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# La Mano e il Braccio: Comparing Italian Immigrant Communities in Louisiana And Florida, 1880-1914

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## **Abstract**

Italian immigration patterns to Louisiana and Tampa, Florida have received a good deal of scholarly attention as two separate phenomena, but they are better understood as informing one another in the evolution of southern thought in regard to Italian immigrants. Italians were the second largest non-black minority group behind Mexicans to be lynched, and in understanding the circumstances surrounding those acts of extrajudicial violence, a pattern is apparent.

Lynchings of Italians in Louisiana emerged out of fear of the Black Hand (La Mano Nera), and the Mafia, whereas the sole incident of an Italian being lynched in Tampa occurred as a result of a strike, and the larger specter of labor militancy. Lynchings and local newspapers are analyzed to see how perception of Italians changed over the decades and especially how discourse from one state could translate to the other. Furthermore, Italian interaction with black laborers in Louisiana and with Spanish and Cuban immigrants in Tampa become important in understanding how an organized labor movement – or the lack thereof – emerged.

*Keywords:* Immigration, Italians, Cubans, Strikes, Lynching

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Italian immigration to the American South has been a matter of scholarly attention, much of it focusing on Ybor City, Florida and the lynching of 11 Italians in New Orleans on March 14, 1891. In isolating these locations and incidents, the larger historical picture is lost. While

historian Donna Gabaccia wrote about Italian immigration in both Louisiana and Tampa in her 1988 book *Militants and Migrants: Rural Sicilians Become American Workers*, she did not compare their experiences and instead discussed the two communities in separate chapters. As such, there is a gap in the literature that could benefit from understanding how their experiences were similar and how they differed. While Italian peasants traveled to Tampa and to Louisiana's sugar parishes, artisans favored New Orleans (Gabaccia 99). Where they settled and what sort of work they did merits further research because those factors greatly affected their experiences.

The Italian experience in the Postbellum South is varied but, nonetheless, certain constants existed: they were the victims of extrajudicial violence, largely in the form of lynching, and they had extensive interaction with other minority groups. Although Patrizia Salvetti notes 10 lynchings with 34 Italians killed in both the South and the West, Clive Webb counts 29 killed in 9 instances specifically in the South (Salvetti VIII; Webb 46). Of the 29 killed, 21 were killed in Louisiana, and two in Tampa. These numbers make Italians, after Mexicans, the second-largest non-black minority to be killed by lynch mobs (Webb 46-47). While lynchings in Louisiana began with the infamous lynching of 11 Italians in New Orleans in 1891, the single lynching in Tampa's history did not occur until 1910. In both places, primarily white mobs resorted to extrajudicial violence to deal with Italian immigrants, the circumstances in which they were lynched differ; in Louisiana, the specter of the Black Hand and the Mafia is the cause of the white elite's ire, whereas in Tampa the local white elite feared class consciousness and leftism.

The experiences of Italians with African Americans were varied, not only between Tampa and Louisiana, but also within Louisiana. Historian Gary Mormino notes that in the cigar factories of Ybor City, Afro-Cubans worked alongside Italians, Spaniards, and white Cubans

(Mormino & Pozzetta 101). While few black people lived in Ybor City prior to urban renewal in the 1950s, between Afro-Cubans and the other groups, “there was a lot of respect, one for the other ... so it was no discrimination between the Latin whites and the Cuban blacks” (Mormino 1979). In Louisiana’s sugar parishes, Italians did business with black customers and held a “significant number of ‘colored saloon licenses’” (Jackson 328). This contrasts from when Italians worked as laborers in the sugar parishes, where Italians “maintained neutral relations to the Afro-Americans” but still “constituted separate communities, marrying and socializing among themselves” (Gabaccia 104). This acts as a deviation from most other Italian American communities, where they patronized African Americans if not worked alongside them as is seen in Tampa and elsewhere in Louisiana.

While Louisiana has a very traditional southern racial dichotomy between white and black people, Tampa benefited from the presence of Spaniards and Cubans in addition to Italians. These three groups all worked together in the cigar factories and had extended interactions with each other. Because Tampa transformed “from an isolated, biracial village to an urban, ethnically diverse manufacturing center,” these three groups – collectively referred to as Latins in the historiography – formed a sort of solidarity in the wake of nativism and establishment violence intended to maintain the status quo of a typical southern town (Ingalls XVIII). Despite this solidarity, certain conditions made it difficult for Italians to maintain their own sense of identity in Tampa. Norino Zenati, an Italian living in Tampa summarized this loss of identity in the Italian-language publication *Il Pensiero* in 1922:

Here in Tampa we do not see “Macelleria” below “Meat Market”; instead we write “Carnicería.” Nor do we write “Calzolaio” underneath “Shoemaker”; we put “Zapatero,” all the while we learn to say *ventana* for window instead of *finestra*.

We are Americanizing, Cubanizing, Hispanicizing, but we do not have the power to Italianize anything (Zenati).

Despite the linguistic hegemony that Cubans and Spaniards exerted over Italians, this did not necessarily affect quotidian interactions. Italians learned Spanish and had extensive contact with their Latin neighbors.

The nomenclature used to describe Italian immigrants in the Postbellum South merits some degree of discussion, as well. Of the Italians who came to Ybor City, over 90 percent were from Sicily and the Italian quarter in New Orleans came to be known as “Little Palermo” (Gabaccia 99, 102). As a result of the overwhelming proportion of Sicilians, many academics have opted to refer to these emigrations as Sicilian rather than Italian. While this distinction can be helpful, it also is affected by the discourse of American publications that justified extrajudicial violence against Italians. An article from the *Lake Charles Commercial* is one such example. The article, which was published in 1890 and simply titled “Mafia” sought to clarify that any Mafia activity should be attributed solely to Sicilians and not Italians as a whole. The author, using the pseudonym “Southern Watchmen,” continued by arguing that it would be “inexcusable” to say that Sicilians are “of the same race as the Italian people” (“Mafia”). This idea was not unique to the Southern consciousness and in fact had its roots in how the liberal Italian state conceived of the southern half of the peninsula, known as the *Mezzogiorno*. It was claimed that the *Mezzogiorno* – and especially Sicily – was “barbarous ... primitive ... violent ... irrational” (Dickie 1). The Dillingham Commission, a joint senate commission that reported on immigration to the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, similarly argued that:

It is generally accepted that North Italians make a most desirable class of immigrants. They are more progressive, enlightened, and it is claimed are more easily assimilated

than their southern countrymen, who, because of their ignorance, low standards of living, and the supposedly great criminal tendencies among them are regarded by many as racially undesirable (176).

The “Othering” of Sicily from the rest of Italy allowed Southerners to create a dichotomy between the “Good Italian” and the “Savage Sicilian.” This orientalist perspective pushed the author to use the term “Italian” to refer to any immigration from the then-recently unified Kingdom of Italy.

Four million Italians immigrated to the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, constituting 29 percent of the nation’s foreign-born population in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Zanoni 45). Louisiana sugar planters specifically imported Italian laborers, using immigration agents on their behalf to direct Italians there, after the emancipation of slaves led to a labor shortage (Cinel 7). This shortage occurred for several reasons: sugar planters above all else wanted to pay workers lower wages than most other industries, which caused many people to leave and look for other work, and freedmen “held out for higher and more regular wages” (Scarpaci 20; Scott 49). As black laborers became more volatile, especially in the face of labor demonstrations, sugar planters began to look for more reliable sources of labor. After failing to attract Scandinavian and Chinese immigrants already living in the United States, and the Spanish and Portuguese governments giving lukewarm responses to planters’ inquiries, they finally struck a deal with the Italian government to import workers, attracting between 30,000 to 80,000 seasonal workers each planting season, known as the *zuccharata* (Scarpaci 20).

New Orleans acted as the starting point for many Italian migrants to the South. So many Italians lived in Louisiana that by 1930, “of the 16,000 foreign families in Louisiana, 44 percent were Italian” (Cinel 7). It served as a home base between planting seasons for those working in

the sugar parishes, but many Italians living in the Crescent City would move to Tampa following the infamous lynching in 1891 (Gabaccia 101). Many Italians in New Orleans worked at the docks or helped corner the fruit trade in the city, not unlike what they would later do in Tampa (Gabaccia 101).

In Florida, Vincente Martinez Ybor and Ignacio Haya, a Cuban cigar factory owner and a Spanish one based in Key West both wanted to relocate so as to temper the radical labor militancy of their Cuban workers (Mormino & Pozzetta 64). They settled on Tampa, a small town situated along the Gulf coast of Florida, in 1886, where they purchased 40 acres and set out to build a company town (Mormino & Pozzetta 65). Soon, the town was filled with Spanish and Cuban immigrants, who turned the town from a traditionally southern town into an industrial center. Immigrants like Angelo Cacciatore who were living in St. Cloud, Florida heard news of opportunity in Tampa and decided to move there in the late 1880s and early 1890s (Mormino & Pozzetta 34). Tampa not only attracted Italians from New Orleans, but directly from Sicily, from New York, and from Pennsylvania (Mormino 1978, 1978, 1984).

Italians in both places worked in a variety of jobs. Italians in Tampa did not solely work in the cigar factories but also held jobs as fruit peddlers, barbers, butchers, dressmakers, and real estate agents (Italian Business Directory). Given their involvement in real estate, Italians bought up much of the property and in many cases acted as landlords (Mormino 1978, 1979). This concept follows the Italian saying *chi ha prato ha tutto* (he who has land has everything) (Baiamonte 370). As Paolo Giordano points out, Italians in Louisiana “had set out a goal for themselves – to be landowners” (167). In places where this was less likely – namely, in the sugar parishes of Louisiana and in St. Cloud, FL – Italians would eventually move on to places where they could own their land.

These two different locations situated along the Gulf Coast would set the stage for a 30-year period marked by urban vigilantism and lynch mobs. These places did not exist in isolation, and through the study of their periodicals, it becomes clear that there existed an evolving rhetoric that both states leaned on in their justifications of extrajudicial violence against Italians. While threats of organized crime and leftism are certainly present, there is also the underlying concern within the Southern consciousness that Italians in part disrupted the rigid racial hierarchy of the region. As Webb notes, white Southerners did not regard Italian immigrants as black, but they nonetheless saw them as an obstruction in the consolidation of power under Jim Crow legislation (48). This in-betweenness of race that Italians found themselves in helps set the stage for the complications that they experience; they were discriminated against by white Southerners, while not necessarily fitting in with the black population, either. These experiences are not unique to Italians in the South; it also was a situation that Mexicans, Cubans, and Spaniards all had to navigate as well. This explains the solidarity that formed in Tampa between Italians, Cubans, and Spaniards, while Italians did not make meaningful connections in Louisiana's sugar parishes with the black laborers, instead staying within their own communities.

The 1891 lynching in New Orleans of 11 Italians has received a good deal of attention in journal articles and monographs. A lot of the research examines the event itself but fails to understand its context. It is important to look at how Italians fit into American Postbellum society, instead of solely within the isolation of the infamous lynching. Looking at the 1891 lynching on its own also misses the evolving rhetoric that the local newspapers adopted; the New Orleans lynching was the first of four lynchings that occurred in Louisiana, making it the state with the most lynchings of Italians in the United States, both in number of people lynched and in number of incidents (Webb 47). As Jessica Barbata Jackson argues, relations between Italians



and southerners in Louisiana had been neutral if not cordial prior to the assassination of New Orleans police superintendent David Hennessy, whose murder precipitated the 1891 lynching (Jackson 304). Because Italian labor was filling a critical shortage of labor, there was a mutual need from both planters and immigrants to coexist. The idea that anti-Italian sentiment fermented beneath the surface years before the lynching uses frameworks that existed in northern cities like New York but did not necessarily reflect reality in Louisiana.

The specter of the Mafia emerged in the early 1890s in the months preceding the assassination of Hennessy, but most publications still maintained the veneer that any organized crime did not reflect upon every Italian. The aforementioned article in the *Lake Charles Commercial* qualified their statements on the Sicilian Mafia by stating that “it must not be supposed that Sicily ... is now merely a nest of assassins” (“Mafia”). This goodwill towards Italians, however, would disappear once Hennessy was killed and the 11 Italians strung up. The idea that not all Sicilians were associated with the Mafia quickly dissipated and was replaced with the notion that every crime committed by an Italian became associated with an Italian organized criminal underground (Kurtz 361). Because Italians occupied a sort of in-betweenness between white and black people within the framework of race in American Postbellum society, Italians’ ethnicities were singled out in articles that reported any crimes committed by them. While the ethnicity of other white minority groups like French or Germans might not be mentioned, any crime committed by an Italian was clarified so as to ensure that the audience understood that Italians were criminals that could not be trusted nor assimilated (DeLucia 214).

Most interesting in the David Hennessy case is the myth that surrounds it. Even within the literature, there are claims that he had “successfully exposed organized crime among a portion of the Italian immigrant population during the 1880s” (Goldfield 93). This secret organization is

given two different names by publications in the early 1890s and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Black Hand (*La Mano Nera*) and the Mafia. The latter had a more enduring impact on the nomenclature of Italian American organized crime, while the former has since faded into more relative obscurity. The Black Hand is best epitomized in the 1855 story of Fransisco Domingo, a Sicilian who was murdered and his throat slit. His widowed wife had in her possession a letter that demanded \$500 for his life. At the bottom was the imprint of a hand in black ink (True Delta 1855). This form of extortion is better understood to constitute the Black Hand, rather than an organized syndicate. The simplicity of the crime means that any petty criminal can extort someone, but Louisiana publications nonetheless would attribute it to a greater conspiracy of Italian underground organizations.

An article published in 1908 by Gaetano D'Amato, the former president of the United Italian Societies, attempted to dispel rumors of the Black Hand. He mentioned that his contemporaries alleged that the Black Hand operated out of Italy, sending members to the United States to kill and plunder its citizens. He argued that the society of the Black Hand was not even Italian, but Spanish, and was scarcely heard in Italy (D'Amato 544). The *Lake Charles Commercial* in 1883, seven years before writing their article on the Mafia, mentions this Spanish organization that bears the same name, calling it a "revolutionary organization" (1833). Other Louisiana publications mention this "society of the Black Hand," talking about their "anarchist" activity (St. Landry Democrat 1883). However, the Black Hand was not exclusive to Spain either. The Black Hand was used in several other European organizations, including the Serbian secret military organization Ujedinjenje ili smrt, which was responsible for the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 (Kurtz 360).

D'Amato continues by arguing that these criminals are but a few bad people among “millions of honest and industrious Italians” (D'Amato 544). An article published in *The Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel* admits that employers of Italians found them reliable and able to “readily learn to work and can be depended on” (The Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel 1896). Throughout the South, Italians had gained a positive reputation for their hard work, even though Southern newspapers often painted Italians in a negative light. Despite D'Amato's positive depiction of Italian immigrants, he makes a statement about the composition of these criminals utilizing the symbol of the Black Hand: “There have crept into this country some thousands of ex-convicts from Naples, Sicily, and Calabria” (D'Amato 544). All of the locations that he mentions in his depiction of ex-convicts belong to the southern half of the Italian peninsula. While D'Amato attempts to defend his compatriots, he falls back on orientalist rhetoric inherited from northern Italy, further contributing to the othering southern Italians as being criminals. He does not mention where those millions of industrious Italians were from, but the implication is that they were not from those three areas that these supposed ex-convicts came from. D'Amato was not alone in his creation of a dichotomy between the “Good Italian” and the “Savage Sicilian;” *Le Meschacébé* reported that “Leading Italians” formed a secret brotherhood to “stamp out the Black Hand” in 1908 (1908). Wealthy Italians fed into nativist rhetoric espoused by the white elite to stamp out an organization that existed only in isolated cases, and could not be at all considered an organization like the various publications depicted it to be. In doing so, they also hoped to win the acclaim of the English-speaking press and disassociate themselves from the so-called Savage Sicilian.

The sole recorded lynching of Italians in Florida's history occurred on September 20, 1910 in Tampa. Angelo Albano and Castenge Ficarotta were arrested for the fatal shooting of J.

Frank Esterling, “an accountant for the Bustillo Brothers and Díaz Cigar Company” (Luconi 30-31). The horse-drawn cart they were being transported in was intercepted, they were taken to a grove and lynched. Pinned to Albano’s belt was a notice which read: “Beware! Others take note or go the same way. We know seven more. We are watching you. If any more citizens are molested, look out – Justice” (Luconi 30-31). A general strike had been declared in August which would last for six months, pushing “for a reduction in the number of apprentices and ... a union shop and formal recognition” for the Cigar Makers International Union (CMIU) (Ingalls 89). As newspapers noted when they reported on the lynching, it was more than just the murder of Esterling that precipitated the violence; it had happened explicitly because of the strike (The Palatka News and Advertiser 1910). It had not been the first time in Tampa that lynch law had been threatened during a strike – there had been a threat during a strike in 1892 – but this event was the first and only instance of a Latin (Italians, Spaniards, and Cubans in Tampa) being lynched (Ingalls 52).

The *Tampa Tribune* was quick to say that “There will probably be a suspension of ‘Black Hand’ activities in Tampa,” conjuring forth the all-too-familiar specter of a secret criminal organization (Ingalls 97). *The Ocala Evening Star* added to this conspiracy in October, complaining that “there is plenty of evidence that Black Hand methods flourish in Tampa” when strikers voted via secret ballot to continue the strike (The Ocala Evening Star 1910). The mentioning of the Black Hand in the instance of Tampa contrasts starkly with that of Louisiana. Whereas mentions of the Black Hand in Louisiana were methods of extortion, supposed Black Hand activity in Tampa served to aid striking workers. Most interesting is that very few publications in Florida ever mentioned the Black Hand in Florida until Albano and Ficarotta were lynched.

Despite the superficial commonality of the Black Hand and Italians being accused of murder resulting in their lynching, the circumstances surrounding these situations greatly differ. While any and all crime committed by an Italian in Louisiana was attributed to the Mafia, Ingalls traces the formation of urban vigilante groups in Tampa specifically to times of strikes (Ingalls XVI). It should be understood that the abrupt mention of the Black Hand in Tampa is related to and, in many ways, informed by what had been happening in Louisiana for the past two decades. If there was little evidence of organized crime in Louisiana, there was even less evidence in Tampa, as reflected by the lack of journalistic attention until the lynching in 1910. In attributing the strike and any actions relating to it to the Black Hand, the local white elite sought to delegitimize any labor militancy that had been brewing in Tampa. Calling upon the specter of *la Mano Nera* took on contours of being conspiratorial, but it was also a tool to turn the average person against the strike.

While it might be hyperbolic to attribute any and all class consciousness to a left-wing movement, Tampa workers readily used the strike as a means of improving their working conditions. Ybor and Haya moved their factories to Tampa in order to temper the labor militancy that was present in Key West, but the cigar factories in newly established Ybor City ironically were delayed by a Cuban strike. So common were strikes in Tampa that “people date their lives from various strikes” (Mormino & Pozzetta 101). The literature agrees that labor relations in the early years of Ybor City can be characterized by anarcho-syndicalism, which advocated for “education, local control, and nonpolitical direct action” (Mormino & Pozzetta 113). Tampa’s radical nature came to be further characterized by other radical ideologies: “left- and right-wing socialists, ... revolutionary and Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) syndicalists, pacifistic and ‘propaganda of the deed’ anarchists, and a number of others as well” (Cannistraro & Meyer

255). Anarchism seemed to have reached its zenith in the 1890s and begun to wane at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which allowed socialism to become the main driver of radical politics in Tampa by the early 1910s (Hirsch, Steven, et al. 290).

The diversity in political opinions resulted in a variety of predominately anarchist and socialist publications. Most, like *El Internacional*, *El Obrero Industrial*, and *El Comercio*, published in Spanish and English. Italian publications like *L'Aurora*, *L'Alba Sociale*, and *La Voce dello Schiavo* published in all three languages. The omnipresence of Spanish in Tampa's radical community meant that while Italian publications had the occasional article in Spanish, Spanish-language publications seldom had Italian articles, given that most workers in the cigar factories learned Spanish (Cannistraro & Meyer 255). These newspapers talked about their respective ideologies, updates on strikes (most Italian radical newspapers thrived during periods of labor unrest), and radical politics in Cuba, Spain, Italy, and many other European countries. Among the subjects of political theory were famous writers like Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, whose work was often reproduced in the Tampa anarchist presses (*L'Alba Sociale* 1901). Because so many political factions existed, coupled with their respective publications advocating for their specific cause, some degree of infighting occurred. *La Voz del Esclavo*, the Spanish-language version of *La Voce dello Schiavo*, sided with the anarchist movement *La Resistencia* during the Tampa strike of 1901, putting it into direct conflict with the American Federation of Labor-backed *El Internacional* (*La Voz del Esclavo* 1900). The fallout between the groups had occurred in the fall of 1900, when the “the two unions fought over turf and members” (Hirsch, Steven, et al. 290). Both groups were unsurprisingly comprised of mostly Spaniards and Cubans, but *La Resistencia*, the larger of the two organizations, did boast 310 Italians (Mormino & Pozzetta 116). While this number seems miniscule, it must be remembered that the 1900

census counts only 1,315 Italian immigrants lived in Ybor City, which means that over 20 percent of the Italian population at the time was involved in radical labor activity (Mormino & Pozzetta 88).

These publications did not exist in a vacuum, and it is important to view Tampa not as an isolated town, but rather a part of a transnational network of leftist groups. This manifested in many ways: Cubans, Spaniards, and Italians having contact with other groups from their home countries, but also communicating with other networks within the United States. Tampa leftists not only read radical publications from their home countries, but also recommended that their readers subscribe to other leftist publications across the country. *La Parola dei Socialisti* in Chicago, IL and *La Fiaccola* in Buffalo, NY were among the publications that Italian socialist newspaper *L'Aurora* recommended to its readers (*L'Aurora* 1912). Likewise, Tampa publications were read across the country and in Cuba, Spain, and Italy. Radicals still living in the Latins' home countries wrote the occasional article in Tampa publications, helping to cement the idea that their fight was transnational in scope (*El Internacional* 1914). These articles were usually in the form of correspondence concerning domestic politics, helping to keep Tampa radicals informed. It is important, therefore, not to see Tampa as either completely informing their home countries, or being completely informed by them, but rather engaging in a dialogue where each part of the network contributed to the leftist cause.

Italian leftism in Tampa was no different from that of Cuban and Spanish anarchism at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; Italians similarly relied on transnational networks in order to spread their beliefs and ideology. The socialist organization *Gruppo Lorenzo Panepinto* operated out of Tampa, having been named after a schoolteacher and radical in Santo Stefano Quisquina, where most Italians in Tampa were from, after he was assassinated by the Sicilian Mafia (Cannistraro &

Meyer 255). This organization sent 1,200 lire to Santo Stefano each year for the continued propagation of leftist ideals in the area (Fiorentino & Sanfilippo 117; Il Martire 1911). Giovanni Vaccaro, the man who founded the *Gruppo Lorenzo Panepinto* wrote after Panepinto was assassinated that: “The socialist *sezione* and the local *Gruppo Lorenzo Panepinto* are actively working to continue the emancipative work of the Teacher [Panepinto]” (L’Aurora 1912). This particular instance shows how Tampa and Santo Stefano adapted to changing circumstances; while Santo Stefano had initially given instruction to Italians in Tampa for radical activity, given that it was very active in the *fascio* movement that swept across Sicily, Tampa soon came to be a benefactor in the maintaining of leftist ideals in their hometown once the movement was violently crushed by Italian president Francesco Crispi.

The Italian Club (*L’Unione Italiana*) is another important source in understanding how Italians funded and participated in radical activity. Founded in April 1894, *L’Unione* would be joined by the other Latin organizations: *El Círculo Cubano*, *El Centro Asturiano*, and *El Centro Español* (Mormino & Pozzetta 188; La Voz del Esclavo 1900). It acted as a mutual aid (*mutuo soccorso*) society, giving money to dues-paying members during times of unemployment, illness, or a strike (L’Unione Italiana 1910). It also provided a free burial for any paying member in the club’s cemetery. These services, alongside the well-stocked library that contained “well-known works of literature, including plays, poetry, novels, and short stories,” as well as radical literature written by the likes of Peter Kropotkin and Pierre-Joseph Proudon, helped to cement the Italian community in Ybor City, as well as better define its radical nature and make it a fixture of the mainstream transnational anarchist world (Pozzetta 78).

*L’Unione* helped pay for guests to come and speak in front of packed halls: “Club resources financed radical speakers and authors” and “Ybor City became a regular stop for



radical luminaries” (Cannistraro & Meyer 256). Many of these guests were on speaking tours, known as a *giro di propaganda* where they discussed leftist theory, held “public debates” and “proselytize[d]” (Pozzetta 77). Well-known Italian anarchist speakers like Arturo Caroti, Luigi Galleani, and Errico Malatesta traveled to Tampa to speak at *L’Unione*. These events were well-attended, not only by Italians but also by Spaniards and Cubans – for this reason, not all of the speakers were Italian. Socialist Italian-language newspaper *L’Aurora*, advertised that Francisco Domenech, a Cuban socialist, was coming to speak at *L’Unione* (*L’Aurora* 1912).

Unsurprisingly, Domenech’s visit was conducted entirely in Spanish, the lingua franca of Tampa’s Latin community. In this way, *L’Unione* not only served Italian interests in Tampa, but that of the entire Latin community.

While Italians certainly participated in strikes and ran leftist publications, it is important to question how many Italians actually had radical tendencies. With over 2,000 foreign-born Italians, and thousands more born in the United States, it is difficult to imagine that a majority of them supported any strain of anarchism or socialism (Mormino & Pozzetta 55). Because the leftist movement was largely centered on the cigar industry, which most Italian men had abandoned in favor of owning grocery stores, fruit stands, barber shops, and acquiring real estate by 1910, the majority of Italians were most likely apathetic to the strikes if not hostile towards them (Italian Business Directory). The 310 Italians that supported *La Resistencia* became statistically insignificant, and even then had constituted about 23 percent of the then-Italian population – an impressive statistic, but far from a majority of Italians in Tampa (Mormino & Pozzetta 88). Over the course of that decade, Italians began to buy and develop the land in Ybor City, eventually becoming “the biggest property owners” (Mormino 1979). The anarchist newspaper *La Voz del Esclavo* wrote that: “The factory owners are not our only enemies; ... the

landlords evict workers without any compassion” (1900). The anarchist newspapers, which argued against racism, calling it “the erroneous judgment of how we view ourselves,” believed that all manners of social and economic oppression were related to class (1901). In this way, they did not feel connected to wealthy Italians, as they believed them to be part of the bourgeois mechanisms that sought to suppress the proletariat.

The lynching of Albano and Ficarotta mark the final recorded time that Italians were lynched in the South. Unlike in Louisiana, where 21 of 29 Italians were lynched, this was the only incident not only in Tampa, but in all of Florida. This alone sets the two states apart, but while both states attracted significant Italian populations, their experiences greatly differed. Among these differences is the reasons for lynching in the first place. While murder is superficially the reason for most lynchings of Italians, the underlying paranoia beneath the surface is what sets Louisiana and Tampa apart. The specter of the Black Hand or the Mafia is something that plagued Louisiana newspapers following the infamous lynching of 1891 and any crime committed by Italians after it; so pervasive was this idea that even the FBI believed there was Mafia presence in New Orleans as early as the 1880s (Kurtz 356). It was not a convenient excuse to justify violence against Italians – sugar planters depended on them for labor as freedmen immigrated north and to Kansas. The “economic self-interest” that Jackson notes exists because sugar planters did not pay money to import Italians, simply to have them lynched (Jackson 304). This dependence would not be so easily forgotten if there was not a genuine fear of Italian organized crime.

In contrast, the lynching in Tampa was not related to the Black Hand nor the Mafia. Mentions of organized crime in Tampa were few and far between, and only spiked in the immediate aftermath of the 1910 lynching. As the Italian government noted, Albano and

Ficarotta were lynched specifically because of the 1910 strike (Ingalls 99). It was not the Mafia that concerned Tampa's elite – it was the possibility of leftism. This concern was not exclusive to Italians, given that Cubans and Spaniards also expressed an interest in radical labor movements, however the Southern precedent of lynching Italians made it more excusable. There were already frameworks in place that they could fall back on to justify such activity. The Black Hand was one such example. In attributing the Black Hand's presence in Tampa as a justification, they leaned on a 20-year-old history of using a nonexistent crime syndicate as a scapegoat.

Another notable difference between Italian immigration in Louisiana and Florida is the failure of Italians in Louisiana to leave behind any legacy of an organized labor movement (Gabaccia 112). In many ways this is not the case for a lack of effort; Italians both in New Orleans and in the sugar parishes formed mutual aid societies; police rounded up suspected Italian anarchists; they “collected money for the imprisoned Carlo Tresca,” an Italian American labor organizer (Gabaccia 109, 111). Despite all of this, Louisiana is not remembered for having an enduring labor movement in the way that Tampa, Chicago, and New York are. There is very little evidence of any sort of labor demonstrations in Louisiana's sugar parishes organized by Italian immigrants.

The lack of solidarity in part has to do with the composition of the Italian laborers, and their relationships with black workers. Most of the migrants who worked in the sugar parishes were from Sambuca di Sicilia, and Gabaccia notes that not only did they have little experience in labor protest, but labor activists from Sambuca also did not ever travel to Louisiana (Gabaccia 101). Their status as temporary migrant workers who participated in the planting season before heading back to Italy, New Orleans, or other places to find seasonal work also made it difficult to

develop a sense of class consciousness. Furthermore, their relationship – or lack thereof – with black workers contributed to the lack of a labor movement. As Gabaccia notes, “ethnic loyalties prevailed,” meaning that black and Italian laborers had very little interaction with one another (Gabaccia 104). At times, they even felt like they were in direct competition with one another (DeLucia 215). The linguistic barrier between the two groups made it especially difficult, and their contractors also did not give them living quarters near each other.

The experiences of Italians in Louisiana and Ybor City, FL have many differences which make them distinct, but they are nonetheless bound by several factors. They faced adversity in the form of the local elite, who tried to depict them as a savage, unassimilable race. These stereotypes of barbarity were questioned by the Italian government when they investigated these acts of vigilante justice, saying that: “Events such as have occurred in New Orleans, and now at Hahnville, cannot be tolerated by nations having any pretense of civilization” (The Progress 1896). The Italian government understood that the discrimination that Italians faced showed the hostility and savagery that the lynch mob could unleash was far worse than anything that the specters of the Black Hand or leftism could invoke. Despite the existential threat of the lynch mob, Italians were able to carve out a living for themselves, and at times even a sense of community. Their experiences were in many ways different, but both communities were able to carve out their own niche and find a degree of success that they may not have been able to find elsewhere.

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