

## 8 Italian Women's Proletarian Feminism in the New York City Garment Trades, 1890s–1940s

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On 19 January 1913 over 4000 striking Italian women garment workers gathered at Cooper Union in New York City to learn that the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) had signed an agreement with manufacturers without their approval. With jeers and the stomping of feet, the women rejected the union leaders' instructions to return to work. Several women rushed to the stage, forcing speakers off the platform with cries of 'a frame up,' and urged workers to abandon the ILGWU in favour of the more militant Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). A 'storm of protest,' as the *New York Times* called it, spread to the streets as Italian women workers hurled stones at the windows of a nearby shirtwaist factory and sat in the centre of Third Avenue, bringing traffic in lower Manhattan to a halt. Dissent spread throughout Brooklyn and Harlem as workers learned of the settlement and gathered in the streets to defy the court injunction forbidding them to picket garment shops. The next day, in an icy snowstorm and sub-zero temperatures, 20,000 workers, most of them Italian women, marched through the city's garment districts in opposition to the union, the state, and their employers.<sup>1</sup>

The rioting in 1913 erupted after unprecedented numbers of first- and second-generation Italian-American women spent months on a mass organizing campaign in New York City's clothing trades. Alongside Russian, Lithuanian, Polish, German, Greek, Irish, Spanish, Hungarian, and other immigrant workers, Italian women had organized picket lines, convinced others to abandon their sewing machines, and withstood arrest and beatings at the hands of employers and police. Although

sceptical of the ILGWU (an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor), they nevertheless hoped the union would bring them union recognition, better wages, and safer working conditions. By late January, 150,000 workers in four sectors of garment production had walked off their jobs, paralyzing the industry and forcing manufacturers into negotiation. As the second largest group of workers in the garment trades, Italian women's solidarity and militancy had been crucial to the union's ability to orchestrate one of the most explosive labour uprisings of the era. Yet, at the height of the strike, Italian women argued, the ILGWU had sold them out. As workers in the most poorly paid and dangerous jobs in the city's dress and shirtwaist factories, they had the most to lose in the settlement, which institutionalized a sex-based division of labour, assigned women to the lowest-paid jobs, and set their minimum wage lower than that of men who held the same jobs. The agreement had won them union recognition, but they had not gained a voice in union affairs. The leaders of the ILGWU, they argued angrily, 'preferred to deal with the employers rather than with their own members.'<sup>2</sup>

The 1913 'riot' encapsulates several compelling themes in the history of Italian women workers in the United States. During the early decades of the twentieth century, the majority of Italian women who migrated to the New York metropolitan area found work in the needle trades and, like other female garment workers, they endured low wages, dangerous working conditions, and inhumane treatment. Yet, unlike the Jewish women who dominated the rank and file of the industry at the turn of the century, Italian women did not join the New York garment unions en masse until the Great Depression. In earlier decades, their political struggles were more often waged outside of and in opposition to mainstream labour and political organizations. Dramas such as the 1913 uprising brought such oppositional grassroots activity to the surface.

The social and cultural world that first- and second-generation Italian-American women created to nurture dissident political activity has remained invisible to scholars of U.S. history, many of whom have heeded the words of the union leaders who argued that 'there was no real discontent among the workers, only a plot by the rival Industrial Workers of the World to destroy the union,' and that Italian women insurgents had been 'easily pacified.'<sup>3</sup> Stereotypes of Italian-American women as docile workers, bound by patriarchal traditions, and confined to their homes to suffer in silence, continue to dominate narratives of U.S. history largely because most of the research on Italian-American women's political activism has relied on English-language sources, and used

the more documented histories of Eastern European and Russian Jewish women's militance and class consciousness as the yardstick by which to assess Italian-American women's activity. Stereotypes also abound in the male-dominated literature on Italian-American working-class activism, where narrow definitions of the political have obscured female activism.

The labour activism of Italian-American women garment workers differed from that of Italian-American men and Jewish women. It also differed from the activism of African-American, Chinese, Korean, Puerto Rican, Jamaican, Panamanian, and the other Asian and Caribbean women who entered the U.S. needle trades alongside and after them. Italian women often entered the labour market at a rank below other European immigrants but always above women of colour, and sometimes men of colour too. Their entry level reflected, in part, the moment at which they entered the U.S. garment trades, before foreign competition and the relocation of businesses to lower-wage areas had begun to erode key sectors of the industry. As a result, they did not experience the disadvantages of industry contractions in the same ways as those workers who entered the trades during and after the Second World War. But external factors provide only a partial explanation. When African-American, Puerto Rican, Chinese, and other Asian and Caribbean women and men began to enter the garment trades in the 1930s, Italians held a relative monopoly over the higher-paying jobs, the result of Italian men's shared political leadership with Jewish men in the union's hierarchy, and their special status as the only workers granted autonomy in their own ethnic locals. This privilege meant that Italians could build a solid base of organizational power within the garment unions, gain access to better-paying jobs, and use the locals as a centre of community activism, organization, and protest. They consolidated this autonomy and power during the 1920s and 1930s, when the ILGWU purged its most radical members and grew increasingly unwilling to distribute power and benefits to its newest members, most of them women of colour. On the eve of the Second World War, Italian garment workers had gained control of a movement that not only notoriously restricted women's role but was also increasingly stratified along racial lines.<sup>4</sup>

This essay examines the transition that Italian women garment workers made from waging oppositional struggles from the margins to occupying the privileged spaces at the centre of U.S. labour institutions. The project of recovering the history of protest and collective action of this group of 'unorganized' workers requires that we follow the advice of scholars such as Robin D.G. Kelley, Ardis Cameron, Nan Enstad, George

Lipsitz, Dana Frank, and others, who have demonstrated how we must think differently about politics in order to appreciate those previously hidden spaces where ordinary people have critiqued authority.<sup>5</sup> By reconceptualizing the political to include unorganized, everyday acts of resistance that inform and shape formal working-class movements and institutions, we are able to understand how Italian immigrant women and their daughters confronted systems of hierarchy and domination in the United States, how they claimed and asserted political identities, and the complex implications of their choices.

### The Roots of Resistance

Italian women needleworkers first became a discernible part of New York City's garment labour force in the 1880s.<sup>6</sup> As one of the largest sectors of the industrial economy, garment manufacturers had long relied on abundant and cheap immigrant labour, which in turn enabled clothing manufacturers to expand their businesses and make New York City an international centre of garment production.<sup>7</sup> The industry's labour force was characterized by a steady displacement of old immigrant groups by more recent immigrants, and by a continued reliance on the cheap labour of women workers. Of the 29,439 workers in U.S. dress and waist shops in 1913, 24,128 were women and 4711 were men.<sup>8</sup> Whereas earlier migration waves had brought Irish and German seamstresses and tailors into New York City's first clothing shops, the 1880s and 1890s saw large numbers of Jews from Eastern Europe and Russia enter the industry, as well as Italians, who formed the second largest group of labourers. By the 1930s Italian women formed the majority of garment workers in New York City, just as African-American, Chinese, Puerto Rican, and other women from the Caribbean began entering the clothing industries in larger numbers.<sup>9</sup>

Various factors account for the presence of Italian women in the garment trades, including their active recruitment by New York garment manufacturers who advertised extensively in Italian newspapers, and often with promises of a union job.<sup>10</sup> They were also trained in needlecraft techniques, such as fine hand sewing and embroidery, whether by female kin, the local seamstress, or in convent and public schools in Italy.<sup>11</sup> Such training prepared women for homemaking but also offered a way to earn wages for their family.<sup>12</sup> Between 1900 and 1910, textiles were among Italy's chief exports and the industry relied heavily on women's labour. While textile work varied from region to region, women

throughout the peninsula dominated the industry, whether in domestic production, cottage industry, or factory manufacture.<sup>13</sup> Tina Gaeta learned to sew from her mother and grandmother, both seamstresses in Salerno, before migrating to New York City in 1902. She recalled that the *sarta* (seamstress) held a distinguished position in her community; the scissors that dangled at her waist symbolized her status. In New York, a young Tina and her siblings helped their mother with piecework in the men's clothing trade; when they became skilled, they entered the factories in their neighbourhood. The daughter of a Sicilian dressmaker, Antoinetta Lazzaro first learned to sew from her mother and sister and then in a day nursery, where the nuns taught embroidery. A week after arriving in the United States in 1928, Antoinetta began work as an operator on dresses in her East Harlem neighbourhood. As a child, Carmela La Rosa was sent to train with a *sarta* in Palermo; by fourteen, she was training other girls and working as a dressmaker out of her home. Upon arriving in New York in 1912, she found work immediately in a bridal dress shop, where for thirty years she sewed alongside other Italian women.<sup>14</sup>

These stories reflect what federal agencies and researchers also discovered for the early decades of the twentieth century: New York City's garment trades contained large percentages of southern Italian women and many of them had earned wages sewing in Italy.<sup>15</sup> As in Italy, needlework was a skill Italian women could use to earn money in New York City. Those women who had not learned to sew in Italy turned to the simple work of finishing men's and women's tailored garments and were trained in other, less-skilled tasks.

Italian women also brought with them a history of protest and rebellion. During the mass migrations (1890s–1920s), widespread poverty, economic depressions, labour upheavals, and violent state repression shaped the lives of most Italians. In the 1890s Italians throughout the peninsula formed workers' organizations, including *fasci dei lavoratori* (workers' unions), and struggled for a reconstruction of society in which industry and government were brought under the control of workers. The Italian government condemned these actions, shutting down newspapers, arresting leaders, and brutally suppressing workers' protests. Repression intensified after Mussolini came to power in 1922. The Italian labour movement extended internationally, as Italians traversed the globe, transplanting traditions of militancy and rebellion.<sup>16</sup>

As historians such as Donna Gabaccia and Jole Calapso have well documented, women played critical roles in these popular movements,

and their collaborative activities often helped them to carve out autonomous political spaces. Throughout southern Italy and Sicily, in regions with the highest percentages of migration to the United States, women often emerged as the most militant activists in popular demonstrations and neighbourhood movements among farm workers and urban labourers. Gender differences were also important; while men focused on employers, women targeted the state and resorted more frequently to direct-action strategies such as looting and rioting. In Sicily women became the primary bearers of the communal protest traditions (be it subsistence towns, areas of market cultivation, or towns with large wheat estates). They formed *sezioni femminili* (women's sections) within local socialist *fasci* as well as their own *fasci femminili* (women's unions). In Piana dei Greci, thousands of women participated in a tax revolt, destroying municipal offices while demanding that 'all should have bread for themselves and their children.' In Monreale, women and children filled the piazza chanting, 'Down with the municipal government and long live the union!' After looting the offices of city council, they marched toward Palermo crying, 'Abbiamo fame!' (We are hungry!) In Villafrati, Caterina Costanzo led a group of women carrying clubs to the fields, where they threatened workers who had not joined the community in a general strike against the repressive local government and high taxes. In Balestrate, thousands of women dressed in traditional clothes and also armed with clubs, marched through the streets, demanding an end to government corruption and high taxes. Many of the Sicilians who later migrated to the United States, Gabaccia observes, had experienced, directly or indirectly, this sort of unrest in their hometowns.<sup>17</sup>

Such protests were not limited to Sicily, but occurred in many cities, including Rome, Bologna, Imola, Ancona, Naples, Bari, Florence, and Genoa. In Ancona, hundreds of women, men, and children demonstrated for lower bread prices and an end to the flour tax in 1898 with the cries 'Viva l'anarchia!' and 'Viva la rivoluzione sociale!' <sup>18</sup> Within months of the nationwide uprisings, Italian prime minister Francesco Crispi announced a state of siege; workers' movements were suppressed, and hundreds of women and men were imprisoned and murdered. After 1900, Italian women turned to collective action in trade unions and radical political parties, participating in organizing drives and strikes in textile, tobacco, clothing, rice, and hemp industries, and in organizations such as the Unione Sindacale Italiana, the Partito Socialista Italiano, and the Camere del Lavoro.<sup>19</sup> By 1908, women's membership in the

National Federation of Textile Trades, the union that represented the country's largest industry and the one employing the most women, equalled that of men.<sup>20</sup> And when the need arose, Italian women workers defended their autonomy from union directives.<sup>21</sup> Such stories, experiences, and political lessons were a vital part of what Italian women carried into the Italian-American labour movement, which, as Rudolph Vecoli observes, 'did not simply spring from the American soil,' but was 'in many ways an extension of the labor movement in Italy.'<sup>22</sup>

The turn of the century also saw the beginning of a labour migration in which Italian women entered important sectors of the North American economy, including New York City's garment trades. Among all Italian women working in the United States in 1905, 80 per cent were employed in the fashion industries, which included garments, millinery, and artificial flowers.<sup>23</sup> In 1911, the U.S. Bureau of Labor reported that half of all women workers in the men's garment industry were Italian; for the clothing industry as a whole the figure ranged from one-quarter to one-third.<sup>24</sup> As Miriam Cohen has documented, the numbers of Italian women garment workers continued to grow during the first half of the twentieth century. In 1925, 64 per cent of all Italian women in the United States worked in the fashion industry. By 1950, 77 per cent of first-generation, and 44 per cent of second-generation Italian-American women in New York City were factory operatives, the majority of them in the needle trades. Highly decentralized and with production processes that required little or no machinery, the garment industry offered women and children the opportunity for immediate wage work. Many owners kept their shops and permanent workforce small, while contractors responsible for sewing the garments cut in the manufacturer's shop subcontracted finishing tasks to homemakers during the busy season.<sup>25</sup> As the U.S. Department of Labor reported in 1916, the nature of the garment industry, with its homework, sweating, contract, and subcontracting systems, and concentration of cheap 'casual women workers,' lent itself to the exploitation of its workers, who toiled under 'a condition of deplorable industrial chaos.'<sup>26</sup>

The industry was also stratified rigidly by gender, and Italian women were assigned to the lowest paid 'women's work' as finishers, operators, sample makers, shirtwaist and dressmakers, and employed as home- or pieceworkers.<sup>27</sup> For the early twentieth century, Miriam Cohen found that one-fifth of workers in the men's garment industry were female home finishers, almost all of them Italian women and their children.<sup>28</sup> A

1911 congressional study revealed that homework was done in approximately one-fourth of all Italian households in New York City,<sup>29</sup> while other government surveys found that 95 per cent of all homework was done by Italians. In 1920, the ILGWU estimated that close to 80 per cent of the 10,000 hand embroiderers in New York City were Italian women.<sup>30</sup> For thousands of them work began with bundles of partly constructed garments (dresses, blouses, skirts, undergarments) picked up at an agent's warehouse or a local factory, often in their neighbourhood. With the help of young children and other female kin or neighbours, they then finished the garments at home. As homework was seasonal, families had to maximize their wages in the rush period, which often meant that all available family members, including young children, worked late into the night to increase output. While home-based work allowed mothers to supplement the family income, watch young children, and enjoy some independence in their work schedules, it was highly exploitative. Women often worked as long as eighteen hours a day and earned only four or five cents an hour.<sup>31</sup>

Both younger single women and married women also sought work outside the home in garment factories. They most often found jobs in the 'unskilled' trades as operators and finishers, 'lining garments, sewing on buttons, trimming threads, and pulling bastings by hand,'<sup>32</sup> while employers, trying to fill orders on short notice, continually pushed them to increase the pace. Exhaustion from standing for hours on end, severe eye strain brought on by hours of close work in poor lighting, long-term exposure to filthy work environments, and the sexual abuse of some bosses and male workers made garment work extremely dangerous and difficult.<sup>33</sup>

Employers monitored women closely to maximize production and discourage collective action. They fined workers for being late, talking, singing, and taking too much time in the bathroom, because these activities might help to build an oppositional political culture. When women attempted to organize outside of the factories, employers found other methods of surveillance, including sending spies to union meetings to spot the 'trouble makers' whose lives they would make so 'unbearable, that the worker was forced to leave, if not dismissed.'<sup>34</sup> Italian immigrant women became highly critical of what they termed the *rigorosa sorveglianza* (rigorous surveillance) of garment employers, the dangerous work conditions, and the low-quality of work they were forced to produce rapidly.<sup>35</sup>



## Women's Revolutionary Proletarian Culture before the First World War

From the moment Italian women entered the United States they united to alleviate poverty and exploitation, and asserted and redefined their identities, priorities, and methods of struggle. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, labour uprisings were a regular feature in Italian immigrant communities. In cities such as Hoboken, Paterson, Newark, Lowell, Passaic, Little Falls, Boston, Hopedale, Rochester, Lawrence, Lynn, Chicago, Tampa, Cleveland, and Providence, Italian women were central actors in workers' movements, and were regularly portrayed in the Italian immigrant radical press as *le più ardenti nella lotta* (the most ardent in the struggle).<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Italian women often entered politics in the U.S. via labour militance. They became pivotal to workplace actions, where they drew on communal protest traditions from Italy and on the urban female neighbourhood networks they had developed. While Italian women rarely held positions of leadership in unions or formal strike committees during this period, their ability to organize co-workers and neighbours often proved crucial in winning labour struggles, especially in the clothing and textile industries, where they outnumbered men in the rank and file.<sup>37</sup>

Stories of Italian female activism on the front lines of U.S. labour struggles are numerous and highlight women's audacity, courage, and inventiveness in confronting abusive and demeaning conditions. Generally, however, these stories have been missing from the scholarship on working women's labour struggles in New York City, with the result that Italian women are assumed absent from such movements. Such conclusions are drawn from sources that portray Italian women as non-militants reluctant to join strikes orchestrated by the Jewish women who dominated the rank and file in garment shops and unions at the turn of the century.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the history of New York City female garment workers in this period remains almost exclusively focused on the first major garment strike in the city, the famous 1909 'Uprising of 20,000.' During this strike Jewish women workers responded to the reluctance of the ILGWU's male leaders to support them by aligning themselves with middle-class progressives and feminist activists in the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL).<sup>39</sup> Scholars have been quick to assert that Italian women were unorganized and unsympathetic to the union movement on the grounds that only 6 per cent (approximately 2000) of the strikers

were Italian women, while they constituted almost 34 per cent of the shirtwaist industry labour force.<sup>40</sup>

This conclusion requires revision. If Italian-language dailies such as *Il Bollettino della Sera* and *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* covered the shirtwaist strike only briefly, they gave considerable attention to another strike that occurred that same month, just across the Hudson River in Hoboken, New Jersey. There, Italian women textile workers engaged in a month-long strike for livable wages, shorter work hours, and improved working conditions, and they did so alongside Italian men, as well as Armenian, Russian, German, Polish, and other immigrant women and men.<sup>41</sup> As a result of their success, Arturo Caroti, an IWW organizer of the strike and manager of a cooperative store owned by the Hoboken silk workers, was recruited immediately by the WTUL to organize Italian female garment workers in New York.<sup>42</sup> But while Caroti gained public prominence as the leader of the Hoboken strike, it was the *pinzettatrici* (pinchers) – Italian women in the worst-paid and most monotonous jobs as pieceworkers in the silk industry – who had formed the most militant core of strikers. Their successful efforts at forging cross-ethnic alliances with other textile and clothing workers under the IWW banner before and during the strike explains why immigrant workers in Hackensack, Passaic, Paterson, North Hudson, Jersey City, and New York City walked off their jobs in solidarity with the Hoboken movement.<sup>43</sup>

In each of these struggles Italian women transplanted homeland strategies. When clashes between workers, police, and factory owners grew violent in Paterson, West Hoboken, and elsewhere, Italian women used a tactic from Italy – protecting their children by sending them to stay with *compagne* (women comrades) in New York City and further away. That strikers could entrust their children to a *compagna* for months at a time reflected the women's success in developing these networks in advance. The 'exodus of children' in turn strengthened ties among Italian women in the New York metropolitan area.<sup>44</sup> As in their *paese* (homeland), women's direct-action tactics involved entire communities, not just wage-earners, as demonstrated in the 1912 Lawrence Strike, where the female mob was at the heart of workers' strategies.<sup>45</sup> It also emerged elsewhere; in 1903 'a mob of Italians, a third of them women,' reportedly 'assaulted a gang of Americans and Irish' laying track on the Third Avenue subway line while Italian men were on strike with the IWW.<sup>46</sup> (We saw these same tactics at work in the 1913 ILGWU strike described at the start of this chapter.) These stories suggest the need to challenge the conventional wisdom that Italian women did not join the 'Uprising of 20,000' because,

unlike Jewish women, they were isolated from radical political and social movements, lacked militant traditions, and suffered from weak community networks and restrictive families.<sup>47</sup> Rather, Italian women garment workers did not join the 1909 uprising en masse in part because they were not convinced that either the ILGWU or the WTUL were committed to their particular struggles.

Writing about the strike in *Collier's* three years later, journalist Adriana Spadoni explained that while the Italian working woman 'appeared gentle, malleable' in reality, she was 'like a rock.' 'Those at the head of the movement for better conditions,' she continued, 'saw all their efforts about to be nullified by this brown, ignorant, silent woman who would not listen, and, when she did, could not or would not understand.'<sup>48</sup> Italian community organizers, however, discovered another reason for the women's lack of enthusiasm. Within days of the uprising, the IWW, the Federazione Socialista Italiana (FSI), and the Socialist party hastily sent out teams of organizers to mobilize Italian women garment workers because this work had not been done before. Several thousand Italian women did walk off their jobs in solidarity with Jewish women, but the organizers noted that the vast majority were deeply sceptical of the strike since very little effort had been made to include them.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, both WTUL and ILGWU leaders routinely described Italian-American women as 'hopeless' labour activists, who were 'absolutely under the dominance of men of their family, and heavily shackled by old customs and traditions.'<sup>50</sup>

Neglected by mainstream labour movements, Italian women in New York City pursued collective forms of protest and resistance that, as in Italy, were independent of formal organization but embedded in the women's own neighbourhood and kinship networks. Since most women found jobs through family and friends and worked in factories located within or near their neighbourhoods, the garment shop was at the centre of informal systems of female networking. Through such relationships Italian women learned transportation systems, how to communicate with English-speaking employers and co-workers, and, if they had children, how to find care for their young while they worked.<sup>51</sup> In her 1919 study, Louise Odencrantz found that the Italian immigrant woman relied on these networks to learn the rudiments of the trade, 'so she did not feel as "strange" as if she had been plunged into the midst of work,' and 'to make her clothes more presentable according to American standards, so she will look less like a new arrival.'<sup>52</sup> Conversations, songs, jokes, workplace complaints, and shared dreams of a life without such

pain also reinforced a sense of collective identity. Ginevre Spagnoletti's dress shop in the Bowery was 'full of Italian women bending over their machines and peering at the needles,' as the El trains roared by, but also was a place where the women were always 'singing and joking together to escape the monotony and beat back the gloom.'<sup>53</sup> Even in shops where singing or talking was prohibited, 'some girl, unable to endure the silence any longer, would begin humming a tune which would be taken up by others near her.'<sup>54</sup> Like other workers, Italian women also colluded to steal time for themselves on the job by slowing down the pace of work and using any opportunity to talk about family, neighbourhood, work conditions, and politics.<sup>55</sup>

Women's networks also facilitated more dramatic episodes of resistance. Strikes often began when one woman was harassed or insulted and her co-workers walked off the job in protest.<sup>56</sup> Adriana Valenti, who learned the power of collective action from her father's stories of peasant uprisings in his *paese*, took action as a teenager after listening to the women in her shop discuss their continual struggle to feed their families. 'I was a fighter,' she recalled of the day she shut off the power in her shop, and signalled workers to leave their machines and hold an outdoor meeting. When the owner came after Adriana with an umbrella, demanding that she leave, all the women operators walked out with her.<sup>57</sup> Such stories fill the oral histories of Italian-American women and also regularly appeared in the radical press. Some English-language labour newspapers also reported these episodes to illustrate that if Italian women were often not sympathetic to unions in the United States, they were adept at collective action and therefore capable of organization.<sup>58</sup>

For their part, Italian-language workers' papers chronicled such stories to encourage oppositional activism. In an effort to build community support for the women in her shop on West 27th Street, Rose Alagna wrote about the indignities they were forced to endure and announced plans to orchestrate a strike against a boss who demanded they stay late without compensation to gather stray pins on the floor.<sup>59</sup> Stories of women's collective action were also retold on the shop floor, around kitchen tables, and on tenement stoops, and passed from one generation to the next. These daily, unorganized, seemingly spontaneous actions formed an important part of Italian-American women's political strategies, as they did for all workers.

Italian seamstresses in New York City also used more formal organizational strategies to build solidarity and political consciousness. Especially

important were the workers' *circoli* (clubs); modelled on the mutual-benefit societies that in Italy had become a popular strategy for extending radical movements, these groups spread throughout the Italian diaspora.<sup>60</sup> In the United States, they also forged alliances with radical Spanish, Eastern European and Russian-Jewish, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and other Caribbean-American immigrant workers' groups (which were also transnational in nature).<sup>61</sup> This network was at the heart of New York City's revolutionary working-class subculture in this period. For example, in the handmade cigar industry, such groups coalesced into unions and jointly published radical newspapers. And in Brooklyn, Italian shoe and garment workers built coalitions with Latin-American, Spanish, and Jewish neighbours through a *circolo* called Club Avanti, which was founded by Sicilian anarchists and free-thinkers.<sup>62</sup>

*L'emancipazione della donna* (the emancipation of women) was a regular topic of conversation within these circles because women kept the issue on the agenda; they invited prominent Italian women radical intellectuals and activists to speak on women's activism in transnational labour movements and to help them mobilize Italian women workers in the U.S.<sup>63</sup> These groups became a primary space for working women's politicization and education. Vincenza Scarpaci discovered that shirtwaist factory workers Angela and Maria Bambace were drawn into labour activism in 1916 by attending meetings sponsored by Italian socialists and anarchists in their neighbourhood in Harlem, where they also met IWW organizers and learned syndicalist strategies.<sup>64</sup> Tina Cacici, a textile worker who would become a notorious leader of a radical faction in the Lawrence strike of 1919 and an organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA), first became known for her fiery speeches on women's emancipation at a local socialist club in Brooklyn.<sup>65</sup> Feminist discourse and activism also emerged as central themes in festivals, dances, picnics, and theatrical performances, thereby making them an integral part of *circoli* culture.<sup>66</sup> Many of these activities included men, but women also organized their own *gruppi femminili di propaganda* (women's propaganda groups), where mothers and daughters could debate and produce revolutionary theory and strategy.<sup>67</sup> In 1897, Maria Roda, a weaver in a Paterson silk mill, self-described anarcho-socialist, and early organizer of separate activist circles for women, announced that women in New York City and New Jersey were meeting on their own 'because we feel and suffer; we too want to immerse ourselves in the struggle against this society, because we too feel, from birth, the need to be free, to be equal.'<sup>68</sup> A decade later, Italian women in New York City were still

building *gruppi femminili di propaganda*, working closely with Italian women's political circles in New Jersey, and corresponding regularly with similar groups in cities such as Boston and Chicago, and in the mining communities of Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Vermont (Barre).<sup>69</sup> They too used community-wide meetings, jointly hosted lectures, and the radical press to publicize their efforts, develop activist networks for women, and bring *l'emancipazione della donna* to the centre of working-class revolutionary debates and practice. As a comrade from the Spring Valley, Illinois, coal town studied by Caroline Waldron Merithew put it, they struggled '[f]or the emancipation of women, together with those struggles that must occur in order to attain the rights that all of oppressed humanity demand.' 'A woman,' she added, 'must struggle with great zeal to emancipate herself from the tyranny and prejudice of men, and from those who foolishly consider women inferior, and often treat her like a slave.'<sup>70</sup>

The *gruppi femminili* also reflected Italian women's desire to assert their commitment to the labour movement, which meant confronting those male comrades who held to notions that a woman could never 'elevate herself from subservience.'<sup>71</sup> In response, they argued, 'You believe that a woman, who takes care of the entire home and the children, is not concerned with education, that she cannot find the time in her long day, to dedicate herself to her emancipation? ... Women also have the capacity, tenacity and perseverance to confront obstacles and elevate themselves to the road of their emancipation ... We agitate, we organize to prove to the world that accuses us, that we too are capable of these things.'<sup>72</sup> The core group of women active in the *gruppi femminili* embraced revolutionary socialist and anarcho-syndicalist ideas, and advocated working-class mobilization and collective action in the context of the industrial union movement. In this way, their propaganda work provided women with a point of entry into the larger American labour movement. The Italian women textile workers in Paterson who formed one of the earliest *gruppi femminili* also participated in forming one of the first IWW locals alongside men in 1906, laying the groundwork for collective action in the years that followed.<sup>73</sup>

In fact, workplace agitation increased dramatically among Italian workers in New York City overall after the founding of the IWW in 1905.<sup>74</sup> The centrality of international working-class struggle and revolution to the *circoli* and the 'virtually disenfranchised status' of Italian workers in relation to the exclusionary and nativist unions of the American Federation of Labor helps to explain why many Italian workers joined 'a mili-

tant organization that made unskilled workers the primary subjects of its revolutionary program.<sup>75</sup> Salvatore Salerno's research has demonstrated how Italian anarchist textile workers in Paterson were among the first to create foreign-language locals of the IWW; that they remained active in the IWW during the critical period (1905–8) when the leadership shifted from socialists to direct actionists; and that Italian women infused these anarcho-syndicalist locals with feminist praxis well into the 1920s.<sup>76</sup> Italian women were particularly drawn to the IWW's emphasis on industrial unionism and direct action, which more closely resembled strategies in Italy. Also, from the start, the IWW backed their labour struggles. Following the 1909 uprising, it was the IWW that demanded that the ILGWU make all of its decisions in mass meetings rather than in committees where Italians were absent or under-represented.<sup>77</sup> The IWW drew its membership from many Italian-American radical circles, and assisted with major organizing drives among Italian shoemakers, and hotel workers, barbers, piano makers, and textile, garment, construction, and dock workers throughout New York City.<sup>78</sup>

The vast majority of Italian garment-workers in New York City did not join the ILGWU in the 1909 strike, but they were visible and active participants in the 'Great Revolt' of 50,000 cloak-makers one year later. That strike helped to make the ILGWU the third-largest member of the AFL (1914). More than 2800 Italian workers, many of them inspired by the gains made in the 1909 uprising, joined the ILGWU in the first three days of the 1910 strike.<sup>79</sup> Three of the strikers, Catherine Valenti, Anna Canno, and Sadie La Porta, organized a separate local to mobilize the unprecedented numbers of Italian women that began attending union meetings and joining picket lines, often with their children. Three weeks later, an additional 20,000 Italian workers walked out, including large numbers of Italian women finishers who went on strike in solidarity with the mostly male cloak-makers.<sup>80</sup>

Why had Italian women begun to organize in garment unions at this time? Their dramatic shift from 'scabs' to ILGWU strikers speaks less of their sudden politicization than of an important change in strategy that was then taking form. First, Italian women were willing to join a strike orchestrated by the more moderate, reformist, AFL-affiliated union because it had become increasingly impossible to organize separately from them. As Annelise Orleck has argued, the 1909 shirtwaist uprising produced mixed results, but it 'breathed new life into a struggling immigrant labor movement and transformed the tiny ILGWU into a union of national significance.'<sup>81</sup> In the next decade, the ILGWU would have

more success than the IWW in forcing garment employers to the bargaining table, and so began to attract many revolutionary leaders in the Italian immigrant community. Second, the ILGWU became willing to invest time and funds to recruit Italian organizers. Unlike in the 1909 uprising, Italians had been involved in planning and executing the 1910 strike.<sup>82</sup>

Significantly, the initial strategy of both the ILGWU and WTUL, to hire prominent socialist Italian male labour leaders to bring Italian women into the union, was unsuccessful. In the 1909 strike the WTUL turned to Arturo Caroti, hoping that his role in the Hoboken movement would enable him to mobilize Italian women workers. However, his tactics – buying off the strike-breakers and enlisting the support of fathers and husbands – failed to generate substantial union membership among women, and he returned to Italy in 1913. Clearly, the needs of the union or the sympathy and support of the men in their families and communities were not enough to coax Italian women into the ILGWU. They began to enter the ILGWU in 1910 partly because of what they had witnessed in 1909; they hoped that building alliances with Jewish workers might bring them access to higher wages, shorter hours, and safer working conditions. In addition, beginning in 1910, the ILGWU granted Italian workers financial and institutional support and, moreover, self-governing spaces crucial to developing the movement and building internal leadership. But since Italian women's mobilization in the ILGWU came on the heels of a strike dominated by male cloak-makers, the union and the WTUL initially assumed that Italian women could only be organized after and with the support of Italian men. Historians also have assumed that 'until Italian men were made to understand the importance of unionization, Italian women would remain outside union ranks.'<sup>83</sup> As a result, they have failed to recognize Italian women's efforts at building solidarity within their own ranks, their conscious shifts in strategy, and their struggle for representation and voice.

The 1910 strike, which was the first ILGWU mobilization to receive a mass base of support among Italian workers, marked a shift for garment workers. It occurred at a time when Italian migration to the United States was peaking, and when, as Bruno Ramirez observes, 'Italian associational networks had grown in leaps and bounds, and their presence within the American industrial apparatus had consolidated.' Over the next several decades, Italian garment workers, as Vecoli notes, 'found themselves in the midst of one of the most sweeping organizational drives ever to take place in one single industrial sector, where



cultural, political, and ethnic dynamics interacted to convert those drives into a truly community-based movement.' In short, New York City's garment unions became a centre of Italian-American labour activism and radicalism.<sup>84</sup>

The movement in the garment trades drew the energies of many Italian men, including prominent radicals, but it was Italian women who at all times composed the majority of workers in the garment industry and unions. From the outset, workers such as the Bambaces, Susanna Angretina, Rosalina Ferrara, Rose De Cara, Giordana Lombardi, Anna Coocha, Laura Di Guglielmo, Lina Manetta, Maria Prestianni, Anna Squillante, Millie Tirreno, and Rosalie Conforti, and countless others, created the first organizing teams that brought thousands of *compagne* (comrades) into the ILGWU.<sup>85</sup> These teams of women were formed after Caroti's campaign, during and after the 1910 strike, and included both immigrants and the American-born. Indeed, union meetings, demonstrations, and picket lines were often multi-generational. Tina Gaeta remembered how her mother, who 'was always against homework,' encouraged her daughters 'to carry the picket sign when her shop went on strike.'<sup>86</sup> Vincenza Scarpaci has documented that Giuseppina Bambace not only let her daughters attend union meetings and participate in organizing activities, but she sometimes joined them on their union rounds with a rolling pin tucked under her arm, just in case there was trouble.<sup>87</sup> A buttonhole-maker and mother of six, Ginevre Spagnoletti, joined the union after she started reading the newspapers and pamphlets of an Italian anárcho-syndicalist *circolo* in her Greenwich Village neighbourhood. Each evening after work, she read them aloud to her children and encouraged political debate at her kitchen table.<sup>88</sup> Families were a central site where Italian women developed oppositional ideologies and strategies of resistance, and the union culture they created would be grounded in such relationships.<sup>89</sup>

The women who formed the first ILGWU organizing teams differed from the rank and file in one significant respect: most did not have children. Yet they often worked in the same 'women's jobs' as their married sisters as operatives, drapers, finishers, hemstitchers, and examiners. They also became radicalized by the deteriorating labour conditions in the factories, exemplified most dramatically by the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911, which claimed the lives of 146 women garment workers in New York City, 'many of them Italian women and girls. Similarly, the highly publicized and violent labour uprisings in the 1910s, in Lawrence, Paterson, Chicago, Ybor City, and other cities where

Italian women were major components of the labour force, further politicized Italian immigrant women. As many scholars have demonstrated, these events helped to unify the Italian community, and also prompted the mainstream Italian-language press, the community's *prominenti*, and local parish priests to support workers' movements publicly.<sup>90</sup>

After the 1910 strike, Italian women formed the majority in the newly formed Organizational Committee of the Italian Branch of the ILGWU, which became the Italian Branch, or Local 25, after the 1913 strike. With their own organizational space, women could consolidate their activism. From isolated shops spread across the city women contacted the committee each day, reporting on their struggles, methods of resistance, and their need for assistance. Organizers met with workers in community meetings and found work in garment shops that were non-union. They visited women and listened to their grievances, brought them into the union, and encouraged them to shape and direct the movement – all at the risk of arrest and beatings from employers and police. They planned workplace committees, distributed leaflets, and ran educational and publicity programs, cultural activities, demonstrations, strikes, picket lines, soup kitchens, and theatre troupes.<sup>91</sup> Organizers used key newspapers, such as the popular socialist Italian-language weekly *L'Operaia* (to which thousands of women garment workers were subscribers by 1914),<sup>92</sup> to create a community of *lavoratrici coscienti* (politically informed or 'conscious' women workers). They carried the message that 'the inferiority of women is not physiological or psychological, but social,' and advocated instead a *femminismo* that was based on 'the spirit of solidarity between women.' This feminism, they asserted, was not 'a movement against men, but one that is primarily interested in developing intelligence among women.' Rather, it was 'the belief that the woman is exploited doubly, by capitalism and by her companion ... In the labor movement women can find the opportunity to become a militant force for humanity with a clear vision of the world.'<sup>93</sup> In addition, Italian women drew on cultural codes of honour and respect, and an emergent ethnic nationalism, to discourage scabbing and encourage a collective identity that was grounded in labour activism. 'You are not Italians,' wrote Clara Zara, a labour organizer and factory operative, 'you who trample on our revolutionary traditions; you are not Italians who dishonour and betray the holy and sublime cause of our work ... You have massacred our reputation, our dignity, our honour, [and created] the suspicion that Italian immigrant women workers have inherited.' Disman-

ting this reputation required organizers to demonstrate how the union movement was a legitimate and necessary site of women's activism.<sup>94</sup>

These tactics paid off when unprecedented numbers of Italian women joined the large-scale uprisings among garment workers in 1913 and 1919.<sup>95</sup> It was also due to such efforts that women joined the ILGWU once Italian members had their own autonomous language locals in 1916 and 1919.<sup>96</sup> Colomba Furio's ground-breaking research on this topic showed that 'an overwhelming majority' of Italian women and girls joined the ranks of striking workers during the 1919 strike wave, and 'distinguished themselves on picket lines, at strikers' meetings, and on organizational committees.'<sup>97</sup> As one older Italian woman recounted, she joined the union in this period because 'me sick of the boss, me sick of work, me sick of go hungry most time.' She then raised her deformed finger, the bone worn down into the shape of a hook, and showed the space where her front teeth had once been. With a body damaged from decades of quickly twisting cotton and biting button holes to save time and keep her factory job, she concluded, 'me sick, me tired, me can stand no longer, that's why me all strike.'<sup>98</sup> The first administration of the Italian Dressmakers' Local 89 of the ILGWU (chartered in 1919) included many women 'who had shown particularly outstanding abilities during the strike' that won the 40-hour work week.<sup>99</sup>

The transition from revolutionary industrial unionism to the reform socialism of the ILGWU was neither straightforward nor accomplished quickly. Shifting strategies were continually contested. Scholars have demonstrated how this tension was informed by the 'ideological and organizational cleavages that had marked the development of the leftist movement in their home country,' and was symptomatic of the divided labour movement in the United States.<sup>100</sup> Throughout the U.S.-based, Italian-language radical press, male activists routinely asked, 'Is it compatible for an industrial socialist to also become a propagandist for the AFL?'<sup>101</sup> Although male political leaders dominate the newspapers and the historiography, Italian-American women were also at the centre of these community struggles, and they made themselves highly conspicuous. When ILGWU organizer Pasquale Di Neri tried to speak before a group of Italian women garment workers before the 1913 strike, he was met with the 'loud cynical laughter' of an older Italian woman who yelled out, 'Ha! Ha! you want more 15 cents to pay you fakers!' She then proceeded to 'make [him] look ridiculous in the presence of the other finishers.' Several weeks later, the same woman led an independent strike in her shop when employers demanded an impossible work pace.<sup>102</sup>

Support for the 'new unions' was always tenuous in this period, as Italian women struggled for representation and voice. In 1913, for instance, several thousand Italian-American women joined the ILGWU strike, but one week after the union settled without a vote and the female 'rioting' in Cooper Union took place, close to one thousand of them in twelve factories across New York City abandoned the ILGWU and declared a strike (for better pay and shorter hours) under the auspices of the IWW.<sup>103</sup> In fact, Italian women did not turn to the reformist unions en masse until post-First World War repression against the left caused the defeat of the more radical alternatives. Even then, they continued to combine activism in the union with other strategies and community movements.

### **Red Scare, Fascism, and Italian-American Women's Radicalism in the Interwar Period**

Reform-oriented socialist labour organizations like the ILGWU were adopted more fully by Italian workers in the 1930s as they came to terms with what was possible in the United States. Historians are only beginning to tell the story of how the repression of immigrant radicals, and of pre-war movements like the IWW, preceded the incorporation of Italian-American workers into the mainstream U.S. labour movement and contributed to the making of their national identities both as Americans and Italians. Yet, scholars generally agree that 'the New York clothing industry [was] the theater of a significant political recomposition within the Italian American left.'<sup>104</sup> Ironically, however, there are virtually no studies that consider the Italian-American women who ran the organizational departments and composed the majority of the rank and file in the very garment unions that were so significant to the Italian-American left during this period.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, as Michael Denning argues, in New York City the 'symbolic center of Popular Front womanhood was the garment industry.' This 'insurgent social movement,' he writes, was '[b]orn out of the social upheavals of 1934 and coincided with the Communist Party's period of greatest influence in US society,' but it was not centred on the Communist party. Rather, the Popular Front emerged as 'a radical historical bloc uniting industrial unionists, Communists, independent socialists, community activists, and emigré anti-fascists around laborist social democracy, anti-fascism, and anti-lynching.'<sup>106</sup> By shifting our focus to the culture of struggle in this period we can locate how second-generation Italian-American women informed working-class

politics in these years, and also identify the continuities and departures from pre-war styles of immigrant activism. Moreover, we can assess the dramatic impact that shifting organizational strategies had on gender and inter-ethnic relations within one of the most visible and celebrated working-class movements of the 1930s.

Italian-American historians generally agree that during and after the First World War, the federal government's push for national unity and the repression of radical campaigns caused a massive dislocation in the Italian-American labour movement.<sup>107</sup> As Vecoli writes, the political climate of the First World War 'dealt the first debilitating blow to Italian radicalism. Smashing their presses, shuttering their offices and meeting places, and arresting thousands, federal and state agencies instituted a reign of terror against the *souversivi* [subversives].'<sup>108</sup> According to Salvatore Salerno, these 'red scare' campaigns targeted those Italian-American radicals who publicly challenged U.S. racist and imperialist ideologies, and thus resulted in the muzzling of a critical oppositional praxis that was developing within Italian America.<sup>109</sup> In addition, during the 1920s, the racism and anti-Catholicism of the Ku Klux Klan, nativist movements for immigration restriction, and the eight-year struggle of anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti made it clear to Italian Americans that they were perceived by native-born white Americans as inferior and undesirable.<sup>110</sup> In response, the majority of Italian-American workers began to turn to new methods of organizing.<sup>111</sup>

Italian-American women responded to this repression by 'uniting around a common ethnic identity' in the Italian-language locals of the reformist socialist unions that were less targeted by the government, such as the ILGWU and the newly formed ACWA.<sup>112</sup> Yet, Vecoli reminds us that this was not a tale of assimilation. Rather, the deradicalization of Italian-American workers was as much due to transnational influences as it was to domestic developments. The Bolshevik and Fascist revolutions had profound impacts upon the Italian labor movement in America.<sup>113</sup> Demographic changes also mattered. With Italian immigration to the United States drastically limited by restrictive legislation in 1921 and 1924, the economic strategies of many Italian families shifted from seasonal labour migrations and temporary settlement to the expansion of community support systems. Regional loyalties and diasporic identities began to give way to Italian and American nationalisms, as 'ethnic identity, class-consciousness, and workers' demand for respect as "citizens" fused.'<sup>114</sup> In addition, at the national level, unionism was at a low tide; the number of women in garment unions plummeted by almost

40 per cent between 1920 and 1927.<sup>115</sup> The strategy of sustaining ethnic autonomy within the garment unions was thus prompted by a variety of cultural, economic, and political exigencies.

In the ILGWU, women's membership dropped even further when 'civil war' broke out in the 1920s, and the General Executive Board expelled communists and unaffiliated women activists struggling for more democratic representation. Alice Kessler-Harris has demonstrated that the 'civil war' that occurred 'in the context of a defensive and harassed trade union movement,' represented a decisive rejection of the cultural space women had created in the ILGWU the decade before.<sup>116</sup> Since Italian garment workers in the ILGWU had established their own language locals just before this confrontation, the 1920s were spent consolidating and safeguarding ethnic autonomy. Furthermore, to protect their new jurisdiction over Italian-American workers, the Italian locals supported the actions of the ILGWU leadership.<sup>117</sup> This placed Italian-American organizers 'in an ideal position to negotiate theirs and their constituency's ethnicity within the broader labour and political context.'<sup>118</sup> But it came at a great cost. By the late 1920s, the Italian Dressmakers' Local 89 (the largest of the two Italian-language locals in the ILGWU) was heavily bureaucratized, with men in leadership positions over a primarily female rank and file. On the eve of the stock market crash, this 'progressive' union (which unlike other AFL unions, had sought to organize women workers) had become deeply stratified along gender lines.

The response of Italian-American women organizers to these developments varied. Some, such as Angela Bambace and Albina Delfino, opposed the direction taken by the Italian locals and became active in Communist party meetings and strikes, where they formed alliances with Jewish anarchist and communist insurgents in the union, some of whom were Wobblies (IWW members). For such actions both women were denounced by the Italian locals. For the rest of the 1920s, Bambace assisted the ACWA's organizational campaigns in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and then accepted a position to unionize garment workers in Baltimore for the ILGWU. Delfino became a labour organizer for the Communist party. In this capacity, she travelled between Lawrence, Providence, Boston, Paterson, and New York City with Frances Ribaldo, another Italian woman organizer in the party, to assist workers on the verge of, or already on strike, and to combat racial and ethnic antagonism within these working-class communities.<sup>119</sup> Other organizers, such as Margaret di Maggio and Grace de Luise, became virulently anti-communist and com-

mitted to the ethnic-based organizing strategy of Local 89. All of these women, however, came together in the anti-Fascist movement.<sup>120</sup>

As Italian-American garment workers became increasingly sympathetic to Mussolini's claims for a 'New Italy,' anarchists, syndicalists, communists, socialists, and other radicals led oppositional movements in their homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces, and unions.<sup>121</sup> Margaret di Maggio, who entered the garment trades at the age of thirteen and joined the ILGWU because of the Triangle Fire, became a renowned organizer of Local 89 by age eighteen. She was also well known in her Sicilian family for challenging those who 'felt drawn by Mussolini's promise of grandeur to the Italian people.' Di Maggio's niece recalled how 'she and my grandfather were always arguing ... She wanted to buy him a round trip ticket to go back to Italy and see how things were.' When the arguments got worse, Margaret bought him a one-way ticket and 'within two months he wrote back here begging her to send him the return ticket.'<sup>122</sup>

Such battles also took place more publicly and suggest that even as Italian workers were changing patterns of migration, settling, and naturalizing in greater numbers, they were still connected to Italy. As Mussolini's propaganda machine stretched across the Atlantic and encouraged Italian women to embrace a new sense of national identity as 'mothers of the race,' thousands of seamstresses participated in the spectacle of sending their wedding rings to Mussolini's coffers and restating their vows in public. Though smaller in number, other women crowded anti-Fascist rallies (many of them sponsored by the garment unions), and disrupted Fascist meetings in their neighbourhoods. A constant stream of political exiles escaping Fascist repression invigorated the radical movement and raised much vocal opposition to the nationalization of Italians and Italian-Americans. They included the anarchist anti-Fascist Virgilia d'Andrea, who eventually settled in Brooklyn in 1928 and, as Robert Ventresca and Franca Iacovetta document (in chapter 9), became a popular and celebrated speaker at Italian workers' demonstrations across the United States.<sup>123</sup> Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Angela Bambace, Margaret Di Maggio, Lucia Romualdi, Lillie Raitano, Josephine Mirenda, and other leading ILGWU organizers were not only active in anti-Fascist circles in New York City, but also joined the inter-ethnic coalition of radical groups that united to fight for the release of Sacco and Vanzetti and build community support for the Spanish anti-Fascist resistance. The union remained one of many sites of activism.<sup>124</sup>

The garment unions did not become central to the lives of Italian-American women garment workers until the dramatic labour mobil-

izations of the 1933–4 Depression-era strike wave. In August of 1933, 60,000 dressmakers in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut walked off their jobs and into the streets.<sup>125</sup> Joined by African-American, East-European Jewish, Puerto Rican, and other Caribbean women dressmakers, Italian women filled strike halls to capacity, stormed non-union shops calling workers to join them, marched through the streets of their neighbourhoods, and formed picket lines outside shops demanding decent wages and working conditions and an end to sweatshops once and for all.<sup>126</sup> The Italian women dressmakers who helped to orchestrate the strike were both veterans from earlier labour struggles and new recruits. They were immigrant and American-born, though predominantly second generation.<sup>127</sup> Together they ushered in an entirely new era that Italian garment workers called *l'alba radiosa* (the radiant dawn).<sup>128</sup>

The five-day strike was the crucial event by which Italian-American garment workers assumed the overwhelming numerical majority within the ILGWU. For the first time, they held a measure of power not only in the industry and union, but before the state, which appeared to support their organizational appeals for economic justice.<sup>129</sup> In fact, many Italian garment workers associated the strike with becoming American. Frank Liberti, a presser and organizer for the Italian 'Dressmakers' Local 89 recalled, 'I became a Citizen ... during the 1933 Strike.'<sup>130</sup> In March 1934, Margaret di Maggio, Minnie Badami, Dorothy Drago, Yolanda Liguori, Angelina Farruggia, and other prominent organizers of Local 89 travelled to Washington to present President Roosevelt with a bronze plaque and pledge the support of Italian-American garment workers to the National Industrial Recovery Act.<sup>131</sup> While Italian women were still not proportionately represented in the union hierarchy, they represented almost 80 per cent of Local 89 (whose 40,000 members made it the largest local in the nation), and the majority of workers in other large locals.<sup>132</sup>

The acquisition of mainstream organizational space and authority in the U.S. labour movement reconfigured Italian-American women's activism in several significant ways. Following the uprising in 1933, the garment unions became a central site of Italian-American women's community activism. Since they composed the majority of the rank and file, they were called upon by the union leadership to consolidate the gains of the strike. They continued to run the organizational drives and struggled with Italian and Jewish men for a voice in union affairs. Yet, the sheer magnitude of new members propelled the Italian locals into 'an important center around which Italian-American life in New York City



revolved.<sup>133</sup> As tens of thousands of women poured into the local's district offices, spread throughout New York City's Italian neighbourhoods, veteran organizers were needed to mentor and train those new to the movement. The movement thus remained multigenerational.<sup>134</sup> As in earlier periods, women socialized their own children within union culture by bringing their families to workers' halls and meetings.<sup>135</sup> Margaret di Maggio, the manager of Local 89's organizational department, was not only described as a mother figure by the newest recruits, but her twelve-year-old niece was literally at her side during many union meetings. The atmosphere in the local's offices also reaffirmed a sense of family. Di Maggio's niece recalled that in 'the 30s and 40s you couldn't get through the halls for the mobs that were there.' 'They would work on their lunch hours,' she added, 'they would run to the union at 5:00. At 8:00 the halls would still be mobbed ... You become so involved, it's home.'<sup>136</sup> Indeed, during the 1930s, while male leaders of the garment unions emphasized ethnic nationalism in their appeals to Italian-American workers, women organizers of Local 89 more often referred to the union as '*nostra grande famiglia*' (our 'large family'),<sup>137</sup> thereby drawing attention to the union as a central community institution that was based on the labour of women. They took the malleable social ideal of *la famiglia* and infused it with political purpose to justify making their union work a priority over their commitments to kin. Indeed, the great flood of new members demanded a new kind of commitment from women organizers. As di Maggio's niece remembered, since union women 'worked until the wee hours of the morning,' and on weekends, 'few knew whether they had families.'<sup>138</sup> Actually, many organizers came from union families; they often delayed marriage, and most left organizing or took a sabbatical during child-rearing years. While some women did their union work in defiance of a husband or parents (and thus talked of being disowned or of 'broken marriages'), most who did marry chose partners within the movement. As Albina Delfino stated, 'You cannot be active, unless your mate has the same opinion.'<sup>139</sup> Such sentiments were prevalent earlier, but during the massive Depression-era organizing drives more women than ever chose to devote their lives to the movement and to redefine their responsibilities to kin in ways that included community activism. Women were drawn to the ILGWU for many of the same reasons that they joined workers' *circoli*. The union provided a space for them to combine political activism and intellectual pursuits, and as with the *circoli*, the union offered classes in political strategy, including Marxist theories of working-class revolution, voca-

tional and technical training, and social events. Labour organizing provided women with a rare opportunity to achieve both personal and collective advancement, earn an income, and get the education most missed when they entered wage work as children.

### Investing in Whiteness: Concluding Comments

As women breathed new life into the labour movement and made careers out of union organizing, they also struggled with increased union bureaucratization, and the resulting entrenched gendered and racial hierarchies. After the civil war of the 1920s, the union offered few avenues for democratic representation and those women who drew attention to inequalities were marginalized, if not removed, from union offices. Women were excluded not only from positions of power in the union, but also from the dominant symbolic system of labour in this period.<sup>140</sup> Ironically, their more common response to this marginalization would be to unite with men around the practice of racialized exclusion, rather than work with other women to democratize the union. In the last few decades, several scholars and labour activists have examined how Italian-American garment workers resented the entrance of new workers into the industry and union (most of whom were Puerto Rican and African-American women) and actively worked to prevent their access to well-paying jobs and positions of power in the union.<sup>141</sup>

Why did Italian-American workers come to see their interests as against rather than in solidarity with the industry's newest recruits? The 1933 strike had dramatically affirmed the logic of working-class solidarity; however, everywhere Italian-American women confronted a society obsessed with the ideology of racial difference. Pronouncements of white racial superiority were widely disseminated in popular radio shows, magazines, vaudeville shows, and movies, and they were used to justify lynchings, immigration restriction, and segregation. Moreover, it was clear that where people lived, which housing they had access to, who was hired, fired, and promoted, who could serve on juries, vote, and become citizens were always mediated by racial privilege. Even in a union like the ILGWU, which claimed to unite workers across the colour line, Italians learned contradictory lessons. At times, union leaders espoused the ideology 'We are all minorities'; at other times, they sought to avoid the issue of race altogether and drew attention instead to the 'culture of unity' offered by a multi-ethnic socialist union.<sup>142</sup> Yet, all workers did not

have the same privileges in the union. Only Italian workers were permitted the autonomy of their own language locals, which, in turn, enabled them to acquire leadership positions in the International, and gain access to the higher-paying jobs in the industry. This privilege was denied to other members, despite repeated demands by Puerto Rican and African-American seamstresses for similar rights.<sup>143</sup>

Italian-American women did not possess the formal power to exclude workers of colour from the union, but the evidence suggests that in the 1930s and 1940s they worked to exclude women and men of colour from the workplace. As Altagracia Ortiz has documented, one way was to oppose granting membership to *puerto-riqueñas* and thus keep them out of union shops.<sup>144</sup> It also appears that those Italian-American women who remained in Local 89 throughout their union careers rarely initiated or joined class-based, inter-ethnic coalitions, but focused instead on building solidarity among Italians and on solidifying their alliances with Jewish workers. Differential access to and control over the better-paid and more highly skilled jobs did not lead Italian-American women to disrupt racial inequality. Instead, they used their political stature in the union to counter the nativism and racism that cast *them* as undesirable citizens and members of an 'inferior race,' and distanced themselves from the newcomers.<sup>145</sup>

The types of coalitions that Italian garment workers had forged with other workers in the decades before the First World War were no longer a central part of their workplace organizing strategies. Rather, alliances with Latin- and African-American workers more often developed outside of the union, in local neighbourhood movements that developed to confront the devastation of the Great Depression. In grassroots struggles for better housing, education, and health care, in Popular Front groups such as the United Council of Working Class Women, the International Workers' Order, Congressman Vito Marcantonio's Harlem Legislative Council, and in the few remaining anarcho-feminist circles, Italian-American women continued to collaborate with African-American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and other Caribbean women.<sup>146</sup> Yet, in the 1940s, Italian-American women also mobilized to keep African and Latin American children out of 'their' schools and 'their' public housing.<sup>147</sup> Decades later Italian-American community activists would recall that tensions between Italians and their Puerto Rican and African-American neighbours increased so dramatically in these decades that it led to new organizing strategies. Vito Magli remembered that in the 1930s 'we had

a situation where we had to intervene and explain to the brothers and sisters about racism in the Italian American community ... We had to combat racism, a problem in the progressive movement.'<sup>148</sup> Robert Orsi has suggested that increased tension occurred in part because Italian immigrants and their children learned that 'achievement in their new environment meant successfully differentiating themselves from the dark-skinned other.'<sup>149</sup> His observation also applies to Italian-American women garment workers, whose claims to being different from their African and Latin American co-workers grew more insistent at precisely the same time that the latter group entered the industry in larger numbers. Yet, Italians had lived alongside African and Latin Americans for decades, sharing neighbourhoods, schools, and workplaces. The 1930s and 1940s, then, were a turning point for Italian immigrants and their children. It is no coincidence that they began to distance themselves from racialized 'others' at the same time as they achieved numerical and political power in the garment unions, and gained access to the higher-paying jobs. As Tom Guglielmo's research on Italians and race-making in Chicago well demonstrates, 'protecting this powerful and privileged position required that Italian Americans grow increasingly vigilant about policing the color line.'<sup>150</sup> This racial privilege too was the site of continual dialogue and contestation, as Italian-Americans confronted and debated the costs of a white identity.<sup>151</sup>

Italian-American women garment workers entered the age of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, a period historians commonly associate with increased inter-ethnic working-class unity, when mobilization at the site of production offered few spaces to challenge hegemonic systems of power. With an increasingly bureaucratized labour movement grounded in racial and gendered hierarchies, the workplace became an unlikely site for the revolutionary culture of struggle characteristic of the pre-First World War years. Mapping the oppositional political culture that Italian-American women created in this period thus requires us to look beyond the union movement and to recognize that women's activism was not always emancipatory or antagonistic to systems of power. By focusing on the complex and often contradictory messages that were conveyed in different political moments, we might better assess the role that Italian immigrant women and their daughters played in both sustaining and challenging institutionalized privilege. After all, systems of power were never stable, but always reconfigured through debate, contest, and negotiation.<sup>152</sup>

## NOTES

I would like to thank the following for sharing their ideas and reading drafts throughout the writing process: the entire Guglielmo family, especially my grandmother Grace and my brothers Marco and Tom; Franca Barchiesi, Jim Barrett, Philip Cannistraro, Nan Enstad, Edvige Giunta, Nancy Hewitt, Rachel Maxine Köchinski, Todd Michney, Yuichiro Onishi, Kym Ragusa, Danilo Romeo, Joseph Sciorra, and Jane Slaughter; and to the participants at the following meetings, where I presented the findings in this essay: Immigration History Research Center's Research in Progress Series (1996); University of Minnesota Comparative Women's History Workshop (1996); Canadian Historical Association (1996); Berkshire History of Women Conference (1996); 'The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism: Politics, Culture, History' Conference (1997); Social Science History Association (1997); Midwest Labor History Conference (1997); North American Labor History Conference (2001); and American Studies Association (2001). I am especially grateful to Donna Gabaccia, David Roediger, and Salvatore Salerno for their wise counsel, and to Franca Iacovetta for her enthusiastic support and editorial expertise.

- 1 *New York Evening Post* (20 Jan. 1913); *New York Times* (19, 20, and 22 Jan. 1913); *New York Call* (30 Dec. 1912; 1, 7, 9, 13–16 and 19–20 Jan. 1913; 2 and 5 Feb. 1913); *New York Sun* (4 Jan. 1913); *Il Bollettino della Sera* (3, 4, 10, and 16 Jan. 1913); *L'Era Nuova* (11 and 25 Jan. 1913); *Il Proletario* (18 and 25 Jan. 1913; 1 Feb. 1913); *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (10 Jan. 1913 to 3 Feb. 1913); Theresa Malkiel, 'Striking for the Right to Live,' *The Coming Nation* 1:124 (25 Jan. 1913). See also Colomba Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry: A Case Study, The Italian Immigrant Women and the Garment Industry, 1880–1950' (PhD diss., New York University, 1979), 185–204; Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 75–6; Melvyn Dubofsky, *When Workers Organize: New York City in the Progressive Era* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968), 83; Louis Levine, *The Women's Garment Workers: A History of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union* (New York: B.W. Heubsch, Inc., 1924), 226–7; Edwin Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions, A Case Study: Italians and American Labor, 1870–1920* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 522–5; Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, vol. 5, *The AFL in the Progressive Era, 1910–1915* (New York: International Publishers, 1980), 256.
- 2 *New York Times* (19 and 20 Jan. 1913) paraphrased in Orleck, *Common Sense*

and a Little Fire, 76. In 1914 the U.S. Department of Labor reported that Jewish women occupied 56% of the dress and waist industry, while Italian women, the second largest group of workers, comprised 34%. See U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *A Study of the Dress and Waist Industry for the Purpose of Industrial Education, Bulletin 145* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1914), 7. See also Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 80, 185–204; and Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side, 1890–1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985), 260.

- 3 I am building on the work of Annelise Orleck, who also advances this argument in *Common Sense and a Little Fire*, 76. The second quotation is from Levine, *The Women's Garment Workers*, 226.
- 4 Altagracia Ortiz, 'Puerto Rican Workers in the Garment Industry of New York City, 1920–1960,' in Robert Asher and Charles Stephenson, eds., *Labor Divided: Race and Ethnicity in the United States Labor Struggles, 1835–1960* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990); Ortiz, '“En la aguja y el pedal eché la hiel”: Puerto Rican Women in the Garment Industry of New York City, 1920–1980,' in Altagracia Ortiz, ed., *Puerto Rican Women and Work: Bridges in Transnational Labor* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); Xiaolan Bao, *Holding Up More than Half the Sky: Chinese Women Garment Workers in New York City, 1948–92* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Alice Kessler-Harris, 'Problems of Coalition-Building: Women and Trade Unions in the 1920s,' in Ruth Milkman, ed., *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's Labor History* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 126–9; Herbert Hill, 'Guardians of the Sweatshops: The Trade Unions, Racism, and the Garment Industry,' in Adalberto López and James Petras, eds., *Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans: Studies in History and Society* (New York: Wiley, 1974); Robert Laurentz, 'Racial/Ethnic Conflict in the New York Garment Industry' (PhD diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1980); Roy B. Helfgott, 'Puerto Rican Integration in the Skirt Industry in New York City,' in *Discrimination and Low Incomes: Social and Economic Discrimination against Minority Groups in Relation to Low Incomes in New York State* (New York: Studies of New York State Commission against Discrimination, New School for Social Research, 1959).
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  - 7 By 1900 close to one-half of the nation's clothing establishments, capital, and product value were located in New York City. See Ben Morris Selekman, Henriette R. Walter, and W.J. Couper, *The Clothing and Textile Industries in New York and Its Environs* (New York: Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, 1925); Louise Odencrantz, *Italian Women in Industry* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1919), 38; Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*; and Levine, *The Women's Garment Workers*.
  - 8 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin 146, *Wages and Regularity of Employment and Standardization of Piece Rates in the Dress and Waist Industry: New York City* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1914), 8.
  - 9 Local 22, ILGWU, *Our Union at Work: A Survey of the Activities of the Dressmakers' Union Local 22, ILGWU* (New York, 1937), Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota (hereafter IHRC); Edith Kine, 'The Garment Union Comes to the Negro Worker,' *Opportunity* 12 (April 1934): 107–10. See also Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*, 200–4; and Ortiz, "En la aguja y el pedal eché la hiel."
  - 10 Odencrantz, *Italian Women in Industry*, 44.
  - 11 Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 67 and reprinted interviews in appendix D; Furio, 'The Cultural Background of the Italian Immigrant Woman and Its Impact on Her Unionization in the New York City Garment

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- 13 From 1880 to 1910, in Lombardy and Piedmont, domestic production continued alongside both silk- and wool-spinning cottage industries, at the same time as both silk and wool factories developed. Furthermore, Anna Cento Bull argues that the 'mechanization of the [Italian] textile industry, the spread of the factory system, the lengthening of working hours, and the worsening of conditions of work were accompanied by a leap forward in the employment of women and children.' Bull, 'The Lombard Silk-Spinners in the Nineteenth Century: An Industrial Workforce in a Rural Setting,' in Zygmunt G. Baraski and Shirley W. Vinall, eds., *Women and Italy: Essays on Gender, Culture and History* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991), 26. Donna Gabaccia discovered that in 1901, spinning and weaving employed almost a third of adult women in Sicily and Calabria. Gabaccia and Fraser Ottanelli, 'Diaspora or International Proletariat?' *Diasporas* 6 (Spring 1997). See also Noether, 'The Silent Half,' 7; Noce, *Gioventù senza sole*; 'Organizing a Women's Union, Italy, 1903' in *European Women: A Documentary History, 1789–1945*, Eleanor S. Riemer and John C. Fout, eds. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983), 27; Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, *Liberazione della donna / Feminism in Italy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1986), 15–18; and Elda Gentili Zappi, *If Eight Hours Seem Too Few: Mobilization of Women Workers in the Italian Rice Fields* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).
- 14 Colomba Furio interview with Tina Gaeta, ILGWU business agent and price



- adjuster, New York City, 22 Nov. 1976; with Antonetta Lazzaro, executive board member and organizer, Local 89, Bronx, New York, 29 Mar. 1977; and with 'Mrs. L,' Ridgewood-Bushwick Senior Citizens' Center, Brooklyn, New York, 2 Nov. 1976. Reprinted in Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 449-50; 472-3; and 409-11.
- 15 In 1911, the Immigration Commission reported that 90% of the southern Italian women in New York City's garment trades had worked in lace-making, embroidery, and sewing in Italy. U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries*, Senate Document 633, 61st Congress, 1st Session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911), 376; Odencrantz reported in 1919 that of 295 Italian women in New York City's garment industry, 133 had worked for wages in Italy. *Italian Women in Industry*, 313-14, 38. For the period 1909-13, Donna Gabaccia found that 94% of Sicilian women living on Elizabeth Street on the Lower East Side worked in the garment industry, and most of them had worked as seamstresses or ladies' tailors in Italy. *Militants and Migrants: Rural Sicilians Become American Workers* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 133.
  - 16 Rudolph J. Vecoli, 'Pane e Giustizia,' *La Parola del Popolo* 26 (September-October 1976); Vecoli, "Primo Maggio" in the United States: An Invented Tradition of the Italian Anarchists,' in Andrea Panaccione, ed., *May Day Celebration, Quaderni della Fondazione G. Brodolini* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1988), 55-83; Vecoli, 'Italian Immigrants in the United States Labor Movement from 1880-1929,' in Bruno Bezza, ed., *Gli italiani fuori d'Italia, gli emigrati italiani nei movimenti operai dei paesi d'adozione, 1880-1940* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1983); Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants*; Gabaccia, 'Migration and Militarism among Italy's Laborers,' in Dirk Hoerder, Horst Rössler, Inge Blank, eds., *Roots of the Transplanted* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 245-67; Mario De Ciampis, 'Storia del Movimento Socialista Rivoluzionario Italiano,' *La Parola del Popolo, Cinquantesimo Anniversario, 1908-1958* (December 1958-January 1959): 136-63; George E. Pozzetta and Bruno Ramirez, eds., *The Italian Diaspora: Migration across the Globe* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1992); Gianfausto Rosoli, ed., *Un secolo di emigrazione italiana, 1766-1976* (Rome: Centro Studi Emigrazione, 1978); Zeffiro Ciuffoletti, 'Il movimento sindacale italiano e l'emigrazione dalle origini al fascismo,' and Emilio Franzina, 'L'emigrazione schedata: Lavoratori sovversivi all'estero e meccanismi di controllo poliziesco tra fine secolo e fascismo,' in Bezza, *Gli italiani fuori d'Italia*; Franco Andreucci and Tommaso Detti, *Il movimento operaio italiano, dizionario biografico, 1853-1943*, 6 vols. (Rome: Edizioni Riuniti, 1975-78); Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864-1892* (Princeton: Princeton

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- 17 Jole Calapso, *Donne Ribelli: Un secolo di lotte femminili in Sicilia* (Palermo: S.F. Flaccovio, 1980); Calapso, *Una donna intransigente: Vita di Maria Giudice* (Palermo: Sellerio Editore, 1996); Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants* (passim); Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Alle origini del movimento femminile in Italia, 1848-1892* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975); Bortolotti, *Femminismo e partiti politici in Italia, 1919-1926* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1978); Bortolotti, *Socialismo e questione femminile in Italia* (Milan: G. Mazzotta, 1974); Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Sul movimento politico delle donne, Scritti inediti*, ed. Annarita Buttafuoco (Rome: Cooperativa Utopia, 1987); Camilla Ravera, *Breve storia del movimento femminile in Italia* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1978); Jane Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance, 1943-1945* (Denver: Arden Press, 1997); Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women, Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Chiavola Birnbaum, *Liberazione della donna*; Claire LaVigna, 'Women in the Canadian and Italian Trade Union Movements at the Turn of the Century: A Comparison,' in Caroli et al., *The Italian Immigrant Woman*; Gentili Zappi, *If Eight Hours Seem Too Few*; Furio, *Immigrant Women and Industry*, 85-6, 57-62, 146, 153. See E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), 183; Francesco Renda, *I Fasci Siciliani, 1892-94* (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1977), 352; and Salvatore Francesco Romano, *Storia dei Fasci Siciliani* (Bari: Giuseppe Laterza e Figli, 1959), 228-30.
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- 29 U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage Earners* 2: *Men's Ready-Made Clothing*, 35, 221. See also U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports*, 26: *Immigrants in Cities*, 1: 20; and Mary Van Kleeck, *Artificial Flower Makers* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, Survey Associates, 1913).
- 30 Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*, 203, 351.
- 31 Cohen, *Workshop to Office*, 47-51; Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, 248-9; Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*, 468-9.
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- 35 'Fra I Tessitori, Lo Sciopero di Hackensack,' *Il Bolletino della Sera*, 17 Dec. 1909; Odencrantz, *Italian Women in Industry*, 41. See also Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, 244.
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  - 41 *Il Bollettino della Sera*, 2, 23, 24, 26, and 27 Nov. 1909; 4, 8, 9, 10, 14, and 17 Dec. 1909; 2 Feb. 1910; *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 25 Nov. 1909;
  - 42 Adriana Spadoni, 'The Italian Working Woman in New York,' *Collier's*, 23 Mar. 1912, 14. See also Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*, 490; and Furio, 'Immigrants and Industry.'
  - 43 *Il Bollettino della Sera*, 2 Nov. 1909; 4, 9, 10, 14, 17 Dec. 1909.
  - 44 *L'Era Nuova*, 17 Feb. 1912; 2 and 10 Mar. 1912; 10 and 17 May 1913; *Il Proletario*, 16 Feb. 1912. See also Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*, 350-3; Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 176-7; Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort*, 142-3, 154; Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 324-6.
  - 45 Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort*, 111-16.
  - 46 *Evening Sun*, 18, 22 and 29 May 1903. See also Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*, 215.
  - 47 For discussion of this literature see Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, 191-4.
  - 48 Spadoni, 'The Italian Working Woman in New York,' 14.
  - 49 'Sciopero generale di lavoratori in Camicette, 40,000 scioperanti,' *Il Proletario*, 3 Dec. 1909; 'Le Sartine, Noi e L'A.F.L.,' *Il Proletario*, 24 Dec. 1909.
  - 50 Quotes from WTUL leaders are reprinted in Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, 190-3. For ILGWU attitudes toward Italian women in this period see Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 99-104; Jean A. (Vincenza) Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union: The Search for an Elusive Activist,' in Pozzetta, *Pane e Lavoro*, 102; and Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*, 483-5.
  - 51 Cohen, *Workshop to Office*, 60-4; Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace,' 101. See also Colomba Furio interview with Gaeta, Lazzaro, and 'Mrs. D' in Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 453, 473, 397; Josephine Roche, 'The Italian Girl,' in *The Neglected Girl* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, Survey Associates, 1914), 95-8; and Odencrantz, *Italian Women in Industry*, 273. This

- was also the case in other cities. For example, Robert Park and Herbert Miller observed that in Chicago, Italian women travelled in groups on the streetcars to and from garment shops. In *Old World Traits Transplanted* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1921), 152.
- 52 Odencrantz, *Italian Women in Industry*, 43, 25.
- 53 Patrick Watson, *Fasanella's City: The Paintings of Ralph Fasanella with the Story of His Life and Art by Patrick Watson* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), 99; Paul S. D'Ambrosio, *Ralph Fasanella's America* (Cooperstown, NY: New York State Historical Association, 2001). See note 55 below.
- 54 Maria Ganz, *Rebels: Into Anarchy and Out Again* (New York, 1920), 73.
- 55 Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, 250. Ginevre Spagnoletti's son, Ralph Fasanella, worked as a steam-iron operator, among other jobs, before becoming an artist. His painting *Dress Shop* (1970) depicted the NYC factory where his mother worked as a buttonhole maker while he was growing up; to signify the women's worries, he placed newspaper headlines on the walls of the factory that stated, 'These women, lots of women, Italian women, Puerto Rican women, black women, Jewish women, sweating away ... did not go through their days in a state of narcosis, but carried the news of the day with them, and worried about their families in the context of current affairs.' Watson, *Fasanella's City*, 99–100.
- 56 Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*.
- 57 Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, 253–4.
- 58 One such story told of several Italian women finishers who grew impatient with a demanding forelady after she continually screamed at them to quicken their pace. When an older worker who 'could not stand the nagging any longer' got the 'courage to tell the forelady to "Shut Up,"' the forewoman, 'with one hand, snatched the garments from her and with the other gave her a good strong push and told her to "Get out of the shop."' In response, 'every worker walked out of the shop in a body, in protest against the action of the forelady and in defense of the abused finisher.' P. Di Neri, 'When Is the Next Meeting?' *The Message*, 15 Oct. 1915.
- 59 *L'Operaia*, 18 Apr. 1914.
- 60 Ramirez, 'Immigration, Ethnicity, and Political Militance,' 116. For instance, *Regeneración*, the newspaper of the Partido Liberal Mexicana, and one of the most important papers of the Mexican Revolution, included an Italian-language column, as well as graphics and cartoons by Ludovico Caminita, a prominent anarchist activist and organizer of workers' circles in New Jersey. See Salvatore Salerno, "Odio di Razza?" ("Race Hatred"): The Beginnings

- of Racial Discourse in the Italian American Anarchist Community,' paper presented at the American Italian Historical Association conference, New York City, 12–14 Nov. 1998.
- 61 Julia Blodgett interview with Antonino Capraro, 11 Sept. 1969, tapes 4, 6, and 7, Capraro Papers, IHRC; Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Dover Publications, [1931] 1970). See also Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants*, 139–41; Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*, chap. 9; Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, 259; Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace'; Vecoli, 'The Italian Immigrants in the United States Labor Movement,' 274–5; Michael Miller Topp, 'The Italian-American Left: Transnationalism and the Quest for Unity,' in Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, eds., *The Immigrant Left in the United States* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996); Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, 198; and De Ciampis, 'Storia del movimento'; Bernardo Vega, *Memorias de Bernardo Vega: Contribucion a la historia de la comunidad puertorriqueña en Nueva York*, ed. Cesar Andreu Iglesias (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Huracan, 1977), 115; Virginia Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Roberto P. Rodríguez-Morazzani, 'Linking a Fractured Past: The World of the Puerto Rican Old Left,' *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 7, 1 (1995); Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1998); Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure*; Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire*, 26–7; and Buhle, *Women and Socialism*, 298–9.
  - 62 Vega, *Memorias de Bernardo Vega*, 115; Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker*. Club Avanti 'supported education, sponsored lectures on peace, religion, and sexual and family questions, on women's emancipation, nationalism, imperialism, major immigrant strikes, the Mexican Revolution, the problems of political prisoners in Italy, and, more generally, current events.' Cited in Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants*, 139–41.
  - 63 For example, the intellectual Bellalma Forzato Spezia came to the Bronx; Concettina Cerantonio went to Newark. *L'Era Nuova*, 27 May 1911; 'Nostre Corrispondenze,' *Il Proletario*, 1 Dec. 1907. The Italian anarchist newspaper *L'Era Nuova* contains much information on women's participation in NYC workers' circles.
  - 64 Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace,' 101. See also 'Notes to interview questions dictated by Angela Bambace to Marian,' 18–20 Feb. 1975. My thanks to Philip Camponeschi, Angela's son, for sharing this and other documents with me. They are now included in the Bambace Papers at the IHRC. For more on the Bambace sisters' activism within these *circoli*, see Blodgett interview with Capraro, 11 Sept. 1969, tape 7, Capraro Papers, IHRC.



- 65 Blodgett interview with Capraro, 12 Sept. 1969, tape 5, Capraro Papers, IHRC; *Il Proletario*, 17 Feb. 1911; Rudolph J. Vecoli, 'Anthony Capraro and the Lawrence Strike of 1919,' in Pozzetta, *Pane e Lavoro*, 14-5.
- 66 See, e.g., 'Per Maria Barbera,' *La Questione Sociale*, 15 Aug. 1895; Club Femminile di Musica e di Canto, 'XI Anniversario della Festa della Frutta,' *La Questione Sociale*, 3 Sept. 1904; 'Una importantissima riunione,' *Cronaca Sovversiva*, 10 Feb. 1906; *Il Proletario*, 8 Nov. 1911; 6 Jan. 1911; Blodgett interview with Capraro, 11 Sept. 1969, tape 7, and 12 Sept. 1969, tape 2, Capraro Papers, IHRC; for other cities see Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, 54-6, 107-8; Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 107-11, 129, 139.
- 67 Maria Roda, 'Alle operaie,' *La Questione Sociale*, 15 Sept. 1897; Luigia Reville, 'Ai Rivoluzionarii, in nome del gruppo "L'azione femminile" di Parigi,' *La Questione Sociale*, 5 May 1900; 'I gruppi femminili di propaganda,' *La Questione Sociale*, 23 Nov. 1901; 'Le nostre compagne,' *La Questione Sociale*, 6 and 23 Nov. 1901; 14 Dec. 1901; 4 and 11 Jan. 1902; 5 Apr. 1902; Il Gruppo Anarchico Femminile, Paterson, 'Il Gruppo Anarchico femminile,' *La Questione Sociale*, 12 July 1902; Gruppo Emancipazione della Donna (GED), Paterson, 'Comunicati,' *La Questione Sociale*, 26 Jul. 1902; GED, 'Pubblicazione di Propaganda,' *La Questione Sociale*, 10 May 1902; GED, *La Questione Sociale*, 16 Aug. 1902. See also Carey, "La Questione Sociale," 292. For a more detailed discussion of these anarcho-socialist and feminist *gruppi* see my essay 'Donne Ribelli: Recovering the History of Italian Women's Radicalism in the United States,' and that of Salvatore Salerno, 'No God, No Master: Italian Anarchists and the Industrial Workers of the World,' forthcoming in Philip Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer, eds., *The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press).
- 68 Maria Roda, 'Alle operaie,' *La Questione Sociale*, 15 Sept. 1897. See also Salerno, 'No God, No Master.'
- 69 'Cronaca di Spring Valley, Il Gruppo Femminile' and Il Gruppo I Nuovi Viventi, Il Gruppo Femminile Luisa Michel, 'La questione della donna,' *L'Aurora*, 22 Dec. 1900; Gruppo Emancipazione della Donna, Paterson, 'Pubblicazione di Propaganda,' *La Questione Sociale*, 10 May 1902; Il Gruppo Anarchico Femminile, 'Il Gruppo Anarchico femminile,' *La Questione Sociale*, 12 July 1902; Gruppo Emancipazione della Donna, Paterson, 'Comunicati,' *La Questione Sociale*, 26 July 1902; GED, *La Questione Sociale*, 16 Aug. 1902; 'I gruppi femminili di propaganda,' *La Questione Sociale*, 23 Nov. 1901; 'Nostre Corrispondenze,' *Il Proletario*, 26 Nov. 1909. See also Gianna S. Panofsky, 'A View of Two Major Centers of Italian Anarchism in the United States: Spring Valley and Chicago, Illinois,' in Dominic Candeloro, Fred L.

Gardaphé and Paolo A. Giordano, eds., *Italian Ethnics: Their Languages, Literature, and Lives* (Staten Island: American Italian Historical Association, 1990), 275–6; and Caroline Waldron Merithew's essay on 'anarchist motherhood' in chapter 7 of this volume.

- 70 The quotation is from 'Cronaca di Spring Valley, Il Gruppo Femminile,' *L'Aurora*, 22 Dec. 1900. On the activities, see 'I gruppi femminili di propaganda,' *La Questione Sociale*, 23 Nov. 1901; Il Gruppo I Nuovi Viventi, Il Gruppo Femminile Luisa Michel, 'La questione della donna,' and 'Cronaca di Spring Valley, Il Gruppo Femminile,' *L'Aurora*, 22 Dec. 1900. See also the regular postings under 'Le nostre compagne' in *La Questione Sociale*, 6 and 14 Nov. 1901; 23 Dec. 1901; 4 and 11 Jan. 1902, and 5 Apr. 1902; Luigia Reville, 'Ai Rivoluzionarii, in nome del gruppo "L'azione femminile" di Parigi,' *La Questione Sociale*, 5 May 1900; Il Gruppo Anarchico Femminile, Paterson, 'Il Gruppo Anarchico femminile,' *La Questione Sociale*, 12 July 1902; Gruppo Emancipazione della Donna, Paterson, 'Comunicati,' *La Questione Sociale*, 26 July 1902; GED, 'Pubblicazione di Propaganda,' *La Questione Sociale*, 10 May 1902; GED, *La Questione Sociale*, 16 Aug. 1902; and 'Movimento Sociale, Dagli Stati Uniti, Paterson, N.J.,' *La Questione Sociale*, 15 Nov. 1902. See also Carey, "La Questione Sociale," 292; Sione, 'Industrial Work, Militancy, and Migrations,' 169; and Waldron Merithew's essay in this volume.
- 71 Alba, 'Eguali diritti,' *La Questione Sociale*, 5 Oct. 1901. See also 'La famiglia, la donna,' *La Questione Sociale*, 6 Nov. 1901.
- 72 Roda, 'Alle operaie.' For other essays by women that defend their commitment to the movement see Alba, 'Eguali diritti,' *La Questione Sociale*, 15 Oct. 1901; Caterina Sebastiani, 'L'Ultima Parola,' *La Questione Sociale*, 8 Dec. 1906; 'I gruppi femminili di propaganda,' *La Questione Sociale*, 23 Nov. 1901; Una Sartina, 'Ma tu sei una donna!' *La Questione Sociale*, 24 Aug. 1901.
- 73 Salerno, 'No God, No Master.' For strike activity among Paterson's silk workers after the formation of the IWW locals see Goldberg, *A Tale of Three Cities*; Huber Tripp, *The IWW and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913*; Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*; Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*; Swanton, ed., *Silk City*; Golin, 'Defeat Becomes Disaster'; Osborne, 'Paterson: Immigrant Strikers and the War of 1913'; Osborne, 'Italian Immigrants and the Working Class in Paterson'; and Dodyk, 'Winders, Wapers, and Girls on the Loom.'
- 74 Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants*, 140; Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*; Cartosio, 'Gli emigrati italiani e l'Industrial Workers of the World'; Ramirez, 'Immigration, Ethnicity, and Political Militance.'
- 75 Ramirez, 'Immigration, Ethnicity, and Political Militance,' 128.

- 76 Salerno, 'No God, No Master' and 'Odio di Razza.' See also George Carey, 'The Vessel, the Deed, and the Idea: Anarchists in Paterson, 1895-1908,' *Antipode* 10-11 (1979); Rudolph Vecoli, 'Free Country': The American Republic Viewed by the Italian Left, 1880-1920,' in Marianne Debouzy, ed. *In the Shadow of the Statue of Liberty: Immigrants, Workers and Citizens in the American Republic* (Saint Denis, France: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1988).
- 77 *Il Proletario*, 16 and 22 July 1910. See also Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 156-7, 242-6; and Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*, 498-9.
- 78 Salerno, *Red November, Black November*, 48-9, 58, 89; Salerno, 'No God, No Master'; Cartosio, 'Gli emigrati italiani e l'Industrial Workers of the World'; Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 156-7, 242-6; Charles Zappia, 'Unionism and the Italian American Worker: A History of the New York City "Italian Local" in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, 1900-1933' (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1991); Zappia, 'Unionism and the Italian American Worker: The Politics of Anti-Communism in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union,' in Rocco Caporale, ed., *Italian Americans through the Generations* (Staten Island: American Italian Historical Association, 1986); De Ciampis, 'Storia del Movimento Socialista Rivoluzionario Italiano,' 154; Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants*, 117, 140-2; Rudolph J. Vecoli, 'The Making and Unmaking of an Italian-American Working Class, 1915-1945,' paper presented at the European Social Science History Conference, Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands, 9-11 May 1996, 25; Vecoli, 'The Italian Immigrants in the United States Labor Movement'; Vecoli, 'Italian American Workers, 1880-1920: Padrone Slaves or Primitive Rebels?' in Silvio Tomasi, ed., *Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1977), 28-9; Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*, 479-91; Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 67; Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire*, 76; Collomp and Debouzy, 'European Migrants and the U.S. Labor Movement,' 363-73; Ramirez, 'Immigration, Ethnicity, and Political Militance.'
- 79 'Cloak Makers Vote to Strike,' *New York Call*, 5 July 1910. See also Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 66; Furio, 'The Cultural Background of the Italian Immigrant Woman,' 93; Furio, 'Immigrant Woman and Industry,' 154; Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*, 364-5.
- 80 'Lo Sciopero dei Sarti,' *L'Araldo* (21 July 1910). See also Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 154-6, 162. Unfortunately, we know very little about women's participation in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America at this time, an organization that was founded in the aftermath of the clothing workers' uprisings in the 1910s, and drew the support of Italian immigrant

- women in New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Rochester, and other cities.
- 81 Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire*, 63.
  - 82 Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*, 495.
  - 83 Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 121.
  - 84 Ramirez, 'Immigration, Ethnicity, and Political Militance,' 130, 139; Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*; Vecoli, 'The Making and Unmaking'; David Montgomery, 'The "New Unionism" and the Transformation of Workers' Consciousness in America, 1909-1922,' *Journal of Social History* 7, 4 (Summer 1974). Between 1900 and 1910 the numbers of Italians in the United States tripled.
  - 85 Angela Bambace, 'Notes to interview questions dictated by Angela Bambace to Marion,' 18-20 Feb. 1975, Bambace Papers, IHRC; *L'Operaia*, 13 Sept. 1913; 4 Apr. 1914; 13 Aug. 1914; 3 Sept. 1914; 17, 24, and 31 Oct. 1914; 2 Jan. 1915; 27 Feb. 1915; Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 192, 196, 251-2; Furio, 'The Cultural Background of the Italian Immigrant Woman,' 96.
  - 86 Colomba Furio interview with Tina Gaeta, ILGWU business agent and price adjuster, New York City, 22 Nov. 1976; repr. in Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 456.
  - 87 Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace,' 103.
  - 88 Watson, *Fasanelle's City*, 137.
  - 89 For examples of scholars who have demonstrated the importance of family to working-class resistance and struggle see Donna Gabaccia, 'Kinship, Culture, and Migration: A Sicilian Example,' *Journal of American Ethnic History* (Spring 1984): 39-53; Smith, 'Our Own Kind'; Elsa Barkley Brown, 'Mothers of Mind,' *Sage* 6 (Summer 1989); Kelley, "We Are Not What We Seem"; Alice Kessler-Harris, 'Treating the Male as "Other": Redefining the Parameters of Labor History,' *Labor History* 34 (Spring-Summer 1993): 190-204; and Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort*.
  - 90 Ramirez, 'Immigration, Ethnicity, and Political Militance,' 134. See also Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*, 320-66; Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; Topp, 'The Italian-American Left,' 131; and Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America*, 93-5.
  - 91 Una Compagna, 'Interessi Femminili,' *Lotta di Classe*, 27 Dec. 1912; *Lotta di Classe*, 13 Apr. 1912; *L'Operaia*, 13 Sept. 1913; 4, 18 and 23 Apr. 1914; 13 Aug. 1914; 3 Sept. 1914; 17, 24, and 31 Oct. 1914; 2 Jan. 1915; 27 Feb. 1915; and 24 Apr. 1915; Bambace, 'Notes to interview questions dictated by Angela Bambace to Marion'; Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*.
  - 92 Circulation figures are estimated in *The Message*, 25 Dec. 1914.

- 93 *L'Operaia*, 4 July 1914; 24 Apr. 1915.
- 94 Clara Zara, 'Alle Krumire della Liptzin & Co.,' *L'Operaia*, 24 Oct. 1914. See also Bambace, 'Notes to interview questions'; *L'Operaia*, 13 Sept. 1913; 4 Apr. 1914; 4 July 1914; 8 and 13 Aug. 1914; 3 Sept. 1914; 17, 24, and 31 Oct. 1914; 28 Nov. 1914; 2 Jan. 1915; 27 Feb. 1915; 24 Apr. 1915); *Lotta di Classe*, 27 Dec. 1912; 25 Feb. 1912; 13 and 27 Apr. 1912; Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry.'
- 95 Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*; Zappia, 'Unionism and the Italian American Worker.'
- 96 There were two Italian-language locals in the ILGWU: The Italian Cloak, Suit, and Skirt Makers' Union Local 48 received its first charter in 1916, and the Italian Dressmakers' Local 89 was chartered in 1919. Local 48-ILGWU, '48' *Libro Ricordo del XXV Anniversario della Unione dei Cloakmakers Italiani* (New York: International Newspaper Printing Co., 1941), 25-30; John S. Crawford, *Luigi Antonini* (New York: Educational Dept. of Italian Dressmakers' Union, 1950); Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; Furio, 'The Cultural Background'; Zappia, 'Unionism and the Italian American Worker'; Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*; Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*, 526; Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*, 366.
- 97 Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; Furio, 'The Cultural Background of the Italian Immigrant Woman,' 94-5. See also Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace,' 101-2; Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*, 526; on Italians in the 1919 strike wave in the steel, coal, textile, and clothing industries, Vecoli, 'The Making and Unmaking,' 10; and Vecoli, 'Anthony Capraro and the Lawrence Strike of 1919.'
- 98 This quote, taken from Theresa Malkiel, 'Striking for the Right to Live,' *The Coming Nation* 1, 124 (25 Jan. 1913), is reprinted in Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 188.
- 99 Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 251; Zappia, 'Unionism and the Italian American Worker'; Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*, 526; Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace,' 101-2. See also 'Amministrazione dell'Unione delle Sartine Italiane No. 89, ILGWU,' *Guistizia*, 6 Dec. 1919, 2.
- 100 Ramirez, 'Immigration, Ethnicity, and Political Militance,' 116.
- 101 *Il Proletario*, 31 Mar. 1911.
- 102 P. Di Neri, 'When Is the Next Meeting?' *The Message*, 15 Oct. 1915.
- 103 *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 1 Jan. 1913.
- 104 Ramirez, 'Immigration, Ethnicity, and Political Militance,' 137. See also Fenton, *Immigrants and Unions*; Vecoli, 'The Making and Unmaking'; Montgomery, 'The "New Unionism"'; Zappia, 'Unionism and the Italian American Worker.'
- 105 The only book-length studies are still unpublished dissertations: Furio,

- 'Immigrant Women and Industry' and Zappia, 'Unionism and the Italian American Worker.'
- 106 Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), 138, 4.
- 107 Fiorello B. Ventresco, 'Crises and Unity: The Italian Radicals in America in the 1920s,' *Ethnic Forum* 15, 1-2 (1995): 12-34; Rudolph J. Vecoli, 'The Making and Un-Making of an Italian Working Class in the United States, 1915-1945,' keynote address, 'The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism,' New York City, 14 May 1997; Vecoli, 'Ethnicity, Internationalism, and Worker Protectionism'; Vecoli, "Free Country"; Vezzosi, 'Class, Ethnicity, and Acculturation'; Vezzosi, *Il socialismo indifferente*; Cartosio, 'Gli emigrati italiani e l'Industrial Workers of the World'; Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti*; Topp, 'The Italian-American Left,' 135.
- 108 Vecoli, 'The Making and Un-Making of an Italian Working Class.' Also important is Vecoli's argument that Italian-American radicals were not only targeted by government agencies, but also by their own *prominenti*, whose 'patriotic fever' was 'vented against the anti-war *sotversivi*.' See Vecoli, 'Ethnicity, Internationalism, and Worker Protectionism,' 14.
- 109 Salerno, 'Odio di Razza?'
- 110 Vecoli, 'The Making and Un-Making'; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 264-330.
- 111 Elisabetta Vezzosi has argued, for example, that after the war, Italian workers turned to strategies that embraced ethnic nationalism, since 'life in the United States fostered the development of ethnic identities and solidarities, even among radical internationalists.' See her 'Radical Ethnic Brokers: Immigrant Socialist Leaders in the United States between Ethnic Community and the Larger Society,' in *Italian Workers of the World: Labor Migration and the Formation of Multiethnic States* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001). See also Ramirez, 'Immigration, Ethnicity, and Political Militance' and Vecoli, 'The Making and Un-Making.'
- 112 Vezzosi, 'Radical Ethnic Brokers.'
- 113 Vecoli, 'The Making and Un-Making.'
- 114 Vezzosi, 'Radical Ethnic Brokers.'
- 115 Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 267.
- 116 Kessler Harris, 'Problems of Coalition-Building,' 133. See also Ruth R. Prago interview with Albina Delfino, 9 Jan. 1981, 'Oral History of the American Left,' Wagner Archives, Tamiment Collection, New York University; Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace'; Zappia, 'Unionism and the Italian American Worker'; David Gurowsky, 'Factional Disputes within the ILGWU,

- 1919–1928' (PhD diss., State University of New York, Binghamton, 1978); and Green, *Ready-to-Wear, Ready-to-Work*.
- 117 Zappia, 'Unionism and the Italian American Worker.'
  - 118 Ramírez, 'Immigration, Ethnicity, and Political Militance,' 139.
  - 119 Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace'; Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; Ruth R. Prago interview with Albina Delfino.
  - 120 Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry.'
  - 121 Vecoli, 'The Making and Unmaking,' 19; Vecoli, 'Italian Immigrants in the United States Labor Movement'; John P. Diggins, 'The Italo-American Anti-Fascist Opposition,' *Journal of American History* 54, 3 (December 1967): 582; Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 112; Philip V. Cannistraro, 'Luigi Antonini and the Italian Anti-Fascist Movement in the United States, 1940–1943,' *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21 (Fall 1995); Cannistraro, 'Fascism and Italian-Americans,' in S.M. Tomasi, ed., *Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1977); Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy: Italian Americans and Fascism, 1921–1929* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Bordighera, 1999); Zappia, 'Unionism and the Italian American Worker'; Gaetano Salvemini, *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States, 1940–1943* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1977); Fiorello B. Ventresco, 'Italian-Americans and the Ethiopian Crisis,' *Italian Americana* 6, 1 (Fall/Winter 1980); Nadia Venturini, *Neri e Italiani ad Harlem: Gli anni Trenta e la guerra d'Etiopia* (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1990); Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace.' For a description of Italian garment workers' support for Fascism see Vanni B. Montana, *Amarostico: Testimonianze euro-americane* (Lovorno: V. Bastogi, 1976).
  - 122 Colomba Furio interview with Diane Romanik, ILGWU officer and niece of organizer Margaret di Maggio, New York City, 1 Apr. 1977, repr. in Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 417–26.
  - 123 For information on Italian-American women's mass donation of wedding rings to Mussolini's regime, see *New York Times*, 8 Jan. 1936, 8; 25 Apr. 1936, 19; 25 May 1936, 21. My gratitude to my brother, Tom Guglielmo, for helping me to locate these sources. See also Ventresco, 'Italian-Americans and the Ethiopian Crisis,' 18–19. For evidence of anti-Fascist rallies among garment workers, see the photographs in the Capraro Papers, IHRC. For discussion of d'Andrea, see Robert Ventresca and Franca Iacovetta, chapter 9 of this collection.
  - 124 Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace,' 104–7; Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; Romualdi, 'Storia della Locale 89'; Philip Camponeschi, 'Speech prepared for Oscar,' 15 Nov. 1908, Bambace Papers, IHRC.

- 125 *New York Times*, 16 and 17 Aug. 1933; Fannia M. Cohn, 'The Uprising of the Sixty Thousand, The General Strike of the Dressmakers' Union,' *Justice*, 1 Sept. 1933; *Daily Worker*, 17, 18, and 19 Aug. 1933; *Il Progresso* 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 Aug. 1933). See also materials on the 1933 strike in box 28, file 5, Papers of Charles Zimmerman and in box 69, file 2, Papers of David Dubinsky, ILGWU Archives, Labor-Management Documentation Center, Cornell University (hereafter LMDC). See also Max Danish, *The World of David Dubinsky* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1957), 77; Gus Tyler, 'Look for the Union Label': *A History of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1995); Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 290; Irving Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1960), 37; Sharon Strom, 'Challenging "Woman's Place": Feminism, The Left, and Industrial Unionism in the 1930s,' *Feminist Studies* 9 (Summer 1983).
- 126 *New York Times*, 16 Aug. 1933; *Daily Worker*, 17, 18, and 19 Aug. 1933; *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 18 and 19 Aug. 1933. During the strike thousands of handbills were distributed by the strikers that read, 'We are calling this strike for the purpose of establishing humane and orderly working conditions in our great industry. The present situation of the dressmakers is unbearable. This general strike is being called to make an end to the misery and chaos in the dress shop, to introduce union concerns in the entire industry, and to enable the dressmakers to work ... and live like human beings.' *New York Times*, 17 Aug. 1933.
- 127 From the Zimmerman Papers, ILGWU Archives, LMDC: 'Joint Board Dress and Waistmakers Union, General Strike (1933) Hall Committee Assignments,' box 45, file 1; 'Tentative Instructions and Information for Hall Chairmen, Secretaries, and Deputies (1932),' box 45, file 1; Letter from Luigi Antonini to Charles Zimmerman, 8 Aug. 1933, box 28, file 5; 'Assignments, Strike 1933,' box 28, file 5; 'Information and Directory of the General Strike Committee, Joint Board Dress and Waistmakers' Union, General Strike, August, 1933,' box 28, file 5; 'Women Speakers List, Strike Meetings, 1932,' box 8, file 15, Papers of the Research Dept. *Giustizia*, January 1932, April-May 1932; August 1932. See also Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; and Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace.'
- 128 Serafino Romualdi, 'Storia della Locale 89,' in *Local 89 Fifteenth Anniversary Commemoration Pamphlet* (1934).
- 129 Serafino Romualdi made a direct connection between *l'alba radiosa* and the strike, the collective power of Italian workers, and state support of the union through Franklin Delano Roosevelt's National Industrial Recovery Act (inaugurated in June 1933); Romualdi, 'Storia della Locale 89.' For



similar sentiments see the speech by Antonino Crivello at the fourth anniversary of the 1933 Strike, ILGWU Local 144, Newark, NJ (1937), box 1, file 1, Papers of Antonino Crivello, IHRC; 'Compagne e Compagni della Local 89!' address by John Gelo, Ratification Meeting, Madison Square Garden, 2 Apr. 1937, box 15, file 8, Antonini Papers, ILGWU Archives, LMD; Local 48-ILGWU, *Libro Ricordo*; 'Il Sindicato dell'Abbigliamento Femminile-ILGWU,' *La Parola del Popolo*, 50th Anniversary Publication, 1908-1958, 195; Local 89, ILGWU, *We the Italian Dressmakers Speak* (New York, 1944); *Giustizia*, October 1933. See also Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; Zappia, 'Unionism and the Italian American Worker'; Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years*, 34, 87-9; and Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*.

- 130 Letter from Frank Liberti to David Dubinsky (1962), Liberti Papers, Botto House National Landmark, Haledon, NJ.
- 131 *Giustizia*, April 1934. The NIRA, which was passed in the first 100 days of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration, sought to stimulate production and competition in business by establishing the National Recovery Administration, which set industrial codes to regulate prices, production, and trade practices.
- 132 At no point during the 1930s and 1940s were women proportionally represented in the hierarchy of their locals. In 1934, 41 women and 79 men held positions within the administration of Local 89. In 1944 women held 75 of the offices, while men held close to 125. Only occasionally were Italian women permitted entrance into the male-dominated positions of price adjuster, district manager, and business agent in Local 89. The business agent and district manager were particularly important since they increasingly set the priorities of the local by controlling union meetings. Price adjusters also held a certain degree of prestige since they had their own offices, and were in charge of negotiating prices with manufacturers. They also assisted workers with their price complaints. In 1934 there were no women district managers and women only held two of the twenty-one business agent positions. In 1944 women still held only four of the thirty-one business agent positions. See 'Administration of Local 89, 1934' in *Local 89 Fifteenth Anniversary Commemoration Pamphlet* (1934), and 'Administration of Local 89, 1944-46' in ILGWU, *Jubilee, 1919-1944* (1944). See also 'New York: Our City-Our Union, 24th Convention of the ILGWU, Fortieth Anniversary' (1940), box 1, Crivello Papers, IHRC. See also Colomba Furio interviews with Tina Catania, Grace de Luise, and Tina Gaeta reprinted in Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 427-35, 436-45, 446-57; Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace'; and Green, *Ready-to-Wear, Ready-to-Work*.

- 133 Zappia, 'Unionism and the Italian American Worker,' 87.
- 134 *Giustizia*, October 1933, November 1933, December 1933, February 1934, March 1934, and April 1934; ILGWU, 'Administration of Local 89,' *Commemorative Pamphlet, Local 89, XV Anniversary of the Formation of the Italian Dressmakers' Local 89* (New York: ILGWU, 1934); Romualdi, 'Storia della Local 89'; Local 89, *Jubilee, 1914-1944*. See also Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 293.
- 135 Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry.'
- 136 Colomba Furio interview with Diane Romanik, ILGWU officer and niece of organizer Margaret di Maggio, New York City, 1 Apr. 1977; repr. in Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 425.
- 137 Romualdi, 'Storia della Locale 89,' 63.
- 138 Furio interview with Diane Romanik; repr. in Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry,' 423.
- 139 Letter from Maria Rosaria Cimato to Luigi Antonini, 9 June 1939, box 16, file 6; Letter from Lucia De Stefano to Luigi Antonini, 9 Feb. 1940, box 15, file 9; Letter from Lina Richeri to Luigi Antonini, 19 Mar. 1942, box 16, file 7; Letter from Lucia Romualdi Lupia to Luigi Antonini, 18 Aug. 1942, box 16, file 7. All letters are from Antonini Papers, ILGWU Archives, LMD. Quotation is from Ruth R. Prago interview with Albina Delfino. See also Furio, 'Immigrant Women and Industry'; Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*; and Scarpaci, 'Angela Bambace.'
- 140 For an in-depth study of gender and the iconography of labour in the 1930s, see Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
- 141 Ortiz, 'En la aguja y el pedal eché la hiel'; Robert Laurentz, 'Racial/Ethnic Conflict in the New York City Garment Industry, 1933-1980' (PhD diss., State University of New York, Binghamton, 1980); Will Herberg, 'The Old-Timers and the Newcomers: Ethnic Group Relations in a Needle Trades' Union,' *Journal of Social Issues*, Summer 1953; Roy B. Helfgott, 'Puerto Rican Integration in the Skirt Industry in New York City,' in New School for Social Research, ed., *Discrimination and Low Incomes: Social and Economic Discrimination against Minority Groups in Relation to Low Incomes in New York State* (New York: Studies of New York State Commission against Discrimination, 1959); Herbert Hill, 'Guardians of the Sweatshops: The Trade Unions, Racism, and the Garment Industry,' in Adalberto López and James Petras, eds., *Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans: Studies in History and Society* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974); Labor Subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and Labor, testimony of Herbert Hill, 17 August

- 1962, 88th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 109, 2 (31 Jan. 1962), 1569–72; Elaine Gail Wrong, *The Negro in the Apparel Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974); Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*.
- 142 Romualdi, 'Storia della Locale 89'; speech given by Antonino Crivello, organizer and district manager for Italian Dressmakers' Local 89 at 4th anniversary of 1933 strike, ILGWU Local 144, Newark (1937), box 1, file 1, Crivello Papers, IHRC. 'We are all minorities' is from Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*, 379. The 'culture of unity' discourse was not confined to Italian-American workers; see Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and 'A Symposium on *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago: 1919–1939*,' *Labor History* 32 (Fall 1991): 562–96.
- 143 In order to maintain power in the union, Jewish and Italian leaders in the ILGWU established exclusionary electoral processes that prevented other groups from occupying important decision-making positions. The eligibility rules for candidates for president, secretary-treasurer, or membership on the general executive board were the strictest among all the labor unions in the nation. This severely limited the number of challengers, especially among the newcomers to the union. In addition, since political groups or caucuses were not allowed to convene until three months before the annual convention, it was difficult for contending candidates to meet with the rank and file to present their platforms. Those in office, however, could meet with the members as often as they wished. Ortiz, 'En la aguja y el pedal eché la hiel'; Herbert Hill, 'Guardians of the Sweatshops'; Laurentz, 'Racial/Ethnic Conflict'; Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*.
- 144 Ortiz, 'En la aguja y el pedal eché la hiel,' 58.
- 145 For an elaboration on this positioning in another context see Robert Orsi, 'The Religious Boundaries of an Inbetween People: Street Feste and the Problem of the Dark-Skinned "Other" in Italian Harlem, 1920–1990,' *American Quarterly* 44 (September 1992).
- 146 Letter from Está Pingaro to Vito Marcantonio, 5 Oct. 1941, box 67, file 6, Papers of Vito Marcantonio, New York Public Library (NYPL); Letter from John W. Sutter to Vito Marcantonio, 24 Oct. 1938, box 3, file 3, Papers of Vito Marcantonio, NYPL; Paul Buhle interview with Vito Magli, 15 Mar. 1983, 'Oral History of the American Left,' Wagner Archives, Tamiment Collection, New York University. See also in the Papers of the International Workers' Order, LMDC: Letter from Natalina Arcangeli to Constantino Lippa, 16 Aug. 1950, box 10, file 14; Letter from Constantino Lippa to 'Sorella Geraci,' 18 Apr. 1950, box 10, file 14; Letter from Constantino

- Lippa to Salvatore Geraci, 22 Aug. 1950, box 10, file 14; 'Conferenza dei Delegati Sezione Italiana alla Quarta Convenzione Nazionale, 28-9 Apr. 1938,' box 10, file 14. For evidence of *circoli* see 'Comunicazioni: New York, NY,' *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*, 26 and 30 Apr. 1932. See also Guglielmo, 'Donne Ribelli,' forthcoming in Cannistraro and Meyer, *The Lost World*; Keeran, 'The Italian Section of the International Workers' Order'; Meyer, *Vito Marcantonio*; and Venturini, *Neri e Italiani*.
- 147 Jennifer Guglielmo, 'Italian American Women's Dialogue on Race in Labor and Neighborhood Coalition Movements in New York City, 1930-1945,' paper presented at American Italian Historical Association, 12-14 Nov. 1998, New York City.
- 148 Paul Buhle interview with Vito Magli.
- 149 Orsi, 'The Religious Boundaries,' 317.
- 150 Tom Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
- 151 For examples of this see the recollections of Vito Magli in his interview with Paul Buhle (15 Mar. 1983) and the Ruth R. Prago interview with Albina Delfino (9 Jan. 1981), in 'Oral History of the American Left,' Wagner Archives, Tamiment Collection, New York University; Angela Bambace, 'Notes re Civil Rights Meeting, July 9, 1963,' Bambace Papers, IHRC; Bambace, 'Radio Address, WBMD' on racism of Governor Wallace, (10 May 1964), Bambace Papers, IHRC; and 'Statement by Mrs. Angela Bambace' (n.d.), Bambace Papers, IHRC. See also Gerald Meyer, 'Italian Americans and the American Communist Party: Notes on a History' and Keeran, 'The Italian Section of the International Workers Order,' papers presented at 'The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism: Labor, Politics, and Culture' conference, City University of New York, New York City, 14-15 May 1997; and Guglielmo, 'Italian American Women's Dialogue on Race.'
- 152 There are many scholars who have provided theoretical models for such work, including: Elsa Barkley Brown, 'Polyrhythms and Improvisation: Lessons for Women's History,' *History Workshop Journal* 31 (Spring 1991); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, 'African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race,' *Signs* 17, 2 (1992): 251-74; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, 'Racial Ethnic Women's Labor: The Intersection of Race, Gender, and Class Oppression,' *Review of Radical Political Economies* 17, 3 (Fall 1985): 86-108; and Frank, 'White Working-Class Women.'