and Vanzetti's Revenge," in *The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism,*edited by Philip Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer, 163-170 (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 163-4.

[8] Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Making and Un-Making of the Italian-American Working Class," in *The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism,* ed. Philip Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 52.

[9] Avrich, "Sacco and Vanzetti's Revenge," 163-164.

[10] Vecoli, "The Making and Un-Making of the Italian-American Working Class," 52.

[11] See Philip Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer, "Introduction," *The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 15.

at least keep hidden their political views.[12] Some scholars, like Michael Miller Topp, argue the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927 signaled the end of a widespread Italian-American Left.[13]

In Vermont specifically, threats of violence against immigrants might have silenced discussions of the Left in Barre. Although often thought of as a Southern phenomenon, the KKK was active in Vermont in the mid-1920s and revealed the strength of nativist sentiment in that decade. Barre in particular had a large Klan chapter targeting Catholics, Jews, organized labor and the foreign-born, and in August 1925 a state-wide Klan rally was held on a farm just outside Montpelier. The Klan in Vermont employed the full range of the organization's terror tactics, with white hooded regalia and burning crosses on the hilltops of Plainfield, Montpelier, Barre, and even Burlington. Resistance to the Klan was widespread across Vermont and the chapter died away within a few years; nevertheless, the organization showed the virulent hostility some held toward immigrants and labor in Vermont.[14]

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[12] Charles A. Zappia, "From Working Class Radicalism to Cold War Anti-Communism: The Case of the Italian Locals of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union," in *The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism,* ed. Philip Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 146-147.

[13] See Michael Miller Topp, "The Italian-American Left: Transnationalism and the Quest for Unity," in *The Immigrant Left in the United States,* edited by Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, 119-147 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 142, although this is disputed by other scholars, see especially Cannistraro and Meyer, *The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism,* 5.

[14] "The KKK in Vermont" by Gene Sessions, Vermont History Center, accessed November 20, 2013. http://vermonthistory.org/research/research-resources-online/green-mountain-chronicles/the-k-k-k-in-vermont-1924.

Although labor activity continued in Barre after the First Red Scare and the Immigration Acts (including strikes for better working conditions for stonecutters in the 20s and 30s), Italian political and cultural activity subsided. Fewer and fewer political lectures were held at the Socialist Hall. Dances to support widows continued, and the Hall became a site of union activity in the mid-nineteen-teens. Significantly, though, by the 1920s, the building's named had changed from the Socialist Labor Party Hall to the Union Hall in any mentions in the local newspaper. By the late 1920s, the building's primary function was as a boxing arena, not a political forum, and in 1936 it was sold to a fruit distribution company.[15]

In addition to the Red Scare of previous decades, there were also very pragmatic reasons to be silent about radicalism at the specific moment of the interviews in 1939 and 1940. In the late 1930s, when *Men Against Granite* was undertaken, the Federal Writers' Project was the object of severe criticism from conservatives in Congress, eventually causing the FWP to be dismantled into the state-by-state Writers' Program. Although it was a federal program that was under attack and not the immigrant Left in particular, nativist views about ethnic

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[15] "Secures New Quarters: Washing Fruit Company Takes Property on Granite Street," Friday, December 13, 1935, *Barre Evening Telegram*, from Russell Belding, "Labor Hall Chronicle." Transcription of *Barre Evening Telegram* and *Montpelier Evening Argus,* 1900-1940. Aldrich Public Library, Barre, Vermont.

Americans underpinned conservative attacks, just as they had during the first Red Scare.

Texas Congressman Martin Dies, creator and chairman of the House Committee Investigating Un-American Activities, led the charge against the FWP, alleging communist activity within the Project. Although the Committee was ostensibly looking for evidence of a particular political philosophy, "communist" because a useful catchword for a more complex phenomenon.[16] Just like the first Red Scare during World War I, the Left was equated with deviance and foreignness, and the words "communism" or "subversion" branded the Federal Writers' Project as treasonous, morally suspect, and alien. During the HUAC hearings and in other writings, Dies expressed nativist views about the twin perils of immigration and the Left. In *The Trojan Horse in America*, and in a 1935 article in the *Saturday Evening Post* on "the immigrant crisis," the Congressman claimed immigrants and foreign ideologies threatened American heritage and institutions. According to Dies, because of immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe, and not industrial capitalism, America faced the same social and economic problems as Europe. As Dies perceived it, the FWP's

[16] See Monty Noam Penkowler, *The Federal Writers' Project: A Study in Government Patronage of the Arts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 203, and Jerrold Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 198.

presentation of ethnic immigrants as a part of the social fabric of the United States was tantamount to treason.[17]

Because of conservative condemnation of the FWP as Leftist, subversive and foreign, *Men Against Granite* writers were aware that anything that could be interpreted as an endorsement of radicalism would endanger their project and their jobs. As evidence of this, in a November 14, 1940 "editorial report on state copy" within the Writers' Program, Richmond and the other *Men Against Granite* writers were counseled to "eliminate material that smacks of political partisanship" as "opinions of this type might, at the present time, be taken as an attempt at propaganda." Specifically this editorial report is written in response to a few lines from Richmond's interview "Better I'm Here" in which the informant, Luigi, a storekeeper and recent immigrant from Italy says, "I try be a good citizen, too, but some-a-time I feel like-a goddam Communist."[18] Clearly this type of censorship, a result of the HUAC hearings, may have contributed to silence surrounding the radical past in Barre.[19]

Additionally, proving Italian-American loyalty to the United States (and therefore anti-radicalism) was of special importance in 1940: the United States

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[17] See Penkowler, *The Federal Writers' Project*, 194 and Hirsch, *Portrait of America*, 199. Martin Dies, from "Immigrant Crisis," quoted in Hirsch, *Portrait of America*, 199.
[18] "Better I'm Here," Interview by Roaldus Richmond, Recorded Writers' Section Files, UNDATED: *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002658/. (Accessed April 18, 2015.)
[19] "Editorial Report on State Copy, re: *Men Against Granite,*" Vermont, November 14, 1940. From Vermont History Center.

was barreling directly toward another war – a war against Italy. This placed Italian-Americans in a precarious position, and again, as in the days preceding the Quota and Immigration Act, called their citizenship and loyalty into question. As author and scholar Louise DeSalvo writes in the memoir "Color: White/Complexion: Dark," in the 1940s "being Italian is dangerous …Italians and Italian Americans are suspect … not pledging allegiance to the United States, not becoming a United States citizen at this time, would have been dangerous…Italians were warily regarded, risked being prosecuted as 'enemy aliens.'"[20] Although war had not yet been declared at the time of the interviews, Mussolini's rise to power and threat of fascism in Europe clearly portended the future conflict.

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In "Finding and Losing the Gems of Barre's Italian Immigrant Past," Rudolph Vecoli cites evidence suggesting that parents who endure traumatic circumstances, like surviving the concentration camps, "erect a wall of silence" surrounding the past to shield their children from trauma. He then suggests that something similar happened with radicalism in Barre. Red Scares led to deportations and beating and jailings, inspiring fear and shame, which, he says, produced amnesia. Certainly state repression of the Left contributed to the silence surrounding radicalism, as discussed above.

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[20] Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, Editors, *Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 22.

But I would extend Vecoli's argument. Certainly it made sense for the first generation to silence an outlawed past. Later generations, though, were not just sufferers of amnesia. They were also taking control of a narrative defining ethnicity. They were responding directly to racial – not just political – allegations of inferiority, unfitness and innate difference. In other words, *Men Against Granite* may be an example of silence, but it is also an act of voice, using story-telling to reshape identity. In suppressing Barre's fascinating political history, contributors to *Men Against Granite* responded to hostile legislation and rhetoric that conflated immigration, Leftist politics and criminality, defining these things in opposition to Americanism. The oral histories subtly confront racial doctrines of difference by smoothing over conflict, and by writing immigrant Others into popularly sanctioned narratives of capitalist success, Yankee ethics, and the American Dream. They work to reshape Italian ethnic identity, and, for the second generation, claim belonging in the American civic body. *Men Against Granite* changes the narrative, and molds the history of immigration into an American tale of progress and assimilation – a tale that makes no room for radicalism.

Men Against Granite does not much concern itself with telling stories of immigration, the Labor Hall or the *mutuo succurso*, struggles to learn English, political resistance, or conflicts with native Vermonters. Instead, the interviews harmoniously blend into larger contemporary master narratives. The interviews

are folksy: they honor the simple, like food, family, work and place. They value individual effort and contribution. They pay tribute to ingenuity, hard work and pluck. Because of their quaint tone and individualist expectations, in many ways the life stories echo popular regionalist representations of Northern New England in the 1930s. Although industrial and not rural, immigrant and not WASP, the shop-owner or stonecarver of *Men Against Granite* resembles those resilient yeoman of *Yankee Magazine* or Frost. By fitting into the regionalist genre, the narrators and writers of the life histories reclaim and repurpose the definition of ethnic immigrant identity in the United States.

Read together, the interviews mediate a celebration of ethnic culture and smooth assimilation to Americanism. This is achieved through older informants who represent the Left as a far-away ghost or a "mad time," second-generation narrators like Gay Pasquanelli who eschew the Old World and focus on their own American aspirations, and informants who paint a clear picture of immigrant success by American standards. In reconciling ethnicity and hegemonic norms in this way, *Men Against Granite* conforms not only to certain regionalist tropes, but to another genre popular in the 1930s: the ghetto pastoral.

Ghetto pastorals, perhaps best exemplified by Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* or Pietro di Donato's *Christ in Concrete,* were tales of growing up and living in ethnic, working-class neighborhoods, and many were written by second-generation immigrants. Members of the second generation, doubly apart

from both hegemonic culture and the Old World customs of their parents, wrote stories that expressed pride in ethnic heritage while asserting an American identity.[21] These novels and memoirs were written in response to racial and ethnic typing of the early twentieth century, from "scientific" doctrines of racial hierarchy to dialect stories in the *Saturday Evening Post* to stereotyped portrayals in the modernist literature of writers like Hemingway and Fitzgerald.[22] This was not necessarily a genre of realism: many of the stories contain conflict, but also seem to escape it. Ghetto pastorals told tales of poverty and want, but at the same time ennobled the simple: hard work, family life, or the honesty of their protagonists.[23]

In particular, interviews conducted and written by Mari Tomasi, herself second-generation Italian, create a pastoral idealization of Barre that bridges Old World traditions and Americanism. In part, these narratives celebrate and uplift Italian cultural life. To do so, Tomasi most often uses food – benign and shared by all – for example in the story "Italian Feed." In this story, Tomasi's narration begins with a glimpse into ethnic ways: she describes a widow named Melicenda Bartoletti wearing long gold earrings and making ravioli by hand: feeding meat and spices into a grinder, and then rolling pastry out on the table. The description is mouthwatering. Americans from Barre and Montpelier come to Melicenda's

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[21] Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front* (London: Verso, 1998), 230-1.
[22] Denning, *The Cultural Front,* 232.
[23] Denning, *The Cultural Front,* 249. Also see Terry Gifford, *Pastoral: The New Critical Idiom.* (London: Routledge, 1999).

house and pay to eat the traditional Italian dishes she cooks: a reminder of the universal appeal of good food and a salute to Italian cooking. Her husband, also an Italian immigrant, died young from stonecutters' T.B., and ever since she's provided for herself and her children by cooking for others. The story is a celebration of Italian culture, and a refutation of racist stereotypes of Italians as disruptive to society. Who doesn't want to eat/be Italian reading this? "Italian Feed," like most of the interviews, is set against a backdrop of poor, working class life, but elevates the simple and universal: food, family and hard work.[24]

Many life stories smooth over the conflicts of immigration and difference and focus instead on second-generation assimilation and success by hegemonic standards. A particularly illustrative example is the interview "A Barre Family," mentioned briefly in chapter one. Tomasi sets the scene: Main Street at four in the afternoon, a bustle of granite-workers just out of the sheds and mines – a snapshot of the everyday life of the working class. Then she hones in on a quiet, serene flower shop, and the woman working there. The interviewee, Joanna Leoti, is a third-generation Italian and the co-owner of the flower shop. She describes her great-uncle Pietro's immigration to the United States, the first Leoti to come to America. Pietro sold fruit from a cart, and was soon able to open his own store. In time he and his brothers "built three business and apartment buildings on Barre's

[24] "Italian Feed," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: SEPT 21, 1940, *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002744/. (Accessed April 18, 2015.)

Main Street. This was in the late nineteenth century. The present generation tends to turn from real estate and stores. Some of the girls have taught here at Spaulding High School, the boys have gone in for dentistry and medicine."[25] Joanna describes a trajectory from immigration, to ownership, to education and entrance into professional fields.

Prejudice and the difficulties of immigrant life are mostly absent from her story, except for describing with disdain her great-uncle's experiences in New York when he first arrived in the United States. She decries "the chicanery of the Neapolitan colony with whom circumstances forced him to live." This is a dig against Southern Italians – who experienced severe racism at the hands of lighter-skinned Northern Italians like the Leotis, who are from Turin. By distancing herself and her family from Neapolitans, Leoti claims whiteness and separates herself from the purported racial traits of Southern Italians.

Joanna describes the granite-working immigrant tenants who live in the Leoti buildings as "hard working" and "honest." She says, "for the most part these stone-working immigrants give their children a good education." Parents wish for their children to have white-collar jobs. Joanna closes her story by expressing the regret her tenants feel over Italy's part in the war in Europe. "I've heard them talk: Italy was their first home, and they would like to be loyal, but America is their

[25] "A Barre Family," Interview by Mari Tomasi, Recorded Writers' Section Files, DATE: AUG 23, 1940, *Men Against Granite*. Online: Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002743/. Accessed April 18, 2015.

new home, their families, property, friends and interests are here. Their sympathy is torn between them and they keep hoping that the United States will keep out of the war." Joanna's oral history demonstrates previous successful paths of immigration, and a first-generation who are already loyal citizens and sure to follow the same path as the Leotis: assimilating well, becoming successful, and contributing materially to their new country. Other of Tomasi's interviews, like "In the Hole," "An Italian Shed Owner," "I Can Skate Loops," and "Yes, Thank You" express similar themes.[26]

Mari Tomasi arises as a voice and interpreter of Barre's Italian granite-workers not only through her work for the WPA, but also through her later fiction. In her own writing, Tomasi combined her personal experience growing up second-generation Italian in central Vermont with the stories and experiences of her *Men Against Granite* informants.[27] For this reason, Tomasi's later work can be read in combination with the *Men Against Granite* interviews, as part of the same dialogue.[28]

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[26] See *Men Against Granite*. Online at the Library of Congress American Memory Website. http://www.loc.gov/search/?in=&q=&new=true&st=. Accessed April 18, 2015.

[27] Helen Barolini, "The Case of Mari Tomasi," In *Italians and Irish in America: proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association*, ed. by Francis X. Femminella, (New York: American Italian Historical Association, 1985), 181-183.

28 Reciprocally, because of standard WPA methods, Tomasi does not delineate her role as recorder, and the ways she might therefore shape the content and message of Men Against Granite. A document entitled "Yankee Folk" ("Yankee Folk" Old and New in New England. DATE 1/18/41?. Reproduced from the Collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) describes WPA methods. Writers should "mak[e] a large number of interviews with a few hand-picked informants." Further, "instead of using questionnaires, the informants were encouraged to talk freely about themselves," presumably limiting the extent to which writers could

Tomasi herself is neither a radical nor a labor activist, but smoothing over difference and conflict comes to be a central concern in her writing. Her own story is not that different from many of the people she interviewed during her days with the Federal Writers' Project. Tomasi was born on Barre Street in Montpelier in January of 1907 to Bartolomeo and Margarita, immigrants from Turin who ran a grocery and cigar store in Vermont. Christened "Marie," she changed her name to Mari (pronounced as Mary) in school because her given name sounded "too foreign." Her compromise is interesting and symbolic of her writing: she retained the "i" in the spelling, perhaps a reflection of her desire to honor her Italian heritage without being marked with its difference.[29]

Like many of the *Men Against Granite* interviews, Tomasi's other published fiction and non-fiction also present Italian-American immigrants as productive citizens and largely apolitical, indicating that Barre's political history is not only repressed by the state but also silenced within the Italian-American

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direct the conversation, but also concealing their role in the narratives. These materials were intended for publication and for a lay-readership, however, thus the writers and editors hoped to achieve "naturalness of presentation" and generate "reader appeal." In order to do so, "chronological order is abandoned" and "the narratives are treated in such a way as to make the material seem true without doing violence to it, on the one hand, and without too much literal transcription, on the other." Quotations from informants are often embedded in description or narration written by FWP employees, which shapes readers' impressions. Available technology was also a factor: tape recorders were not used in the New Deal projects. Interviewers reconstructed oral histories from notes or even from memory. In this way, these narratives come into being as a collaborative blend of writer's and informants' voices, and it is hard for modern readers to know exactly the composition of that blend.

[29] Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale, *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 372.

community itself. Tomasi's writing holds on to ethnicity while downplaying anything that might be construed as deviancy, including political radicalism.

In her novel *Like Lesser Gods,* published in 1949, Tomasi draws on her own experiences and on the *Men Against Granite* interviews to depict the Italian-American community in Barre.[30] The novel, broken in two parts, one set in 1924 and the other in 1941, tells the story of the family of Pietro Dalli, an Italian immigrant stonecarver from Northern Italy. In a larger sense, the book also traces the journey from first to second generation. Italian-American life and culture – like Italian cooking, mushroom hunting, and playing bocce – is revealed to readers and celebrated as a wholesome, family-oriented lifestyle, conducive to American norms and expectations. As Mary Jo Bona argues, the book introduces *"italianita* to non-Italians in an attempt to create a bridge between both worlds" and offers "models of successful negotiating" between non-ethnics and Italians.[31] To do this, Tomasi never mentions a history of political difference in Barre.

Silicosis and its ramifications are the only conflicts addressed in Tomasi's writing, and even these are portrayed less as labor issues than as the perils of artistic life. Curiously absent are bitter strikes, inter-ethnic antagonisms, and discrimination experienced by Italian-Americans. Not only are Italians freed from

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[30] Alfred Rosa, "Afterward" to *Like Lesser Gods* by Mari Tomasi (Shelburne, VT: New England Press, 1988). Online at http://www.uvm.edu/~arosa/Afterword.html, (accessed 11/12).
[31] Mari Tomasi, *Like Lesser Gods* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1949), and Mary Jo Bona, *Claiming a Tradition: Italian-American Women Writers* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 26-7.

a controversial radical past, but Barre Anglos are exonerated from racism and xenophobia. Italians become good, assimilated Americans, perhaps best symbolized by the marriage of an Italian stoneworker's daughter to a Scottish quarry owner's son at the end of the novel.[32]

Likewise, in "The Italian Story in Vermont," a non-fiction essay written for the Vermont Historical Society in 1960, Tomasi depicts the Italian-American community in Barre as easily assimilating to American norms. For example, she says, "most of the Italians found it easy to become Vermonters" because of their Yankee-like "strong and persevering individualism." She dismisses political motivations for leaving Italy, and stresses the faithful Catholicism of Italian-Americans, although the Barre immigrants were largely opposed to religion and distrustful of the Catholic Church. She does discuss the radical Left in Barre, but, similar to the *Men Against Granite* informants, she describes this period as one of "maladjustment" due to the "emotional upheavals [of] vast immigration," a "brief night" in Barre's history when "anarchists formed but a very small fraction of the population." But, she says, "by 1909 or shortly afterwards, the Barre anarchist flare-up had died to gray ashes …and when the echoes died away they quietly settled down to an American way of life."[33] In this quote, Tomasi both dismisses the Left as a long-gone phenomenon and corroborates the assumption that "Leftist" and "American" are mutually exclusive. Like the *Men Against Granite*

[32] Barolini, "The Case of Mari Tomasi," 181-183.
[33] Mari Tomasi, "The Italian Story in Vermont," *Vermont History* 38 (January 28, 1960): 75-82.

interviews, Tomasi expresses a sense of embarrassment at Barre's radicalism, and assures the public that the movement is no more than "ashes."

In Tomasi's writing, as in the *Men Against Granite* interviews, second-generation Italian immigrants responded not just to allegations of radicalism, but to the ethnic stereotyping in popular discourses of the early twentieth century. Because radicalism, especially anarchism, was synonymous with and a symbol for chaos and disorder – harkening back to the vengeful, panicked response to incidents like the shooting of Chief Patrick Brown – it was jettisoned not to protect the radicals, but so their children could put behind them a past when Italians occupied the shadowy position of the feared outsider. As Jennifer Guglielmo points out, participation in a hegemonically white America "required that Italians distort their histories to condemn and disown those parts of themselves which most resembled the dark 'other.'" The radical Left, popularly portrayed as a symptom of civic disorder that marked "inferior races," was one of those dark other parts.

And, in silencing that radical past, *Men Against Granite* participates in the formation of an important master narrative: the ghetto pastoral and immigrant success story. Ghetto pastorals were at first seen by critics as a minor regional form, but by the 1940s, narratives of ethnic, working class neighborhoods had become an important genre in American fiction. From this genre, the immigrant saga and the theme of the great migration became central to American mythology.

As Michael Denning puts it, "by the time of Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy and Don Bluth's animated epic of the Mousekowitzes, *An American Tale*, the story of the ghetto had become quintessentially American."[34]

Men Against Granite, while silent about or deprecatory of the Leftist history of Barre, is radical in its own right: it claims a place in America for immigrants and the working class. By working within popular genres of the time, like the regionalist folk narrative or the ghetto pastoral, the informants and writers of *Men Against Granite* create a space where immigrant culture and the American Dream of self-made success, social mobility, and the wish for a better life for one's children are inextricably linked. As empowering as the interviews might be, though, they hardly scratch the surface of the fascinating history of activism, intellectualism and community that existed in Barre in the early twentieth century.

[34] Denning, *The Cultural Front,* 231.

Conclusion

In 1939, residents of Barre were asked to share their life narratives and the fascinating story of their cosmopolitan industrial town with a national audience. As we now know, even had these interviews been published, they barely scratch the surface of the intriguing political and social history of the town. But, in the end, not even the quaint, immigrant-success versions of Barre's past were shared. So, what happened to the oral histories? I'll explore that question briefly here.

After conducting over a hundred interviews in little more than a year, from 1939 to early 1941, and after writing up the life stories and revising them, Mari Tomasi and Roaldus Richmond went back and forth in review with the Washington, D.C. Writers' Program office and with publishers. Initially some of the interviews were suggested for publication as part of the larger compilation *Men At Work*, and then the stories were submitted to the New York publishing firm Duell, Sloan and Pearce. Duell, Sloan and Pearce rejected the stories for reasons of quality, calling them "amateurish."[1] As United States involvement in World War II grew, the limited resources of the Writers' Program shifted from social and ethnic studies to projects that focused on national defense.[2] Although

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[1] Writers' Program Letters: Correspondence between Roaldus Richmond, Mari Tomasi, J.D. Newsom, and H.P. Radigan. 1940-1941. From Vermont History Center.
[2] Monty Noam Penkowler, *The Federal Writers' Project: A Study in Government Patronage of the Arts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 230.

Stephen Daye Press of Brattleboro was interested in publishing *Men Against Granite*, in early 1942 Program officials in Washington decided to divert all Vermont Writers' Program resources to the completion of *Fort Ethan Allen, A Guide to the Fort and Vicinity.*[3] Ultimately, *Men Against Granite* was jettisoned entirely.[4] Like many other FWP materials, the life histories of *Men Against Granite* were shelved until 2004, when they were re-found, edited and published.

Even if the stories had been published, they would not have told tales of Luigi Galleani, the *Cronaca Sovversivi* or the children of the Bread and Roses Strike given refuge in Barre. Instead, the *Men Against Granite* narratives present a quaint picturesque of Italian-American identity. Like the regionalist images of Northern New England discussed in the introduction, the life histories contribute to a specific master narrative – the immigrant success story – in which new arrivals claimed ownership over a particular version of the American Dream. However, because *Men Against Granite* (like so many other WPA projects) was never published, even the quaint immigrant picturesque was stymied. The only major depiction of this region to filter through in popular imagination and hegemonic culture, then, was that of *Yankee Magazine*: pre-industrial, WASP-y, bucolic.

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[3] Writers' Program Letters: letter from J.D. Newsom, Director, WPA Writers' Program to H.P. Radigan, State Work Projects Administrator, Vermont, Jan. 13, 1942. Vermont History Center.
[4] See Ann Banks, editor, *First Person America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991), 96.

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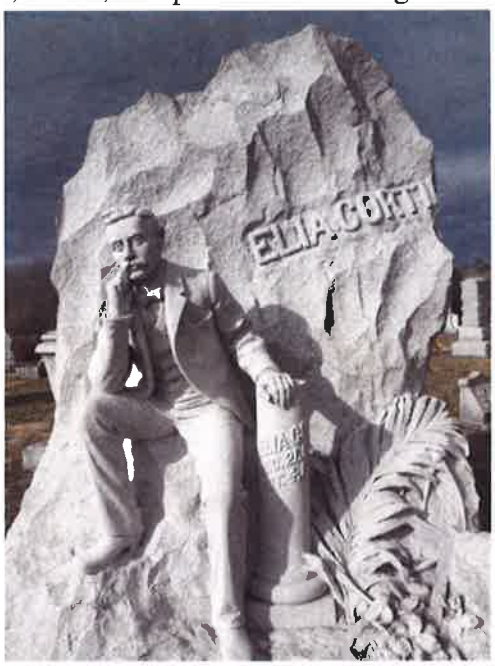
Despite the non-publication of *Men Against Granite*, and beyond that its internal silences, Barre's story is recorded in another formidable and lasting medium: stone. Through it, Italian immigrant stonecutters left a powerful and beautiful story. When I traveled to Barre to research and to see the grave of Eli Corti, the town's past – although obscured in other ways – was there in plain sight for me to see, written in stone. From the Robert Burns memorial, to Innocente Belli's gravestone with the single word "anarchist," to the symbolic arm and hammer carved in granite atop the Socialist Labor Party Hall, the record of immigration, artisanship and Leftist politics remains visible.

Amidst the other symbols and signifiers of Italian history in town, the beautiful memorial to Eli Corti in Hope Cemetery reveals many things about Barre, first and foremost the artistry and cosmopolitan training of the stonecutters there. The monument was carved by Corti's brother-in-law, John Comi, and his brother, William Corti, from a model by Italian sculptor Abramo Ghigli of Carrara, who opened a studio in Barre in 1902. The statue is an example of *verismo,* a version of artistic realism imported from Italy that emphasized the individual and his circumstances, rather than relying on the conventions of neoclassicism.[5] In the statue, Corti, who was a successful business owner, is dressed in a suit and bowtie. His tragic death is revealed in his position – he is

[5] Donald G. Allen, *Barre Granite Heritage* (Barre, VT: L. Brown and Sons, 1997), 33-37 and Gene Sessions, editor, *Celebrating a Century of Granite Art* (1989), 26.

portrayed in the traditional expression of "melancholic reflection": his right elbow on his bent knee, his cheek in his hand. His left hand rests on the bottom of a broken column, a symbol of a life cut short, a "martyr to labor" as Robert McGrath, author of "Ghosts in Granite" says. At his feet are the instruments of his art: his carving tools: calipers, square, hammer, chisel, and pneumatic carving tool. A palm branch is there, too, a symbol of peace. The statue is a testament to the strength and vitality of the Italian stonecutters' community: the base of the monument was fashioned by grieving carvers from all over the state.[6]



Above: The Corti Memorial in Hope Cemetery. Picture by the author.

* * *

The stone record was the one I saw first when I went to Barre that gray day in March. Since the interviews were done in the 1930s and 40s the town's history of immigration, industry and Leftist politics has proudly come out, at least locally and in scholarly circles. In general, however, the image of Northern New England that remains is the other one: Robert Frost, stonewalls, and old red barns. Barre is just one small New

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[6] Allen, *Barre Granite Heritage,* 33 and McGrath, "Ghosts in Granite: Reflections on the Art of Dying" 25.

England town with a past, and this thesis is very much a local history – countless other places with equally intriguing and fascinating stories await the research of other graduate students.

The history of Italian immigrant political movements, like the history of Northern New England, also lies half-obscured under the weight of popular master narrative. Despite significant scholarly investigation into immigrant history and the history of the Left in the United States since the 1960s, Italian-Americans are often rendered in conservative Mafioso stereotypes (perpetuated in popular culture by movies like *The Godfather* or television shows like the *Sopranos*) or portrayed as insularly family-and food-oriented and non-political.[7] In part, this repression of history has happened because of state action and the stereotypes of outsiders, and in part immigrants themselves have been complicit in the silence. State repression, both political and cultural, in the form of the Palmer Raids, immigration quotas, and HUAC hearings decimated the Left and made it both dangerous and socially unacceptable to be a socialist or anarchist. In response to racism, repression and forces of Americanization, which defined non-capitalism as deviant, later generations shunned the political militancy of the immigrant generation. As Ruldolph Vecoli says, for Italian-Americans "a radical

[7] Philip Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer, "Introduction" to *The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 2.

identity was not a viable option in the land of triumphant capitalism."[8] Instead, the *Men Against Granite* informants and writers spoke a different story: one that both celebrated Italian culture, and described a trajectory of assimilation and the American Dream. The retelling of Barre history conforms to a persistent and popular American tale: the immigrant success story.

Uncovering the political, industrial and racial history of places like Barre is crucial to helping us understand the present and allows us to contextualize current issues of great complexity and conflict like race relations and the limits of political discourse. In the era of mass incarceration, Ferguson, Missouri and "the new Jim Crow," there is renewed importance in remembering the fickle, constructed, and overlapping definitions of race and criminality. In a time of great wealth inequity and transparent use of wealth to wield political power, it is crucial that when challenges to the status quo – whether racial, political, or economic – are branded un-American, we know, given our history, that is simply not true.

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[8] Rudolph Vecoli quoted in Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale, *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian-American Experience* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 243.

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