

Richard N. Juliani. *Little Italy in the Great War: Philadelphia's Italians on the Battlefield and Home Front.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2020. 342 pp. \$37.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4399-1878-4.

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Using mainly printed sources—in particular, the city's most important English-language newspaper, the *Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger*, but also the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and, to a lesser extent, local Italian-language press outlets such as the ethnic newspaper *La Libera Parola*—Juliani's book presents a massive and analytical reconstruction of how the Great War impacted the lives of residents of Italian descent living in Philadelphia, the nation's second-largest Italian American community at the time.

The core of the author's reflection is aptly, on the one hand, the problem of the dual allegiance manifested by the Italians, on that occasion, toward their homeland of origin and toward their new country, and on the other hand, the theme of their Americanization through the American army. The author concludes that "by being partly assimilated into a hybrid Italian/American community, they were no longer fully Italian nor quite yet entirely American, leaving them marginalized, as a German officer had once recognized, as 'semi-Americans'" (p. 260).

The book tells in a fascinating way how Italy's declaration of war to Austria-Hungary was received and how about three thousand reservists left at the end of the spring of 1915, either because they were motivated by sincere enthusiasm or because they were afraid of not being able to re-em-

brace a wife or a relative left in Italy if they were declared deserters. Among those who left, because they were still formally Italian citizens, Juliani, correctly quoting the important report of New York journalist Gino Speranza, highlights that there were reservists who were already American citizens and who returned to Italy to fight, representing an early version of what would later come to be called "transnationalism" (p. 39). When the United States entered the conflict in April 1917, the status of aliens, however, remained unresolved and their obligation to enlist was a controversial issue. In fact, the 1871 Treaty of Commerce and Navigation signed between Italy and the United States stated that citizens of both countries could not be enlisted in their respective territories, but unnaturalized immigrants in practice were soon required to enlist in compliance with the US Selective Service. During the last two years of the war, those who refused to enlist, for political or other reasons, "living in a haven of diplomatic immunity," were exposed to the charge of taking advantage of the American system of freedoms without having the courage to defend it against the "German Threat."

The author describes how the training of the enlisted men took place at Camp Meade in Admiral, Maryland, where many of the Italians did not speak English, and effectively recounts the efforts

made by the authorities to transform the aliens into citizens, especially after the passage of the Alien Naturalization Act of May 9, 1918, which allowed special courts to grant American citizenship to recruits leaving for Europe, thus solving the problem of their status. Italians provided the largest contingent of new citizens.

In the chapter entitled “They Who Served,” Juliani recalls the sacrifice of the many Italian Americans from Philadelphia, starting with the first to die as an American soldier, Corporal James Giordano, and their blood ties with brothers and other relatives who were serving in the Italian army, providing many of their names (sometimes misinterpreted by newspapers) and mentioning some of their letters published in the city’s newspapers (which should be tackled with greater caution because they were mediated by the propaganda of the time). The author, in an interesting way, points out how the use of Italian as the language of some of the articles of these newspapers persisted even after the end of the war, reporting even routine facts such as engagements, marriages, deaths and crime. This was one of the legacies that wartime communication left behind.

Much space in the volume is appropriately dedicated to the life of Philadelphia’s Little Italy as a “home front” during the war, where civil mobilization took place (even before the United States entered) with numerous fundraisers, promotion of the “Liberty Bonds,” patriotic conferences, and film screenings promoted by the Italian Supreme Command. Juliani also tells of the visit of the Italian War Commission in the late spring of 1917, composed by, among others, the future prime minister, Francesco Saverio Nitti, and the senator and scientist Guglielmo Marconi. If on Columbus Day, each October, marching along the streets toward the statue of the explorer placed in Fairmount Park, the Italians of the city were isolated from the other Philadelphians, that event had a more inclusive character because dignitaries and local

leaders were obliged to pay homage to the colony itself.

Some of the most interesting pages in the volume concern the role of women and children. As is well known, women were called upon to carry out tasks traditionally entrusted to men, and even in the Italian community there was the hope on their part for a more balanced relationship between the two genders, even at the end of the conflict. Behind patriotism, however, the fears of women—those left behind by husbands who had gone to join the fighting in Italy, and those soon to be left in poverty and isolation—were often hidden.

In a very appropriate way, Juliani’s book goes beyond the end of the war, recounting, for example, the visit of General Armando Diaz to the Italian community of Philadelphia in November 1921 and, above all, pointing out how the migration policy that during the conflict had granted citizenship more easily would soon change, leaving room for theories about a stricter enforcement of the present laws to prevent the arrival of southern and eastern Europeans, which would soon lead to the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924.

Juliani states that the tendency to see the Great War almost exclusively on the western front has not only neglected the conflict being waged on the other fronts, such as the Italian one, but “has almost erased its implications for immigrant groups who found themselves in America” (p. 40). Juliani’s book is a successful attempt to overcome this historiographical limit. However, the author concludes by asserting that while the service of Italians under American colors can be well documented, “the record of immigrants as reservists in the Italian army, beginning with how many of them reported, remains to be more fully examined” (p. 253). In order to better answer this research question, and more generally the relationship between Italians and their homeland, an analysis of some archival sources would have been useful, such as the papers relating to the Italian

Embassy in Washington and to the Italian Consulate of Philadelphia preserved at the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome. A dialogue with Italian historiography (in particular, Emilio Franzina, Patrizia Salvetti, and Stefano Luconi), which has already developed several remarkable studies on the subject, would also have been beneficial.

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