

**Maddalena Marinari.** *Unwanted: Italian and Jewish Mobilization against Restrictive Laws, 1882-1965.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. 280 pp. \$27.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4696-5293-1.

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Immigration continues to be one of the most pressing social issues of our time. As with any global problem, the better we understand the scope of what has changed, the better we are equipped to respond with constructive and concrete solutions. Maddalena Marinari's recent book, *Unwanted: Italian and Jewish Mobilization against Restrictive Immigration Laws*, engages with this conversation. Tackling over eighty years of immigration history in the United States, *Unwanted* examines the rise of immigration restrictions from 1882 to 1965 through the lens of the two largest and most prominent migrant communities: Italians and Jews. Marinari argues that both restrictionists and anti-restrictionists shaped immigration legislation during the age of restriction through intentional and unintentional choices. By focusing on grassroots, ethnic advocacy organizations, she contends that immigration policy becomes less about top-down directives and more about the negotiations and tensions between stakeholders who are serving a rapidly diversifying constituency.

Marinari's account begins with efforts by groups such as the Immigration Restriction League to limit what had been fairly unimpeded migration from southern and eastern Europe. In the first half of the book, Marinari charts the failed efforts of Italian and Jewish leaders to respond to such restrictive policies. The 1917 Immigration Act, for in-

stance, mandated literacy testing and reinforced an "Asiatic barred zone," prohibiting migration from East Asia and the Pacific Islands (p. 42). Even though

Jewish lobbyists did win two small victories—an exemption for religious persecution and a test waiver for family members—the act was a blow to the anti-restrictionist community's larger strategy. Key to Marinari's larger argument is that the legacy of this legislative contest had far-reaching consequences for lawmaking, ensuring that only moderate positions had the access to influence future policy campaigns. As xenophobia heightened, immigration laws became increasingly restrictive throughout the 1910s and 1920s, culminating in the 1924 National Origins Act and its notorious quota system. Shifting public sentiment circumscribed the kinds of reforms that Jewish and Italian organizations could pursue. Driven in part by self-preservation, even groups who were against policies like literacy tests favored some kinds of restriction and shared concerns with restrictionists about "unfettered immigration" (p. 18). Thus, Jewish and Italian leaders upheld the restrictionist status quo rather than casting, in Marinari's words, "an alternative vision of U.S. immigration policy" (p. 15). Marinari contends that Jewish and Italian leaders feared that if they pushed too hard for more generous provisions, then they would endan-

ger the hard-won—albeit modest—gains they had achieved in family reunification and humanitarian relief provisions.

Still, despite increasing resistance to immigration reform and circular migration as economic depression swept the globe, the focus on family reunification became a mainstay of the Italian and Jewish strategy. Certainly, this was a strategy that paid off in the short term as it led officials to admit increasing numbers of immigrants throughout the 1930s and 40s. US foreign policy prerogatives also aided the anti-restrictionist cause, according to Marinari, because focusing on a universal democratic vision in the developing world encouraged leaders to downplay ethnic differences, shifting away from earlier nativist discourses. Notions of colorblindness also eliminated the barriers to collaboration among disparate immigrant groups when their reform interests aligned. Marinari is careful, though, to show how the reforms that the Cold War ushered in supported a two-tiered system: one serving a privileged class comprised of permanent migrants with skills and family connections and the other, a vulnerable class comprised of temporary and unskilled migrants. Furthermore, the quota system held throughout the 1950s, despite fierce resistance from the Italian and Jewish communities and the softening of hardened ethnic categories. Not until the 1960s, with President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, were the efforts of advocacy organizations like the American Jewish Committee and the American Committee on Italian Migration rewarded with an end to the quota system. Both groups celebrated the law's passage, although lamented that the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act lacked the "flexible and internationally oriented provisions" of President John Kennedy's initial proposal (p. 174).

Marinari's focus on how Jewish and Italian interests interacted with federal immigration policy highlights the contributions of two important minority communities in twentieth-century immigration history. Without the efforts of these leaders,

it is unlikely that certain refugee exemptions and family protections would have persisted in US law. Furthermore, Marinari is careful to document the heterogeneous nature of the Jewish and Italian communities. Uneven alliances formed in the Jewish community as the longer-established German Jewish population offered its resources to the more recent eastern European Jewish migrants. Generational differences manifested too as older migrants became seen as "accommodationists" and younger migrants as "protestors" within both populations. Internecine divisions notwithstanding, Italians and Jews did find ways to work together when it served the interests of their communities. By juxtaposing these groups, Marinari shows how crucial such interethnic alliances were to effective change while also underscoring their fragility. Through this case study, it is easier to understand how twenty-first-century interest groups struggle to push beyond the needs of their own communities in advocating for reform.

That said, in the first half of the era that Marinari surveys, she admits that Italian and Jewish reform efforts had little impact. Marinari argues that not until the mid-1940s were anti-restrictionist organizations able to influence the direction of immigration legislation in a more expansive way. Marinari attributes this influence to Italian and Jewish immigrants' lobbying experience and election to political office in addition to shifts in broader social norms. As many historians have shown, the broader post-World War II and Cold War context crucially contributed to the expansion of refugee provisions and the eventual elimination of the race-based quota system.[1] Marinari could argue that because of their past experience, Italian and Jewish organizations had the existing infrastructure, knowledge, and experience to maximize their advantage given the Cold War context. But since they were also prone to advocate for restrictions in earlier eras, it seems like the broader context influenced their actions more fundamentally than being elected to political office. Along the same lines, while Marinari's eighty-year time

frame is impressive, ending the study in 1965 does not allow the reader to understand the extent to which family reunification arguments both persisted and adapted as waves of Asian, Central and South American, and African migrants became the primary beneficiaries in the 1970s-2000s. How did larger historical phenomena such as the Cold War, globalization, and terrorism influence family reunification policies? Studies that consider these trends would offer scholars better historical tools to understand and respond to recent injustices, such as the separation of Central American families at the US/Mexico border.

One of Marinari's governing threads is that once a particular iteration of immigration law was enacted, it hardened categories and enshrined practices—a process that made future revisions harder to come by. US policymaking is often, in fact, a “thing of shreds and patches” as the title of chapter 5 states (p. 125). Tracing these “shreds and patches,” *Unwanted* fits into the larger policy history literature that seeks to dismantle the binaries of top-down/bottom-up framing and sheds light on the piecemeal, multistakeholder, and interest-beholden nature of twentieth-century change. Because of this, comprehensive reform is notoriously difficult in US politics, and Marinari's book gives a concrete accounting of why that is the case when it comes to immigration reform. Even with this astute framing, Marinari seems to lament an ideologically holistic reform that never existed but could have been. Reflecting on the use of refugee law to bypass the quota system, Marinari asserts, “By 1956, compromise remained the only viable option” (p. 126). Given the nativist climate, geopolitical factors, diverse demographics, and US political culture over Marinari's era, it would be hard to fathom a solution to immigration that did not include at least some kind of compromise, aligned lobbying efforts notwithstanding. Pragmatic compromises have been fundamental to shared governance in US history—something that Marinari's Italian and Jewish lobbyists not only accepted, but used to their advantage when possible. And yet,

Marinari appears to use the term “compromise” to signify a failure of some kind. Considering the current polarization in the United States, I wonder if that framing is more a reflection of recent thought than the way that historical actors would have understood the term in the mid-twentieth century.

Even with its insight into the work of Italian and Jewish immigration advocates, *Unwanted* does not fundamentally alter the existing narrative on US immigration restrictions. Indeed, Marinari's monograph reiterates that moderate and conservative positions had more sway in shaping immigration policy than radical ones; restrictionist arguments were incredibly successful during and after World War I; the shifting geopolitical climate in the 1940s ushered in more expansive policies toward refugees and family units; and minority groups were unlikely to help each other, as seen in the case of Italian and Jewish leaders remaining silent about Asian exclusion and Mexican refugee asylum. Immigration experts might find it useful to have a record of the nuanced roles that Italian and Jewish advocacy played in particular policies. For a general reader, however, this reads like a story one has heard many times before.

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Note

[1]. See, for example, Carl Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees during the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

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