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# "The cornerstone is laid": Italian American Memorial Building in New York City and Immigrants' Right to the City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

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- 1 At the end of the nineteenth century, the massive arrival of Eastern and Southern European immigrants in the United States was often depicted in the local press as an "invasion" of "undesirable" crowds. Permeated with eugenic ideology, the New York newspapers presented the "dark faced Italians" who were "swarming through the doors of Barge Office."<sup>1</sup> This "miserable lot of human beings" was deemed a potential nuisance in a society which needed cheap labor but had difficulties welcoming foreign workers on an equal footing.<sup>2</sup> At a time when rapid industrialization was contributing to shaping the cities, the question of space became crucial. Indeed, immigrants were somehow seen as usurping an urban territory which was not theirs, and which they were allegedly altering for the worse. Thus, Italians, like other groups, were constantly criticized for clustering in specific neighborhoods that were "filthy beyond description" and "unfit for a human being to live in." While some associations campaigned "to rid [the] city of the presence of swarthy sons and daughters of sunny Italy," conflict, tensions or derision could be observed

whenever the latter tried – even temporarily – to trespass the limits of their wards and invest public areas, be they streets or parks.<sup>3</sup> Yet the elite of what was then called the Italian “colony” was quite aware that “space is political” and that to gain recognition and acceptance, their fellow countrymen should claim a right to the city.<sup>4</sup> This paper will analyze how Italian Americans used memorial building to get a greater exposure as an ethnic group and transcend the boundaries of the skimpy Little Italies. It will argue that, by disputing space with the city authorities for the erection of monuments, immigrants also questioned the place they had been assigned in American society and history, and tried to redefine their role as political actors of the city.

## 1. Carving Ethnicity in the City

- <sup>2</sup> In New York City, the man who led that struggle for appropriating public space in the name of Italian Americans was Carlo Barsotti (1850-1927), the directing manager of the leading Italian-language newspaper *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*. At the same time a banker and a boarding house landlord, he had left Tuscany when he was twenty-one and had rapidly shown great abilities as a businessman.<sup>5</sup> In the paper he founded with Vincenzo Polidori in 1880, he pressed readers to “rise and walk towards the highest hopes that might smile at the emigrant in America,” a goal he believed could be reached also very concretely by building memorials outside of the Little Italies.<sup>6</sup> Increasing Italian Americans’ visibility was a process which did include “rising and walking” in the city, and memorials provided the immigrants with opportunities to do so. Thus Barsotti dedicated much of his time to raising funds and lobbying for the construction of various monuments to the glory of Italian heroes, among whom were Giuseppe Garibaldi at Washington Square Park (1888) and on Staten Island (1896), Christopher Columbus at Columbus Circle (1892), Giuseppe Verdi between Broadway and 73<sup>rd</sup> Street (1906), Giovanni da Verrazzano in Battery Park (1909), and Dante Alighieri between Broadway and Columbus Avenue, near Lincoln Square (1921).

<sup>3</sup> Barsotti was certainly not the only editor to invest so much energy in memorial building, within or outside immigrant communities. In fact, the first monument to be

erected by Italian Americans in New York City was a bust of Risorgimento's leading political thinker Giuseppe Mazzini. It had been inaugurated as early as 1878 in Central Park, under the initiative of sculptor Nestore Corradi (1811-1891) and the *Unione e Fratellanza* benevolent society, with the support of the Italian-language weekly *L'Eco d'Italia*, owned by Giovanni Francesco Secchi de Casali (1819-1885).<sup>7</sup> More generally, ethnic newspapers made a point of marking urban space to promote ethnic pride and show the American public an expression of their collective identity that was redefined in their terms, and staged outside of their despised neighborhoods. Although the *Washington Post* claimed "the Italian's devotion to commemorating" was "a national trait particularly strong in his race,"<sup>8</sup> paying tribute to great historical figures by organizing celebrations, parades and pageants or by building monuments was a compulsion shared by most immigrants.<sup>9</sup> As John Bodnar has shown, the latter expressed their patriotism with multiple forms of commemorations aiming at affirming their ethnic identity as "a positive force helping them create the nation," thus contributing to forging a public memory of their own experience in the United States.<sup>10</sup> It is not surprising, then, that the New York City Art Commission was overwhelmed with requests from all ethnic groups, each of them wanting to leave its imprint on the urban space, revisiting its immigrant past, and inscribing its presence in the vast panorama of urban activities.<sup>11</sup>

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The initiatives led by *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* are therefore to be understood against this backdrop. To Barsotti, promoting *Italianità* (a sense of Italian pride) with memorials was essential because carving the name of Italians and his own in the Carrara marble of those monuments was a way of marking his environment. The building process seemed almost of a carnal nature as it allowed Italian Americans to actually dig into the flesh of the city. When referring to the construction of the Columbus statue, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* underscored that Italian workers had excavated sixty thousand cubic feet of earth from 59<sup>th</sup> Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue to form the hole that was then filled with quicklime and cement as a foundation of a seventy-foot-high granite column supporting the Genoan sailor. For this project, the Italian laborers, whose contribution to the development of the local

infrastructures usually remained unacknowledged, had accepted to work for free because they knew they were leaving a trace for everyone to see.<sup>12</sup> In the same line of thought, when the Garibaldi and the Columbus memorials were laid, Barsotti buried copies of his daily in the foundations, as if he conferred the press the power to fecundate the American soil with seeds that would grow into flags of Italianness.<sup>13</sup> This feeling was imparted by his readers who congratulated him for showing that, from scratch, "a scrap of paper like *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*" could "make monuments of bronze and granite rise up" in America.<sup>14</sup> Italian immigrants, therefore, wished to impress Americans with their art and the legendary mastery of Italy's sculptors was meant to contrast with the squalor of their tenements. Planting statues obviously aimed at enhancing their image not only in New York City's public sites but also in the press, a strategy which proved to be only partly successful. In 1909, even though the *New York Tribune* praised Italians for "doing their part toward the decoration of the city," it had to admit "few New Yorkers realize[d] the extent to which they ha[d] contributed to the city's beautification."<sup>15</sup> The path to recognition of Italian merits was long and tortuous.

## 2. Breaking Boundaries, Switching Roles

- 5 Yet modifying the cityscape did help Italian Americans map themselves into the future social space of the United States, if anything because it extended their walking geography. At a time when "new immigrants poured into" the "modern city," thus making the urban population "increasingly fluid and unstable," the creation of monuments gave them reasons to stroll outside the boundaries of their enclaves.<sup>16</sup> Historian Bernard Lepetit explains that, "confronted with an existing space," foreigners develop practices which allow them to make this new environment their own, not only by building their own places, but also through what he calls a "deambulatory usage" which ranges from religious processions to the daily commuting of workers between their homes and the factory.<sup>17</sup> Barsotti himself understood that the city's restlessness and constant movement could serve his purpose of putting the Italian-American community on display. For example, when the City of New York decided the Garibaldi statue was to be laid in Washington Square, many of his countrymen complained

that the spot was "unsuitable and unbecoming" because it was not as decorous a place as other landmark squares of the city. There was too much agitation around it. Barsotti, on the contrary, defended that choice on the ground that "the creation of a statue honoring a European hero in one of the rare places of passage of the city was quite unusual, yet not unheard of."<sup>18</sup> The location was deemed strategic: the monument was to be seen by an ongoing flow of American passersby, including the "ancient and aristocratic New York families" living in the "magnificent houses" surrounding Washington Square. At the same time, the site was at the crossroads of "main streets" like "Fifth Avenue, University Place, the outlets of Broadway and 6<sup>th</sup> avenue" where "all the Italian societies converged for the parade of the XX<sup>th</sup> of September,"<sup>19</sup> and where the Garibaldi statue would be "exposed to [their] sight, memory and admiration."<sup>20</sup> It therefore matched two of Barsotti's implicit requirements: forcing Italian historical heritage on Americans and giving Italians an excuse to occupy new areas of the city. The inauguration of memorials was indeed a moment when the Italian population was breaking the barriers separating the Little Italies from bourgeois New York. In 1907, as the original Garibaldi statue was moved to Staten Island and replaced by a new more artistic piece by the same sculptor, the American press was struck by the unexpected and overwhelming fluidity of Italian Americans, noting that, in addition to Mulberry and Elizabeth Streets, "the uptown Little Italies" had "sent hundreds downtown." The tide of men and women had "daubed the square with color" and "beneath the Washington Arch they made a picture that could hardly have been classed as American."<sup>21</sup> With their parades, immigrants were consciously seizing quarters from which they were estranged by their social condition. Such movement was often regarded with condescension or amused contempt, since most celebrations brought with them not only the orderly marches or processions planned by the Italian elite to earn Americans' respect, but also boisterous crowds of ordinary people whose joyful customs contrasted with the local decorum. Quite revealing in that regard is the following description of the laying of the Columbus Statue, published by the *New York Times* in 1892:

Fifth Avenue was treated to such a color display as it had not seen in many a long month. All Little Italy swarmed out of Mulberry Bend and the streets south of Washington Square to see the great procession of the Italian societies march up the avenue and to Fifty-third Street and Eighth Avenue, where the cornerstone of the

statue to Christopher Columbus was to be laid. It was something unusual for the avenue, and the regular promenaders were to be seen gazing at the spectacle from the chamber windows, while the Italian peripatetic vendors thronged the sidewalks, and Italian mothers in rainbow attire dandled their children in arms on the steps of millionaires' palaces. The column of men in uniforms seldom seen above Bleecker Street marched up between the rows of brownstone houses to the lively music of the Italian national air. It was Italy's Day, and the dwellers along the avenue could only look and smile, and perhaps wish for a fraction of the sense of enjoyment and the enthusiasm displayed by these same Italians.

- 6 Once the ceremony was over, concluded the newspaper, "all Little Italy disappeared from its unaccustomed surroundings."<sup>22</sup> Surprise and embarrassment seemed to prevail in this account of what was presented as an intrusion into areas normally reserved to a certain class of New Yorkers. The temporary displacement of population went with a change of roles. The immigrants who were marching under the banners of their fraternal organizations, displaying with pride the colors of their humble professions (tailors, barbers, etc.) became the center of American passersby's attention. In this process, rich Americans were pushed up against the buildings, to the margins of sidewalks, a place where a number of immigrants were usually waiting to sell their goods and services. Such a reversal of positions was a source of discomfort that could generate mockery. Some lamented with cruel irony that "not a shine or a chestnut was to be had" down those colorful processions and that should anyone have "yelled 'next' the parade[s] would have been disrupted."<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, the Italian-American leaders thought those pageants and the publicity they brought in the press enhanced the image of their countrymen in the United States, and created a favorable context for a more general reflection on the Italians' contribution to American history.

### 3. Claiming a Space in the City, Finding a Place in the Nation's History

- 7 The idea that monuments participated in the civic education of the people was not new and it found many supporters in the City Beautiful Movement of the 1890s. For example, art historian George Kriehn praised historical bronzes and sculptures for teaching patriotism to Americans. He also believed nothing could be a "more effective agent in making good citizens" of the "foreign population" who could not read English books but could "read monuments which

appeal to the eye."<sup>24</sup> Carlo Barsotti and other prominent figures of the Italian colony were using similar arguments, but they were targeting the American public. By granting Italians a space in the city, they meant to give them a place in the past of America, the latter justifying the former. In other words, they intended to rewrite history, correcting its omissions and errors, so as to show that Italians were not invading a foreign land but that, on the contrary, they were settling in a place that their ancestors had contributed to discovering, and that they could claim as their own too.

8

Two historical figures played a major part in that quest for legitimacy: Christopher Columbus and Giuseppe Da Verrazzano. Columbus supposedly embodied the fraternity bonds existing between Italy and America and allowed the Italian-American elite to develop a kind of rhetoric immigrants relished. As Barsotti liked to recall, the "man who had discovered the New World and had opened it to the conquests of civilization, labor, industry, wealth and glory was Italian."<sup>25</sup> Italy was, therefore, presented as "the mother of the great discoverer" and America as "the DAUGHTER of its genius,"<sup>26</sup> a line of argumentation which was quite convenient as it reinvented an organic bond between the United States and Italy, while making eternal the debts the New World had contracted towards Italians. It was, obviously, to remind Americans of this debt that Italian Americans launched a campaign to make October 12 a national holiday known as Columbus Day, the celebration of which also led to a greater appropriation of public space.<sup>27</sup>

9

After Columbus, Barsotti looked for new heroes that could further justify the presence of Italians in the United States. Verrazzano, who was known for having sailed in the Bay of New York as early as 1524, stood out as a perfect choice. In 1909, the editor of *IlProgresso Italo-Americano* thus commissioned Italian artist Ettore Ximenes to sculpt a statue which he hoped would be planted in City Hall Park, a symbolically-charged place where the already existing monuments immortalized the proud Anglo-Dutch past of the city. The point was to fill in what he considered a historical gap: Henry Hudson was not the first explorer to have discovered the bay and the river that were unjustly bearing his name and this honor should be granted instead to Verrazzano. The New York Art Commission, which questioned the artistic quality of the bust and was reluctant



to challenge the predominance of the Anglo-Dutch heritage of the park, denied his request.<sup>28</sup> Yet it took more than a rebuff to discourage Barsotti, who kept harassing the commission until the latter allowed Ximenes's work to find refuge in Battery Park, south of Manhattan. He defended his project all the more fiercely as he wanted the memorial to be unveiled during the great festivities organized in the fall of 1909 for the tercentenary of the discovery of the bay by Hudson. Barsotti won that battle and succeeded not only in being assigned a space in what was to be the center stage of the Hudson-Fulton pageantry, but also in imposing the Italian name of Verrazzano on the program of a historical event dedicated to the memory of an English sailor. It was no small victory, considering that city planning was controlled by advocates of historic preservation, who, as historian Randall Mason recalls, favored the creation of specific places where immigrants could pay tribute to their heroes. In New York City, "tacit negotiations" were indeed taking place about "the geography of memory sites and their political symbolism," resulting in the "zoning of particular narratives in particular places."<sup>29</sup> A touch of ethnic plurality was welcome, but only as long as it did not interfere with the official tale of the nation or irrupt into areas designed for American civic education. Getting Verrazzano to be admitted in the Hudson-Fulton celebration meant making room for the heritage of undesirable immigrants in a festival that was praising mainly the contribution of early northern European colonists. It was a tour de force which, as American newspapers remarked, "ought to have caused old Henry Hudson to turn in his grave," but which Barsotti fully savored.<sup>30</sup> His obstinacy led the whole national press to discuss Verrazzano and his compatriots' claim.<sup>31</sup> The Hudson-Fulton commission was thus forced to admit the Italian navigator was "the earliest European visitor to these waters," although they insisted the stream had been "correctly named" because Hudson was "the first to give an authentic record of careful exploration of the river," making it known to mankind, as the true definition of the term "discoverer" required.<sup>32</sup> Even though the name of the celebration was maintained, the very fact that the commission had to justify itself could be interpreted as an achievement.

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It was Barsotti's granddaughter, an American girl of Italian ancestry, who unveiled the monument which she

hoped would show "all the children of New York" that "it was an Italian who discovered the island of Manhattan."<sup>33</sup> As for Barsotti, he took pride in the "boldness of *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*," which had met the "noble challenge" of planting the statue in Battery Park.<sup>34</sup> This was an act of "vindication" by which he wanted to right the wrong inflicted on Italians.<sup>35</sup> Beyond what he called the "justice of history," what was at stake was not so much the past as the present of Italians in America. The bronze was meant to become a symbol of the qualities nativist politicians and scientists denied his countrymen. The Italian ambassador's address during the festivities reflected such preoccupations. While eugenic principles were gaining momentum, he chose to pay "tribute to the sublime Latin genius, the grand Latin genius which led its sons to conquests of science not less than of letters and art." Implicitly replying to the racist theories of the time, the diplomat claimed that "the union of the two races - the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon - in what he called 'this noble American land,' formed a race more complete and more perfect, which promised to advance more and more in the high road of civilization."<sup>36</sup> Clearly, the Verrazzano and Columbus memorials also served as tribunes for voicing Italian immigrants' grievances, and claiming a political space at the city and state levels. Indeed, Barsotti resorted to the same strategy each time he wanted to launch a new commemoration project, transforming all those heroes - including Dante Alighieri - into "symbols of Italianness" who heralded the hopes of the "New immigrant Italy."<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. Conquering New Spaces for Unity or Division?

- <sup>11</sup> It is obvious that the United States' collective memory was then rather selective and left little room for new immigrants. Yet, as mentioned above, building memorials had a wider scope than the mere celebration of old glories. To use historian Christine M. Boyer's words, city monuments became for Italian-Americans "artifacts and traces that connect[ed] the past with the present in imaginative ways, and help[ed] to build a sense of community, culture and nation."<sup>38</sup> On the one hand, erecting bronzes and marble columns was supposed to get so-called "old stock" Americans to look at Italians as legitimate co-users of the city. On the other hand, it aimed at bringing together Sicilians, Neapolitans, Genoans, and others,

easing the process of national identity building within an ethnic group whose members hardly felt Italian yet, as the unification of Italy (1861) was still rather recent. Laying stones was, therefore, intended as an opportunity to foster unity within and without the community. Nevertheless, that goal was not easily reached. Both the American and the Italian authorities looked at the mushrooming of statues with a critical eye. While the Garibaldi monument in Washington Square was criticized for being "the least artistic statue in this unhappy city," the unlucky fate of other Italian bronzes delighted the U.S. press, which did not necessarily support the message of national pride those memorials conveyed.<sup>39</sup> Far from generating admiration, the Verdi statue was said to diversify "the not too attractive square at the junction of Broadway and Amsterdam with a touch of the grotesque" and to provide "a background of unconscious but lasting humor for the row of waiting taxicabs."<sup>40</sup> Dante's bust, which found a place in the city only after years of hectic negotiations between Barsotti and the New York City Art Commission, became a source of particular strain and sarcasm.<sup>41</sup> When *Il Progresso Italo-Americano's* editor suggested that it be laid in Times Square, Commissioner Stover confessed he had "grave doubts as to the appropriateness of placing a man who wrote the divine comedy in such a bustling, happy crossroads," for "if ever a monument [was] to grace the square it should be an American of the Americans."<sup>42</sup> As for the *New York Tribune*, it held that that just because the city was "so hospitable to peoples of the Old World," it could not "afford to be equally hospitable to their enthusiasms when they take the form of statues," as there was no "room in the parks for all the national poets and heroes, even of the foreign groups who cut a figure at the polls."<sup>43</sup>

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Other ethnic groups also contested the public space Italians had been granted, and the memorials became targets for potential dissenters. The Garibaldi statue, for instance, was deemed "a thorn in the eye" of the Irish who thought the monument was the "apotheosis of the most ferocious and implacable enemy of the papacy and of the church" and who therefore seized every opportunity to spit on it. On such occasions, Washington Square witnessed episodes of physical conflict, Italians giving a "good hiding and fist fighting lesson" to those who dared disrespect the statue.<sup>44</sup> Mayor Abram Hewitt himself "received several

protests for consenting to review the Garibaldi Italian jubilation over the looting of the Pope's temporal possessions" whereas he had refused to attend the Saint Patrick parade.<sup>45</sup> As Michael Kammen has shown, commemorations were not just moments of consensus.<sup>46</sup> They were also staging competing memories.

<sup>13</sup>  
The Little Italies were not exempted from dissensions either. While the city authorities were suspected of wanting to sacrifice municipal space on the altar of political patronage, Barsotti was accused of wasting and even embezzling funds from his contributors. Italian-American radicals such as anarchist leader Luigi Galleani (1861-1931) systematically tried to undermine Barsotti's efforts because not only did they see memorials as worthless and politically unacceptable,<sup>47</sup> but they also claimed the money sent to *Il Progresso* was being misappropriated. Barsotti "will flood New York with great monuments of stone," "pocketing huge money in addition to applauses" because he has "understood the spirit of the colony and knows how to exploit it," explained Galleani's newspaper *Cronaca Sovversiva* in 1910.<sup>48</sup> Such an allegation was recurrent even among his competitors, who mocked his "*mal della pietra*,"<sup>49</sup> a disease which led him to build memorials all over the city and made him rich.<sup>50</sup> Dubbed the "Statue Man" by the U.S. press, Barsotti was certainly raising monuments so as to get the attention of both the Italian consulate and the city authorities and be seen as a leading figure of the "colony."<sup>51</sup> While many Italian benevolent societies contributed to collecting funds and organizing the commemorative parades, he was the first to benefit from the light he shed on Italian historical figures. So intense was his thirst for fame that he tried to get his own name carved on the pedestal of the statues whenever he got a chance to.<sup>52</sup> What he did with the funds cannot be ascertained. Yet the numerous campaigns led against him by Italian-American businessmen like Vincenzo Polidori, the editing manager of *Cristoforo Colombo*<sup>53</sup> show that the stakes were high. Barsotti's detractors also questioned the very necessity of financing statues when the Little Italies needed hospitals, schools, and libraries. Memorial building was thus anything but consensual, even within the ethnic community.

<sup>14</sup>  
The Italian-American newspapermen's drive to lay statues in New York and other cities of the United States

was undoubtedly motivated by a quest for self-promotion. When Barsotti and his competitors dedicated time and money to mark the territory they lived in, they wanted to leave a personal imprint as much as they hoped it would help their countrymen force their way through new areas of the American public space. But there was more to it. Barsotti did see space as a reality that endured, to paraphrase Maurice Halbwachs.<sup>54</sup> He cared about posterity and wanted to reshape the geography of memory sites in the city by impressing lasting landmarks of Italian heritage on New York maps. To sculptor Ettore Ximenes, who had designed two of the monuments sponsored by *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, Barsotti had confessed that he paid little attention to criticisms because the future was his only preoccupation. "As long as Columbus looks at those small creatures who press around him today, and stays on his pedestal," he explained, "as long as people bow to Verdi and now to Verrazzano, I feel happy," because "monuments remain while petty talks, gossips and calumny die away with men."<sup>55</sup>

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## NOTES

1. "Blue-Eyed Immigrants," *Sun*, 6 April 1891, 5.
2. "Undesirable Immigrants," *New York Times*, 6 November 1879, 3. On anti-Italian prejudice, see: Salvatore J. LaGumina, ed., *Wop! A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1973) and William J Connell, Fred Gardaphé, eds., *Anti-Italianism: Essays on a Prejudice* (New York: Palgrave, 2010).
3. "An Anti-Italian League," *Sun*, 17 July 1887, 12.
4. Henri Lefebvre, "Reflections on the Politics of Space," in *State, Space, World: Selected Essays* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 170. See also: Grégory Busquet, "Political Space in the Work of Henri Lefebvre: Ideology and Utopia" [translation : Sharon Moren], *Justice Spatiale | Spatial Justice* 5 (Dec. 2012-Dec. 2013), <http://www.jssj.org>.
5. Howard Marraro, "Carlo Barsotti," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol.6, ed. Alberto Ghisalberti *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol.6, (Rome: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 1964), 541-542.
6. *Il Progresso Italo-Americano, Per la mostra del Lavoro degl'Italiani all'estero, Esposizione Internazionale di Torino pel cinquantenario dell'Unità nazionale* (New York, 1911), 43.

7. "In Memory of Mazzini. Unveiling the Bust in Central Park," *New York Tribune*, 30 May 1878, 8. The bust was sculpted by Giovanni Turini.
8. "Italians Love Monuments," *Washington Post*, 22 October 1910, 6.
9. See for instance: Jürgen Heideking, Geneviève Fabre, eds., *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation, American Festive Culture from the Revolution to the Early 20th Century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001); Terence Schoone-Jongen, *The Dutch American Identity: Staging Memory and Ethnicity in Community Celebrations* (New York: Cambria Press, 2008).
10. John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1992), 69-70.
11. See Michele H. Bogart, *The Politics of Urban Beauty. New York and its Art Commission* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 22-24; 108-114. The author dedicates well documented pages to the building of the Verrazzano and Dante statues promoted by Barsotti.
12. "Il 4°. Centenario della Scoperta d'America," in *Guida Italiana e calendario universale del Progresso Italo-Americano per gli Stati Uniti, il Canada, il Messico etc* (New York: Tipografia del Progresso Italo-americano, 1893), 9.
13. "Per Garibaldi: La collocazione della pietra del monumento," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 1 June 1888, 1; "The Columbus Memorial Arch," *The Architectural and Building Monthly*, 1 October 1892, 10.
14. "Lettere," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 10 February 1888, 1.
15. "Columbus Day Joys," *New York Tribune*, 10 October 1909, A5.
16. Kevin Mattson, *Creating a Democratic Public : The Struggle for Urban Participatory Democracy During the Progressive Era* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 15.
17. Bernard Lepetit, "Proposition et Avertissement," in *Les étrangers dans la ville, Minorités et espace urbain du bas Moyen-Age à l'époque moderne*, eds. Jacques Bottin and Donatella Calabi (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'homme, 1999), 14.
18. "Per Garibaldi: L'Inaugurazione del Monumento," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 7 June 1888, 1.
19. This parade celebrated the completion of Italian unity with the capture of Rome on September 20, 1870.
20. "Perché il Monumento a Garibaldi in New York sarà eretto in Washington Square," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 2 March 1888, 1.
21. "Italians Dedicate Garibaldi Memorial," *New York Times*, 5 July 1907, 6.
22. "The Cornerstone is Laid," *New York Times*, 17 September 1892, 8.
23. "Verrazzano Bust Unveiled," *Sun*, 7 October 1909, 5.
24. George Kriehn, "The City Beautiful," *Municipal Affairs* 3/ 4 (December 1899): 600.
25. "Per Cristoforo Colombo," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, 22 July 1890, 1.
26. "To Stand Forever," *New York Tribune*, 13 October 1892, 3.
27. This battle was finally won in 1968 at the federal level, but some states had already adopted Columbus Day as a legal holiday as soon as the 1910s. For more details see: Carol J. Bradley, "Towards a Celebration: The Columbus Monument in New York," in *Italian Americans Celebrate Life. The Arts and Popular Culture*, eds. Paola A. Sensi-Isolani and Anthony Julian Tamburri (Staten Island, NY: American Italian Historical Association, 1990), 81-94; Bénédicte Deschamps, "Italian Americans and Columbus Day: A Quest for

Consensus Between National and Group Identities (1840-1910)," in *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation*, eds. Jürgen Heideking and Geneviève Fabre,, 124-139; and "La scoperta dell'America narrata dai giornali italo-americani, 1880-2000," in *Comunicare il passato: Cinema, giornali e libri di testo nella narrazione storica*, eds. Simone Cinotto and Marco Mariano *Comunicare il passato: Cinema, giornali e libri di testo nella narrazione storica*(Turin: L'Harmattan Italia, 2004), 409-438; Stefano Luconi, "Le celebrazioni del cinquantenario e i prominenti italo-americani negli Stati Uniti," *Archivio Storico dell'Emigrazione Italiana* 7 (2011):41-50 and "Columbus and Vespucci as Italian Navigators: The Ethnic Legacy of Explorations and Italian Americans' Search for Legitimacy in the United States," in *Florence in Italy and Abroad from Vespucci to Contemporary Innovators* (Florence: Florence Campus Publishing House, 2012), 62-77; and Kathleen Loock, *Kolumbus in den USA: Vom Nationalhelden zur ethnischen Identifikationsfigur* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014).

28. Michele H. Bogart, *The Politics of Urban Beauty*, 109-110.

29. Randall Mason, *The Once and Future New York: Historic Preservation and the Modern City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 62.

30. "Henry Hudson's Peary Luck," *New York Tribune*, 14 September 1909, 12.

31. See, for instance, "Verrazzano Saw the River First," *Evening Statesman*, 6 October 1909, 8.

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33. "Verrazzano Bust Unveiled," *Sun*, 7 October 1909, 5.

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## ABSTRACTS

This paper will analyze how, at the end of the nineteenth century, Italian Americans used memorial building to get a greater exposure as an ethnic group, transcend the boundaries of the

Little Italies, question the place they had been assigned in American society and history, and redefine their role as political actors of the city.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Carlo Barsotti, commemorative space, ethnicity, Italian Americans, Italian immigration, memorials, New York City, politics of memory., urban planning

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