And They Came to Chicago: The Italian American Legacy

Don Fiore: My father got on the boat and wound up here in Chicago. I said Dad did you regret that? He said, 'I regretted it 15 minutes after the boat was out.

Lida Allegrini: My dad met us at the station and having not ever seen my dad, I didn't take to him right off the bat.'

Emil Bertolini: So I am sitting there in this classroom, and I don't understand anything. How awful that is not even being able to communicate with anyone and just take up space.

Dennis Farina: My mother and father when they really didn't want us to know anything, they would speak a Pidgin Italian. Man, I don't know what was going on.

Tom Brindisi: You knew where your neighborhood began and ended. There were certain streets you didn't cross.

Fred Gardaphé: I went to my grandfather's hometown. I began to get so emotional. I started crying.

Gloria Nardini: My father was born to be American. He took to the whole thing like a duck to water.

Act I - A New Beginning

NARRATOR: No other American city of the late nineteenth century showed the explosive ambition of Chicago. Daredevil vision had transformed swampland along Lake Michigan's shores into a modern metropolis. Not even the Great Fire could tame its drive. Less than a decade after disaster, the city rose from the ashes – more sure of itself and bolder than before. That constant sense of renewal brought people from everywhere, ready to gamble on a new beginning.

Dominic Candeloro: Chicago was the fastest growing city in the United States and it remained so for a long, long time. Chicago as a railroad center meant that factories were growing, and you had to build the railroads and you had to build the factories and you had to staff the factories. The factories needed unskilled labor. So Italians came in relatively large numbers after 1880.

NARRATOR: Some Northern Italians and Sicilians were already here. They had flourishing businesses restaurants and barbershops, saloons and fruit markets. Genovese businessmen built the Assumption Church just across the river from the downtown business district.

Dominic Candeloro: The first Italians who came, came in the 1850's. They were Genoese. They weren't your ordinary working men. They were business people. They were sometimes the younger sons of successful traders or maybe they had relatives in other cities and they were the Chicago representatives in their families.

Dominic Pacyga: The economy in the 19th century is a modern, dynamic, flowing economy, and as it flows it takes people with it, brings people to new experiences. They go from Sicily, to New York, to Chicago, to Brazil. and then they end up back in Sicily. And of course they bring new ideas, too. I mean, ideas about business, ideas about religion, ideas about democracy, or not.

NARRATOR: These globetrotters brought ideas back to an Italy that had become a nation only two decades earlier. Unification exposed how deeply divided the country still was.

Dominic Candeloro: People were very loyal to the hometown. Their ancestors had been there for hundreds and hundreds of years. But there was a class structure. There was no opportunity to make a living.

Rudy Vecoli: The unification of Italy had not brought prosperity to the agricultural population. This was reflected in the taxation system which rested heavily on the peasants, that if a peasant owned a donkey, that was taxed. If a signore owned a horse, it was not taxed.

Dominic Candeloro: So how much can you love a town that doesn't give you a place to, to live?

NARRATOR: These conditions triggered one of the greatest migrations in history. One third of Italy's population would eventually leave. Most would never return.

NARRATOR: Ellis Island, New York. This was the principal receiving station for passenger ships arriving from Europe.

Dominic Pacyga: If you could imagine this huge room just filled to the max with immigrants and various kinds of immigration officers. This Babylon of voices, people screaming in Italian and Hungarian, Lithuanian, Polish, all these people getting pushed through the line. How much money do you have? Do you have someone to live with? Where are you going?

Violet Valiani Chisholm: After Ellis Island my family was asked where they were going which was Chicago and a big tag was put on their clothing and they were put on a train for Chicago. My grandmother did not like what she saw from the train. She said, 'I can't believe we are leaving our beautiful Tuscany, our beautiful Italy. This country doesn't look very beautiful.'

Dominic Pacyga: The long trip to Chicago by railroad was very much I think a trying experience. And on the railroad, they were third-class passengers also. Of course stockyards were booming at this time. So if there was a big run at the stockyards and a lot of cattle were coming, they held the immigrants trains in Pennsylvania and Ohio until all the livestock trains passed. So your cousin could be waiting for you at the station. You were supposed to arrive at 3 o'clock that afternoon. You're not there. He goes home.

NARRATOR: As more Italians arrived, they began forming distinct enclaves in neighborhoods first settled by earlier immigrants.

Dominic Pacyga: In a big city like Chicago, you might have an Italian community on 26th Street in Bridgeport. You might have an Italian community on Ohio Street. You might have an Italian community on Taylor Street. This wasn't like moving into some little village. This was moving into a mass metropolis.

NARRATOR: First stop for many arrivals was Dearborn Station, the main railway hub in the South Loop.

Dominic Pacyga: This was a very notorious district, to say the least. This was the red-light district. And it was the district where a small Italian community began to develop as they moved to the West Side.

NARRATOR: Vice ruled the Levee district. An immigrant just arriving from Calabria or Sicily was easy prey.

Dominic Candeloro: There were a lot of sharp operators tricking them out of the little money they had. It could be on the level of someone at the train station preying on the folks who didn't know where they were going.

NARRATOR: Some of these predators were smooth-talking labor agents or padroni savvy in the ways of the Americano.

Dominic Candeloro: Sometimes they were trying to get them to sign on for rotten jobs and, 'We have a good job in a coal mine for you. Just sign this paper and get on the train.' A lot of times they were crooks. And a lot of times they were useful. It could be like a guy who owns the bar-room and maybe he's got some connections a railroad foreman or some factory that needs workers.

NARRATOR: The padrone system faded out as family networks grew.

Dominic Pacyga: You sent for your future wife, you sent for your brother, you sent for your own for your mother. People would bring their own families, bring their cousins, bring their neighbors to live together in what we call chain migration.

Sam Ciambrone: Some paesani came from Ohio, settled here, got a job. And that's the way it was. They'd say to the boss, 'I got a cousin who's a good worker.' 'Send him over.' And they hired him.

Dominic Pacyga: They tended to locate among their own paesani, people from their own group: the Calabresi in one place, the Sicilians in another, the Neopolitans in another. And the Northern Italians of course stayed away from the Southern Italians. So there's this sort of division within the Italian American community.

NARRATOR: Insular, at times impenetrable to the outsider, divisions within these Italian neighborhoods had their origins in the homeland.

Rudy Vecoli: The campanile is the bell tower so it was said that their sense of belonging and identity was only within earshot of that campanile. And anyone beyond that was a forestiere, a stranger.

Dominic Candeloro: They married, intermarried everybody's a cousin, they probably share 99 percent of the same DNA. A mixed marriage in some families was an Italian person marrying another person from a town ten miles away. There's all sorts of sayings, 'if you are acquiring cows and wives, it's better if you get one from your own town.'

NARRATOR: Italians soon dominated the multi-ethnic neighborhood on the Near West Side. The area became known as Taylor Street. Some of the city's worst housing was here, packed into 12 square blocks. Dark courtyards and rickety staircases were places to work, play and socialize.

Dominic Pacyga: Living conditions were very crowded. They tended to live close to industrial sites. They were small apartments their houses. They tended to be four-room apartments often without indoor plumbing until after World War One.

NARRATOR: Life on the inner-city streets was harsh. Women and children who had grown up in the countryside spent their days picking through garbage dumps for scrap metal and food. Their fathers, husbands and sons were for the most part unskilled laborers, railroad and construction workers.

Dominic Pacyga: A lot of the Italians worked outdoors. Many of them lived in the central city and then traveled to outlying districts for construction. They often lived in railroad cars, things like that while they were on the job.

NARRATOR: Men entered the steel mills in and around Chicago in large numbers, as they would for decades.

Dominic Pacyga: Steel was the consumer of men. In 1909, in one mill alone over 40 people died. This job was also a 12 hour, 6 to 7 day work week. Men were

known to slip into the fire. Men were known to disappear in a very quick explosion.

NARRATOR: The production of steel defined industrial Chicago. Belching smoke stacks, the endless clattering of machines. Some called it hell on earth.

Bill Jaconetti: My father worked for 47 years in the steel mills. I went to work with my father one day and I turned to him and said, 'Pa, do you do this every day?" He said, 'Yeah, Billy, what's wrong with it? I said, 'This is the most horrible job. It's 120 degrees, the furnaces are blasting. He said, 'Billy, this is what I do.'

NARRATOR: A seminary-educated woman from Cedarville, Illinois named Jane Addams had a new approach to helping immigrants adjust to American culture. She opened Hull House in 1889 which coincided with the large influx of Italians on the Near West Side.

Dominic Candeloro: The major target of Jane Addams social work for probably a half of century was Italian immigrants on the Near West Side.

NARRATOR: Hull House would grow to encompass an entire block. It was a city within a city.

Kathy Catambrone: Jane Addams had English classes and classes on how to vote and how become an American citizen. She had a very large music and theatre program that a lot of the Italian kids were involved in. So it really was an outlet for early immigrants who had very little.

NARRATOR: Many of Hull House social workers came from well-to-do families who had little in common with the residents they served.

Dominic Candeloro: Some people looked down on the social worker saying you are just trying to make all those people middle class and change their value system and get rid of their ethnicity. But Jane Addams was somewhat different. She had respect. She traveled in Italy and she knew something of Italian culture. And she respected the culture and encouraged them to use their language.

NARRATOR: Addams was especially concerned about the plight of Italian women. Many were illiterate, tightly bound to Old World customs--isolated. Their world would expand as they entered the work force.

Kathy Catambrone: My dad's mom worked in the family grocery store and raised a large family and didn't speak much English at all. She was fulfilling both roles. The traditional roles that you would expect of an Italian woman and also being out in the work force and helping to contribute, helping to contribute to the economic growth of the family.

NARRATOR: On May 1st, 1893, the Columbian Exposition opened in Chicago. The event marked the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' voyage to America. It was a chance for Chicago to flex its muscle like no other Western city had done before.

Dominic Pacyga: Chicago wanted to show that it wasn't just a cow town. It wasn't just a place where you slaughtered animals. That it was a cultural capital. And so for Chicagoans this gave them a sense they were first-class world city.

NARRATOR: The Fairgrounds were called the White City. Over 25 million visitors came to view attractions spread over 600 acres on Lake Michigan's South Shore. The Italians displayed artworks in their own pavilion and along the Midway Plaisance. People could ride in a Venetian gondola from one point to another. Five months after the fair opened, Chicago Italians celebrated with a downtown parade attended by several thousand.

Dominic Pacyga: It was extremely important for the Italian community because of course it was celebrating Columbus. And Columbus, of course, was the son of Italy. So this fair gives them a chance to, how can I say, strut their stuff, right? They can go out and say, 'Look, we are the bringers of Western Civilization to the Western Hemisphere.'

NARRATOR: That view meant little to the masses who had come to America for survival. When construction broke ground at the fair site, a mob attacked Italian laborers. Some were earning 15 cents an hour.

Rudy Vecoli: The argument was that, these immigrants were undercutting the standard of living of American workers. They were competing for their jobs and taking their jobs away from them and that the Italians were able to live on a loaf of bread and the uh American working man needed meat and potatoes.

NARRATOR: An economic depression also discouraged more Italians from emigrating.

Dominic Pacyga: There's a tremendous amount of letters going back and forth in 1893, 1894 saying, 'Stay. Don't come.' When the economy goes down, they know about it in uh Palermo. They know about it in Calabria.

NARRATOR: Some returned home for good.

Dominic Candeloro: They would come to America, save up some money go back and buy land or set up a business or something.

Rudy Vecoli: They were sojourners and they went back to hopefully be able to buy some land. Land was the basis for not for not only a livelihood, but also of status. You were more of a person, a human being if you owned even a small

plot of land.

NARRATOR: The immigrant who returned home became forever linked with their time in the United States.

Dominic Pacyga: When an immigrant decided he was leaving the village, they already referred to him as the American. And when he came back, he was still the American. And he might be 50 years left in that village living and he'd still be known now, 'Go see the American. He'll tell you what New York is like. He'll tell you what Chicago is like.'

NARRATOR: But in the American public's mind, an Italian would never be an American.

Rudy Vecoli: There already was formed in the minds of Americans who read newspapers a sense of the criminality of the Italians.

Dominic Pacyga: Italians would be pictured as this sort of dark, husky, um, one eyebrow, a devious looking character. There was this kind of feeling that this was the unassimilatable. They're never really to be understood.

NARRATOR: That incomprehension went even deeper.

Dominic Pacyga: These people come with these new ideas that are alien and so there's a conflict between the immigrant and the native-born over ideology. But even more of a conflict, I think, over the idea of race. Who's white? Who's not white? Who is acceptable? Who is not acceptable?

ACT II – The rise of a community

NARRATOR: By the turn of the 20th century, Italian communities were thriving across the country. Chicago was the second largest city in the nation. The rise of its ethnic enclaves mirrored the city's rapid growth.

Dominic Pacyga: Chicago is a city of neighborhoods. Groupings of little villages around the Loop, and spreading out in a sort of pattern and off into the prairie.

NARRATOR: There were Little Palermos and Napolis, Little Modenas and Urbinos—self-contained cities where residents could find anything they needed just around the corner.

Violet Valiani Chisholm: Life was beautiful at 24th and Oakley. There was the pharmacy, the doctor's, the grocery store and then there was and when you ventured a little out of the area then there were the clothing stores. My grandmother would take me with her as an interpreter. But when we got to the stores, she'd just shoo me aside and took care of things on her own.

NARRATOR: By 1910, almost 25,000 Southern Italians lived on the Near West Side. The area's downtown served a multi-ethnic population, but there were clear dividing lines.

Kathy Catambrone: Back then, going four blocks anywhere in the city was like going on vacation. One reason was just geography. That they just physically couldn't get from one area to the other and you had no reason to because you didn't know anyone there. If you were from the west end of Taylor Street, you didn't mix with the east end of Taylor Street.

NARRATOR: As their numbers grew, mutual aid societies helped people locate work and housing and paid sick benefits to paesani injured on the job.

Dominic Candeloro: They might hire a doctor to be on call to the members. They would ask each member to contribute x amount of money whenever one of their members died to help with the funeral. They were here in this country without a social safety net. They created a safety net together.

Dominic Pacyga: How do people feel secure in those neighborhoods? They have their own institutions. They have their own clubs, they have the local coffeehouse, the local saloon, the local union meeting hall. And for most people the Catholic Church of course because that had been important in Italy.

NARRATOR: In Chicago and across America, the Church united Italian communities through a shared identity, language and faith. It also brought together Italians from different regions. As they knew it in Italy, the Church was sometimes a source of apprehension and mistrust.

Dominic Pacyga: The institutional church was sometimes seen as an oppressor, especially in the southern part of Italy. It was seen as Rome extending its influence. The church and the papal states opposed the unification of Italy.

NARRATOR: The most vocal opposition toward Italian nationalism came from Pope Pius the Ninth.

Dominic Pacyga: I mean, the Pope was Italian, but he didn't want his land taken away from him. So you had sort of a how could I put it, bifurcated religion. You had the institutional church, Rome, and then you had the real church, the people, okay, and the local pastors.

NARRATOR: The immigrant's plight deeply affected John Baptist Scalabrini. Once as a young man, he stood inside a Milan train station filled with people leaving for America. He saw old men bent over from hard labor and women gaunt with hunger. He knew they faced a crueler life there among strangers.

Father Gino Dalpiaz: They were abandoned by the government, by society, abandoned by the Church. Bishop Scalabrini said somebody has to take care of these people, not only religiously, but also socially.

NARRATOR: That day in the train station steered Scalabrini toward his life's work.

Paul Basile: The Scalabrians came with the great wave of Southern Italian immigrants at the turn of the 20th century. It was their job to minister to the temporal and spiritual needs of the Italian immigrants in the new land.

Dominic Candeloro: The churches that Italians attempted to go to earlier were Irish. And it wasn't comfortable. Often they were relegated to the basement by the Irish pastor and maybe pushed away.

Paul Basile: The Scalabrinians organized the Italian American community in the Chicago area into parishes. They brought them together to pray and they also brought them together to preserve their culture.

NARRATOR: One woman matched Scalabrini's singular dedication toward the immigrants. Maria Francesca Cabrini entered the convent when she was in her mid-20's. Her ambition was to become a missionary.

Father Gino Dalpiaz: When she founded her order, the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Mother Cabrini's idea was to go to China, to the Indies. And Blessed John Baptist Scalabrini, our founder, tried to tell her, your Indies are in the United States and South America with the Italian immigrants. They need you.

Scalabrini admired her dedication and good business sense. She could minister to the needy and entertain the wealthy patrons who financed her good works. He convinced her to go to Chicago.

Father Gino Dalpiaz: She was a little woman but very dynamic, very determined. And she founded schools all over the country, hospitals, but she never put them under the Church, under the parish.

NARRATOR: Italian businessmen gave her start-up funds and land and she opened Columbus Hospital in the winter of 1905.

Father Gino Dalpiaz: She was canonized after the Second World War, the first American Saint who was a naturalized citizen, an Italian woman.

NARRATOR: Mother Cabrini came to Chicago to relieve the poverty of her people – and she had seen a few of them climbing to the top like never before. Chicago's population was growing at the rate of half a million each decade. Italians were entering the professions in greater numbers and making a name for themselves in business. Italian American-owned companies like the Cuneo Press gave newcomers their first job.

Mike Bacarella: My father worked for the Cuneos. They had the fabulous Cuneo Press for so many years and employed so many people and gave a chance to get started. They took it and ran with it and made it work, the American Dream.

Caesar Pasquesi: My dad arrived here with 9 dollars in his pocket. And he found any job he possibly could. One of the better jobs he got in Chicago at the Gonnella Baking Company. He worked in the evening and in the mornings he went to the Chicago schools where they taught English.

NARRATOR: New immigrants didn't always find a welcoming work environment. Conditions had not improved much since the last century. And there was little concern for the worker. The Irish, Germans and native-born Americans had helped build strong trade unions which clashed with big industry.

Dominic Pacyga: You are talking about an America that was very different from today. You're talking about a place where industry was king. Where industrialism was exploding across the infrastructure of the country and where corporations were seen as individuals. And so individuals could sue individuals, but unions were seen as something negative.

NARRATOR: Italians had not been welcomed into the unions at first. Companies sometimes employed them as strikebreakers. As their numbers swelled in the trades, so did their demand for fair wages and better working conditions.

Dominic Candeloro: A lot of Italians or brick layers or construction workers, they

helped to develop the laborers' union. And it was Italian American leadership that built that into a strong union.

NARRATOR: Chicago's garment industry was the largest employer of Italians in the early part of the century.

Violet Valiani Chisholm: My mother at 14 went into the tailoring industry. She had to leave school. Everybody seemed to know how to sew so they all worked in the tailoring industry in the big companies like Hart Schaffner and Marx.

NARRATOR: On September 22, 1910, 16 women at Hart Schaffner and Marx went on strike. By the end of the week, 2,000 walked the picket lines. When the United Garment Workers union lent its support, 41,000 walked off the job. Three months later, the company and the workers reached an agreement, but many still lost their jobs.

Violet Valiani Chisholm: In the very beginning of the strike, people were carted away in the patty wagon as they called it, and my father was one of them. But he believed very much in the union and in rights for workers. They worked long hours and short pay, and he was a member of the Amalgamated Union until he died.

NARRATOR: The strike cut across class and ethnic lines and showed a growing solidarity among Italians and other immigrants.

Dominic Pacyga: On the factory floor, there's a unanimity. But going back to the neighborhood now, there becomes divisions between people based on ethnicity, based on race that divide these various immigrant groups. And often there is violence between these groups.

NARRATOR: Violence of a different kind was emerging in Italian communities across the country –even in Chicago.

NARRATOR: On January 6th, 1910, police found clothing merchant Benedetto Cinene murdered in his store in Little Sicily on the Near North Side. They also found letters sent to Cinene demanding money and threatening his life. Police quickly deduced the suspect: La Mano Nera.

Rudy Vecoli: The Black Hand was real. It wasn't a figment of the imagination. This element preyed upon the, uh, the Italians. They themselves being Italian and, um, often they were paid because there was a fear.

NARRATOR: The threat was real enough that Chicago police formed a special unit to investigate Black Hand Crime. Gabriel Longobardi and Julian Bernacchi chased down leads throughout Chicago's Italian neighborhoods.

NARRATOR: Perpetrators of crimes that included kidnapping, extortion, and murder sometimes worked alone or in small groups. A few were women. A victim could be a neighbor or a businessman featured in the Sunday papers.

Mike Serritella: My mother told the story that one she was taken out to the back door of their house, and a black powder bomb, whatever that is, blew the front of their house off. So, of course then they got the Pinkerton Guards who were paid thugs. Grandpa then founded the White Hand Society.

NARRATOR: Columbus Hospital director Dr. Camillo Volini headed up the White Hand Society's first meeting in 1907. Prominent Italian business leaders like banker Modestino Mastrogiovanni were also targets of Black Hand Crime.

NARRATOR: One of the youngest victims was Angelo Mareno. The 6-year-old was kidnapped while playing outside his home. His abductors were sentenced to life in prison but never served time. The Mareno kidnapping was one of the most publicized cases during the Black Hand's reign of terror in Chicago. La Mano Nera faded with the rising specter of war overseas. But the public's fear would remain unabated.

NARRATOR: World War One propelled the United States into a global conflict that would redefine 20th century politics. Over 300,000 Italian Americans, including 87,000 Italian nationals, enlisted for service. For the time being, the call to arms overrode ethnic prejudice.

Ted Grippo: My dad came from a little town outside of Potenza and, uh, ended up in Chicago and joined the American Army in World War One. About that time the world war was breaking and he wanted to get citizenship faster. While the other fellas were carousing around he studied and taught himself English and became a sergeant in the American army and a first-class gunner.

NARRATOR: As Italian immigration picked up again after the war and families were reunited, an antipathy that had been simmering for some time exploded into a national debate. And it started right in the hallowed halls of Academia.

Dominic Pacyga: One of the best-selling books in the United States about 1910 was by Madison Grant. It was called the Passing of the Great Race. The Great Race he was talking about was the Anglo-Saxon race.

Dominic Candeloro: Racism up until the 1920's, was the reigning academic truth. Professors at universities preached about the Nordic, Aryan race having a bigger brain, and it was shown that people from different ethnic backgrounds scored differently on these tests. This was science!

NARRATOR: Anglo-Saxon America genuinely feared it would be overrun by an immigrant tide. To stem that tide, the 1924 Immigration Act severely restricted

the number of Southern and Eastern Europeans entering the country. Prohibition further cast a pall on the Italian community.

Dominic Pacyga: Prohibition was part of that whole anti-immigrant movement between 1910 and 1920. Immigrants were seen as the purveyors of the saloons, they were seen as the owners of the brothels. And it was felt that if you cut of alcohol, you cut off all these problems.

NARRATOR: Across Chicagoland, the illicit buying and selling of liquor was an easy buck. Everyone had a hand in the city's multi-million dollar cottage industry: from the cop on the beat all the way up to City Hall.

Ed Bernardi: Highwood had many taverns. They called them blind pigs where during Prohibition, wine was made and served to those who knew where the blind pigs were.

Sam Ciambrone: The feds come in and they'd take the workers send them to jail. And they would say 'where's pa?' And they'd say, well, he went to college. I was probably in my teens and I knew all of them, and I knew they weren't college graduates. So I did ask my father, how come they say they go to college? He said, 'He went to jail during Prohibition. So the kids wouldn't know, they'd say he went "a la college."

NARRATOR: For Chicago's most notorious names of the era – Mike "The Pike" Heitler, Jack Guzik, Dion O'Bannion, Al Capone – the game was all about gaining prosperity in a wide-open market.

Fred Gardaphé: The American way of life was changing from a primarily agricultural society to an urban society and Capone showed people how to deal with it, And Capone is showing people how to be more individual and gain power.

Dominic Pacyga: Let me make it perfectly clear that this was not simply Italians. There were various Poles, Jews who played an important role in the Capone gang. Others, Lithuanians, et cetera, the Irish, of course, so this was a multi-ethnic gang.

NARRATOR: In the midst of Prohibition's headiest years, a fish peddler and shoemaker sat on Death Row for murder. In July 1921, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were found guilty of murdering a a shoe factory paymaster in South Braintree, Massachusetts.
As immigrants, anarchists and advocates of workers rights, the cards were stacked against an impartial trial.

Ted Grippo: It was a tough time in this country. There was the Great Red Scare because the Russian Revolution had been going on. They were deporting

Italians right and left, arresting them without warrants and sending back to Italy.

Fred Gardaphé: Sacco and Vanzetti started scaring the hell out of people. Because people found, that even if they told the truth, because they were Italians who told the truth, they would not be accepted in a Court of Law.

Ted Grippo: There's no question they got an unfair trial. That case went on for 7 years before they were executed.

NARRATOR: Their deaths sparked mass protests around the globe. Some believed justice had been done. Others felt personal anguish.

Ted Grippo: My dad wouldn't talk about it. I didn't understand if it was fear or shame. I think it was more fear as I have thought about it. Fear that something bad would happen to him and his wife and children.

NARRATOR: Sacco and Vanzetti, the anti-immigrant backlash, and the stigma of Prohibition. All these together pushed Chicago Italians quietly back into their neighborhoods. The coming decade would put their loyalty to the test, and radically change how America saw them, all over again.

ACT III - Italian or American

NARRATOR: By the early 1930's, Chicago and the rest of America was in the midst of the Great Depression. The manufacturing sector was hit hard and by 1933, nearly half of Chicago's workforce was out on the streets.

Dennis Farina: The depression in our household lasted until about 1976, '77. My father came from Sicily and became a doctor and he was doing quite well, and they took everything.

Josephine Raciti Forsberg: My mother went to work. She sewed tents. We got poorer and poorer Soon there was nothing except the house that we lived in.

Ed Bernardi: You wondered were your next meal was coming from.
I do remember the man coming around once a month to collect the rent. And they were getting the nickels together and the pennies together and literally paying an extra 50 cents on their mortgage.

NARRATOR: The Century of Progress Exposition opened in Chicago on May 27th, 1933. The event provided a cultural safety valve that helped boost the nation's morale.
More than 23 million people visited Chicago's lakefront to view exhibits showcasing every invention of the modern age.

Don Fiore: The theme of the fair was a vision of the future and stressing technology and science and that was exactly the image that Italy was trying to convey of itself: technological leader. This is another side of Italy that the world doesn't expect. You guys aren't all fish mongers and anarchists and lowly railroad workers.

NARRATOR: Life moved with more urgency than usual on the morning of July 15th, just a few months after the fair opened.

Lida Allegrini: The streets of 24th and Oakley were practically deserted by midday. Everybody had left early to get down to Navy Pier.

Don Fiore: Every Italian who had two legs was down on the lakefront that day.

Lida Allegrini: We waited which seemed to me like an eternity, until I finally saw something in the distance which looked to me like a flock of small birds. I heard the people in the background shouting, 'they've arrived, they've arrived!'

Reporter: *"General Italo Balbo led his fleet of 24 giant seaplanes, landing in flawless array."*

NARRATOR: Aviator Balbo was Minister of the Italian Airforce under fascism. His

squadron's record-setting flight was a triumph of the new era. The Italian and English language press touted Balbo as a Modern Columbus.

Don Fiore: Yeah, it was absolute delirium. 'Wow! Look at what one of own did.' It was a great moral boost for them.

Gloria Nardini: My father he viewed Balbo as a real example of pride for Italy. He always used to tell us the story, that he was asked on the spur of the moment if he would translate for Balbo. And I don't know how much we believed his story. And then later in his life, we found photographs of Balbo and him together. So in fact it was true. I think it was a high point in my dad's life.

NARRATOR: With Balbo's flight, Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini earned favor among Americans and Italians abroad.

Dominic Candeloro: In the 1930's, there was a very strong effort by Mussolini and the fascist government to get support from the Italians in America. And they got it! Three thousand Italian American women in Chicago gave up their wedding rings to Mussolini.

NARRATOR: Italians praised Mussolini when he invaded Ethiopia and raised funds for the cause. But not everyone supported him. After winning the Nobel Prize in 1938, physicist Enrico Fermi fled Italy with his Jewish wife Laura and their children. They found a new home at the University of Chicago. Other Italians followed suit.

Judith Santacaterina: My grandfather was a staunch socialist and he was very concerned as to what was happening at the time. He felt that they had to leave to come to America to pursue their dreams and their political freedom.

Ed Bernardi: Even before the war, my father would not allow me to join the boy scouts. And the reason for it was because of the uniform, which reminded him of the fascists.

NARRATOR: Many Chicago Italians saw Mussolini's quest for power as a return to Italy's glory days when it was the center of the Roman Empire.

Dominic Candeloro: Italy had a great future. They were proud to be Italians. Mussolini declares war on the United States on December 10th. The Italian Americans were out on a limb for Mussolini and he sawed it off.

Mike Bacarella: Instead of remaining neutral, he chose to sign a pact with the devil and ruined his country.

NARRATOR: Italy had become the enemy and Italian Americans chose their side.

Fred Gardaphé: World War II was a turning point. It was a time in which more Italian Americans before proved how American they were, and volunteering to fight in numbers far exceeding other percentages of ethnic groups.

NARRATOR: More than half a million Italian Americans enlisted and headed off to fight in Europe and the Pacific. Nearly 25 thousand of them came from Chicago.

Joe Amella: My father came to this country and joined the service at 16 yrs old. He loved America. He was always a soldier, and he expected that me and my brother would become soldiers, which we did. It was never if we were going to the service, it was when are going.

Caesar Pasquesi: Dear Caesar. You are called to defend the most deserving flag. Mamma and I realize that if we had grown our wonderful family in our original country, our children would have been exposed to danger long before this. While it is a natural that we would like to have you as near as possible, the best thing is to carry on day by day. Love and best wishes, Mother and Father

NARRATOR: While Italian-Americans were sacrificing their lives for this country, their parents' loyalty was being questioned. 600,000 Italian nationals were registered as enemy aliens. Some were interned. Because of their heritage, Italian Americans were shunned, harassed, shamed.

Josephine Raciti Forsberg: Mussolini was the one that the non-Italians would throw up in my face. That's where most of the harassing came from, was the fact that Mussolini was the Italian, and so are you.

Dominic Candeloro: I was mortified to be spoken to in Italian in public. If my mother went to a PTA meeting or something and she would speak to me in Italian. And really Mussolini, who was supposed to do so much for italianità, I think killed the Italian language in that second generation.

Franklin D. Roosevelt: *"An armistice with Italy has been concluded. It is great victory for the United Nations. But it is also a great victory for the Italian people."*

NARRATOR: In September, 1943, Italy joined the Allies in the fight against Nazi Germany.

Emil Bertolini: My Dad, he went almost every night went with the army's guys on patrol. And he would show them where the bridges were, where the positions were, how they could get around to the mountains. So one time my Dad and five soldiers came back and saw two guys standing alongside the doorways. And the fellow on this side had a machine gun in his hand and he killed five soldiers in front of the house out by the porch. And then turned the gun inside to kill my

Dad. And my father stayed against the wall and they missed him. We were extremely fortunate to survive, my entire family.

NARRATOR: One voice that brought news of the armistice to Occupied Italy was Chicago broadcaster Amabile Peguri Santacaterina. Santacaterina garnered her biggest following during the war years while organizing relief drives to collect food and clothing for the Italian population.

Judith Santacaterina: The State Department asked her as well as my grandfather to come to Washington D.C. to make the tapes that they were going to be playing particularly in some very rural areas of Italy where people were not aware that the Italians were now our Allies. She said, 'we had one take and that was it,' I can remember her telling me. 'But I usually only needed one take.'

NARRATOR: May 7th, 1945. The spirit of V-E Day swept across America. New doors opened for Italian-Americans like never before. Returning servicemen and women were attending colleges and buying their first homes on the GI Bill.

NARRATOR: As the first Italian American elected president of the National Musician's Union, James Petrillo was at the top of his game in the 1940's.

James Petrillo: *"We're going to give it to them, aren't we Mr. President?"*

NARRATOR: He was a sewer digger's son from the tenements on the Near West Side who became one of the most powerful players in the entertainment industry.

Donna DeRosa: Music performance was not his strong suit. He was an organizer. He would give you a punch first and ask questions later. Political correctness was not part of his shtick.

NARRATOR: During that decade, Petrillo led two successful strikes that granted musicians royalties for recorded performances. Even after moving to tony Lake Shore Drive, he always returned to his old neighborhood.

Donna Derosa: When we would go on vacations we would get in a cab, and he would say to the cab driver, 'take me to a poor area' and Grandpa would get out, and give, I would think he was giving hundreds of dollars, silver dollars, away. He never forgot where he came from.

James Petrillo: *"I hope that in the very near future that concerts like these in Grant Park will be played in every city in America."*

NARRATOR: The center of life for first and second generation Italian Americans was where they grew up. There was no place like the old neighborhood.

Dennis Farina: There were a lot of characters in my neighborhood, believe me, and a lot of them were in my family. We had the uh peanut man. We had the hot dog man. Joe the rat man. Pete the uh, knife man. Everybody was a man.

Dennis Farina: And then there was a guy that used to put on a chicken show. You can't write this stuff! He had a chicken and the chicken would do tricks. And then one day the chicken was gone and we think he ate the chicken, but I'm not sure. If he ate the chicken his whole act was gone.

Frances Varner: It was fun growing up in Bridgeport. I remember as a child that every time they wanted to put on a show and they needed something they would say, 'Frances go do the tarantella or Frances go sing this,' and I would do it. I wouldn't know what I was doing but I faked it good.

NARRATOR: From the beginning, religious fests were big events every year and there were dozens of them all over Chicagoland. Sant'Angelo Muxaro in Bridgeport, Santa Maria Lauretana in Little Sicily, Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Melrose Park. You name the saint and there was a procession.

Fred Gardaphé: The feast was a time when you could let go. It really is like a combination Christmas, New Year. It was a time for us to both show off and defend our town.

Don Fiore: A big event in our life was Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. My father met my mother there. My father was a bandista. And back in those days, all the girls used to like the musicians. And that music has impregnated itself in my mind and because it goes back so far.

NARRATOR: Next to street processions, sports reigned king in the old neighborhood and everyone had their favorite sports hero. Even if a guy was not from your favorite team, it was cool rooting for the name with the vowel on the end.

Dennis Farina: We admired anybody who had an Italian last name.

Sam Ciambrone: Phil Cavarretta.

Jim Purgatorio: Gerry Arrigo.

Dennis Farina: Carmen Basilio.

Leonard Amari: Ernie Banks.

Sam Ciambrone: Countrymen.

Dennis Farina: Certainly Joe DiMaggio.

Leonard Amari: Joe DiMaggio.

Jim Purgatorio: Joe DiMaggio.

Tom Brindisi: I can hear my uncle. You should have seen Joe DiMaggio hit the ball! You should have seen Joe DiMaggio make a catch! You should have seen…

Ed Bernardi: Joe DiMaggio. Period.

Jim Purgatorio: Rocky Marciano.

Dennis Farina: Rocky Marciano.

Bill Jaconetti: It was Rocky Marciano.

Mike Bacarella: I was into movies!

Tom Brindisi: My neighborhood was 99 and 4/ 100ths percent White Sox Fans. The 59 White Sox basically. That quarter of a percent that weren't Sox fans were New York Yankee fans. Poor guys. Mislead.

NARRATOR: In Chicago, when it was actually time to play ball, the game was 16" inch softball.

Tom Brindisi: You could play it anywhere. The ball was big enough that you didn't need a mitt so the poorer guys that didn't have gloves could play. You didn't get killed.

Dennis Farina: It was usually a used softball. And I remember uh wetting it would make it hard as a rock. You'd catch those things. I still have fingers that are a little messed up because of them.

NARRATOR: Italy's fragile economy in the post-war era brought a new wave of immigrants to the U.S.

Emil Bertolini: We get to Chicago. It was overwhelming. And the neon lights. We hadn't seen neon lights in my little town. It looked like Christmas.

Renato Turano: My father was a coffee salesman. When he came over here he had to go and work in construction. He was in Chicago for 14 months, and after 14 months he came back and said, 'it's not for me.' He said, 'I have lost my dignity.'

Rosemarie Andolino: My aunts were all on the verge of becoming teachers. And when they came here, they didn't have what was necessary to continue that.

The language barrier being one and two, the required schooling then that would be required. So, they ended up working in factories.

NARRATOR: Education was the ticket out of blue-collar enclaves and into the white-collar world.

Ed Bernardi: Growing up in Highwood-Highland Park, number one thing is you got a job you went to work. When I went to college, I didn't go to college to learn philosophy or the arts. I was going into business. And who knows what business was.

Gloria Nardini: My dad was a man who was a real advocate of education. He bought us the World Book in the 1950's when buying the World Book was something you did for your family. And then I remember he would stay up late every night, looking through these pages of the World Book, and he was so amazed at the things that were contained there.

Leonard Amari: My father was a Damon Runyon character with no education. But boy, if I got check marks on my report cards or the nuns called up the house, that was the death knell for me.

NARRATOR: Daniel Moose BRINDISI was all about education. Everybody knew the University of Chicago-educated social worker around the Grand and Ogden neighborhood.

Tom Brindisi: When we were kids growing up, you never knew who was going to be at dinner. One night it might be a homeless person. It might be a Judge, it might be an Alderman, it might be a State Senator.

NARRATOR: Just like co-worker Tony Sorrentino who served the Near West Side, BRINDISI championed the underdog: the new immigrant, the elderly and especially kids.

Tom Brindisi: My dad would go in front of the Judge on behalf of kids that had gotten in trouble and the Judge would say, 'But, Moose, you were here two weeks ago.' 'Well, I know Judge but this time we are really going to make it work. When he did lose a kid, he felt like he had failed.

NARRATOR: On December 1st 1958, afternoon classes had already started at Our Lady of Angels grammar school on the Near West Side. Luciana Mordini and her family had arrived from Italy five years earlier.

Lucy Mordini: I was in the 7th grade, Room 208. There was a transom over the door and umm one of the boys went and opened it and smoke came in. And then sister went and tried to open the door and she couldn't open it. By then you could not see anything in the room. It was completely pitch black.

NARRATOR: Frantic neighbors began gathering around the building. 15-year-old Bill JACONETTI was just coming home from school.

Bill Jaconetti: We had got off the bus, me and two of my friends, and we saw a fire engine coming by, and inner city kids chase fire engines and that's what we did. When the firetruck was there it was just maybe five minutes later, that's when near the rear of the school, everything went up.

Lucy Mordini: Sister told us to pray and that everything would be okay. And I remember she was walking up and down the aisles and she walked past me. You could hear the wooden beads hitting up against the desk.

Father Ognibene: *"I looked up and I saw the smoke. Some of the kids got panicky. We tried to talk to them and keep them calm because you could only take one down at a time."*

NARRATOR: The fire quickly spread through the two-story school. Mordini and several of her classmates leaped from the windows as firemen tried to contain the blaze. In the end, three nuns and 92 children died. Many of them were Italian Americans.

Bill Jaconetti: I was standing alongside of a policeman. And the policeman was crying, like his hands were tied, 'what can we do, how can we help?' And tears just streaming from his eyes. Fire fighters overwhelmed by just a tragedy.

Lucy Mordini: The neighborhood slowly started to disintegrate. I think the disintegration had to do with the fire, but it had to do with just the times. People were moving to the suburbs or moving further North.

Paul Basile: My parents moved to Park Ridge, as a lot of ethnics did, after World War Two basically to escape their ethnicity. Back 100 years ago, Italian Americans lived and breathed their culture in their homes, in the streets, on the doorstep. When the Italian Americans moved out into the suburbs and spread out and became Americanized, they lost that tie, that ability to preserve their culture.

NARRATOR: But their neighborhoods wouldn't go down so easily. Not without a fight.

ACT IV - Ethnic Survival

NARRATOR: By 1960, Chicago's landscape had radically changed. Urban Renewal was the big hope of the second half of the century. But it was destroying key Italian neighborhoods.

Paul Basile: You have the highways that cut thru most of the Italian enclaves, inner-city Italian enclaves. Then you have the University of Illinois at Chicago.

NARRATOR: In February 1961, Mayor Richard Daley and University of Illinois trustees announced plans to build a 105-acre campus at Harrison and Halstead Streets in the heart of the Near West Side's Italian community.

Father Gino Dalpiaz: The families suffered. It fought. Not everybody in the neighborhood was with them and I was not afraid to stick my head for them. Because you had to be politically incorrect. In other words, the powers wanted to be there the university there, starting with the City Fathers.

NARRATOR: Leading the fight to save the ethnically diverse neighborhood was Florence Scala, an immigrant tailor's daughter. The first houses in the neighborhood were already demolished when she took her case to federal court.

Father Gino Dalpiaz: Florence Scala was a great warrior trying to defend the neighborhood and the Little Italy which it was, but to no avail.

NARRATOR: In 1963, Scala and her supporters lost their appeal. That same year, most of Jane Addams' Hull House settlement, which Scala attended as a young girl, was torn down.

Kathy Catambrone: They were literally coming in and tearing down houses and a lot of my friends had to move because their houses were taken. What we had known as a neighborhood was wiped out.

Joe Stella: My family and mother's street is gone. It's a parking lot. She cries. She'll stand there on the sidewalk, and there's a parking lot for the university behind her. You can tell she had so many beautiful memories on that street, and there's nothing there.

Paul Basile: Now, I think it can be legitimately argued that if the U of I hadn't been plopped down there, that the community would have scattered because of the common issues of ethnic succession in these urban areas. But still, there was a perception that this was done intentionally to break them up and, at the time, it did bust up the community.

NARRATOR: Public housing projects like Cabrini Green on the Near North Side further displaced Italian neighborhoods.

Dennis Farina: We couldn't get my father out with a bomb. We finally got him out of there about 1971. And things were pretty bad in that neighborhood, but he still didn't want to leave.

NARRATOR: Two men created a unified front at a time when community was scattering.

Dominic Candeloro: Frank Annunzio was a labor organizer in the 1940's and in the early 1960's he was nominated to run for Congress, and got elected. Along with Congressman Rodino from New Jersey, he pushed for Columbus Day to be a national holiday.

NARRATOR: Annunzio's grassroots ally was Father Armando Pierini who came to Chicago in the 1930s.

Father Gino Dalpiaz: Father Pierini is an icon. This man I think was a priest for 60 or 65 years. Never took one vacation. He was no-nonsense and somehow we feared him a little bit.

Paul Basile: He created the community. He was the driving force behind the Sacred Heart Seminary, which was the focus on the community during the 30's the 40's the 50's. And he created Fra Noi.

NARRATOR: Fra Noi would become one of the most widely circulated Italian American newspapers in the nation. It helped finance Pierini's projects like the Villa Scalabrini Retirement Home in Northlake.

Paul Basile: He was an incredibly shrewd marketer. Every weekend he would be at a dinner dance, two, three dinner dances with Italian Americans in tuxedos standing all in a row, smiling uncomfortably and handing checks to Father Pierini.

NARRATOR: The divide between Italian-born parents and their American offspring was growing wider. In the post-Vietnam era, ethnic survival became a choice.

Fred Gardaphé: It was not until after the end of the Vietnam War that we began to take a look at ethnicity. I had friends of mine who were getting killed in Vietnam and I actually became more aware that it was us working-class and poor kids who were getting killed.

Mike Bacarella: I was a product of the 60's. When it came to being an Italian American, we were other. Kind of like some orbiting moon that was going around the whole scene, and we couldn't fit in here or there.

NARRATOR: Churches were losing their foothold in key ethnic neighborhoods across the city. Taylor Street's main Italian parish was threatened with closure.

Father Gino Dalpiaz: The Scalabrini Fathers decided to give back Our Lady of Pompeii to the Diocese because, well, we figured, or they figured, we had done our job, our mission there.

Paul Basile: That had a devastating impact on the community's relationship with the Scalabrians and it also had a devastating impact on the community's sense of cohesion.

NARRATOR: Our Lady of Pompeii was designated a shrine in 1994 and the building was saved. Other churches faced a different fate.

Sam Ciambrone: "*I still see the building there. It's not there physically, but psychologically, it's still there. You can't remove it.*"

NARRATOR: Angelo Ciambrone was mayor of Chicago Heights when he appealed to the Vatican to save San Rocco Church. It was designated an oratory in 1996. By that time it was too late to save the building.

Sam Ciambrone: February 28th 1995. I'll never forget the date. To see a wrecking ball knocking Down these walls. They were built ten cents by ten cents. It was all built: sweat, toil.

Paul Basile: God bless their souls. Italian Americans, God bless their independent souls, Italian Americans may be the only ethnic group in the Chicago area that don't vote as a block. And that works against them.

NARRATOR: In 1992, Congressmen Marty Russo and Frank Annunzio were redistricted out of office. For the first time in three decades, Chicago Italian Americans were without a voice.

Paul Basile: There's a silver lining to that cloud because Italian Americans don't have the ethnic coattails to ride, they really have to run on their own merits and it makes them much more responsible public servants.

NARRATOR: In Hollywood, ethnicity is both an entrée and a ghetto.

Dennis Farina: I think I specifically got the jobs because, because of my heritage. I also think that, justifiably, that I didn't get jobs because I was too ethnic or too Italian.

Mike Bacarella: In the early 90's, I decided to form an Italian American Actors Committee with the Screen Actors Guild here in Chicago. The way I was informed that I was to be the chairman of this committee was, I was told,

‘Congratulations. I understand that you are now Chairman of the Wops.’

Dennis Farina: You are an Italian American after they come to you and they say to you, do you wanna play Capone? I would much rather play Dante or somebody like that. But they don’t make movies about Dante or Raphael or Michelangelo.

Woman: *“I think the show’s great. Hey, take it for what it’s worth.”*

Reporter: *“It could be the mob’s biggest hit. Is The Sopranos unconstitutional? This group of Italian Americans says it is at least in Illinois and today filed suit against the show and Time Warner’s HBO division.”*

NARRATOR: In 2001, Chicago lawyers condemned The Sopranos negative portrayal of Italian Americans claiming it violated Italian Americans’ individual dignity.

Ted Grippo: *“We’re looking for a vindication of our reputation. We realize that we can’t stop the free-speech rights of Time Warner. We’re not looking for money. We’re not looking for damages. We want a moral victory here.”*

Paul Basile: Sometimes to win a war you have to lose a battle or two. But the lawsuit served notice to the mainstream that mainstream Italian Americans find this sort of portrayal abhorrent. You can march with placards on the street, but that’s different from having a group of lawyers bring it to the courts.

Fred Gardaphé: Italian American pizza, Italian American gangsters, Italian American opera singers. This becomes this conglomeration of what it is to be Italian. The story of one immigrant coming to the United States to me is more powerful, and that story of our connection to Italy is much more important in our identity.

Dennis Farina: I remember the aromas our neighborhood. Smelling the cooking and everyone sitting outside.

Frances Varner: Everyone else’s family was my family, too. I remember when I was a young teenager, both of my brothers went into the service at the same time and people would say you don’t have anybody to watch you now and I would say, ‘Oh no? What about all their friends?’

Josephine Raciti Forsberg: My grandpa had lots of land. He grew vegetables and took me out there sometimes with a pail of water and would pick some nice fresh tomato for me and wash it in the pail.

Bill Jaconetti: When I was a little boy, my ma would get me up and say come on Billy were walking over to church. She would give me a dime to put in the

collection box. I'd say 'Ma, we really don't have any money.' She would say, 'don't worry.' We have to give back to the community.'

Reporter: *"His name is Renato Turano. He is the pride of the Italian American community."*

NARRATOR: In 2006, Renato TURANO became the first American elected to the Italian Senate. The boy who came from Calabria at 15 had made good.

Renato Turano: The greatest thrill was to just walk by the Senate doors and the guards that salute you and you walk in and they say, 'Buongiorno, Senatore TURANO!' That was a fantastic thing for me. Um, I just wish that my father could have seen it

NARRATOR: For second or third generation Americans, a trip to Italy is still a return home.

Ross Pontarelli: *"This used to be grandma's house."*

NARRATOR: These sites, these tastes, this history is somehow as familiar as the neighborhoods of Chicago.

Ross Pontarelli: *"You see? That is where my father was born. See this little window here? That's where I was born."*

Fred Gardaphé: I had never been to Italy before. I went to Italy, I went to my grandfather's hometown. I began to get so emotional. I started crying. I came back to the United States and//I became this born again Italian. I started taking naps in the afternoon after I ate, I started drinking expresso. I would look at the Chicago River and imagine having a gondola franchise on the Chicago River which I still think somebody should do.

NARRATOR: So much has changed over the decades. Churches closed and so did favorite hangouts. New Little Italies sprouted up in the suburbs. But those physical changes could never break that strong sense of place, and of kinship.

Rosemarie Andolino: Italian American to me is who I am. It's my foundation. It made me what I am today.

Ted Grippo: It never got me a client. It never got me a promotion. And it never got me a raise. But what it did do is gave me a character that I took from my parents. It gave me the pioneering spirit they had.

Gloria Nardini: I loved having this link to another language and another culture. It was always an extra something.

Tom Brindisi: I think people look at Italians today as a people of culture, a people of accomplishment in America.

Mike Bacarella: But look at the tenacity of these people. Look at how they thrived in spite of all that. They still soared.

Father Gino Dalpiaz: I am, first of all, American. This is my mother. Italy is my grandmother. But I love my grandmother, too.

Ed Bernardi: The courage that it took for them to come. How can we ever repay that debt? I am my father's dream.