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**Italian Immigrants in the Early 20th Century
and How They Have Impacted American Opinions on Immigration**

by

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HIS 490 History Honors Thesis

Department of History

Providence College

Spring 2019

My senior thesis is lovingly dedicated to my parents who have given me the gift of my education, instilled in me a love of learning, and have continuously supported me. They have shaped me into the person I am today and I am proud to represent them always.

I am blessed to be their daughter.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my advisor and secondary reader, Dr. Orquiza and Dr. Murphy, thank you for inspiring me and guiding me during this project. I would not have been able to succeed and enjoy this experience without you. You two were my ideal picks for advisor and secondary reader because of your intelligence and compassion. I am truly humbled and honored that you took me on while working on projects of your own. I am very lucky and very grateful to have been your student.

Special thanks to Mary Brown who is the head archivist at The Center for Migration Studies in New York (CMS). This project all started in summer of 2017 when I had the pleasure of working with Mary. I did not know it then, but my work at CMS is the very reason I had the desire and the resources to complete my senior thesis. I owe a tremendous amount of credit to Mary Brown and her incredible generosity throughout this process.

Additional thanks to my childhood friends and their parents. Their stories of immigration and the fact that they have welcomed me as a part of their families is the reason why I care so deeply about this topic.

INTRODUCTION

Italian Immigration to America in the Early-Twentieth Century and its Relevance to Today

Italian immigration into the United States of America during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, from 1880-1915, provides insight for the contention of immigrants brought about by the drastically changing composition of immigrant groups who came at this time. Issues of class, religion, culture, and linguistics became very prevalent due to this shift in immigration patterns. Immigration remained an unanswered question for the American government which found itself ill-prepared and unsure of how to handle the increased number of immigrants who sought a better life in the states. Italian immigrants gained a great deal of attention for three main reasons. First, Italian immigrants relocated to escape poverty for unskilled labor opportunities abroad.¹ This made the Italians social pariahs as well as victims of exploitation by industrial labor companies who needed able bodied men for backbreaking labor at little personal expense to the companies. Second, Italian immigrants came over at around one hundred thousand each year.² Americans viewed large quantities of newcomers as a threat to their way of life because of cultural, linguistic, and religious differences which were seen as “un-

¹ Maria Tsampas, “The Peopling of New York City: Italians in New York City,” cuny.edu, published on March 8, 2016 (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://eportfolios.macaulay.cuny.edu/murphy16/2016/03/08/italians-in-new-york-city/>.

² Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 5.

American.” Third, Italians were part of new wave of immigration and seen as less desirable and considered incomparable in quality to the old immigrants of Germany and the United Kingdom.³ Religion would play a significant role in these harsh criticism of Italians by Americans because the Catholic faith, the religion of the Italians, was unfavorable in the U.S. These factors contributed to the negative outlook Americans had toward Italian immigration into the United States.

Americans had always been weary of newcomers despite immigrants providing major sources of labor in addition to assistance with population growth. Some groups came to be viewed less critically than others. In the case of the Germans immigrants, who had their greatest quantity of arrivals in the 1880s, German farmers helped to populate the rural farms of the Midwest.⁴ Since the Germans had been coming to America for several decades prior, in addition to their choice to continue west instead of remain in the cities, Americans largely accepted German immigrants. Italians, on the other hand, needed jobs which consisted of manual labor and no trained skill in order to make money to send back to family members who remained in Italy. The majority of the Italian immigrants never made it out of New York City.⁵ The same can be said for many Irish immigrants who were lumped into the unfavorable category alongside

³ William Williams papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, (Accessed on April 22, 2019) <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3346>.

⁴ “Germans in the Midwest,” Smithsonian, National Museum of American History, Behring Center, (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://americanhistory.si.edu/many-voices-exhibition/peopling-expanding-nation-1776%E2%80%931900/pushed-and-pulled-european-immigration-0>.

⁵ E. Sweeney, Letter from E. Sweeney to Most Reverend M. A. Corrigan, November 26, 1900, Box 1, Corrigan Correspondence with Saint Raphael Society, The Saint Raphael Society for Italian Immigrants, New York, N.Y. Records, Archives of the Center for Migration Studies of New York, 2.

Italians. The Irish were also poor Catholics fleeing poverty and famine while in need of industrial labor opportunities. Life alongside Americans in urban cities while impoverished led Americans to both fear and scorn the Italian immigrants. In response, the doors of the United States had begun to close on those considered to be poor new wave immigrants like the Italians.

The generalized negative reaction which welcomed most Italians as they stepped off the steamships and onto Ellis Island led to a larger debate over who was responsible for the well-being of immigrants. Twentieth century Italian American lawyer Gino Speranza observed this reaction of the government towards immigration.

Our country has passed the stage of, and certainly has ceased to welcome mass migration of any foreign element and is beginning to see the error of its old policy of encouraging the immigrant mass to become naturalized. On the other hand we still, undoubtedly, need foreign labor of certain qualities and in certain amounts. In other words, we are entering a phases of the immigration problem when, in order to discipline the inflow into our country and make the needed selections we must enter into international agreements about the subject matter.⁶

This statement demonstrated the central conflict over immigration from the perspective of the government. Labor was needed, but only by those deemed to be of “a certain quality” or “desirable” by the United States government. Additionally, the American and Italian governments had to collaborate in some way in order to create international standards of immigration if any change were to have been made possible.

Twentieth century Republicans of New York attempted to blockade poorer immigrants through their exclusionist policies. Conservatives maintained control of immigration throughout the majority of the early-twentieth century under President Theodore Roosevelt, President William Howard Taft, and Ellis Island Commissioner William Williams. New York is the

⁶ Gino Speranza, “Applied Law,” Box 35, Folder Articles on Immigration A-H, Gino Speranza Papers (123A-1) 1887-1935 (bulk 1905-1925), Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, 3.

premiere location for Italian immigration research given that majority of these people came through Ellis Island and lived in New York. In the Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, the William Williams Collection contains several newspaper articles, reports, and personal letters which can be used to create a narrative of the world in which Italian immigrants lived while in New York.⁷ Private letters to and from Williams contained his true sentiments such as his personal remarks to Roosevelt slandering the immigrants: “foreigners will continue to pour into this country, whose presence will lower our standard of living and civilization.”⁸ Letters like this demonstrate the true motivations behind Williams’ policies as well as his closeness to the presidents to whom he wrote. Further clarity is given by the newspapers which detested and exposed Williams the longer he was in office with headlines like *Camp News*’s “Contemptable Attack on Commissioner Williams.”⁹ This contrast of reality and opinion gives light to the fact that few immigrants were actually considered during immigration debates. Often generalized, immigrants were called the problem but never given a face to a name through which to humanize the problem.

⁷ William Williams papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (Accessed on April 22, 2019), <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3346>.

⁸ William Williams. Letter from Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams to President Theodore Roosevelt, November 25, 1902, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁹ “Contemptable Attack on Commissioner Williams,” *Camp News*, June 10, 1917, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

The Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants is the model for how immigrants could achieve success in the United States with a little extra help which in turn humanized these people. Italian immigration and immigrant aid has gained relevance once again as immigration into the United States has reappeared as a popular debate in recent years. Just like with the Italians, Americans are again wondering what to do with new immigrant groups and the Catholic Church is again lending its voice to the matter. Pope Francis is extremely relevant in this matter as he is the child of Italian immigrants to Argentina and has this to say of immigration today: “It is the fear that makes us crazy.”¹⁰ The Catholics of the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants were once called to save immigrants and here Pope Francis is calling his Church to once again cast out their fear in exchange for mercy. Faith based charities have played a vital role in immigrant care for decades as demonstrated by the research of scholars at the Center for Migration Studies of New York (CMS) which doubles as both an immigrant non-profit as well as an archive for all things immigration in New York. CMS researcher Mike Nicholson presents a clear definition of faith based charities like Saint Raphael’s and their impact on neglected immigrant communities.

Faith-based organizations are defined as agencies founded on the principles of faith and religion. They include religious congregations (e.g. churches, mosques, synagogues, or temples), programs or projects sponsored by a religious congregation, and nonprofit organization founded by religious congregations or individuals motivated by religion. Such organizations possess valuable networks and resources that can support migrants. They often play a vital role in strengthening the livelihoods of the world’s most vulnerable migrants.¹¹

¹⁰ Associated Press, “Pope Francis says fear of migrants ‘makes us crazy;’ The pontiff, who is the son of Italian immigrants to Argentina, has made the plight of migrants and refugees a cornerstone of his papacy,” NBC News, published on January 23, 2019 (Accessed on April 23, 2019) <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/pope-francis-says-fear-migrants-makes-us-crazy-n961611>.

CMS is the home of the Saint Raphael Society Collection which details the work of the Catholic charity as well as scholarship on the mission by Edward C. Stibili. Stibili's work has been published in recent years, with support from his research on the Saint Raphael Society, most likely as a response to the increased concerns over immigration. Stibili's books, *Pietro Bandini: Missionary, Social Worker, and Colonizer, 1852-1917* and *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923*, give context to the primary sources found within the collection. Important figures like Pietro Bandini, Father Gaspare Moretto, the Scalabrini brothers, and other clergy who lent their time to the organization for the sake of the immigrants are featured. These figures as well as the immigrants mentioned bring to life the data collected in the Annual Reports, letters, and other documentation of the Saint Raphael Society. Records like these help to demonstrate the successes of immigrant aid based in religious faith as well as to humanize the immigrants and their struggles.

Faith is something which Americans seem to be lacking today as they continue to fear change and the unfamiliar. Through this resurgence of the interest in Italian immigration, the country can learn how to best move forward in matters of immigration. The United States is a country built by immigrants and should not be fearful of them. The first chapter of this thesis will follow the roadblocks for the Italian immigrants who came to the United States through Ellis Island and lived in New York City. The impact of major political players, like Commissioner Williams, President Roosevelt, and President Taft, will be used to demonstrate the hurt which comes from prejudice. For the second chapter, Catholic missionaries of the Italian Saint Raphael

¹¹ Mike Nicholson, "The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Immigrants' Health and Entrepreneurship," The Center for Migration Studies of New York (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://cmsny.org/publications/2018smc-nicholson/>.

Society will play the heroes as they saved thousands of immigrants from demise. Finally, this study of legislation, personal accounts, and additional immigration records will serve to demonstrate the significance of Italian immigration into this country alongside the prompting of a larger conversation about the similar issues which face immigration today regardless of whether one has an open or closed door policy. Efforts made to humanize all of the players in this story are meant to educate opinions, not to give an answer to the immigration question as that is something which the people American will have to decide upon themselves.

CHAPTER 1
COMMISSIONER OF ELLIS ISLAND WILLIAM WILLIAMS AND HIS IMPACT ON
ITALIAN IMMIGRANTS

Debate Ensues: The Beginning of Italian Mass Migration through the Port of New York and the Local Government's Response

The first period of Italian mass migration into the United States, from 1890-1914, helped to spark a larger conversation among Americans and members of their government on issues of immigration. No thorough study of early-twentieth century Italian immigration into the United States through the Port of New York could be conducted without proper attention given to Ellis Island and its Commissioner from the time, William Williams. Commissioner of Ellis Island, Williams was first appointed directly by Republican President Theodore Roosevelt in 1902 under the correct assumption that he shared the same conservative viewpoint on immigration as President Roosevelt.¹² Both Williams and Roosevelt were natives of New York as well as veterans of the Spanish American War. These commonalities between the two allowed for the men to see eye to eye on the issues created by the increased number of immigrants in the United States. Roosevelt's administration was among the first to make immigration a major point of political discussion and contention as well as of legislative reform carried out on the local level by Williams' hand. Neither Williams nor Roosevelt were against immigration as a whole. The

¹² William Williams papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (Accessed on February 18, 2019), <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3346>.

two looked upon new arrivals with a critical eye and particular disdain for those they believed to be inferior on the basis of country of origin and economic status. Ellis Island was more racially biased than it was unsuccessful. Under Williams, Ellis Island was extremely efficient, but also notably critical of immigrants, like the Italians, who were escaping poverty. The chapter will follow Williams' evolution as a Commissioner in order to demonstrate how his various policies have established stigmas on new immigrant groups which continue to be transferred from group to group from the twentieth century up into today.

Efforts made by Commissioner Williams progressed in severity of accusation and stigma in order to keep certain immigrants, like the early-twentieth century Italians, out of America through negative associations. Examples of policies employed or tests given to Italian immigrants included association with disease by rushed medical exams upon arrival, poor economic status with his infamous "\$25 rule," lack of education through his literacy, memory, IQ, and puzzle related tests, and inability to find work with his predictions of immigrants becoming public charges. In the case of Commissioner Williams, he had a specific bias against Southern and Eastern Europeans like the Italians, whom he perceived to be of a lesser quality or "castoffs" compared to the Northern and Western Europeans of previous immigration waves.¹³ Williams' known bias towards the "old" immigrants versus the "new" immigrants caused "alien" sympathizers to create the narrative of him as the scathing gatekeeper of Ellis Island who excluded immigrant access to the United States through Ellis Island. Further development of Williams' ideals for immigrants allowed for the rise of his new policies on Ellis Island in order to restrict the Southern and Eastern European immigrants, and certainly Italian immigrants,

¹³ William Williams papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (Accessed on February 18, 2019), <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3346>.

potential access to the land of opportunity they sought. Williams would go on to serve two non-consecutive terms, the first from 1902 to 1905 and the second from 1909-1914 as Commissioner of Ellis Island during which time he worked to streamline the average of five thousand immigrants per day, over one million immigrants per year, who gained access to the country through the Port of New York.¹⁴ Through this discussion of his efforts to moderate immigrant inflow, readers might come to understand where their own personal biases originate in history.

Italians played a major role in the development of Ellis Island and its policies because Italians made up the second largest ethnic group arriving to the United States, specifically through the Port of New York, from the late-nineteenth century until the early-twentieth century. Italians were second only to the Jews fleeing religious persecution back in Europe at this time.¹⁵ Italian immigration in the 1880s to 1910s was among the early waves of new or unfamiliar immigrant groups to the United States, ironically also of European descent, since the days of the thirteen colonies. Just like the Irish, many Americans looked down on Italians despite their also being of European descent. Previously accepted groups of Europeans who immigrated to the United States were of German and English descent and thus Anglo-Saxon. Italians and Irish peoples were not able to be a part of the Anglo-Saxon majority which dominated the American identity of the time because they were not considered to be a part of the Anglo-Saxon race.

Williams had both a plan as well as the capability to have changed New York State run Ellis Island into a functional institution for processing the newly arrived immigrants. Williams

¹⁴ Olivia B. Waxman, "Ellis Island's Busiest Day Ever Was 110 Years Ago. Here's Why," *Time*, April 17, 2017 (Accessed on March 21, 2019), <http://time.com/4740248/ellis-island-busiest-day/>.

¹⁵ Frederick M. Binder, *All the Nations Under Heaven: An Ethnic and Racial History of New York City*, Columbia History of Urban Life (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 135.

envisioned Ellis Island and its operation in the fashion that fellow conservatives saw fit. Commissioner Williams had graduated from Yale University as a member of the undergraduate class of 1884 and continued on to Harvard law school for his graduate coarse work. Prior to his first installation as Commissioner of Ellis Island, Williams had worked in the transport division of the Spanish American War on the island of Puerto Rico where he served as a major in the quartermaster's department. Later, he also worked in New York as a lawyer.¹⁶ Williams was largely met with support from the public initially for his selection. One of the leading publications from Pittsburgh, *The Pittsburgh Dispatch*, called Williams "loyal to his duty" and hailed him as a hero for having abandoned his law practice for the service of his country as a "patriot."¹⁷ Contemporaries saw him as a loyal Republican with experience in law, foreign affairs, and the transportation of individuals which made him the perfect man for Roosevelt to have placed in charge of the immigration process at Ellis Island to favor his vision for the immigrants. These factors led to Williams's initially positive reception as the then newly appointed Commissioner of Ellis Island.¹⁸ Roosevelt's selection of Williams came as a surprise to no one as Roosevelt's biggest challenge was finding someone willing to accept the post. "The chief difficulty that the President met in filling this place was to find a man... who would be willing to accept the position with its inadequate remuneration." Williams' military experience

¹⁶ "Mr. Williams Accepts," 1902, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

¹⁷ "William Williams, The Commissioner of Ellis Island, Is Loyal To His Duty," *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, 1902, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

¹⁸ William Williams papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (Accessed on February 18, 2019), <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3346>.

seemed to be what put him ahead of other candidates who also had both money and education as it showed another side to his character as well as dedication to his country. The military comradery between Williams and Roosevelt satisfied the public and created an image of Williams as an American hero who was “nearly” an ideal American coming in to restore order to a corrupt institution and save the American people.¹⁹

In the years leading up to Williams’ appointment, immigrants from Eastern and Western Europe arrived in larger numbers which in turn fostered the growth of nativist sentiments like the ones held by President Roosevelt and Commissioner Williams. In the 1880s immigration was welcomed to help replace the generation of working men claimed as victims of the Civil War. Immigrant men were needed to fill the positions of hard labor which greatly supported the continued industrialization and reconstruction efforts of the country in the post-war era. The need for laborers coincided well with the flight of laboring men from Italy beginning in the 1880s and 1890s. Compared to these other major immigrant groups of the time, the Italians had some catching up to do. For the Italians, from 1880 to 1890, they were still building up towards the hundreds of thousands and not amassing a total of over 100,000 each year until 1899 to 1900. While numbers steadily increased, having been 52,003 from 1889 to 1890 and 68,060 from 1885 to 1886, Italians continued to amass hatred which the Germans were no longer experiencing at this time.²⁰ Between the years of 1880 to 1890, an average of 100,000 Germans immigrated to

¹⁹ “New Head at Ellis Island: Why the President Choose Mr. Williams,” 1902, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

²⁰ E. Sweeney, Letter from E. Sweeney to Most Reverend M. A. Corrigan, November 26, 1900, Box 1, Corrigan Correspondence with Saint Raphael Society, The Saint Raphael Society for Italian Immigrants, New York, N.Y. Records, Archives of the Center for Migration Studies of New York, 2.

the United States each year.²¹ From 1820 to 1880, 300,000 Jews from Central Europe immigrated to the United States.²² Just as many Germans had been coming over and yet numerous Americans looked upon arriving Italian and Jewish laborers with scathing glares and disdain. Williams and his supporters shared the pre-conceived notion that these laborers were not what the country needed and that the Italians, alongside other fellow Eastern and Central Europeans such as the Russian Jews and the Slavs, were uneducated, socially inept, and incapable of fitting both the American and “proper” European molds for how a person ought to be.²³ Concerns over both the increasing number of poor workers coming from Europe as well as the lack of resources made available to handle the arrivals caused government workers to scramble to create an immigration process aimed at keeping out the less desired arrivals. In turn, this situation created a need for an establishment like Ellis Island that could process thousands of immigrants and maintain a sense of order to the process of screening newcomers.

The phenomenon of Italian mass migration, and their impact on New York, was unlike and incomparable to any of the other waves of Italians who left Italy previously. From 1832 to 1873, the period just before Italian unification and mass exodus, the average number of Italian immigrants per year arriving to the United States was 1,150. This small sum is nothing compared to the average of 100,000 Italians who left Italy for the United States of America per year from

²¹ “Germans in the Midwest,” Smithsonian, National Museum of American History, Behring Center (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://americanhistory.si.edu/many-voices-exhibition/peopling-expanding-nation-1776%E2%80%931900/pushed-and-pulled-european-immigration-0>.

²² “From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America: A Century of Immigration, 1820-1924,” Library of Congress (Accessed on May 4, 2019), <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/haven-century.html>.

²³ Thomas M. Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 14.

1900-1915. This meant that every year during the peak period of Italian mass migration 100,000 new Italians made their way to the land of opportunity.²⁴ By 1913, 235,000 Italian immigrants lived in Brooklyn and 310,000 Italian immigrants lived in Manhattan. Also in 1913, the five boroughs has approximately twenty five separate Italian districts with anywhere from 2,000 to 100,000 Italians living in each district. In 1920, after those immigrants who desired to repatriate had returned to Italy, there were 391,000 foreign born Italians living in New York City. The number of foreign born Italians in New York City had surpassed the number of foreign born Irish and Germans living in New York City at this time.²⁵ This meant that while the Italians were only the second largest ethnic group coming to the United States during the early-twentieth century, Italians also managed to be one of the most prevalent groups remaining and living in the greater New York area.

Several factors contributed to the mass exodus of Italian immigrants from Italy to the United States. One of the largest contributing factors to Italian immigration was the late-nineteenth century unification of Italy. While the exact date of Italian national unification is 1871, the period of unification and negative reactions to unification dated from about 1861 to 1919.²⁶ What Americans failed to understand, from the perspective of the immigrants who left Italy, was that Italian unification was viewed under a guise of negativity by the Italian people who identified more with their region than being Italian. Prior to 1871, Italy was made up of

²⁴ Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 5.

²⁵ Frederick M. Binder, *All the Nations Under Heaven: An Ethnic and Racial History of New York City*, Columbia History of Urban Life (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 136.

²⁶ Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 43.

several smaller nation states called regions. While the regions have long endured, the nationalist tendencies toward the region state of a person's origin have also continued to divide overall Italian unity. This concept appeared foreign to Americans, despite their own internal divisions exhibited by the Civil War, who had not had to deal with a different type of government in each state like the Italian regions had. Americans failed to understand that, to the Italian people, states and regions were not and would never be reconcilable. To the Italian people, each region was essentially its own little country within the larger Italy making the reality of national unity so offensive; in their minds it is comparable to the United States joining up with Canada and Mexico to form one North American country.

This Italian divide amongst various regions was further intensified by the larger economic disparity between the northern and southern regions of Italy. This economic disparity was a result of the difference in lifestyle between the agriculturally based south and more industrially developed north. Northern Italians tended to look down upon the southern Italians which made it difficult for southern Italians to find help and work in other Italian cities away from their farms. Southern Italians suffered greatly during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as a result of the collapse of the obsolete agricultural system. Unification brought ruin upon the Southern Italian farmers as they went from trying to produce enough crops for just their region to trying to produce enough crops for the entire country in the blink of an eye. In terms of demand, with the example of the region of Sicily, Sicilian farmers went from feeding 2.3 million people in 1858 to feeding 28.2 million people by 1880. As the population increased from 28.2 million to 34.4 million by 1910, the agricultural south was in shambles.²⁷ The agricultural way of southern Italy was not able to sustain the number of people who lived in the entirety of Italy

²⁷ Tacitus. NU, "Population of Italy," (Accessed on March 21, 2019), <http://www.tacitus.nu/historical-atlas/population/italy.htm>.

because it was outdated in practice and not a large enough operation to provide for the entire country at this time. Malaria, drought, and deforestation also played a significant role in the exacerbation of the inevitable demise of the southern Italian agricultural system. The collapse of the south would subsequently impact the rest of the country as the rest of Italy struggled to carry the imposing burden of survival. Heavy taxes, low wages, and unemployment made it difficult for southern Italians to find jobs in their home country and led to the flight of the Italians to the United States.²⁸ The reasons why southern Italians left were the very reasons why Williams and Ellis Island staff restricted these immigrants. There was fear of those who needed help and a lack of motivation to be compassionate and to help these individuals.

As a figure of power, Williams attitudes towards immigrants was a direct instigator of the phenomenon of the repatriation of immigrants like Italian immigrant laborer Stefano Miele of Southern Italy who came to the United States because he could not find work back home and would eventually return home because he felt unwelcome here. Miele, who lends a voice to the stereotypical narrative of the Italian man leaving Italy for temporary work in the United States in order to send money home to his family, was noted for having said the following about his choice to have decided to come to America.

If I am to be frank, then I shall say that I left Italy and came to America for the sole purpose of making money... If I could have worked my way up in my chosen profession in Italy, I would have stayed in Italy. But repeated efforts showed me that I could not. America was the land of opportunity and so I came, intending to make money and then to return to Italy. This is true of most Italian emigrants to America.²⁹

²⁸ Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 5.

²⁹ Stefano Miele, "The Difference Between Americans and Italians," *A Documentary History of the Italian Americans*, ed. Wayne Moquin with Charles Van Doren and consulting ed. Francis A. J. Ianni (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 150.

When asked to elaborate further on why he chose not to remain in the United States after having found economic prosperity, Miele with negative sentiments towards the American treatment of foreign laborers.

Americans wants the immigrant as a worker; but does it make any effort to direct him, to distribute him to the places where workers are needed? No; it leaves the immigrant to go here, there, any place. If the immigrant were a horse instead of a human being, America would be more careful of him; if it loses a horse it feels it loses something, if it loses an immigrant it feels it loses nothing.³⁰

Lack of economic opportunity in Italy and the lack of respect for immigrant laborers on the behalf of Americans created two of the main issues which faced Commissioner Williams on Ellis Island. First, immigrants were mistreated by Americans as well as taken advantage of by swindlers and employers who perceived immigrants as expendables. The second issue, a direct result of the first, is that Americans came to view immigrants as disloyal to Americans because of their desire to return to Italy someday. Americans employers felt that the Italian laborers were lesser and did little to benefit them. In actuality, as early as 1890, Italian laboring men made up over ninety percent of New York's public works constructors.³¹ What this meant was that New Yorkers actually owed a great deal of their infamous skyline to these Italian construction workers. Americans failed to process that in treating the Italian immigrants as beneath them, the Italian immigrants were outcast from American society. As a result, it was impossible for them to have a stake in a world they were told they could never partake in. Additional concerns over the poverty of these poor immigrant workers as a liability to the United States because of the

³⁰ Stefano Miele, "The Difference Between Americans and Italians," *A Documentary History of the Italian Americans*, ed. Wayne Moquin and Charles Van Doren and consulting ed. A.J. Ianni (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 150.

³¹ "Italian Immigration," *Digital History* (Accessed on April 5, 2019), www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/voices/italiano_immigration.cfm.

possibility of their economic burden on American citizens fueled Williams' public debate as he endorsed his fear of immigrants becoming public charges to the state of New York.

Williams at the Helm: A Regular Roosevelt Progressive

The version of Ellis Island which Mr. Williams arrived at as Commissioner in 1902 was vastly different from the version of Ellis Island Williams left both in 1905 and in 1914. Williams became Commissioner of Ellis Island not only during a time in which immigration was poorly addressed, but Ellis Island was new operation entirely, originating in 1892, and had been a completely cast off and ignored as an institution prior to Williams' appointment and arrival in 1902. When Williams arrived in 1902, the building that housed his office had only been standing for approximately two years. The original Ellis Island was constructed of wood and had poor electrical work throughout, which led to the building's demise in 1897 on June 14th when it combusted into flames.³² All eyes were on Williams as his experience on Ellis Island would set the tone for later dealings of immigration at other United States ports given the large scale immigration occurring in New York at the time. Williams' Ellis Island was opened in 1900 and it was completely different from its prior operation thanks to the direction Commissioner Williams two years after its resurrection.³³ Few policies were employed with the only restriction to exist before Williams being the medical exam performed by an onsite physician as well as an interview which checked for possible communists and radicals. Past Commissioner Dr. Joseph H. Senner was the first to have these two tests administered on Ellis Island. Dr. Joseph H. Senner

³² Thomas M. Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 26.

³³ Thomas M. Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 29.

had been appointed by fellow Democrat President Grover Cleveland.³⁴ With growing concerns over money, intelligence, and assimilation potential of immigrants leading up to Williams' term in office, he had begun to think of how to address this concerns on a legislative level.

Corruption under Commissioner Senner, in the Republican opinion, in the form of a lack of a streamlined process for immigration control was something which Williams had to address immediately upon appointment. The original debate for an open-door policy, a less restrictive immigration policy, versus a closed-door policy, a more restrictive immigration policy, comes from this initial debate between Republicans and Democrats of the early-twentieth century. Democrats favored the open-door policy while Republicans felt the closed-door policy was a non-negotiable necessity. Republican did not wish to keep out all immigrants; at the same time they did not wish to have a country without rules. Sympathizers to the Republican opinion wanted immigrants treated with respect, as there were fears over a lack of regulation leading to fake charities taking advantage of the vulnerable immigrants, but they also did not want the country to be flooded with millions of people whom the government could sustain.³⁵ President Roosevelt said, "The things that will destroy America are prosperity-at-any-price, peace-at-any-price, safety-first instead of duty-first, the love of soft living, and the get-rich-quick theory of life."³⁶ What Roosevelt meant through his words was that without rules and a sense of duty to the American people the country would fall apart.

³⁴ Thomas M. Pitkin, *Keepers of the gate: A History of Ellis Island* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 21.

³⁵ W. D. Brooks, Letter from W.D. Brooks to the Editor of *The World*, May 24, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

³⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, 1917.

Ellis Island is historically significant for Italian immigration because of its location and the massive numbers of Italian immigrants who entered the United States directly through the Port of New York which was located on Ellis Island. According to Williams, seventy percent of the immigrants who arrived to Ellis Island in 1903 were of Italian, Hungarian, Austrian, and Russian descent. Of the arriving Eastern and Central Europeans Williams mentions, fifty three percent of these immigrants were seen as undesirable by the Commissioner for an assumed lack of a useful trade or skill.³⁷ New York was a major travel destination for new immigrants since crowded cities like New York had better job opportunities for poor laborers. From 1889 to 1900 alone, 682,134 of the 705,048 Italian immigrants coming to the United States through Ellis Island named New York as their final destination.³⁸ The economic opportunities for unskilled workers in these major cities are what led to the reality of these numerous Italian immigrants found at the mercy of Commissioner Williams and his ideals for what America should have hoped to become. Ellis Island ended up processing an average of five thousand immigrants per day from 1905 to 1914.³⁹ In a statement made by Commissioner William Williams to the media about Ellis Island, he said,

I took charge of this disorganized and demoralized office at the time when immigration was increasing by leaps and bounds... The force under me numbered

³⁷ "Immigration Record Broken: Enormous Influx This Month-The Bulk Undesirable," May 30, 1903, Room 328, Z1-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

³⁸ Bishop Corrigan of New York, Letter from Bishop Corrigan of New York to Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams, November 26, 1900, Collection 005, Box 01, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.-Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

³⁹ Olivia B. Waxman, "Ellis Island's Busiest Day Ever Was 110 Years Ago. Here's Why," *Time*, April 17, 2017 (Accessed on February 18, 2019), <http://time.com/4740248/ellis-island-busiest-day/>.

about 550, including the medical staff, composed of some 20 Marine Hospital surgeons plus hospital attendants... the office had been operated in the interest of the steamship companies, the privilege holders... The laws were improperly enforced, immigrants maltreated... There were many other evil practices. Drastic measures had to be taken.⁴⁰

Williams' comment to the media circus during his first stint on Ellis Island demonstrated Williams' humane motivation to change Ellis Island for the better of both the immigrants who arrived there as well as the staff who worked at the site.

Williams worked with diligence to better the environment on Ellis Island for both his minimal staff as well as the numerous immigrants coming from around the globe. Often times, Commissioner Williams was painted as a heartless man who turned his nose up when given the task to care for all immigrants as equals who were new to the country. The reality is that Mr. Williams, like many of his contemporaries and many politicians of the early-twentieth century, followed the "norm" of his time in his line of work. Immigration work was often an effort to try and blockade "undesirables" from entrance into the United States in an attempt to "guarantee" the best for Americans first. During the early-twentieth century, industrialization had led to increased nationalistic tendencies among Americans as well as Europeans. Consequently, due to increasing global competition, countries like the United States began to nationalize and think of themselves as exclusive to their respective groups which in turn led to the concept of certain immigrant demographics to be considered unworthy. Since this nationalistic and xenophobic attitude was a central part of Williams character, his good deeds are often left out of his narrative as Commissioner in order to have himself painted as the sole villain of Ellis Island. What many have forgotten about Williams, especially from his first few months in office, was that the first of

⁴⁰ Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams to the media room, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

Williams reforms were made with good intentions. These intentions were to treat immigrants with respect while still placing the needs of Americans above the needs of others. Almost immediately after having set foot on Ellis Island, Williams made drastic changes that positively affected the safety and the health of staff and immigrant alike.⁴¹

In the mind of William Williams the Commissioner of Ellis Island, his first tasks were aimed at the improvement of the function, safety, respect, and overall healthy environment of Ellis Island. Williams immediately posted signs around Ellis Island calling for the respectful behavior towards immigrants. “Kindness and decency” were to be the key principles for the treatment of foreigners.⁴² He investigated situations that he found to be unsafe such as his concerns for child laborers. In a memo to steamship Captain Weldon, Williams calls out suspicious activity he noticed. “Italian boys of 14 are stated by the Boards frequently to be laborers. This seems absurd. Look into this matter.”⁴³ Here a Commissioner with concern for the individual is seen. Motivated by concerns over the health of staff and immigrants as a result of exposure to toxic air, especially for women and children, Williams also passed a no smoking policy in May of 1902. He also held employees accountable with his punctuality accountability policy. Ferryboat conductors had once waited for stragglers, but the new punctuality accountability policy put a stop to this. Boat drivers were to leave on time without any late

⁴¹ William Williams papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (Accessed on April 22, 2019), <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3346>.

⁴² William Williams papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (Accessed on April 22, 2019), <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3346>.

⁴³ William Williams, Memo from Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams to steamship Captain Weldon, May 23, 1903, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

comers. Williams also demanded that employees not disembark the ferry before it had fully stopped and docked.⁴⁴ While many employees were left “rattled,” Williams set these new rules forth in an effort to keep everyone safe, healthy, and productive. These changes benefited immigrants because these new regulations forced employees to take their work with the immigrant populations seriously. The new statutes instated by Williams also prevented possible injury and illness. William’s most unique addition was his no smoking rule because it was not popularly believed or even confirmed until the 1950s, over forty years later, that smoking was a health hazard and potential carcinogen.⁴⁵ Smoking was commonplace during this time and the fact that Williams banned smoking is not only unusual, but also accidentally revolutionary.

In his description of the operations of Ellis Island, Williams warned his staff of the dangers of predatory boarding-house owners who tried to take advantage of immigrants as soon as they set foot on Ellis Island. Evil landlords approached immigrants immediately in order to lock them into a housing situation in which they felt that they could not leave. Williams warned his staff to look closely at who the immigrants left with as there had been swindlers on Ellis Island for a number of years. Williams wanted these criminals to be stopped in their tracks. Swindlers took immigrants, “to filthy places where they detained them to swell the revenues of their boarding houses and exposed even women and girls to vulgar treatment. At one of these ‘Homes’ a rubber hose filled with shot is kept for the purpose of compelling immigrants to

⁴⁴ “Reform Tidal Wave Whelms Ellis Island: Old Employees Swept Off Their Feet by Set of New Rules,” May 12, 1902, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Mendes, “The Study That Helped Spur the U.S. Stop-Smoking Movement,” American Cancer Society, January 9, 2014 (Accessed on February 18, 2019), <https://www.cancer.org/latest-news/the-study-that-helped-spur-the-us-stop-smoking-movement.html>.

obey.”⁴⁶ Williams concerned his staff with the search for these evildoers in the hopes of the prevention further abuses to immigrants. He also wrote an open letter to all who called themselves missionaries in the hopes of deterring true evil doers. “You should all be so jealous of the honorable purposes for which true missionaries may come to Ellis Island, that you will bring to my immediate attention the case of any person who, while pretending to be here for missionary work, is here in fact primarily for the purposes of pecuniary gain.”⁴⁷ In this instance, Williams can be viewed as a true progressive for his efforts to protect immigrants before they left Ellis Island and his domain of power.

The infamous \$25 rule was the most shocking introductory policy passed by Williams’ to increase his control over Ellis Island and is what came to define him and his entire Commissionership as negative. This rule is exactly as the name implied; each immigrant was expected to have at the very least \$25 in their pocket upon arrival to Ellis Island. The \$25 rule has lived in infamy as well as permanently attached to the name “Williams.” A monetary requirement was made because in Williams’ words, “Immigrants are frequently brought to New York with small sums of money.... This office will as a rule detain all such immigrants...who may...be eventually allowed to land...only after they have received sufficient funds.”⁴⁸ This

⁴⁶ Commissioner William Williams of Ellis Island, “Ellis Island, its Organization and Some of its Work: Missionaries and Immigrant Aid Societies,” page 53, December 1912, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁴⁷ William Williams, Open letter from Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams to all missionaries and representatives of homes at Ellis Island, September 14, 1903, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁴⁸ William Williams, Letter from Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams to the owners of all vessels bringing immigrants to the Port of New York, May 23, 1904, Room 328,

rule was unusual as it was the first monetary requirement to have been systematically and explicitly placed on immigrants.⁴⁹ Williams wanted the immigrants to have come with something and leave with something. In this way both the immigrant and the United States brought something to the table which insured that both the United States economy and the immigrant financially benefited from the tradeoff. Monetary requirements for entry onto Ellis Island and into the United States would prove to be a major problem for the poor immigrants from Italy who had decided to come to the United States in order to make money.

The 1908 Messina earthquake in Italy prompted the zenith of Italian migration in 1909. An earthquake compounded by a tsunami assaulted the Sicilian Calabrian regions of Italy with casualties estimated to be over 120,000.⁵⁰ Complete decimation of the area's resources, economy, and morality led to the exponential summit of southern Italian flight. This earthquake also made it more difficult for Italians to have this \$25 in their pocket once they arrived. As the first notorious rule with the capability to initiate the downfall of the public's opinion as well as of the legacy of the Williams administration as strict and foreboding instead of revolutionary, the \$25 rule is the most significant maneuver made by Williams as a leader.

In his 1904 letter, Williams instructed steamship companies and the ships' operators that all persons who lacked \$25 were to be detained on the steamships and it was because of this

Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁴⁹ "Hebrews Denounce \$25 Exclusion Rule," July 8, 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939. Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁵⁰ Salvatore J. LaGumina, "The Great Earthquake: America Comes to Messina's Rescue Frank J. Cavaoli," reviewed by Frank J. Cavaoli, *Italian Americana*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Winter 2010), 103 (Accessed on April 2, 2019), www.jstor.org/stable/41932414.

instruction that the rule became so widely known and criticized.

Immigrants are frequently brought to New York with small sums of money, which are manifestly inadequate for their support until the time when they are likely to obtain profitable employment. This office will as a rule detain all such immigrants, and if those who may appear to be otherwise qualified be allowed eventually to land, this will occur only after they have received sufficient funds for the above purpose.

Detention lasted indeterminately as the immigrant in question was either deported or the money was produced to prove that the immigrant in question would be well enough off until they were able to find proper employment. Interestingly, despite claiming the rule as his own, Williams also called for the news of the policy to be spread by the steamship staff and not the staff of Ellis Island. The phrase used was “due publicity abroad” and it was up to the transporters, in the eyes of the commissioner, to relay this message to incoming new persons. Explicitly in this letter, Williams revealed his connection to the concept that if a person had money they would not become a burden to the state and his inclination to place responsibility in the hands of others rather than himself by his insistence that it was the job of others to spread his news of change.⁵¹ This imposition on others is where the negative side of Williams, as a critical man, came to light and negative impacts on his legacy begin.

When the press announced Williams’ newest regulation, Williams’ position became more difficult and his reputation was tarnished. Journalists had begun to claim that Ellis Island had deteriorated under Williams’ administration. Some claimed that the new Ellis Island administration guided by Mr. Williams was riddled with horrible scandals unlike anything ever

⁵¹ William Williams, Letter from Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams, to steamship companies, approved by Commissioner General F. P. Sargent, May 23, 1904, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

seen before on Ellis Island.⁵² A Jewish newspaper detailed how immigrants were not permitted to reach out to friends or family for help in obtaining the money prior to their deportation.⁵³ In one highly critical newspaper article that choose to respond to Williams, the author said everything they needed to say in the title of their piece; “Ellis, Saddest Island of All.”⁵⁴ However, these claims were backed up with no evidence. The problems which Mr. Williams was accused of having created were long standing issues of sanitation, issues with steamship companies, and anger over deportations. Angered presses simply ignored the good Williams had done, as well as the fact that the issues Williams was accused of having incited were long term and preexisting, in favor of topics which they believed exposed Williams as a villain in the immigration narrative. In an open letter published in a newspaper written by the *ED Daily People* to Dr. K. Vornberg, who was the Secretary of the American Jewish Society for the Regulation of Immigration in New York City, the *ED Daily People* demonized Dr. K. Vonberg and Williams for having approved and created such a rule in the first place. The *ED Daily People* blamed all the subsequent and “inhumane” deportations of the poorer immigrants Williams’ stricter immigration tendencies and Dr. K. Vonberg for his compliance in the matter.⁵⁵ Exclusion

⁵² Staats Zeit, September 14, 1903, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁵³ “Hebrews Denounce \$25 Exclusion Rule,” July 8, 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁵⁴ “Ellis, Saddest Island of All: Williams’ Autocratic Rule Causes Daily Heartrending Scenes at Immigration Office,” 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library.

⁵⁵ *ED Daily People*, Letter from the *ED Daily People* to Secretary Dr. K. Vornberg of the American Jewish Society for the Regulation of Immigration in New York City, July 31, 1902,

of the poorer immigrants was something that the newspapers harped on and took serious issue with in regards to Williams, his administration, and his vision for Ellis Island. As a result, the presses would become Williams' biggest rival in the immigration debate of the early-twentieth century.

Some reactions to Williams and his new ways were more positive, such as the letter he received from John Keller of the Diocese of Newark. In his letter to Commissioner Williams, Keller expressed his gratitude for having decided to run Ellis Island in his chosen manner. Keller's message to Williams came as a response to the Paterson Clericus having been given a tour of Ellis Island and all its workings. The Paterson Clericus consisted of the clergy of a Christian church from Passaic Country New Jersey with Paterson being the largest city in this area. Impressed with the cleanliness of the facilities as well as the capability of the staff to have successfully processed large quantities of immigrants per day, the clergy approved of Ellis Island. People from the Paterson Clericus seemed to perceive Ellis to be a smoothly run operation. John Keller went so far as to directly call Williams "honorable" as well as having offered him congratulations for his efforts. Keller wrote, "The good order, tidiness, and excellent sanitary condition of the buildings, and the thoughtful provisions made for the prompt and efficient handling of a large volume of most important, practical and difficult sociological work."⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that this letter contradicted the anger, dissent, and disapproval

Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁵⁶ John Keller, Letter from John Keller of the Diocese of Newark to Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams, August 25, 1904, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

expressed by the people of the presses and the riot which Williams had attempted to ignore. This example shows that some people were more interested in efforts made to sanitize and maximize the functionality of Ellis Island rather than his efforts made to create a sense of exclusivity towards certain immigrant groups like the Italians.

Eventually, the negativity and the criticism of the press would lead Mr. Williams to abandon his post at Ellis Island temporarily. Williams would resign in order to escape the taunts of the newspapers and his critiques because the pressure of commanding Ellis Island had become too much to handle. Williams never said that this was his reason for leaving, but it has been widely speculated given the immense pressure he was under and the fact that he choose to resign.⁵⁷ While on hiatus, Robert Watchorn was appointed in Williams' stead. While Watchorn was not a revolutionary Commissioner of Ellis Island, he changed none of Williams' polices and did little to nothing to ruffle any feathers during his own administration. Watchorn was not exactly a beloved Commissioner of Ellis Island either. Commissioner Watchorn came under fire for having allowed too many immigrants into the country because he favored an open door policy when it came to matters of immigration. His stance on immigration made him unpopular among fellow politicians as well as Americans, which resulted in his inquiry to step down from his post. After Watchorn was asked to step down, Williams was asked by new Republican President William Howard Taft to resume his Commissionership and to return to Ellis Island in 1909.⁵⁸ Interim Commissioner Watchorn demonstrated that despite the controversy of Williams

⁵⁷ William Williams papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (Accessed on February 18, 2019), <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3346>.

⁵⁸ William Williams papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (Accessed on February 18, 2019), <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3346>.

as Commissioner of Ellis Island, the government saw fit to have a revolutionary at the helm rather than a conventional thinker if change were to be possible. Change took precedent over appeasement which is why this period of recodification is such a turbulent time historically.

When Williams returned to Ellis Island again in 1909, he was a very different man compared to the man he was during his first term in office from 1902 to 1905. He focused more on work and less on heart meaning his focus was on administration rather than looking out for his staff and waiting immigrants as he once had in his first years in office. Williams returned to office after another man had taken Roosevelt's place. President William Howard Taft, also a Republican and also a Yale graduate, had been elected in Roosevelt's stead as Roosevelt had decided not to run for a third term in office.⁵⁹ Comforted by the fact that the presidency was still Republican and still favored a closed door, Commissioner Williams continued to concern himself with issues of operation and the protection of immigrants. However, he was more focused than before on his vision of stricter immigration regulations on Ellis Island. President Taft called Williams back to the frontlines of immigration with the expectation that experience would make Williams bolder in his practices to control immigration into New York. In the new era of a confident Williams, he focused more effective rules with which to bar the sick immigrants from entrance to the country as well as to Ellis Island, he fought more with the steamship carriers to keep undesirables from disembarking vessels, and he would test the intelligence of newcomers through his employment of puzzles and literacy tests. As a result, the \$25 dollar rule was no longer his most aggressive policy to bar entrance into this country and his focus was less so on matters concerning the safety of immigrants and staff so as to devote more

⁵⁹ "Yale Dignified on Taft Day," *Yale Alumni Weekly*, June 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation.

attention to keeping people out. All these efforts were carried out in the hopes of the creating more difficult hurdles for immigrants to have to overcome in order to make it in the United States.

More articles and letters which denounced Williams can be found from his second term compared to his first and these attacks went after his character instead of just his policies. *The Evening World* published a piece in 1909 that detailed Williams' the events which transpired regularly outside Williams' office. Ethel Lloyd Patterson, a female New York journalist, interviewed Williams. Patterson's story begun outside Williams' mahogany office doors, where immigrants of all ages, gender, and nationality waited in a line that never moved. "For one-half hour while I waited in the Commissioner's outer office for an interview with him, I watched Italians, Germans, Irish, French, and Poles crowded shoulder to shoulder, regardless of sex or age, in a shuffling line... toward the mahogany doors through which these aliens never pass." When Patterson entered Williams' office, Williams greeted her with expressionless eyes. "His eyes are gray and small and very steady. When he smiles it is with his lips—the expression of his eyes remains unchanged."⁶⁰ This created an image of him as a cold and unfeeling man who cared very little for the immigrants waiting outside his office door. This negative impression matched up with the assumption that Williams cared more about efficiency than the individuals affected. It is also important to note that Patterson debunked the myth of only male immigrants having arrived to the states. Ms. Patterson increased awareness to the new demographics, women and children through their mention in this piece. Williams' interview continued with mention of the

⁶⁰ Ethel Lloyd Patterson, "Not All Aliens With Less Than \$25 Are Barred, Explains Mr. Williams," *The Evening Journal*, July 8, 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

\$25 rule. Williams denied the existence of such a rule, then continued to mention how the steamship companies brought “inadequate” immigrants to Ellis Island. Williams placed the blame on these companies for the maltreatment of immigrants. He then told Patterson that the arrival of poor immigrants was a hazard and that steamship companies should have stopped bringing poor immigrants to Ellis Island by now. The interview abruptly concluded when Williams stood up and Patterson felt she should “deport herself from his office.” On her way out, Patterson saw an old woman who was waiting to be deported.⁶¹ This piece from *The Evening World* stirred further debate and reactions from the American masses.

Further outrage towards the “Saddest Island of All” came from angered Americans who favored an open door policy as the golden standard for immigration within the United States.⁶² An anonymous young student no less, wrote to Williams in order have his outrage heard directly by the Commissioner who had upset him or her with the \$25 rule. The unnamed student wrote perhaps one of the most scathing pieces about Williams to date. In the letter addressed directly to Williams, the student called Commissioner Williams a murderer of the worst kind. The student wrote that Williams did not realize the full effects of his actions in his xenophobic requirements and accused Williams of having killed people without a knife. As the student continued, they pointed out flaws in Williams’ logic.

A person who has a mind and hands and has not \$25 cash is not a person?... You

⁶¹ Ethel Lloyd Patterson, “Not All Aliens With Less Than \$25 Are Barred, Explains Mr. Williams,” *The Evening Journal*, July 8, 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁶² “Ellis, Saddest Island of All: Williams’ Autocratic Rule Causes Daily Heartrending Scenes at Immigration Office,” 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library.

think that they are not people but animals...They are people with a mind and with as much sence as you are but not such murderers as you...I do not see what do foreigners do harm. I know I go with foreigners to school they are bright, intelligent, and gentle as the Americans.⁶³

This letter captured the rage and opinion held by those who were in opposition with Williams and why they felt the way they felt. To those who opposed Williams, they felt that monetary status and country of origin had nothing to do with the quality of an immigrant who should first be considered a person rather than an “alien” or a “foreigner.”

There were other American citizens who wrote in and tried to defend Williams as commendable for having placed Americans above others even with the cost to the humanity of the newcomers. A particular letter from a proud New Yorker, journalist, and William Williams supporter responded to the piece by Ethel Lloyd Patterson in July 8, 1909 edition of *The Evening World* with encouragement for Williams to keep up his work. This letter came from Orville G. Victor, a member of the L. Boardman Smith Camp No. 25 in the Department of New York, and congratulated Williams for his “noble work” of having upheld the law of the land by his instillation of restrictions and policies which kept immigrants at bay. In his letter, Victor displayed extreme nationalistic as well as racist attitudes toward immigrants. With supporters and defenders like Orville G. Victor, it is easy to see why Williams had such an unfavorable opinion among many other Americans who were not so extreme. Victor wrote a particularly xenophobic letter based upon his opinions of himself and other Americans as superior to the new “dirty scum of European fields” and the “barbarians of Rome” who can be assumed to be the Italians. Victor describes “true Americans” as those with colonial ancestry because these are the

⁶³ Anonymous, Letter from a pupil of P.S. 62 to Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams, July 18, 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

people who, “conquered the wilderness... overcame the mercenary troops of the British monarch, and established here a government of freedom” that people want to take advantage of “without showing any evidence of willingness to take up arms in its future defense if needed.”⁶⁴

Abiel Abbot, a female resident of New York, wrote to Williams, “Your action in refusing to allow undesirable immigrants to land on our shore is most commendable and is fully appreciated by many citizens.”⁶⁵ While Abbot represented only a portion of twentieth century New Yorkers, her negative sentiments shed light onto the reactions Italians were frequently met with. Native born American man L. M. Mooers furthered Abbot’s sentiments when he had given an impression to the Commissioner where the Americans appeared to have little sympathy for the situation facing the Italian immigrants. Mooers wrote to Williams, “any rule you may make or anything you may do to restrict or sift immigration is commended... My association is with native Americans and I can assure you the sentiment against loose immigration inspection is virtually unanimous.”⁶⁶ White Americans who were angered by new immigrants was not shocking.

Matters escalated with the discovery of 1909 as a record year of deportations for immigrants and the only link to why the numbers had increased so dramatically was the \$25 rule.

⁶⁴ Orville G. Victor, Letter from Orville G. Victor to Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams, July 17, 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁶⁵ Abial Abbot, Letter from Abiel Abbot to Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams, July 14, 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁶⁶ L. M. Mooers, Letter from L. M. Mooers to Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams, July 16, 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

Just before the public had begun to respond to the news of \$25 rule, its affects came to light with the revelation of the 247 deportations from July 7, 1909 alone. Those who were immigrant sympathizers were not only distraught by the number of immigrants deported, but also the quality of the immigrants who found themselves deported. A particular coal miner was brought to the public's attention because the only reason for his deportation was that he did not have \$25 in his pocket upon arrival. The unnamed coal miner was not sick, was able bodied, and had a skill and yet he was still forced to leave without being given the chance to set foot on Ellis Island and advocate for his case.⁶⁷ This record day of deportations also escalated tensions between Williams and the steamship companies and ship operators who were greatly impacted by Williams' choices and polices of exclusion.

Williams' administration struggled to keep up as employees were few and ill prepared to handle the amount of immigrants on the island. In the beginning of the New Year, between the months of January and February of 1910, 3,500 immigrants had been deported at the hands of Williams and his administration. Williams claimed that this could only be blamed on the steamship companies for not having brought "qualified" immigrants.⁶⁸ According to Williams, sole responsibility for this disaster was entirely the fault of the steamship companies and the Ellis Island staff and Williams had to be blameless for simply doing their job. Instead of peace, Williams brought dissent and revolt through the vessel of his idea for patching up his relationship with the steamship companies. Williams passed a law, in response to past tensions

⁶⁷ "Record Day For Deportations; 247 Sent Back," July 7, 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library.

⁶⁸ "Carriers Blamed for Deportations," March 19, 1910, Room 328, ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

between him and the steamship companies who felt that Williams used their boats as containment units instead of transportation devices, restricting the sick immigrants to the steamships which rendered arriving immigrants helpless as well as robbed these immigrants of an opportunity to plead their case before Williams and the Ellis Island staff. This new law made steamship staff the responsible party for the care of the vulnerable and sick immigrants instead of the trained staff at the Ellis Island hospital. While Williams thought he had unburdened his small staff and made his operation run more smoothly, he had actually done the opposite. Rumors had begun to surface that the staff of Ellis Island was poorly trained and ill-prepared to handle the task which they were assigned to perform. In order to have been capable of performing the tasks needed to treat the immigrants, steamship companies needed more money that Williams was incapable as well as unwilling to provide.⁶⁹

Steamship companies quickly countered Williams' new transportation regulation with a revolt almost immediately after the law was passed. Fees for immigrant medical bills pushed onto the steamship company tabs and instead of making attempts to negotiate with Williams the companies refused to abide by the new law. Crew members rioted and subsequently delayed the immigration process for several immigrants, the majority of whom were sick. Williams told the press that by having reacted so negatively, the steamship companies and crew caused harm and distress to the immigrants who were temporarily disabled by their illness. As if that was not bad enough, Williams also went on to justify his regulation with his statement that he had passed the

⁶⁹ "Liners Must Care For The Alien Sick: Government's New Order Refusing to Accept Ill Immigrants at Ellis Island is Now in Force," *Times*, December 21, 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

restriction to keep immigrants from being deported when they were found to be ill.⁷⁰ The taunts continued as Williams went on to blame all deportations on the steamship companies for not having screened the immigrants before they boarded the steamships or disembarked.

Italian immigrants were again greatly impacted by Williams' strict and exclusionist agenda. With this restriction of the sick to the steamships, Williams had targeted those immigrants who were the poorest and also the most likely to have fallen ill because of the germs which immigrants were exposed to while aboard the steamships in steerage. Almost every Italian immigrant who came to the United States at this time could only, barely, afford a steerage ticket on any steamship that could take them to America. Being in steerage meant that these Italian immigrants were more likely to have been exposed to germs because of the poor conditions in the typically crowded and windowless rooms they occupied with complete strangers. Tight quarters, unfamiliar faces, and unclean spaces made it extremely likely for even the healthiest of immigrants to have fallen ill during their journey. By Williams' choice to seclude the immigrants to the steamships, he prevented immigrants from at the very least receiving the medical care which they so desperately needed as well as prevented their immigration to the United States. Prevention of the care of immigrants is a stain on Williams' career as it demonstrates how policy is more important to him than human rights and individual lives.

End of an Era: Legacy, Influence, and the Debunking of the Myth Surrounding Ellis Island

Williams' career as Commissioner of Ellis Island began to decline towards the end with odd policies like the jigsaw puzzle test developed by Ellis Island physician Howard A. Knox.

⁷⁰ "Steamship Lines Revolt at Rule," *Herald*, December 21, 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

First tested out among immigrants at Ellis Island in 1912, the jigsaw puzzle test came to be known as the Feature Profile Test. The Feature Profile Test was instituted based off of the stigma as well as the concern for mentally unstable or un-intelligent immigrants being granted access into the country and later becoming a burden to the country. IQ and linguistic exams had been given to immigrants for several years prior to the creation of the Feature Profile Test, however, Knox wanted to try a new way to test the competency of the immigrants. Knox considered this puzzle test to be less harsh and difficult when compared to other tests administered to immigrants and Williams had approved the use of the practice at Ellis Island.⁷¹

Knox felt that the long term usage of IQ and linguistic tests was incapable of being able to properly measure the intelligence, mental state, and the abilities of immigrants upon arrival. Many immigrants failed these examinations and were deported based on resulted implications of being an “imbecile” because of not having had the exact knowledge that examiners on Ellis Island wanted from them.⁷² Linguistic and IQ exams proved especially problematic for Italian immigrants because of the many dialects which have existed within the Italian language and because the northern Italian immigrants had access to better educational opportunities than the southern Italian immigrants. The Italian language had not even begun to be standardized until after Italian unification in 1871 and many Italians resisted learning the newer version of the standardized Italian. The majority, especially those who lived in rural villages, had either no clue

⁷¹ Adam Cohen, “This Jigsaw Puzzle Was Given to Ellis Island Immigrants to Test Their Intelligence: A confusing set of blocks could seal their fate,” Smithsonian.com, May 2017 (Accessed on February 18, 2019), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/puzzle-given-ellis-island-immigrants-test-intelligence-180962779/>.

⁷² Adam Cohen, “This Jigsaw Puzzle Was Given to Ellis Island Immigrants to Test Their Intelligence: A confusing set of blocks could seal their fate,” Smithsonian.com, May 2017 (Accessed on February 18, 2019), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/puzzle-given-ellis-island-immigrants-test-intelligence-180962779/>.

that their language was changing and or no opportunity to learn the new version of Italian that was being insisted upon by the newly unified Italian government. Lack of education and absence of knowledge of the version of Italian which the Americans who worked at Ellis Island thought the Italian immigrants should have known led to the deportation of many able bodied and intelligent individuals. There was also the issue of a lack of literacy in Italy as whole. The illiteracy rate as of 1900 was seventy percent in Italy, so the expectation that all Italians should have been able to take a literacy test was unfair.⁷³

As seen in the letter sent from the anonymous New York City student to Williams, many of the immigrants who came over were intelligent and seen as capable by other Americans despite their economic status.⁷⁴ The press also jumped to the defense of the abilities of the immigrants with an article written by Arthur Brisbane in *The New York Evening Journal*. Presses continued to be an ever popular critique of Commissioner Williams the making concept for the piece which Brisbane wrote in *The New York Evening Journal* was no surprise. However, the comparison drawn between a very famous American and the immigrants was a startling surprise. Brisbane wrote with passion, “Remember that among the most ignorant in book learning very few are as ignorant as Nancy Hanks when she gave birth to Abraham Lincoln.”⁷⁵ This comparison is truly remarkable given the social and political context of both Brisbane’s

⁷³ “Italian Immigration,” *Digital History*, www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/voices/italiano_immigration.cfm, (Accessed on April 5, 2019).

⁷⁴ Anonymous, Letter from a pupil of P.S. 62 to Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams, July 18, 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁷⁵ Arthur Brisbane, “Brutality at Ellis Island,” *The New York Evening Journal*, 1911 Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

statement and the time period in which the piece was published. The significance of the mention of a Civil War hero, Abraham Lincoln, would not be lost among the American people as well as the connection to the context of the Italian immigrants who came over to replace the lost generation of laboring men. To draw attention to the supposed “unintelligence” of Abraham Lincoln’s mother while still having demonstrated that she was essential to American history, was a stark but understandable claim. Brisbane’s article critiqued Williams’ expectations for immigrants to be rich enough and smart enough in order to point out the value which immigrants provided Americans if allowed to enter. Abraham Lincoln had not started out rich and smart and yet he changed the course of the country’s history positively so why could this not also be the case for immigrants. Desires for immigrants to receive kindness continued and some of that sentiment could be seen in Howard A. Knox’s attempt to reduce the severity of the intelligence screening process at Ellis Island.

The Feature Profile Test was created by Knox in an attempt to require less specific knowledge of immigrants. Knox claimed, “The purpose of our mental measuring scale at Ellis Island is the sorting out of those immigrants who may, because of their mental make-up, become a burden to the State or who may produce offspring that will require care in prisons, asylums, and institutions.”⁷⁶ Instead of being asked questions about culture and their own language, the fate of an immigrant would be decided based upon their ability to solve the wooden jigsaw block puzzle that was handed to them. While Knox was viewed as more progressive and lenient than Williams, Knox was still similar to Williams in that he feared the acceptance of incompetent, insane, or mentally challenged immigrants. Concerns for the sanity of immigrants again proved

⁷⁶ Adam Cohen, “This Jigsaw Puzzle Was Given to Ellis Island Immigrants to Test Their Intelligence: A confusing set of blocks could seal their fate,” Smithsonian.com, May 2017 (Accessed on February 18, 2019), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/puzzle-given-ellis-island-immigrants-test-intelligence-180962779/>.

to be a problem for Italian immigrants because if they spoke an unfamiliar tongue or did anything that Americans considered to be out of the ordinary could have placed in a mental institution. Many times, Italian immigrants in mental institutions were placed there because of communication barriers that had led to a misunderstanding that cost them their freedom or resulted in their deportation.

As many lashed out at Williams for having employed and approved of such elitist and discriminatory practices at Ellis Island, newly elected Republican President William Howard Taft attempted to publicly defend Williams and their nativist ideals and all exclusionist policies. The new president was called to charge as President Roosevelt could not run for a third term in the 1908 election. Taft became the successor to the Roosevelt ideals and it was now his duty to maintain the closed door immigration ideals. He tried to change the tone of the presses with his letter to Williams that he had published in pressed across New York in which endorsed Williams as the perfect man for the job of operating Ellis Island. “I want to write and congratulate you on the great work you doing. I want you to know that every day, as I think over the Government, I rejoice that I have a Commissioner like you in the place you fill... you are too ‘darn’ conscientious... neglecting your own health.” Taft painted a very empathetic picture of the Commissioner Williams narrative with him as the good guy. Taft described Williams as someone on the straight and narrow path whose shortcoming was that he worked too hard, followed the rules too well, and was essentially too good and dedicated to his job to the point of negatively having impacted his health.⁷⁷ The fact that the President felt the need to address the situation of

⁷⁷ William Howard Taft, Letter from President William Howard Taft to Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams published in the presses, “The White House: Washington,” November 25, 1911, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

Williams and the opinion that Americans had of him shows just how controversial of a figure Williams was even during his own life. In having published this letter to Williams in the press, Taft had hoped to garner favor with the masses for the disagreeable task that Williams had been assigned to on Ellis Island. Taft had also hoped that by his endorsement of Williams people would have stopped antagonizing him, but this was not to be as one final scandal would bring an end to the days of Commissioner Williams as the Commissioner of Ellis Island.

The true and final nail in the coffin of Williams' career at Ellis Island was the scandal known as the Sabath Affair which occurred in the fall of 1912. Commissioner Williams found himself in deep water when his personal conflict with Congressman Adolph J. Sabath boiled over and became public knowledge. It had long been understood that Williams had a preference as to which immigrants, if any, should have been allowed into the country. Despite the fact that Williams' prejudice had been common knowledge, the Sabath Affair officially confirmed his racial bias as well as linked him to anti-Semitism. Conflict between Sabath and Williams aroused because Congressman Sabath felt that Williams was going to extremes in his efforts to control immigration. Sabath, being a Jewish Czech-born Democrat who had immigrated to the United States in his youth from southeastern Europe, felt that the Williams was going far beyond his duty of screening immigrants for potential problems and was instead rejecting immigrants based upon his own personal ideals of racial superiority.

Fellow Republicans of the time, like Californian House of Representatives Representative E. A. Hayes, also found Sabath to be a "crank" who would have let just about anybody in.⁷⁸ However, contemporaries of Williams did point out that the rude remarks Williams

⁷⁸ E. A. Hayes, Letter from Californian House of Representatives Representative E. A. Hayes to Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams, September 30, 1912, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor,

and Sabath had made towards each other in their private letters were condemning and as a result Williams was not able to have been entirely innocent in all of this debacle. While Williams' was never found guilty of any of the accusations brought upon him, Williams later repeated history where he again decide to vacate his post at the end in June of 1913. Williams was nominated for the position of Commissioner of the New York City Department of Water Supply, Gas, and Electric. After his acceptance, Williams started off 1914 in his new position.⁷⁹ Despite having left Ellis Island and concerns of immigration behind, Williams was still able to have a successful political career in New York through his new position leading to the conclusion that the Sabath Affair did not take him out of favor with fellow politicians who wanted to him to continue to hold office. After retiring from politics, Williams continued his law practice until his death in 1947.

It is true that the Sabath Affair did not mark the end of Williams' political career. However, it did mark the end of Williams' time in the immigration office as well as cement the narrative of Williams as the scathing gatekeeper. Ellis Island has obtained a reputation of being a "Hell on Earth" over the years because of people like Williams who once ruled at the helm.⁸⁰ The reality is, there is more substantial evidence for Williams' and other commissioners' racial prejudice against certain immigrant groups than there is for Ellis Island having been a poorly run

Lenox, and Tilden Foundation.

⁷⁹William Williams papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (Accessed on February 18, 2019), <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3346>.

⁸⁰ Rev. Sydney Herbert Bars to his representative at Ellis Island, "Pastor Calls Ellis Island a Hell on Earth," *The New York Evening Journal*, June 21, 1911, Room 328, ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

institution. “Tales of a father’s or grandfather’s sorrows at Ellis Island form part of the legends of millions of American families... They are likely confused, however, with harsh experiences in steerage... The actual time spent at the island by the average immigrant was only a few hours.”⁸¹ Williams’ positive impact is very rarely documented, with most notable mentions seeming to only be pulled from his first term, as his negative impact on racial policy has long since endured and impacted numerous Italian immigrants whom he had deemed to be unworthy. Williams’ legacy lives on in the ongoing repercussions of the stigmas he instilled within the Ellis Island staff who examined incoming immigrants. Once he attached stigmas to certain groups, they stuck. Immigrants of later generations still face backlash due to their poverty level, the language which they speak if it is not English, their intelligence, and the fact that there continues to be a hierarchy of culture in today’s new wave and old wave immigrants. These alienating factors created a need for a third party to involve itself in order to safeguard the immigrants who had been left awaiting their fate. The hero of this story would be the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants. This Catholic charity dedicated itself to these Italian immigrants who had been left vulnerable by their new life in an unfamiliar place.

⁸¹ Thomas Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 19.

CHAPTER 2

SAVING GRACE OF THE ITALIAN SAINT RAPHAEL SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF IMMIGRANTS

A Growing Problem

Desertion and abandonment reflect how many of the Italian immigrants felt during the early years of their new life in the United States. Staff members on Ellis Island paid little attention to the individuals observed and instead fussed over each immigrant's economic position and potential liabilities only to turn a blind eye when struggle set in post examination. Life on the mainland was difficult for Italian immigrants as they found themselves largely ignored and left to despair which served to increase cases of repatriation back to Italy. Of the immigrant men who came to the United States from 1880 to 1915 and worked as manual laborers, upwards of thirty to fifty percent of these Italians inevitably repatriated back to Italy a few short years after their arrival.⁸² Negligence toward the Italian immigrants on behalf of the American government workers capable of protecting these vulnerable people led to the establishment of independent, private heroes who organized themselves to help the Italians. Ellis Island remained unconcerned, but the New York Catholic Americans became motivated by compassion and decided to care about the immigrants. In 1891, in response to the cries for help of the immigrants, the Italian

⁸² "Immigration... Italian: The Great Arrival," Library of Congress (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/italian3.html>.

Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants promised its resources and services to those who had struggled in their new home in New York.⁸³ It is through Catholic acts of charity that the void of Italian immigrant aid was eventually filled. Additionally, through their close record keeping, the society was able to tell the story of Italian immigration through the eyes of the Italians.

The influx in the number of Italian immigrants continued as significantly more migrants arrived to Ellis Island in the early-twentieth century which created further social issues. By the end of the first period of Italian migration in 1915, over four million Italian immigrants sought refuge in America.⁸⁴ From 1900 to 1910, three million of those four million immigrants made their journey.⁸⁵ Larger numbers of Italian immigrants brought new problems with them related to poverty. Passage of the checkpoint of Ellis Island had not marked the end of the struggle for Italian immigrants in America. Shelter became one of the most central issues to the heartache of the Italian immigrants in America. On average, rent was around twenty dollars a month.⁸⁶ Considering twenty five dollars was the required amount to enter the United States with, the

⁸³ Archbishop of New York Monsignor Augustino, Letter from Archbishop of New York Monsignor Augustino to Revered Sir, July 10, 1891, Collection 005, Box 1, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.- Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

⁸⁴ "Immigration... Italian: The Great Arrival," Library of Congress (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/italian3.html>.

⁸⁵ "From Europe to America: Immigration Through Family Tales: History of Italian Immigration: Who Traveled to America?," Mtholyoke, (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/~molna22a/classweb/politics/Italianhistory.html>.

⁸⁶ "The Tenements," (Accessed on March 14, 2019), https://www.sssm.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/5thGrade_Tenement_TalH.pdf, 2.

prospect of housing proved to be one of the most risky but necessary investments for an immigrant to make. Eight percent of that twenty five dollars, on average, went towards the first month's rent leaving the immigrants with little to rely on should they be unable to find a job before the next month's rent became due. Despite American criteria of the monetary requirements, Italian immigrants were viewed as the responsibility of the country they left behind. Italy was ridiculed by American journalist and closed door sympathizer S. Collier for not "sifting through its immigrants" prior to passengers boarding ships and was accused of making things more difficult for Americans in having thought so "inconsiderately." "The steamship companies... will carry any one who can pay the fares... The sifting of the unacceptable ought to be done in Europe, not here."⁸⁷ American expectations for Italian immigration to be the concern of Italy did not align with the perceptions held by the Italian government who found it difficult to support people who had left Italy.⁸⁸ Additionally, Italy barely had the resources to provide for its own people, as almost all resources were directed towards rebuilding after civil unrest from unification and natural disasters like the Messina earthquake of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.⁸⁹

Italians back in Italy felt that those who had immigrated to the United States had left

⁸⁷ S. Collier, "Restricting Immigration," January, 1911, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁸⁸ Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 43.

⁸⁹ "Immigration... Italian: The Great Arrival," Library of Congress (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/italian3.html>.

others behind to suffer and resented those who left for this reason. Consequently, the first few years of Italian immigration were met without compassion. While leaving was necessary for many of the economically struggling Italians, it took until the near end of the first great wave of Italian immigration into the United States for the Italian government to view the situation with a rose colored lens. The first Italian mass migration movement can be broken down into three periods which tell the story of how the Italian government eventually came around to the idea of Italian immigration as a positive element for the country of Italy and its people. The first time period is from the date of unification in 1871 until 1895 when Italian immigration started to pick up into an active movement. Second, came the period from 1895 to 1908 when immigration became a regular reality for Italians and was no longer an uncommon practice among the people of Italy. Conclusion of the first Italian mass migration in stage three was the third period from 1908 to the end of World War I where immigration from Italy to the United States both peaked and fell within the same time.⁹⁰ United States Secretary of Labor Robert F. Foerster had this to say of the three stages of Italian immigration:

In the first, men deplored emigration; in the second they deemed it necessary and upon some grounds, positively advantageous; in the third, regarding it as not the less necessary, they accumulated concrete evidence of gains at home and discerned it to be a manageable instrument to expansion abroad. In the first period they sought to curb it, in the second to protect and encourage—without stimulating—it, in the third to cherish it and give it direction.⁹¹

What this analysis of the Italian government's changed heart procured was hope for the possibility of Italian immigrants support in their new home in the United States of America. A

⁹⁰ Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 43.

⁹¹ Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 43.

need had been created by the traditional lack of support from both countries as well as the vulnerable status of Italians as financially lacking, culturally and linguistically different, and easy targets for the corrupt who searched immigrant victims. The Italian government could not divert significant funds to their Italian compatriots abroad but, the Italian government maintained a crucial role in the Italian immigration process through their support of private religious charities. While Catholics in both Italy and the United States paved the way for immigrant aid, the Italian government also helped to open the door for the lifesaving organization that was the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants which helped the Italian immigrants in New York in numerous ways. Given the tendency for Catholics involvement in charitable works of service, compounded by the fact that the vast majority, if not all, of the Italians were baptized Catholics, it was not a shock that the Italian Saint Raphael Society was a uniquely Catholic charitable organization. Officially founded in June of 1891, and initially headed by clergyman Pietro Bandini, the Italian Saint Raphael Society became a very important part of the community of the Italian Catholics of New York.⁹²

A Saint Raphael Society was not an entirely new concept, as there were also German and Irish counterparts, since Saint Raphael is the patron saint of travelers in the Catholic religion.⁹³ Saint Raphael Societies were ethnically based and it was not until 1891 that the Italians had their own version of the Catholic charity. In a letter written in Italian from the Archbishop of New York, Monsignor Augustino who was of Italian descent, said the following of the need for a

⁹² Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 119.

⁹³ Archbishop of New York Monsignor Augustino, Letter from Archbishop of New York Monsignor Augustino to Reverend Sir, July 10, 1891, Collection 005, Box 1, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.-Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

Catholic Italian Saint Raphael Society in his home of New York City. “E’ una questione grave per l’onore della Chiesa... degli Americani cattolici, gli emigranti Italiani rappresentano una popolazione su cui la Chiesa (deve la) al suo potere morale.”⁹⁴ The English translation of this section of Augustino’s letter is, “It is a serious question for the honor of the Church... of American Catholics, Italian emigrants represent a population on which the Church (owes) to its moral power.” Here, Archbishop Augustino called the American Catholics to action in accordance with his view of Italian immigrants as fellow Catholics and thus members of the community. As members of this group in New York, the faithful should have placed upon themselves an internal moral obligation to support Italian Catholics; their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Poor native born New Yorkers who lived alongside the Italians felt as if they were in competition with Italian workers who also struggled to make ends meet. This furthered the rift between the working class native born Americans and the disadvantaged immigrants. The negative attitudes of some of the New Yorkers, however, were not to be taken lightly. There were those people who thought “true Americans” barred the gates for “undesirable” and poorer peoples seeking refuge. Some of these negative attitudes had a lot to do with an individual’s perception of what an American should be. In the eyes of the nationalistic xenophobes who called for immigrants to be rejected, such as urban native born workers who feared Italian workers as competition, immigrants could never be American because they are foreign and did

⁹⁴ Archbishop of New York Monsignor Augustino, Letter from Archbishop of New York Monsignor Augustino to Reverend Sir, July 10, 1891, Collection 005, Box 1, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.-Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

not oppose the acceptance of new people into the country.⁹⁵ Italian immigrants could not expect themselves to measure up in the eyes of these American nationalists because according to these people immigrants were the enemy. This toxic view made it impossible for the Italian immigrants to find help and comradery among Americans leaving them stranded without any support.

Germans, unlike Italians, were part of the “old immigration” which consisted of those peoples who had been immigrating to the United States for several years already. The majority of “old immigrants” consisted of individuals from Germany and England with the Irish immigrants arriving a little later and being scorned in comparison to the favored Germans and British immigrants. Between 1880 and 1890 alone, just at the beginning Italian mass migration, one and half million Germans had immigrated to the United States and largely settled in the Midwest.⁹⁶ Almost every German immigrant moved west to work as a farmer where they could successfully keep to themselves and keep their German traditions alive. A “German triangle” was created in Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin as these states were dominated by German immigrant farmers.⁹⁷ The Germans also had more money than the “new immigrants” demonstrated by the ability of many to pay to continue west after their initial arrival on the east coast. Italian immigrants, like

⁹⁵ The Bronx, Letter from The Bronx to Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams, July 20, 1909, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁹⁶ “European Reading Room: The Germans in America: Chronology,” Library of Congress (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://www.loc.gov/rr/european/imde/germchro.html>.

⁹⁷ “Germans in the Midwest,” Smithsonian, National Museum of American History, Behring Center (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://americanhistory.si.edu/many-voices-exhibition/peopling-expanding-nation-1776%E2%80%931900/pushed-and-pulled-european-immigration-0>.

the Irish before them, remained on the east coast due to financial struggle and desperation for work opportunities. This left the unfamiliar “new immigrants” open to the criticism and scorn of native born American neighbors who believed themselves to be in competition with the Italians for jobs and living space. It is because of these differences between the Germans and the Irish, and later the Germans and the Italians that the Italians found themselves out of favor with the American public. Germans were seen as familiar, economically sufficient, and Anglo-Saxon whereas Italians were seen as unfamiliar, poor, and not white which led the nativist Americans to negatively compare the two ethnic groups and place Germans above Italians in terms of acceptance.

Gino Speranza was an Italian American lawyer and author who lived and worked in New York and advocated for the rights of immigrants in the early twentieth century. As an Italian-American, and an early example of one, Gino Speranza used his connection to both Americans and Italians in order to present evidence for the value of the Italians who came to New York. Speranza was the child of immigrant parents Carlo L. Speranza and Adele Capetti. He spent his formative childhood years in Verona, Italy.⁹⁸ Speranza had essentially grown up living between two worlds which led to the formation of his Italian-American identity as well as his unique ability to bring a new perspective to the immigration debate. He was proof that Italians could assimilate, still care about their fellow Italians, as well as succeed in this country.

Speranza was so similar and yet so different from Commissioner Williams who had also been outspoken on issues of immigration. Like Williams, Gino Speranza graduated from law school, opened his own law practice, lived, and worked in New York City. Unlike Speranza,

⁹⁸ “Gino Speranza Papers, Biographical/Historical Information,” Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/2844>.

Williams knew only what it was like to be American while Speranza knew what it was like to belong to more than one culture. This led to his heartbreak at the negligence towards Italian immigrants in the United States he observed. As a result of his connection to the Italian people, Speranza would prove to be a loyal advocate in the New York courts of law on behalf of his Italian brothers and sisters. Founded in 1906, in collaboration with the Italian government, Gino Speranza worked with the Bureau for Italian Immigrants and found himself directly involved in cases. Even after his retirement from law in 1912, Gino Speranza continued to write on the issues which plagued immigration in his second career as a journalist which he embarked upon in 1915.⁹⁹

When Italians faced criticism based upon their physical features and perceived but unproven involvement in criminal activity Gino Speranza wrote his personal essay “How it Feels to be a Problem” as a way for American readers to understand the harmful impact of these arbitrary yet hurtful comments.

Too often, let it be said, does the American of common schooling interpret differences from his own standards and habits of life, as necessarily signs of inferiority. Foreignness of features or of apparel is for him often the denial of brother- hood. Often, again, the fine brow and aquiline nose of the Latin will seem to the American to betoken a criminal type rather than the impress of a splendid racial struggle.¹⁰⁰

Physically, the Italians looked different than the Germans. American unfamiliarity with darker features led fear and judgment to be placed upon each Italian encountered by untrusting

⁹⁹ “Gino Speranza Papers, Biographical/Historical Information,” Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/2844> .

¹⁰⁰ Gino Speranza, “How it Feels to be a Problem,” May 7, 1904, Box 35, Folder Articles on Immigration A-H, Gino Speranza Papers (123A-1) 1887-1935 (bulk 1905-1925), Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, 2.

Americans. Simply put, Italians were seen almost as less human because they were not identical to native born Americans. Legends of the mafia or “mafiosa” in Italian, the patriarchal crime system of Italy, exacerbated the fear which the Americans felt toward the Italian immigrants. Italian-American lawyer Gino Speranza called for a stop to these rumors on the basis of his personal experience and the lack of evidence for Italian mafia or criminal activity in America. Since Gino actually worked in a court of law, he had seen numerous cases of Italian immigrants accused of crimes be dismissed because of lack of evidence or a cultural misunderstanding. He said of Italian arrests and crime in America, “While it is true that many Italians are arrested for ‘violations of city ordinances’, these are often the result of ignorance.”¹⁰¹ Here Gino pointed to the lack of understanding between the Americans and the Italians due to their different cultures and their polarity within the nation. He continued by his acknowledgement of the flawed expectations of Americans for Italians to just know and assimilate into a culture where they were not welcome. “Our naïve cocksureness that what is American is necessarily the best and most desirable, rises almost to the dignity of a national sin.”¹⁰² In the presentation of his experience, Gino Speranza worked to improve the idea of Italians in the United States in the hope of a positive American reaction to the idea of immigrant aid. The mentality of “brotherhood” with the Italians, as Gino Speranza had called it in his personal writings, seemed impossible from the

¹⁰¹ Gino Speranza, “How it Feels to be a Problem,” May 7, 1904, Box 35, Folder Articles on Immigration A-H, Gino Speranza Papers (123A-1) 1887-1935 (bulk 1905-1925), Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, 17.

¹⁰² Gino Speranza, “How it Feels to be a Problem,” May 7, 1904, Box 35, Folder Articles on Immigration A-H, Gino Speranza Papers (123A-1) 1887-1935 (bulk 1905-1925), Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, 2.

American standpoint.¹⁰³

Of the five boroughs of New York, the Bronx in particular seemed to have the most with the acceptance of their new Italian immigrant neighbors into their community. Historically, Brooklyn, Lower Manhattan, and the Bronx had been the most common final destination stops for the majority of the Italian immigrants. Initially many Italians settled in Lower Manhattan and Greenwich Village. As more Italians arrived, they were squeezed out toward Brooklyn and the Bronx.¹⁰⁴ Some of these immigrants to New York who fell in with the majority of those people who remained in the Northeast did venture out to nearby towns in New Jersey, but most remained well within the confines of the New York metropolitan area.¹⁰⁵ With most Italian immigrants setting up shop in the Bronx and Brooklyn by 1900, it became hard for some native born Americans to cope with the overcrowding resulting from the new residents. While many Americans struggled with their new reality, none seemed as distraught as the people from the Bronx who choose to write to Ellis Island Commissioner William Williams about their distaste for their situation. In a 1909 letter to Williams signed “The Bronx,” a group of locals called Williams “the man of the hour” and encouraged him to enact stricter policies aimed at preventing more immigrants, especially poor Italians, from being allowed to come to and to live in the

¹⁰³ Gino Speranza, “How it Feels to be a Problem,” May 7, 1904, Box 35, Folder Articles on Immigration A-H, Gino Speranza Papers (123A-1) 1887-1935 (bulk 1905-1925), Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Maria Tsampas, “The Peopling of New York City: Italians in New York City,” cuny.edu, published on March 8, 2016 (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://eportfolios.macaulay.cuny.edu/murphy16/2016/03/08/italians-in-new-york-city/>.

¹⁰⁵ “Immigration... Italian: A City of Villages,” Library of Congress (Accessed on March 12, 2019), <https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/italian5.html>.

United States.¹⁰⁶

Immigrant housing was held to a lesser standard than American housing, even amongst poor Americans, which negatively impacted every aspect of life for the Italians. Gino Speranza wrote “The Influence of America on the Italian Immigrant” in order to highlight the role which all Americans played, even those who turned a blind eye, in the deterioration of the Italian immigrants living in such a desperate state. Acceptance of a deplorable state for the Italians is unjust in the opinion of Speranza. Speranza goes on to describe, “the unfortunate and evil tendencies and conditions developed by the new life,” of the Italian immigrants who were limited in means and allies.¹⁰⁷ Potential housing options were limited to boarding and tenement housing as they were the cheapest and most centrally located to many of the job opportunities in the city. Boarding houses were a viable option for Italian immigrants as they were cheap and could easily be found in the “ethnic enclaves” popping up around the city as more immigrants settled in the area. The community aspect, when an ethnically Italian one, was a particular draw in for Italian immigrants as it helped them to not feel so alone in a city that tended to reject them. A boarding house was a property typically owned and rented out to the poor immigrants by a working class family, possibly also an immigrant family, who rented out rooms in their space to make extra money.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ The Bronx, Letter from The Bronx, Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

¹⁰⁷ Gino Speranza, “The Influence of America on the Italian Immigrant,” Box 35, Folder Articles on Immigration A-H, Gino Speranza Papers (123A-1) 1887-1935 (bulk 1905-1925), Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, 1.

¹⁰⁸ Edward C. Stibili, *Pietro Bandini: Missionary, Social Worker, and Colonizer, 1852-1917* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2016), 348.

While the majority of Italians did not intend to maintain permanent residence in the United States, those who did favored boarding houses as they were cheaper and allowed for immigrants to save up for the passage of other family members down the line.¹⁰⁹ Speranza believed that this type of environment was not good for Italians as it was a life in poverty where they often found themselves at the mercy of another or taken advantage of regularly by evil neighbors who sought to profit off the unfortunate Italians. While few in the power to change this danger did so, Gino Speranza wrote on this tragedy in the hopes that, “If we bear in mind that the first period of the immigrants experience in the new country is lived in abnormal conditions-that it is a period both of adjustment and struggle, our study of him will be both more sympathetic and just.”¹¹⁰ He wanted to make this lifestyle not so acceptable to the Americans so that they would be sympathetic to the Italians and accept responsibility for their negligence in order to initiate a positive response to help the Italians out of this destitute life.

Conceptually, the idea of tenement and boarding housing as a potential residence for poor immigrants and completed Italian family units was very appealing to the Italian immigrant families but this was not the reality as it was carried out in practice. Prices were never accurate to how cheap they were advertised to be and it was very rare for an Italian family to have an apartment all to themselves as they often had to share the property with many other poor

¹⁰⁹ Maria Tsampas, “The Peopling of New York City: Italians in New York City,” cuny.edu, published on March 8, 2016 (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://eportfolios.macaulay.cuny.edu/murphy16/2016/03/08/italians-in-new-york-city/>.

¹¹⁰ Gino Speranza, “The Influence of America on the Italian Immigrant,” Box 35, Folder Articles on Immigration A-H, Gino Speranza Papers (123A-1) 1887-1935 (bulk 1905-1925), Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, 1.

immigrants often of all sorts of other ethnic backgrounds. The task of crowding the spaces with numbers well past maximum capacity limits and up charging tenants allowed for landlords to consistently maintain increased profits. In a strange turn of events, while majority of swindlers were not other Italians, there were sometimes Italians who had been in the country longer who used and abused their compatriots for monetary gain. Speranza highlighted the crisis caused by the lack of trust in Americans as the causation of evil within the Italian community itself as Italians who had been met with success early on bought property in order to create a livelihood off of desperate brethren. “The Italian immigrant instinctually follows the line of least resistance—goes to live in little Italy, and relies on his own countrymen however dishonest rather than a stranger.”¹¹¹ American resistance of Italians opened new doors for unjust behavior towards the Italians that could not have been foreseen.

Aside from the false advertising of price and size of space which put immigrants at risk for financial ruin, poor quality of life, and eventual deportation, tenement housing deteriorated as more and more people lived in these buildings and little to no maintenance or upkeep was performed. When the tenement housing apartments were initially constructed, ventilation, sanitation, and building upkeep were not huge problems as the buildings were initially made well. A lack of building codes led many to cut corners and safety measures which led the buildings to be hazardous structures as time went on. What further escalated this dangerous and inevitably health hazardous living environment was the overcrowding of the tenement housing apartments to absurd numbers of immigrants per room and per floor. Buildings were typically

¹¹¹ Gino Speranza, “The Influence of America on the Italian Immigrant,” Box 35, Folder Articles on Immigration A-H, Gino Speranza Papers (123A-1) 1887-1935 (bulk 1905-1925), Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, 1.

five to six stories high which intensified issues of ventilation and fire safety due to the overcrowding.¹¹² More people crowding the emerging little Italys had less space created the problem of trash piling up within the rooms and the halls of the buildings. The influx of trash became a disaster for those living inside these tenement buildings with the air quality toxic. Since it was impossible for fresh air to find its way into the building with all the blockage, personal safety had become complicated by the reality of there being more to burn leading to an increased risk of fire inside the buildings.¹¹³ Overcrowding decreased the possibility of a safe evacuation in the event of an emergency. Many Italians found themselves living in such conditions with their lives at risk daily from their living situation.

Matters went from bad to worse with the passage of time as the buildings continued to fall apart and no one in a position to repair them seemed to care about the safety and the quality of life of the Italians who lived in these apartments. Inspectors came and evaluated the living conditions, but rarely did anything productive come from these visits and there was typically little to no follow up. An attitude of negligence can be seen in the letter from the visit of Inspector Herman Larry to Tenement House Commissioner Hon. Thos. C. T. Crain. In Herman Larry's report on a particular Lower East Side property, the building has been declared to be of higher quality than most tenement buildings of Italian residence and as a result was in need of no major maintenance. Claims of "higher quality" are then contradicted by their juxtaposition to Herman Larry's notes. Larry recorded a whopping eight violations capable of threatening the

¹¹² Edward C. Stibili, *Pietro Bandini: Missionary, Social Worker, and Colonizer, 1852-1917* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2016), 348.

¹¹³ Edward C. Stibili, *Pietro Bandini: Missionary, Social Worker, and Colonizer, 1852-1917* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2016), 348.

safety as well as the health of the residents who lived in the building in question. Infractions consisted of mostly plumbing issues, various sites were leaking, and despite this information Inspector Herman Larry wrote in his report that the building had good enough plumbing.¹¹⁴ Instances of indifference were all too common and put many Italians at risk for illness, injury, and in worst cases death. The attitude of Ellis Island staff and the American public for Italians being the problem of Italy and the lack of care shown for the despicable life quality of these immigrants in New York led to the internal and physical destruction of many Italians drove home Speranza's point that the entirety of America played a role in this unacceptable reality.

An Answer to Their Prayers: The Establishment of the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants

Americans turned a blind eye toward the plagues placed upon the daily lives of Italian immigrants since it was easiest to have blamed the immigrants for their personal problems. Instead of acknowledgement of their role in the decline which faced the innocent, blame was tossed between the immigrants themselves, the Italian government, and the steamship companies. In reality, even Americans played a role in the dire situation as all parties maintained influence on the matter. Gino Speranza wanted Americans to take responsibility for their influence on the Italian immigrants who lived in the United States. In his essay titled "The Influence of America on the Italian Immigrant," Gino Speranza showed the experience of Italian immigrants who lived and worked in twentieth century American cities and how the American people played a crucial role in the individual experience of the Italians.

¹¹⁴ Herman Larry, Letter to Tenement Housing Commissioner Hon. Thos. C. T. Crain from Inspector Herman Larry, January 27, 1904, New York Municipal Archives.

The immigrant's life, is at best, a struggle. Many an Italian dies because of the hardship of the climate. The change of life from work in the country to the closed life in the factory or tenement in the city gives a large percentage of death, especially among Italian women... I have asked ship surgeons on emigrant steamship lines what their impression was between the physical conditions of the Italian immigrants coming to America and those returning to Italy. The answer has almost always been that returning immigrants showed marked signs of physical deterioration.¹¹⁵

With these disturbing words, Speranza summed up the verified threat that urban work and tenement life had on the lifespan of the Italian immigrants who believed themselves to have been without another option. Harsh realities called for change brought about by the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants. The Americans involved with the Catholic charity saw the value in the preservation of the lives of the Italian immigrants and were able to save the lives of many through their noble work.

Matters had later begun to improve for the Italians when the Catholic Church took its stand on immigrants as "our Italian immigrants," as presented by priest turned journalist Giacomo Gambera. The Catholic Church wanted the American populations to see the Italian immigrants as people who warranted their compassion and thus called them to action.¹¹⁶

Giacomo Gambera, the man who coined this phrase "our Italian immigrants," was an Italian-American, like Gino Speranza, and a priest who advocated for the care of Italian immigrants as

¹¹⁵ Gino Speranza, "The Influence of America on the Italian Immigrant," Box 35, Folder Articles on Immigration A-H, Gino Speranza Papers (123A-1) 1887-1935 (bulk 1905-1925) Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, 2.

¹¹⁶ Giacomo Gambera, "Our Italian Immigrants," *The New World* (Chicago), February 25, 1911, The Saint Raphael Collection, Archives of The Center for Migration Studies of New York.

valuable members of American society.¹¹⁷ Gambera also worked as a representative for the Catholic charity called the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants.¹¹⁸ He was a minority in thought because of his desire for immigrants to be included in American life. As an Italian American tied to the Catholic Church through his status as a clergy member, he was able to reach other members of the American community whom Gino Speranza could not. Gambera also had religious and subsequently moral authority over his parishners which called the Catholic New Yorkers whom he preached for to reconsider their stance on immigrants. Work as a lawyer and author connected Speranza directly with immigrants, politicians, and academics who either needed or could instigate change. Gambera, on the other hand, worked with a wider range of American families, men, women, and children, from the parishes where he practiced. In turn, Gambera was better able to advocate for aid while Speranza advocated for administrative change because of Gambera's connection to the Saint Raphael Society and the Catholic Church.

Part of why the Italian immigrants found themselves alone in every sense of the word, and susceptible to the ploys of evildoers, was because Italians felt they no longer had a place in Italian society and would never gain acceptance into American society. This rang especially true in the case of the Sicilian Italians who consisted a high quantity of the Italians who immigrated to the United States. Italians from Sicily felt as though they could not have returned home because there would have been no arms which wanted to embrace them. "In one village of Sicily, which is now not quite sure whether its headquarters are in Sicily or America," a disconnect

¹¹⁷ Mary Brown, *A Migrant Missionary Story: The Autobiography of Giacomo Gambera*, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division (Accessed on April 6, 2019), <https://cmsny.org/publications/book-a-migrant-missionary-story/>.

¹¹⁸ License of Operation for Representative Giacomo Gambera and Agent Ettore Trippitelli, Collection 005, Box 15, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.-Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

between the immigrants, the Americans, and the Italians can be clearly seen.¹¹⁹ With no one left behind, but no one feeling comfortable in their new home either, the Italian immigrants felt like they would have to roam the earth forever now that they lacked a clear community. These were the people whom the Italian Saint Raphael Society was meant to serve. Missioners would help to create a new supportive community for those Italians who felt alone in the United States.

Archbishop Augustino also wrote this letter to highlight the Saint Raphael Society shortly after its initial instillation. Being the Bishop gave Augustino more authority than Gambera since he was more highly ranked within the Church. This also meant that he had an even larger audience than Gambera and possibly Speranza as well. Augustino wrote in the hopes that the Italian Saint Raphael Society would have appealed to the masses.

Dietro iniziativa dei Padri delle Missioni per gli emigranti italiani, in questa giorni con atto solenne si e' costituita giuridicamente la Societa' di S. Raffaele per gl' italiani, unifornandosi nello spirit e nello scopo a quell ache gia' da gran tempo esiste nella nostra citta' a beneficio della emigrasione irlandese e tedesca.¹²⁰

Augustino's words, when translated, referred to the establishment of the Italian branch of the Saint Raphael Society as an addition to the previous ones which had existed for the Irish and the Germans. He choose to mention the Irish and German branches since the Irish and Germans immigrants were already accepted by the Americans at this time. They were considered to be both Anglo-Saxon "enough" as well as familiar "old wave" immigrant group. The Archbishop expressed the idea that these "new wave" immigrants, like the Italians, also needed as well as deserved help from Catholics.

¹¹⁹ Newspaper article, Collection 005, Box 15, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.-Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

¹²⁰ Archbishop of New York Monsignor Augustino, Letter from Archbishop of New York Monsignor Augustino to Reverend Sir, July 10, 1891, Collection 005, Box 1, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.-Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

One of the truly exemplary leaders of the Saint Raphael Society, for his longtime devotion to ministry and service, was Pietro Bandini who had been appointed by Bishop Scalabrini who was Archbishop of Piacenza, Italy. Pietro Bandini had a love of missionary work and was the perfect man for the job given his passion for charity work and his ties to both Italy and the United States. Pietro Bandini had experience with missionary work in the United States. Bandini had previously worked out west with other underprivileged individuals. Scalabrini selected Pietro Bandini because he would act not only as the link between Americans and Italians, but also as the link between man and religion in Christian service. In writing, Scalabrini once said, “Religion and Fatherland, these two supreme aspirations blend and complete themselves in this work of love which is the protection of the weak. All the miserable obstacles raised by hatred and anger disappear... The love of the weak should be the greatest ambition of the strong.”¹²¹ The vision for Saint Raphael’s was to provide the services which immigrants both needed and lacked. Overall, the mission of the Catholic charity was the protection of all Italian immigrants to the best of their ability.¹²² Eventually Pietro Bandini passed on his position to Reverend Father Gaspare Moretto when Bandini was no longer able to keep up due to the complications of old age.¹²³ Father Moretto served as organization head until the Catholic charity dispersed due to lack of funding in 1923.

One of the helpful services provided by the missionary group was that the group stationed

¹²¹ “Congregation of Saint Charles Borromeo: Scalabrini Fathers,” Introduced into the United States in 1888, New York Municipal Archives.

¹²² Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 119.

¹²³ Annual Report for the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants, 1909, Collection 005, Box 6, Folder 1910, page 20, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.-Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

agents directly on Ellis Island to assist immigrants immediately after they disembarked from their steamship. Representatives of the society were placed on Ellis Island to minimize the chances of immigrants being taken advantage of in addition to the risks immigrants would face on their own after having left Ellis Island. Commissioner Williams had nothing against immigrant aid groups in theory as they helped him to keep down the number of public charges in New York through their care for new immigrants. In fact, it appeared as though Williams might have had a deep level of respect for those who looked after immigrants according to his statements on missionary groups working on Ellis Island.

Immigrants who are qualified to land some times require assistance beyond that which the Government is able to give... For many years a number of earnest missionaries and representatives of immigrant aid societies have been coming to Ellis Island. For the great good they have done and are doing they are entitled to high praise and every encouragement.¹²⁴

Here Williams returned to his tender side that had once been more concerned with safety and immigrant care like when he put up signs telling all Ellis Island staff to treat immigrants with respect.¹²⁵ Despite approval of good deeds, he had concerns for those who lied about the legitimacy of their organization in order to take advantage of immigrants. Abuses by fake charities were all too common and in his 1912 edition of “Ellis Island, its Organization and Some of its Work” Williams voiced his concerns for the maltreatment of at risk immigrants.

It is unfortunate that from time to time so many persons calling themselves missionaries, though in fact mere boarding-house keepers (and dishonest ones at

¹²⁴Commissioner William Williams of Ellis Island, “Ellis Island, its Organization and Some of its Work: Missionaries and Immigrant Aid Societies,” page 52, December 1912, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

¹²⁵ William Williams papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (Accessed on April 6, 2019), <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3346>.

that), have found a footing at Ellis Island...They appeared to think that they could use a Government station as a basis for abusing, swindling and other wise exploiting immigrants and taking them to filthy places where they detained them.¹²⁶

Williams took this issue of maltreatment of immigrants by criminals very seriously and came up with a policy to block them from reaching potential victims.

The fact that the Saint Raphael Society was able to work directly on Ellis Island is a testament to their integrity as well as their legitimacy. Operation on Ellis Island allowed for societal agents to protect immigrants from the moment they arrived to America. In in his own efforts of protection of immigrants against their potential abusers, Williams drilled his staff to keep an eye out for shady individuals. He also created a need for the missionaries to have proper documentation in order to carry out their work on Ellis Island. Workers from immigrant aid societies needed to be recognized by Ellis Island as well as presented a government issued license for each member of their charity who worked as on Ellis Island in order to validate who was took immigrants off the island and why. This protective measure, while sometimes a roadblock for those who wished to help immigrants, was necessary in order to safeguard immigrants from harm. This policy was one of the few ways in which Ellis Island staff took care of immigrants. It was also an example of one of the few collaborative efforts between those who favored immigration and those who did not as the two camps were united in the belief of respecting the lives of the immigrants.

An example of a license for the Saint Raphael Society, which like the language tests was written in Italian in order to be more easily understood by Italians, read as follows. First, the

¹²⁶ Commissioner William Williams of Ellis Island, "Ellis Island, its Organization and Some of its Work: Missionaries and Immigrant Aid Societies," page 52-53, December 1912, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943[bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

identification card displayed the name and purpose of the organization, where the group was located, and the names of the agents who should be presenting the card. Next a summary of services was provided.

Lo scopo della San Raffaele e' di aiutare, assistere, dirigere, proteggere gli emigranti allo sbarco, contotare i detenuti ed agevolare la libera' uscita col fare per loro quanto e' richiesto dai singoli casi. Di prendere in consegna e ricoverare nella Casa quegli emigranti, che le Autorita' di Ellis Island credono rilasciare sotto la responsabilita' della San Raffaele. La Societa' S. Raffaele non chiede, ne' vuole recompense o pagamenti dai beneficoti, ma aggradira le spontanere offerte delle persone caritatevoli.¹²⁷

This translates into the statements below.

The purpose of the San Raffaele is to help, assist, direct, protect emigrants from disembarking, contact the owners and facilitate the free exit by doing for them what is required by the individual cases. To take over and admit those emigrants into the House, who the Ellis Island Authorities believe release under the responsibility of the San Raffaele. The Society of St. Raphael does not ask for, nor does it want, recompense or payments from the beneficiaries, but welcomes the spontaneous offers of charitable people.

As demonstrated by the validation which the Saint Raphael Society received for its work on Ellis Island through the obtainment of their license to practice on Ellis Island, the Saint Raphael Society proved to be one of the leaders in immigrant care and advocacy. Through the attention and respect given to the Italian immigrants by the Saint Raphael Society, the organization demonstrated the possibility and the benefit of immigrants as worthy in the eyes of those who deemed them to be less. The next section will demonstrate the numerous successes of the society.

Successes of the Italian Saint Raphael Society as Documented through Annual Reports

¹²⁷ License of Operation for Representative Giacomo Gambera and Agent Ettore Trippitelli, Collection 005, Box 15, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.-Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

The Italian Saint Raphael Society was funded in a very unique way. Unlike other Christian missionary organizations for the protection of immigrants, the Italian Saint Raphael Society was able to receive the closest thing to a global level of support in a time when global communications had not yet become the standard for the formation of networks. With headquarters at 8-10 Charlton Street in Brooklyn, New York as well as connections to the Vatican back in Rome, word of the charitable acts performed by the Saint Raphael Society spread to a wider array of potential supporters as well as back even to family members in both the United States and Italy. This wider support group for the employees of the Saint Raphael Society to cast their donation net into later proved to be a valuable resource to the mission of Italian immigrant aid as the charity remained successful, thanks to numerous donations, for over thirty years. Most importantly, the Catholic service group was met with high levels of support during the most momentous years of Italian immigration to the United States from 1908-1911 in the aftermath of the Great Messina Earthquake of December of 1908.

As demonstrated by society records from the period, the Saint Raphael Society cared for the greatest numbers of Italian immigrants from 1908 until numbers began to taper off and shrink with the arrival of the First World War. Up until that point, and for a few more years after, the Italian Saint Raphael Society assisted a wide demographic of the thousands of immigrants entrusted into their care. The best records of activities of the association of Catholic missionary workers and clergy come from the time period of 1905 to 1915. Better data collection and maintenance is an indication of the higher level of support welcomed by the group at this time. General societal documentation indicates that employees and volunteers helped immigrants with the following; shelter, entrustment to relatives, securing work opportunity, repatriation due to poverty or sickness, location of baggage, boarding and lodging, letter forwarding, letter retrieval, telegram forwarding, and meals. Some of the terms listed are repetitive due to different phrasing

in societal records. Concerns with living arrangements tended to be the most utilized benefit of the society as numerous immigrants struggled to find adequate shelter permanently or as they waited for a relative to come claim them due to their lack of financial resources, the language barrier, and the unsafe living conditions for immigrants of the twentieth century.¹²⁸

General expense reports indicate that the primary sponsors for the many services provided by the institution were by government subsidy, general donations, and the collections taken up by the local religious sisters who were active in Catholic parishes of the area. Government subsidy came not from the American government, but from the Italian government with the intention of aiding those who wished to repatriate back to Italy. Monetary aid on the behalf of the Italian government made up majority of the funds made available to the Italian Saint Raphael Society through which to perform their beneficiary tasks to Italian immigrants.¹²⁹ In the earlier years of active operation, the collections from the sisters were excluded from the financial records because so little money was brought in by their efforts. As the Saint Raphael Society gained traction in the New York area, these collections by the nuns did eventually turn over more profits. From 1905 to 1907, the collections done by the local nuns were unsuccessful, but from 1908 to 1909, these contributions were needed more than ever because of the consequences of the Messina Earthquake. In 1908 the sisters raised \$2,019.03 compared to the Italian government's contribution of \$1,931.80 and the general donations of \$359.¹³⁰ This sum

¹²⁸ Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 255.

¹²⁹ Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 255.

¹³⁰ Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 255.

surpassed both the regular donations as well as the government subsidy which demonstrated the impact of the Messina earthquake on the Italian community, both at home and abroad, because it was actually the members of American Catholic parishes who kept the charity afloat in 1908 with significant efforts in 1909 as well.

Contributions gathered by the Catholic religious sisters of New York would continue to surpass the offerings made by the regular donation pool throughout the rest of the data collection up until 1915 when there is both a drop off in collection of information as well as a need for the aid of the missionaries. The government subsidiary would remain the largest contributor from 1909 until 1915 as the Italians were successfully able to recover from the disaster of the Messina earthquake. The government was able to steadily increase its support of the Italian Saint Raphael Society from 1909 onward with significant growth in financial aid from the allocated \$1,931.80 of 1909 to the contribution of \$2,294.56 in 1914. 1914 was the year in which the Italian government was able to contribute the most to the efforts of caring for the Italian immigrant populations arriving to New York through successful examinations on Ellis Island. 1915 still produced a substantial monetary donation of \$2,018.50 before the contributions dropped off to unmentioned, and unsubstantial, quantities from 1916 to 1922 when the era of Saint Raphael's blessings upon the Italian immigrants of New York would come to an end.¹³¹

Through the eyes of the volunteers at the Italian Saint Raphael Society headquarters at 8-10 Charlton Street in Brooklyn, New York the evolution of the Italians coming to the United States can be clearly seen and recorded. Earlier generations of Italian immigrants who sought opportunity and to escape in the United States of America were typically the man if not all the

¹³¹ Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 255-257.

men of a particular southern Italian family. These men were coming over as the dominant demographic for the Italian immigrants in the United States from 1880 until the end of the mass migration period between 1914 and 1915. There was a change in the pattern of total male dominance with the arrival of the twentieth century as the records of those immigrants helped by the Italian Saint Raphael Society demonstrate that there was a significant increase in the number of women and children arriving to America from 1905 to 1915. Still a male dominated activity, Italian immigration was seventy-eight percent male as of 1900 but that percentage changed with the increase in women arrivals to North America in the twentieth century.¹³² These women and children were coming over in order to reunite with those Italian laboring men who desired to both stay in the United States and to be reunited with their family members who had still been living in Italy.

The importance of the Saint Raphael Society to these more vulnerable women and children can be seen by the understanding of women and children having been the primary population subjected to the care of the agents of the Saint Raphael Society. In 1905, one of the initial best years for record keeping at Saint Raphael's, both the number of women and children surpassed the number of men helped by the organization. 786 women, 419 children, and 134 men were helped and sheltered through the charitable efforts of the missionaries who took notice of them. The year of the disaster in Messina, 1908, there were 1,165 women, 566 children, and 394 men helped by the charity as a result of the havoc wrought upon families by the tragedy, Italian devastation of the natural resources, as well as the Italian economy. 1915 saw the continuation of the increase in women and children seeking refuge at 8-10 Charlton Street with 1,477 women,

¹³² "Italian Immigration," *Digital History* (Accessed on April 5, 2019), www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/voices/italiano_immigration.cfm.

839 children, and 292 men benefiting from the care found by the Catholics there.¹³³ Not only does this shift in immigration demonstrate the increased completion of family units in the United States, but it also demonstrated the impact of the horrors of the natural disaster of 1908 as a causation factor which increased in the number of immigrants as well as the number of particularly vulnerable groups, like women and children, who fled Italy for help abroad.

As more Italians cried for help, the Saint Raphael Society workers had to think of a better way with which to communicate the message and the purpose of their organization to those in need as well as potential investors. One of the ways in which the organization staff and clergy attempted to collect donations was through the advertisement of the Catholic charity in the annual reports of the Saint Raphael Society. Written and distributed in both Italy and the United States, each year the Italian Saint Raphael Society was able to continue its work with the poor Italian immigrant populations a booklet which contained the successes of the society was distributed. The first ever Annual Report for the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants was placed together by Pietro Bandini and released on July 30, 1892, just one year after the formalized creation of the Benevolent Society. This first ever Annual Report was twenty seven pages long and contained many of the original ideas and standards for later Annual Reports to follow.

Information under the following headings (appeared in the first Annual Report):
origin, the constitution, press comments, how the society attains its end,
employment, spiritual welfare, home for the immigrants, some of the evils of
Italian immigration, advice for those who intend to emigrate to North America,
how to secure the protection of the society on your arrival, the advantages of the
Free Italian Labor Bureau, return of the immigrant to Italy, a warning to

¹³³ Edward C. Stibili, *What Can Be Done to Help Them?: The Italian Saint Raphael Society, 1887-1923* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 2003), 255-256.

immigrants who remain in New York and the suburbs, and the future of the Italian immigrant.¹³⁴

These numerous headings were aimed at the attraction of both the Italians themselves as well as potential donors who took interest in the various issues which plagued the Italian immigrants. The first table of statistics appears here as well to demonstrate how many immigrants needed the Italian Saint Raphael society from June of 1891 to July of 1892. The most significant feature of the pamphlets, which all later editions would follow, was the featuring of special cases. Special cases gave the Saint Raphael Society immigrants and mission a chance to shine through the showcase of the most vulnerable immigrants of the year.¹³⁵ Personal connections or empathy for the individual struggles of the immigrants who shared their story allowed for readers to have seen the world through the eyes of those who sought their help. These stories helped humanize the immigrant struggle to those who did not know what it felt like to be considered a “problem” or a “burden” on society. There is no data on the success rate of these booklets, however, they are helpful in the support of the cause of the provision of aid to the immigrants.

In addition to the provision of a level of personal investment and connection to the larger issues of Italian immigration, these special cases mentioned also served to demonstrate to the Italians back in Italy and the Americans in the states the reality of the statistics presented by the Saint Raphael Society and more. This reality was that Italian immigration was and continued to be so much more than Italian men coming to America to work as shown by the example of the

¹³⁴ Edward C. Stibili, *Pietro Bandini: Missionary, Social Worker, and Colonizer, 1852-1917*, (New York: Scalabrini International Migration Network, 2016), 133.

¹³⁵ Edward C. Stibili, *Pietro Bandini: Missionary, Social Worker, and Colonizer, 1852-1917*, (New York: Scalabrini International Migration Network, 2016), 133-134.

over one thousand special cases in 1909 alone.¹³⁶ Just as those laboring men had names and families, these helpless women, children, and even elderly Italians also faced problems throughout their journey. As a result, immigrants were portrayed as being worthy of the help they so desperately needed in order to live the life which they did had a basic human right to; a life where they felt safe and were able to keep themselves alive and well. These special cases also allowed for the stories that would be considered the exception to the rule to be given a place to shine. These exceptions were not just those who were helped by the charity, they were those individuals who needed the charity to survive.

The 1909 Annual Report was particularly notable as it was the first report released since the 1908 Messina Earthquake ravaged Italy and caused the peak of Italian migration west. Stories of Italian immigrants who had suffered and later found salvation were told in Italian to keep the tales authentic as well as to appeal to other Italians who were more able to have understood the issues involved with Italian immigration compared to the Americans. An example of one of these tales of immigrant triumph came from the 1909 report. Interestingly enough, this report started with a photo of immigrants who came from Messina to America as a result of the devastation but their personal story was left out of the booklet.¹³⁷ Perhaps this is because these particular individuals were too distressed to have shared their woes and wanted to keep them private. Like all other Annual Reports, the 1909 edition started off with an overall description of

¹³⁶ Annual Report for the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants, 1909, Collection 005, Box 6, Folder 1909, page 15, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.-Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

¹³⁷ Annual Report for the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants, 1909, Collection 005, Box 6, Folder 1909, page 14, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.-Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

the year which the Saint Raphael Society had endured. The translation from Italian to English goes as follows.

During the excursion of 1909, the Society of Saint Raphael had 1,000 special cases. We credit our many good experts briefly. Each of them can form an exact concept of their work and the advantages that are practical for the Society's cause of helping the immigrants. With this sequence of cases is easy to deduce the many benefits of Saint Raphael's; the poor will not be evicted, the roaming will not be repatriated by force, mothers, spouses, and children will be reunited, a few jobs can be located, many of them have been found and secured so that they can recover and be relieved during their residence in New York because of the hospitalization of their children. There was also a special hurry for those who were sick and detained on Ellis Island. They administered baptisms to the many children on board and even performed civil and religious marriages.¹³⁸

This introduction showcased the extent of the work of the society well from its immigration services to its religious benefits. Additionally, there was an effort to show family units helped by Saint Raphael's in order to demonstrate the role of the Church in providing aid for those in need. After introductions concluded, the pamphlet moved right into the discussion of highlighted immigrants from the year.

The Lanzo family unit was the next family unit to demonstrate the positive impact of the service of the Saint Raphael Society. Concerns for those affected by the destruction in Messina were again brought out by the feature of the story of this family who sought refuge in the United States after the tragedy they faced in Messina. The Lanzo family consisted of five family members: Pasquale, his wife Giuseppa Battaglia, and their three children Nunzia, Salvatrice, and Pietrina. The translation of the story of the Lanzo family from Italian to English went as follows.

These disgraced people, had lost everything they had and the house that they lived in. They sought refuge for six days in a traveling sleeping area, in bulk with many of the other unfortunate people. Finally, the Committee of Genova came to their

¹³⁸ Annual Report for the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants, 1909, Collection 005, Box 6, Folder 1909, page 15, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.-Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

aid. They embarked on their way to Campania and they were transported to the Christopher Columbus Hotel so they could be provided for... \$80 was needed for the voyage to begin and for the family to embark on their way to New York. When they were arriving they were considered “undesirables” and because they were invited to the States they were sent to the Committee of Benefaction...\$80 was not enough to pay for the tickets for the ferry and the family was detained on Ellis Island. This immediately interested the Society who decided to assist the souls of the Italians... Their final cost of their travels was covered and the family was reunited. They endured their adventure.¹³⁹

The story of the Lanzo family highlighted their entire journey from Italy to the United States from the perspective of a complete family unit who had struggled a great deal due to the issues which plagued Italy in the early-twentieth century. This story is significant because an impoverished family was helped by the Church, at no cost to the state, and was able to have a good life in the states for having been saved. An impoverished family like the Lanzo family having a story with such an ending goes against Williams’ idea that “undesirables” are bad and encouraged other Catholics to continue to support the work of the charity so that others may have the same happy ending.

Another example of a special case from the 1909 annual report which demonstrated the effectiveness of many of the services provided by the charity, as well as demonstrated the impact on the policies of Ellis Island on families, was the story of Carolina Di Carlo and her five children. The Di Carlo family came to the United States through the Port of New York after Carolina’s husband had passed away in a mining accident. Carolina planned on taking her children to Virginia in order to start a new life since her husband could no longer send the family money. Once arrived at Ellis Island, one of her children was detained there at the hospital due to illness. A representative from the society was sent and took Carolina and her remaining children

¹³⁹ Annual Report for the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants, 1909, Collection 005, Box 6, Folder 1909, page 15, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.-Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

to the Saint Raphael House. At the house, the family was given food and shelter until the detained child was released. After the child had been cleared of illness, staff discovered the child lacked a birth certificate. Agents from the Saint Raphael's rushed to Ellis Island and prevented the child from deportation for lack of documentation. The delegates theorized the child's birth certificate never existed because of the disorganization of the new Italian government. After agents debated with the Ellis Island staff on behalf of the family, the representatives took the family to Virginia and concluded the Di Carlo family travels.¹⁴⁰ The inclusion of such a story in the 1909 annual report with agents present every step of the way gave the impression that without the help of the Saint Raphael Society, the family would have suffered on many accounts. It was stories like this which best showcased the benefits of Saint Raphael's. Additionally, it showed how the policy to detain or deport the sick broke up family units who might have remained broken if the third party had not gotten involved.

A few years after the annual reports had begun, stories of families gained some ground in the mainstream presses of New York. One selection of note was an article by closed door policy sympathizing journalist S. Collier. In 1911, Collier released a piece titled "Restricting Immigration" where he notoriously blamed Italy for having allowed "undesirables" to have boarded steamships headed to America. The general tone of the article, the article has since lost its title and publication since being recorded in the archives, was unfavorable toward immigrants, however, it is notable that Collier included an important mention of a family unit. Inclusion of an immigrant family unit in the piece unintentionally humanized the situation which plagued immigrants in terms of deportation.

¹⁴⁰ Annual Report for the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants, 1909, Collection 005, Box 6, Folder 1909, page 16, The Saint Raphael Society for the Italian Immigrants New York, N.Y.-Records, The Center for Migration Studies of New York, Archives Division.

These cases of separation of families are very pitiful, but for that matter all cases of deportation are pitiful. The *World* last week told how a woman with four children was ordered deported because the children had the measles; how a mother was sent back with one child out of five that she had brought, because that child had ringworm...It is significant that when President Taft visited Ellis Island the other day he begged the commissioner to admit a family that the commissioner had proposed to exclude, and that family is now to be deported because in the course of a few weeks it has become a public charge.¹⁴¹

Collier's remark shed even more light onto the reality which the Saint Raphael Society wanted to advocate for. Other families were like the Di Carlos and not all of them received a happy ending. While Collier argued the family should have been deported originally, he also argued that the Italian government should have helped these people. Placement of sole blame on steamships and the Italian government is incorrect, but American mention of the humanity of the immigration struggle demonstrated a slight change in the perception of immigrants as normal people instead of another statistic.

What all these personal immigration stories and successes of the Saint Raphael Society served to demonstrate was that the Italian Saint Raphael Society for the Protection of Immigrants succeed not only in terms of the care of individuals, but also from the perspective of the humanization of immigrants. In a time when immigrants were both visible and invisible to those known to have the power to create positive change as well as those who lived alongside them, the Italian Saint Raphael Society initiated positive change on the behalf of their local community as well as their country. In turn, those who answered the call of the Saint Raphael Society and saw things differently in addition to having acted on the basis of human dignity no matter the place of birth helped to pave the way for future Italian immigrants to be met with understanding

¹⁴¹ S. Collier, "Restricting Immigration," January, 1911, Room 328, Call Number ZL-445, William Williams Papers 1902-1943 [bulk 1902-1917], Series I. Ellis Island 1902-1914, 1939, Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

in place of disgust. Because of the Saint Raphael Society, immigrants were seen as able and worthy of being helped versus a burden on the state. Immigrant aid societies proved that immigrants held a place in American society and that the “Italian Problem” was also an American problem.

CONCLUSION

Italian Immigration was only the Beginning: How Immigration has evolved and why it Matters

For many Americans today, the idea of identifying with one particular nationality, place, or country is uncommon. More Americans than ever are new to the United States and maintain close ties to family in other countries across the globe. CMS scholar Mike Nicholson reports, “As of 2017, over 258 million people lived outside their home country, an increase of almost 50 percent relative to 2000 (UN DESA 2017).”¹⁴² Theodore Roosevelt once said, “We have room but for one language here, and that language is English.”¹⁴³ English still maintains the top spot for spoken languages in the United States, with 98.6 percent of the population knowledgeable in English demonstrating that Roosevelt’s opinion is still alive and well among contemporary Americans despite the rise in bilingualism.¹⁴⁴ Bilingualism in the U.S. has doubled since 1986 when it was only 10.68 percent of Americans who spoke another language. As of 2016, 20.14

¹⁴² Mike Nicholson, “The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Immigrants’ Health and Entrepreneurship,” The Center for Migration Studies of New York (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://cmsny.org/publications/2018msnc-nicholson/>.

¹⁴³ Theodore Roosevelt, 1907.

¹⁴⁴ Francois Grosjean Ph. D., “The Amazing Rise of Bilingualism in the United States: The number of bilinguals in the U.S. has practically doubled since 1980,” *Psychology Today*, published September 11, 2018 (Accessed on April 22, 2019), <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/life-bilingual/201809/the-amazing-rise-bilingualism-in-the-united-states>.

percent of Americans are fluent in another language aside from English largely due to the steady increase in immigration since the 1980s. Of these bilingual Americans, 21 percent of them speak a language other than English at home.¹⁴⁶ Relative to population, this means that nearly one in five Americans can speak a language other than English.¹⁴⁷ Spanish is the second most common language spoken in the United States with over 38 million speakers in the U.S. today.¹⁴⁸ Changes in language reflect the changes in immigration as they once did with the Italian immigrants of the early-twentieth century. Language is a central part of the analysis of Italian immigration as well as immigration today as it is one of the things that makes people different from others, such as speaking another language, and prompts fear and division among those who harbor resentment. As history has previously taught through the Italians, immigrants are not meant to be feared and they can actually be quite beneficial to the nation.

Mexicans have maintained their status as the dominant immigrant demographic arriving to the United States for decades now. “Since 1980, immigrants arriving from Mexico have been the largest national-origin group in the United States.”¹⁴⁹ California, Texas, and New York have

¹⁴⁶ Mary Beth Griggs, “More Americans Speak Arabic at Home Than Italian or Polish: 21 percent of Americans speak another language at home,” Smithsonian.com, published on October 9, 2018 (Accessed on April 22, 2019), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/more-americans-speak-arabic-home-italian-or-polish-180952982/>.

¹⁴⁷ Kimberly Scamman, “Interactive Map of Languages Spoken in the United States,” Telelanguage, published on April 13, 2018 (Accessed on April 22, 2019), <https://teleguage.com/interactive-map-of-languages-united-states/>.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Beth Griggs, “More Americans Speak Arabic at Home Than Italian or Polish: 21 percent of Americans speak another language at home,” Smithsonian.com, published on October 9, 2018 (Accessed on April 22, 2019), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/more-americans-speak-arabic-home-italian-or-polish-180952982/>.

¹⁴⁹ “U.S. Immigration Trends: Mexican Immigrants: Number and Share of Total U.S. Immigrant Population, 1850-2017,” Migration Policy Institute (Accessed on April 22, 2019), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/us-immigration-trends#history>.

the largest numbers of immigrant populations in the country respectively. California's population is 26.9 percent immigrants, Texas's population is 22.9 percent immigrants, and New York's population is 17.1 percent immigrants as of 2017.¹⁵⁰ New York has always had large numbers of immigrant arrivals, as demonstrated by the Italians of the early-twentieth century, but Texas and California have seen a significant increase in the number of immigrants coming to their states. This most likely is due to the change in migration methods. The Atlantic Ocean acted as the geographic boundary between Italy and the United States while the geographic boundary between California, Texas, and Mexico is the man made border. Since the early twentieth century, there has been a shift to more immigrants arriving from Asia and South America instead of Europe. Results of the shift in immigration and in the geographic boundaries have served to bring up feelings of xenophobia toward the new migrant groups in a repetition of history from the American experience with the Italians at Ellis Island.

The myth of the American "melting pot" has been called into question by a historian at the Smithsonian named Mary Beth Griggs despite the increasing diversity of the languages and cultures brought to the United States each year.

Even as more Americans speak foreign languages at home, there is little risk that anyone of them will crowd out English. History has shown that eventually, the American "melting pot" consumes them all leading some linguists to call the U.S. a "cemetery of languages." Most of the children and grandchildren of immigrants who spoke Yiddish, German, or Italian have long since abandoned those languages in daily discourse.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ "U.S. Immigration Trends: Mexican Immigrants: State Immigration Trends: Number and Share of Total State Population, 1990-2017," Migration Policy Institute (Accessed on April 22, 2019), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/us-immigration-trends#history>.

¹⁵¹ Mary Beth Griggs, "More Americans Speak Arabic at Home Than Italian or Polish: 21 percent of Americans speak another language at home," Smithsonian.com, published on October 9, 2018 (Accessed on April 22, 2019), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/more-americans-speak-arabic-home-italian-or-polish-180952982/>.

Even as countless Americans connect with families abroad and desire to learn more about where they come from, it is difficult to reconcile cultural and national identity while living in one place. Twentieth century Italian American lawyer Gino Speranza pointed out this fact which remains true today: “There is nothing in our Constitution of the United States or any State in the Union establishing English as the language of this country.”¹⁵² Unlike with other countries, the United States was founded by ethnically different groups and so numerous languages have been spoken here even before the colonists set foot on the land. The American Indians had their own languages and they too are dying out. Newer immigrant groups have been able to maintain a hold on their native tongues, but only time will tell if their languages have the same destiny as Yiddish, German, and Italian which have fallen out of daily use among Yiddish, German, and Italian Americans today. Through the generations, the “melting pot” sometimes boils everyone into a similar mold to fill as an American. As the Saint Raphael Society was eventually able to portray, immigrants can become Americans in addition to being valuable contributors to the country. Long gone are the days of confused Italians at Ellis Island. Now we see “Little Italy” everywhere with Americans embracing Italians as a valued demographic of the population. This too will hopefully change for each group to migrate to the United States after them.

The important distinction from the 1928 definition of immigration is the permanence of the change and the intention to remain in the new place. In terms of history and its study, as demonstrated by Noah Webster, to immigrate has been defined as, “To remove into a country for the purpose of permanent residence.” This is the 1928 definition given by Noah Webster in his

¹⁵² Gino Speranza, “The Melting Pot of Literature,” Box 35, Folder Articles on Immigration M-N, Gino Speranza Papers (123A-1) 1887-1935 (bulk 1905-1925), Manuscript and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, 1.

Webster's Dictionary as an updated version of his 1906 definition from his *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*. The 1928 definition is an important elaboration from the 1906 definition that simply explained to immigrate as, “to remove into a country.”¹⁵³ Noah Webster's new definition of “immigrate” has fed into this American fear of immigrants and set the stage for the Americans who would become fearful or feel alienated from immigrants well into today. This reality is best summed up as follows by contemporary journalist Matthew Willis.

By telling the Americans that immigration involves coming from another country, Webster set up an us-versus-them opposition, foreigner against native-born. By telling Americans that immigration is permanent and involves the intent of residence, Webster encouraged them to fear that in time they might be displaced, their cities overrun and their jobs jeopardized.¹⁵⁴

It is this harmful perception of immigrants and those who immigrate that has created the divide between Americans and newcomers. Like in chapter one, concerns over language, economic status, and unfamiliarity continue to dominate the opinions of those who fear newcomers as they once placed these concerns upon the Italians coming to Ellis Island. Also like in chapter two, Catholics, like Pope Francis, imitate the mercy of the Italian Saint Raphael Society and again call Americans to view the situation with compassion and history appears to be repeating itself. Immigration matters, and has always mattered to this country regardless of ethnic origin. The American experience is a unique one where new identities can be embraced, like that of the Italian-Americans who are now different from both the Italians and the Americans. New immigrant groups of today, while no longer coming to Ellis Island, continue to

¹⁵³ Matthew Willis, “How Noah Webster Invented the Word Immigration,” *Jstor Daily*, published on May 25, 2017 (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://daily.jstor.org/how-noah-webster-invented-the-word-immigration/>, 1.

¹⁵⁴ Matthew Willis, “How Noah Webster Invented the Word Immigration,” *Jstor Daily*, published on May 25, 2017 (Accessed on April 20, 2019), <https://daily.jstor.org/how-noah-webster-invented-the-word-immigration/>, 1.

come to this country with hope and to be met with an uncertain American response. With new immigrant groups arriving today, conversations on the history of immigration become even more important as the nation strives to not repeat past mistakes of mistreatment. Italian immigration has taught Americans the benefits of having hardworking immigrants and may this be a lesson not soon forgotten.

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