

T. Guglielmo, "‘No Color Barrier’: Italians, Race, and Power in the United States," in J. Guglielmo and S. Salerno (eds.) Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America (New York: Routledge, 2003)

A. The Italian "hard work/self-made man" narrative and its racial subtext

B. Historical context of TG's argument: Italian immigration to U.S. from 1890-1920. How were these immigrants viewed? Southern Italians, the bulk of U.S. Italian immigrants, seen by some opinion-makers in Italy as inferior to Northern Italians. This view of their inferiority was picked up by Anglo-Saxon Americans when they immigrated to the U.S.

C. To understand this form of inferiority, and how it changed over time, TG distinguishes between

"color" (Groups normally thought of as races and symbolized by color terminology: white, black, yellow, red, brown)

"race" (groups defined by cultural/physical characteristics *within* "color" groups)

[COMMENT: This terminology may be misleading. What Guglielmo is calling "color" is what we nowadays normally think of as "race," with an emphasis on the color terminology we use to symbolize races. What Guglielmo calls "race" is what we now think of as "ethnicity," although with the somewhat "racialized" manner in which ethnic groups were thought of in the U.S. in the first several decades of the 20th century.]

Guglielmo's point is that "color" defined a much more consequential social category and social grouping in the U.S. than did "race," in the sense that color-defined groups were much more strongly discriminated against than were "racial" groups.

D. What kind and extent of discrimination did Italian immigrants suffer from?

1. Although there were occasionally challenges to it, Italian immigrants were seen as "white" in color and so did not suffer from color discrimination as did Asians, Blacks, and Mexicans. This "whiteness" was grounded in then-current scientific understandings of race; Roman civilization as superior; naturalization and immigration law, which treated Europeans as falling within the category of "whites;" the U.S. Census during this period; and U.S.'s historical investment in the "white/black/Asian/Native American" racial scheme.

2. But they did suffer from race discrimination, as they were seen as "racially" distinct from the Anglo-Saxon dominant group.

[Guglielmo details these forms of discrimination, which occasionally involved actual lynching, while also making clear that this discrimination differed in both degree and often in kind from color discrimination. The latter involved official segregation {in the South}, job discrimination, discrimination in union membership, discrimination in housing and residence, and exclusion from various public and civic positions {in North as well as South}.]

E. "Whiteness," which Italians possessed, conferred various historic benefits. The government discriminated in favor of Whites in various ways, and not only in the South: for example

1. housing policy,
2. the GI Bill after WWII,
3. Social Security eligibility {excluded farmers and domestic workers, both categories of which were largely Black during the 30's and 40's}. And Whites, including Italian-Americans, continue to reap the benefit of this historical advantaging.

F. Implications for the "we made it on our own without government help" narrative.