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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Pellegrino Nazzaro. *Fascist and Anti-Fascist Propaganda in America: The Dispatches of Italian Ambassador Gelasio Caetani.* Youngstown: Cambria Press, 2008. xvi + 257 pp. $104.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-934043-66-0.

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Published on H-Italy (May, 2009)
Commissioned by Dora M. Dumont

Fascist American Graffiti

The common view many scholars hold of Italian Americans is that they are conservative. Thus, it is not surprising that when considering the influence of Italian Fascism in the United States the default position is that Benito Mussolini and Fascism held the allegiance of most Italian Americans or, at least, profited from their apathy. The Duce had the support of American Italians due to their inferiority complex, the conventional wisdom goes. Because the respect Mussolini enjoyed among American government officials and influential press outlets such as the *New York Times* finally gave Italian Americans some consideration, the lowly and grateful Italian immigrants responded by hailing the Duce and his historical mission of refurbishing Italy's image.

This idea is logical and has some basis, but is it the entire story? Pellegrino Nazzaro's book narrates a more complex tale–one of struggle between Italian American supporters of Italian Fascism and anti-Fascists, and of interaction between Italian diplomatic officials in the United States and federal and state authorities who generally did not mind Italian Fascist activities in the country. This outlook may appear paradoxical given the mission of American authorities to protect the country and when compared to the alarm demonstrated toward Nazi activities in this country. However, it is important to recall two points when chronicling the history of Fascist conduct in the United States.

First, the United States did not feel threatened by Fascism, not only because Italy was weaker than Germany but also because the Duce had the sympathy of Americans, especially before the Ethiopian War in 1935. In fact, the United States was the foreign country that most admired him. This admiration stemmed in no small part from the opinion of businesspeople who lauded his victory over communism and his triumph over the strong union movement, led by leftists, in Italy. The American business community faced similar if less serious threats because leftists dominated the American union movement and because of its own differences with workers. Moreover, American business advocated nonintervention by the government in the economy–a principle to which it still adheres. In Italy, the government had a history of intervention in the economy, which increased during World War I and the postwar crisis. When he came to power, Mussolini appointed free-trader Alberto De Stefani as finance minister (1922-25) to run Italian economic policy. De Stefani promoted deregulation policies that pleased big business, and businesspeople profited during the economic boom of the 1920s. Of course, because it dealt with a much poorer country than the United States, the Italian government could not get out of the economy altogether, but the Duce's laissez-faire policies in the 1920s met with American approbation. The Duce became a hero for American business, which held up his government's retreat from regulation as a model. This view changed during the 1930s with the Great Depression and the Fascist government's implementation of an activist policy.

The second element that helps explain Mussolini's popularity is the contention made by his government that its activities among Italian Americans were designed only to make them better American citizens by instilling a more disciplined mind-set and by warning them of the dangers posed by communism. American authorities appreciated these goals, and Nazzaro rightly emphasizes this point in his book.

These views, however, tell only part of the story. Nazzaro's theme is that "the history of Fascism in America cannot be separated from that of anti-Fascism" (p. 123). Nazzaro tells the story of this struggle, relating it, according to the book's subtitle, to "The Dispatches of Italian Ambassador Gelasio Caetani." The book details well the nature and development of this fight. Today, unfortunately, this history is mostly neglected. Schol-

ars are in Nazzaro's debt for his research in recuperating and focusing on an important slice of Italian American memory–one that should be part of their identity–and for his contribution to correcting the historical record that sees Italian Americans responding to the manipulation of the *prominenti* as active or passive supporters of Italian Fascism up to the entrance of the United States into World War II.

The general consensus is that the *prominenti* supported Mussolini through the Italian American press and other venues but reversed course as Mussolini became more aggressive. Nazzaro, however, emphasizes that anti-Fascist sentiment ran deep among many Italian Americans even earlier. Mussolini's enemies faced more insidious opposition from the American press, prominent Americans, and high-level government authorities than from the *prominenti*, whose support of the Italian Fascist government reflected a desire to reinforce their economic and political interests by playing up to Americans who, for various reasons, backed the regime. The *prominenti* switched gears when support for Mussolini waned in the United States after the Ethiopian War, his alliance with Adolf Hitler, and his entrance into World War II.

While Nazzaro's book offers a very good discussion on the Fascist/anti-Fascist struggle (particularly where it applies to the Socialists), it is less impressive on the Italian government's efforts to gain control of Italian communities in the United States. An outline and some important details of these efforts are certainly present in his work, but the author could have given readers a better idea of how these labors were directed, what the concrete aims were (besides general support), and how Mussolini lost interest in the American movement. Sure enough, Ambassador Gelasio Caetani's actions are discussed, but not in the depth promised by the subtitle. Furthermore, there is hardly anything on the activities of the local consulates, which were important in implementing Italian policy. Plenty of material on this subject exists in the archives that remains untapped and still awaits a diligent young scholar to mine it.

Reviewers often criticize books because they are not the ones they would have liked to have seen written or the ones they themselves would have written. At the risk of falling into this trap, I might point out some opportunities that the author passes up. I am surprised that Nazzaro did not expand his research into the 1930s in a consistent manner. The book includes a couple of chapters on the decade, but it could have profited from a much more wide-ranging discussion of this decade's events. The book in general suffers from this lack of a wider perspective. For example, in discussing the Italian American reaction to the Ethiopian War, Nazzaro gives readers the details of this response and the mobilization of opinion in support of Italy's war effort. Italian Americans saw application of the Neutrality Act as an unfriendly move against Italy, but Nazzaro does not emphasize that the American embargo against arms shipment to both belligerents hurt the Ethiopians because it prevented the export of American arms to them, even as the Italians had no need to import weapons; nor does he discuss in any depth the wider diplomatic implications of this conflict.

The treatment of the Ethiopian War symbolizes the book's lost opportunities. For example, the author notes that anti-Fascist Italian Americans were not as active in opposition to this conflict as they might have been. He does not give much detail about this point, but it might have served as an opportunity to note how the venture raised Mussolini's popularity in Italy to its height (even prominent leftists had a moment of *sbandamento*) and then to conduct a deeper analysis of how nationalism bolstered support of the *Patria* and for the person who embodied it at that time. In general, he could have explained to readers why nationalism was and remains such a powerful force in all countries and particularly in Italy. In addition, Nazzaro might have paid more attention to how the war affected relations between Italian Americans and African Americans. He devotes a couple of paragraphs to the issue and quotes William Dubois, but he misses an opportunity to go into substantial depth on an interesting issue that might have had implications for relations between the two groups in the future. Similarly, the book does not give much consideration to the role of the Anarchists in the anti-Fascist struggle in America, despite their importance and the general silence about them. In light of the Sacco-Vanzetti case (1927) and its wider implications, this lack also qualifies as a missed opportunity. An analysis of Italian American Anarchism, its press and actions, would have both been enlightening and increased the book's appeal. It might be argued that a detailed development of such themes is not crucial to the story Nazzaro tells, but the examination of significant topics–their context, their impact, and their interrelationship to American Italian history–is important if the field of Italian American studies is to come out of the restricted sphere in which it frequently operates.

The book suffers from other weaknesses. It gives the impression of research long in the works but that has lain fallow for a long time. It does not make sufficient use of the most recent scholarship. The failure to cite Nunzio Pernicone's book on Carlo Tresca is a case in point. In addition, there are some technical aspects of the book

that could have been improved. Nazzaro leaves a portrait of Caetani for his last chapter; the book would have been better served if it had been the first. The book has misprints and errors, such as citing "Fiorella" La Guardia and using the irritating term "Fascis"; the word is "Fasci" in English as well as in Italian (p. 109).

Even if his book has blemishes, Nazzaro has helped reopen the issue of the struggle between Fascism and anti-Fascism in the United States, especially in the 1920s. Other books, I hope, will take the topic further.

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Citation: Spencer Di Scala. Review of Nazzaro, Pellegrino, *Fascist and Anti-Fascist Propaganda in America: The Dispatches of Italian Ambassador Gelasio Caetani.* H-Italy, H-Net Reviews. May, 2009.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=24714

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