The Machine Has a Soul: American Sympathizers with Italian Fascism

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By

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Americans across the political and cultural spectrum sympathized with Italian fascism in the interwar years. This dissertation demonstrates that American fascist sympathizers believed that Italy was coping better with the challenges of modernity than the United States. Fascist sympathizers argued that fascist squads revived older values of service and honor, even as Mussolini kept pace with a fast-moving society. They claimed that the corporate state was an up-to-date form of government, which protected Italians from the worst effects of the global depression. And, as the fascist state became increasingly totalitarian, they represented Italy as a place where men and women could transcend the grit and grind of modern life to find inner peace.

American fascist sympathizers had various goals when they invoked Italy’s apparent successes in managing the challenges of modernity. First, they aimed to expose faults in their own society: the numbing effects of standardization; the erosion of higher ideals; the failure of government to protect Americans from the ravages of industrialization. Second, they suggested solutions to the United States’ problems: the reform of government to promote expertise in policymaking; and measures to create jobs and support the return to a simpler life. Finally, they aimed to send the reassuring message that Americans, too, could combine the best of the traditional and the modern, and have a government that was both effective and inspiring—a machine with a soul.

This dissertation accesses fascist sympathizers’ views through the intellectual biographies of four prominent Americans, analyzing their journalism, lectures, books, and unpublished letters, and records of their contacts with officials in both Italy and the US. In contrast to the preexisting scholarship, this study shows that anxieties about modernity united American fascist sympathizers of various political persuasions and cultural tendencies. It sheds light onto fascism’s own ambivalent relationship with modernity, while illuminating issues that animated American public opinion and policymaking in the
interwar years, including the cultural and social consequences of mass production, consumption, and urbanization, and the need to forge institutions and policies to ensure that men and women made their way through modernity with their souls intact.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction. The Machine with a Soul ..........................................................................................1
Two (Very Different) Forerunners to this Study ...........................................................................3
Methodology and Scope ..................................................................................................................5
Four Fascist Sympathizers .............................................................................................................7
What Explains Fascist Sympathies? ..............................................................................................16
Why American Fascist Sympathizers Matter ...............................................................................19
Chapter I. The Good Adventure: Fascist Squads in a War-Weary World ..................................27
The Wrong Side of Paradise ............................................................................................................29
Italia Disprezzata ..........................................................................................................................31
The Weary World ...........................................................................................................................35
Renewing War ...............................................................................................................................38
March on Rome ..............................................................................................................................46
The Leader of the Fascists ............................................................................................................51
The Promise of a New World ..........................................................................................................54
Chapter II. Mystic in a Morning Coat: Americans’ Mussolini in the 1920s ..............................56
The Right Kind of Businessman .....................................................................................................58
More Modern, More Italian ..........................................................................................................63
Italy’s Answer to Horatio Alger .....................................................................................................65
Manliness Lost in the United States ..............................................................................................72
The Promise of Manhood Regained ..............................................................................................77
Old-Fashioned and Eternal ..........................................................................................................81
Panacea, Foil, and Model ..............................................................................................................86
Chapter III. The Dream Machine: The Fascist State in an Era of Democratic Disillusionment ..92
The Broken-Down Machine ..........................................................................................................96
The Crumbling Citadel ..................................................................................................................97
The Cadaver Sings .........................................................................................................................104
The Daily Plebiscite ......................................................................................................................109
Homegrown Solutions .................................................................................................................115
Realities and Dreams ...................................................................................................................119
Chapter IV. Man as the Measure of All Things: Sympathizing with Fascism in the Early Depression Years .........................................................................................................................122
The Machine-Made Crisis ..........................................................................................................123
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Richard Washburn Child in 1924 ......................................................... 24
Figure 2. Anne O’Hare McCormick in 1937 .............................................................. 25
Figure 3. Generoso Pope, Date Unknown ................................................................. 25
Figure 4. Herbert Wallace Schneider, Date Unknown .................................................. 26
Figure 5. Generoso Pope’s First Day at a New Job, November 1928 .......................... 88
Figure 6. The “Honorable” Benito Mussolini ............................................................ 89
Figure 7. Pope Meets Mussolini, July 1929 .............................................................. 90
Figure 8. Mussolini as an Executive with a Soul, 1928 ............................................. 91
Figure 9. The Fascist Elite in Action, 1929 ............................................................... 121
Figure 10. Mussolini Goes Back to the Land ............................................................. 163
Figure 11. Pope and Balbo Get a Police Escort, July 1933 ........................................ 217
Figure 12. The Men in White, 1933 ........................................................................... 218
Figure 13. Mussolini at the Child Welfare Show in Rome, 1937 .............................. 219
Figure 14. The Valley of Youth ................................................................................. 219
Figure 15. Risen Again .............................................................................................. 220
Figure 16. “A Good Fascist Nationalist,” 1937 ......................................................... 260

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Selection Criteria for the Study ..................................................................... 6
Introduction. The Machine with a Soul

It was Benito Mussolini who described fascism as a machine with soul, but it was Richard Washburn Child, a former American Ambassador to Italy, who communicated this image to the American public. Child was the United States’ chief representative in Italy in 1922, when the fascists marched on Rome; in diplomatic cables, private letters, and published accounts, he celebrated Mussolini’s rise to power. Upon his retirement from the diplomatic service in 1924, Child continued to express support for fascism through articles in the mass-circulation magazine, the Saturday Evening Post. In 1928, Child was the editor of Mussolini’s first English-language autobiography. In his foreword to this autobiography, Child wrote that Mussolini aimed to make the fascist state “‘the machine which will run and has a soul.”’

The image of fascism as a machine with a soul was powerful because it was surprising. Even to our ears there is something incongruous about it, since a machine is a tangible, practical, and man-made thing, and a soul is just the opposite—ethereal, spiritual, and beyond human comprehension. The idea of a machine with a soul would have been more arresting still for Child’s contemporaries, because it upended a commonplace understanding of a conflict between humans and machines in the modern age. According to widespread critiques, machines dominated Americans’ leisure activities, workplaces, and landscapes, contributing to the corruption of honorable morals, the decline of political intelligence, the erosion of human dignity, and a brutalized environment. Mussolini’s genius, Child implied, lay in harnessing forces that were typically arraigned against one another, and fusing them into one.

Richard Washburn Child’s presentation of fascism as a machine with a soul lies at the heart of this study because it tells us much about why Mussolini’s regime appealed to Americans in the interwar years. Child, like many of his contemporaries, identified the machine as both a precipitator of, and proxy for, American modernity. Public intellectuals and cultural commentators understood that machines, which powered assembly lines, disseminated cultural content, and propelled vehicles, were catalysts for change. But they also argued that machines hollowed-out human beings, and rendered preexisting institutions

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obsolete. For instance, Walter Lippmann, one of the most influential public intellectuals of the interwar years, suggested that machines overwhelmed men and women. According to Lippmann, the “noise, odor, and heat” of factories, the clattering of typewriters, and the jerking rhythms of streetcars made Americans addled creatures, with little capacity for calm reflection about issues of public interest. Child and other American fascist sympathizers echoed Lippmann’s observations, to argue that American institutions—and democracy itself—were unsuited to the realities of the machine age.

While contemporary observers identified actual machines as harbingers of modernity, they also used the machine as a metaphor for the modern experience. For example, the novelist and critic Waldo Frank invoked the machine to convey Americans’ obsessions with power, efficiency, and success. Frank argued that, like the machine, these values developed a momentum of their own; men and women worshipped them, fueled them, and got caught in their thrall. Similarly, American fascist sympathizers used images of the machine to invoke the atmosphere of modernity, in which humans felt swept along, and out of control. Anne O’Hare McCormick, a New York Times journalist who, like Child, was a long-term supporter of Mussolini and fascism, expressed Americans’ relationship with modernity in these terms. All the United States’ problems were “bound up with the machine,” she wrote in 1930, alluding to both the economic challenges provoked by mechanical production, as well as pervasive feelings of being outpaced, overwhelmed, and overpowered in the modern world.

American fascist sympathizers echoed the sentiments of an array of commentators in the interwar years—including staunch opponents of fascism like Walter Lippmann and Waldo Frank—who lamented a

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machine-driven society and lambasted machine-driven women and men. Where American fascist sympathizers parted ways with the likes of Lippmann and Frank, of course, was in their belief that things were going better in fascist Italy. Richard Washburn Child, Anne O’Hare McCormick, and other fascist sympathizers argued that Italy was coping more effectively with the problems of modernity than the United States because fascism was infusing the machine with soul. Italy’s experience was relevant for Americans, they believed, because the fascists did not reject mechanization, modernization, and progress; instead, the fascists tamed the machine, and harmonized its relationship with women and men. The United States, they suggested, could learn from this example.

**Two (Very Different) Forerunners to this Study**

This research project did not begin with the notion that Americans sympathized with fascism because they believed that Mussolini was coping better with the problems of modernity. It began with a more basic curiosity. Prior to this study, the most complete work on the question of American fascist sympathizers is John Diggins’ *Mussolini and Fascism; The View from America*, published in 1972. In this book, Diggins demonstrated that fascist sympathizers could be found within many areas of American life in the interwar years, including the government, universities, the Catholic Church, and the Italian American community. Diggins argued that various groups supported Mussolini for different reasons: government officials believed Mussolini would create stability in Italy; academics and pundits were impressed by his apparent pragmatism; Catholic churchmen appreciated Mussolini for his resolution of the state’s conflict with the Vatican; and Italian Americans felt immense pride in Italy under *il Duce*. This variety of responses, Diggins suggested, was a reflection of the protean nature of fascism and of

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8 Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 77-110 (on Italian Americans), 182-97 (on Catholics), 221-32 (on academics and pundits), 262-86 (on government).
Mussolini himself, who was all things to all men—a part-time statesman, athlete, and warrior, and a full-time fraud.9

Diggins succeeded in demonstrating that fascist sympathies were widespread in American society in the interwar years. But beyond their love of Mussolini, he found little in common across the various groups of fascist sympathizers. Reading Mussolini and Fascism; The View from America is like looking through a kaleidoscope at hundreds of brightly colored shards: you will struggle to see, still less remember, the big picture. The absence of a big picture—or thesis—was partly due to Diggins’ methodology. He incorporated the views of scores of Americans who expressed sympathies with fascism, however fleetingly. This broad approach did not allow Diggins to investigate deeply the mental landscape of individuals. Most notably, Diggins did a good job of uncovering what American fascist sympathizers thought of Italy, but he devoted very little attention to what they thought about the United States.

No historian since Diggins has revisited the question of sympathies with Italian fascism across American society in the interwar years, although some—notably Philip Cannistraro and Peter D’Agostino—have investigated Italian Americans’ and the Catholic Church’s support for Mussolini’s regime.10 The absence of scholarly contributions to the study of broader American sympathies for fascism has left the field open to polemics. In 2008, the conservative pundit Jonah Goldberg argued that American liberalism was a “totalitarian political religion.” For evidence, Goldberg pointed to the American progressives who simultaneously supported Mussolini and FDR. Goldberg ignored a lot in his version of history, including the American conservatives who admired Mussolini in the interwar years.11 But then, his objective was not really (or at least merely) to write history. Rather, Goldberg used history to argue

9 Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 58-73.
that contemporary progressives were self-satisfied elites, intent on harnessing Americans to a gigantic state, and intolerant of anyone who disagreed with them.  

Together, Diggins’ and Goldberg’s contributions to the question of American fascist sympathizers encouraged me to make a contribution of my own. Diggins’ research indicated that more work could be done to understand why some Americans sympathized with fascism—to search for commonalities (as well as differences) in the views of Mussolini’s American supporters, and to uncover more fully what they thought not just about Italy, but about the United States. Goldberg’s Liberal Fascism convinced me that there was some urgency in this task, to ensure that warped accounts, which used the evidence selectively to support present-day political agendas, were not the only voices in the debate.

Methodology and Scope

When designing the method and scope of this study, I consciously chose an approach that was different from Diggins’. While Diggins considered the views of hundreds of Americans who expressed sympathetic views toward Mussolini, I decided to analyze in depth the intellectual biographies and activities of four American fascist sympathizers. This approach would enable me to consider fascist sympathizers’ opinions about both Italy and the United States in equal measure, to contextualize their

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12 Jonah Goldberg, Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left From Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 14, 121-62. Goldberg cherry-picked some of this evidence from Diggins’ Mussolini and Fascism, without acknowledging Diggins’ central observation that fascist sympathies could be found across the political spectrum in the US. Goldberg also pointed to the resemblance between the fascist state and some elements of the New Deal (particularly the National Recovery Administration), while ignoring the sheer eclecticism of the New Deal, which referenced social programs in Scandinavia and Australasia far more often than fascist Italy. See: Kiram Klaus Patel, The New Deal: A Global History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016). Goldberg, Liberal Fascism, 317-57. Goldberg’s principal objective was to expose Hillary Clinton as a “liberal fascist” in the year that she was running for the Democratic Party’s nomination as presidential candidate.

13 More recent works have followed in Goldberg’s footsteps. Ennio Caretto, Quando l’America Si Innamorò di Mussolini (Rome: Editori Internazionali Riuniti, 2014). In the wake of the global financial crisis, Ennio Caretto, a veteran Italian journalist, argued that financial and business elites and their conservative allies in government were the principal supporters of fascism in the United States during the interwar years. Both Goldberg and Caretto used the past to underpin an argument about the present, suggesting that since some American progressives/conservatives once admired Mussolini, American progressivism/conservatism is inherently fascistic. Read together, Goldberg’s and Caretto’s versions of history more or less cancel each other out. Dinesh D’Souza, The Big Lie: Exposing the Nazi Roots of the American Left (Washington DC: Regnery, 2017). Most recently, Dinesh D’Souza, a right-wing commentator, has argued that the American Democratic Party has a tradition of fascism that predates European fascism by one hundred years and, most crucially from d’Souza’s point of view, continues to this present day.
views within American culture in the interwar years, and to consider how they used Italy to shift the lines of debate and policymaking in the United States.

When selecting individuals to research I had three basic criteria. First, they had to have expressed positive sentiments about fascism for a relatively long period—around a decade or more. This would allow for a sustained investigation, which assessed how the same individual’s views changed over time. Second, they needed to represent various walks of American life. This would avoid giving the impression (perpetuated by Goldberg, among others) that fascist sympathies were the unique preserve of any one group of Americans. Third, these individuals needed to be men and women of significant influence, whether that influence was on their peer group, a broader swathe of public opinion, or policymakers in Italy and the United States.

Based on these criteria, I selected four individuals for an in-depth study of fascist sympathies in the United States. In addition to Richard Washburn Child, the diplomat and writer, and Anne O’Hare McCormick, the New York Times journalist, Generoso Pope, an Italian American community leader, and Herbert Wallace Schneider, a professor of philosophy, each fulfilled my basic criteria. All four expressed sustained support for fascism, they came from various walks of American life, and were people of influence (Table 1).

**Table 1. Selection Criteria for the Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Duration of sympathies toward fascism</th>
<th>Profession and politics</th>
<th>Channels of influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Richard Washburn Child</strong></td>
<td>11 yrs.; 1922-33</td>
<td>• Diplomat, journalist</td>
<td>• Contacts with US and Italian government, incl. Mussolini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Conservative and Republican, until 1932</td>
<td>• Journalism in <em>Saturday Evening Post</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anne O’Hare McCormick</strong></td>
<td>15 yrs.; 1921-36</td>
<td>• Journalist</td>
<td>• Contacts with US and Italian government, incl. Mussolini and FDR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Democrat, influenced by ideas of Catholic Social Justice</td>
<td>• Journalism in the <em>New York Times</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Generoso Pope | 13 yrs.; 1928-41 | • Italian American community leader, businessman, publisher
• Democrat | • Contacts with US and Italian government, incl. Mussolini and FDR
• Ownership of Il Progresso Italo-Americano |
|---------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Herbert Schneider | 10 yrs.; 1926-36 | • Philosopher, instrumentalist
• No overt party political affiliations | • Academics, incl. prominent political scientists |

Four Fascist Sympathizers

Richard Washburn Child. Born in 1880, the only child of a Massachusetts family, Richard Washburn Child grew up on the outer edges of the American establishment.\(^4\) He attended Milton—a boarding school in his home state—and went on to Harvard University.\(^5\) Child’s earliest political work was for Theodore Roosevelt’s Progressive Party in 1912, when he supported an uncle in a (failed) campaign for Governor of Massachusetts.\(^6\) By 1920, Child was a Republican, working as a speechwriter and adviser for the presidential candidate Warren Harding.\(^7\) President Harding appointed Child

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\(^4\) Richard Washburn Child’s father, Horace Walter Child, owned a shoe company. But it had fallen on hard times. Horace Walter owed his brother-in-law, the industrialist and politician Charles Sumner Bird, more than $10,000 in the 1920s. See: Promissory Note, November 1, 1921; Folder “Bills and Receipts”; and Charles Sumner Bird to Horace Walter Child, June 24, 1924; Folder “General Correspondence, 1909-24.” Both in Reel 1; Richard Washburn Child Papers; Library of Congress, Washington, District of Columbia (hereafter cited as RWCP).


\(^7\) John A. Morello, *Selling the President, 1920: Albert D. Lasker, Advertising, and the Election of Warren G. Harding* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 53, 67, 73. Letter, Richard Washburn Child to Horace Walter Child, October 13, 1920; Folder “1920-21”; Reel 2; RWCP. Child suggested that his work on Harding’s campaign was not always the cleanest. “When they [Harding’s team] couldn’t get anybody else they got me and I did it,” he confided to Walter. “I did it without any truckling and on the level and they all said it was done. I am satisfied.”
Ambassador to Italy in 1921, to thank him for his work during a (notoriously dirty) presidential campaign (Figure 1).\textsuperscript{18}

Throughout the 1920s, Child was a staunch proponent of a conservative worldview. He esteemed individuals and nations who minded “their own business” and argued that the best possible government was the “least possible government.”\textsuperscript{19} Child’s political philosophy changed—or at least appeared to—in 1932, when the depth of the Great Depression and the momentum of Franklin Roosevelt’s campaign prompted him to back the Democratic candidate for president and to express a more capacious view of government’s role in Americans’ lives.\textsuperscript{20}

As Child’s transition across party lines suggests, he worked hard to align himself with whoever had the most power in Washington, DC. His efforts had mixed results. Child’s direct influence on policymaking circles was greatest between 1921 and 1924, when he was Ambassador to Italy. His analysis of the fascist movement and the new Italian Prime Minister contributed to Washington’s positive reception of Mussolini.\textsuperscript{21} But after the death of Warren Harding, Child struggled to influence decision-makers in Washington: he was a marginal figure in the administration of Calvin Coolidge; he had no official role in Herbert Hoover’s presidency; and Franklin Roosevelt distrusted Child and kept him at a distance.\textsuperscript{22}

Child’s exerted his greatest, and most sustained, influence through his work for the \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, the United States’ pre-eminent mass-circulation magazine. More than two million

\textsuperscript{19} Embassy Weekly, June 30, 1923; 865/1239; Record Group 59; Microcopy 527; National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter cited as RG#: M#: NARA). Richard Washburn Child, \textit{A Diplomat Looks at Europe} (New York: Duffield and Company, 1925), 154; also published as, Richard Washburn Child, “The Making of Mussolini,” \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, June 28, 1924.
\textsuperscript{21} Embassy Weekly, November 4, 1922; 865.00/1180; Embassy Weekly, November 11, 1922; 864.00/1184; both RG59; M527; NARA. David F. Schmitz, \textit{The United States and Fascist Italy, 1922-1940} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 51-53, 56-57.
Americans subscribed to *Post* in the early 1920s, and readership continued to rise over the course of the decade. The magazine’s editor, George Horace Lorimer, dictated the *Post*’s editorial line, championing individual initiative, old-fashioned values, and small government. Child wrote more than seventy articles for the *Post* between 1924 and 1932. By no means all of these contributions related to Mussolini and fascism (although a good number did). Rather, Child addressed a variety of topics: the American presidency; domestic policy concerns; and politics in Europe. Through the *Post*, Child communicated his position on European and American politics and culture to a vast readership, warning Americans that their communities were changing at an alarming pace, that traditional values were under threat, and that democratic institutions were unsuited to the challenges of the modern age.

**Anne O’Hare McCormick.** Born in 1880, Anne O’Hare McCormick was an exact contemporary of Richard Washburn Child. But McCormick and Child were perhaps as unalike as two journalists who sympathized with fascism could be. McCormick’s politics were frequently progressive, informed by principles of Catholic social justice fostered during her upbringing in industrializing Ohio and her earliest journalism for her diocesan newspaper. McCormick lamented the United States’ retreat from Wilsonian internationalism in the early 1920s. She was sensitive to the conditions for those Americans—particularly in rural communities—who felt few of the benefits of the decade’s economic boom. And

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24 Cohn, *Creating America*, 3, 8, 10, 12, 141.
26 Marco Mariano and Federica Pinelli, *Europa e Stati Uniti Secondo il New York Times. La Corrispondenza Estera di Anne O’Hare McCormick 1920-1954* (Torino: Otto, 2000), 18-26. McCormick’s first journalism was for the *Catholic Universe*, the official paper of the Cleveland diocese, where she lived with her mother after her father abandoned the family in the late 1890s. Paul Lubienecki, “From the Parish Hall to the Union Hall: Catholic Labor Education in Cleveland,” *Ohio History* 124, no. 2 (2017): 49-84, esp. 65. Lubienecki provides insights into the atmosphere of Cleveland in those years. There were over one hundred unions in the city in the early 1900s, a high percentage of foreign born workers, and conflicts between labor and law enforcement, for example during the garment workers’ strike of 1911. The “bisсhops of the diocese exhibited a progressive attitude in support of workers and workers’ rights,” reflecting the precepts of the 1891 papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. For the importance of ideals of social justice within American Catholicism in the 1920s and 1930s, see: James O’Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 145-71.
28 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Uncertain, the Farmer Waits,” *New York Times*, March 31, 1929. McCormick’s principal focus was on white farmers; she was far less sensitive to the conditions of African Americans in either
she identified with the Democrats as the political party that she believed would most help those left behind in a period of breathtaking change.\textsuperscript{29}

McCormick assumed a mounting influence over American culture and policymaking over the course of the interwar years. The Times editors interpreted her first pieces for the newspaper—written in the winter of 1920 to 1921—as travel writing.\textsuperscript{30} But soon the Times recognized the political import of McCormick’s observations. Her journalism from Italy was instrumental in boosting her professional reputation: she was one of the first American journalists to report on the rising fascist movement; and in 1926 she interviewed Mussolini for the first time.\textsuperscript{31} Interviews such as this sealed McCormick’s reputation as a talented writer, capable of humanizing powerful men, and translating their policies into terms that her readers could readily understand.\textsuperscript{32}

McCormick’s political progressivism, Democratic affiliations, and capacity to distill the essence of a man, and his policies, to the public made her a useful ally for Franklin Roosevelt. Rarely one to miss a public relations opportunity, Roosevelt used McCormick wisely, to both of their advantages. FDR and McCormick met on numerous occasions in the mid-to late-1930s. During their meetings, the President mined the journalist for her insights into the precarious situation on the European continent; the journalist,
in turn, mined the President for his views on the changing role of government in the lives of ordinary Americans.\(^{33}\)

By the mid-1930s, Anne O’Hare McCormick had established herself as an authority on European affairs—someone with a keen sense of the public mood in various countries, and access to leaders, including Mussolini.\(^{34}\) At the same time, she had built her reputation as an acute observer of the United States. McCormick travelled frequently across the country, reporting on the experiences of Americans in the Midwest, the West and the South. Drawing upon personal anecdotes and snippets of conversation, she relayed ordinary peoples’ anxieties and aspirations to readers of the *New York Times*.\(^{35}\) McCormick was at her most compelling as a chronicler of the human experience, an artful assembler of details, which, combined, told Americans so much about the challenges they faced in the modern world (Figure 2).

**Generoso Pope.** Born in a village in rural Campania in 1891, Generoso Pope migrated to the United States as a teenager, with little money or formal education. Pope rose from a laborer in the sand quarries of Long Island, to a supervisor at a sand and gravel company, to the owner of the same firm.

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\(^{33}\) For a typical article on Roosevelt’s domestic policy, see Anne O’Hare McCormick, “As He Sees Himself,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1938. Letter, Anne O’Hare McCormick to Franklin Roosevelt, October 13, 1938; Folder, *New York Times* (Anne O’Hare McCormick), 1936-1937; President’s Personal File 675; FDRL. Writing to the President after an interview and before this article was published, McCormick explained: “I have tried to simplify even your simplification, with the thought of restating a few fundamentals that get lost in the confusion of many voices.” She suggested that they meet soon to discuss foreign policy. For other examples of McCormick’s interpretations of FDR’s domestic policy, see: Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Roosevelt’s View of the Big Job,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1932; Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Where in the Next Four Years?” *New York Times*, November 8, 1936; “The Big Moment—the Two Men,” *New York Times*, November 1, 1936; Anne O’Hare McCormick, “As Mr. Roosevelt Sees His Role,” *New York Times*, January 17, 1937.

\(^{34}\) See, for example: McCormick, “Il Duce Pictures the New State”; Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Mussolini of the Year IX,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1931; Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Mussolini Willing to Guarantee Enforcement of an Arms Treaty,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1934. In addition to her many meetings with Mussolini, McCormick met with Hitler six months after he became Chancellor of Germany. See: Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Hitler Seeks Jobs for All Germans,” July 10, 1933. “Anne O’Hare McCormick Is Dead,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1954. The *Times* promoted McCormick onto the newspaper’s editorial board in 1936 (she was the first woman to ever occupy this role), and gave her a column devoted to European affairs (another first, not just for a female journalist, but for the newspaper). McCormick won a Pulitzer Prize in 1937 for her European correspondence of the previous year.

Aided by a close relationship with Tammany Hall politicians, by the mid-1920s he had achieved a virtual monopoly over New York City’s cement industry (Figure 3).\(^{36}\)

Pope purchased *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (New York’s preeminent Italian-language daily) in 1928 with the support of the Italian government, which was anxious to ensure that the newspaper remained in Italian American hands.\(^{37}\) The fascist regime recognized that the owner of *Il Progresso* had immense influence over Italian Americans’ attitudes. The regime courted Pope: it bestowed knighthoods upon him, and granted him access to the Prime Minister and other high-level officials when he visited Italy in 1929 and 1937.\(^{38}\) The benefits of this relationship ran both ways. Pope gave fascism favorable press, and occasionally intervened with American policymakers on the regime’s behalf.\(^{39}\) The fascist regime gave Pope the kind of public endorsement of his own importance that he seemed to crave.

While Generoso Pope’s ownership of *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* cemented his relationship with the fascist regime, it also advanced his position as a Democratic Party powerbroker. Pope used *Il Progresso* to strengthen Italian Americans as a political force; in frequent editorials, he encouraged his


\(^{37}\) Francesco Di Legge, “L’Aquila e il Littorio: Direttive, Strutture e Strumenti della Propaganda Fascista negli Stati Uniti d’America, 1922-1941” (PhD dissertation, Università Degli Studi Del Molise, 2014), 164-68. Legge finds that Carlo Barsotti, *Il Progresso*’s owner until 1928, defended the fascist regime at crisis points in the mid-decade, including the Italian landing in Corfu and the murder of Giacomo Matteotti. But Barsotti was a more muted support of fascism than Pope turned out to be. Cannistraro, “Generoso Pope and the Rise of Italian American Politics,” 274-75. The regime calculated that an Italian American owner would provide more robust backing for fascism than the powerful American publisher William Randolph Hearst—who was then well-disposed to Mussolini and put in his own bid on *Il Progresso*.


fellow ethnics to claim citizenship, and reminded them of their duty to vote. Democratic politicians—including Mayor Jimmy Walker, Senator Robert Wagner, and Governor Franklin Roosevelt—cultivated relationships with Pope, recognizing that favorable coverage in Il Progresso would result in votes in their favor on election day. The ties between Roosevelt and Pope tightened after Roosevelt moved into the White House, especially in the second half of the 1930s, as diplomatic relations between Italy and the United States strained. More than ever before, the publisher needed the President to prop up his reputation as a loyal American; and more than ever before, the President needed the publisher to secure votes. In private, Franklin Roosevelt sometimes expressed distaste for Generoso Pope, but politics dictated that the two men appeared in public as allies and friends.

Herbert Wallace Schneider. Herbert Schneider was born in 1892, in a small town in Ohio, the son of an itinerant Methodist minister, whose work eventually brought the family to New York. Herbert finished high school in Brooklyn, and went on to study at City College and then Columbia University.

The intellectual milieu of Columbia University in the 1910s and early 1920s shaped Schneider. Through his doctoral studies with the moral philosopher John Dewey, Schneider developed a version of instrumentalism that was more strident than Dewey’s own. According to Schneider’s conception, norms—such as democracy—had no value independent of their effects. Unlike Child, the sometime

41 For Pope’s relationship with Walker, see: Pope, Deeds of My Fathers, 91. For his relationship with Wagner, see: Letter, Robert Wagner to George Akerson, April 2, 1930; Folder Pope; Presidential Secretary’s File; Herbert Hoover Papers; Herbert Hoover Library; West Branch, Iowa (hereafter cited as HHP). For a meeting with Governor Roosevelt, see: “Contro la Disoccupazione,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, March 9, 1930.
42 Memorandum, Franklin Roosevelt to Edwin Watson, September 28, 1944; Folder: Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File 4617; FDRL. “Generoso Pope Sees Roosevelt,” New York Times, October 18, 1944.
44 Herbert Schneider, Science and Social Progress: A Philosophical Introduction to Moral Science (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1920), 61, 37, 49. Schneider argued that ideals were not “fit instruments of progress” because they “[i]nvariably outlive[d] their original setting and purpose, and [were] imposed extraneously upon other situations to which they [were] not germane.” He wrote: “It is often said that without some such ultimate ideal we have no measure or criterion of progress. Some such idea as . . . democracy is taken as an ultimate standard
Republican, or McCormick and Pope, the committed Democrats, Schneider expressed no public affiliation to one American political party or another. But his agnosticism extended beyond political parties, to entire systems of government. Function trumped all in Schneider’s worldview: for him Democrat or Republican, democracy or dictatorship, mattered less than whether or not the government worked.

In 1926, the influential political scientist Charles Merriam nominated Schneider for a prestigious fellowship to research Italian fascism. This project established Schneider as an authority on Mussolini’s regime. Relying almost exclusively upon regime and pro-fascist sources, Schneider argued that the fascist state was both effective and inspiring. Schneider’s peers in American academia responded positively to his assessment of Mussolini’s regime, arguing that his research demonstrated the “significance” of fascism for the “modern world.”

One well-reviewed monograph led to further opportunities. In 1929, Merriam asked Schneider to co-author an overview of “civic education” in Italy. Again, academics across the social sciences in accordance with which progress must proceed. But these ideas then cease to be hypotheses for testing, and become principles for measuring the truth of other ideas. And this means social fossilization rather than social progress.” “Just as the truth of irrigation consists in its ability to control and fulfill the problem which it was intended to solve, so the truth of democracy . . . consists in [its] ability to control the situations which gave rise to [it]. Apart from such an experimental verification, there can be no claim to moral truth or knowledge.”

45 Charles Merriam to Herbert Schneider, April 14, 1926, Folder, Correspondence, 1924-1929, 107/1/3, Herbert Wallace Schneider Papers, University of Southern Illinois, Carbondale, Illinois (hereafter cited as HWSP). The fellowship was awarded by the Social Science Research Council, of which Merriam was chairman. Reminiscences of Herbert Wallace Schneider. Schneider later remembered how he was chosen for the award: “Merriam, asked the economist Wesley Mitchell in 1925: ‘Do you know of any young man who could go over to Italy and study what’s happened there under Mussolini?’” “And Dewey said, ‘Well, there’s this young fellow Schneider who might go over. He’s busy with other things, but he might be willing to spend some time on it if it’s important.’ Merriam said, ‘Well, I have reason for wanting someone to go over there and tell us the truth about what’s happening. I don’t know anybody that we could trust.’”


47 Charles Ellwood, review of Making the Fascist State, American Journal of Sociology 35, no. 2 (September 1929): 323-24. See also: Leonard Manyon, review of Making the Fascist State, American Historical Review 34, no. 3 (April 1929): 597-99; Roscoe C. Martin, review of Making the Fascist State, Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly 11, no. 2 (September 1930): 202-3; William Yandell Elliott, review of Making the Fascist State, American Political Science Review 23, no. 2 (May 1929): 477-81. Elliot apart, all these reviewers praised Schneider for his unbiased assessment of fascism. For Schneider’s sources, see: Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 365-85.

48 The book was part of a series, edited by Merriam, which assessed civic training in various countries, including the USSR, Germany and Great Britain. The project reflected a trend in comparative studies in political science (along
welcomed Schneider’s (largely positive) assessment of fascism. 49 Charles Beard, the famous Columbia University professor of history, described the survey as provocative and penetrating. 50 The almost universally positive reception of political scientists, sociologists and historians to Schneider’s assessments of fascism in the late 1920s was indicative of their shared belief that American democracy was faltering. Ferdinand Schevill, a historian at the University of Chicago, argued that Schneider had demonstrated that fascism represented a “challenge of the democratic faith,” not because it was violent or repressive, but because fascism (unlike democracy, implicitly) gave the Italians a government that worked. 51

In 1934, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace awarded Schneider a visiting professorship in Rome, at a university headed by Giacomo Acerbo, a fascist economist and politician. 52

with the implicit idea that the United States could learn from methods of civic training in both non-democratic and democratic countries). For the interest in comparative approaches, see: David M. Ricci, The Tragedy of Political Science: Politics, Scholarship, and Democracy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 61. Gabriel A. Almond, Ventures in Political Science: Narratives and Reflections (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 196. Almond, a near-contemporary of Schneider’s, remembered that Merriam had originally approached Robert Michels, a German sociologist, and member of the Italian fascist party, to author the book on Italy. This fact should alert us that the relatively new academic discipline of political science still lacked a standardized methodology or code of practice. See: Herbert Wallace Schneider and Shepard Bancroft Clough, Making Fascists (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), xiii. “From the very first it was apparent that the success of the volume depended largely upon the cooperation of those men who were intimately acquainted with making Fascists, men who were actually taking part in the Fascist experiment. Without exception every request for aid was graciously accorded. Officials of the Fascist party, the presidents of the various confederations, the heads of many Fascist organizations, Fascist journalists, technical advisers to the Régime, members of the bureaucracy and statesmen gave liberally of their time and knowledge to make this book informative. It is no exaggeration to state that direct contact either by personal interview or by correspondence was made with some leader in every phase of the Fascist enterprise. In order that the picture may be a balanced one, the authors also interviewed opponents of the Régime both in Italy and abroad.” While they claimed balance, the author’s sources were obviously skewed toward the regime.

49 Eugene N. Anderson, review of Making Fascists, Social Service Review 4, no. 4 (December 1930): 673-75. In a largely positive review, Anderson noted that the authors tended to overstate fascism’s “achievements and successes” and understate its “weaknesses.” Ferdinand Schevill, review of Making Fascists, International Journal of Ethics 40, no. 3 (April 1930): 439-41. Both Anderson and Schevill suggested that Schneider and Clough had given due weight to the corporate state as a method of encouraging civic loyalty.

50 Charles A. Beard, review of Making Fascists, American Political Science Review 24, no. 1 (February 1930): 181-82.


52 Letter, Henry Haskell to Herbert Schneider, November 16, 1934; Folder, Correspondence, 1930-1935; 107/1/4; HWSP. Henry Haskell was the secretary for the Carnegie Endowment’s president (and the head of Columbia University), Nicholas Murray Butler, who for many years supported the fascist regime. For Butler’s fascist sympathies, and the tendency of many Columbia University professors to support Mussolini, see: Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 255-57. By the mid-1930s, Butler had become critical of fascism, identifying similarities between, and alarming tendencies within, all totalitarian regimes. See: Michael Williams, “The Contemporary Crisis in Thought and the Historian,” Catholic Historical Review 20, 4 (January 1935), 361-62. Letter, Angelo Flavio Guidi to Ottavio de Peppo, 14 April, 1936; Fascicolo, Propaganda nel Nord America; Busta 220, Stati Uniti 1935-1936; Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS.
By the time Schneider delivered his lectures in Rome, Italy had invaded in Ethiopia—a move that provoked the opprobrium of (but little effective response from) the international community. A Carnegie official reminded Schneider that he should not write or say anything that would upset his fascist hosts. Schneider needed no such reminder: he could be counted on as someone who avoided making moral judgments about fascism, not just as a matter of tact, but as a method of inquiry (Figure 4).

In sum, Richard Washburn Child, Anne O’Hare McCormick, Generoso Pope, and Herbert Schneider came from a cross-section of American society and asserted their influence through quite different channels. Child was the product of an elite upbringing and education, and a long-standing conservative. McCormick came from far more modest origins and was progressive in her politics. Pope was an immigrant, businessman, and Democratic Party powerbroker. Schneider was a professor, who kept himself one step removed from American party politics. Despite their differences, all these individuals expressed sustained sympathies for fascist Italy. This study explains why.

What Explains Fascist Sympathies?

It is both intuitive—and true—that three men and one woman as different in their intellectual backgrounds, politics, activities and proclivities as Child, McCormick, Pope and Schneider would view the fascist state from different angles. To Richard Washburn Child, a conservative, Mussolini offered

“The gravest situation is that of Casa Italiana,” at Columbia University, wrote the fascist journalist Guidi to the Secretary for Press and Propaganda. “Butler has become anti-Italian.” The historiography regarding Columbia’s Casa Italiana, in particular, brims with vituperation. Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 255. Diggins wrote that “fascism found a veritable home in America” through the Casa, and its head, the pragmatist philosopher, Giuseppe Prezzolini. Giuseppe Prezzolini, The Case of the Casa Italiana (New York: American Institute of Italian Studies, 1976). Prezzolini authored a slim but vicious volume, in which he denied each of Diggins’ charges, accused Diggins of sloppy research, and claimed that there was no archival evidence to support the allegations of regime support for Casa Italiana. Elena Bacchin, “Prezzolini in America E Il Fascismo. Un Memoriale,” Contemporanea 11, no. 2 (2008): 243-56. More recent scholarship has found that Prezzolini viewed fascism favorably and that he became a card carrying member of the fascist party in 1935.

53 Letter, Henry Haskell to Herbert Schneider, November 16, 1935; Folder, Correspondence, 1930-1935; 107/1/4; HWSP.

54 Charles Merriam, “Editor’s Introduction,” in Schneider and Clough, Making Fascists, xii. Merriam wrote that Schneider and Clough had “endeavored to obtain a rounded and objective idea of a situation which is often viewed through the distorting lens of emotion,” and “prejudice.”

55 Mariano and Pinelli, Europa e Stati Uniti Secondo il New York Times, 12-18. Immigrants from Yorkshire to Columbus, Ohio, McCormick’s parents were initially well-to-do; her father was an executive for the Home Life insurance company. But he had a financial failure, and abandoned the family, never to return. Anne, her mother, and two younger sisters moved to Cleveland, where both Anne and her mother found work at the Catholic Universe.
stability, and—initially at least—a laissez faire approach to economics that would allow businesses to thrive. For Anne O’Hare McCormick, a liberal Catholic, the new regime promised the resolution of two conflicts that concerned her very much: one between the Church and state, which stymied the Pope’s temporal powers; and one between capital and labor, which labor invariably lost. For Generoso Pope, and many Italian Americans, fascism’s claims to order and progress offered gratifying ripostes to nativist stereotypes of Italians as anarchic and archaic. And for Herbert Schneider, a political philosopher, the fascist state seemed to be proof positive of the pragmatists’ proposition that the best kind of government was a government that worked. In so far as this study demonstrates that these very different Americans were attracted to fascism for different reasons, then, it supports the arguments of John Diggins, as well as the work of those historians who have considered why discrete groups within American society supported Mussolini’s regime.

57 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “The Drama of Pope and Premier,” New York Times, June 14, 1931; Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Italy Puts the Yoke on Capital and Labor,” New York Times, November 28, 1926. “Gli Italiani nel Mondo,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, August 4, 1929. “In the 7 years of the fascist regime, the work of Il Duce has been powerful, capable, efficient,” wrote this contributor, adding that Italians living abroad experienced the positive effects of Italy’s new prestige.
58 Herbert Schneider, The Fascist Government of Italy (New York: Van Nostrand, 1936), viii-x, 62. Schneider argued that any government’s efficacy could be measured by its ability to extract taxation from its citizens, and that a thirty percent taxation rate was the limit for even the most effective state, above which any government would likely incite rebellion. Repeating the regime’s claim that 30 percent of national income went to the government, Schneider argued that the fascist state was functioning very well.
59 Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism; D’Agostino, Rome in America, 158-257; Cannistraro, Blackshirts in Little Italy. The discussion of many Italian Americans’ support for fascism owes a debt to those historians who have described the effects of nativism and discrimination on ethnic communities. John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925 (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Matthew Frye Jacobson, Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). See also: Thomas A. Guglielmo, White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 113-28, esp. 114-15. Guglielmo challenges Jacobson’s argument that native-born white Americans did not consider Italians to be fully white, noting that Italians received the legal privileges afforded to other white groups upon arrival in the US. But Guglielmo nonetheless provides countless examples of the discriminatory treatment suffered by Italian Americans, which encouraged many of them to support Mussolini. Guglielmo writes: “many Italians, deeply scarred by restriction, racialism, and criminalization, drew great pride from the rise of the ‘New Italy,’ from Mussolini, and from the widespread popularity of both in America. Long relying on past glories to defend themselves, many Italians were overjoyed to have contemporary events serve the same purpose.” Peter G. Vellon, A Great Conspiracy Against Our Race: Italian Immigrant Newspapers and the Construction of Whiteness in the Early 20th Century (New York: New York University Press, 2014). Vellon’s research ends in the early 1920s but his arguments are germane to this study. He writes that the Italian American press had a long tradition of defending the Italian Americans against nativist and racist attacks, which it often did by asserting the civilized nature of Italy and Italians.
But this study is not only—or even mainly—about the different reasons why Americans from various walks of life supported fascism. Rather, it is about the common ground that these individuals occupied, in spite of their differences. Child, a conservative writer for a popular magazine, McCormick, a progressive Catholic journalist at the nation’s most respected broadsheet, Pope, a businessman and powerbroker, and Schneider, an academic schooled in the philosophy of instrumentalism, worried about the toll that modernity was taking on the United States and argued that Italy was coping better with change. Each of these Americans saw fascism as a means of harnessing the benefits of modernity, while resisting its soul-sucking effects. They used fascism’s apparent successes to highlight what was wrong in the United States, to offer examples for what Americans might do to ease the transition to modernity, and to provide their countrymen with something that filled a lacuna in their own lives—the machine that ran and had a soul.

From the early 1920s to the late 1930s, Child, McCormick, Pope and Schneider retained their overarching concern with how Italy and the United States were coping with the challenges of modernity. But the interplay of events in Italy and the United States, current themes in fascist propaganda, and American cultural, economic and political preoccupations affected the specific issues they explored at any given time.

In the early 1920s, as fascist squads engaged in street fights against their political enemies in Italy, the United States returned to peace-time routines of work, consumption, and leisure. As shown in Chapter one, Child, McCormick and Schneider rendered young fascists as embodiments of a martial ideal to argue that the ennui of modern times was more damaging to society than war.

In the mid-decade, the United States experienced unprecedented rates of economic growth, fueled by speculation and consumption, provoking concerns about the erosion of Victorian ideals of benevolence, sobriety, and self-control. Chapter two describes how Child, McCormick and Pope used images of Mussolini as a man of old-fashioned values and modern capacities both to critique American culture and to send a reassuring message that it was possible to combine the best of old and new in the contemporary age.
At the decade’s end, American political scientists and cultural commentators voiced growing concerns over an apparent mismatch between the static institutions of democracy and the dynamic forces of society. Chapter three shows how all four of these American fascist sympathizers invoked the fascist corporate state to highlight weaknesses in the democratic system and to suggest possible reforms in the United States.

In the early 1930s, fascist propaganda asserted that Italy had withstood the worst of the global depression by enabling a return to simpler ways of life. Chapter four analyzes how Child, McCormick, Schneider and Pope used Italy’s apparent success to call for policy interventions in the United States that would both enable a short-term recovery from the depression and ensure a long-term recalibration of the relationship between humans and machines.

As shown in chapter five, in the mid-1930s, these observers responded to an increasingly totalitarian Italy by reproducing images of Italy and Ethiopia as gardens, so as to offer Americans experiences of control, beauty, and even peace, which were lacking in their own unstable nation and an increasingly volatile world.

It was not until the late 1930s, as fascist Italy drew closer with Nazi Germany, issued anti-Jewish edicts, and embarked on a path that would lead to global conflagration, that these observers withdrew their support from Mussolini. They did so with various degrees of silence and noise, no public admission of past errors, and only very rarely an expression of remorse.

**Why American Fascist Sympathizers Matter**

By understanding why Americans of such different backgrounds sympathized with Italian fascism in the interwar years we can learn something about the nature of the fascist regime—at least as it presented itself. We can also gain insights into the prevailing anxieties and policy challenges of the United States in the interwar years. Finally, a fuller understanding of the history of American fascist sympathies has some implications for our contemporary societies, as they grapple with cultural, social, and economic change.
The research presented in this study shows that to understand the appeal of Italian fascism we need to confront its relationship with modernity. As such, it supports the work of other historians—most notably, Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Roger Griffin—who have attempted to parse out fascism’s complex attitude toward the modern world.\(^{61}\) The responses of American fascist sympathizers show that various tendencies within fascism that might appear contradictory from our vantage point—such as the regime’s embrace of modern technology alongside its promotion of rural communities—seemed to be consistent to some contemporary observers. Indeed, for Child, McCormick, Pope and Schneider, fascism’s genius lay at the meeting point between modernity and tradition.\(^{62}\) This does not suggest that Italian fascism in practice was consistent—too many historians have demonstrated that the regime was riven with internal power

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\(^{61}\) Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001). Ben-Ghiat analyzes how the regime used its cultural policy to argue that fascism would simultaneously promote economic modernization and reinforce traditions. Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning Under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 181-82. Griffin describes fascism (of both the Italian and German varieties) as a “revolutionary” form of “political modernism,” which aimed to “overcome the decadence” that “drained modernity of meaning.” Griffin uses “modernism” to denote a wide swath of reactions against the conditions of modern life in the interwar years, as contemporaries reckoned with an erosion of traditional values and the feelings of dislocation that accompanied industrialization, urbanization and consumerism. Griffin suggests that fascist regimes gained and held power in interwar Italy and Germany in large part because they promised a national regeneration, which would inject modern life with vitality and meaning. Where I part ways with Griffin is in his suggestion that we can define fascism almost entirely through its relationship with modernity. A definition of fascism as a revolutionary political response to the challenges of modernity cannot give appropriate weight to the lived experiences of Italians and Africans under Italian occupation, which included censorship, repression, internal displacement, confinement, imprisonment, war, bombing, occupation, and internment. Italian fascism was all of this too. For a similar view, see: Thomas Rohkrämer, review of *Modernism and Fascism*, *German History* 27, no. 3 (July 2009): 448-49. Rohkrämer argues that Griffin’s definition focuses excessively on how Hitler and Mussolini’s regimes packaged themselves and insufficiently on how they operated in practice—as murderous, repressive and racist regimes, which were met with popular apathy and resistance, as well as approval and consent. See: Michael Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Ebner examines the confinement of 15,000 Italians over the course of two decades in southern Italian villages and islands. Other historians have also argued that we must define fascism not just through its ideology but through its practice. See: Michael Mann, *Fascists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 11-12. Sven Reichard, “Faschismus–Praxeologisch: Ein Kommentar zu Roger Griffin,” *Erwägen, Wissen, Ethik* 15, no. 3 (July 2004): 344-46. See also: Fernando Esposito, *Fascism, Aviation and Mythical Modernity*, trans. Patrick Camiller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). Esposito shows how fascist aviation policy and related propaganda promulgated the idea of fascist man harnessing the otherwise untamed forces of modernity. Both Griffin and Esposito owe some intellectual debt to Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983), 16. Often quoted, Berman wrote that modern life gave birth to a “variety of visions and ideas that aim[ed] to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that [was] changing them, to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own.”

\(^{62}\) For a typical formulation of this, see: Schneider and Clough, *Making Fascists*, 199. “The feature above all others which singles out Fascism as a unique experiment is that it asserts an ancient ideal to be realized by modern methods: the ends are Roman and the means are up to date; the sovereign state dreamed by Dante and Machiavelli is to be achieved by economic and political devices invented since the French Revolution. Such a marriage of old and new, such an attempt to make opposites meet, presents the fundamental conflicts and confusions of modern civilization in their most paradoxical and challenging aspect.”

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struggles, and survived for as long as it did because Mussolini was an opportunist, rather than a purist. But it does show that we underestimate fascism if we dismiss it as an eclectic mishmash, merely because it seems so to us. Fascism appealed to these observers because it claimed to reconcile the clash between new and old, by ensuring that machines edified rather than eroded the souls of women and men.

By focusing on the Americans’ responses to fascism in the interwar years, this study also illuminates the pervasiveness of anxieties about modernity in the United States. Child, McCormick, Pope and Schneider stayed in the mainstream of American society in the 1920s and 1930s because they addressed issues that concerned many of their contemporaries, including those who opposed fascism: the erosion of values of service and honor; the impact of a get-rich-quick ethos; the obsolescence of democratic institutions; the devastating economic and cultural effects of mass-production; the sense that men and women were overwhelmed by forces beyond their capacity to control. In other words, the anxieties of these fascist sympathizers were American anxieties. We cannot understand the temper and tone of the United States in the interwar years without addressing how Americans interpreted the cultural, political, economic, and spiritual challenges presented by modernity. By contextualizing fascist sympathizers’ views about modernity, and by demonstrating that these individuals spoke to various public and policy audiences who were eager to hear their words, this study does just that.


64 Zeev Sternhell, “Fascist Ideology” in *Fascism: A Reader’s Guide: Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography*, ed. Walter Laqueur (Berkley: University of California Press, 1978), 316. Post-war critics of fascism were particularly liable to dismiss it as lacking any coherent ideology. Sternhell reflected that “[f]or many years … it was common form to see fascism as … wanting in ideological concepts” or masking behind a thin veneer of ideology. “This attitude was almost certainly bound up with a fundamental refusal to view fascism as anything other than a horrid lapsus in European history.” Marla Stone, review of *Modernism and Fascism, Modernism/modernity* 16, no. 2 (April 2009): 448-50. Although she is by no means dismissive of fascism, Marla Stone offers a more recent interpretation of fascism as, above all, eclectic. She argues that Griffin’s focus on fascism’s relationship with modernity cannot take full account of opposing tendencies toward conservatism and traditionalism within fascism, and asserts that “[p]erhaps fascism can best be understood as a multidirectional and hybrid culture and ideology.” See also: Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture & Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). While I have no quibbles with Stone’s principal argument that Italian fascist cultural policy fostered “aesthetic pluralism,” my research does suggest that by labelling traditional and modern tendencies as multifarious, Stone underestimates the degree to which fascism aimed to reconcile the two.
Arguing that dictatorship could be more effective and inspiring than democracy, and that liberty should be curtailed since it was less of a blessing and more of a curse, Child, McCormick, Pope and Schneider helped to undermine once vaunted norms, at a time when they were crumbling anyway. But in contrast to some of the more pessimistic observers of the American scene, these four individuals offered hope. They argued that Americans could replace questionable ideals and obsolete institutions with meaningful values and relevant structures. They claimed that it was possible to restore traditional hierarchies while keeping pace with the modern age. And they argued that solutions to democracy’s ills and the economy’s manifest weaknesses were within reach. Again, Child, McCormick, Pope and Schneider were not screaming into the wind: many Americans read their words; government officials listened to them (albeit to various degrees); their peers published them, promoted them, and respected them. This suggests that some (and perhaps many) Americans craved the restoration of an equilibrium that their society seemed to lack.

American fascist sympathizers’ interest in finding solutions to the problems of the modern age also helps to explain their simultaneous support for Franklin Roosevelt and Mussolini. As already noted, Child, McCormick and Pope all publically backed Roosevelt; and although Schneider strove to keep domestic party politics out of his work, in private he supported the New Deal. On the surface, this fact seems to bolster Jonah Goldberg’s thesis that American liberalism is a form of fascism. But a careful analysis of these individuals’ ideas runs counter to Goldberg’s assertion that American progressives supported the New Deal because they welcomed the advance of a behemoth state. These American fascist sympathizers supported Roosevelt because they believed he would implement policies that put men,

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66 *Reminiscences of Herbert Wallace Schneider*. Schneider noted that a number of his colleagues at Columbia University, including Rexford Tugwell, worked in the administration, “we were all very eager to know how the New Deal would go on and how it would succeed and what the techniques would be.”
rather than machines, at the center of solutions to the United States’ economic problems. They supported the New Deal because they believed that the government could intervene to enable a return to small units and local traditions, not—as Goldberg argues—because they were enamored by the notion of mammoth government.

Probably the most useful insight offered by Jonah Goldberg’s work is that history does not rest in the past. It is hard to talk and write about American fascist sympathies in the interwar years without touching raw nerves about American politics and culture in the present, and raw nerves rarely encourage rational debates. Nerves are perhaps rawer in 2018 than they were a decade ago, when Goldberg wrote Liberal Fascism, since the United States now has a president with a penchant for big construction projects, mass rallies, and military parades, a president who has refused to denounce the neo-fascists who make up a fraction of his base.

Perhaps more than even before, a historian cannot write about the history of American fascist sympathizers without provoking some conversation about our present times. If I do not explain what I think this episode in history can tell us about the present, others are likely to infer (and misinterpret) my meaning. In the interwar years, fascism appealed to four Americans from very different walks of life because they believed that Mussolini’s Italy was managing better with the transition to modernity than the United States. These fascist sympathizers wrote for and spoke to those Americans who felt threatened by various changes, including the decline of communities, the erosion of traditional values, and the sense that the machine—as both a literal presence and a metaphor for modernity—dominated mankind. In the 1920s and up until 1933, American fascist sympathizers argued that the United States’ political leaders had failed to make democracy relevant, to manage the pace of industrialization, and to support those who felt left behind in the modern world. And even after Roosevelt rolled out the New Deal, they argued that more should and could be done to manage the transition to modernity. If this study suggests a lesson in our present circumstances, the lesson is here. When a system of government fails to protect those damaged by transitions, it will provoke feelings of disenchantment, both with that system of government, and with the rate and impact of cultural, social, and economic change. Disenchanted people may seethe quietly. Or
they may look for alternative forms of government that promise the restoration of past values, the
protection of embattled communities, and the assurance that they—and not outside forces—are in control.

Figure 1. Richard Washburn Child in 1924
“Richard Washburn Childs (sic),” 1924, photograph, call number LC-F8- 28852, Prints and Photographs
Figure 2. Anne O’Hare McCormick in 1937

Figure 3. Generoso Pope, Date Unknown
Photograph, “Generoso Pope,” by Ajdp3 (Own work) [CC BY 3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0)], via Wikimedia Commons, accessed March 12, 2018, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AGeneroso_Head_Shot.png.
Figure 4. Herbert Wallace Schneider, Date Unknown
Chapter I. The Good Adventure: Fascist Squads in a War-Weary World

From a window of a stranger’s home in April 1921, Anne O’Hare McCormick caught her first glimpse of a formation of fascisti. It was Rome’s birthday—the first day of its 2,676th year—and the city was animated with gatherings and parades.¹ The temper of Rome in the spring of 1921 was entirely different from the atmosphere in the same city, the previous fall. Then, there had been no crowds to celebrate the anniversary of Italian unification, and the standard bearers had been hired men, “shabby wretches,” proceeding haphazardly, with about as much enthusiasm for the job as they felt for their country.² But in April 1921 there was a large crowd, which carried McCormick from the top of the Capitoline to the streets below. It was a rare kind of crowd that “somehow succeeded in crushing gently,” and she welcomed an offer of a temporary shelter in a home on the Via Aracoeli—a typically narrow street, its flat-fronted buildings abutting the road. She hung from the window and watched.

Soon, troops of young fascists, sharply dressed and marching shoulder to shoulder, came by. McCormick felt a “thrill” shared by her host, a Piedmontese woman so overcome with “excitement” that she almost fell from the window into the street below. The woman was moved by the presence in one parade of young men from all over Italy; of a wounded veteran, who only months before would have been attacked had he dared to march in public; and of women, not just in the crowd of spectators, but even among the marchers themselves. McCormick was moved by all of this, and by something more basic too. The young marchers, “electric with life” and “conscious of power,” made her feel alive once more.³

McCormick’s initial response to the fascists is indicative of why some American observers were attracted to the movement in its early years. The silence she heard upon first arriving in Italy in 1920 felt wrong. Rome’s “shabby” standard bearers and the few “listless” residents who watched them were expressions of a more universal disillusionment.⁴ As she moved across the continent, taking in France, Belgium, England and Ireland, McCormick breathed stale air that differed only slightly according to

¹ McCormick, “The Revolt of Youth.”
² McCormick, “New Italy of the Italians.”
³ McCormick, “The Revolt of Youth.”
⁴ McCormick, “New Italy of the Italians.”
national characteristics. Wherever she went, her analysis suggested the same conclusion: the Great War, which had once promised to remake nations and men, had delivered nothing of that sort. In place of national unity, there was apathy. Instead of higher values of service and duty, there was disengagement and despair. Europeans were depressed, she suggested, not because of the changes wrought by the war, but because the war had seemed to change so very little.

Returning to Italy the following year, she was happy to find the country in the early stages of an uprising, and not just because it made good copy. The “excitement” felt by McCormick’s host on the Via Aracoeli was primarily a “patriotic” one. Well-dressed young men were harbingers of a national self-respect that had been eroded by the war. The veterans among them indicated a perpetuation of higher ideals: duty; honor; service. The mobilization of Italy’s notoriously apolitical women, whether the few who marched alongside the fascists, or the many who cheered them—suggested that the movement could galvanize a divided nation.\(^5\)

For McCormick and other American sympathizers, fascism in its early stages provided an optimistic rejoinder to the prevailing cynicism of the early 1920s; living proof that the hopes for a moral rebirth that had accompanied the Great War had not been laughably naïve. Service, duty, and honor were not defunct, they argued; the values were embodied in fascist youth. Intertwined in their appreciation of fascism for its war-like values was their appreciation of fascism for its war-like effects on the imagination. For months, McCormick had travelled through Europe, reporting on the lifelessness of its inhabitants. Shell-shocked and poorer than they had been in 1914, Europeans seemed nonetheless bound to the same old patterns of repetitive production, meaningless consumption, and self-serving politics that were part and parcel of the modern condition. No wonder the Europeans were depressed; it was depressing. But, leaning out of a stranger’s window on the Via Aracoeli, McCormick felt the “thrill” of adrenalin that humans feel in proximity to violence.\(^6\) Adrenalin and depression just do not go together; when the two meet, adrenalin wins out. For that, she was grateful.

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\(^5\) McCormick, “The Revolt of Youth.”

\(^6\) McCormick, “The Revolt of Youth.”
Other historians have not given much attention to sympathetic American responses to the fascist movement in the early 1920s. John Diggins dispensed with the attitudes of the Americans to the fascist squads prior to the March on Rome in a single paragraph, suggesting that they failed to capture Americans’ imagination. He argued that this only changed once Mussolini became Prime Minister, in October 1922; then sympathetic observers welcomed fascism as a bulwark against Bolshevism.7

The observations of Anne O’Hare McCormick, Richard Washburn Child, and Herbert Schneider do not bear Diggins’ arguments out. First, these observers wrote prolifically about the fascist movement before the March on Rome; the squads fascinated them. Second, anti-Bolshevism did not fully account for their appreciation of fascism in its early stages; of these three individuals, only McCormick insisted on a simple causal relationship between the rise of fascism and the decline of the radical left in Italy. Had Child, McCormick and Schneider viewed fascist squads as merely a force for order, they would have presented attacks on socialists and communists as a necessary, or even unfortunate, precursor to stability. But instead, they savored the violence, implying that it had a moral and aesthetic value that transcended immediate political needs. To them, the fascisti embodied a rebellion not just against communism, but against apathy in the wake of the Great War.

The Wrong Side of Paradise

Fascist sympathizers wrote against the grain of American culture in the early 1920s, when references to the Great War were more likely to evoke expressions of bitterness than nostalgia. The war had promised Americans a lot in 1917. Those on the frontlines had imagined that it would provide them with stimulation of senses numbed by modern life: “I constantly feel the need of the drunken excitement of a good bombardment,” John Dos Passos wrote from France.8 Government propaganda suggested that Americans on the home front could also experience the elevating effects of war. The Committee on Public Information’s (CPI’s) campaign implied that, by supporting the war effort, Americans could

7 Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 29-31.
realize higher ideals of duty, obligation and sacrifice; the purchase of war savings certificates was the home-front equivalent to fighting in France.⁹

Pro-war intellectuals also imagined that the war would be transformative, remaking not just Americans but the entire world.¹⁰ From the “horror” of war, Walter Lippmann wrote in July 1917, “we can dare to hope for things which we never dared to hope for in the past.” Predicting that a “Federation of the World” would spring from the war, this was Lippmann at his most millenarian.¹¹ Richard Washburn Child was probably influenced by this (and similar) tracts, when he wrote to his father later that summer. Child interpreted the war as a chastening experience—heaven’s revenge on men who had pursued “tangibles” at the expense of their “spirit[s].” He imagined that a “new world” would “rise from the wallow of gore and starvation and chaos—a better world.” Child even anticipated that a “prophet” would “come forth,” although he had no idea, in 1917, who that prophet might be.¹²

Big ideas often sound naive in retrospect. The war had promised too much. To most Americans, it did not feel like a new world once the mud had dried, countries had counted their dead, and the allies had imposed their punishing peace.¹³ Any excitement that John Dos Passos felt in 1917 faded as he cogitated the realities of mechanized warfare. Far from representing a break from modernity, the war seemed to

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¹⁰ Kennedy, Over Here, 44.


¹² Richard Washburn Child to H. Walter Child, August 19, 1917; Folder “1881-1919”; Reel 2; RWCP.

¹³ John Maynard Keynes’ 1919 The Economic Consequences of the Peace (which was serialized in the New Republic) helped to popularize the idea that the Treaty of Versailles was too punitive. See: Barry Alan Marks, “The Idea of Propaganda in America” (PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1957), 31.
epitomize the dehumanizing effects of machine-made civilization.¹⁴ Civilians also reassessed their wartime experience in a harsh light. In 1920, George Creel, the former head of the CPI, boasted that his campaign had been “the world’s greatest adventure in advertising.”¹⁵ Although Creel insisted that he had merely sold brilliantly packaged truths, Americans were no longer inclined to believe him.¹⁶ Intellectuals who had favored the war, particularly those of a progressive bent, turned away from their previous optimism in disgust. Walter Lippmann would never again sound millenarian.¹⁷

The American mood after the war was one of pervasive disillusionment: disillusionment with the high-minded ideals that had fueled the intervention in Europe, with the mechanics of modern war that precluded a good death, with politics, turned propaganda, turned lies.¹⁸ A young generation “had grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in men shaken,” wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1920, in *This Side of Paradise.*¹⁹ For many of Fitzgerald’s contemporaries, the pursuit of personal power and pleasure seemed to be all that was left.²⁰

**Italia Disprezzata**

To Anne O’Hare McCormick, Italy seemed to be a particularly potent expression of what was wrong with the post-war world. She arrived from the United States in the summer of 1920 to a country that was “visibly run down,” crippled by debt, and “‘choked with [the] dead.’”²¹ Worse, in her mind, than the material and physical impact of the war was its emotional and spiritual effects. The Italian people felt

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¹⁶ Marks, “The Idea of Propaganda in America,” 28-52. Marks argues that Americans were at first scandalized by the influence of British propaganda on their entry into the war, before they came to terms with their own government’s role in spreading untruths through propaganda. Brett Gary, *The Nervous Liberals: Propaganda Anxieties From World War I to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 23-26.
²⁰ Baritz, “Introduction,” in *Culture of the Twenties,* xix.
cheated by political leaders, who had dragged them into the war without securing for them the spoils of victory. Fiume, the Adriatic city that many Italians felt should have been theirs, was a focal point for popular resentment. But McCormick did not believe that Gabrielle D’Annunzio, the eccentric and effete poet who led the occupation of Fiume from the fall 1919 to the end of 1920, could galvanize the nation. By her estimation, most Italians had withdrawn into themselves, in disgust. The country was “tired, drained of emotion,” she observed. Schneider and Child sustained this characterization. In the aftermath of the war, the “prevailing atmosphere was of “Italia disprezzata,” according to Schneider. It felt like a nation “drifting toward nowhere,” wrote Child.

Child interpreted Italy’s “red years” as a manifestation of Italians’ inward turn. He arrived to his post of Ambassador in the summer of 1921, in the later stages of the radical labor movement. In Child’s telling, in an overwhelmingly apathetic nation, a minority of Italians had attached themselves superficially to anarchism, socialism, communism, or some hybrid of all three. The radicals who staged protests and strikes in Italy were, in his view, a self-centered minority. Child argued that their attitude was summed up by a young Italian who came to the Embassy to petition for Sacco and Vanzetti, the anarchists found guilty of armed robbery in Massachusetts in July 1921. A few days later, according to Child, the same young Italian returned to the Embassy to ask for a job. Italian leftists felt no true fervor, no attachment to causes larger than themselves, he maintained. Child seemed genuinely to believe that, wherever it was located in the world, the left was motivated only by self-interest. But his tendency to tie

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22 McCormick, “New Italy of the Italians.” McCormick argued that D’Annunzio was “madman to most of the people.”
23 McCormick, “New Italy of the Italians.”
24 Schneider, “Giovinezza,” 187. See also, Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 83.
25 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 158; also published as Child, “Making of Mussolini.”
26 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 162-63; also published as Child, “Making of Mussolini.”
27 Letter, Richard Washburn Child to H. Walter Child, October 14, [1919?]; Folder “1881-1919”; Reel 2; RWCP. As the editor of the weekly publication Colliers in 1919, Child had railed against the New York printer’s strikes, which temporarily paralyzed the magazine business. Echoing widespread American anxieties that year, Child argued that “red” agitators in the printing trade had forced the strike upon their “white” co-workers. “The bald fact that a minority—the minority of organized labor—is trying to hold up the country is patent everywhere; but this case is worse since it is not even organized labor as a whole but only a minority—the ‘something for nothing’ minority—of organized labor.” For news coverage of this strike, see: “More Printers Quit Without Sanction,” New York Times, October 4, 1919.
together the various strands of the left, and then dismiss the whole bunch as selfish, was also de riguer for any contributor to the *Saturday Evening Post.*

Although Herbert Schneider and Anne O’Hare McCormick had more sophisticated understandings of the left, their analysis brought them to very similar observations regarding the temper of Italy in the immediate post-war years. In contrast to Child’s tendency to lump together disparate movements, Schneider recognized that the left in Italy consisted of parliamentary socialists and communists, syndicalists, non-parliamentary socialists and communists, and anarchists, among others. For her part, McCormick perceived a causal chain running from economic deprivation and ineffectual governance to the occupation of factories and land, and used interviews with ordinary people to communicate this viewpoint: “‘I tell you hunger is the first cause of all revolutions,’” she quoted a young woman in Florence; “‘In Italy we are reaping what we have sown…The peasants have always lived too close to the starving line,’” she cited a “wise old” banker. But despite these more nuanced understandings, McCormick and Schneider echoed Child’s perception that the strikes and protests of 1919 to 1921 had failed to capture fully the popular imagination. At the height of the “red years,” the predominant attitude of Italians toward the strikers was “exasperation…diluted with forbearance,” McCormick argued.

For all these observers, then, the “red years” were an expression of a general disillusionment in the aftermath of the war. They invoked the economic paralysis caused by strikes as a motif for a wider

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28 Cohn, *Creating America*, 135-53. His interpretation of socialism as an expression of selfishness in the wake of the war was at one with the editorial position of the *Saturday Evening Post*, which would soon publish his account of this period in Italy. Cohn, *Creating America*, 141, 181-82. Child’s tendency to group the various factions of the Italian left into a single category was also typical of the *Post*. This lumping was not due only to the absence of a proper understanding of Italian politics. It also conformed to Lorimer’s (and Child’s) belief that socialism was a creeping disease, which blurred any distinction between the American progressives, the British Labor Party, and the Russian Bolsheviks.

29 Schneider, *Making the Fascist State*, 93, 74, 153.

30 McCormick, “Italy Rebels Against Rebellion.”


32 McCormick, “Italy Rebels Against Rebellion.” Writing in April 1921, McCormick looked back at the fall of 1920 to describe the apathetic attitude of most Italians toward the strikes.
paralysis—a kind of spiritual death. “One wakes up any morning...to find a whole city as dead as if it had been asphyxiated in the night,” wrote McCormick.\textsuperscript{33} The mood was one of pervasive nihilism. All three of these observers claimed that Italians had departed so far from wartime values that they turned upon their own veterans: civilians hissed at men in uniforms; children and women threw bottles, water and stones at them.\textsuperscript{34} McCormick, Schneider and Child argued that Italians felt no pride in their recent past, no trust in their government, and no sense of self-worth. Feeling betrayed and abandoned, they sometimes responded with expressions of misdirected anger. But even their protests lacked conviction. The dominant sensation was of a nation laid to waste by a war that had once promised “re-birth.”\textsuperscript{35}

Child, Schneider and McCormick argued that passivity had also become official policy. The Italian government seemed to acquiesce to everything: national humiliation at the hands of other victorious powers; violence against soldiers; the chaos of strikes. For his reader’s in the \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, Child alluded to ideas of sexual dysfunction to suggest a weak and indulgent state. The government was “flabby,” he wrote; its “failure spread” out “like watery jelly.”\textsuperscript{36} Italy was not only “disprezzata,” according to Schneider, it was “decadenta”: its liberal government seemed to shelter all in its midst.\textsuperscript{37} McCormick cited one example of this apparent decadence in government: its seating of Francesco Misiano, a communist and “deserter” in the Great War, in the Chamber of Deputies.\textsuperscript{38} Misiano’s presence in the parliament was deeply offensive to veterans. By allowing Misiano to take his seat in parliament, the government signaled that liberal ideas of tolerance were more important than patriotic values of service and sacrifice.

\begin{enumerate}
  \item Schneider and Clough, \textit{Making Fascists}, 44.
  \item Schneider, \textit{Making the Fascist State}, 83.
  \item Child, \textit{Diplomat Looks at Europe}, 165-66, 157; also published as Child, “Making of Mussolini.” Letter, Richard Washburn Child to Charles Evans Hughes, October 9, 1922; 865.00/1162; RG59, M527, NARA. In this letter, Child recognized that the liberal government’s policy of “ostensible tolerance” of radicalism was a deliberate strategy, and not ineffectual. “While the government was exercising this policy it encouraged or tolerated the growth of the Fascisti opposition to communism. Probably no parallel can be found in history where a government has so cleverly evaded the responsibility for blocking a revolutionary movement.”
  \item Schneider, \textit{Making the Fascist State}, 83.
  \item McCormick, “Italy and Popes and Parliaments.”
\end{enumerate}
Liberalism felt permissive to these observers: “nice, easy, benevolent,” and weak.\textsuperscript{39} Even as they described the details of Italian politics and society, they seemed to allude to a wider cultural shift toward tolerance at the expense of standards. The world was “shrieking after freedom, self-indulgence and anything bizarre,” in the aftermath of the war, according to Child. “[C]are, trouble, toil, service, thrift and even morals”—the values which the Great War had instilled—no longer seemed to matter anymore.\textsuperscript{40}

\textbf{The Weary World}

Drifting unmoored, decaying from within, and turning its back on its wartime legacy, Italy, as rendered by these observers, embodied much of what was wrong with the post-war world. To them, grey was the dominant color in Europe in the aftermath of the war, and silence the dominant sound. Child, attending some of the post-war conferences, described Paris in 1919 as a “wet and weary city,” and Lausanne in 1922 as “chilly, damp, dull.”\textsuperscript{41} This was blatant pathetic fallacy: grey weather, a stand-in for both internationalism (which Child considered deceptive, depressing, and boring) and the popular mood of despondency, apathy and withdrawal. A “generation” had “seen the inherent desire of mankind for conflict come to a head, burst disastrously for everyone,” he wrote. He felt “no fever in Europe, no high blood pressure,” in the early 1920s. He felt, “rather, fatigue and chill.”\textsuperscript{42}

Similarly, McCormick described a desolate atmosphere in Europe in the winter of 1920-1921.\textsuperscript{43} McCormick arrived in Europe after a wave of strikes and socialist-inspired unrest, which peaked in 1919, had subsided (although if her responses to Italy’s labor movement were any indication, these protests would have, in any case, left her unimpressed). In the winter of 1920 to 1921, she described a continent

\textsuperscript{39} Child, \textit{Diplomat Looks at Europe}, 166; also published as, Child, “Making of Mussolini.”
\textsuperscript{40} Child, \textit{Diplomat Looks at Europe}, 255; also published as, Richard Washburn Child, “What Europe Thinks,” \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, April 4, 1925.
\textsuperscript{43} McCormick, “Ireland’s ‘Black and Tans’”; McCormick, “Europe Under the Arc Light.” Ireland was “hard and grim and quiet,” “a country without laughter or tears.” Christmas in London was subdued, the English “dispirited” and “tired.” Paris was deserted after ten pm, she wrote.
devoid of energy. The Europeans could not even muster the energy to celebrate Christmas, let alone build a new world “on the ruins of the old.”

McCormick suggested that Europe’s—and indeed the United States’—troubles ran deeper than the war. They were the troubles of a world that the war had failed to change. As was often the case in her journalism, McCormick let nameless strangers articulate her ideas. The American tourists who trickled back to Europe in the summer of 1921 were, without exception, bored, she thought. They had come in the spirit of adventure, with a hope of seeing transformation. They found nothing of the sort. They visited the battlefields, but could not remember from one day to the next whether they had been in Arras or Reims. It all blurred in a single grey fog; the war was already far away, the reality of the trenches out of reach.

These visitors emitted an aura of “ennui,” and as with any good rendition of ennui it was hard to pinpoint the source of the problem. An American tourist in Cherbourg came closest to explaining it. “‘What is there over here that we haven’t got at home except ruins?’” she asked. Americans could be sanguine about uncomfortable trains and bad plumbing, but they could not accept gracefully “the presence of so many home discomforts,” McCormick wrote. Had they been at ease with boredom, they would have stayed in the United States. The Times underscored this point. In an illustration for McCormick’s piece, three American women stood listlessly in an unidentifiable European town. One glanced off into the distance, guidebook in hand. Another suppressed a yawn. The third woman stooped over a cane, her eyes downcast. “‘I am bored stiff with this life,’” the caption read. It was Americans’ life that was boring; Europe had provided none of the hoped-for stimulation.

In McCormick’s telling, mass-production and mass-culture were the main culprits for Americans’ world-weariness. Her domestic journalism in the early 1920s contained a critique of these homogenizing forces. Though Americans loved to hate New York, she observed, they all moved reflexively to the same

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44 McCormick, “Europe Under the Arc Light.”
45 For passing references to Italy’s wartime experience, see: Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Italy and Mr. Wilson’s Will,” New York Times, July 17, 1921; and McCormick, “New Italy of the Italians.”
47 “I am Bored Stiff with this Life,” illustration, in McCormick, “Bored Americans Abroad.”
“tickers,” and the same jazz. New York, in its lurid representation of the “the temporary in decay” was, “only our town grown big,” so when they expressed distaste for New York, Americans revealed an inherent, and usually unconscious, disgust with themselves. As a people, they remained “restless” with the instincts of their pioneering forbears. But since the frontier had shrunk to “Dutch Colonials, tiled bathrooms and twelve cylinder cars,” Americans searched in vain for the emotional satisfactions of a good adventure.

McCormick’s ideas were not novel. A critique of modernity had taken on renewed piquancy in the early 1920s as more Americans than ever before became absorbed in predictable patterns of factory work or office jobs, and sought release in ready-made entertainment. In listing products that made up the American standard— “perfect Dutch Colonials, tiled bathrooms and twelve cylinder cars”— McCormick echoed one of Sinclair Lewis’s literary techniques. She overwhelmed her reader with the pointlessness of it all. She believed that like Lewis’s anti-hero, George Babbitt, more and more middle-class Americans defined themselves through their “tooth-brush holder, shaving-brush holder, soap-dish, sponge-dish, and medicine cabinet.” Like the characters in Babbitt, they worked soulless jobs so that they might fill their lives with more material goods. They hoped for fulfilment in an electric cigar lighter or a new sedan. The fulfilment would never come.

McCormick argued that this problem spread far beyond American shores. Revealing more about the social circles she moved in than about the reality of European life in the early 1920s, she wrote that Europeans increasingly resembled Americans. They wore “the same clothes” used “the same soap, razors, adding machines,” and danced to the same music. This, then, was the “new world,” as McCormick perceived it. Not a morally cleaner, more Spartan, world. Just a planet of people who aspired to the same American standard. To paraphrase Lewis, McCormick seems to have preferred people who were

50 Dumenil, Modern Temper, 55-97.
52 Lewis, Babbitt, 68, 74.
miserable and knew it to those who felt an undefinable unhappiness but could not admit it.\textsuperscript{54} So she welcomed any differences that alerted Americans to their own misery. In the spring of 1922, she mused:

I wonder whether in this New World, in which all the nations are so closely huddled together…I wonder whether dissatisfaction with ourselves and a little wistfulness for the ways of others is not what we all most need.\textsuperscript{55}

Events in Italy would soon provide McCormick with the differences she yearned for and a “wistfulness for the ways of others” that she believed would spur Americans to retrieve their better selves.

**Renewing War**

“In 1920 a disgusted and wretched Italy” had “never wanted to hear of war again,” wrote Herbert Schneider.\textsuperscript{56} Although on the victors’ side at the war’s end, the nation had suffered many of the humiliations associated with defeat: first, at Caporetto in the fall of 1917, when the Austro-German army broke through the Italian lines, and Italians, in their hundreds of thousands, deserted; and again, at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, when Italy gained none of the Adriatic territories promised to her by Britain and France before she entered the war.\textsuperscript{57} Feelings of deep disillusionment in Italy after the war felt like a dramatic expression of a broader tendency among both Europeans and Americans to drift from the war-time values of service, honor, and sacrifice, and to disavow the war-time promise of a morally purer world. Schneider argued that, against all odds, the fascists were able to “renew the war in imagination.” Their apparent success seemed all the more “remarkable” given the depths of despair to which Italians had sunk.\textsuperscript{58} It suggested that under the layers of disillusionment, human beings craved a good war and its accompanying sensations of higher ideals, patriotic spirit, and adrenalin thrill. They just needed something to light the spark.

\textsuperscript{54} McCormick, “Zenith Discusses ‘Babbitt.’” Lewis, Babbitt, 50.


\textsuperscript{56} Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 40.

\textsuperscript{57} Mark Thompson, The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front, 1915-1919 (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 324. Of Caporetto, Thompson writes: “The Italians lost nearly 12,000 dead, 30,000 wounded and 294,000 prisoners. In addition, there were 350,000 disband ed men, roaming around or making for home. Only half of the army’s 65 divisions survived intact, and half the artillery had been lost.” H. James Burgwyn, The Legend of the Mutilated Victory: Italy, the Great War, and the Paris Peace Conference, 1915-1919 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993). Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 44, 17-18.

\textsuperscript{58} Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 40.
For these observers, the *squadristi* provided that spark. Fascist squads sprung up across northern and central Italy in the early 1920s. The idea that squadrist violence was necessary to suppress communism has always been controversial, and historians have shown that, for most of their members, the squads were primarily social gangs and vehicles to control economic and political competitors. Even a number of sympathetic contemporary observers, including Herbert Schneider and Richard Washburn Child, did not present squadrist violence as necessary to suppress communism. As Schneider noted, Italy’s labor movement lost its momentum after the failure of factory occupations in the fall of 1921, while squadrist violence peaked in 1922; chronology simply did not support the idea that the fascists suppressed the radical left. And diplomats at the US Embassy under Child observed that fascist squads exacerbated, rather than quelled, the conditions of social chaos in Italy. Only McCormick argued definitively that squadism “saved Italy from Bolshevism,” but her tone on this issue was invariably defensive. Like Child and Schneider, she focused less on the strategic necessity of fascist violence against the radical left and more on the aesthetics and psychological impact of the fights.

McCormick’s first report of fights between fascists and communists was typical in this regard. She relied on the testimony of a “young English girl” (whose wide-eyed ardor made her a conveniently romantic raconteur) to describe the violence in Florence in March 1921. This witness told McCormick that a “‘perfectly harmless and orderly group’” of “‘students’” had been doing nothing more than waving the tricolore in the streets, when a group of communists attacked them. Although the students “‘put up as

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60 Schneider, *Making the Fascist State*, 63.

61 As the Embassy noted, labor groups often organized strikes in protest against fascist violence, rather than the other way round. Embassy Weekly, November 15, 1921; 865.00/1008; RG59; M527; NARA. Workers called the public transportation strike in Rome in November 1921 to register their disgust at the lawlessness of fascist youth, who had killed a train-driver, the Embassy reported. Embassy Weekly, November 22, 1921; 865.00/1012; RG59; M527; NARA. Naples workers also went on strike to protest this act of violence. Embassy Weekly, December 3, 1921; 865.00/1031; RG59; M527; NARA. The following month, fascists killed two typesetters in Trieste. The central printers’ syndicate called for a nationwide strike to protest this “brutal assassination.”

stiff a fight as they could,’” they were outnumbered, and, seemingly, unarmed. The communists killed around a dozen “‘nice quiet patriotic boys’”; they “‘murdered’” them “‘without a chance.’” Following this act of wanton violence, the fascists rushed in to avenge the young men. There followed “‘three days of real war,’” with both sides in “‘terrible earnest, fighting to kill.’” To the relief of McCormick’s “young friend,” the fascists eventually prevailed; she imagined that they beat the communists because their outrage was purer.63

The observations of this eyewitness introduced McCormick’s readers to a number of characteristics of fascist squads, which were hallmarks of other sympathetic accounts. The first of these was their association with students. While McCormick’s witness described the fascists of Florence as rushing to students’ defense (suggesting a link between the two groups), elsewhere sympathetic observers homed in on student members within the squads.64 In reality, the social composition of squads varied by area, with agricultural laborers and farmers making up around one third of the entire movement, while perhaps one out of every eight squadrist was a student.65 But American observers stressed the role of students in squadism because their presence imbued the movement with élan, glamor, and class. Since the Boston police strike of 1919, when Harvard students volunteered as strikebreakers, the student as an upper-class hero in the war against radicals was a familiar image for Americans.66 In the guise of students, fascist sympathizers could argue that the squadristes were “‘ardent devotees” of “higher” ideals.67

63 McCormick, “Italy Rebels Against Rebellion.”
64 McCormick, “The Revolt of Youth.” Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 234, 250. Although Schneider recognized the mixed makeup of the squads, he referred frequently to the students among them, and the movements “characteristics of a student movement.”
65 Salvatore Lupo, Il Fascismo: La Politica in Un Regime Totalitario (Rome: Donzelli, 2005), 93. Lupo cites the statistics gathered by the squadristes themselves up to 1921, recognizing that these were likely to be inexact. Roberta Suzzi Valli, “The Myth of Squadismo in the Fascist Regime,” Journal of Contemporary History 35, no. 2 (April 2000): 137. Not surprisingly, Valli cites much higher student membership in university towns, Bologna and Florence, where between forty and fifty percent of squadristes were students. By contrast, in Reggio Emilia only two percent of squadristes came from student backgrounds.
67 Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 234.
At the same time, the image of squadrist students enabled these observers to dismiss excesses of fascist violence as no more than “fraternity” fun. In Herbert Schneider’s hands, the “castor oil treatment,” and other forms of political violence meted out by the fascists, were “student pranks.”

Child, McCormick and Schneider, made no mention of waterboarding, of men assassinated in front of their families, or of those left to bleed slowly to death, although these practices, too, formed part of the squadrists’ repertoire. Instead, they limited their descriptions to acts that seemed to be worthy of young gentlemen.

Fascist sympathizers consistently argued that the squadrist embodied honorable values. Often, they used gendered ideas and language to insist on this point. McCormick’s “young English girl” was just one of a number of women who seemed to be in awe of the squadrists’ tough martial code. McCormick too was impressed. She described the impeccable manners of a squadrist leader who met with her in Rome in 1922. This “perfectly groomed” young man came early to their appointment, just to explain that he could not stay. He was part of an elite corps, always on duty, always ready to perform the fascists’ “most dangerous and bloody work.” According to Child, the squadrist movement gained “lyric and epic” qualities, based around traditions of “sacrifice,” “discipline” and “orderly restraint.”

He described one such tradition: a commander would shout the name of a slain fascist during roll call; and upon hearing their dead comrade’s name, the rest of the company would respond in unison, “Here!”

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68 Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 250. See also Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 185, for similar interpretations of political violence.
71 McCormick, “Politics à l’Italienne.” Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 166; also published as, Child, “Making of Mussolini.” Similarly, Child described his first glimpse of the fascist squads in Genoa in the spring of 1922, as “healthy lean boys, apparently in top training,” who rushed past him on a “determined errand.”
72 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 177, 170; also published as, Child, “Making of Mussolini” and Richard Washburn Child, “Open the Gates,” Saturday Evening Post, July 12, 1924
73 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 170; also published as, Child, “Making of Mussolini.”
In an era when Americans worried about a decline in “manners and morals” of youth, and a blurring of gender lines, there was something reassuringly old-fashioned to patterns of behavior that were both chivalric and decisively masculine. In an illustration that accompanied a 1921 New York Times article by McCormick, fascism appeared in the form of a muscular knight in shining armor, firmly standing his ground against a weak and cowering socialist. Elsewhere, McCormick described the fascists as Italy’s answer to the Rough Riders. Sympathizers painted these young men as continuing traditions of martial honor that had receded in the United States.

For American sympathizers, the fascist squads also represented a righteous outrage against moral laxity. Just as McCormick’s young eyewitness hailed the “terrible anger” of the squadrist in Florence in March 1921, the journalist herself suggested that the fascists shored up the country against moral decay. She welcomed the entry of thirty-five fascists into the Chamber of Deputies, following snap elections in May 1921. These men did not share the liberal government’s tolerant attitude toward the communist war deserter, Francesco Misiano, who sat among them. In June, the fascists launched a “perfectly legitimate demonstration” against Misiano, wrote McCormick. An Embassy report proffered further details, describing how the fascists “attacked” Misiano, “spat in his face,” and drove him into the lavatories of the parliamentary building. By the end of the year, the fascists had forced Misiano out of parliament. McCormick wrote that it was “easy to sympathize with” the “patriotic exasperation” of the fascists. They appeared to counteract a modern mood that was part liberal acceptance, part spiritual despondency.

Unlike their liberal government, the fascists in and out of parliament would not make “concessions to

75 “The Socialists Themselves Have Created the Reaction,” illustration, in McCormick, “Italy’s Parliamentary Paradoxes.”
76 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “The Old Woman in the New Italy.”
77 McCormick, “Italy Rebels Against Rebellion.”
78 McCormick, “Italy and Popes and Parliaments.” Christopher Duggan, Fascist Voices an Intimate History of Mussolini’s Italy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 45. The fascists shouted at Misiano: “‘Out! Out with Deserters! Here we do not offend the glorious dead of the war and revolution.’” They shaved and painted his head, tied a placard around his neck, and forced him to walk down the Corso to jeering crowds.
79 Embassy Weekly, December 19, 1921; 865.00/1040; RG59; M527; NARA. Embassy Weekly, December 26, 1921; 865.00/1047; RG59; M527; NARA.
80 McCormick, “Italy and Popes and Parliaments.”
anarchy”; unlike their liberal government, they were not “weakened by any desire to temper the wind.”

If the wind was cold and angry, so be it, she believed. At the very least, a cold and angry wind reminded Italians that they were still alive.

In their spirit of intolerance, the fascist squads resembled the American Legion, and, in case the parallel was lost on her readers, McCormick made it explicit. Like Italian fascism, the American Legion was a post-war movement that trumpeted wartime values of sacrifice, service and nationalism. Like the fascists, its members engaged in violent combat against organized labor, under the rubric of defending the nation against a genuine communist threat. And like fascists, Legionnaire vigilantes claimed to form a moral police force, which stepped in, in the absence of an adequately forceful state, to rescue society from decadence.

But in the United States, the values embodied by the Legion seemed to be on the wane. The vigilante activities of the Legion peaked in 1919; by the early 1920s, the organization’s leadership had distanced themselves from these tendencies. The Legionnaires who raided the Industrial Workers of the World hall in Centralia, Washington in November 1919 and participated in the lynching of a local Wobbly, seemed to be a rearguard in American society. By contrast, fascist sympathizers portrayed the squadristi as the wave of the future. The youthfulness of the squadristi—the majority of whom were born at the turn of the century—was symbolic in this regard. Herbert Schneider devoted an entire article—

81 McCormick, “The Revolt of Youth.”
82 McCormick, “Italy Rebels Against Rebellion.” McCormick described the fascists as “a league of combatants something like the American Legion.” Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 206. Alvin Owsley, the Legion’s National Commander, and himself an admirer of fascism, would have surely welcomed McCormick’s comparison of squadristi to legionnaires.
83 Capozzola, Uncle Same Wants You, 210-212.
85 “Demands Action at Once Against Reds,” Los Angeles Times, November 13, 1919.
“Giovinezza”—to this topic alone. The squadrist’s youth evoked all the clichés that accompany renditions of youth in fiction, poetry and art: they represented the “hopes for their country,” and the “the hope of the future,” wrote Schneider.  

These observers argued that the squadrist were a vanguard. They led, and their country followed. Child, McCormick and Schneider described a swift eradication of sentiments of despondency, depression and withdrawal, as the nation rallied behind the fascists. Sometimes, they used specific examples to indicate a broader trend. For instance, Child claimed that by the summer of 1922 all the servants in his home in Rome had joined the movement. American fascist sympathizers cited “conversions” of socialists and communists to fascism, not only as evidence of Italians’ superficial attachment to leftist creeds, but also as an indication that the Italians (like human beings everywhere) were latent patriots. The movement generated by the squads had brought Italy to a higher level of “national self-consciousness” than it had ever experienced before, wrote McCormick in the spring of 1921. Ignoring the basic reality that most people opt for self-preservation over ideological integrity in the face of violence, these observers imagined that Italians were experiencing a moment of national unity. Such a moment would have felt both familiar and remote to Americans in the early 1920s, and intentionally so: these observers wanted their readers to feel nostalgic for a recent yet strangely distant time, when they had united behind their country.

Fascist sympathizers suggested that in addition to elevated ideals of service, honor, and patriotism, the squads offered excitement of senses dulled in the postwar years. Although more basic, the sense of invigoration provoked by displays of violence seemed to be just as integral to their appreciation.

89 Schneider, “Giovinezza.”
90 Schneider, “Giovinezza.” See also, Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 40. “Exuberant confidence in Italy’s future and youthful enthusiasm for conflict are certainly the most obvious traits of the fascist mind and imagination.” Child, A Diplomat Looks at Europe, 171, 177; also published as, Child, “Making of Mussolini,” and Child, “Open the Gates.” Fascism was “hope,” wrote Child.
91 Schneider, “Giovinezza,” Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 18, 40.
92 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 171; also published as, Child, “Making of Mussolini.” McCormick, “Revolt of Youth.” Similarly, McCormick used her Piedmontese host on the Via Aracoeli to express Italians’ seemingly universal excitement about the “glorious . . . resurrection” of their country.
93 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 171; also published as, Child, “Making of Mussolini.” McCormick, “Italy’s Parliamentary Paradoxes.”
94 McCormick, “Italy’s Parliamentary Paradoxes.”
of squadism. McCormick had raced to Florence from France, in March 1921, but she arrived too late to witness the fight. “Oh, it’s too bad you missed it,” she quoted the young English woman. The woman’s eyes sparkled as she described how she had been trapped in a working-class neighborhood during the “hottest hours of the conflict.”\(^95\) She suffered from none of the ennui that afflicted typical tourists in Europe; the violence had brought her to life. Naturally, McCormick welcomed the fascists squads when she finally witnessed them for herself on the Via Aracoeli the next month in Rome. They provided the elation she had craved since arriving in Europe the previous summer.\(^96\) McCormick lent out of the window to get as close as she could to the march below.

Child too courted adventure. He claimed that he walked out in Rome, against the advice of his staff.\(^97\) “I’ve had dozens of serious warnings that I would be assassinated,” he wrote to his father. “I am not bothering much.” One “red” had threatened him, but the Ambassador responded directly, “Tell your crowd to go to Hell!”; the two men had ended up laughing with one another.\(^98\) In describing relaxed encounters with dangerous men, Child wanted to convey something of his own hardboiled character. His wife, Maude Parker, wrote to her parents-in-law of “several days of excitement” generated by street fights between communists and fascists in the fall of 1921. Forty people, she thought, had died in the clashes. Forty people killed in several exciting days. Nothing in Parker’s words suggested any regret at the loss of human life.\(^99\)

Fascist sympathizers suggested that violence had brought the whole nation to life. After years of silence born of apathy, they bore witness to an atavistic spirit in the Italians. The atmosphere they described is familiar to anyone who has seen civilians living in a conflict zone: people tend to be unflappable, sanguine, and so very alive. There was “nothing in the least abnormal in the air and

\(^{95}\) McCormick, “Italy Rebels Against Rebellion.”

\(^{96}\) McCormick, “The Revolt of Youth.”

\(^{97}\) Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 161-62; also published as, Child, “Making of Mussolini.”

\(^{98}\) Richard Washburn Child to H. Walter Child, November 5, 1921; Folder “1920-21”; Reel 2; RWCP. By suggesting that they were not a serious threat, Child also conveyed that communists and socialists were not deeply committed to their cause.

\(^{99}\) Maude Parker to Mr. and Mrs. H. Walter Child; November 14, [1921?]; Folder “1920-21”; Reel 2; RWCP.
atmosphere” of Florence when McCormick visited it in the days following the clashes. Rome, too, maintained its composure under gun fire. The Italians took the violence in their stride, drinking coffee and vermouth in outdoor cafes as bullets flew by. And lest her readers consider this ease with violence as a uniquely Latin trait, McCormick was at pains to argue that Italians were only “overdeveloped” examples of “human nature.” Their experiences belonged to everyone. Americans, insulated in their postwar comforts of shower bath, sleeping porch, and frame garage, might feel far from the streets of Florence and Rome, but these observers hoped to bring them as near as possible to the violence, so near that they might feel its pleasures for themselves.

The fascists’ revival of “war in imagination” was a “remarkable achievement,” according to sympathetic observers. They argued that a once-disconsolate nation galvanized around the squadristi, inspired by their codes of honor and sacrifice, impressed by their refusal to compromise, seduced by their youth, and invigorated by their “enthusiasm for conflict.” References (both oblique and direct) to the Rough Riders, to student strikebreakers, to the culture of the Great War, and the American Legion helped to make the squadristi feel both close and distant to an American audience. This paradoxical feeling of recognition and remoteness is the essence of nostalgia. Fascist sympathizers wanted their readers to realize fully their own discomforts, to long for a recent past, and to seek a vicarious release in the bloodletting that seemed to make Italians whole.

March on Rome

Of the three Americans discussed in this chapter, only Richard Washburn Child was in Italy during the March on Rome of October 1922. But for all three, the march represented a culmination of the tendencies that they observed in squadristism since its inception: enlivenment of the modern experience;

100 McCormick, “Italy Rebels Against Rebellion.”
101 McCormick, “Politics à l’Italienne.”
102 McCormick, “Italy and Popes and Parliaments.”
103 For the “shower bath” as an American standard, see: McCormick, “Bored Americans Abroad.” For the frame garage and sleeping porch as essential trappings of middle-class life, see: Lewis, Babbitt, 14, 73.
104 Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 40.
revival of wartime values; and an augur of change, which the Great War had once promised but never delivered.

Child’s descriptions of these days pricked with energy. His telegrams to Washington barely concealed his delight.¹⁰⁵ In private, he was ecstatic. “We are having a fine young revolution here—no danger, plenty of enthusiasm & color,” he wrote to his father, a fortnight before the march. “We all enjoy it. Confidential.”¹⁰⁶ Maude Parker too was enraptured by the atmosphere: fascism’s “great triumph,” she wrote, was its appeal to youth; even their young daughters dressed up in makeshift fascist uniforms and sang marching songs.¹⁰⁷

In his published memoires, Child switched style to describe these heady days. Instead of writing from the vantage point of 1925, he relayed the events mainly in the form of diary excerpts. He wanted to bring his readers as close to the sensations as possible; to the unique atmosphere of a city on the brink of violence, in which everyday actions were infused with color. Scheduled dinner parties went ahead, even as the fascists approached the city. The expatriates were having fun.¹⁰⁸ On October 28, Child recorded:

There is a perversity in human beings which asks that violence happen. The best of us have love of conflict. I could find no one in my office and none of my many visitors whose eyes were not bright with expectancy.¹⁰⁹

Finally, on Sunday October 29, the fascist squads entered the city; almost one hundred thousand men flooded into Rome over the next few days, Child estimated.¹¹⁰ Child had his Sunday lunch in a restaurant on the Via Veneto and rushed onto a terrace when he heard the sound of gunfire. There was not quite enough violence to satisfy him; he “motored about” the city that day searching for disorder, finding little.¹¹¹ The March on Rome was as close as Child would ever come to experiencing conflict, and its

¹⁰⁵ Telegram, Richard Washburn Child to Charles Evans Hughes, October 26, 1922; 865.00/1164; Telegram, Richard Washburn Child to Charles Hughes, October 28, 1922, 865.00/1165. Both RG59, M527; NARA.
¹⁰⁶ Letter, Richard Washburn Child to H. Walter Child, October 13, 1922; Folder “1922”; Reel 2; RWCP.
¹⁰⁷ Letter, Maude Parker to Mr. and Mrs. H. Walter Child, October 24, 1922; Folder “1922”; Reel 2; RWCP. Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 178-79; also published as, Child, “Open the Gates.”
¹⁰⁸ Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 189; also published as, Child, “Open the Gates.”
¹⁰⁹ Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 191; also published as, Child, “Open the Gates.”
¹¹⁰ Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 196; also published as, Child, “Open the Gates.”
¹¹¹ Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 194; also published as, Child, “Open the Gates.”
attendant sensations. He was enjoying himself, and he wanted his readers, too, to appreciate fascism for its invigorating effects.

It rained a lot in central Italy over those days. Child watched from a window at the Embassy as troops of fascists marched by on October 30. They were a “muddy, tired, healthy lot,” he wrote. Some had marched over open fields for two days. They were hungry, soaked, and sleep deprived. But from faces streaked with mud, their eyes were shining brightly.112 These descriptions might have called to his contemporaries’ minds the homegrown heroes of the Great War: mud-splattered men who jumped from trenches and ran across battlefields in posters advertising liberty bonds.113 Bored American tourists in Europe had failed to sense the realities of trench warfare, even when they had visited Rheims and Arras.114 The March on Rome, mediated by observers like Richard Washburn Child, tried to bring Americans closer, not to the trenches per se, but to a sanitized battlefield, with something of the aesthetic, little of the suffering, and much of the excitement, of war.

These marching men were an embodiment, also, of a Spartan morality, according to Child. They refrained from raids on food shops in spite of their hunger; they avoided alcohol despite their euphoria and their thirst.115 McCormick too would interpret the absence of disorder in Rome that October as evidence of the fascists’ self-restraint, made more remarkable by the fact that many of them were “country boys,” seeing the city for the first time. Wholesome and naïve, these young men remained

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112 Child, *Diplomat Looks at Europe*, 195; also published as, Child, “Open the Gates.”
113 Stylized images of men in the trenches had been a mainstay of World War I propaganda in the United States, when posters urging Americans to buy liberty bonds often featured images of men on the front. See: “Bring them Back Victorious! Buy Liberty Bonds,” 1918, POS - WWI - US, no. 286, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. This features an image of a soldier sleeping in a trench, and urges the viewer to “make his dreams come true—buy more liberty bonds.” See also: “Our Boys in the Trenches—Is There Anything They Need That You Would Not Give Them?,” 1917, POS-WWI-US, no. 276, Prints and Photos Division, Library of Congress. This shows soldiers climbing out of the trenches as shells explode overhead. W. A. Rogers, “His Liberty Bond, Paid in Full,” 1917, POS-US.R635, no. 1, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. This features a dead soldier, lying on a battlefield.
114 McCormick, “Bored Americans Abroad.”
115 Child, *Diplomat Looks at Europe*, 196; also published as, Child, “Open the Gates.”
disciplined, despite the lure of the metropole.\textsuperscript{116} The portrait functioned as a riposte to the caricature of the youthful Americans of the jazz age, who flocked to cities to partake of myriad sins.

Child claimed that there were very few opponents of fascism in Italy in the fall of 1922. Those there were would have been familiar types to anyone who read the gossip columns in the daily American press: men like the “terrified, titled wastrel, whose private life had been too public”; libertines who feared the punishment of “notorious cases of scandal in society.”\textsuperscript{117} The fascist would not tolerate the kind of activities satirized so knowingly by Child’s \textit{Smart Set} contemporaries—bacchanalia, the exploration of sexual identity, the pursuit of self.

According to Child, the forces of a new nationalism culminated in the victory parade on October 31. The Ambassador and his wife joined the spectators in the Piazza Venezia, enjoying a rare moment of anonymity in “the jostling crowd.” There was no longer any reason to fear for his own safety, he suggested: there was no serious opposition to speak of; the nation, to all intents and purposes, had become one. The mud-splattered men had cleaned themselves up for the occasion.\textsuperscript{118} Now, the collective face of fascism was a dignified and handsome one, “lean” and “brown.”\textsuperscript{119} Child described how the marching companies sang \textit{Giovinezza}—Youth—the hymn of the fascists; and how the crowd sang back the same song. The fascists marched up to the steps of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, signaling continuity between times of war and times of peace. They passed the Quirinale, where from a balcony King Vittorio Emanuele III, dressed in uniform, acknowledge their cheers with a military salute.\textsuperscript{120} Four years after the end of the war, Italy finally had a worthy victory parade.

These descriptions would have struck the chords of memory for most American readers. They would have been familiar to anyone who had participated in spontaneous celebrations of victory in

\begin{itemize}
\item McCormick, “Swashbuckling Mussolini.” McCormick inadvertently revealed her lack of direct knowledge of the March on Rome by describing the marchers as “dusty and dry.” Anyone who was actually there, and who experienced the torrential downpours, would have attested to the opposite.
\item Child, \textit{Diplomat Looks at Europe}, 195; also published as, Child, “Open the Gates.”
\item Child, \textit{Diplomat Looks at Europe}, 197; also published as, Child, “Open the Gates.”
\item Child, \textit{Diplomat Looks at Europe}, 198; also published as, Child, “Open the Gates.”
\item Child, \textit{A Diplomat Looks at Europe}, 197-98; also published as, Child, “Open the Gates.” Child suggested that any concerns about the constitutionality of the March on Rome were rendered moot in this reconciliation between fascism and the Crown.
\end{itemize}
November 1918, when church bells rang, schools were closed, and crowds flooded the streets, and familiar to anyone who had welcomed the troops when they had arrived on domestic shores the following spring. Yet they would have felt strangely remote to Americans who had lived through the subsequent years. In 1922, Armistice Day in the United States was a subdued affair, marked by quiet services in churches or at memorial sites. That same month, thousands flooded onto the streets of Elizabeth, New Jersey, to fete the world welterweight champion, Mickey Walker; the “entire” body of Harvard undergraduates cheered the varsity eleven during practice; and the seventy-five thousand seater stadium at Ohio State University opened to capacity crowds. Americans of 1922 seemed more likely to rally around a titleholder or a team than they did their national flag. Child seems to have intended his descriptions of Italy that fall to remind Americans of what they were missing.

The reality of the March on Rome was not as Child described it. One hundred thousand men did not march on Rome. When Schneider cut that number in half, and when McCormick reduced it by ten thousand more, they exaggerated still. Historians now estimate that fewer than thirty thousand fascists joined the march. Many of the squadristi at regional outposts failed to congregate on time. Those who did were poorly armed. They were also poorly fed: the “lean” faces that Child described were “lean” for a reason. It did rain a lot in Rome in late October. For four days, young men hung around the city in the pouring rain. Did the squads clean off the mud and adjust their uniforms to present a dignified countenance, worthy of a victory parade, as Child wrote? Or did all that rain just wash the mud away?

Herbert Schneider suggested that none of these details mattered. What mattered was that the March on Rome had created “a ferment of emotion and ideation” that was “much more revolutionary than the event

122 “Pay Silent Tribute to the Dead in War,” New York Times, November 12, 1922.
124 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 196.
125 Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 82; McCormick, “Italy and Bolshevism.”
126 Martin Blinkhorn, Mussolini and Fascist Italy (New York: Routledge, 1994), 22.
127 Lyttelton, Seizure of Power, 85–86.
itself.” What mattered, he suggested, was that Italians had been susceptible to dreams of battles, heroes, glory. What mattered, he suggested, was that people wanted to believe.

**The Leader of the Fascists**

Mussolini, as described by these observers, was at first a shadowy figure. Their initial impressions of him were hazy, and ill-informed: “Mussolino,” McCormick called him when she first introduced him to her readers in July 1921; the man poised to resign as the leader of the fascists, the Embassy informed the Department of State in August that year. It was only in the weeks leading up to the March on Rome that Mussolini came into focus at all. Fascist sympathizers soon portrayed him as the right man to lead a war-weary nation out of its malaise: a man committed to the ideals of war, who scourged liberalism, and electrified a nation.

When sympathetic American observers considered Mussolini’s past, they believed that more relevant than his socialism *per se* was his break with the majority of socialists over Italy’s entry into World War I. In 1914, Mussolini was editor of the socialist daily, *Avanti*, noted Schneider and Child. But the party forced him to resign because he wrote in favor of intervention on the side of the allied powers. Mussolini quickly organized a new paper, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, which became an influential champion of Italy’s entry into the war. Schneider summarized Mussolini’s editorials: a policy of neutrality was

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128 Schneider, *Making the Fascist State*, 83.
129 McCormick, “Italy and Popes and Parliaments.” Before this article was published in the *Times*, the newspaper’s main section had only carried six articles referring to Mussolini (mainly in passing). The article that devoted the most attention to him before July 1921 reinforced his reputation as a man of political principle. See: “Fascisti to Oppose Giolitti in Chamber,” *New York Times*, May 23, 1921. Embassy Weekly, August 30, 1921; 865.00/944; RG59; M527; NARA.
130 Schneider, *Making the Fascist State*, 9-13; Child, *Diplomat Looks at Europe*, 172-73; Embassy Weekly, November 4, 1922; 865.00/1180; RG59; M527; NARA. See also: *Reminiscences of Herbert Wallace Schneider*; and Patrick D Reagan, *Designing a New America: The Origins of New Deal Planning, 1890-1943* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 65. Schneider claimed that *Il Popolo d’Italia* had received American funding during the war, channeled to Mussolini via Charles Merriam, who then worked for the Committee of Public Information in Rome. In the mid-1920s, Merriam told Schneider that during the war, he had been “’given a big sum of money and sent over to Italy to swing Italy into the war on the side of the allies instead of Austria, and I [Merriam] decided to give that to this socialist leader, Mussolini, and see if he couldn’t do it.’” According to Schneider, “[Merriam] didn’t tell me where he had gotten the money, but I guessed.” The historian, Patrick D. Reagan, suggests that this money was from the Rockefeller Foundation, the same organization that gave Schneider funding (via the Social Science Research Council) for his 1927 trip to Rome. “Merriam got them to give the money [for Schneider’s research],” Schneider said, because Merriam was interested in finding out whether the American financial support had had any impact on Mussolini’s position during the war. Schneider told his interviewers: “This money [that Mussolini] got through Merriam he used to found a newspaper, *Popolo d’Italia*...which in a month was the great newspaper of
morally bankrupt; Italians had to fight, and “make sacrifices,” if they wanted to gain anything from the war.131

According to the Embassy, and later Child, when called to fight in the war, Mussolini conducted himself heroically. Child wrote that Mussolini fought in the “ranks” and was “shredded by shrapnel in a hundred wounds.”132 (Mussolini, in point of fact, was injured in a training exercise not by enemy fire, as Child implied.)133 These observers noted that Mussolini maintained his fervent interventionism, even when Italian morale was at its lowest ebb, in the wake of the humiliating defeat at Caporetto.134 In this guise, he was fascism’s most famous “convert” from socialism—a man who went against the party when the party line interfered with his sense of honor, and his belief in what was right for his country.135

Following the war, these observers argued that Mussolini embodied righteous indignation that was sorely lacking in Italy, and much of the rest of the world. In their minds, he was the incarnation of a “spirit which could no longer tolerate drifting.”136 According to Schneider, Mussolini avoided sinking into the atmosphere *disprezzo* that characterized society after the war. Instead, he turned his rage upon Italy’s “pessimistic, timid, degenerate” leaders, who, he believed, had failed to secure for Italy the territorial rewards of victory.137

When Mussolini entered parliament in June 1921, as leader of the small group of elected fascists, his spirit of intolerance was evident again. McCormick heard his first speech in the Chamber of Deputies on June 21st. She described it as “one of the best political speeches” she had ever heard, “caustic,
powerful and telling.” In this speech Mussolini declared the communists to be his enemies and castigated the socialists for their fatalism, materialism, and opposition to the war.138

Mussolini’s rage seemed to be at one with the “‘terrible anger’” of the squadristi, even if it typically took a less physical form.139 It was harsh, unforgiving, and uncompromising. It felt refreshing to those who were disgusted with the atmosphere of passive acceptance that seemed to prevail in the post-war years. For instance, Child described a meeting with the leader of the fascists, in the fall of 1922, just before the March on Rome. The two men drank tea with Maude Parker and laughed about European politics.140 But within this relaxed encounter there was an apparent authenticity, which Child obviously relished. He wrote: “Mussolini tears the cover off all pretenses; it is his foremost characteristic. Veneer is nothing; he rips it away and looks at the wood. We got on.”141 As was frequently the case in fascist sympathizers’ writing, Child’s portrait of Mussolini had sexual undercurrents. In this case, Child suggested that Mussolini’s passion was pure, his approach was penetrating, and that their encounters provided Child with an immense sense of relief.

During his precipitous rise to power, Mussolini personified the fascists’ spirit of élan vital, in American observer’s mind. He was young in age, remarked Child; “giovane in spirit,” according to Schneider.142 Although he was not the most bloodthirsty of fascists, Mussolini offered aggressive energy, seemingly contained within a chivalric code. In May 1922, the Embassy reported that Mussolini had wounded an editor of another journal, Mario Missiroli, in a duel.143 The fascist leader seemed to be a man

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139 McCormick, “Italy Rebels Against Rebellion.”
140 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 173. Telegram, Richard Washburn Child to Charles Evans Hughes, October 26, 1922; 865.00/1164; RG59; M527; NARA. In Child’s official account of this meeting, Mussolini seemed less relaxed and more calculating.
141 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 173-4; also published as, Child, “Making of Mussolini.”
142 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 172; also published as, Child, “Making of Mussolini”; Schneider, “Giovinezza,” 194.
143 Embassy Weekly, May 20, 1922; 865.00/1114; RG59; M527; NARA. Mussolini, according to this report, had refused to retract an article, in which he criticized Missiroli.
of action, as well as thought, and sympathetic American observers appreciated the theater. Herbert Schneider interpreted the March on Rome as Mussolini’s most triumphant spectacle: he channeled the squadristi’s energies; choreographed their “revolution”; and he ensured that their violence was held within bounds.

Both Schneider and McCormick commented on the speed with which Mussolini got the squadristi out of Rome after their victory parade of October 31. Within twenty-four hours, according to Schneider, and even sooner, according to McCormick, the marchers marched back from where they had come. Schneider and McCormick emphasized this point to suggest that Mussolini represented the vitality of youth, without its associated excesses. His apparent capacity for control seemed to bode well for Italian (and global) stability. But his ability to unleash, made these observers, quite simply, happy to be alive. It felt like Child’s “prophet” had arrived.

**The Promise of a New World**

American sympathizers with fascism reacted against the prevailing culture of disillusionment in the wake of the First World War. By 1922, they could tell Italy’s story in a satisfying narrative arc, starting with despair and ending with redemption. According to their perceptions, Italians in 1920 were extreme embodiments of the modern mood. They were apathetic; even their attachments to socialism, communism, and other manifestations of the left, were shallow and self-serving. As a people they had turned against their government, their nation, and their recent participation in the war. They had turned inward, toward only themselves. Italy, like the rest of Europe, was depressing in 1919, not because it was a nation in mourning, but because it seemed to want to forget.

These observers argued that fascist squads excited senses numbed by the apathetic atmosphere left in the wake of the war. Richard Washburn Child and Herbert Schneider both conceded that fascist violence was not necessary for the suppression of communism. But, along with Anne O’Hare

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144 McCormick, “The Swashbuckling Mussolini.” In McCormick’s mind, he made “politics a kind of noble show” and kept “enlivened and interested the audience, so bored by his predecessors.”
145 Schneider, *Making the Fascist State*, 81-82.
146 Schneider, *Making the Fascist State*, 82; McCormick, “Swashbuckling Mussolini.”
147 Letter, Richard Washburn Child to H. Walter Child, August 19, 1917; Folder “1881-1919”; Reel 2; RWCP.
McCormick, they welcomed squadism as a force for disorder, which created at least “‘one diversion in a
dull world.’”

Fascism, they believed, could renew the spirit of the Great War in at least three ways. First, fascist youths demonstrated the inherent dignity of martial ideals. The call to service, American sympathizers suggested, could still be pure—unsullied by self-interest—and powerful—capable of inspiring, galvanizing. Second, nothing awakened one’s sense of being alive better than being close to death. McCormick and Child aimed to get as near to the violence as possible so as to benefit from its therapeutic effects. And all three of these observers attempted to bring their readers, too, into the vortex, away from the modern appliances and motor cars, to remind them that there was more to living. Finally, fascism—both in and out of politics—promised the beginning of the “new world,” which the war had failed to deliver. After she had watched the fascists as they trooped down the Via Aracoeli, in April 1921, Anne O’Hare McCormick expressed her own uncertainty about a future that she deemed to be in the hands of these young men:

I wondered if the world they will create for us, a world already more solid than the shaken planet of the past few years, will be as liberal, as easy for the nonconformists, as indulgent of the mildly mad, as pitiful of the weak, as the muddling old world we used to know or used to think we knew until that August morning when it crashed!

The question was barely a question. McCormick’s answer, though never explicitly articulated, was surely a hopeful “No.”
Chapter II. Mystic in a Morning Coat: Americans’ Mussolini in the 1920s

How quickly Richard Washburn Child turned the youthful, irreverent leader of the squadristi into an effective yet soulful administrator. Child caught sight of Mussolini in a limousine on a Roman side street by the parliament on November 16, 1922. The two men saw each other, and then Mussolini raised his eyes and threw his head up to the sky. Child interpreted the gesture as a sign that Mussolini had made a decision, and that he was satisfied with it. Minutes later, the Ambassador watched from the gallery as the new Prime Minister made his first address to the Chamber of Representatives. He spoke quietly, yet firmly, with none of the florid conventions of Italian rhetoric. Child distilled the “essence” of Mussolini’s words to his readers. First, he said he had chosen to limit the revolution. Second, he observed that the will to act was more important than programs of action. The fascist government, he said, embodied such will. Finally, Mussolini accepted personal responsibility for the trials that lay ahead. He had, he said, a “‘religious sense’” of the difficulties that Italy faced.¹ The celebrations were over; work had begun.

While the image of Mussolini as an effective executive indicated that he could navigate the technical challenges of modernity, it also implied that he would act as a bulwark against modernity’s worst effects. Silent in his limousine, speaking quietly in the chamber, and using only those words which were necessary, Mussolini was a calm riposte to the modern tendency of self-expression, words and more words, noise and more noise. Fascist sympathizers suggested that this austerity with words was at one with an economy of character. Their Mussolini embodied older ideals of savings and responsibility that were fading in the United States, flushed, as it was, with cash. Child’s description conveyed a man who was driven by an internal impetus rather than external stimuli, who stood, Neptune-like, above the waves, and calmed the storm. In the modern era, when men and women seemed driven by forces outside of themselves—the pace of the assembly line, the tempo of jazz, and the speed of cars—Mussolini offered a hope that human beings, endowed with sufficient will, could still be in control.

Despite the apparent directness of the Prime Minister’s words, there was something mystical about him according to sympathetic onlookers: hidden depths. Child alluded to this mysticism in the

¹ Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 204-206; also published as, Child, “What Does Mussolini Mean?”
silent gestures that conveyed meanings, rather like a Renaissance portrait of a saint. He saw mysticism in Mussolini’s “religious sense” of his duty to others.\(^2\) As Anne O’Hare McCormick observed, Mussolini’s speech before the Chamber of Deputies marked the first time that any Italian prime minister had bound his secular role to the spiritual realm.\(^3\) Even in this early appearance as Prime Minister, Mussolini seemed to suggest that he would be more than an effective administrator, and more than an exemplar of old-fashioned values of austerity, will, selflessness, and responsibility. He would be a spiritual leader, who could nourish the modern soul.

Fascist sympathizers saw Mussolini as a man who could simultaneously navigate the complexities of the modern world, and slow down the breakneck speed of modern culture. They also believed that he could provide Americans with an emotional and spiritual fulfillment that seemed lacking in their own milieu. John Diggins pointed to this idea when he wrote that Mussolini was, for some Americans, the “answer to many things that were wrong with the modern world.”\(^4\) In a study that was broader than it was deep, Diggins could offer his readers no more than a tantalizing glimpse of this argument.

Yet the work of other cultural historians demonstrates the validity of the hypothesis that Mussolini appealed to Americans as an antidote to the ills of modernity. According to Warren Susman, the “culture heroes” of the 1920s were men who succeeded in modern arenas while they displayed character traits associated with the late-Victorian era. Henry Ford, for instance, built the archetypal assembly line, while insisting on old-fashioned ideals of simplicity, hard work, and austerity. Ford, argued Susman, eased the transition to modernity by suggesting that Americans could succeed in a new world by playing by the old rules. As the nineteenth century emphasis on character—defined by internal measures of self-control, hard work, and will—gave way to the celebration of personality—defined by

\(^2\) Child, *Diplomat Looks at Europe*, 206; also published as, Child, “What Does Mussolini Mean?”
external measures of beauty, likeability, and charisma—Ford and other “culture heroes” sent a reassuring message that a man’s integrity still mattered.\(^5\)

As Diggins’ and Susman’s research suggests, fascist sympathizers were attracted to Mussolini for his apparent capacity to navigate modernity while moderating its worst effects. Constructed as the austere administrator with a deep soul, sympathizers’ Mussolini drew attention to all that Americans had sacrificed in their race to the future and provided recompense for those who felt lost, lonely, or left behind by change.

**The Right Kind of Businessman**

Richard Washburn Child used the image of a limousine, idling in a Roman side street in November 1922, to suggest that Mussolini resembled a modern business executive. This was just one of the many ways that fascist sympathizers conveyed the new Prime Minister’s ease in a complex modern world.\(^6\) Some historians, most notably Gian Giacomo Migone, have argued that Mussolini was popular with Americans in the 1920s because he appeared to offer a stable destination for dollar investments; and this argument does indeed go some way to explaining why the Americans studied here reproduced images of the Prime Minister as a business executive *par excellence*.\(^7\) Child, while he was still Ambassador, was


\(^6\) Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 145-46, 156-161. Other historians have recognized the prevalence of this image, although they have tended to interpret it quite narrowly. For instance, Diggins found that the American business community welcomed renditions of Mussolini that conveyed the norms they held dear: conservatism; technical capacity; efficiency. I argue that Americans with little direct interest in business still embraced images of Mussolini as an effective executive because these images connoted stability and certainty as an antidote to the modern condition.

\(^7\) Gian Giacomo Migone, *The United States and Fascist Italy: The Rise of American Finance in Europe*, trans. Molly Tambor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For the renegotiation of Italy’s war debt, which paved the way for the final negotiations of a J.P. Morgan loan, see Schmitz, *United States and Fascist Italy*, 89-96; Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion*, 133-34, 147-48; Migone, *United States and Fascist Italy*, 86-140. For suggestions that Mussolini was constructed as a businessman to encourage the outflow of US dollars, see in particular, Migone,
involved in discussions with Mussolini about economic opportunities for American investors; Anne O’Hare McCormick advocated dollar outlays as a spur to recovery in post-war Europe; Generoso Pope’s newspaper portrayed Italy as a safe home for foreign financiers; and Herbert Schneider argued that, under Mussolini, the country’s economy was in capable hands.8

But after Child retired from the ambassadorship in 1924, none of these onlookers was particularly well-placed to influence decision-making in the upper echelons of American government and finance, at least while Republican administrations remained in power.9 These observers aimed to impact the United

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8 Schmitz, United States and Fascist Italy, 56; Costigliola, Awkward Dominion, 94. Child discussed economic opportunities for American investors with Mussolini in the days after the March on Rome. Letter, Maude Parker to Mr. and Mrs. H. Walter Child, November 25, 1923; Folder “1923-24”; Reel 2; RWCP. Child met with Thomas Lamont of J. P. Morgan when he was in the United States, in December 1923. Embassy reports compiled on Child’s watch also reassured Washington that Mussolini could bring political stability and much-needed economic reforms to Italy. Embassy Weekly, November 4, 1922; 865.00/1180; RG59; M527; NARA. Within days of the March on Rome, Mussolini began to discuss “a definite economic program based on concrete proposals,” according to this Embassy report. Whereas previous governments had “shrunk” before such “confusing obstacles,” the new government tackled Italy’s economic problems head on. For similar language conveying the firmness and definition of Mussolini’s economic policies, see Embassy Weekly, November 11, 1922; 864.00/1184; RG59; M527; NARA. Letter, Richard Washburn Child to Charles Evan Hughes, May 1, 1923; 865.00/1227; RG59; M527; NARA. On the other hand, Ambassador Child occasionally voiced doubts Mussolini’s capacity to manage the “centrifugal forces” of fascism. For McCormick’s views on American aid and investment in Europe, see: Anne O’Hare McCormick, “When Greek Greets Greek,” New York Times, July 13, 1924; Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Climax Passed, League Faces Knotty Issues,” New York Times, October 3, 1926. For Il Progresso, see for example: “Italy’s Fiscal House in Order,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, February 3, 1929. This article argued that American investors had “shown their faith in the stability of Italian enterprises,” and that Mussolini’s capacity to solve “big problems” attracted foreign capital. Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 71. Schneider attributed much of this economic stability to Mussolini’s choice of the liberal economist Alberto De Stefani as Finance Minister. McCormick, “Swashbuckling Mussolini.” McCormick was similarly impressed with De Stefani, whom she called “perhaps the ablest member of Mussolini’s government.” Embassy Weekly, May 19, 1923; 865.00/1230; RG 59; M527; NARA. US Embassy reports praised De Stefani for his efforts to balance Italy’s budget.

9 Letter, Richard Washburn Child to Mr. H. Walter Child, August 5, 1923; Folder “1923-24”; Reel 2; RWCP. Child saw Warren Harding’s death as a “bad blow.” When Harding passed, the Ambassador had “just worked out the biggest play” of his life. The President’s bad timing meant that, for Child “months of labor” were for naught. Child worked hard to ingratiate himself with Coolidge. Letter, Richard Washburn Child to H. Walter Child, February 13, 1924; Folder, “1923-24”; Reel 2; RWCP. A meeting with Coolidge in late October 1923 yielded no concrete opportunities. He dined at the Whitehouse in February 1924, boasting “the President all the evening was voluble and confidential with me.” Richard Washburn Child to Mr. and Mrs. H. Walter Child, [Late July 1926?]; Folder “1925-30”; Reel 2; RWCP. Child’s relationship with the Coolidge’s seems to have peaked in 1926, when he spent an afternoon swimming with Mrs. Coolidge. “Coolidge will be a Candidate, Says R. W. Child,” New York Times. But he never achieved a higher position in the administration that of a part-time public relations man. Letter, Robert Wagner to George Akerson, April 2, 1930; Folder Pope; Presidential Secretary’s File; HHP. When Pope got the ear
States’ domestic culture by addressing a much broader public. Financial and business concerns only give us a partial explanation for their reproduction of images of Mussolini as an effective administrator.

Fascist sympathizers portrayed Mussolini as a figure who gracefully mastered the complexities of the modern economy, creating clarity where there was confusion. Child presented his Saturday Evening Post readers with a list of figures. In Mussolini’s first year in power, he reported, the government reduced the budget deficit by nearly one-half, as private savings increased by fifteen percent. Through a crackdown on evasion, the regime added almost one million taxpayers to its rolls. By sacking “useless personnel,” it cut railway costs by 370,000,000 lire. At the same time, it reduced overall unemployment by more than two-thirds, to under 180,000 men nationwide. In reciting these figures, and many more, Child probably did not imagine that many of his readers would pause to analyze them (and those who did would have felt justifiably skeptical about a man who could simultaneously initiate drastic reductions of public spending while stimulating output and employment). His goal was rather to suggest that ordinary Americans, like ordinary Italians, need not concern themselves with these complexities. An administrative genius was in command, a man who could add “a column of cold figures which finely balance a budget” with ease.

Child’s Mussolini exuded calm. Child claimed that he met with the Prime Minister often in his early days of “administrative superlabor.” Although busy, Mussolini still had time to reflect on the nature of his work. He was laboring hard, he confided; he was absorbing the details. “‘Detail!’” this Mussolini exclaimed, as he “spread his short strong arms apart to indicate the world of detail.” There, in his sturdy embrace, Mussolini held the details. It was a comforting image of a strong man assuming a

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of politicians in the 1920s it was usually to discuss the status of Italian Americans at home, not investment strategies abroad. Wagner’s letter to the President’s secretary, asking for a meeting between Pope and Hoover, was almost certainly part of Pope’s efforts to have Hoover make good on his campaign promise to liberalize immigration restrictions. There is no indication that Pope met with the President.

Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 222-23; also published as, Child, “What Does Mussolini Mean?” Neglecting to mention the role of de Stefani, Child implied that Mussolini was directly responsible for the program’s creation, and its apparent successes. Letter, Richard Washburn Child to Charles Evan Hughes, May 1, 1923; 865/1227; RG59; M527; NARA. More skeptical in his official missives, Ambassador Child suggested that the proposed budget cuts would be undermined by military expenditures, preventing a “financial result” that would prompt Italy to praise Mussolini as “its savior.”


burden so that others need not. And it was made more comforting still by Mussolini’s pronounced ability to do away with the details entirely. “‘Detail interferes with wise solution of the larger problems,’” Child quoted him as saying.13 Like a magician, he held the details and, in a flash, they disappeared.

McCormick also portrayed Mussolini as adept at simplifying complex realities. She met the Prime Minister for the first time in the summer of 1926. The regime had only just announced its plans for the corporate state, and international onlookers were uncertain about what this really entailed—their own uncertainties a reflection of the confusion within the fascist government itself.14 Had McCormick seen clearly, she might have described Italian corporatism as a half-baked attempt to mediate the competing demands of capital and labor, almost always to the disadvantage of the latter.15 But instead she described it as a complete system of economic management, not unlike an integrated factory, with Mussolini as the chief of the enterprise. McCormick’s Mussolini certainly had all the communication skills of the modern businessman. According to her, the Prime Minister responded enthusiastically to her expressions of interest, “jumping up” to show her a “diagram on the wall” of his office. Speaking calmly and patiently, this Mussolini explained to McCormick the “whole economic structure of the nation.”16 Never have smoke and mirrors looked so simple.

The reality of McCormick’s interview with Mussolini in 1926 was far less straightforward than she claimed. The two met in mid-July for what was less of an interview and more of an audience. The following day, McCormick sent the Prime Minister a list of written questions. Did His Excellency, she asked, “wish to say a few words to American readers on his concept of the new corporate state?”17 In return, she received a diagram from Giacomo Paulucci, the head of the Cabinet of Foreign Affairs.18 Perhaps this, or another, diagram of the corporate state also hung on Mussolini’s office wall, or perhaps

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13 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 215; also published as, Child “What Does Mussolini Mean?”
14 Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 160.
16 McCormick, “Il Duce Pictures the New State.”
17 Letter, McCormick to Mussolini, July 15, 1926, and “Intervista Mc Kormick (sic).” Both in Sotto-fascicolo “1926 Anna O’Hare Mc. Cormick”; Fascicolo “interveste”; Busta 752; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD.
18 Letter, McCormick to Paulucci, July 26, 1926; Sotto-fascicolo “1926 Anna O’Hare Mc. Cormick”; Fascicolo “interveste”; Busta 752; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD.
McCormick took a great deal of journalistic license and hung it there herself. But in response to her specific questions, McCormick heard nothing at all. She prodded Paulucci in late July and again in early August. Someone in the government compiled the answers. Mussolini’s chief contribution was to delay the process further, in an effort to pace his appearances in the US news. “One month after the Associated [Press] one” he scribbled on top of McCormick’s questionnaire. The Times was not able to publish the piece until October 1926. In it, McCormick portrayed an entirely different man from the one who had eluded her for more than three months: a man who was honest and open, instead of calculating and indirect; a man who distilled complex realities down to their essence, instead of one who created murky clouds in muddy water.

When McCormick fashioned Mussolini into this alter-ego, she wanted Americans to recognize that they too needed men who could bring calm and clarity to their frenetic and confusing culture. The journalist had spent most of 1925 in the United States, where she had witnessed the Florida land-boom at its peak. From Florida, she had relayed dizzying statistics to her readers: fifteen hundred cars, carrying more than four thousand people, entered the state each day; the tourist industry was worth sixty million dollars a year; and the advertisers for prospective lots on Davis Island had sold three million dollars worth of land, site unseen (and unseeable, since it still lay below water). McCormick suggested that Florida was a product of the United States in the mid-1920s, moving so fast that you could barely make sense of it.

In contrast to her Mussolini, who made sense of complexities, the American businessmen whom McCormick profiled in Florida compounded and profited from the mayhem. Men like Dave Davis—the
investor behind Davis Island—had turned Florida into a land of “high pressure salesmen.” McCormick’s Mussolini of 1926 both highlighted the shortcomings of contemporary models of masculinity and suggested the kind of men Americans should find among themselves: executives who faced the chaos, so that others need not; administrators who absorbed complexity, removing its burden on society.

More Modern, More Italian

The claim that Mussolini effortlessly managed modernity was particularly useful for Generoso Pope. On November 2, 1928—the day after Pope assumed leadership of Il Progresso Italo-Americano—he stated that his goal was to make the newspaper “più moderno, più italiano.” The notion of “more modern, more Italian” implied a challenge to nativist prejudices, which equated Italians with, at best, beautiful chaos and an irretrievable past, and, at worst, congenital disorder and immunity to modernity. Images of Mussolini as an effective executive furthered Pope’s objective by demonstrating the compatibility of modernity and Italianità.

A typical photograph of the Prime Minister, reprinted in the newspaper in January 1929, showed him speaking at a meeting of Italian business managers. Standing behind a lectern in a suit, with a neat pile of papers before him, and indoor plants in the background, the image was as suggestive of an American Chamber of Commerce convention as it was of a meeting of the Italian corporate state. “An Italian Genius, He Knows His Business,” crowed a headline, which touted Mussolini’s managerial capacities, that same month. Photographed in a March meeting of the Grand Council—as the fascist elite handpicked deputies to replace elected representatives in the parliament—the Prime Minister sat

23 McCormick, “Making a Speedway of De Soto’s Trail.”
26 Italianità can be translated, simply, as Italian identity. But as some historians have shown, in the context of a hostile environment in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Italianità was sometimes underpinned by claims to the superiority of Italian civilization, and chauvinism toward people with darker skins than their own. Vellon, Great Conspiracy Against Our Race. Vellon charts how the Italian American press constructed Italian Americans’ identities vis-à-vis Africans, African Americans, Asians, Asian Americans and Native Americans.
27 “S. E. Mussolini Mentre Pronuncia . . . ,” photograph, Il Progresso Italo-Americano, January 6, 1929.
28 “An Italian Genius; He Knows His Business,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, January 11, 1929. This article was a reprint of a piece published in Hearst’s New York Evening Journal.
behind a desk loaded with papers, poised to make a decision. Images like this foregrounded Mussolini’s administrative skills, while obscuring the loss of Italians’ freedoms entailed by his executive actions.

Contributors to Il Progresso argued that Mussolini’s skills as an administrator were not his alone, but were typical of his countrymen, whether in Italy or the United States. One fascist official, quoted at length in Il Progresso, argued that Mussolini’s “capacity for problems of a technical character, and for statistics” showed that Italians were not just good artists, as once was thought. The newspaper’s English-language section—a feature launched by Pope to reach second-generation immigrants as well as native-born Americans—published a series of articles on local self-made men entitled “Italian-Americans of Whom We are Proud.” In contrast to Child’s and McCormick’s journalism, which suggested that most Americans had lost control of the economic forces that governed their daily existence, this series portrayed Italian Americans as methodically overcoming challenges, to succeed in a modern United States. The series featured lawyers, like Ferdinand Pecora, who had migrated from Italy as a child, studying and working assiduously to reach the peak of his profession, and bankers, like Italo Palermo who had “exploited the opportunities” of a booming American financial sector to triple the capital of his company.

Examples such as this implied that Italian Americans were importing Mussolini’s talents into the United States. Nobody seemed more suggestive of this claim than Generoso Pope himself, at least as he was rendered in Il Progresso. The first image that readers of Il Progresso saw of their new owner was of a well-dressed man in a suit, walking purposefully, busy, but not harried, a man who took modern life in his stride (Figure 5). Italo Carlo Falbo, Il Progresso’s director, reflected on Pope’s pathway to success, from a low-wage worker in a sand company to the unassailable cement king of New York. Pope, wrote Falbo, had succeeded due to his “vigor for organization and administration.” Buying up company after

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company, he had “strengthened and secured” the construction industry for the benefit of all Americans.\textsuperscript{33} Falbo’s account naturally sanitized Pope’s life story of the mafia connections that had facilitated his rise, and eschewed any notion that monopoly produced dangerous economic distortions rather than stability.\textsuperscript{34} Pope, in this guise, was the kind of man who was in short supply and much demand in the United States: one who managed the “maelstrom” of modernity, without getting swept up in its force.\textsuperscript{35}

In these ways, \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano} reproduced and reinterpreted images of Mussolini for its own purposes. Like Child and McCormick’s portraits of the Italian Prime Minister, the newspaper’s representations of Mussolini as an effective administrator suggested that he had a capacity to absorb the details that overwhelmed many modern Americans. But \textit{Il Progresso} went further, to claim that Mussolini’s skills, while scarce among Americans, were innate to Italians, as exemplified, above all, by Generoso Pope. These images rebuffed pejorative stereotypes of Italian immigrants as incapable of incorporation into American modernity, suggesting that Americans needed Italians to live among them, as much as, or even more than, Italians needed to live in the United States.

\textbf{Italy’s Answer to Horatio Alger}

Even as they praised him for his abilities to manage the technical challenges associated with modernity, American fascist sympathizers suggested that the Prime Minister held steadfast to an older model of manhood. The \textit{New York Times} hinted at this in an illustration, which accompanied McCormick’s 1926 piece based on her interview with Mussolini. In this drawing, the Prime Minister appeared in a morning suit—a form of dress that by 1926 was decidedly old-fashioned in the United States.\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{Il Progresso}, too, consistently reproduced images of Mussolini that were reminiscent of older masculine ideals. Pictured at work in 1929, Mussolini’s eyes were cast away from the camera, in the

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\item \textsuperscript{33} I. C. Falbo, “Ai Lettori del ‘Progresso,’” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, November 2, 1928.
\item \textsuperscript{34} For these mafia connections see: Jack Vitek, \textit{The Godfather of Tabloid: Generoso Pope Jr. and the National Enquirer} (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 16-18, 23-24.
\item \textsuperscript{35} For “maelstrom” see Berman, \textit{All That Is Solid Melts Into Air}, 15-16.
\item \textsuperscript{36} “He is Big Enough to Scrap Caesar and Napoleon in Favor of Mussolini,” illustration, in McCormick, “Il Duce Pictures the New State.”
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direction of the business of government that occupied him. Il Progresso invited the viewer to make contrasts between representations of Mussolini and those of other famous men who appeared frequently in the newspaper, such as the boxing champion Primo Carnera and the aviator Italo Balbo. Carnera and Balbo were a source of titillating images and a more modern aesthetic, which emphasized the physical self and used youthful good looks to establish a connection with the audience. But the newspaper consistently selected opposing images to represent the leader of Italians. By far the most prevalent image of Mussolini in Il Progresso was a sober profile: Mussolini in a dark suit, the background black. Face turned to the side, eyes downcast, it suggested that the putative viewer could not have been further from the Prime Minister’s mind (Figure 6). To employ Warren Susman’s distinction, images of Carnera and Balbo evoked “personalities”; those of Mussolini, “character.” The difference was between men who had been swept into an easy but often superficial modern world, and a man who held on to a harder but truer self.

Child, McCormick and Pope’s Mussolini shared many characteristics with the protagonist of a Horatio Alger tale of a young man, born in poverty, who achieved success through integrity. They emphasized various features of Mussolini’s character—including self-denial, inner will, benevolence, and responsibility—which were reminiscent of one of Alger’s protagonists. In attaching these characteristics to Mussolini, American fascist sympathizers had a number of objectives. First, and most obviously, they aimed to make Mussolini admirable, and even likeable. Second, they insisted on Mussolini’s adherence to late-Victorian ideals to critique modern American men, and the society that encouraged them to drift so far from their anchors. Finally, they used the example of Mussolini to suggest a reassuring, or

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40 Susman, “‘Personality’ and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture,” 271–85.
“therapeutic,” message, that Americans too could become hybrid men, who combined technical capabilities with older sensibilities, thereby escaping modernity’s thrall.41

Mussolini’s reputation for austerity was the invention of Italian propagandists, who recognized that in a relatively poor dictatorship it was wise for the Prime Minister to claim he preferred black bread to red meat, and few words to constant debate.42 When American sympathizers reproduced propaganda images of Mussolini as austere, they suggested that he shunned consumption, physical pleasure and self-expression in favor of a simple life. These observers insisted that Mussolini learned his austerity in childhood. In the mid-1920s, the regime made a shrine of Mussolini’s childhood home in Predappio, Romagna, refurbishing it artfully, to conjure poverty.43 Dutifully, McCormick described the “tumble-down tenement” that was Mussolini’s childhood home; dutifully, too, she suggested that the Prime Minister never lost the ascetic habits that he had learned as a “half-starved” child.44

As editor of Mussolini’s English-language autobiography, Child also insisted on this theme.45 The first two chapters of the autobiography were devoted to Mussolini’s early years of simple play in the

42 Luisa Passerini, Mussolini Immaginario: Storia di Una Biografia, 1915-1939 (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1991), 123. As Schneider recognized, Mussolini insisted that his opponents speak less than he. Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 86.
44 McCormick, “Il Duce Pictures the New State.”
45 How Child came to edit Mussolini’s autobiography is a story itself. The once-powerful American publisher S.S. McClure, then in his dotage, was an admirer of Mussolini. Letter, Ugo Ojetti to Dino Grandi, July 31 1926; Fascicolo “Mac Clure (sic) e Rivetta”; Busta 256; Ministero Cultura Popolare: ASD. Ojetti, the director of Corriere della Sera (which by the mid-1920s was subject to fascist censorship) wrote to Grandi, at the Foreign Ministry, to introduce McClure as “a warm admirer of Benito Mussolini, who was once a loyal friend of Theodore Roosevelt: it seems to him that one can see in Mussolini a more practical, younger, and braver Roosevelt.” Letter, S.S. McClure to Giovanni Capasso Torre, August 12, 1926; Fascicolo “Mac Clure (sic) e Rivetta”; Busta 256; Ministero Cultura Popolare: ASD. McClure wrote to Capasso to pitch his idea. “I want to supervise the editing of a book telling the story of Italy. The book will be compiled under my direction, but the writing and preparation of the text will be accomplished by men assigned and paid by the Italian government. . . . The book will present the Italian viewpoint on Italy; yet it will avoid the character of propaganda. . . . In order to secure wide reading in all countries, the book should ultimately bear the name of Mussolini.” Kenneth Roberts, I Wanted to Write (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1949), 176-79. McClure then approached George Horace Lorimer, the Post’s editor, in search of a ghost writer. Kenneth Roberts, a regular contributor to the Post, was Lorimer’s first choice for the job, but Roberts pulled out of the deal due to the conditions imposed by Margherita Sarfatti (Mussolini’s mistress and adviser): Sarfatti did not want a ghost-writer, and insisted that she would compile the autobiography. Child sailed to Rome in the fall of 1927, to engage in painful negotiations with Sarfatti. Letter, Richard Washburn Child to H. Walter Child, October
fields and simple work in his father’s blacksmith shop. Introducing the autobiography to readers of the *Saturday Evening Post*, Child argued that the Prime Minister maintained these habits into his adult life: Mussolini was “abstemious, almost ascetic”; he neither had nor wanted money; he shunned alcohol and cigarettes; and resisted the distractions of friends or the sycophancy of acquaintances.

Fascist sympathizers argued that Mussolini’s Spartan character was evident, too, in his economy of words. Edward Corsi, the English-language editor of *Il Progresso*, wrote that in the Prime Minister’s speeches—all substance and no flourish—he saw “the man himself.” According to these constructions, Mussolini remained faithful to his humble and straightforward origins, even as his changing circumstances put the temptations of luxury, physical pleasure, and adulation in his path.

In Mussolini’s self-abnegation, these observers identified a strong inner will. They argued that his will, too, was evident in his work ethic. McCormick wrote that when she met Mussolini in 1926, he had been working in the summer heat for ten hours, and showed no signs of letting up. The *Saturday Evening Post* summarized Mussolini’s approach in a single sub-heading, which could have been lifted from the pages of a Victorian success manual: *Work and Discipline*. *Il Progresso* similarly stressed that Mussolini was the hardest of hard workers—“un lavoratore formidabile.”

The Prime Minister’s will to work came from within, according to American sympathizers. He drove himself. In more imaginative ways, too, they suggested that Mussolini’s impetus was internal. Child described his habit of listening quietly in meetings with his ministers. Suddenly, he would sit up,

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47 Child, “Mussolini Now.” See also, McCormick, “Il Duce Pictures the New State,” “He Drinks Not at All,” read the sub-heading of one section.


49 McCormick, “Il Duce Pictures the New State.”

50 Child, “Mussolini Now.”

and “with a jerk of his stocky body” shoot out his decision. It was not the only allusion to ejaculation that Child made in his descriptions of Mussolini and fascism. In this case, the metaphor suggested that Mussolini’s decisions obeyed a rhythm all of their own; they were often contrary to the expectations of others; and, like bodily fluids, they came from the inside.

Similarly, Mussolini’s much touted pragmatism was suggestive of a man who acted out of his own instincts rather than according to external expectations. By this interpretation, Mussolini’s changing identities, from a Socialist firebrand in his youth, to fervent interventionist in 1914, to anti-Bolshevik militant in the early 1920s, to effective administrator by the mid-decade, were not the various masks of a modern personality, changing on the outside, hollow in the middle. Rather, they showed that he refused to follow doctrine for doctrine’s sake, and that he was willing to make enemies out of erstwhile allies when the welfare of the nation was at stake. These observers argued that Mussolini’s love for country occupied his core; it was the central axis around which all his decisions turned. There was nothing hollow about that.

To underscore the idea that Mussolini was animated by profound patriotism, American fascist sympathizers reproduced a familiar image of regime propaganda: that of the Prime Minister as a lonely figure—a “sad, solitary giant” as Herbert Schneider called him—who carried the weight of the world on

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52 Child, *Diplomat Looks at Europe*, 222; also published as, Child, “What Does Mussolini Mean.” See also, Sarfatti, “Famous Author Sees Fascist Art in the Making.” Much like Child, Sarfatti described Mussolini’s “unpredictable” speaking patterns; she argued that these were “animated by immediate and direct sincerity.”


his shoulders. The recurrent portrait of Mussolini in *Il Progresso* (Figure 6) communicated this notion. He seemed burdened by responsibility—managing effectively, but deriving no personal pleasure from his position of power. The image implied that Mussolini’s dictatorship was a selfless act, which he bestowed on the Italian people even at the cost on his own person. Often the burden had physical manifestations. Child claimed that, when he was Ambassador, he would frequently find Mussolini at his desk in the morning, “hollow-eyed and pale—up all night no doubt.” McCormick, too, noted that the Prime Minister’s eyes were “heavily weary.” He suffered for his country.

The notion that Mussolini cared for his country rather than himself was evident, too, in his reputed benevolence, which consisted, in part, of acts of charity for the deserving poor. For instance, in his autobiography, Mussolini claimed that had recently rebuilt Predappio, not with the aim of creating a suitable destination for mass political pilgrimages, but to protect its inhabitants from the risk of avalanche. And in January 1929, *Il Progresso* reported that the Prime Minister had personally contributed fifty-thousand lire so that Rome’s poorest children could receive gifts on epiphany.

But the claim to benevolence ran further than these discrete acts of giving. “[T]here is bitterness in power when one has no narcotic for it,” wrote Richard Washburn Child, as if he, too, understood public service to be something a man did for his country, and not for himself. By this construction, every additional office Mussolini assumed, every extra power he accumulated, was an act of giving to others. By presenting dictatorship as Mussolini’s gift to his country, American fascist sympathizers suggested that one-man rule enabled the revival of a traditional ethic of benevolence. In this way, they disguised the deprivations that Italians suffered under dictatorship—a loss of representation and a theft of their political voices—as a gift.

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56 Luísa Passerini, *Mussolini Immaginario*, 39. Schneider, *Making the Fascist State*, 125. In contrast to Child, McCormick, and Pope, Schneider adopted an ironic tone when discussing aspects of Mussolini’s image. This comported with Schneider’s belief that Mussolini’s actual character mattered less than his ability to project aspects of character—including self-abnegation and responsibility—that enabled effective leadership.
57 Child, *Diplomat Looks at Europe*, 215; also published as, Child, “What Does Mussolini Mean?”
These observers also dressed up dictatorship as the exercise of an old-fashioned code of individual accountability. Frequently, they presented Mussolini’s ever-expanding powers as proof that he was “not afraid of responsibility.”62 While he was still Ambassador, Child made a speech in Rome praising Mussolini. “I want to see leaders who, instead of telling men of their rights, will lead them to take a full share of their responsibilities,” said Child.63 To him, Mussolini was such a man. Five years later, Child insisted on this theme. The Prime Minister, he wrote, took “responsibility for everything.” Over those five years, Mussolini had banned the political opposition and made himself Minister of the Interior, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of War, Minister of the Navy, Minister for Aviation, and Minister of Corporations. To Child, this dizzying accumulation of cabinet posts was not a sign of megalomania. Rather, it was proof of Mussolini’s readiness to stand and fall on his commitments. This was “admirable courage” of a kind rarely seen in modern life, according to Richard Washburn Child.64

Of course, had Child really cared to find examples of men and women of “admirable courage,” who were willing to stand and fall for their beliefs, he ought to have looked among Mussolini’s political opponents, serving terms of confino (domestic exile) in the South of Italy, or unable to access jobs or welfare because they resisted fascist strictures.65 But none of these observers aimed to find real examples of old-fashioned virtues among the remaining representatives of Italian labor, socialism, or liberalism. Rather, they aimed to make Mussolini’s repressive and brutal tendencies palatable to American readers by repackaging them as facets of an old-fashioned character. They hoped to make Mussolini likeable or even lovable, even as they insisted that the Prime Minister himself had no interest in the superficial allure of being adored.

62 “An Italian Genius; He Knows His Business,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano. McCormick, “Behind Fascism Stands a Philosopher.” Similarly, McCormick wrote: “The Fascist State is the application on a national scale of the commission-manager form of government. Mussolini believes in undivided responsibility. ‘I don’t want Ministries,’ he says, ‘I want Ministers, for whom I am absolutely responsible and who are absolutely responsible to me.’”
63 Embassy Weekly, June 30, 1923; 865/1239; RG59; M527; NARA, contains the text of Child’s Speech at the Banquet of the Italo-American Society in Rome, June 28, 1923. See also, “New Envoy to Italy Tells of U.S. Ideals,” New York Times, June 22, 1921. Just before he left the United States to take up the post of Ambassador to Italy, Child he made a speech in New York, arguing that progress was “founded less upon the assertion of men’s rights than upon the stern performance of their obligations.”
64 Child, “Foreword,” in My Autobiography, xv; also published as Child, “Mussolini Now.”
Manliness Lost in the United States

By the 1920s in the United States, the heroes of Horatio Alger’s novels belonged to a different, and seemingly simpler, time. These observers argued that each of the characteristics that Mussolini embodied had been undermined by alternative notions of masculinity that prevailed in the modern age. Here they joined a larger chorus of contemporaries, who, not for the first or last time in American history, used the apparent decadence of manliness to express anxieties about social and cultural change.66 Fascist sympathizers constructed each of the facets of Mussolini’s character—abstinence, will, benevolence, and responsibility—as a counterpoint to a modern personality defined by consumption, external stimuli, self-centeredness, and frivolity. In doing so, they took aim at both a new generation of Americans who embodied these tendencies and the modern culture that had created them.

Modern man was a product of a materialistic society. This reality seemed to strike Anne O’Hare McCormick hard when she visited Florida in 1925. She was recently returned from the Balkans, and had seen the refugee camps of Greece, where families survived on almost nothing at all.67 In Florida, by contrast, all the conversations McCormick heard were about money. The wealthy talked about getting wealthier, the poor talked about getting wealthy too.68 She argued that the state offered financial prospects to any man, regardless of his savings, regardless of his “personal habits.”69 Character seemed to count for nothing in Florida, McCormick claimed, and was counting for less and less across the United States, as a get-rich-quick culture eroded the values of savings and self-control that had once been the route to success.

Child too argued that economic and cultural change in the United States had a detrimental impact on American manhood. In search of a job after he left the Ambassadorship, he saw an opportunity in an

66 Fass, Damned and the Beautiful, 7, 13. Fass wrote: “Contemporaries caricatured youth in order to . . . come to terms with the many changes youth represented.” “[P]art myth, part reality, the youth problem was for contemporaries a symbol for the strains of a culture running headlong into the twentieth century.” For these anxieties in different periods of history, see: Judy Hilkey, Character Is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); James Gilbert, A Cycle of Outrage: America’s Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
67 McCormick, “When Greek Greets Greek.”
69 McCormick, “Miracle Men on Florida’s Gold Coast.”
apparent domestic crime wave. In 1924 and 1925, Child published a book, *Battling the Criminal*, which was serialized in the *Saturday Evening Post*, and served on a National Crime Commission alongside his former boss at the Department of State, Charles Evans Hughes, and the young governor of New York, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Rehashing ideas that were common among his contemporaries, Child argued that the post-war consumption boom had contributed to a spike in juvenile delinquency. Cheap amusements and road houses, he argued, lured young men out of the home, the sanctuary of traditional values. The ubiquitous automobile only facilitated access to degenerate forms of entertainment. Above all, consumerism altered the standards for success, as a new generation sought peer approval through smoking, spending, and speeding. These young Americans claimed “the right to enjoy every luxury” of “a complex civilization,” wrote Child. He argued that it was only a small step from this “lawless claim” to lawless behavior.

Child suggested that even those men who avoided a life of crime entered amoral territory when they succumbed to the “idleness and excitement” of consumption. As consumers, men derived their impetus from the outside, following passing fads and hoping for the approval of their acquaintances and friends. Another part of the problem, as Child diagnosed it, lay in the nature of work in the 1920s. It had become too easy: the contemporary American executive did not need much of a work ethic, he could spend his winters in Palm Beach, his summers in Europe, cut his day in the office short at three p.m., and

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71 See, for example: Emory Stephen Bogardus, *The City Boy and His Problems; a Survey of Boy Life in Los Angeles* (Report Financed by the Rotary Club of Los Angeles, 1926). See, Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929), 268, for one judge’s view that movies were to blame for delinquency.


73 Child, *Battling the Criminal*, 46; also published as, Child, “The Great American Scandal—Why We Have Crime.”

74 Child, *Battling the Criminal*, 46; also published as, Child, “The Great American Scandal—Why We Have Crime.”

75 Child, “The President.”
still make a fortune.\footnote{Child, \textit{Battling the Criminal}, 46; also published as, Child, “The Great American Scandal—Why We Have Crime.”} Even manual workers seemed to be affected by the ease of their regime. Whereas a working-class man’s job had once demanded discernment, craftsmanship, and physical strength, Child argued that by the mid-1920s, it required only the stamina to resist boredom.\footnote{Child, \textit{Diplomat Looks at Europe}, 273-75; also published as “What Europe Thinks.”} Deriving little satisfaction in their work, Americans searched for it in movement, the movies, or the latest craze.\footnote{Child, “Battling the Criminal,” 121; also published as, Richard Washburn Child “The Great American Scandal—Take This Case,” \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, September 26, 1925. In Child’s word’s, “the eternal inhuman monotony of standing in front of a machine probably made some kind of escape from self imperative.”} Child diagnosed “a form of dipsomania.” Americans were, “amusement drunkards,” addicted to “endless entertainments outside” themselves.\footnote{Child, “The President.”}

McCormick, too, suggested that the modern personality was a weak amalgam of external stimuli. Her domestic journalism often imitated the tempo of American life, each sentence breathless, packed to bursting point. McCormick’s writing seemed designed to induce anxiety in the reader, to show how irresistible was the pace of “the opulent, self-starting, power-plus…post-war epoch. “We jazz in the jungle with a 12-cylinder engine and dynamite the protoplasm,” she wrote in 1925, the year she deemed the “fastest” in history.\footnote{McCormick, “Making a Speedway of De Soto’s Trail.”} It was as if Americans, unable to catch up, had just given in. For once, Child put it best: “We have invented and found nearly everything; about the only thing we have not found is ourselves.”\footnote{McCormick, “Scout Training Guides Youths through Shoals of Temptations,” \textit{New York Herald Tribune}, April 24, 1927.}

While the self remained elusive, Americans continued to search. They searched for themselves down blind alleyways, according to Child, following doctrines for self-improvement that brought them no closer to enlightenment: Charles Wagner’s advice for a Simple Life, Rabindranath Tagore’s insights into Eastern mysticism, and Sigmund Freud’s doctrine of psychoanalysis. This was pointless self-indulgence,
in Child’s mind. Men, he suggested, would have more luck realizing themselves if they laid off the self-help literature and did something that helped others.82

But civic-spiritedness seemed, to these observers, to be on the decline. There were plenty of professional associations, such as the Rotary and Lions Clubs, which had charitable functions. But McCormick struggled to find men who gave without an expectation of professional advancement in return. Building private fortresses in their suburban homes and country clubs, modern middle-class men cared little about their poorer neighbors, she believed. They paid entrance fees for sanitary or beautiful spaces instead of creating them in public spheres in their own towns. In April 1929, McCormick concluded that the average “citizen grows more selfish as he grows richer.”83 And, in April 1929, there seemed to be no end to this average citizen’s accumulation of wealth.

Pulled this way and that by forces that he either could not or cared not to control, modern man lacked a moral center, according to these critiques. “Habitually, he goes more and more his own way . . . he is more irresponsible,” wrote McCormick.84 Child deemed masculine responsibility to be a casualty of various post-war phenomena: the slackening of a culture of public service; an emphasis on rights instead of obligations; New Women, who carelessly withdrew their attention from their sons; psychiatry, with its attendant proposition that an individual was not to blame for his own misdemeanors; and even avant-garde artists, who claimed that their hurried splashes of paint were better than the painstaking efforts of the great masters.85 The “wine of irresponsibility,” he wrote, came “in many bottles.”86 But whatever the bottle, the effects were the same: autonomy and integrity were no longer the sine qua non of a man’s

82 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 253; also published as, Child, “What Europe Thinks.”
84 McCormick, “The Mass Offensive of Women.”
85 For the decline of the culture of service and obligation, see: Embassy Weekly, June 30, 1923; 865/1239; RG59; M527; NARA, which contains the text of Child’s Speech at the Banquet of the Italo-American Society in Rome, June 28, 1923. For New Women, and their effects on youth, see Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 256-57; also published as, Child, “What Europe Thinks.” For juvenile delinquency, see: Child, Battling the Criminal, 33, 68-69; also published as, Child, “The Great American Crime Scandal—Why We Have Crime”; and Child, “The Great American Scandal—Youth and Felony.” For modern art, see: Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 256; also published as, Child, “What Europe Thinks.”
86 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 256; also published as, Child, “What Europe Thinks.”
social worth. Child lamented a precipitous decline: by the late 1920s, an American man could be a speculator, a drinker, a delinquent, or a sloth, and still a man.

McCormick and Child both argued that, in the early twentieth century, American men had fallen: from self-control to spending; from inner-direction to external definition; from benevolence to self-centeredness; and from responsibility to a total lack thereof. The fall of man was, in their minds, due to an indulgent society, which made consumption and work too easy and welcomed degeneration as self-expression, even art. Mussolini, for them, functioned as a foil: a model of late-Victorian manliness, who drew attention to the seemingly immense changes in values in the United States. They hoped that through Mussolini their audience would mourn all that had fallen by the wayside in the race to modernity. They hoped that through Mussolini their readers would see these changes as a race to the bottom, as well as a race to the top.

For one of these observers, at least, the parable of manliness lost had personal dimensions. To his readers, Child insisted he shunned “silky comforts” in favor of “hard” work and the “hard” life. This was far from the truth. Child’s only hardship seemed to be that he never had quite enough money, at least for his liking. He obsessed about money: how to make it; and how to spend it. During his tenure in Rome, he confessed to his father that he was trapped in a “silly, vapid, degenerate” social circle. Though he claimed to loathe these contacts, and long for “serious personalities and the clean,” he was unable to break away from all the fun. Child succumbed to the rhythms of evening dinner parties, and morning hangover cures—the “endless entertainment outside” himself.

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89 Letter, Richard Washburn Child to H. Walter Child, October 11, 1922; Folder “1922,” Reel 2, RWCP.

90 Child, *Diplomat Looks at Europe*, 23; also published as, Child, “Our American Diplomat.” For his readers, Child ascribed these excesses to other expatriates in Rome. He wrote that, unlike these socialites, he resisted the “shirt front” and “soda mints.” Child, “The President.”
Although he did not accept Maude Parker’s charge that he was “an adulterer and drunk all the time,” in Rome, Child admitted that the breakup of his (second) marriage was his fault. He had had, it seemed, more than his fair share of the “wine of irresponsibility.” Seeking beauty among the damned, he wrote to his father, “The human and the humane gutter is better than the inhuman and inhumane palace. I ought to know. I’ve seen ‘em both.” By the time the gossip-hungry press picked up on rumors of Richard’s pending divorce to Maude, he was living with Eva Sanderson. Known affectionately, when affection reigned, as Billy, Sanderson would be Child’s third, but not final, wife. He could never quite get out of the gutters he made for himself. In many ways, the Mussolini of his imagination was the kind of man that Child failed, so spectacularly, to be: austere, hard-working, and guided by a moral compass that determined his responsibility to others over self. What truth there was in the parable of manliness lost lay not with Benito Mussolini, but with Richard Washburn Child.

The Promise of Manhood Regained

American fascist sympathizers crafted this old-fashioned Mussolini to evoke feelings of loss in Americans. But they did not want to provoke a sense of despair. Rather, they used Mussolini’s example to suggest that recovery of lost manly virtues might be possible in the United States.

91 Letter, Richard Washburn Child to H. Walter Child, March 17, [1926?]; Letter, Richard Washburn Child to H. Walter Child, November 14, 1925; both in Folder “General Correspondence, “1925-27”; Reel 1; RWCP. “My warmth of emotion has been a good deal of affliction upon [Maude’s] superior and less primitive nature,” Child wrote. Letter, Richard Washburn Child to H. Walter Child, August 1916; Folder “General Correspondence, 1909-24”; Reel 1; RWCP. Child’s first marriage was to Elizabeth Scott, in 1905. He left Scott for Maude Parker in 1916, writing to his father that he was marrying Parkers speedily on doctor’s orders, as it was necessary to relieve her poor nerves. Letter, Richard Washburn Child to H. Walter Child [undated, from Rome], Folder “Undated”; Reel 1; RWCP. Child justified his first divorce as in the interests of everyone (except perhaps Elizabeth). Writing from Rome, during his Ambassadorship, he reflected that had he stayed in the marriage, “[i]t would have been paid for with my life, your joys, Maude’s development, the existence of Anne and Constance [their daughters], the usefulness of all of us to the world. That was the cost of staying with Elizabeth and I foresaw the reasons why justice and indeed mercy required me not to pay it.” Elizabeth Scott was by then dead, and Child moved on quickly to discuss his inheritance from her.

92 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 256; also published as, Child, “What Europe Thinks.”

93 Letter, Richard Washburn Child to H. Walter Child, [No day given] November, 1925; Folder “General Correspondence, 1925-27”; Reel 1; RWCP. “I’ve made a lot of errors from Christ’s point of view,” Child confided.

Sometimes these observers pointed to specific institutions or policies that might help American men. In 1929, Herbert Schneider co-authored a book on civic training in Italy. Schneider observed that Italian educational reforms aimed to teach “individual character,” and that state-sponsored organizations gave moral training to boys.\(^{95}\) Schneider did not argue that the United States ought to import carbon copies of fascist institutions to cleanse the morals of American youths. Instead, like a number of his contemporaries in political science, he suggested that Italy and the United States were facing similar problems, and that Italy had implemented “striking” responses, worthy of study.\(^{96}\) Child, too, implied that Americans could learn from the ways in which fascist Italy was shaping a new generation of men. The United States needed tough law enforcement, the restoration of authority and discipline, and organizations to train youth “in virile and yet restrained conduct,” he argued.\(^{97}\) Child suggested that American men would benefit from a social order that resembled the one he admired in Italy, while maintaining that domestic institutions—from the police, to the law courts, to the boy scouts—could preside over the changes.

But beyond the realm of specific policies, Mussolini functioned as an object of hope for American fascist sympathizers. Crafted as a man of technical capabilities and old-fashioned values, Mussolini suggested that it was possible for American men simultaneously to pursue the former and recover the latter. According to the owner of Il Progresso, Italian Americans had a special role to play in enabling the recovery of manliness lost. Pope styled himself, like Mussolini, as a potent example of old-fashioned virtues. The image of Pope that graced Il Progresso’s front page in November 1928 conveyed a sober man, seemingly unaware of his audience, propelled by an internal impetus (Figure 5). According to the newspaper’s director, Italo Carlo Falbo, Generoso had been “a poor boy, alone and without help,” when he had left the small town of Arpaise for New York. He had “walked the ‘stations of the cross’ of all poor Italian immigrants,” taking on the hardest jobs, and persisting despite the indignities and

\(^{95}\) Schneider and Clough, *Making Fascists*, 83-109, esp. 86, and 178-82.
prejudices he suffered. Material success had not changed Pope’s character, Falbo insisted. Rather, he had
er used his wealth to help others, providing electricity to Arpaise, endowing New York’s Italian Hospital,
and contributing to Columbia University’s Casa Italiana, so that all Americans could benefit from Italy’s
cultural patrimony.98

In reality, there was little that was altruistic in Pope’s acts of benevolence, which were calculated
to win him accolades and influence. Pope used his reputation for generosity to demand recognition from
the Italian government: Falbo wrote to Mussolini’s private secretary in December 1928, asking that Pope
be commended for his philanthropy.99 The government obliged and, in February 1929, the Italian Consul
General in New York bestowed the Order of Commendatore of the Crown of Italy on Pope.100 Speaking
at the award ceremony, Mayor Walker commended Pope as a self-made man, whose “tenacious hard
work,” “formidable will,” and generosity had ensured his success.101

In June 1929, Pope left for Italy, accompanied by Falbo, his wife, Catherine, and their two eldest
sons, Anthony and Fortune.102 Pope and his entourage had an audience with Pius XI and meetings with
various fascist officials.103 The people of Arpaise gave their prodigal son a hero’s welcome.104 The tour
culminated in a meeting with Mussolini. Falbo accompanied Pope.105 Behind closed doors, this short
conference occupied the grey zone, where business and politics met: Pope secured the regime’s approval
of his purchase of another New York daily, Il Corriere d’America; in return, he promised that his

98 I. C. Falbo, “Ai Lettori del ‘Progresso.’” For the controversy surrounding Casa Italiana see Introduction, footnote
52, above.
99 Italo Falbo to Alessandro Chiavolini, December 11, 1928; Fascicolo H407, Raccomandato Pope, Generoso New
York Oggetto:1928 Onorificenza; Busta 18; Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario; ACS.
101 “La Grande Manifestazione in Onore Del Comm. Generoso Pope all’Hotel Biltmore,” Il Progresso Italo-
Americano.
103 “Il S. Padre Ha Ricevuto nella Sala del Trono il Comm. Pope,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, July 5, 1929; “Un
14, 1929.
1929.
newspapers would continue to support fascism. But to its readers, Il Progresso presented the meeting in a brighter light, as a union of two mutually-admiring, and admirable, gentlemen. The editors put a positive spin on a photograph, which showed a nervous-looking Pope, smiling awkwardly, next to a recalcitrant Mussolini, who looked like he would rather be anywhere else, with anyone else. An “interesting,” picture, was how the editors described it, “most welcomingly attesting to the benevolent feelings of the Duce for Comm. Pope.” If only the camera, too, could lie (Figure 7).

Hiccups in the narrative, such as this one, aside, Il Progresso Italo-Americano insisted that Pope and Mussolini shared similar characteristics of late-Victorian manliness. The newspaper insisted, too, that these values were Italian values. When Mayor Walker lauded Pope in February 1929, it was as “a prototype” of the Italian men of New York. Walker’s words, according to Il Progresso, were a “hymn to our race.” Similarly, the newspaper recounted how a fascist deputy had feted Pope in Naples in the summer of 1929 “as a typical example of Italians abroad: a tenacious worker; a man of audacious initiative, adamant honesty, ardent patriotism, whose fortune is the result of years of tireless effort.”

The Italian Americans who featured in the newspaper’s self-made man series were invariably cut from this cloth. These men were not just technical whizzes. Like the characters of a Horatio Alger novel, they showed unerring strength of character, overcoming “poverty, prejudice” and “an unfavorable social environment” to advance in American life. When they found fortune, these men gave back to their community, even as other Americans turned toward the pursuit of private pleasure. In contrast to native-born Americans, Italian-born Americans divorced rarely, the newspaper noted: Italian Americans

107 “Il Primo Ministro on. Mussolini Riceve il Comm. Pope e l’On. Falbo,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano. This article described the topics of conversation as: the mutual interests of Italy and the United States; the conditions of Italian Americans; the state of the Italian-American press. But above all it stressed the “great cordiality” of Mussolini’s reception of Pope, his “lively interest” in what Pope had to say, and his pleasure in posing for a photograph together.
112 Pope, “To the Readers of ‘Il Progresso.”
defended the institution of the family at a time when it was under threat in the United States.\textsuperscript{113}

Countering the stereotypical view of Italian immigrants as untethered young men, disproportionately responsible for urban crimes, \textit{Il Progresso} argued that the community helped to stabilize the United States in volatile times.\textsuperscript{114} If Mussolini’s virtues and Pope’s virtues were Italian virtues, it followed that the Italians in their midst could help Americans find the manliness they had recently lost. A wider, and warmer, melting pot was required.\textsuperscript{115}

\textbf{Old-Fashioned and Eternal}

In the 1920s, the state of Americans’ souls became a talking point not just for fascist sympathizers, but for a range of commentators concerned about the changes wrought by modernity. For instance, the critic Waldo Frank wrote that Americans worshipped the gods of the age—the machine, efficiency, the corporation, sport, and sex—in the hope of fulfillment, but to no avail.\textsuperscript{116} Walter Lippmann observed that the results of newfound freedoms were “not as good as” people had anticipated. “The prison door” was “wide open,” and Americans “stagger[ed] out into trackless space under a blinding sun,” Lippmann wrote.\textsuperscript{117} Another critic, Joseph Krutch, described a people deprived of comforting illusions, including religion and romantic love: “a whole range of effects” had “dropped” from Americans’ “symphony,” as they moved “nearer to that state in which existence is seen as a vast emptiness.”\textsuperscript{118}

Richard Washburn Child echoed the mood set by his contemporaries, describing the typical American as a “stunted soul without peace.”\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{114} “In Defense of the Family,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}.
\textsuperscript{115} Summers, \textit{Manliness & Its Discontents}. This observation bears a resemblance to Summers’ argument that (particularly older generation) African Americans and African Caribbean immigrants formulated their own identity as embodiments of Victorian ideals in the 1930s, in part to stake claims for respectability and belonging in the United States.
\textsuperscript{116} Frank, \textit{Re-Discovery of America}, 105. Also published as, Frank, “The Re-Discovery of America. IX: Gods and Cults of Power.” “With our spirit, we give them life and blood, in order that they should fulfil us. And they do not touch us,” Frank wrote.
\textsuperscript{118} Krutch, \textit{Modern Temper}, 113-14.
\textsuperscript{119} Child, \textit{Diplomat Looks at Europe}, 273; also published as, Child, “What Europe Thinks.”
It was not just the inhabitants of suburban homes, playing “mah-jongg one year” and doing “cross-word puzzles the next,” who seemed to be hurting in a modern climate. McCormick met with farmers across the Midwest who suffered under a new regime of corporate ownership and expert management. According to one North Dakotan man, efficiency had come at the cost of “civic spirit,” “country spirit,” and his own spirit too. He felt loss: “‘I don’t like it,’” he told McCormick. And he felt lost: “‘I can’t see where it is going.’”

The editor of Il Progresso’s English-language section also made frequent forays into the depths of the American soul. Quoting the Italian playwright and erstwhile fascist sympathizer, Luigi Pirandello, Corsi suggested that the United States felt like “‘a temporary camp, an outpost on the road to the ultimate destination, and nothing more.’” It was little surprise, then, that Americans were “restless,” to the point of despair. Corsi even suggested that rising suicides were the “price” that native-born Americans were paying for their modernity.

These observers argued that part of the problem lay in the absence of a strong leader, to shepherd Americans through a period of unsettling change. William Jennings Bryan and Theodore Roosevelt were dead, lamented Corsi, and no Americans of equivalent stature had risen to fill their shoes. The “characters” in American politics were most noteworthy for their paucity, according to McCormick. It seemed that she could count them on one hand: William Borah; Al Smith; and William Jennings’ less famous brother, Charles Wayland Bryan. Such men were few in number, and, with the exception of Borah, they had the disappointing habit of losing key elections.

120 Child, “The President.”
121 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Uncertain, the Farmer Waits.”
127 Al Smith, of course, lost the 1928 presidential contest against Herbert Hoover. He was also unsuccessful in his bid for the Democratic nomination for president in 1924. Charles Wayland Bryan was the Democrats’ vice-
In the presidency itself, Calvin Coolidge’s notorious silence enabled Child to present him as an embodiment of old-fashioned austerity. But even Child could not stretch the truth so far as to argue that Coolidge was a “driving, inspiring superfigure.” McCormick interpreted Herbert Hoover’s 1928 election as a sign that Americans craved a “super-technician”—an engineer, no less—to make sense of their “intricate” world. Hoover, more than any figure in American life, embodied the virtues of the efficient administrator. But there, he seemed to stop. The new president, in McCormick’s mind, was all efficiency, the human equivalent of a “Modern Improvement” to a factory, organization, or home: it looked good, perhaps it even worked well, but it did not feel like much.

Mussolini was different, these observers believed, because he had more than old-fashioned simplicity, and more than technical capacity, although he had these things too, in spades. He was, according to Child, one of the only men he had met who combined organizational capacity with heart and soul:

This is the combination for which every country—even our own—hungers and thirsts.

Efficient administrators who fail really to lead us we can find. Passionate and sincere prophets we can dig up. But rare, indeed, and needed, indeed, is the man who can be two men at once.

American fascist sympathizers located part of Mussolini’s ex-socialist soul in the Church. Mediated, as always, through propaganda, fascist policies of the mid-1920s lent themselves to a reconfiguration of the Prime Minister as a man of faith. Invoking the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, the regime presented its austerity program as a spiritual journey. Mussolini made a pilgrimage to Assisi in 1926, and propaganda materials claimed parallels between the Prime Minister and the saint who had

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presidential candidate in the 1924 election, which the Democrats lost in a landslide to Calvin Coolidge and Charles Dawes.

128 Child, “The President.”
129 Child, “The President.”
130 McCormick, “America at Last Airs Its Mind.”
131 McCormick, “Uncertain, the Farmer Waits.”
133 Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 221; also published as, Child, “What Does Mussolini Mean?”
shunned the luxurious life. The regime publicized images like that of the sober Mussolini (Figure 6), which were intentionally reminiscent of devotional portraits of the saints. Reproduced in Il Progresso, this image suggested that Mussolini’s austerity was not just an expression of old-fashioned values—it was a form of Catholic piety.

Mussolini’s attempt to appropriate the cult of St Francis was but one aspect of a larger scheme, by which the Prime Minister approached the Catholic Church in a spirit of reconciliation that belied his intention to usurp its spiritual claims. Other manifestations of this strategy included his invocation of God in the Chamber of Deputies and his appearance alongside prelates in ceremonies of state. The policy culminated in the February 1929 Lateran Accords, which officially restored the political power of the Catholic Church and granted the Pope a miniscule territory.

McCormick, like many Roman Catholics, was struck by the enormity of the event. Pope Pius XI called Mussolini “the man of destiny,” sent by God to reinvigorate the position of the church. McCormick took up the theme in her coverage of the Accords, which portrayed Pius and Mussolini as two very

137 For speech in the Chamber of Deputies, see: Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 86; McCormick, “Age Old Issue Stirs Rome”; Mussolini, My Autobiography, 199; also published as, Benito Mussolini, “The Death Struggle of a Worn-Out Democracy,” Saturday Evening Post, June 23 1928. For appearance with prelates, see Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 230; Schneider and Clough, Making Fascists, 67. The observers studied here had quite different responses to various aspects of this strategy toward the Catholic Church. Schneider and Clough, Making Fascists, 74, 80; Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 222. Prefiguring Emilio Gentile’s argument, Schneider recognized the rapprochement for what it was: a power grab. He was no less admiring of the Prime Minister as a result, suggesting that this strategy might be the most effective way to garner the enthusiasm of young men. McCormick, “Il Duce Pictures the New State”; McCormick, “Fascism Takes Francis as Patron Saint”; McCormick, “The Swashbuckling Mussolini.” McCormick, too, understood that Mussolini had an instrumentalist approach to religion (although she was somewhat gentler in her assessment than Schneider, writing that the Prime Minister viewed faith as an “aide to national morale.”) She expressed approval that Mussolini had elevated the Church to what she considered to be its proper place in society. Mussolini, My Autobiography, 31; also published as, Benito Mussolini, “War and its Effect Upon a Man,” Saturday Evening Post, May 1928. Child never questioned the sincerity of Mussolini’s devotion to the Catholic faith. “Il Viaggio del Duce in Toscana: Le Feste di Livorno e di Firenze,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, May 12, 1930. Il Progresso also saw genuine piety in Mussolini’s performances.
different men, each converging on the same point in history, guided by a supernatural force. McCormick could not help but succumb to the idea that God had chosen Mussolini.

Commentators in *Il Progresso* agreed, suggesting that God had chosen carefully, indeed. The Lateran Accords were a product of Mussolini’s unique combination of “acute” intelligence, unbending will, and pragmatic flexibility, according to these writers. A less determined man, less focused on a single end, more receptive to naysayers, and more vulnerable to external ideologies, could not have achieved the same result. An entirely modern man, in short, would have failed. “The problem was awaiting a man like Him.”

In various photos memorializing the event, Mussolini always appeared in the guise of the sober executive, eyes downcast, absorbed in his task. At the same time, *Il Progresso* supported the Prime Minister’s claim to a god-like status, implicit in the capitalized “Him.” The Lateran Accords not only facilitated the “spiritual renewal” of Italy, according to these constructions, but elevated Mussolini to the indisputable position of a spiritual leader.

Child, in particular, argued that the Prime Minister’s spirituality stretched well beyond the realm of formal religion. In his introduction to Mussolini’s autobiography, Child claimed that Mussolini was changing Italians’ “hearts, their spirits” through a program of “applied spirituality.” A convenient thing about spirituality is that you cannot offer anything concrete to demonstrate its existence. Describing spirituality allows for, and maybe even necessitates, artistic license. Child was in his element there. He returned to a favorite metaphor: the male orgasm. Mussolini, he wrote, was like Theodore Roosevelt, RIP. Each man, had “energy,” bubbling “up and over like an eternally effervescent, irrepressible fluid.” Upon

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138 McCormick, “The Drama of Pope and Premier.”
142 “Dopo la Conciliazione Fra la Chiesa e lo Stato in Italia.”
parting, each man left behind the impression that “one could squeeze something of him out of one’s clothes.”\(^{145}\) Mussolini, in Child’s words, had even become a “mystic to himself”:

I imagine, as he reaches forth to touch reality in himself, he finds that he himself has gone a little forward, isolated, determined, illusive, untouchable, just out of reach—onward!\(^{146}\)

The editors of the *Saturday Evening Post* added their own emphasis to Child’s proposition that Mussolini offered a spirituality that Americans struggled to find in themselves. He was more than an administrative genius: according to the magazine’s subheadings he was “Genius and Mystic.” And he was not just an embodiment of old-fashioned values: he was “Old-Fashioned and Eternal.”\(^{147}\) Mussolini was the man who appeared in his serialized autobiography, dressed in a suit, taking a brisk, lonely walk. His suit was the executive’s uniform, and his walk was the activity of someone who chose hard exercise over soft leisure. But this Mussolini walked along a beach, where the expanse of sea and the rays of light peeking out from behind the clouds connoted vast spiritual depths—undefinable, and all the better for that (Figure 8).

**Panacea, Foil, and Model**

American sympathizers with fascism suggested that their fellow countrymen needed Mussolini as a panacea, foil, and model. As a panacea, Mussolini promised to absorb the complexities of modernity, to spare others from anxieties provoked by the abstract forces that seemed, more and more, to dictate their lives.

As a foil, Mussolini drew attention to what Americans appeared to have lost in the transition to modernity, as austerity, inner-direction, benevolence, and responsibility had given way to consumption, peer-group approval, pleasure, and self-discovery. These observers used the discussion of masculinity to enter into a critique of the contrasting societies, which had apparently produced these different kinds of

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\(^{145}\) Child, “Foreword,” in *My Autobiography*, xviii-xix; also published as Child, “Mussolini Now.” Child persisted with the metaphor, in which Italy became a vanquished woman. Under Mussolini, he wrote, “Battle becomes a game. The game becomes a romp. It is absurd to say that Italy groans under the discipline. Italy chortles with it! It is victory!”

\(^{146}\) Child, “Foreword,” in *My Autobiography*, xix; also published as, Child, “Mussolini Now.”

\(^{147}\) Child, “Mussolini Now.”
men. According to this construction, Mussolini was at home in Italy, a country that was partly of his own making. Italians did not experience the easy pleasures associated with the “American standard”; men and women engaged in labor-intensive work in the fields; fascist policies seemed to have strengthened traditional institutions—such as the family and the Church; and youth training programs emphasized authority and discipline. The average American man seemed to belong to a different place. Money was easier to come by and easier to spend; homes and church pews seemed emptier than before; and the values of service, hierarchy and honor appeared to have fallen into abeyance with the end of the war. Like many contemporary cultural critics, fascist sympathizers argued that modernity gave, and modernity took away.

As a model, Mussolini suggested both what Americans should look for in their leaders and what they themselves could become. As a model, he countered the pessimistic notes that inhered in criticisms of American masculinity in contemporary society, to offer the promise of change. Part of the change seemed to rest on policy actions, for instance in the area of education and youth training, as suggested by Schneider and Child. And part seemed to require a shift in attitudes toward Italian Americans, as argued by Pope. But Mussolini, as a model, could also float freely, unlinked to any specific reform or recommendation. His very existence offered a reassuring message that men could span multiple worlds: that they could manage the challenges of modernity while recovering their traditional values and replenishing their empty souls.

Fascist sympathizers’ critiques of American modernity and their construction of Mussolini as an antidote to these ills were shot through with ironies, of course. They reproduced propaganda, even as they argued that modern group-thinking rotted the mind. They used contrived images and apocryphal tales to argue for the importance of integrity and authenticity. They aimed to make Mussolini popular, although they lamented celebrity culture. And they decried the tendency to seek quick fixes to profound problems, while suggesting that they had found, in Mussolini, a savior who could make modern men whole.
Figure 5. Generoso Pope’s First Day at a New Job, November 1928
Figure 6. The “Honorable” Benito Mussolini
Figure 7. Pope Meets Mussolini, July 1929
Figure 8. Mussolini as an Executive with a Soul, 1928
Chapter III. The Dream Machine: The Fascist State in an Era of Democratic Disillusionment

In his 1928 book, Making the Fascist State, Herbert Schneider presented fascist theories on democracy to his American readers. He described how the fascists viewed democracy as a product of the past, unsuited the demands of the modern age. According to Schneider, the fascists believed that in the ancient demos citizens had sufficient time and education to grasp the main issues that animated public life; their votes were an expression of well-informed opinion, which directed policies toward the common good. The fascists thought that in contemporary democracy, citizens had neither the time nor the wherewithal to understand complex political issues; votes cast in these circumstances were an expression of half-formed ideas, and public policies suffered as a result.¹ “In the so-called democratic state” the people were “not really sovereign” and their representatives did “not really govern,” Schneider wrote, because neither was in command of the principal issues of the day. The shortcomings of democratic institutions left the field wide open to special interest groups, according to fascist thinkers.² Democracy, in these circumstances, became “the organized struggle of particular groups and not a government at all.”³

Herbert Schneider wrote in a way that made it difficult to tell where fascist theories ended and his own ideas began. He used the passive voice almost exclusively. In his writing, ideas were thought; it is unclear whether it was only the fascists, or Schneider too, who did the thinking.⁴ It is even harder to disentangle the fascists’ ideas on democracy from Schneider’s own when we consider his intellectual biography. As a graduate student under the supervision of John Dewey, both before and after the Great War, Schneider absorbed Dewey’s concept of instrumentalism more fully than he did Dewey’s belief in

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¹ Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 158-159. Schneider ascribed these ideas to syndicalist thinking as a precursor to, and element within, fascist thinking. For the relationship between the press and “so-called public opinion” in fascist thought, see Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 95-96.
² Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 158. Again, Schneider ascribed these ideas to syndicalist thinking, claiming that it contributed to fascist theories on government.
³ Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 103.
⁴ Elliott, review of Making the Fascist State. Elliot wrote that it was “impossible to tell,” in some places, whether Schneider was presenting the ideas of the fascists or offering his “own judgments.” Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 26, 107, 237-38, 260. Elliott also expressed concerns that William James’s and John Dewey’s instrumentalism and pragmatism created an entry wedge for fascism. Edward A. Purcell, The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism & the Problem of Value (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1973). 10-11. The historian Edward Purcell agreed with Elliott’s argument, suggesting that (albeit usually unwittingly) pragmatic theories undermined notions of democracy as a morally superior condition to dictatorship.
democracy as a morally superior form of government, worth striving for.\textsuperscript{5} In his PhD dissertation, Schneider observed that Americans habitually viewed “democracy” and “self-determination” as “absolute ends.” These values, he argued, were only “instrumental in nature.”\textsuperscript{6} In the words of one historian, Schneider approached democracy as “a kind of arbitrary social experiment” that should be dismissed as a “failure” if it did not provide “solutions” for contemporary problems.\textsuperscript{7}

Schneider’s experiences during the war probably contributed to his own belief that democracy did not offer the best form of government for the modern age. Intellectual historians have described how intelligence tests, designed to measure the cognitive abilities of American soldiers during the war, impacted contemporary debates on democracy.\textsuperscript{8} Schneider’s war work consisted of administering these tests in army camps throughout the US. Decades later, Schneider would remember his year in the army as “quite a critical experience.” He made “lifelong friends” in the army medical corps, where he found intellectuals, like him, who wanted to serve, but “didn’t know how to fight.” The results of the intelligence tests performed on soldiers who did know how to fight came as a surprise to Schneider and his colleagues; the “standards were so much lower than they had anticipated.”\textsuperscript{9} As Schneider observed, war-time IQ tests proved to be less valuable to military planners than they were to academics.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{5} For Dewey and democracy, see: Robert B. Westbrooke, \textit{John Dewey and American Democracy} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
\textsuperscript{6} Herbert Schneider, \textit{Science and Social Progress}. For relevant excerpts, see footnote 44 in Introduction, above. \textit{Reminiscences of Herbert Wallace Schneider}. Reflecting back on his dissertation with the hindsight of more than fifty years, Schneider said, that he wrote it, “not only under [Dewey] but with him. He helped me a good deal.” He did not acknowledge the areas where his and Dewey’s ideas differed.
\textsuperscript{7} Peter Vogt, “Herbert Schneider and the Ideal of an Intelligent Society,” \textit{Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society} 38, no. 3 (July 2002): 395.
\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Reminiscences of Herbert Wallace Schneider}. Schneider recalled that he got the position via one of his mentors, the head of Columbia University’s undergraduate department, John J. Cass. He was one of “about a dozen” Columbia men, who, alongside men from other universities made up “a couple of companies of academic persons” in the medical corps. Schneider’s specialty was administering the tests designed for illiterate men. He reflected that he “enjoyed being in camp with people worth knowing, a lot of people were important people. And I got something out of the work. I learned statistics and stuff like that. But army life, the camp life…I hated it.” Schneider conceded that it had been “practically impossible” to create “a test in which academic education was irrelevant,” suggesting that the lower-than-expected test results were at least in part due to methodological weaknesses in the tests themselves.
\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Reminiscences of Herbert Wallace Schneider}. 72
war’s end, psychologists and social scientists invoked soldiers’ low test scores to question whether the average man was capable of fulfilling his democratic duties.\textsuperscript{11}

It was befitting to an era that embraced disillusionment and mass activities in equal measure that pessimism about American democracy was pandemic in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{12} By 1928, each of the fascist theories on democracy, as described by Schneider in \textit{Making the Fascist State}, had also been articulated by American pundits and political scientists. In 1922, Walter Lippmann argued that ordinary people were incapable of participating constructively in a complex modern democracy.\textsuperscript{13} Four years on, the political scientist, Benjamin Wright, claimed that he had read more than a handful of books and innumerable articles, which compared the people in a democracy to a “ventriloquist’s obliging dummy.”\textsuperscript{14} In the meantime, other writers, including the popular journalist, Frank Kent, identified special interest groups as a powerful political force in American society, subverting the public interest to promote their own ends.\textsuperscript{15} Benjamin Wright, Walter Lippmann, and their many contemporaries who expressed doubts about American democracy were not fascist sympathizers.\textsuperscript{16} But their skepticism about the aptness of democracy in modern circumstances sounded similar to fascist political theories, as Schneider described them. This overlap was intentional: Schneider wanted the fascists’ critique of democracy to sound familiar to Americans.

In the late 1920s, American fascist sympathizers presented a three-part argument about democracy and political reform in Italy and the United States. First, they harked back to the time of a multiparty system in Italy to imply a cautionary tale for the US. Even if American democracy had not sunk to the same nadir as Italian democracy, a lack of congressional expertise, the rise of special interest

\textsuperscript{11} Purcell, \textit{Crisis of Democratic Theory}, 98-104.
\textsuperscript{12} Paul V. Murphy, \textit{The New Era: American Thought and Culture in the 1920s} (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 149-79.
\textsuperscript{13} Lippmann, \textit{Public Opinion}, 72, 79-94. Lippmann argued that modernity was detrimental to ordinary people’s intelligent understanding of public issues. He argued that an over-stimulating environment forced people to use “stereotypes” to process complex information, depriving them of the nuance necessary to engage constructively in democratic politics.
\textsuperscript{14} Benjamin F. Wright, “The Tendency Away from Political Democracy in the United States,” \textit{Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly} 7, no. 1 (June 1926): 25.
\textsuperscript{15} Ricci, \textit{Tragedy of Political Science}, 83.
\textsuperscript{16} Kent, on the other hand, had his sympathetic moments. See: Frank R. Kent, “Mussolini Explains Aims of Fascism and Predicts its World-Wide Acceptance,” \textit{Baltimore Sun}, October 1, 1930.
groups, and popular disillusionment meant that it was experiencing similar symptoms of decay, they suggested. These observers portrayed Italy, prior to Mussolini’s dictatorship, as a harbinger of what might happen in the US if political decadence was left unchecked.

Second, they insisted that, through the corporate state, the fascist government had adapted political institutions to contemporary exigencies, enabling expert and efficient management of economic problems, and advancing policies in the direction of the general good. Sympathetic American observers claimed that by separating policymaking from politics, and by encouraging all Italians to participate in the latter, the regime had created a form of government that fulfilled Italians’ material, emotional, and even spiritual, needs.

Finally, American fascist sympathizers argued that the United States, too, needed to look beyond its pre-existing institutions of government to create a state that was adept at dealing with the problems of modernity. They asserted that Americans, no less than Italians, needed a government that both managed complex policy issues, and captured its citizens’ hearts and their souls.

These observers used fascist Italy to transport Americans to a different place, where policies were better managed, and the government was more popular, than in the United States. They encouraged Americans to fantasize, to dream. As in most dreams, their version of fascist Italy contained familiar reference points. Herbert Schneider described fascist theories on democracy in terms that would have sounded reasonable to contemporary political scientists. Richard Washburn Child likened the corporate state to the board of directors of an American corporation, or a government war board. Anne O’Hare McCormick and contributors to Il Progresso Italo-Americano described a welfare-oriented state, reminiscent of the progressive era in the United States. Like all psychologically useful dreams, those of fascist sympathizers had enough familiarity to feel relevant, and enough difference to pique the imagination, as Americans surveyed their own democracy, took stock of its faults, and imagined its future.

17 Child, Writing on the Wall, 271.
The Broken-Down Machine

In 1928, Herbert Schneider, Anne O’Hare McCormick and Richard Washburn Child each revisited political conditions in Italy prior to Mussolini’s dictatorship. Between 1919 and 1922, Italy’s liberal democracy had been in a state of protracted crisis. “The situation was very complicated,” Schneider reminded his readers, but the basic problem lay in a combination of universal manhood suffrage and proportional representation that turned Italy into an exaggerated version of democracy. Elections in 1919 and 1921 brought around a dozen political parties into parliament. The liberals struggled to form stable governing coalitions. Prime ministers resigned at an alarming rate, until it seemed that there was nobody left within the old political elite who wanted the top job.

These were not conditions that were conducive to running a country. Italy’s postwar democracy produced a “period of national paralysis,” in McCormick’s words. According to Schneider, “[e]ndless party squabbling” obstructed the legislative process at a time when Italians desperately needed their government’s help. The country faced social and economic problems of the first order: strikes; crippling

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18 Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 79. See also Child, Writing on the Wall, 72. “Giolitti who introduced the proportional representation system . . . told me once that it was the final straw which made ridiculous the multiparty situation.”

19 Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 80. For a similar interpretation, see: Mussolini, My Autobiography, 158-60; also published as, Benito Mussolini, “Toward Conquest of Power,” Saturday Evening Post, July 21, 1928. Analysis generated by Child when he was Ambassador also indicated that Italy’s political problems stemmed from the multiparty system, governmental instability, and, ultimately, the lack of men willing to assume the political risks entailed in the premiership. See, for example: Richard Washburn Child to Charles Evans Hughes, October 4, 1921; 865.00/969; RG 59; M527; NARA. “The opinion is very general that Italy would vastly improve under a two-party system of politics. The present system results in furtive and weak ministries and in politics which reshape themselves moment by moment.” See, also: Richard Washburn Child to Charles Evans Hughes, October 9, 1922; 865.00/1162; RG59; M527: NARA. Child wrote that the government’s problems included a “Parliament which tends to spend its energies in breaking up into an ever increasing number of political groupings and factions. These groups form temporary coalitions not dedicated to constructive policies but to the obstruction or destruction of existing ministries. This tendency is greatly exaggerated under the present political system of proportional representation.” “Ministries, under such conditions, have no dependable support from monarchy or parliament, and there follows a situation where every ministry is makeshift, where each necessity to form a ministry is attended by increasing difficulty even to accomplish a makeshift portfolio, and strong men avoid rather than seek the hazards of administrative service.”

20 McCormick, “Italy and Bolshevism.” Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 79. The parliament was “deadlocked,” according to Schneider.

21 Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 80. For similar sentiments, see: Mussolini, My Autobiography, 89-90; also published as, Mussolini, “Toward Conquest of Power.”
debts, and inflation.\textsuperscript{22} Fascist sympathizers argued that Italians felt disgusted not only with specific iterations of democratic government, but with democracy itself.\textsuperscript{23} On the eve of the March on Rome, wrote Schneider, the democratic government “hardly had a single friend in the country.”\textsuperscript{24}

Mussolini provided his own analysis of the end of Italian democracy in his English-language autobiography, edited by Richard Washburn Child. He suggested that Italian democracy’s most fundamental failure had been a failure to adapt. The “historical parties” had not adjusted to the “new conditions of modern life,” Mussolini wrote. Traditional politicians clung to old-fashioned customs and institutions, even when these customs and institutions no longer worked for the country. Italy’s democracy was a broken-down machine, he argued, which could not be salvaged with “pitiful repairs.” Italians needed a different form of government, suited to “the living reality of the twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{25} They needed a new machine entirely.\textsuperscript{26}

The Crumbling Citadel

American fascist sympathizers aimed to connect Italy’s political crisis of the early 1920s with conditions in the United States at the decade’s end. An episode of Mussolini’s serialized biography, 

\textsuperscript{23} McCormick, “Italy and Bolshevism.” There was a sense of “profound popular discouragement” wrote McCormick. Child, \textit{Writing on the Wall}, 145. Child wrote that the expression, “‘Elections mean nothing,’” became a truism for Italians.
\textsuperscript{24} Schneider, \textit{Making the Fascist State}, 80.
\textsuperscript{25} Mussolini, \textit{My Autobiography}, 69; also published as, Benito Mussolini, “Ashes and Embers,” \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, June 2, 1928.
\textsuperscript{26} Schneider, \textit{Making the Fascist State}, 88-98; Mussolini, \textit{My Autobiography}, 214-26; also published as, Benito Mussolini, “Five Years of Government,” \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, August 25, 1928. Both Schneider and Mussolini, in his English-language autobiography, paid significant attention to the period between October 1922 (when the Fascists marched on Rome) and late 1924. This period was defined by various attempts to doctor parliament so it worked in fascism’s favor. The 1923 Acerbo Law gave two thirds of parliamentary seats to whichever party came first (with at least twenty-five percent of votes) in a national election. The fascists used fraud and intimidation to ensure their subsequent victory in elections in April 1924. In the next parliament, the fascists had a two-thirds majority. Both Schneider and Mussolini argued that fascism’s remaining parliamentary opponents—and, most notably, the socialist deputy, Giacomo Matteotti—were a self-interested minority, intent on blocking the fascists’ legislative agenda, despite their electoral mandate. They suggested that the Acerbo Law had been a form of tinkering with the machinery of a broken-down democracy, to try to get it to work. When fascism’s opponents blocked the government, Mussolini had no choice, they argued, but to scrap multi-party politics. For more accurate analysis of these years, see: Adrian Lyttelton, “Fascism in Italy: The Second Wave,” \textit{Journal of Contemporary History} 1, no. 1 (1966): 75-100; Matteo Millan, “‘Semplicemente Squadristi.’ Il Fascismo Post-Marcia a Genova,” \textit{Contemporanea} 16, no.2 (April-June 2013): 209-38; Mauro Canali “The Matteotti Murder and the Origins of Mussolini’s Totalitarian Fascist Regime in Italy,” \textit{Journal of Modern Italian Studies} 14, no. 2 (2009): 143-67.
published on the first page of the *Saturday Evening Post* in June 1928, began with a statement: “I have little doubt that all inefficient party and parliamentary governments die from the same causes and with the same typical mannerisms of decay.” Post readers, well-versed in contemporary ideas of democratic decadence, would have understood Mussolini’s statement as it was intended to be understood: a prediction that the United States’ democracy of 1928—seemingly so different from Italy’s in 1922—risked collapse for similar reasons, and along similar lines.

Richard Washburn Child also preyed upon Americans’ fears of democratic decadence. In 1929, he published a new book, *The Writing on the Wall*. Child described himself as a modern-day prophet, who foretold of the end of liberal democracy, not just in Europe, but in the United States. Child’s book was a highly selective survey, taking in the conditions of various polities. He deemed recent dictatorships in Spain, Turkey and, of course, Italy, to be success stories. By contrast, he asserted, democracies on the continent were in poor shape—flagging in France, struggling to stay afloat in Germany.

Child paid particular attention to the precarious conditions of British democracy. Britain’s first weakness, he wrote, stemmed from a decline in the quality of its parliamentary representatives. Members of parliament seemed to lack the technical knowledge to address “the challenges” of a modern state. Britain’s second problem, according to Child, lay in a pending change from a two- to a three-party system. The Labour Party had risen because neither of the two major parties had effectively managed the transition to an industrial economy. Child predicted that Labour would fare no better in this regard, and

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32 Child, *Writing on the Wall*, 183
that its failure would give rise to a fourth party, and so on. Unresponsive to the needs of the British people and poised to descend into multiparty chaos, as rendered by Child, the British “citadel” of 1929 looked not so different from the Italian ruins of 1922. Child was explicit about why he was so concerned about British political conditions. If Britain was one of the world’s “supposed citadels” of representative government, then the United States was the other; and since British democracy was “obviously slipping,” this did not bode well for the United States. Child used Britain as a stepping stone between continental Europe and the United States to suggest that none of the distances were very great.

Child, McCormick, and contributors to Il Progresso Italo-Americano argued that a declining quality of elected officials beset the United States. These observers echoed the frequently articulated notion that, in the modern age, ordinary men and women failed to elect men and women who would best serve their interests. Child sounded a lot like Walter Lippmann when he described the “snapshot, transitory judgments” of the average citizen in a democracy. Child suggested that Americans selected their candidates for office as they might select their brand of cigarettes, responding to “fabricated” images in newspapers and magazines, mediated sounds on the radio, and ersatz advertising campaigns.

Similarly, McCormick interpreted the 1928 presidential election as proof of the supposition that the people’s choice in a democracy was rarely the best candidate to meet the people’s needs. The

34 Child, Writing on the Wall, 58-59. Great Britain, he wrote, was a “real field for study” for Americans.
35 Lippmann, Public Opinion, 72.
36 Child, Writing on the Wall, 60.
37 Child, Writing on the Wall, 146. Anne O’Hare McCormick, “The Candidate Is Everywhere at Once,” New York Times, October 28, 1928. McCormick also echoed Lippmann’s ideas. She described the enormous volume of information that circulated in the United States in the lead up to the 1928 presidential elections. Radio stations, movies, pamphlets, even airplanes pulling slogans across the sky, surrounded Americans with noises, light, and words, she observed. But the proliferation of information had not resulted in a better-informed public, according to McCormick. Entire neighborhoods simply “turn[ed] off the current” when an opposition candidate spoke on the radio. Child and McCormick differed in their interpretation of the relationship between female suffrage and public opinion. Child, Writing on the Wall, 65-67, 143. The expansion of the vote to women, in Child’s mind, had increased the pool of “politically untrained” Americans. Child suggested that the female vote, more than the male vote, was motivated by “sentiment.” McCormick, “Enter Woman, the New Boss of Politics,” New York Times, October 21, 1928. McCormick argued that women’s votes were no more “motivated by prejudice or trivial emotions” than men’s.
38 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “The Corn Belt Looks at Governor Smith,” New York Times, September 23, 1928. McCormick was at first more optimistic about Smith’s chances in the Midwest. She noted that the candidate drew crowds, and that rural Americans related to his humanity. She was aware that these responses too were driven by “prejudices,” in the sense that voters were responding to the candidate on an emotional, rather than, rational basis.
election coincided with a crisis in American agriculture, and McCormick suggested that rational assessments of the two candidates’ platforms demonstrated that the Democrat, Al Smith, was the best man to help the farmers: in contrast to Hoover, Smith supported direct subsidies as part of a larger program of farm relief. 39 But in the run-up to the election she struggled to find a rural American who agreed with her. The farmers who McCormick spoke to associated Smith with all that was alien to them: urbanism, immigrants, alcohol, and the Catholic Church. The election, McCormick believed, would not be decided by citizens’ rational assessments of their interests. It would be decided instead by prejudices, and by fears. 40 McCormick’s coverage of the election was tinged with her sense of a tragedy in the making: by exercising their vaunted democratic rights, ordinary Americans were injuring themselves. 41

McCormick and contributors to Il Progresso argued that Americans’ limited political capacities were reflected, too, in the representatives they elected to Congress. Il Progresso echoed contemporary characterizations of Congress as a frivolous “show”—a circus or vaudeville act, tone-deaf to the serious problems facing the nation. 42 McCormick observed the new Congress of 1929 with a mounting sense of disgust. President Hoover made his own version of farm relief (which stopped short of loans to farmers) a

And she noted that while mid-westerners liked Smith more than anticipated, it was yet unclear whether their affection would translate into votes. By and large, it did not.

39 McCormick, “Trailing the Elusive Farm Vote.” McCormick noted that as a group rural Americans had benefited far less from modernity than their urban counterparts. Half of all American farmers, she wrote, still had “no power machinery, no telephone, no gas or electric light, no running water or plumbing.” She argued that farmers had already made an error in the 1924 elections, voting mainly for Coolidge, who twice vetoed the McNary-Haugen Bill, when their interests had been most aligned with Robert La Follette’s Progressive party.

40 McCormick, “Enter the Woman, the New Boss of Politics.” She wrote: “So called tent meetings that are the most depressing exhibit of the campaign. These meetings are held in the rural districts of Oklahoma and Tennessee—perhaps in other States; I mention only what I saw. They are conducted by unknown itinerant preachers, appearing no one knows whence or at whose expense, who put up tents and proceed, after a brief religious service, to harangue against Catholicism and Governor Smith.” She suggested that, by confirming rural Protestants’ underlying prejudices, the preachers ensured that these citizens would not vote for Smith. McCormick, “Now We All Debate the Issues.” She wrote that the “fear” of Smith was “real.” “As far as it can be rationalized, it is the fear of something foreign, the same fear, but deeper and more instinctive, that kept us out of the League of Nations. In the interior of the country nothing is more menacing than foreigners. It is a complex, a sincere, if inverted, patriotism . . . it affects every other issue, and the popular instinct . . . mulls it over as if no other question were up for decision.”

41 McCormick, “Trailing the Elusive Farm Vote” McCormick, “Now We All Debate the Issues” ; McCormick, “Enter the Woman, the New Boss of Politics.”

42 “Senate Show to Open for Three-Month Run,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, December 2, 1928. See also: “Problems That Confront the New Congress,” New York Times, April 7, 1929. The cartoon illustration that accompanied this article was demonstrative of the disaffection of Americans with their congressional system. Entitled “The Circus Has Come to Town,” the cartoon featured Hoover as ring master and Congress as a naïf acrobat, wobbly on his spindly legs, poised before the hoop of “farm relief.”
priority. In the spring of 1929, McCormick sat in the visitors’ gallery of the House as one congressman made a speech about the sugar tariff. Only the delegate from Hawaii listened. The other representatives were “chatting and reading newspapers, chewing gum, picking their teeth or yawning.” According to McCormick, these were not the best, or the brightest, men in the nation. She argued that congressmen were reluctant to pass arcane legislation to deal with problems they barely grasped. Congress, she suggested, was in over its head. If it resembled any kind of machine, it was in her mind a lumbering tank: a blind mechanical beast, so destructive in its potential that its unqualified drivers preferred to leave it behind closed gates.

These observers argued special interest groups had risen to fill the void in legislative expertise. Child and McCormick gave voice to a widespread concern about the power of political lobbies. Child tallied the special interest groups in Washington DC at five hundred in 1929. The American government was becoming, in his words, “a government by blackmail,” which implemented the agendas of “organized minorities” ahead of the national interest. McCormick asserted that with each passing year, the technical

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44 The Senate also held up the administration’s proposals for farm relief. See: McCormick, “Senate and House in Test of Strength,” New York Times, May 19, 1929. “The Revolt in the Republican Party,” New York Times, November 17, 1929. Party progressives, led by Senators Borah and Norris, were unhappy with Hoover’s proposals for farm relief. The senators picked away at the administration’s plan. Although she was sympathetic to the progressives’ cause, McCormick believed they should side with the President. They were wasting precious time, she warned, debating, as the farm surpluses grew. In June, the Senate passed Hoover’s Agricultural Marketing bill, but, to her chagrin, the same party insurgents continued to challenge the administration’s legislative program, including tariff reforms, for the rest of the year. See: Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Over the Senate Insurgent Whips Snap,” New York Times, November 17, 1929.
46 McCormick, “Congress: Mirror of the Nation.” McCormick described the members of Congress as a “dull” assortment of “inattentive” men (and a few somewhat brighter women), and a “fair sample” of the country, perhaps “a bit above the average citizen.” Wright, “Tendency Away from Political Democracy,” 30. These ideas compared with those articulated by Benjamin Wright. “Many and many a time I have read or heard highly unfavorable opinions about the merits of our legislatures and of their work; not once have I read or head the assertion that they are not at least a typical cross-section of the community. . . . It may well be that their only fault is that they are too representative of the people.” Child, Writing on the Wall, 61, esp. 237. Child argued that the poor quality of congressional representatives created a downward spiral. “When all standards of legislative representation are lowered, it becomes more and more difficult to get men of integrity and capacity to take office,” he wrote.
47 McCormick, “Congress: Mirror of the Nation.” An accompanying illustration featured a tank (as a metaphor for Congress) tumbling down the steps of the Capitol, as American citizens fled to avoid being killed or injured by it.
49 Child, Writing on the Wall, 54, 229, 234-36. Although Child bemoaned the influence of money power over political processes, the pressure groups that he identified as destructive were not the repositories of business and
capacity of lobbies grew. Possessing the specific sectoral expertise that elected representatives lacked, lobbyists could run circles around Congress, she argued. Not incorrectly, McCormick cited the Hawley-Smoot tariff bill as a typical outcome of this asymmetry of expertise: lobbyists had, in effect, written the tariff schedules for congressmen, resulting in legislation that favored big business over the common good.

Just as he did for Great Britain, Child predicted that the ineffectiveness of the United States’ contemporary system risked edging the nation toward “democracy’s shortest . . . road to ruin”: a multiparty system. In this prediction, as in most other critiques of American democracy, he added a note of hysteria to the more measured ideas of contemporary political scientists. Child interpreted every political lobby as an embryonic party. The longer the American government failed to cope with problems associated with modernity—including the agricultural crisis, industrialization, and a growing urban rural-divide—the higher the risk that new parties would form, and gather strength, he argued. Italy’s calamitous political situation on the eve of the March on Rome was merely the endpoint of a process that was already underway in the United States, Child implied; a multiparty system, entailing “intolerable chaos,” was a distinct possibility.
American fascist sympathizers suggested that the United States’ democracy at the decade’s end was reminiscent of Italy’s at the decade’s beginning in another way: ordinary people no longer supported the principle of self-government. Around half of the Americans qualified to vote had not done so in the elections of 1920 and 1924. Simplifying the findings of Charles Merriam and Harold Gosnell, political scientists who studied non-voting, Child ascribed low voting rates to popular disillusionment with democracy. Even the fifty percent of Americans who did go to the polls went ironically, indifferently, or skeptically, Child asserted; it was little wonder, then, that the other fifty percent shunned the “farce” of voting altogether.

In 1928, Anne O’Hare McCormick observed an uptick in public interest in politics, which would be borne out by voting rates that fall. McCormick argued that emotions drew many of her compatriots to the presidential race: prohibition and religion were gut issues; and the contrasting personas of Hoover and Smith made for good political theater. Yet even this, the most animated contest of the decade, did not seem to capture fully the public’s attention. Travelling in the West in the summer of 1928 McCormick watched groups of men gather around a radio in a hotel lobby. The group that gathered for Smith’s acceptance speech was a little larger than the group that gathered for Hoover’s. But she observed that a group ten times that size gathered to listen to the coverage of the fight between the world heavyweight

56 Child, Writing on the Wall, 144. Charles E. Merriam and Harold F. Gosnell, Non-Voting, Causes and Methods of Control (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924). Merriam and Gosnell produced the decade’s most complete analysis of non-voting, based on political behavior in Chicago’s 1923 mayoral elections. At fifty percent, the voting rates in Chicago were similar to participation rates in the presidential elections of 1920 and 1924. By Merriam’s and Gosnell’s estimations, “inertia” accounted for more than 40 percent of the failure to vote in Chicago in 1923; and one quarter of the nonvoters surveyed claimed that they were indifferent to the outcome of elections in general. Although they warned against extrapolating too much from a discrete survey, Merriam’s and Gosnell’s contemporaries, including Lippmann and Child, frequently cited the report. Walter Lippmann, The Phantom Public (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, 2011), 7-8. Purcell, Crisis of Democratic Theory, 108. According to Purcell, Lippmann drew “extensively” on Merriam and Gosnell’s research in The Phantom Public. See also: Walter Lippmann, “Causes of Political Indifference Today,” Atlantic Monthly, February 1927.

57 Child, Writing on the Wall, 194. McCormick, “America at Last Airs Its Mind.” In 1928, McCormick looked back at the previous two presidential races. “No one cared very much who was President of the United States so long as he kept quiet and left us alone,” she observed. “Prosperity” had turned Americans into “stand-patters.”

58 At almost 57 percent, voter turnout in 1928 was about eight percent higher than it had been in the previous two presidential elections.

59 McCormick, “Now We All Debate the Issues.” Walter Lippmann, “The Causes of Political Indifference Today.” Lippmann similarly argued that the “questions which really engage[d] the masses of the people” in the late 1920s were “prohibition, the Ku Klux Klan, Romanism, Fundamentalism, immigration.”

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champion, Gene Tunney, and his challenger. McCormick suggested that Americans were hungry for an emotionally engaging experience; politics left them wanting.

Reciting an idea that was common among scholars and writers in the late 1920s, these observers argued that the United States’ principal problem (just like democratic Italy’s had been) stemmed from a failure to adapt its political institutions to modern conditions. McCormick summed up this argument in an article published shortly after Hoover’s election. American political institutions, she argued, were lagging behind economic and social developments in the modern age. An accompanying illustration underlined her concern. It featured the statue of a politician as a nineteenth-century man, entirely incongruous with the dynamic scene around him. Though set in the foreground, the statue seemed lost, and the engraving on its pedestal—Politics—was half-obsured by shade. In this same article, McCormick praised Mussolini’s efforts to update Italy’s government before she paraphrased the Prime Minister himself: “Why, he asks, should you take government from the nineteenth century when in all other departments of life you have progressed beyond it?” Why, she seemed to wonder, indeed?

The Cadaver Sings

American sympathizers argued that the fascists created an effective form of government for modern Italy. They portrayed the new state as crafted by experts in response to contemporary realities, endowed with sufficient know-how to enable effective legislative action, truly representative of the nation, and responsive to the country’s most pressing needs. These observers frequently invoked images of a machine in connection with the fascist state. Whereas American democratic Politics were represented by the statue of a nineteenth-century man, the Italian corporate state was, in McCormick’s mind, “the

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60 McCormick, “Now We All Debate the Issues.”
61 Westbrooke, John Dewey and American Democracy, 307-8. Dewey expressed this idea in 1927, in The Public and Its Problems, when he argued that political institutions created for a decentralized, predominantly agricultural society were insufficient for an interconnected, industrialized, and urbanized one. “The ‘new age of human relationships’” Dewey wrote, had “no political agencies worthy of it.” McCormick, “Now We All Debate the Issues.” In 1928, McCormick wrote that political scientists and ordinary Americans shared the notion “that the swift processes of industry and invention have carried the world a hundred years ahead of the processes of government.”
62 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Bringing Politics Up to Date,” New York Times, November 25, 1928. This article includes an illustration, as described, with caption “The Old Language of Politics is a Dead Language in the Age of the Machine.”
motor power of the only European country actually going forward since the war.” In the words of Richard Washburn Child, the corporate state was a machine that would “run,” “function,” “do,” and “accomplish.” Images of the Italian state as an efficient machine implied that the fascists had eliminated the lag between political institutions and economic and social realities, hauling Politics into the mechanical age.

Sympathetic observers argued that Italy’s best minds designed new institutions of government. In the summer of 1924, Mussolini appointed a commission of “solons” made up of “outstanding scholars,” according to Herbert Schneider. The head of the commission was the idealist philosopher, Giovanni Gentile, whom McCormick described as “Italy’s answer to Josiah Royce and William James.” Subsequent reforms came with a similar intellectual pedigree. According to sympathetic Americans, Italy’s best and brightest painstakingly constructed the institutional foundations of the corporate state.

These observers also claimed that the new institutions of the corporate state insulated parliament from the vagaries of public opinion. Following a 1928 electoral law, Italians no longer selected their parliamentary representatives. As explained in some detail by Child, Schneider, and contributors to Il Progresso Italo-Americano, the Grand Council instead selected four hundred members of parliament from a list of one thousand candidates proposed by confederations of labor, employers, and

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63 McCormick, “Italy Puts the Yoke on Capital and Labor.” See, also: McCormick, “Behind Fascism Stands a Philosopher.” After acknowledging that parts of the corporate state—including the parliament—were yet to be operational, she wrote that “the thing still has a dynamo and it works—works so much better than any old State in Europe that Italy, for the moment without any voice in its own government, is about the only national plant that runs on a Continent rattling with broken-down political machinery.”

64 Child, “Foreword,” in My Autobiography, xi; also published as, Child “Mussolini Now.” See, also: Mussolini, My Autobiography, 161; also published as, Mussolini, “Toward Conquest of Power.” Mussolini also likened fascism to a “powerful machine.” Child, Writing on the Wall, 193-217, 272-74. Child frequently compared the corporate state to an effective “new machine.”

65 Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 94.

66 McCormick, “Behind Fascism Stands a Philosopher.”

67 McCormick, “Italy Puts the Yoke on Capital and Labor.” McCormick described Alfredo Rocco, the fascist Minister of Justice who wrote the 1926 law on the corporate state as “a juris-consult of the first order.” Fascist sympathizers presented the architects of the corporate state as hard-working, in addition to highly talented. McCormick, “Behind Fascism Stands a Philosopher.” McCormick described the law on corporations as the product of “all-night battles in the Fascist Grand Council.” Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 191. Schneider noted, with a touch of irony, that the “Grand Council does only night work!”

68 Reminiscences of Herbert Wallace Schneider. Schneider later remembered that when he was in Italy in 1927, “I got interested in the general theory of the corporate state. . . . I got a lot of political dope on the new constitution, and I wrote it up for Political Science Quarterly. . . . It was all news to everybody [in the United States].” The article appeared as Schneider, “Italy’s New Syndicalist Constitution.”
professionals. A March 1929 photograph in *Il Progresso* featured the Council members, hunched over long tables in a darkened meeting room, as they selected the four hundred representatives. Other than Mussolini, no man was distinguishable as an individual (Figure 9). Thus rendered, the members of the Grand Council were a disinterested bureaucratic elite, bearing more than a passing resemblance to the neutral experts whom Walter Lippmann hoped would soon preside over policymaking in the United States. Unlike average men and women, these elites would not resort to simplifications or allow prejudices to guide their choices, images like this implied.

By selecting from a pool of potential representatives nominated by the corporations, the Grand Council would also ensure that parliamentarians were sectoral experts, fascist sympathizers argued. In early 1929, *Il Progresso* reprinted an article, written under Mussolini’s name, which explained the advantages of the corporate parliament to American readers. Mussolini argued that the traditional democratic system of geographical representation precluded the development of legislative expertise: parliamentarians had to represent the varied interests of their constituents. By contrast, the corporate system required each legislator to have technical knowledge of a specific economic area. By

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70 “I Candidati Scelti dal Gran Consiglio per la XXVIII Legislatura della Camera Italiana,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, March 1, 1929. *Il Progresso* reported that, once more, the members of the Grand Council worked into the night.


73 Through their untiring work, they ensured that the four hundred representatives would be the “intellectual and moral nobility” of the country, the newspaper’s Rome correspondent claimed. “Fascist Council Busy Preparing Final Ticket for Election of Italian Chamber in Italy,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, February 21, 1929. The members of the corporate parliament would be “men of real worth,” according to this article.

74 Child, *Writing on the Wall*, 212-13. Child argued that the Grand Council’s authority to also select men outside the corporations’ lists only bolstered expertise within the parliament: if Council members perceived that the national interest demanded the further elucidation of particular issues, they could select the best men to represent these concerns, he wrote.

75 “Il Duce Explains New Chamber,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, April 14, 1929. McCormick, “Bringing Politics Up to Date.” In 1928, Mussolini reportedly offered McCormick a similar explanation of the benefits of a corporate parliament: “‘How does a lawyer represent a bricklayer, and how does a farmer speak for a journalist, or vice versa?’” Schneider, *Making the Fascist State*, 201-3. Schneider sub-titled this sub-section, which explained the corporate parliament, “Economic Representation.”
implication, such men would have no need for the advice of lobbyists and special interest groups: they
would have all the knowledge they needed to perform their jobs effectively.

Fascist sympathizers argued that by, first, representing and, second, reconciling the interests of all
groups in Italian society, the corporate parliament would advance the common good. In the spring of
1929, *Il Progresso* provided evidence to support this claim. In May 1929, less than a month after the new
chamber opened, the parliament approved the Lateran Accords—legislation of momentous significance to
all Italians. *Il Progresso* predicted that the parliament’s agenda would be packed with laws of great
consequence: measures to control inflation; projects for land reclamation and irrigation; improvements in
rural homes; and the construction of transportation and communication infrastructure for remote areas.
Portraits such as this suggested that nobody would be yawning, reading his newspaper, or chewing gum
in the new corporate parliament: it would be endowed with the requisite representative structures and
technical capacity to ensure that all Italians felt the benefits of modernity.

In their descriptions of the corporate state, fascist sympathizers misrepresented the regime’s
propaganda as reality. Few of the claims that American sympathizers advanced on behalf of fascist
corporatism can be sustained. First, although the “solons” and members of the Grand Council were
certainly more educated than the average Italian, they were not impartial bureaucrats. Personal ambitions,

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75 Child, *Writing on the Wall*, 271-72. Child argued in contrast to the democratic system, which disingenuously
“masked” the influence of special interests, the corporate parliament openly recognized all interest groups. “Fascist
Council Busy Preparing Final Ticket for Election of Italian Chamber in Italy,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano. Il
Progresso* anticipated that the 1929 parliament would be “truly representative of the productive forces of the
country.” This article described the apportionment of representatives as “consistent” with each economic and social
group’s “numerical strength” and “usefulness to the State.” Schneider, *Making the Fascist State*, 160. Schneider
attributed these ideas to syndical theory, by which “[p]rivate interests” were “never transcended” nor were “national
interests superimposed on them”; instead, the “national interests are the private interests coordinated.” Schneider,
*Making the Fascist State*, 112. According to Schneider, the fascists believed that once adequately represented, these
various interest groups could be “coordinated” to create a more “constructive” political system. See also
McCormick, *Behind Fascism Stands a Philosopher*. Following her meeting with Gentile in 1926, McCormick
described how the corporate state was based on a recognition of tangible economic interests, as opposed to nebulous
opinion. The state, she argued, would reconcile these interests, stepping in to resolve disputes when necessary, in
order to advance the common good.

unanimous vote was false. Cortesi noted that two deputies actually voted against the accords. Their vote, he wrote,
was “likely” a “mistake,” which he supposed was due to unfamiliarity with the “machinery of voting.”

Progresso Italo-Americano*, April 21, 1929.
patronage networks, and political debts affected every decision that the fascist elite made, purportedly on behalf of the people. Second, the four hundred men whom the Grand Council chose to fill the corporate parliament were hardly representative of Italian society. The final makeup of the corporate parliament of 1929 corresponded to the political importance of various groups to the fascist state, with veterans and capital over-represented, and laboring classes sidelined. The corporate parliament was a microcosm of fascism, not a microcosm of Italy, and—contrary to the claims of American sympathizers—fascism and Italy were not the same.

Only one claim that these observers staked for the new Italian parliament rang true: its members passed many laws, quickly. But this apparent efficiency was a testimony to the hollowness of the parliament. It is simple to pass legislation when you lack any discretionary authority; it is natural to pass legislation when your job, or perhaps even your life, depends on it. The fascist corporate state was a skeleton of institutions and laws, which deprived Italians of far more than it gave them. Fascist

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78 Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy (Berkley: University of California Press, 2000), 132. Misrepresentation was rooted in the confederations, which nominated the list of one thousand potential parliamentarians. Lawyers, professors, and other professionals dominated the confederations of factory and farm workers, depriving the laboring classes of representation by their social peers. “Elections in Italy,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano. Misrepresentation was then reinforced by the Grand Council’s authority to choose men outside the confederations’ nominations entirely. Il Progresso noted that the Grand Council did not publish the initial list of one thousand possible representatives chosen by the confederations and public bodies; but the newspaper did not acknowledge that, without a public list, the Grand Council could ignore the confederations’ nominations without accountability to the public.

79 “Il Duce Explains New Chamber,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano. Even Mussolini conceded that the corporate parliament did not “perfectly” represent each economic and social group “due to other considerations,” although he did not specify what these considerations were. Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 56. Discussing the composition of the Chamber of Deputies in 1936, Schneider noted that readers could get a “rough scale of fascist values” from the size of each of the various groups. “Veterans, the liberal professions, and the employers,” were the “most favored,” he wrote. De Grand, Italian Fascism, 77. Historians, including De Grand, have been much more emphatic that the relatively weak representation of labor in the corporate state reflected its subordination under Mussolini’s regime.

80 For approval of Mussolini’s claim that “Italy [was] Fascism and Fascism [was] Italy,” see: Rastignac, “La Portata del Discorso di Mussolini,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, March 12, 1929. Fascist sympathizers echoed this claim from the early days of the fascist seizure of power. Child, Diplomat Looks at Europe, 158. For instance, Child wrote that in the early 1920s, the “national spirit,” within all Italians, came “bursting out into Fascism.”

81 McCormick and Schneider occasionally conveyed some hesitancy about Italian corporatism. McCormick, “Light on the Elusive Lobbyist.” McCormick conceded at the end of 1929 that the parliament was “so dominated by Mussolini that it has as yet no value as an experiment in government.” As was usual, her more critical comments about the fascist state tended to appear in her reporting from outside of Italy, almost hidden away, as a sub-clause of a sentence. Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 201. In a typical passage, Schneider both acknowledged that rhetoric preceded substance on the corporate state, before arguing that fascist rhetoric had power to make myths into reality. He described how Mussolini announced that 1927 was “the corporate year” and even dropped a casual
sympathizers gave it substance where it had none. They breathed life into the skeleton and made the cadaver sing.

**The Daily Plebiscite**

Sympathetic observers argued that the corporate state had all the efficiency of a modern machine, with none of the metallic chill. In Richard Washburn Child’s words, Mussolini envisaged his new state not just as a machine that would run, but as a machine with a soul. An ordinary machine, even a highly functioning one, did not promise to change the texture of modern life. At best, it would temporarily replace an obsolete form of government, before passing into obsolescence itself. But a machine with a soul had the potential to lift men and women beyond the material world. It combined modern efficiency with the spirituality that was sorely lacking in contemporary society.

Fascist sympathizers provided concrete evidence for the nebulous notion of the Italian state as a machine with a soul. First, they argued that, by simplifying elections, the fascists enabled modern men to participate more meaningfully in formal politics than they had under a democracy. Second, they claimed that by expanding the political realm into the informal sphere, fascism enabled Italians to celebrate spontaneously the presence of their government in their everyday lives.

Italy’s new system offered a straightforward means for participating in elections, according to these observers. Although Italian men no longer voted for individual candidates for parliament, they were not excluded from the selection process entirely. Instead, in March 1929, they participated in a referendum: did they accept the four hundred representatives that the Grand Council had chosen on their behalf? Child argued that ordinary people preferred this kind of referendum to complex elections: they

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83 Child, *Writing on the Wall*, 213. “Come Si Preparano le Elezioni,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, January 21, 1929. “Elections in Italy,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*. “Fascist Council Busy Preparing Final Ticket for Election of Italian Chamber in Italy,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*. reference to an economic parliament in place of the ‘worn-out one.’” According to Schneider, “Mussolini’s words [had] a thousand echoes; and the slightest mention by him of such a possibility was enough to set the whole scheme on its feet.” Schneider, *Fascist Government of Italy*, 52-53. It was not until 1936 that Schneider acknowledged that under the corporate system, parliament was “more a survival than a power.” By contrast, in *Writing on the Wall*, Child expressed no reservations whatsoever about the corporate state and corporate parliament, and *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* issued only praise for the corporate state.
wanted nothing less, and little more, than the chance to say “Yes or No to a broad policy,” wrote Child.\footnote{Child, \textit{Writing on the Wall}, 195.}

\textit{Il Progresso} cited the turnout on election day, March 24, as evidence that the fascist state had created a format that drew people to the polls. Eight and a half million men, or more than ninety percent of those eligible, had voted, the newspaper reported.\footnote{“Le Elezioni Plebiscitarie Svoltesi in Italia Tra Scene di Intenso Entusiasmo,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, March 25, 1929. See also: Schneider and Clough, \textit{Making Fascists}, 157. Edward Corsi, “A Record Vote,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, March 31, 1929. The “astounding” turnout indicated that Mussolini had created an extraordinary “‘machine,’” editorialized Edward Corsi.} In the previous three national elections, voter turnout had hovered around sixty percent. According to this analysis, the fascist regime was empowering Italians as they had never been empowered in a liberal democracy, which had demanded more time and intellectual energy than modern men could dedicate to formal politics.

Taken at face value, the results of the elections demonstrated that Italians were happy, too, to outsource the selection of representatives to men more qualified for this task: ninety-eight percent of those who participated in the election, some 8.4 million men, answered “Yes” when asked if they approved of the list of four hundred parliamentarians chosen by the Grand Council.\footnote{“Le Elezioni in Italia—Voti a Favore Del Regime: 8,506,576—Contrari: 136,198,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, March 26, 1929. Rastignac, “Plebiscito Che Consacra Il Fascismo Rinnovatore delle Fortune d’Italia,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, March 27, 1929.} It was a short step from the claim that fascism provided Italians with the form of government they wanted to the idea that it was more democratic than liberal democracy. It was a short step and Child took it. Wherever a form of government arose “from the true will of the people,” there was “democracy in the modern…sense,” Child wrote.\footnote{Child, \textit{Writing on the Wall}, 44, 216. McCormick made similar suggestions about the corporate state in 1926. See footnote 92, in this chapter.} Claiming that Italians had had an “absolute freedom” to vote with their conscience, \textit{Il Progresso}’s Rome correspondent, Rastignac, argued that the 8.4 million yeses signified a passionate identification of Italians with the fascist state.\footnote{Rastignac, “Plebiscito Che Consacra il Fascismo Rinnovatore delle Fortune d’Italia.” \textit{Il Progresso}’s Rome correspondent, Rastignac, described the scenes on election day: everywhere, men had waited patiently in lines for hours, eager to cast their vote in favor of the regime. See also: “Le Elezioni Plebiscitarie Svoltesi in Italia Tra Scene di Intenso Entusiasmo,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}.}
In Mussolini’s words, reprinted in *Il Progresso*, the 1929 election results demonstrated that fascism had “‘captured the souls of Italy.’”89 Fascist sympathizers suggested that the 1929 referendum was proof of a transformation in Italians’ relationship with their state, which stretched beyond the event itself. The more cerebral of these observers rooted this development in the political philosophy of Giovanni Gentile, whose concept of the “stato etico” portrayed the ideal government not as a fenced off appendage, but integral to all aspects of national life.90 Sympathetic American observers minimized the militaristic and expansionist implications of an integral state, opting instead for a gentler picture of a government that generated Italians’ loyalty by caring for them and living among them. This warm portrait of the corporate state filtered into Mussolini’s English-language autobiography, also. Citing maximum working hours, social insurance, pensions, and women and child labor laws as evidence that Italy’s social welfare program was the most advanced in Europe, Mussolini wrote that “to-day the state is not an abstract and unknowing entity; the government is present everywhere, every day.”91

The progressive connotations of an “ethical state” fueled the imagination of Anne O’Hare McCormick, in particular. As a Catholic, committed to the principles of social justice, she hoped that the corporate state might be “more representative of all the people” than a traditional liberal democracy.92 McCormick suggested that the government’s contribution to the welfare of the most vulnerable had earned it “broad foundations” of support at the base of Italian society.93

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89 “Il Duce Explains New Chamber.”
92 “Intervista Mc Kormick,” July 15, 1926; Sotto-fascicolo; “1926 Anna O’Hare Mc. Cormick”; Fascicolo “interveste,” Busta 752; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. Following an audience with Mussolini in 1926, McCormick wrote to the Prime Minister. She him asked whether he would say that the corporate state was “more representative of all the people” than a democracy. The regime’s opaque answer was as follows: “I answer by recalling a phrase of the proclamation issued by me on the day when the syndical regulations were approved: ‘Only today a people laboring in the various activities and categories in the Fascist State rises up to be the active and conscious agent of its own destiny.’” McCormick, “Il Duce Pictures the New State.” In the final article, published in the *Times*, McCormick’s question stood out much more than Mussolini’s response.
93 McCormick, “Mussolini of the Year IX.”
This presumed support for the corporate state included the fifty percent of Italians ineligible to vote in periodic national referendums—women.\textsuperscript{94} Since the start of the decade, McCormick had suggested that fascism appealed to women because it protected their roles as mothers.\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Il Progresso} identified various manifestations of the regime’s pro-natal policy, including the National Organization for Maternity and Childhood, which provided healthcare to infants and mothers, taxes on bachelors, subsidies for large families, and stringent anti-pornography laws.\textsuperscript{96} Naturally, the newspaper avoided any implication that the fascist pro-natalism might be more concerned with military planning than women’s welfare. Instead, it suggested that the “ethical state” had entered workplaces, homes, and nurseries, and that, with every encroachment, Italians loved it a little bit more.

These observers argued that fascism’s appeal outside the realm of formal politics was most evident among the youth of Italy. They asserted that young women and men flocked into a movement that inspired them as political liberalism, the organized left, or the Church could not.\textsuperscript{97} Although the Lateran Accords ushered in a broad peace between Church and State, the late 1920s were also years of increased tension between the two institutions with respect to Italian youth. Herbert Schneider argued that the

\textsuperscript{94} As an observer of the fascist movement at the beginning of the 1920s, McCormick had commented on the participation of women in public manifestations, including the march on Rome. For participation, see: McCormick, “The Revolt of Youth.” For March on Rome, see: McCormick, “Italy and Bolshevism.”

\textsuperscript{95} McCormick, “The Old Woman in the New Italy.” Women, she wrote, appreciated fascism because it promised to restore traditions, uphold the family, and protect the home. “Intervista Mc Kormick,” Sotto-fascicolo “1926 Anna O’Hare Mc. Cormick”; Fascicolo “interveste”; Busta 752; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. McCormick asked “What are the ideas of H.E. on divorce?” to which the regime sent this response: “Since fascism is based on ideas of discipline and hierarchy I am therefore against divorce. Divorce resolves not a single problem…in a civilization like ours. If we consider divorce from the social point of view, and marriage as an element of coordination and order of society, one sees that divorce is a socially anti-disciplinary concept and that hierarchically we need to defend at the base of society that organic familial structure, which most traditionalist sociologists consider to be the basic and essential cell of an ordered and advancing [in Italian \textit{progredienti}] society.” Mussolini himself contributed to this response, as evidenced by his handwritten additions and edits. This response appeared word for word in “Il Duce Pictures the New State,” although McCormick (mis)translated “\textit{progredienti}” as “progressive” (rather than “advancing” or “progressing”), which fit her conception of the fascist state as enabling social justice.


\textsuperscript{97} Child, \textit{Diplomat Looks at Europe}, 166, 178; also published as Child, “The Making of Mussolini,” and Child, “Open the Gates”; McCormick, “Swashbuckling Mussolini.” Child and McCormick both used gendered language (and metaphors of sexual impotence) to convey the lack of appeal of liberalism and the left to young Italian men in the 1920s. For example, Child described the liberal governments as “flabby”; McCormick described the “slackness” of Italy, prior to Fascism.
The fascist state was beating the Catholic church on its own territory, by offering religious-like rituals in a “more vigorous and more spectacular” format.98

News stories published in Il Progresso supported the idea that fascism had a magnetic appeal for youth. The newspaper described how the fascists offered a new team sport, volata, as a homegrown substitute for soccer.99 Fifty thousand Italians gathered to watch the first volata game in 1929, and left the stadium singing the fascist anthem “Giovinezza” (youth), the newspaper reported.100 Sympathetic Americans suggested that fascism attracted young Italians by offering more emotional stimulation than a standard political party, a more relevant form of spiritual sustenance than the ministrations of the Church, and as much excitement as a sports team.101 It seemed like an unbeatable combination.102

Unlike politics in the United States, politics in Italy appeared to capture emotional currents that would otherwise be frittered away on frivolities, these observers implied. Schneider argued that the fascists had succeeded in insulating government policies from public interference, even as they encouraged the people to express their wholehearted support for fascist politics.103 Photographs in Il Progresso bore out this observation. In dark rooms, far from the hubbub of the streets, serious men went to work crafting policies and passing legislation.104 Meanwhile, on brightly lit piazze, passionate crowds,

98 Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 219, 223-24.
99 “‘La Volata’ un Nuovo Sport Italiano Ideato da A. Turati,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, December 26, 1928. Augusto Turati was the Secretary of the Fascist Party.
101 For another example, of the movement’s impact on youth, see: “Ventimila Ragazzi in Rivista a Roma,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, December 16, 1929. This article described a parade of twenty thousand young fascists, in the park of the Villa Borghese, watched by an enormous crowd.
102 Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 223. Schneider chose his words carefully when he described the effects of fascism on Italian youth. He wrote that fascism was stimulating young peoples’ “political . . . feelings,” rather than their “political . . . ideas.” Schneider made this very deliberate distinction between the political “feelings” and “ideas” of the masses, because he believed that the former were of vital interest to a modern state, while the latter were, just as Walter Lippmann argued, rather beside the point. Lippmann, Public Opinion, 31. Lippmann wrote that the idea that “each of us must acquire a competent opinion about all public affairs” was an “intolerable and unworkable fiction.”
103 See also Schneider and Clough, Making Fascists, 201. “Moral enthusiasm on the one hand and technical competence on the other—this is an ancient and familiar philosophy” which the regime had “applied through modern institutions.” Child, Writing on the Wall, 213, 271. Child argued that the referendum “enlisted” the “political will of the people,” while the parliament was a bastion of administrative efficiency. McCormick, “Il Duce Pictures the New State.” McCormick wrote that the corporate state represented Italians’ “interests” rather than their “opinions.”
104 “S.E. Mussolini Insedia il Nuovo Presidente del Consiglio di Stato, S.E, il Prof. Santi Romano,” photograph, and “Il Senato Italiano Chiude Labori della XXVII Legislatura . . . ,” photograph. Both in Il Progresso Italo-Americano,
stretching out into infinity, expressed their approval of the fascist state. Every day was like an election day in Italy, the newspaper suggested. And every day, from the bottom of their hearts, the people shouted “Yes!”

There was little truth in fascist sympathizers’ claim that, in recalibrating political participation, the corporate state met the capacities and needs of modern men and women. Italian men’s participation in the 1929 plebiscite was not a spontaneous demonstration of enthusiasm for a new kind of politics. As antifascist émigrés argued at the time, many men were forced to vote and others arrived at the polls to find their ballots already cast. The difference in the appearance of ballots—the “Si” ticket emblazoned with the tricolore, the “No” ticket plain—undercut secrecy at the polls. Brave, indeed, were the tiny fraction of Italian men who registered their disapproval of the regime by casting a “No” vote in 1929. Most Italians felt that they had no freedom to exercise the “veto power,” which Child claimed the election granted them. 8.4 million yes votes in Italy’s plebiscite masked a range of opinions about fascism, from approval, to ambivalence, to outright opposition, to downright fear.


107 “Raccolta Ufficiale delle Leggi e dei Decreti del Regno d’Italia,” Article 57 and Article 72, 6090, 6098. This law stipulated the different appearances of the “yes” and “no” ballots. Both ballots were plain when folded and sealed. The voter ostensibly voted in secret, but had to leave his discarded ballot in an urn in the booth. He then had to bring his chosen ballot to a fascist official, who would “scrutinize” the ballot to “ensure” that it had been sealed. The official then placed the chosen ballot in a second urn. The paper trail of discarded votes and official scrutiny gave Italians the distinct impression that their vote was not secret.

108 Child, Writing on the Wall, 264; Schneider, Making the Fascist State, 203. Schneider was more realistic than Child. In theory, he noted, the law provided for the Italian people to register their disapproval of the parliament. In practice, he accepted, chaos and violence could flow from any “No” vote. But Schneider dismissed such considerations; “why pursue further such purely speculative eventualities,” he asked? He failed to acknowledge that this was precisely the kind of speculation that any Italian would pursue before exercising the vote. The possibility of reprisals made Italians far less willing to vote “No.”

109 “Foe to Fascism Airs His Views,” Los Angeles Times. Gaetano Salvemini estimated that under free conditions, six in every ten Italians would have voted against the regime, one would have voted in favor, and three would have stayed at home. Critical comments about the plebiscite, such as this, were rare in American newspapers. Arnoldo Cortesi, “99 of Every 100 Voted for Fascism,” New York Times, March 26, 1929. Arnoldo Cortesi’s coverage in the Times ensured a much more favorable impression. Cortesi claimed that the election process was largely fair: he conceded that the returns “exaggerated” the popularity of the government, but imagined that they were by and large correct in demonstrating Italians’ high levels of satisfaction with their regime. “Italy’s Unique Election,”
Just as a “yes” vote in the referendum was not necessarily an expression of approval of the regime, the Italians who turned out for youth activities, mass meetings, or volata games felt a variety of sentiments toward the fascist state, including apathy and opposition, shrewdly camouflaged as consent. American fascist sympathizers willfully ignored the complex texture of grassroots responses to fascism. They also misrepresented the implications of fascism for the poorest and most vulnerable Italians. A state bent on militarization and wars of aggression, fascist Italy was never tending toward social justice.

There was little that was ethical about the so-called ethical state.

**Homegrown Solutions**

In the late 1920s American fascist sympathizers insisted that the corporate state was fascism’s most significant innovation. For once, Herbert Schneider expressed no ambiguity of authorial voice. It was a “simple fact,” he wrote in 1928, that Italy’s entire political and economic system was “being fused into the corporate state.” McCormick similarly argued in 1928 that fascism was corporatism. Fascist sympathizers believed in their dreams because Italy’s apparent successes offered hope for the United States.

If Italy had created a new form of government, which both ran and had a soul, then the United States could do the same, they suggested. These observers did not argue that the Italian version of a corporate state should be grafted directly on to the United States in the 1920s. In this, as in most things,
they were faithful to the position of the regime itself: anxious to remain on good terms with the American government in the 1920s, Mussolini denied that fascism was “for export” to the United States.\footnote{Marcus Duffield, “Mussolini’s American Empire,” \textit{Harpers}, November 1929. In late 1929, \textit{Harpers} published an investigative report on Mussolini’s support for grassroots fascist organizations in the United States. Alan Cassels, “Fascism for Export: Italy and the United States in the Twenties,” \textit{American Historical Review} 69, no. 3 (April 1964): 707–12; Diggins, \textit{Mussolini and Fascism}, 89-94. Although a number of Duffield’s claims were exaggerated, his basic observation that the fascist regime provided active support to Italian American sympathizers through the Fascist League of North America was correct. Duffield’s article caused a stir on Capitol Hill, prompting the Italian government to disband the League. “Italy’s Ambassador Speaks,” \textit{Il Progresso Italico-Americano}, December 1, 1929; “Amb. De Martino and Antifascist Propaganda,” \textit{Il Progresso Italico-Americano}, December 1, 1929. Echoing the Italian government, \textit{Il Progresso} vigorously denied that the regime had any interest in expanding fascism beyond Italy’s borders.}

For fascist sympathizers, the corporate state functioned as inspiration, rather than blueprint, for possible reforms in the United States. They observed that in the late 1920s Italy was the only country in the world with an “economic parliament” that had replaced the existing chamber of representatives entirely. But other European countries, too, seemed to be providing political representation for economic interests. McCormick and Child noted that Czechoslovakia, Germany, Hungary and Rumania had created institutions to grant economic groups a role in law-making, although neither investigated how these institutions worked (in practice, they had little influence on policymaking).\footnote{McCormick, “Light on the Elusive Lobbyist”; Child, \textit{Writing on the Wall}, 215. Charles S. Maier, “Between Taylorism and Technocracy: European Ideologies and the Vision of Industrial Productivity in the 1920s,” \textit{Journal of Contemporary History} 5, no. 2 (1970): 27-61. In Germany’s case, a council on economic affairs—the \textit{Reichswirtschaftsrat}—was composed of representatives of employees, employers and public bodies. Its role was to advise parliament on legislation. According to Maier, it “rarely progressed beyond stalemate and paralysis.” Created in 1921, it only “functioned actively” until 1923, thereafter, its work was “restricted,” until its formal dissolution, by Hitler, in 1933. Karl Lowenstein, “Occupational Representation and the Idea of an Economic Parliament,” \textit{Social Science} 12, no. 4 (October 1937): 424-25. In Czechoslovakia, an advisory board consulted the government on economic policy and legislation. According to Lowenstein, this body was an arm of the central government, which in no way complied with the “theoretical premises of the idea of functional representation.” In Hungary and Rumania, representatives of the professions were incorporated into the upper houses of the existing parliament. Making up only a small proportion of their chambers, they were “hardly in a position to influence parliament.”} Child observed that Britons, too, were interested in a parallel “‘Parliament of Human Life and Labor,’” which would address economic and social problems associated with modernity.\footnote{Child, \textit{Writing on the Wall}, 174, 183. Samuel George Hobson, \textit{National Guilds: An Inquiry into the Wage System and the Way Out} (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914), 256-57, 263; Winston S. Churchill, \textit{Parliamentary Government and the Economic Problem} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 16; Geoffrey Foote, \textit{The Labour Party’s Political Thought: A History} (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 1997), 108-9, 117, 170. In Britain, corporate ideas were only applicable to the Italian people or do you think that Italy is the pioneer of a revolution which, due to the necessities of modern industrial civilization, should be extended to other countries?” In response, the regime replied: “The new organization is perfectly Italian and perfectly fascist. But without doubt the fascist experiment has a character that brings with it international values. Others should follow developments of this new state with profound interest.”}
By implication, an equivalent arrangement in the United States could be a uniquely American affair: an expression of indigenous customs and institutions. In 1929, McCormick’s suggested starting point was that most American of institutions: the political lobby. McCormick argued that ordinary citizens detested lobbyists for good reasons: without formal status, they had a disproportionate and clandestine influence over legislators. But if lobbyists’ position as a de facto “supplementary government” were formalized, she believed that their expertise could be harnessed for the good of society. An American “economic parliament,” would be “no more than an official assembly” of the lobbies that already assembled in Washington, DC, she asserted, suggesting that American democracy would be better served if it were so.

Richard Washburn Child argued that Americans required a form of government that offered “less talk” and “more administration” than their present democracy. He claimed that a corporate parliament would help the United States become a leaner, more efficient machine. Invoking a rose-tinted memory of the United States’ War Industries Board (WIB) of 1917 to 1918 (which was neither very efficient nor first associated with guild socialists. For instance, Hobson envisaged a “Guild Congress,” which would deal with “industrial problems,” while parliament would manage “affairs of State.” Although the guild socialists’ heyday was the immediate post-war period, their calls for “functional” assemblies persisted through the 1920s and gained renewed energy during the depression. Churchill was among those who called for an “economic sub-parliament” to confront industrial and financial problems. By this time, Oswald Mosely too suggested corporate arrangements as a solution to Britain’s problems, but in contrast to other Britons’ conceptions, Mosely’s ideas were modelled directly on the Italian corporate state.

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118 Oliver McKee, Jr., “Lobbying for Good or Evil,” North American Review 227, no. 3 (March 1929): 343-52. McCormick, “Light on the Elusive Lobbyist.” Echoing arguments presented in an article published in the North American Review that spring, McCormick suggested that lobbies presented both a threat and opportunity for American democracy. As an adverse force, they could outwit congressmen, undermine the public interest, and create additional layers of elitism and secrecy in government. But as a constructive influence, they could provide sectoral expertise, promote necessary legislation, and, by representing interest groups, widen the base of democracy.

119 Pendleton, Group Representation Before Congress, 9-10. Herring E. Pendleton, “Legalized Lobbying in Europe,” Current History 31, no. 5 (February 1930): 947. Schneider and Clough, Making Fascists, 18. Like McCormick, Pendleton compared American lobbies to European economic parliaments. Conversely, Schneider and Clough vastly overstated the influence of the confederations in the Italian corporate system, by arguing that they had been empowered to function like American political lobbies. They wrote that the confederations “formulate[d] the needs and interests” of their members “to present them to the government for consideration. Thus they form[ed] powerful, centralized lobbies through which most of the legislative suggestions come.”

120 McCormick, “Light on the Elusive Lobbyist.” McCormick’s piece ended with a note of pessimism. She doubted that Americans would be willing to innovate an entirely new institution of government in the foreseeable future. “[A]s a people we are slower to change our institutions than our habits,” she wrote.

121 Child, Writing on the Wall, 154, 268.

122 Child, Writing on the Wall, 271. Although he refrained from specifying the precise form for such an institution, Child suggested that it ought to be far smaller than Italy’s chamber of four hundred men. The number of representatives in a well-functioning corporate parliament would be “few in number,” he wrote.
very popular) Child implied that contemporary political conditions constituted a peace-time emergency. In these circumstances, he maintained, Americans would welcome a government that, like the WIB, prioritized administrative efficiency over democratic process. Child suggested that routine elections, too, could be dispensed with in a remodeled American state. He believed that, just like modern Italians, modern Americans wanted only the “occasional opportunity to say Yes or No to a broad policy,” and the chance to veto their government if it overstepped its legitimate (and expansive) authority. Americans, he argued, would welcome a relief from the “fol-de-rol” of frequent elections.

American fascist sympathizers suggested that these reforms would go some way to restoring Americans’ faith in their democracy. But contributors to Il Progresso and Anne O’Hare McCormick suggested that even more could be done to endear the government to the people. In contrast to Child, who in 1929 maintained that an effective “new machine” would be rooted in traditions of small government, these other observers articulated a vision of a more expansive state. Even before the onset of the depression, Edward Corsi, the editor of Il Progresso’s English section, argued that Herbert Hoover’s conception of “American individualism” made little sense in a modern era, in which man was a “mere atom in a . . . giant structure.” Corsi implied that the President needed to accept a greater role for the federal government in guiding Americans through their increasingly connected, and unstable, world.

McCormick, too, argued that the right government for Americans in the late 1920s was one that would intervene, with unprecedented vigor, to even out social inequalities and sectoral discrepancies: a “humanizing” government that was ready to alleviate the “uncertainty” and “precariousness” that beset

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123 For reference to war government, see: Child, Writing on the Wall, 264. For the War Industries Board, see: Robert D. Cuff, The War Industries Board: Business-Government Relations During World War I (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Kennedy, Over Here, 126-36.
124 Child, Writing on the Wall, 195, 151, 264.
125 Child, Writing on the Wall, 264.
126 Child, Writing on the Wall, 183. Referring to the British example, Child quoted a Labour leader who said that a “Parliament of Human Life and Labor,” would be “infinitely more important” to “human beings” than the Houses of Commons and Lords. As discussed, Britain often functioned as a point of close comparison with the United States for Child.
entire social groups in an era of infamous plenty.\textsuperscript{128} Such a government was not unlike the Italian “ethical state,” as McCormick imagined it: tending toward the political left, it would care for its citizens, earning their love. Without a government that cared for them, McCormick implied that Americans would continue to express their joy, and their pain, in other realms. They would crowd around the radio, to listen, blow-by-blow, as one boxer knocked another to the floor.\textsuperscript{129} They would search for satisfaction in superficial distractions, and, since their spirits would be left wanting, they would continue their restless search.

**Realities and Dreams**

Fascist sympathizers’ accounts of the destruction of democracy and creation of the corporate state in Italy presented a terribly warped version of reality. These observers exaggerated a lot: the role of experts in law making; the representativeness of the corporate parliament; and the enthusiasm that the Italian people felt toward their state. They ignored even more: antifascists’ courage in protesting; systematic intimidation and state-sponsored violence; regressive economic outcomes, which benefited businessmen and landowners at the expense of workers and farmers; and countless Italians’ silent opposition to their own regime. Fascist sympathizers exaggerated and ignored so as to tell a story, which they believed was relevant to Americans in the late 1920s. It was the story of one broken-down machine that could not be fixed. And it was the story of a successful effort to create another kind of machine altogether: a machine that both worked, and moved women and men, old and young, in body, mind, and soul.

Fascist sympathizers proposed changes to American institutions of government, which would, in McCormick’s words, “translate democratic formulas into new forms,” suitable for the modern era.\textsuperscript{130} As in the Italy of their imagination, these reforms called for greater expertise in policymaking, simpler mechanisms for participation in formal politics, and a more integrated relationship between citizens and their state.

\textsuperscript{128} McCormick, “America at Last Airs Its Mind”; McCormick, “Uncertain, the Farmer Waits.”
\textsuperscript{129} McCormick, “Now We All Debate the Issues.”
\textsuperscript{130} McCormick, “Light on the Elusive Lobbyist.”
The inherent problems in such suggestions were manifold. Even Walter Lippmann acknowledged that an expanded role for experts in government risked adding a self-serving bureaucracy, without gaining much in efficiency at all.\textsuperscript{131} McCormick’s imagined parliament of lobbyists would have been to the advantage of big businesses, whose existing influence on legislation she so lamented. Child’s suggestion that ordinary people were politically equipped to vote in referenda on broad policy issues was questionable, to say the least. Finally, the notion that any, or all of these reforms combined, would result in policies that promoted the common good was illusory.\textsuperscript{132} These observers differed among themselves about what the common good looked like in the late 1920s. Was the common good best served by state-sponsored farm relief or a hands-off approach, by a big government or a small one? Who would decide when the opinions of various experts, and the preferences of various interest groups, collided? If fascist sympathizers’ suggestions for the United States tended anywhere, it was toward repression and autocracy, not “solidarity” and social justice.\textsuperscript{133}

American fascist sympathizers were no more attuned to the flaws in their proposed reforms for their own democracy than they were to political repression and social inequalities within the fascist state. The corporate state, which these observers constructed, was a dream machine in more than one sense of the phrase. In their eyes, it was an ideal instrument for guiding Italians through the perils of modernity—as close to perfection as a manmade institution could get. It was also a mechanism to transport their readers into another world, which seemed better managed and more spiritually satisfying than their own. But to the historian, the dream machine connotes something else: a manipulated reality that tells us more about the dreamers than it does about the machine.

\textsuperscript{131} Lippmann, \textit{Public Opinion}, 268.
\textsuperscript{132} Lippmann, \textit{Public Opinion}, 202-13. Lippmann discarded the possibility of corporate representation (in the form of guild socialism) as a solution to democracy’s problems, mainly because he recognized that it would be impossible to reconcile the interests of various groups to arrive at the “common interest.”
\textsuperscript{133} Child, \textit{Writing on the Wall}, 215, 268.
Figure 9. The Fascist Elite in Action, 1929
Chapter IV. Man as the Measure of All Things: Sympathizing with Fascism in the Early Depression Years

In the fall of 1933, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* carried a short story about a drive that Mussolini took through the Piedmont countryside. As he motored over the hills, Mussolini brought his car to a halt. He had seen a group of peasant women on the side of the road near the village of Niella Belbo. He got out of his car, stood with the women and asked them simple questions. How many children did they have? Did they work? Before Mussolini left, his aide gave each woman some money. He did not travel far before he stopped his car once more, this time at the village of Mombarcaro. Above the sound of his motor, he had heard an old man’s request for help with an application for a veteran’s pension. Mussolini asked the man for details. He promised that he would find out what had happened to the application and that he would write to the veteran to let him know. He kept his promise. Twice more that day, as Mussolini sped through the countryside, he stopped when he saw ordinary people in need, to listen to them, to ask them direct questions, and to offer them practical help.¹

This story was consistent with many of the images of Italy and Mussolini produced by American sympathizers with fascism during the depression years. It was in part a caricature of Italy as a country of villages, made up of small communities working the land. Places, however small, had names and local identities. Niella Belbo and Mombarcaro were not wealthy, but their inhabitants were knit together. In other words, economic capital was low while social capital was high. This story was also an allegory of Mussolini’s relationship with technology and with his people. Driving through the countryside, he was at ease with modern machinery and with speed. He used his car to make human connections, and to reach remote villages untouched by previous Italian governments. He was in control of the pace of his machine, and could slow down, even to a stop, at will. He heard a single plaintiff voice, asking for a pension, above the engine’s roar. In government of one man, he provided a humane, responsive and effective regime, which ensured that no peasant went hungry, that no pension went unpaid.

¹ Thomas B. Morgan, “Mussolini Becomes Champion of Poor Who Confide Their Troubles to Him,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, October 22, 1933. Morgan was head of the United Press office in Rome. *Il Progresso* frequently picked up his complimentary articles on fascist Italy.
During the depression years, American fascist sympathizers fashioned images of Italy and Mussolini to suggest the kind of country that wanted the United States to be, and the kind of leader they wanted the United States to have. Already deeply skeptical about American modernity, these observers echoed widespread interpretations of the depression as a product of machine-made capitalism, exacerbated by a government that had fetishized technology at the expense of human beings. A silver lining of the crisis, they believed, was that it forced a recalibration of the United States, away from bigness, mass-production, and the metropolis, toward simplicity, the home, and the countryside. In Roosevelt, fascist sympathizers saw a leader who, like Mussolini, understood ordinary people and wanted, above anything, to help them. By relaying the apparent successes of fascist policies of ruralization and work creation, American sympathizers argued that the New Deal could succeed in making man, rather than machines, once more the measure of all things.

The Machine-Made Crisis

As the United States sank into a depression in 1930, all Americans struggled to understand the paradox of poverty in a land of plenty. Like many of their fellow countrymen, fascist sympathizers understood the causes of the depression as symptomatic of American modernity, which they deemed to be increasingly mechanical, impersonal, and anonymous. Machines, in both their literal and metaphorical manifestations, figured prominently in their explanations of the crisis.

Echoing ideas that were a hallmark (although by no means the unique preserve) of fascist economics, American sympathizers argued that mechanical production was the principal cause of the depression. In 1930, *Il Progresso* described Mussolini’s understanding of the depression as “wise.” The Italian Prime Minister argued that the American system had failed because machines made goods while humans bought them; consumers could not keep up with the pace set by mechanical producers. Contributors to *Il Progresso* observed that machines created problems of unemployment as well as surplus production. *Il Progresso’s* director, Italo Carlo Falbo, argued that mechanical production had

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2 For this theory as a hallmark for fascist economics, see: Ralph Grimaldi, “New Deal Must Follow Fascist Evolution if it is to Survive, Dr. Grimaldi Asserts,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, May 11, 1934.

dispaced “thousands of human hands.” As the unemployment crisis worsened, Generoso Pope insisted on this argument:

Each mechanical invention liberates the worker from difficult tasks. Each new device, by boosting production, assures unarguable benefits to industry. But, by the same token, new machines diminish the contribution of manual labor to a minimum and throw thousands of people by the wayside.

All of these observations juxtaposed men and machines, warm skin and cold metal. All of these observations suggested that machines, although made by men, had outpaced their creators. McCormick encapsulated these arguments in a piece she wrote for the Times in the spring of 1930. Americans were being overpowered by the machines they had themselves invented, she wrote. The Times provided an illustration to underscore her arguments. In the cartoon, Uncle Sam stood at the base of a gigantic complex of machinery, his palms raised upward in a gesture of bemusement. Mounted on a pedestal of cogs and wheels, a robot, twice Sam’s height and four times his heft, sputtered on, its blank face registering none of the damage it had wrought.

Anne O’Hare McCormick implied that the “machine” represented not only mechanical production but also a “complex” of distant forces that governed the modern economy: the stock market; corporations; chain stores. To an unprecedented degree, the fate of the average American was dictated by

4 I. C. Falbo, “Problemi Del Lavoro,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, October 9, 1930.
6 See also: Glaucus, “Per Rimettere in Azione il Gigantesco Ingrangaggio Industriale degli S. U.,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, August 20, 1933. Glaucus used similar language, writing that machines had “paralyzed the arms of human laborers.”
7 McCormick, “A Year of the Hoover Method.”
9 McCormick, “The Great Dam of Controversy.” In this article on Mussel Shoals, McCormick reflected more broadly on an “always widening and at the same time always concentrating complex of economic forces.” See also: Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Hunting the Elusive Paramount Issues,” New York Times, March 22, 1931. McCormick described the “almost irresistible movement . . . of capitalism,” which increasingly “dictate[d] the terms on which” Americans lived.
these “impersonal” forces, she argued: when the machine rattled, every home in the country shook.\textsuperscript{10}

McCormick suggested that impassive groups of unemployed men, who crouched in the streets and parks of many American cities, were an inevitable outcome of this system.\textsuperscript{11} As Americans had lost control of their own economic fates, they had lost their identity as “self-determinate individual[s].”\textsuperscript{12} The end point of this process seemed to be precisely the spectacle she witnessed in the fall of 1932: hundreds of unemployed and homeless men huddled together in a desolate park in Detroit, waiting.\textsuperscript{13}

McCormick did not blame the victims of the depression for their misfortune; by definition, she saw the problems as too big for ordinary Americans to control. Instead, McCormick blamed the system, identifying issues of distance, dissonance, and passivity both within and far beyond the economic realm. For instance, in the winter of 1931 and the spring of 1932, she wrote two series for the \textit{New York Times} on Hollywood and the radio, respectively. McCormick conceived of neither series as an opportunity to provide her readers with light relief from their economic travails. Images of diminutive men eclipsed by machines dominated these pieces.\textsuperscript{14} She described actors and radio presenters as emotionally and physically removed from their audiences and argued that passive consumption habits undermined individual autonomy.\textsuperscript{15} Lest her readers miss the meaning of these observations, McCormick described the radio as a “perfect example of the way we do things” and Hollywood as a metaphor for “the whole modern show.”\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{13} McCormick, “A New Americanism Is Emerging.”


Il Progresso also portrayed the depression as an outgrowth of the ills of modernity. With the onset of the crisis, the New York-based newspaper published more vociferous critiques of urban America. Much as McCormick portrayed machines as man-made inventions that overwhelmed man, in 1930 Franco Ciarlantini (a fascist propagandist and member of the Italian parliament) described New York’s skyscrapers as “monuments to business” that dominated the “human anthills” they had been built to serve. “Vertiginous New York” diminished people to “moving shadow[s],” wrote Ciarlantini.\(^\text{17}\) Similarly, Italian American contributors to Il Progresso described the city as “cold” and unresponsive: an “empire of stone” that crushed human beings “with the inexorability of a necropolis.”\(^\text{18}\) These observers implied that starving wretches on the Bowery—which one writer described as a “boulevard of beaten men”—were the products of a city that had cared more about making money than building community, and had prioritized materiality over humanity.\(^\text{19}\)

Fascist sympathizers were not alone in their criticisms of a machine-made economy and urban culture in the early depression years. They joined a chorus of observers who searched for symptoms of society’s ills and pointed their fingers either directly or indirectly at machines. For instance, in 1933, a research committee sponsored by the Hoover administration found that mechanical production outpaced consumer demand and displaced labor, contributing to excess production and unemployment.\(^\text{20}\)

Intellectuals, including Walter Lippmann, John Dewey, and Lewis Mumford, argued that problems

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\(^\text{20}\) President’s Research Committee on Social Trends, Recent Social Trends in the United States; Report of the President’s Research Committee on Social Trends (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1933), xiii, also 144-51, 271, 283, 310. See also: David M. Kennedy, Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 21-24.
associated with mass production permeated American culture: using mass culture as a “mode of escape,” humans had become “more passive and mechanical,” in Mumford’s words. Meanwhile, mass culture itself was often a vehicle to criticize various manifestations of machine-made modernity. As noted by one cultural historian, the popular comic strip, *The Gumps*, “rejected the materialism and get-rich-quick ethos that many saw as a cause of the Depression,” while *Superman* and *Amos ‘n’ Andy* portrayed cities as bleak, corrupt, and degenerate. In summary, American fascist sympathizers shared many of their fellow countrymen’s ideas about what was wrong with the United States in the 1930s. They only parted ways in their argument that fascist Italy, under Mussolini, provided signposts on the road to recovery.

**Like Old Times**

In the pre-crisis years, the editors of *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* tended to downplay Italy’s poverty; the nation’s economic weakness was a source of shame, which fed nativist stereotypes of Italian immigrants as an underclass. But following the crash, *Il Progresso* began to boast about the simplicity of life in Italy. The country, it argued, was surviving the depression in part because Italians were uncorrupted by materialism and unaccustomed to a now worthless “American standard.” Herbert Schneider echoed this analysis: the depression had of course created “hardships” for Italians, as it had for

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21 Anna Siomopoulos, “Entertaining Ethics: Technology, Mass Culture and American Intellectuals of the 1930s,” *Film History* 11, no. 1 (1999): 45-54. Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1934), 315-16. Mumford wrote of his contemporaries: “Too dull to think, people might read: too tired to read, they might look at the moving pictures: unable to visit the picture theater they might turn on the radio: in any case, they might avoid the call to action: surrogate lovers, surrogate heroes and heroines, surrogate wealth filled their debilitated and impoverished lives and carried the perfume of unreality into their dwellings. And as the machine itself became, as it were, more active and human, reproducing the organic properties of eye and ear, the human beings who employed the machine as a mode of escape have tended to become more passive and mechanical. Unsure of their own voices, unable to hold a tune. . . . Even such autonomy as the poorest drudge once had, left like Cinderella to her dreams of Prince Charming when her sisters went off to the ball, is gone in this mechanical environment: whatever compensations her present-day counterpart may have, it must come through the machine.”


127
almost every person in the global economy. But, in Schneider’s view, Italians’ suffering was not “excessive.” A people who lived modestly had much less far to fall in the depression.25

Summarily excluding Italy’s industrial north as atypical, both Schneider and McCormick suggested that the country could best be understood by Tuscany. Tuscany, wrote Schneider, was “Italia centrale in more ways than one”; its landscape of bustling market towns connected to their rural surrounds typical of much of the peninsula.26 In Florence, as in other provincial towns, the “simple economic processes,” which had defined Italian life for centuries, persisted.27 McCormick observed that, in the market place, country folk and town folk met, traded, and talked. The small-scale nature of these economies supported constant contact between one human being and another, and between human beings and the products of their labor. The absence of chain and department stores meant that in Florence, as elsewhere in Italy, you bought each component of your supper from a different market stall or shop. Human encounters were woven into the fabric of every exchange and with each purchase you touched, and appreciated, the labor of another.28

McCormick was at pains to point out that Italy was not frozen in time. For instance, she noted that Florence had plentiful modern amenities, from “dial telephones” to “garbage reduction.” But although they made life more convenient, mechanical devices did not dominate the scenery or society. Florence remained a city of craftsmen and traders, symbiotically linked to the small farmers who lived in the hinterlands. Italy, McCormick wrote,

suggests answers to most of the questions asked since the beginning of the transition to the machine age and emphasized by the present crisis of mass production. Here are a people living on a much lower material level than Americans. . . . But they have more enjoyment in their work. They perform it without the strain imposed on men by the inhuman speeds of the machine, and they seem to get more amusement out of their simpler play.

25 Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 86.
26 Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 6.
27 Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 15-16.
28 McCormick, “The Average Italian Is Still Himself.”
If the average Italian was “less depressed by depression,” it was because he had a greater sense of control over his daily life than the average American.\(^2^9\)

These observers noted with approval that the depression had forced Americans to adopt some of the habits, and the values, that came so readily to Italians. Cash poor, many had reverted to growing their own food and preserving the surplus. Americans touched once more the product of their labors. A system of barter and exchange put them in contact with their neighbors. And, in the absence of much government assistance, they formed community drives to help those most in need. The atmosphere in these local voluntary efforts, noted McCormick, was invariably “cheerful, even jolly.” Americans were enjoying human connections.\(^3^0\)

An illustration that accompanied one of Richard Washburn Child’s contributions to the *Saturday Evening Post* summed up the mood of Middle America: a sense of relief that, after a decade of lurid consumption and ruthless pursuit of the modern, its children had finally returned home. In this illustration, two fashionable young women sat in the parlor; one played the piano, the other reintroduced herself to Grandpa. A young man enjoyed the simple pleasures of a book. The family dog barked. It was disturbed, perhaps, by the strangers in its midst. But Ma and Pa were unable to suppress their pleasure that all was, once more, “like old times.”\(^3^1\)

*Il Progresso* suggested that Italian Americans could help guide their fellow Americans back toward a more satisfying life. In the early depression years, the humbleness of immigrants was a source of pride for contributors to the newspaper. In the fall of 1930, Giacomo Di Martino, the Italian Ambassador to the United States, suggested that Americans could find the simplicity they craved among the Italian communities in their midst. The Italian street vendor, pushing his cart of fruit and vegetables, provided “a

\(^2^9\) McCormick, “The Average Italian Is Still Himself.”


\(^3^1\) Herbert Johnson, “The Silver Lining—Families Are Getting Acquainted Again,” illustration, in Richard Washburn Child, “Unmasking Events,” *Saturday Evening Post*, July 16, 1932. This illustration accompanied Child’s final non-fiction contribution to the *Post*. Cohn, *Creating America*, 13-14, 181-82, 218, 228-9 234-5, 243-6. While Horace Lorimer, the *Post*’s editor, was receptive to favorable journalism on Mussolini, he was a staunch opponent of Roosevelt’s New Deal, which Child backed in 1933.
note of individualism on the flat even level of standardization,” Di Martino wrote.\textsuperscript{32} An editorial in the same issue emphasized Generoso Pope’s pride in the “homely” qualities that the Italian people had brought with them to the United States.\textsuperscript{33} These observations suggested that, when they ostracized or excluded Italians, native-born Americans harmed only themselves. Even more liberally-minded Americans, who stressed Italians’ ability to assimilate to the “American system,” risked depriving themselves of an important resource: a people who instinctively knew the value of simple things, as Americans searched for a way to survive the leanest of times.\textsuperscript{34}

**The Search for a Leader**

If Americans were fumbling toward a new equilibrium in the early depression years, it was in spite of, rather than because of, their political leaders. McCormick diagnosed a disconnect in government between politicians and their constituents, similar to the separation she saw in mass culture between actors and their audience. Congressmen continued to perform. They debated an entertainment fund for diplomats, the vote over Philippines independence, the ins and outs of wet versus dry. In their performance, they showed no understanding of the “human experience,” the travails of ordinary Americans.\textsuperscript{35} Delegates attended their gaudy conventions in Chicago in the summer of 1932 even as the desperate, the jobless, and the hungry stood silently in a nearby park.\textsuperscript{36} They were not unlike screen actors, these congressmen, so distant from ordinary Americans that they felt none of the satisfactions of a

\textsuperscript{32}“H. E. Ambassador De Martino Urges Italo-Americans Here to Heed United States Ideals,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, November 9, 1930.

\textsuperscript{33}“Our Fiftieth Anniversary,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, November 9, 1930. See also, Generoso Pope, “Il Lavoro Italiano,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, March 18, 1934. The rising stock of the “average man” in American culture enabled Pope to express a new-found pride in Italian Americans’ contributions to the US, not just as lawyers, bankers and businessmen (the newspaper’s refrain from 1928 to 1929), but as “bakers, dressmakers, tailors, butchers, carpenters, coalmen, shoemakers, bricklayers, decorators, cigarette sellers, ice sellers, cooks, waiters, door men.”

\textsuperscript{34}Ciarlantini, “La Vertiginosa New York.” Ciarlantini suggested that New York City lost something as Italian immigrants adapted to its fast pace and materialistic values. In Italy, they had learned that “serene contemplation” was an end in itself, but in the United States, they were taught hollower objectives of “progress,” and how to be “efficient and up to date.”


“kindling human response.” McCormick suggested that Americans were longing for political leaders who would look them in the eyes, understand their pain, and do something to alleviate it.

Herbert Hoover certainly struggled in this regard. Like many of their contemporaries, American fascist sympathizers downgraded Hoover’s technical approach to government in the light of the depression. According to McCormick, the “Hoover method” was the political equivalent of the assembly line, with all its attendant shortcomings: it elevated technological process and expertise and neglected the “human touch.” Already in the mid-1920s, Richard Washburn Child, though still a Republican, had begun to express nostalgia for his progressive political roots. Government could not run on “cold efficiency” alone, he had written. “It needs a soul. It needs a tang of human understanding.” When Child finally parted ways with Hoover in September 1932 he cited coldness, to the point of cruelty, as his grounds for separation: the administration, he declared, had given no “expression to the silent and patient rank and file of the American majority.” Similarly, the editors at Il Progresso criticized a president who seemed at ease in a world of abstract statistics but failed to offer even a “slight note of encouragement to the distressed people.”

37 McCormick, “Vastest Audience Ever Assembled.”
40 “R. W. Child Opens Roosevelt Drive,” New York Times. See also: Lecture notes, Herbert W. Schneider, “The Discipline of American Agriculture.” Schneider described Hoover as insulated by a “complacent dream” as his nation collapsed around him. Lecture notes, Herbert W. Schneider, “Industry and Labor Under the Roosevelt Regime.” Schneider argued that the Hoover administration only “grudgingly” increased government’s role in human affairs. Both of these lectures were part of a lecture series delivered in Rome in 1935-1936: “Lineamenti Storici e Ideali del Conflitto Economico-Politico Intorno di Roosevelt”; Folder, “Manuscripts, L”; 107/3/5; HWSP.
41 “President Hoover’s Message,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, December 13, 1931. “The Issues as the Candidates See Them,” New York Times, November 4, 1928.” During the 1928 election campaign, Hoover opposed increases in total immigration or changes to the quotas but stated that the United States should “humanize” the laws. Generoso Pope, “Buon Natale!” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, December 25, 1928. Pope tried to hold him to this promise, to no avail. Letter, Robert Wagner to George Akerson, April 2, 1930; Folder, Pope; President’s Secretary’s Files; HHP. In 1930, Senator Wagner tried to set up a meeting between Pope and the President. There is no record of such a meeting in either the President’s papers or Il Progresso, suggesting that it never took place. “Alien Restriction Is Hailed by Green,” New York Times, September 11, 1930; Glen Jeansonne, The Life of Herbert Hoover: Fighting Quaker, 1928-1933 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 326-27. The political climate was not at all conducive to immigration reform during the Hoover presidency: Hoover took no action to “humanize” the existing laws and, with the support of organized labor, he issued an executive order in 1930, which tightened immigration restrictions further. “The President’s Message,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, December 7, 1930. By the early 1930s, Pope’s
Such characterizations underestimated Hoover’s communitarian convictions and his willingness to expand the reach of federal government to help ordinary Americans. But they gave voice to a widespread belief that the President was cold and uncaring. Hoover’s problems were in part an issue of public relations. He was an incumbent president in the midst of a deep economic crisis, with a wooden persona, who had none of the privileges of a pliant press and submissive legislature that were part and parcel of dictatorship. This orphan son of a blacksmith had great difficulty in conveying his own humanity.

Fascist propaganda enabled observers to draw a stark contrast between a democratically elected president’s distance from his citizens and a dictator’s connection to his people. The depression years saw the multiplication of stories that exaggerated Mussolini’s humble origins, sanctified his childhood home in the Romagna countryside, and presented him as a family man. Combined, these images etched away at the austere portraits that had proliferated in the mid-1920s, to soften Mussolini and to humanize him. Il Progresso faithfully reproduced images of Mussolini as a man of the soil, a father, husband, and son. Open to visitors, Mussolini’s childhood home in Predappio exhibited his modest background. There, was the iron bed that his blacksmith father had made, which he had shared with his brother. There, where a mattress might have been, was a hay stack, of the kind that the boys had slept on.

frustration with Hoover’s failure to take executive action with regard to immigration blurred with a more general frustration regarding the president’s failure to respond to the depression.

42 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “The Nation Renews Its Faith,” New York Times, March 19, 1933. McCormick did recognize that Hoover expanded the government but she did not suggest that this expansion helped ordinary Americans survive the depression.


In contrast to earlier interpretations, which had invoked Mussolini’s simple upbringing to portray him as a self-made man who had risen out of poverty in the Horatio Alger tradition, propaganda in the early 1930s tended to root Mussolini in his rural past, to suggest that he still belonged there. Mussolini returned to Predappio often in these years—to speak to local villagers and to farm a plot of land—in displays of public intimacy.47 A typical photograph, republished in Il Progresso, showed Mussolini on his land, bent over to harvest the grain by hand, with his son Vittorio by his side (Figure 10). In these moments of (contrived and heavily publicized) familiarity, Mussolini appeared as almost indistinguishable from the people he talked to, worked with, or walked alongside.48

Sympathizers suggested that these incarnations of Mussolini were more than superficial postures: they were the symbolic counterparts of concrete policies. The regime facilitated this idea by disseminating stories about the fascist government’s efforts to improve the quality of life of ordinary Italians. Land reclamation, maternal and child welfare schemes, social insurance, and tuberculosis prevention featured frequently in material that the Ministry of Press and Propaganda sent to the Italian Consul General in New York, to pass on to receptive editors in the United States.49 Stories like this implied that Mussolini, the man of the soil, was ensuring that Italy remained a nation of small plots of land, just as Mussolini, the loving husband, father, and son, was protecting the traditional family as the basic unit of Italian society.50 Through his most human of experiences, Mussolini had forged his most human of policies.

49 See: Fascicolo, Invia material di propaganda negli Stati Uniti; Busta 218, Stati Uniti 1934; Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS.
50 McCormick, “The Average Italian is Still Himself.” Mussolini, wrote McCormick, was the only leader of a modern state who had prioritized the development of agriculture over industrial production, who had worked “not only to keep his country as agrarian as it is but to make it more so.” For observations linking fascist maternity care to Mussolini’s veneration of his mother, see: “Benito Mussolini Com’è Visto dalle Donne Americane,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano.
American fascist sympathizers were not naïve when they reproduced fascist propaganda; Anne O’Hare McCormick, for instance, acknowledged that aspects of Mussolini’s persona were “make believe.” But still, she argued, he was one of the few responsive leaders “in a world peopled by the half-dead.”\(^{51}\) Richard Washburn Child agreed. Mussolini was the rare kind of leader who “knew his people,” wrote Child in September 1932.\(^{52}\) He was animated, when Herbert Hoover, and indeed the entire democratic machinery of American government, seemed to have ground to a halt.\(^{53}\)

If small-town and rural Italy had existed merely due to accidents of history and geography, it would have always functioned as a romantic escape for American sympathizers, dismayed as they were by the toll that machines and metropolises had taken on American life. But fascist propaganda allowed them to claim that Italy was more than a picturesque alternative. Arguing that sage policies had ensured that Italy had withstood the worst of the depression and kept the effects of modernity in check, they could present Italy as a country that offered practical solutions to the problems that the United States faced. They suggested that, in 1932, all that Americans lacked was the right leader.

**His Master’s Voice**

Franklin Roosevelt’s capacity to connect with ordinary people, his ability to speak for the “forgotten man,” is so well-known that we risk taking for granted what it meant to those to whom he spoke. Ordinary Americans felt forgotten by their government and lost; Roosevelt told them that he remembered them and would find them, the “farmers of Iowa,” “the cotton pickers of Georgia, the fruit growers in the Santa Clara Valley.”\(^{54}\) By naming them, and individualizing them, he made them count.

Roosevelt promised to humanize government. In September 1932, eager, as ever, to attach himself to a rising star, Richard Washburn Child announced the creation of the League of Republicans for

\(^{51}\) McCormick, “The Mussolini of the Year IX.”


\(^{53}\) “Gov. Roosevelt for ‘Little Fellow,’” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, April 10, 1932; Anne O’Hare McCormick, “A New Hoover Emerges,” *New York Times*, February 7, 1932. Even when Hoover did take action, these observers argued that it was too little too late, and that he continued to intervene in favor of corporations (as evidenced by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation) rather than the common man. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 85, 91. This was a common critique.

\(^{54}\) Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Preparing for ‘the New Deal,’” *New York Times*, January 15, 1933; “Gov. Roosevelt for ‘Little Fellow.’”
Roosevelt. Child was the League’s chairman. The nation, he wrote, would find the “greater human understanding” it so desperately needed in FDR. At the League’s rally, five days before the election, Roosevelt made this human understanding the centerpiece of his speech. Herbert Hoover, he said, had looked for a “great invention, hidden away . . . in the lockers of science” as a solution to the crisis. But the way out would not come from “some new equivalent of the automobile or electric power.” A government of men, not machines, would provide human solutions to human problems.

Fascist sympathizers’ simultaneous support of Mussolini and Roosevelt is best understood in this context. McCormick, Pope, and Child interpreted the Great Depression as proof that human beings had lost control of the pace and scale of modernity. As a result, they were deeply skeptical of any government that suggested that the answers to these problems lay in the “scientific method.” According to one contributor to Il Progresso, “modern society,” though credited with “mechanical and scientific perfection,” had caused human suffering in its most basic forms: humiliation; hunger; cold. A cure could not be found in the disease.

In Mussolini and FDR these observers found similarly reassuring characteristics. Child reflected on both men’s pragmatism. It was, he suggested, an expression of their ability to adapt government to changing human realities. McCormick commented on both men’s capacity to listen. It was, she argued, a mark of their responsiveness. She saw in Roosevelt a “nostalgia for the good life, free and simple, of

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55 “R. W. Child Opens Roosevelt Drive,” New York Times, September 26, 1932. The League was headquartered in New York’s Roosevelt Hotel, in a symbolic nod to Theodore Roosevelt, the Bull Mooser. Generoso Pope, a lifelong Democrat, was on the board’s advisory committee.
57 McCormick, “A Year of the Hoover Method.” For further skepticism about scientific government, see the last paragraph of Richard Washburn Child, “‘Brain Trust’ a Myth, Says Child; President Not Walled in by His Advisers,” New York American, November 5, 1933. Child argued that the “myth” of the Brain Trust was as tragic as the idea of a “thinking machine.”
our rural past.” Although he had no appropriately modest childhood home to claim as his own, FDR, like Mussolini, embodied a longing to return to a pared down past. And in his White House he created an atmosphere of informality that resembled an ordinary American home.

Like Mussolini, as conceived by fascist sympathizers, Roosevelt was comfortable with technology. Mussolini reached remote villages in his fast car; Roosevelt used the radio to enter people’s living rooms, establishing an intimate connection with his audience, which contemporary observers—McCormick included—felt that mass media so often lacked. Like Mussolini, Roosevelt sent the reassuring message that, in the right hands, machines could be tamed and returned to their proper dimensions, as servants and not masters of men.

The individuals examined here avoided drawing simplistic equations between Roosevelt and Mussolini, aware that, in the hands of his FDR’s enemies, such statements would only do him damage. Yet, they could not disguise their satisfaction that the United States had, in Pope’s words, found “il buon duce.” In 1921, when she had heard Mussolini’s first speech in parliament, McCormick had prophesized that Italy was hearing its “new master’s voice.” This was an observation to which she would return, repeatedly, during the depression years. It was probably no coincidence, no mere slip of the tongue, that, two weeks into the New Deal, she voiced her approval in the same terms: the United States, too, was finally hearing its own “master’s voice.” McCormick’s intention was not to argue that Roosevelt was

61 McCormick, “Preparing for ‘the New Deal.’” See also, McCormick, “Roosevelt’s View of the Big Job.”
63 Generoso Pope, “Bilancio di Due Settimane,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, March 19, 1933; McCormick, “‘Let’s Try It!’ Says Roosevelt.” See also: Child, “‘Brain Trust’ a Myth, Says Child.” Roosevelt, wrote Child, was “determined to speak to the country like a brother” and wanted “the country to talk to him like a brother” too.
65 Pope, “Bilancio di Due Settimane.”
66 McCormick, “Drama of Pope and Premier”; Anne O’Hare McCormick, “The Man the World Watches,” New York Times, September 1, 1935. His Master’s Voice was a British gramophone company. HMV records were labeled with the image of a fox terrier, listening to a gramophone, which contributed to the brand’s international recognition.
Mussolini, but rather that each man was the right person to lead his country through the most trying of times, that each would help to make his people whole again.

From the onset of the depression to well into Roosevelt’s first term, American fascist sympathizers argued that Italy provided examples of policies that would enable the United States to recover economically and spiritually, resist future crises, and restore proportionality in the relationship between men and machines. They pointed to the apparent successes of the fascist state’s back-to-the-land policies and job creation programs to suggest the scope of the possible in the United States. At each turn, they expressed a belief that Italy had succeeded in forging human, and humane, solutions to the problems of modernity and that the United States could do the same.

**Full Stomachs and Simple Satisfactions**

Superficially, since its goal was to boost production, fascist agricultural policy ran in a contradictory direction to the needs of agriculture in the United States, benighted by immense surpluses. But Mussolini’s program of *bonifica integrale* (land reclamation) placed its emphasis on an increase in total (labor-intensive) production, rather than an increase in per hectare (capital-intensive) production. At least as presented by fascist propaganda, Italy would win its “Battle for Grain” by encouraging internal migration from urban to rural areas and supporting smallholder settlement on modest plots of land, where traditional farming methods would be enhanced—but not displaced—by judicious application of machinery.68 “Among the terraced hillsides” of Southern Italy, wrote Schneider, farming, even when informed by science, would be “carried on in the same small plots and with the same simple instruments used for centuries.”69

According to *Il Progresso*, although feats of modern technology enabled the process of reclamation, the beneficiaries would be families who moved from larger towns to settle in Littoria,


Sabaudia, and other Pontine communities, designed around human beings’ spiritual, social, and cultural needs, “each with church, school, dispensary, rural police-station, and after-work recreation hall.” By 1931, a successful back-to-farm movement was well underway in Italy, argued Il Progresso. 19,142 families had settled in the countryside beyond Rome, it noted, with a precision that both complimented the accounting capacities of the fascist regime and echoed its propaganda that every Italian counted. The program would benefit poorer families the most, this article claimed, by forcing wealthy landowners who did not cultivate their land to surrender it. In the summer of 1933, the newspaper described the Pontine settlements as an antidote to contemporary materialism. According to Il Progresso, Italians did not flock to Littoria or Sabaudia with a materialistic mindset: they came in search of a simple life, consisting of hard work, community, and bread.

McCormick sustained portraits of the land reclamation program as a successful effort to restore Italians’ attachment to the earth. In the fall of 1933, Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini’s son-in-law and the head of his press office, furnished McCormick with information about the Pontine program and organized a guided visit of Littoria for the journalist. In an article published in Ladies’ Home Journal the following spring, McCormick declared Littoria to be a “perfect” rendition of the Italian government’s back-to-the-land initiative. She homed in on the experiences of a single family—the evocatively-named Padovanis (meaning from Padua). According to McCormick, the Padovanis had moved from the “overcrowded” north of the country, encouraged by the promise of a new home, a sixty-acre plot of land, subsidized rent and farming supplies, and state-run facilities for education, entertainment, and health care. McCormick acknowledged that the Padovanis were “mezzadri” (sharecroppers), who owed half their crops to the state,

| 70 | “Plan to Reclaim 200,000 Acres of Pontine Marshes,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, December 20, 1931. See also Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 111. |
| 71 | “Reclamation of Campagna Lands Nets Big Results,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, May 17, 1931. For a further example of precise accounting of individuals, see: “Italy’s Social Insurance Aid Shows Progress,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, August 16, 1931. |
| 72 | “Reclamation of Campagna Lands Nets Big Results.” |
| 73 | “‘La Guerra Che Preferiamo,’” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, August 16, 1933. |
| 74 | Galleazzo Ciano to Valentino Orsolini Cencelli, November 23, 1933; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. |
| 75 | Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.,” Ladies Home Journal, March 1934. “Veterans’ City Named ‘Littoria.’” By contrast, Il Progresso reported that the average plot size was twelve to fifteen acres. |
but she claimed that this status was merely temporary. The Padovanis were “members of a community being collectively prepared for individual ownership,” she wrote. As portrayed by McCormick, the Padovanis seemed happy and proud. They did not enjoy a luxurious life in Littoria: their “solid” six-room home (painted blue, like the sky) accommodated thirteen people; and they worked hard. As portrayed by McCormick, the Padovanis seemed happy and proud, not in spite of their modest circumstances and hard work but because of them.76

The archives do not show for certain if the Padovanis existed, or if they were a synthetic amalgam of the informants and information, which the regime funneled McCormick’s way. The archives do show, however, that McCormick was not averse to such dubious forms of journalism. In 1933, she solicited the regime for statistics on average incomes, which soon found their way into Ladies Home Journal, not as cold data, but as the perceptions of a living, breathing person.77 McCormick quoted Signora Rossi, a “clear-headed” widow, who was the principal breadwinner in a family of five. Signora Rossi was not a farmer herself, she was a journalist, who lived in Rome. But she had detailed knowledge of the income of Italian farmers. In 1929, farm incomes had been low relative to American averages, noted Signora Rossi; since then, they had declined only twenty percent, while cost of living adjustments meant that the real income remained more or less unchanged.78 McCormick made Signora Rossi a vehicle for the information sent to her by the fascist Ministry of Press and Propaganda. This kind of journalism fulfilled her readers’ interests in the lives of ordinary people.79 But, at least in the case of Signora Rossi, a seemingly ordinary person was an incarnation of fascist propaganda; lies made flesh and blood.

76 McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.”
77 Undated document; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. McCormick asked the government, “What are the average wages of skilled workers…? Unskilled labor? Are there any figures on approximate income levels?” The government responded with a table, which demonstrated average incomes by economic sector, from the years 1929 to 1933. These statistics demonstrated that nominal wages in agriculture had declined by twenty percent over these years.
78 McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.” McCormick, “Mussolini of the Year IX.” In the Times, in 1931, McCormick had acknowledged more challenges in Italian public finances: “growing unemployment,” a large budget deficit, and the threat of falling real wages.
79 Dickstein, Dancing in the Dark, 219. Dickstein writes that there was a “documentary impulse in the 1930s”—a “widespread effort to examine people’s real lives to show how they were coping with adverse conditions that seemed unprecedented.”
Herbert Schneider took a less imaginative approach to the regime’s statistics. He merely presented trumped-up data as facts. In the mid-decade, Schneider cited official data to demonstrate a recent uptick in real wages in agriculture, an increase in calorie consumption relative to pre-war years, and the growth of “independent classes” of farmers. By implication, the back-to-farm movement had made tangible improvements to the lives of ordinary Italians, enabling them to live with greater dignity and security, and fuller stomachs.

Unsurprisingly, historians have demonstrated that fascist agricultural programs were neither as effective in boosting incomes nor as sensitive to the welfare of small farmers as claimed by sympathizers with the regime. Fascist agricultural policy entailed no significant land redistribution, as Il Progresso claimed. Far from encouraging “independent classes” of farmers, Mussolini’s “Battle for Grain” had a punishing effect on them. Protectionism of wheat production crowded out the cultivation of fruit, vegetables, and olives—labor-intensive crops that were independent producers’ traditional preserve. According to one economic historian, there were fewer “small owner-operators” in the early 1930s than there had been only a few years earlier. On the Pontine lands, all farmers were mezzadri (sharecroppers), and many were far less happy than the Padovanis about this arrangement. Pontine farmers frequently engaged in sabotage and slowdowns to register their discontent, and absconded from the land, in search of supplementary incomes. They needed the money, since farm incomes had not stayed the same, in real terms, as McCormick’s Signora Rossi claimed. In the depression years, Italian farmers were poorer than they had been in the 1920s, their poverty made worse by the scarcity of the nutritious crops and meat that they had previously cultivated and raised. Contrary to Schneider’s claims, farmers’ stomachs were

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80 Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 86-87, 112. Schneider presented the regime’s 1935 Annual Statistics, which showed a decline in real wages in the early depression years followed by a more recent improvement, and ten percent higher per capita calories from food (as opposed to alcohol) in 1929-1933 relative to 1910-1914.


82 Diane Ghirardo, Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 51-53. Ghirardo notes that the Pontine migrants had to pay for their transport to the South, and that little of the government support was in the form of grants. Even their first meal, which they received upon arrival, went into a ledger book as a debt. Bosworth, Mussolini’s Italy, 438. Bosworth writes that migrants were often left more indebted than they were before their move to the Agro Pontine.
emptier in the depression years than they were before, sometimes to the point of desperation: in at least one case, families from the Veneto, who had recently settled on Pontine land, ate diseased carrion in their bid to survive.\textsuperscript{83}

The regime did its best to hide these realities, and it is perhaps unfair to criticize contemporary American observers for their failure to uncover truths that subsequent historians struggled to tease out.\textsuperscript{84} But we can certainly criticize them for their failure to try. As a political philosopher and journalist, respectively, Schneider and McCormick were schooled in disciplines that demanded keen powers of observation and healthy doses of skepticism. Each was in Italy for extended periods in the 1920s and again in the 1930s. If they did not see that Italian farmers were hungrier in the depression years than they were before, it was because they refused to look.

Both self-serving and more public-spirited motives accounted for the selective blindness of McCormick and Schneider, as well as Generoso Pope. Selfishly, these individuals had built their careers upon favorable representations of fascist Italy and felt little incentive to end their mutually beneficial relationships with the regime. More altruistically, they believed that the United States needed a success story. The fascist agricultural program, as they portrayed it, combined the best of new-fangled conceptions of collectivity, technology, and government support with old-fashioned values of individual ownership, connection to the earth, and community. These observers hoped that Italy would present Americans with the promise of full stomachs and simple satisfactions, which they would find difficult to resist.

**Back to American Soil**

While fascist sympathizers praised Italy’s back-to-farm policies in the early 1930s, they found a similar program at home. In Michigan, Henry Ford was engaged in an experiment in subsistence farming. In semi-rural areas, far from Detroit, the godfather of mass production had created model communities, in which workers’ hours were split between small-scale industry and garden farms. In the spring of 1932,

\textsuperscript{83} Bosworth, *Mussolini’s Italy*, 438.
\textsuperscript{84} Cohen, “Fascism and Agriculture in Italy.” Cohen discusses the limitations of the data.
McCormick argued that Ford was attempting to create a new equilibrium for the United States—a “return to the moral balance” that he considered “as seriously disturbed as the economic balance.” Since Ford had always marched one step ahead of other Americans, McCormick read his experiment as an augur, no less realistic a vision of the near future than the assembly line had been in 1910. The editors of Il Progresso shared McCormick’s interest in Ford’s experiment and were equally confident in its chances of success. Photographs that accompanied this coverage suggested that, in Ford’s model communities, the relationship between men and machines was restored to manageable proportions. In the Times, two men (presumably at a Ford farm) sat astride a mechanical harvester no bigger than a horse and cart. If anything dominated the scene, it was nature: the fields, the vast sky. In Il Progresso, ten men worked side-by-side with hand-held tools on a small plot of land. These images conveyed a simple companionship, between men, and with the earth.

For his part, Generoso Pope was so convinced by the feasibility of the back-to-farm idea that he attempted to exert his political influence with FDR to enable the resettlement of unemployed Italian Americans on upstate farmland. In March 1930, Pope met with then-Governor Roosevelt to discuss the idea. Noting that Roosevelt responded favorably, Il Progresso kept up its campaign. The newspaper’s director, I. C. Falbo, argued that a back-to-the-land program made impeccable economic and moral sense. A “voyage of return” offered more than survival for impoverished city dwellers. It would provide a corrective to the “mania for urbanization” that had taken a spiritual toll on the United States and furnish “tranquility,” and “happiness,” of the kind so readily found in rural Italy. Technology could play a

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87 “What Outlook for City Dwellers in Farming?” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, April 9, 1933.
89 “Workers on Henry Ford’s Experimental Farm,” photograph, Il Progresso Italo-Americano, April 9, 1933.
90 “Contro la Disoccupazione,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano.
supportive role in such communities, according to one contributor to the newspaper: a farmer with ten hectares of land or six livestock had no need for a tractor or an electric milking machine but he would benefit from a radio, to learn of the latest production techniques. Digging with a spade, milking with his hands, this farmer would touch the fruits of his labor. He would meet his neighbors, and talk to them, at weekly markets. Italian Americans could be at the forefront of a movement to “live on the land as we did as children in Italy and as our relatives still do over there.”

Roosevelt was indeed interested in the back-to-the-land movement. “Suppose one were to offer these [urban unemployed] men opportunity to go on the land, to provide a house and a few acres in the country and a little money and tools to put in small food crops,” he mused in 1931. Subsistence agriculture, he suggested, could be the difference between starvation and survival, humiliation and dignity, for these men. Interviewed by McCormick during the 1932 campaign, Roosevelt convinced her that, like “Henry Ford, the repentant mass producer,” he would go “back to the soil for his solutions” to the economic crisis.

Under the early New Deal, a modestly funded Subsistence Homestead program breathed life into the back-to-land movement. Similar to Ford’s experiments in Michigan, the program envisaged small communities, each with a school, a post office, a church. Farmers would cultivate “garden plots,” noted Schneider, and they would supplement their labor on the land with work in a small, local factory. According to the program’s supporters, machines would enhance, but not dominate, human conditions. For instance, farmers’ homes would have indoor bathrooms and electricity. But the overall aim was to simplify modern life, enabling adults to enjoy the satisfactions of work and the pleasures of community

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92 Giovanni Macerata, “Come gli Italiani in America Possono Contribuire alla Soluzione della Crisi,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, December 11, 1932. Macerata noted that his suggestions were in line with both fascist state policy and FDR’s ideas.
94 McCormick, “Roosevelt’s View of the Big Job.”
and providing children with a wholesome environment. Program planners presented the project as an antidote to the “evils of over-urbanization” and a refuge for “outcasts of the jazz-industrial age.” They imagined that through Subsistence Homesteads, the New Deal would create a balanced landscape, and a balanced existence, once more.

The Subsistence Homestead program was a typical example of New Deal’s eclecticism: it borrowed from similar experiments in other countries, including Australia and Denmark. In July 1933, Roosevelt met with the Italian pilot (and Mussolini’s heir apparent), Italo Balbo, on the occasion of his flying visit to the United States. According to a report soon filed by Balbo, Roosevelt expressed his desire to de-urbanize the United States and said that Americans should be “induced to return to the country.” Balbo reminded Roosevelt of Mussolini’s “pioneering work” in this area. With obvious pride, Balbo reported back to Mussolini that the United States—“the most up to date country in the world”—was moving back to the land. Balbo evidently derived satisfaction from the notion that Italy and the United States were moving in the same direction. The editors of Il Progresso went further, to suggest that Italy’s experience had directly informed the New Deal’s approach to de-urbanization.

Yet there is little evidence to suggest that the fascist program functioned as more than a loose

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96 Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 105-6, 114-15. Conkin notes that the debate around the use of technology on the Homesteads was part of a wider discussion regarding the costs of the project. Those who believed in spending more to make homesteaders lives more comfortable won the argument.

97 For “evils” see the remarks of Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, in: Memorandum for the Press, for release in the afternoon papers of October 12, 1933; Folder, Secretary to the President 1933-36, Subsistence Housing, 1933; Papers of Louis M. Howe; FDRL. For “outcasts,” see quote from M. L. Wilson, the chief of the Subsistence Homestead Division, in William E. Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 136.

98 “The De-Urbanization Movement,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, August 6, 1933. Editors at Il Progresso identified the Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace as a supporter of “de-urbanization.” They cited Wallace’s contribution to Country Life magazine, in which he hoped that the Agricultural Adjustment Act would help to shift the United States away “‘from huddling great masses of our population in cities.’”

99 Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 43-58. Conkin points to the influence of the ideas of Elwood Mead on the Subsistence Homestead Program. Decades before, Mead had supervised reclamation and settlement projects in Australia. See also, Ghirardo, Building New Communities, 127. Pamphlet, “General Information Concerning the Purposes and Policies of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads,” November 15, 1933, Division of Subsistence Homesteads, United States Department of the Interior; Folder, “Department of the Interior, Research on Subsistence Homestead”; Accretion to John Ihlder Papers, Washington Housing and Development Matters; FDRL. Planning documents of the Subsistence Homestead Division referenced the experiences of Denmark.

100 Translation of Memo, Italo Balbo to Mussolini; Source: Bollettino del Ministro degli Affari Esteri (Bulletin of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), July 1933; Document created in November 1933; Folder: Long, Breckenridge; President’s Personal File 434; FDRL.

source of inspiration for the United States. Indeed, when New Dealer Rexford Tugwell, who was then Undersecretary for Agriculture, visited Italy in the fall of 1934, he declared that he found “nothing of any significance or interest from the point of view of social arrangements” in the Pontine reclamation projects. Roosevelt, ever the politician, was comfortable giving Balbo the impression that United States had followed in Italy’s footsteps. Roosevelt, ever the pragmatist, was happy to cherry pick from various models, wherever he found them.

In any case, the Subsistence Homestead Program was certainly not the backbone of the United States’ recovery efforts. Around thirty rural or semi-rural communities, usually of fewer than one hundred households, had been created by 1935, when the administration merged the program with other resettlement projects under Tugwell’s stewardship. Herbert Schneider anticipated that this administrative merger could be the first step toward an effort to encourage small farming communities on a wider scale. Instead, it signaled the expiration of government-sponsored subsistence farming, as Tugwell turned his attention to suburban development, in tacit recognition that modern Americans were, in the main, urban creatures.

102 Letter, James Farley to Franklin D. Roosevelt, December 8, 1933; Folder: Farley, James A., 1932-1939; President’s Personal File 309; FDRL. The only evidence of a high-level New Dealer who expressed admiration, in broad terms, for Mussolini’s agricultural program, comes from James Farley’s 1933 trip to Europe. Farley wrote: “I was quite impressed with Mussolini’s great drainage development where he converted marshes into fine farm lands.” Farley was Chair of both the New York Democratic Committee and the National Democratic Committee, as well as the Post Master General. He was not an economic policy maker. Ghirardo, Building New Communities, 129-30. Ghirardo finds little evidence that Italy was a source of inspiration for the subsistence homestead project. She notes that “low-level administrators” of resettlement projects perused “consular reports about subsistence projects in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Norway.”

103 Rexford Tugwell, Diary entries for October 20 and 22, 1934; Folder, Diary: March-Dec. 1934; Rexford Tugwell Papers; FDRL. Tugwell’s diary revealed admiration for aspects of Italy’s response to the depression: the regime’s “systematic” construction projects and its “effectiveness of administration.” But Tugwell expressed grave reservations about the suppression of freedom in Italy. Goldberg, Liberal Fascism, 11, 156. Goldberg neglects to mention these criticisms when he quotes the same diary entries, to create the impression that Tugwell was an unqualified fan of fascism.

104 Patel, New Deal.

105 For this merger, see: Conkin, Tomorrow a New World, 113; Brown, Back to the Land, 150.


The back-to-the-land movement fueled the imagination of the Roosevelts, Eleanor especially. But it would never be writ large. Underfunding may have accounted for some of the program’s shortcomings but, for the main part, its limitations were inbuilt: economic recovery on a national scale depended in large part on adaptation in the industrial and service sectors. Fascist sympathizers supported the back-to-the land movement because it seemed to offer both an immediate response to problems of hunger and unemployment and a long-term re-balancing of the relations between men and machines. But subsistence farming could not provide a feasible solution for more than a tiny slither of crisis-hit Americans.

**Making Work**

Public works occupied a far more central place in the United States’ recovery efforts and here, too, fascist sympathizers suggested that Italy could be a model for an approach that placed men, rather than machines, at the center of the solution. As these American observers recognized, Italy’s portfolio of public works preceded the depression and included the program of land reclamation, as well as hydroelectric power projects, road and railway construction, and the building of workers’ homes.

Schneider noted that public works were financed by deficit spending during the crisis years: since 1929, Italy’s budget balance had shifted from black to red, reaching a debt of over 6 billion lire in 1933. Quoting no less an authority than Alberto De Stefani, the classically-trained economist and ex-Minister of Finance, Schneider explained fascism’s new orthodoxy on deficits. The budget, wrote De Stefani, was the “‘balance of assets and liabilities between . . . between citizen and citizen.’” On one side of the balance sheet, according to this view, was the work of women and men; on the other, the “human

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109 Michael A. Bernstein, “Why the Great Depression Was Great: Toward a New Understanding of the Interwar Economic Crisis in the United States,” in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, ed.s Gary Gerstle and Steve Fraser (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 32-54. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 136-37. Leuchtenburg argues that while progenitors of the back-to-land movement believed they were enabling people to “escape from the evils of a vulgar industrial society,” the most successful homesteads were not those that attempted to revive a rural existence but rather those that created settlements akin to modern suburban subdivisions.
111 Schneider, *Fascist Government of Italy*, 114.
and material aspects” of the entire country. According to Schneider, De Stefani—an erstwhile disciple of Adam Smith—had come to see the budget as an organic arrangement, its columns representing not numbers but people: Italians’ work; Italians’ wellbeing.

These observers argued that Mussolini’s willingness to spend his way out of the depression had a pronounced effect on the lives of ordinary Italians. Reproducing the regime’s statistics, Schneider argued that public spending had a “telling” effect on employment rates, leading to year-on-year reductions in joblessness. Il Progresso tracked the impact of public works over the 1930s: 36,681 workers would be employed on the Bologna to Florence railway project, inaugurated in the summer of 1930, the newspaper claimed; 339 land reclamation projects, costing 528,110,131 lire (around 27 million dollars), had created 11,695,757 days of work by the fall of 1932. At the end of 1932, the newspaper reported that a New Hampshire judge had returned from Italy with praise for Mussolini’s road building program. “No Machines Used,” Il Progresso’s editors emphasized. Rather, Judge Jacobs had watched hundreds of men breaking stones with small hammers. The men, said the judge, were “satisfied”: they received a daily wage of twenty-seven and a half cents, bread and wine, which was enough to feed their families; they preferred this system to the humiliations of a dole.

Once again, McCormick let Signora Rossi speak for the regime. In Signora Rossi’s words, Italy’s “vast public works program” meant that unemployment had “never reached anything like the proportions” of joblessness in wealthy countries.

A reduced, forty hour working week was another element of Italy’s response to the depression, these observers noted. In the fall of 1932, Il Progresso predicted that this program would give jobs to one

112 Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 118-19.
113 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Mussolini Eager to Maintain Peace,” New York Times, June 5, 1933. McCormick wrote: “Italy has broken the force of the depression with a vast program of public works which have given the people facilities they never had before: roads and reclaimed land, schools and electrified railways, parks and suburban housing.”
114 Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 114, 118. According to Schneider, the six billion lire peak of the budget deficit in 1933 produced a reduction in unemployment from over 1.1 million men in 1933 to below nine hundred thousand in 1934. By 1935, according to these official statistics, Italy’s unemployed numbered just six hundred thousand.
117 McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.”
million additional workers. Italy was “[s]etting the pace for the reduction of working hours the world over,” the newspaper editorialized.\textsuperscript{118} In the first year of the program, the forty-hour rule for industrial work created jobs for two-hundred thousand unemployed men, according to Schneider. The new rules amounted to state-mandated risk-sharing: in theory, they meant that communities as a whole would experience higher levels of social protection: fewer men without jobs, and fewer hungry families.\textsuperscript{119} Put another way by \textit{Il Progresso}, work sharing was a “substitution” for unemployment.\textsuperscript{120} When presented in these terms, it seemed like a beneficial trade-off. \textit{Il Progresso} argued that Americans should seek solace in Italy’s example: work sharing demonstrated that some solutions to the problem of unemployment were simple; all that was required was political will.\textsuperscript{121}

Using heavily distorted evidence, fascist sympathizers argued that Italy’s government had created jobs for men and security for their families. For instance, \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano} claimed that, as a result of the fascist government’s combined policies of public works and reduced hours, only three in every hundred Italians were without a job in 1933.\textsuperscript{122} Over the course of decades, others would provide more realistic representations of employment rates and living standards for ordinary Italians in the early depression years. Already in 1934, the anti-fascist exile, Gaetano Salvemini, argued that the regime “systematically distorted” unemployment statistics.\textsuperscript{123} Every so often, a fragment of the truth slipped out, as it did when newspapers published jobless rates based on the 1931 census. 8,930 men in Ferrara described themselves as unemployed, noted Salvemini—many times the number of unemployed men counted in official statistics “faked in Rome.”\textsuperscript{124} The regime acted quickly to silence damning evidence of this kind. Historians would later piece the reality together as best they could. According to two economic historians, public works gave full-time employment to between 3 and 8.8 percent of jobless Italians.

\textsuperscript{118} “Italy and the 5-Day Week,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, September 11, 1932.
\textsuperscript{119} Schneider, \textit{Fascist Government of Italy}, 83.
\textsuperscript{120} “La Disoccupazione e l’Italia,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, June 24, 1933.
\textsuperscript{121} “Share the Work,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, October 9, 1932.
\textsuperscript{122} “La Disoccupazione e l’Italia.”
\textsuperscript{123} Gaetano Salvemini, “Italian Unemployment Statistics,” \textit{Social Research} 1, no. 3 (1934): 349.
\textsuperscript{124} Salvemini, “Italian Unemployment Statistics.” Salvemini argued that, in the province of Ferrara in the early 1930s, unemployment was seven times higher than the regime acknowledged. Overall, he suggested that the regime’s unemployment figures represented around half of the real number of unemployed.
between 1931 and 1933. Like every country in the world, Italy faced an unemployment crisis that was not amenable to simple solutions.

In all probability, Italians’ own coping strategies during the depression had a greater impact on their well-being than official interventions. Disregarding the regime’s ruralization policies, Italians moved regularly between rural and urban areas, picking up informal work in cities and short-term jobs in factories. They worked fewer hours for lower income not because of government-mandated work-sharing programs, but because less work at lower pay was all that was available.

Survival, in these conditions, was far less dignified than American fascist sympathizers imagined. In 1934, McCormick wrote that soup, pasta and sauce, fish, meat, eggs, vegetables, fruit, and cheese, were among the daily standards of the Borgheses of Florence— an “average” family, whom she described to readers in *Ladies Home Journal*. Of course, there was nothing “average” about such a diet in Italy in the depression years. Perhaps the women of Trieste, who sent their boys out into the streets in February 1933 to kill pigeons “‘because their families were dying of hunger,’” struck a better average. At the very least, the women of Trieste, unlike the Borgheses of Florence, rang true.

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125 Gianni Toniolo and Francesco Piva, “Unemployment in the 1930s: The Case of Italy,” in *Interwar Unemployment in International Perspective*, eds Barry Eichengreen and T. J. Hatton (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer, 1988), 237. The variation between 3 and 8.8 percent is due to the unreliability of any official estimates for unemployment (in the industrial sector alone). The authors derive the lower bound estimates of unemployment from official unemployment statistics and the upper bound from the industrial census. The authors note that, due to pervasive informality and underemployment in agriculture in this era, there is no way to calculate actual (un)employment rates in this sector. De Grazia, *Culture of Consent*, 52, citing Renzo De Felice. Less critical examination of the regime’s statistics has prompted other historians to claim that, by 1935, public works employed around 500,000 of “several million” unemployed Italians.

126 Toniolo and Piva, “Unemployment in the 1930s,” 224.


128 Toniolo and Piva, “Unemployment in the 1930s,” 224.

129 McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.” McCormick qualified the notion that the Borgheses were “average” by describing them as a “middle-class” family. But she made no effort to suggest that such a bourgeois lifestyle was rare in Italy. Undated document; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. McCormick used data provided to her by the government to discuss the Borgheses’ tax payments. This document includes McCormick’s question (“What percentage of his income would be paid in taxes by a man with a wife and three children whose income from salary is 30.000 lire a year?”) and the government’s answer to the question, reflected in the *Ladies Home Journal* piece.

130 Bosworth, *Mussolini’s Italy*, 270, citing “Review of the Political and Economic Situation in the Provinces,” February 8, 1933. For other insights into the typical experiences of Italians in the depression years, see: “Poor Raid Food Shops in Italy; Distress Grows,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 16, 1931. This article noted a rise in the number of beggars in Rome. It observed that many families in working-class neighborhoods had no fuel and were
Why Can’t We?

From the onset of the depression until the winter of 1932, American fascist sympathizers invoked Italy’s apparent success in creating work to chide President Hoover for his inadequate responses. In the early years of the depression, Hoover’s program for recovery emphasized private initiatives and voluntarism, both for job creation and shorter working hours. In the absence of a bold federal intervention to create jobs, Generoso Pope took matters into his own hands, in his own community at least. In the spring of 1930, he employed Italian American men to work on New York City’s roads. Il Progresso named each man whom Generoso Pope put to work. Men like Antonio Salina, of East 105th Street, a father of seven children, who had been unemployed for nine months, and Giuseppe Lo Tauro, of Cherry Street, a father of eleven children, who had been without work for a year. Each man had a name, a home, and a family to feed. Each man had an identity as a breadwinner, which needed to be revived. For every man whom Pope could employ, the newspaper acknowledged, there were hundreds of thousands of American men who had been abandoned to the indignities of charity and waiting, day in day out, in line.

Pope probably had a number of goals in mind when he created this modestly sized and highly publicized program of private employment. As was always the case, he aimed to use his beneficence to strengthen his reputation as a leader of New York’s Italian American community. Perhaps, too, he wanted to demonstrate that the task of job creation was a relatively simple one: it did not need expert commissions, bureaucratic processes, and long debates; it only required an injection of cash, and a

subsisting on a pared-down diet, low in nutrition. It described shanty towns on the outskirts of the capital. It also observed that poor Italians were raiding food shops all over the country.


132 “L’Iniziativa del ‘Progresso’ in Favore dei Disoccupati,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, March 23, 1930. Pope emphasized that his program would grant priority to unemployed men with families. It was male household heads, he suggested, that suffered the most in the depression. Even if they were able to scramble together resources through unemployment relief and charity, men who relied on handouts lost their status as providers. For the effect of the depression on masculinity and gender roles, see: Robert S. McElvaine, The Great Depression, America 1929-1941 (New York: Random House, 1984), 180-81.


willingness to act. But Pope’s uncharacteristically modest recognition of his own limitations—of the hundreds of thousands of men whom he would never be able to help—was suggestive of an additional goal. It seems that Generoso Pope wanted to show that private individuals, even those with deep pockets and seemingly big hearts, could never substitute for a government that cared.\textsuperscript{135}

In a similar vein, Pope was a vociferous proponent of state-mandated work-sharing. Many American businessmen backed a voluntary “share-the-work” movement in the early depression years.\textsuperscript{136} Pope’s newspaper, however, went further, to argue that the state should enforce new caps on working hours. “The conflict between men and machines has reached the stage where we can no longer take a laissez faire approach,” wrote Pope in September 1932. Just as the fascist government had done in Italy, the US federal government needed to forge a better balance between human beings and technology, he suggested.\textsuperscript{137}

Italy was frequently the reference point for these observers. After meeting with Mussolini at the end of 1930, McCormick claimed she had asked him what he would do if he, not Herbert Hoover, were the American president. As was often his way, Mussolini avoided giving a direct answer to a difficult question. As was often her way, McCormick filled the void. “One saw how the imagination of an autocrat kindled to the opportunity presented by the idle millions, men and dollars, available in the United States,” she wrote. If Italy, “a poor country,” had created jobs for two hundred thousand men that winter, then the United States could do so much more, McCormick implied.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{135} “Disoccupati Che Si Sfamano Fra Grand e Forsyth Streets, a New York, Con Pubbliche Offerte,” photograph, \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, November 1, 1930. The newspaper documented the results of the Hoover’s reliance on volunteerism that fall. On a desolate stretch, between Grand and Forsyth streets in New York, unemployed men crouched on the cold ground, huddled over charitable provisions. Though they were many in number, each man appeared isolated, his back turned against the man who sat closest to him. This photograph appeared on the same page as a story describing how an American woman, the widow of the architect of the American Academy in Rome, had donated money to the Italian government to thank it for transporting her husband’s body. “Mussolini allotted the money given by Mrs. Mead to the regime’s relief and assistance works.” See: “La Signora Mead Offre Al Duce Diecimila Lire per Opere Fascista,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, November 1, 1930.


\textsuperscript{137} Pope, “Perché Tutti Possono Lavorare.”

\textsuperscript{138} McCormick, “Mussolini of the Year IX.”
The following summer, *Il Progresso* featured an editorial, entitled “If Italy Can Do This, Why Can’t We?” According to this piece, Mussolini had already earmarked 45 million dollars to provide work for unemployed Italians during the winter of 1931 to 1932. The editorial suggested that the American government should use the “undeniable wealth” at its disposal to do the same. In *Il Progresso*, articles of this kind combined feelings of outrage toward the Hoover administration with a sense pride in Mussolini’s achievements. But the genre was common, not only in the Italian-language press, but in English-language media in the early 1930s, as an expression of yearning for a decisive response to the unemployment crisis, which observers felt was well-within Herbert Hoover’s reach.

Even when President Hoover finally accepted the necessity of federal programs for public works, Generoso Pope argued that the President offered too little, too late. In July 1932, Hoover authorized the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) to disburse $1.5 billion of loans to the states for public works, but not before he vetoed a more expansive relief bill, proposed by House Speaker, John Garner, and New York Senator, Robert Wagner. Pope registered his disapproval of the government for its failure to implement “more generous” measures. “Give Work to the Unemployed!” his front page article implored. In September, with the election approaching, Pope argued that the government needed to move more quickly, to implement the public works enabled by the recent law. Bureaucratic barriers, he implied, prevented the legislation from taking effect. In this, Pope was not incorrect. Under the Hoover administration, qualifications for RFC loans were so stringent that only a tiny fraction of funds were actually disbursed. Hoover’s program helped very few unemployed men. Pope argued that, if the

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140 “A Mussolini Might Help Solve Crisis,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, February 5, 1933; “L’Italia Può Far Questo.” These pieces were based on excerpts from the Hearst Press—the *Chicago American* and the *Evening Journal*. Hearst was both sympathetic toward Mussolini and vociferously critical of the Hoover administration. See: Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 48-49; Welky, *Everything was Better in America*, 20, 34.
141 Badger, *FDR: The First Hundred Days*, 86.
144 The historiography of Hoover’s response to the depression is contentious but there are areas on which historians broadly agree. Jeanonne, *Life of Herbert Hoover*, 201-2. William E Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover* (New York: Times Books, 2009), 109-12. In 1930, Hoover slashed his own Emergency Committee for Employment’s recommended appropriation by 80 percent. For stringent qualifications for RFC funding, see Leuchtenberg, *Herbert Hoover*, 135. Leuchtenburg, as an admirer of Roosevelt, emphasizes differences between the two presidents’
administration implemented a combined policy of public works and reduced working hours with alacrity, millions of jobless Americans could have work by winter time.\textsuperscript{145} But he held out little hope for Hoover.\textsuperscript{146} In the fall of 1932, Generoso Pope was thinking less about the onset of winter, and more about the upcoming spring.

\textit{“Let’s Try It!”}

For many Americans, Franklin Roosevelt’s election offered hope that the government would create jobs for the unemployed. At the League of Republicans for Roosevelt pre-election rally in November 1932, FDR described himself as the answer to the “blighted hopes” of “ten million unemployed men” and reminded his audience that, as Governor of New York, he had been responsible for a program of work-based unemployment relief. He promised that, if elected, he would provide “two great human values—work and security.”\textsuperscript{147} But he offered few details regarding his plans for the country.\textsuperscript{148} Immediately after his inauguration, McCormick met with Roosevelt to discuss his ideas for the nation. She argued that FDR’s approach would be active and experimental, as encapsulated by the phrase, “Let’s try it!” But McCormick was unable to offer any precision about what “it” was.\textsuperscript{149}

As Americans waited for the new president’s policies on unemployment to emerge, Generoso Pope offered his own opinions. In late January 1933, the \textit{New York World Telegram} published Rexford Tugwell’s proposal for at least five billion dollars of spending on public works. Conservatives decried the

\textsuperscript{145} Pope, “Gl’ Insegnamenti della Crisi.”

\textsuperscript{146} Generoso Pope, “The Greatest Need,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, February 26, 1933. Pope also criticized Hoover’s weak implementation of work sharing schemes, which he believed had only been used to freeze out foreign-born workers from factories in the United States.


\textsuperscript{148} For the intentional vagueness of Roosevelt’s program during the campaign, see: Alter, \textit{Defining Moment}, 129, 132.

\textsuperscript{149} McCormick, “‘Let’s Try It!’ Says Roosevelt.”
plan as a revolution in government.\textsuperscript{150} Responding to the backlash, Pope wrote that ordinary Americans had experienced the “ruinous effects of disinterested government” for too long; in 1933 they needed the very kind of “paternalistic” state that conservatives feared. He could only hope that the President-elect’s program of public works would be as generous as the one Tugwell proposed.\textsuperscript{151}

Similarly, Richard Washburn Child argued that the time had passed for a miserly approach to public finances. In the spring of 1933, he acknowledged that large-scale job creation entailed unprecedented expenses for government and, ultimately, taxpayers. But it was a necessary price to reverse the spectacle of men “pauperize[d]” by charity and “humiliate[d]” by joblessness.\textsuperscript{152} In 1933, Child, once the champion of a small federal government financed on a shoestring, argued for loose money and increased taxation to create jobs for men.\textsuperscript{153}

Public work spending in the early New Deal fell short of the five-billion-dollar mark supported by Generoso Pope, but it was still far more expansive than anything the federal government had initiated before. The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) of June 1933 authorized the President to borrow 3.3 billion dollars for public works.\textsuperscript{154} “We’re Going Back to Work,” read Pope’s headline, two days after Roosevelt signed the NIRA into law. Pope believed that Americans already felt the moral effects of the NIRA: “pessimism” had given way to hope; a sense of abandonment had been replaced by “trust” in government. He predicted that soon they would also feel its material effects: “within months,” or even “a few weeks,” millions of men would be back at work; families, “abased” by years of poverty, would know once more the “simple” comforts of economic security.\textsuperscript{155} Pope also roundly approved of the new administration’s efforts to reduce working hours. “How many times did I write that the best way to give

\textsuperscript{150} “Prof Tugwell Denies He Spoke for Roosevelt,” \textit{Baltimore Sun}, January 27, 1933.
\textsuperscript{154} Badger, \textit{FDR: The First Hundred Days}, 98-101. These 3.3 billion dollars were administered through the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, renamed the Public Works Administration (PWA) in 1935.
the unemployed work was not to burn machines, the inexorable rivals of manual labor, but to reduce working hours?” he crowed in September 1933.156

In 1933, these observers gave voice to hopes that permeated the United States in the wake of Roosevelt’s action. Sometimes, their faith that the government would create millions of jobs substituted for tangible progress. New Dealers theorized that government-sponsored construction projects would stimulate up-stream private sector employment in concrete and steel; the newly employed would then spend a portion of their wages on goods and services, stimulating further job creation.157 But in practice, this process took time. In September 1933, a frequent contributor to Il Progresso, who wrote by the name of Glaucus, engaged in the same kind of wishful thinking that the newspaper applied to Italy throughout the depression years. The government had “begun the process of distributing $1,023,966,201” for public works, Glaucus wrote. Men were busy once more, laying roads, constructing dams, and building ships. And for every man whom the government paid to mix concrete, break stone, or lay grout, others would find work in revitalized factories, labor yards, and docks.158 In its enthusiasm for the New Deal, Pope’s newspaper declared, quite prematurely, that the pump was primed.

Flawed Realities

For Richard Washburn Child and Generoso Pope, no subsequent period of FDR’s administration would produce the heady mixture of relief and hope that characterized the summer and fall of 1933. Inertia and uncertainty, it seemed, had given way to action and clarity; the New Deal, they hoped, would rebalance the relationships between towns and countryside and men and machines. But by 1934, their initial enthusiasms had tapered off. Having recently reinvented himself as a New Deal progressive, in 1934, Child returned to conservative traditions. Publically, Child insisted that he still favored “humane

158 Glaucus, “Il ‘Labor Day’ Trova gli Stati Uniti in Piena Lotta Contro la Crisi,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, September 3, 1933. Just as it did for Italy, Il Progresso used precise accounting to suggest that public works in the United States had the most human of effects. The precision of this figure obfuscated the fuzziness of the language. You can begin the process of distributing any amount of money, without spending much at all. Kennedy, Freedom from Fear, 178-79. As other historians have shown, little money was actually spent on public works in 1933.
relief” for the “deserving jobless.” 

Privately, he told FDR that he still admired his “love of humanity.” But, increasingly, Child argued that Roosevelt’s programs risked producing an unsustainable budget deficit and long-term dependency on government-sponsored jobs. The once necessary costs of the New Deal struck Child, suddenly, as too high.

Child’s abrupt turn against the New Deal came as no surprise to administration insiders, based on what they knew of him. For the best part of two years, Child had looked to Franklin Roosevelt for a job—not the kind of job that would feed his family for the winter, but a top appointment—and had employed a schizophrenic blend of obsequiousness and menace in his efforts to secure one. His criticisms were an expression of disillusionment with the New Deal, not so much because it had failed in its promises to the country, but because it had failed in its promises to Richard Washburn Child. But Child also voiced

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160 Letter, Richard Washburn Child to Franklin D. Roosevelt, August 30, 1934; Folder: Child, Richard Washburn; President’s Personal File 1760; FDRL.


In addition to his economic criticisms of the New Deal, Child argued that the program placed excessively rigid demands for consensus on Americans, which undermined constitutional freedoms.

162 Letter, E. Paul Yaselli to Marvin McIntyre, May 10, 1933; Folder, Richard Washburn Child; President’s Personal File 1760; FDRL. As early as May 1933, the President received word that Child would attempt to derail the New Deal if he did not receive a prime appointment. Paul Yaselli, who had served with Child on the League of Republicans for Roosevelt wrote to the President’s secretary, warning that Child had expressed an “intention to attack the President in the Press in the event of the latter’s failure to accord him adequate recognition of service rendered during the campaign.” See: Letter, Richard Washburn Child to Franklin D. Roosevelt, May 11 1933; Folder: Security Exchange Act, 1933 May 1-15; Official Files 242; FDRL; Letter Richard Washburn Child to Franklin D. Roosevelt, February 6, 1934; Folder: Bonds and Securities, 1934; Official File 242a; FDRL. Child’s first appointment, to work on problems related to American holders of foreign bonds, did not satisfy him. Letter, Richard Washburn Child to Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 11, 1934; Folder: Endorsements for Minster, 1933-1946; Official File 218b. In the spring 1934, Child wrote to FDR suggesting that he take up the Ambassadorship for Ireland. Roosevelt wanted to be rid of Child and attached a handwritten note to the Secretary of State regarding the possibility of stationing Child in Dublin: “What do you think of this rather happy thought?” Ultimately Child was given an improvised post, as a roving economic ambassador to Europe. Memorandum, Franklin D. Roosevelt to William Phillips, February 21, 1934, Folder: Jan-March 1934; Official File 20 Dept. of State. Roosevelt declared this “an excellent idea.” Letter, Stephen Duggan to Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 9, 1934; Letter, Franklin D. Roosevelt to Stephen Duggan, March 26, 1934: both in Folder, Duggan, Stephen; President’s Personal File 1404; FDRL. The political scientist Stephen Duggan wrote to FDR expressing concern about this appointment: he was worried that Child did not have the best interests of the New Deal at heart. FDR replied to this concern: “Don’t worry about the gentleman in question!” By implication, the role of economic ambassador had no clout, it was a way to keep Child quiet, and out of the country. Letter, Breckenridge Long to Franklin D. Roosevelt, May 23, 1934; Folder: Diplomatic Correspondence Italy; Long Breckenridge: 1933-19; President’s Secretary’s File 41; FDRL. From Rome, Ambassador Long confirmed Duggan’s fears. He had been told by a reliable informant that, while in Italy, Child had met with the conservative publisher Frank Knox and had agreed to write a series of articles against
conservative anxieties—common not only outside but also within the administration—which inhibited government spending on New Deal projects and slowed down the pace of job creation.

Any disappointment Generoso Pope felt with Roosevelt in early 1934 was due to precisely those conservative tendencies that existed within the New Deal. In February 1934, the publisher expressed disbelief that FDR would bow to conservative pressures to limit the costs of the Civilian Works Administration.163 The President, wrote Pope, had promised that Americans would no longer suffer from hunger. How, then, could he deprive the four million CWA beneficiaries of the wages that had fed them, and their families, during the winter months? Pope hoped that FDR’s sense of “justice and responsibility” would prevail over the orthodoxy of a balanced budget. He hoped, in short, that the American government would adopt the same humane (or, others might say, creative) approach to accounting that Herbert Schneider attributed to Italian public finances in the depression years.164

On the same day that Il Progresso criticized FDR’s fiscal prudence, it published news from Italy: the fascist state had spent seventeen billion lire (around one and a half billion dollars) on public works.165 In praising Mussolini’s approach to job creation, Pope’s suggestion was always the same: the United States government, wealthy and powerful, could and should be doing much more to give jobs to men. While Richard Washburn Child wanted FDR to tighten his belt, in early 1934, Pope called upon the President to loosen it some more. Unintentionally, their criticisms revealed that it is difficult for a democratically elected leader to be all things to all men.

Generoso Pope and his colleagues also expressed disappointment over the fate of the National Recovery Administration, which the administration launched with such pizzazz in June 1933. For Pope, the early days of the NRA were days of triumph. Editorials in Il Progresso expressed a mixture of relief

the NRA at $1000 dollars each. Roosevelt never met with Child again and the tone of Child’s letters reached new depths of resentment. Letter, Richard Washburn Child to Franklin D. Roosevelt, August 30, 1934; Folder: Child, Richard Washburn; President’s Personal File 1760; FDRL. Summarizing a series of career disappointments that he had suffered at the hands of the President, Child signed off: “I am ready to help you, but not by any loss of self-respect.” It was rather too late to be worrying about that.

163 Badger, The New Deal, 199-200; Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 175-76. The work of other historians suggests that this kind of analysis underestimated FDR’s own fiscal conservatism.
that the government had taken decisive action and pride that the NRA appeared to echo the corporative policies pursued by Mussolini’s regime.\textsuperscript{166} But here, too, contributors to \textit{Il Progresso} expected too much from the New Deal. Glaucus (\textit{Il Progresso}’s resident champion of optimism in 1933) imagined that the NRA would enable decent wages, boost workers’ purchasing power, eliminate “illegitimate” competition, stabilize industrial production, and ensure peaceful cooperation between capital and labor.\textsuperscript{167} But such claims were no more realistic for the NRA than they were for the fascist corporate state.

In the summer and fall of 1933, \textit{Il Progresso}’s fervent support of the NRA merged with its desire to see Americans cohere seamlessly around the government’s goals. Editorials in the newspaper endorsed conformism as a positive good. \textit{Il Progresso}’s vision was unabashedly authoritarian: a little reminiscent, perhaps, of the United States’ home front in the Great War, but much more redolent of the contemporary fascist state. “The politics of self is an insupportable luxury in moments of grave crisis,” editorialized Falbo, using a phrase that might as well have been plucked from Mussolini’s mouth.\textsuperscript{168} In September 1933, the chairman of the NRA in New York, Grover Whalen, denied any similarities between the NRA and Italian corporate state. Whalen argued that the NRA welcomed voices of dissent, in contrast to the fascist state. Italo Carlo Falbo demurred. The fascist government allowed constructive criticism but not “systematic opposition,” he wrote. If the NRA were to succeed, the Roosevelt administration should take the same approach as the Italian government, Falbo insisted: opposition could not be tolerated.\textsuperscript{169}

This was not the direction that the New Deal was heading in, and no one in the administration, with the notable exception of Hugh Johnson, seemed to welcome the comparison between the NRA and

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{166} Generoso Pope, “Un Grande Esperimento,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, August 13, 1933. Pope argued that Americans should seek solace in the “excellent results” under an Italian corporative system of “state control,” and “class collaboration”; with the National Industrial Recovery Act, the United States, too, was on the right path. \\
\textsuperscript{167} Glaucus, “Per R metametere in Azione Il Gigantesco Ingrangaggio Industriale degli S. U.” \\
\textsuperscript{169} I. C. Falbo, “NRA e Fascismo.” Generoso Pope, “La N.R.A. all’Opera,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, November 12, 1933. Similarly, Pope wrote: “It is necessary, of course, that capitalists and workers, under the auspices of the NRA, march together in discipline, faithful in the fairness and supreme tutelage of the Government, abandoning on one hand the whims of total independence and despotic individualism, and on the other part the mania for chronic and tumultuous strikes. The work of reconstruction . . . presupposes class cooperation, presupposes the superiority of the national interest and the general interest of all over the particular interests of a few, presupposes a collective force of good will, which will facilitate the success of the NRA”\end{flushleft}
the Italian corporate state. The NRA could not succeed, in part because the American government could not control voices of dissent and dominate the press with apocryphal success stories. By the spring of 1934, Pope muted all his praise of the NRA, which had delivered neither the economic miracles nor the “disciplined” unity Il Progresso had anticipated.

Only Anne O’Hare McCormick lost no enthusiasm for the New Deal as the winter of 1933 to 1934 gave way to spring, summer, and fall. Travelling around the United States in latter half of 1934, McCormick described the effects of public works in “the new roads or old roads widened and beautified, new parks or neglected parks replanted, bridges, dams, waterworks, sanitation systems, hospitals, schools, municipal buildings.” She described the effects of the New Deal, in other words, as a list of public goods that rivalled the list of private ones, which had defined the lost American souls of the 1920s. And she suggested that more valuable than the practice of “throwing away and building new,” was a rediscovered habit of “making over,” whether through publically funded projects of rejuvenation or private endeavors.

The government paid men to plant trees and flowers along roadways and in parks; other, and sometimes

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170 Translation of Memo, Italo Balbo to Mussolini; Source: Bollettino del Ministro degli Affari Esteri (Bulletin of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), July 1933; Document created in November 1933; Folder: Long, Breckenridge; President’s Personal File 434; FDRL. Roosevelt never expressed more than a vague admiration for the corporate state. After his meeting with FDR in July 1933, Balbo wrote to Mussolini: “The President also spoke words of appreciation for the labor organization of our country.” Maurizio Vaudagna, “The New Deal and Corporativism in Italy,” Radical History Review 1977, no. 14 (1977): 6-7. Of perhaps more significance, are the NRA planning documents, cited by Vaudagna, which included a favorable assessment of the corporate state as enabling economic stability and class cooperation. Reports such as these were examples of New Dealers’ willingness to reference models from all over the world, if aspects of them might be of use to the United States. Vaudagna notes that Ambassador Long also expressed admiration for the corporate state, encouraged Hugh Johnson to study it, and that Johnson “expressed interest in the matter.” Katzenstein, Fear Itself, 93. In addition to keeping a portrait of Mussolini in his office, Johnson handed out a fascist pamphlet on the corporate state to cabinet members. But it seems that most members of the cabinet viewed Johnson, who was erratic and alcoholic, as a liability. Katzenstein, Fear Itself, 236. Katzenstein cites FDR’s second fireside chat of May 7, 1933, and the NRA’s General Counsel, Donald Richberg’s, “Progress Under the National Recovery Act,” Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science 15, no. 4 (January 1934): 25-32, as examples of New Dealer’s refutation of comparisons between the NRA and both communism and fascism. See also: “NRA ‘the American Way,’” New York Times, March 6, 1934. At a meeting with business leaders, attended by Secretary of Labor, Francis Perkins, Johnson, and Richberg, Roosevelt said: “I am always a little amused and perhaps at times a little saddened—and I think the American people feel the same way—by those few writers and speakers who proclaim tearfully either that we are now committed to Communism and collectivism or that we have adopted Fascism and a dictatorship.” Roosevelt claimed that he was revamping American democracy to make it work. For criticisms of the NRA as similar to fascism, see: “Socialists Assail NRA as Labor’s Foe,” New York Times, June 3, 1934; “NRA Policies Emulate Reds, Says Hoover,” Washington Post, September 11, 1934. Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 185-88. Under pressure to demonstrate the difference between the NRA and totalitarian regimes, Hugh Johnson launched a “field day of criticism” for the NRA in February 1934. 171 Generoso Pope, “4 Marzo 1933—4 Marzo 1934,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, March 4, 1934.
the same, men supplemented their shorter work days by painting their porches and mending their fences.  

With the help of New Deal public works projects, McCormick reported that the center of gravity had shifted away from big cities and away from New York. Although its skyscrapers still stood, McCormick suggested that the city’s financial center was as humbled as Icarus, after his fall. The city had shrunk back to human proportions, and she found its pulse not in the corpse of Wall Street but uptown, in the outdoor cafés, where New Yorkers sought the company of one another. In the place of one big city, dominating the culture and economy of the United States, tens, or even hundreds, of small towns had become lively centers, with modest spheres of influence all of their own. And while Malthusian processes accounted for the subdued atmosphere of Wall Street, there was nothing laissez faire in the revival of Atlanta, Des Moines and Kansas City. Government support for agriculture and job creation had, in McCormick’s estimation, revived provincial towns. By stimulating civic life and injecting cash into local economies, federally-funded public works had chipped away at the veneer of standardization, to reveal peculiarities of place, culture, and heritage that had lain dormant for so many years.

The United States that McCormick re-discovered in 1934 had much in common with Italy as she described it in the early depression years: life was simple, emotionally gratifying, and local; town and countryside survived in symbiosis with one another, and with the government’s support. But while McCormick conceded that there was something of the “Old World” to this new United States, she believed that it was a product of uniquely American traditions and environments and a uniquely American democratic process.

In this patchwork landscape, McCormick found a new harmony. An illustration that accompanied her journalism from 1934 portrayed a nation in equipoise. From a domestic interior, an avuncular

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173 McCormick, “This America: A Re-Discovery.”
174 McCormick, “This America: A Re-Discovery; McCormick, “The Mood of America on Election Eve.”
175 McCormick, “The Mood of America on Election Eve.” McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.” Similarly, in this article she also expressed her confidence that “wherever” the United States went, the direction would be “American.”

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Roosevelt looked out at a richly textured scene. In the background was a lightly sketched city, its skyscrapers merely a suggestion, partially eclipsed by the gentle wisps of smoke that rose from the factories before it. Like the city, these factories did not dominate the scene; their horizontal profile echoed the landscape around them. Closer to the President still was a small town, its silhouettes evoking a church, a bank, local stores, and family homes. There was space in this composition for nature: perhaps half of the image was made up of the sky, mountains, fields, gardens, and parks. In the very foreground, almost as if they were in the President’s own front yard, were two men: a farmer in overalls; and a mechanic whose only tools were contained in a box, which he carried by hand. These two men were muscular from physical labor, strong from adequate food. They were standing tall, very tall, with pride of work well-done.  

Indeed, although she was touched by the changing landscape of the United States, McCormick was more touched still by the people she met across half a dozen states, most of them in the heartland. Were Americans happier, she wondered, than they had been in the “feverish, straining” decade past? They were certainly more fully realized. The people who spoke to her were wounded, scarred, and chastened. Their pain was heartrending, it felt like “the ache of a thousand fears.” But so was their hope. Tentatively, so very tentatively, they told her that their government was helping them to find their way out of the depression. The Americans who spoke to McCormick were often critical of elements of the administration’s policies. But whether they fully approved of the New Deal or not, Americans understood their system of government in startling details. Government was no longer a gigantic machine, beyond human capacity to control or comprehend. It was a personal experience, a lived reality. Lived reality was flawed reality, McCormick suggested. And what could be more human than that?

177 McCormick, “This America: A Re-Discovery.”
178 McCormick, “This America: A Re-Discovery.”
179 McCormick, “The Mood of America on Election Eve.”
180 McCormick, “This America: A Re-Discovery.”
Why did some Americans sympathize with fascism in the early depression years? Uncomfortable with the toll that modernity had taken on the fabric of their society, fascist sympathizers were primed to understand the depression as blowback from a decade of urbanization, agglomeration, machine-made production, and mindless consumption. They searched for solutions that would enable not only economic recovery but a recalibration of the relationship between machines and men. The predominantly rural and small-town Italy of sympathizers’ imagination functioned as more than a therapeutic salve for the “acids of modernity”; interpreted as a product of deliberate government policies, it offered concrete solutions for similar problems in the United States. Heartened by Americans’ seemingly instinctive gravitation toward the home and the local community in the depression’s wake, they argued that humans were happiest, and most themselves, when they had the greatest contact with one another and the products of their labor. In Roosevelt, they saw a leader who, like Mussolini, could shepherd men back into a seemingly more natural state, in which their lives could be enhanced, but never again overpowered, by modern technology.

These fascist sympathizers were pragmatic patriots. They were pragmatic, because they looked for solutions wherever they could find them, whether in Henry Ford’s experimental farms or the reclaimed marshlands of fascist propaganda. They were patriots, because they sincerely wanted what they thought was best for their fellow Americans. It seemed simple, all too simple: if Italy, a cash-strapped, resource-scarce nation, had implemented appropriate policies to manage the depression, then surely the United States, a country of plentiful resources and vast lands, could too.

It is ironic, perhaps even absurd, that fascist sympathizers saw a model for making man the measure of all things in a regime that demanded ever greater conformity from its subjects and ruthlessly exploited individuals for production and, soon, for violent expansion. But if we are to engage in the (admittedly dangerous) practice of using the present to understand the past, then perhaps an instructive observation is that in times of economic stress, when humans feel overwhelmed by forces seemingly

beyond their control, they admire leaders who reflect their anxieties and offer deceptively simple responses to their problems. People will search for solutions in the strangest of places.

Figure 10. Mussolini Goes Back to the Land
Chapter V. The Garden of Fascism: Beauty, Transcendence, and Peace in an Era of Uncertainty

In the summer of 1933, Italo Balbo embarked on a feat that many believed impossible: a formation flight of seaplanes across the North Atlantic, in an east to west direction.\(^1\) One hundred Italian airmen, in twenty-five seaplanes, left Orbetello airfield in Tuscany, on July 1, 1933. Their first alightment, in Amsterdam, did not go to plan. One seaplane capsized, and a mechanic, Sergeant Ugo Quintavalle, died. The next stopover, in Londonderry, was smoother, and the airmen pressed on to Reykjavik on July the 5th.\(^2\) Then the fog set in and, for six days, Balbo waited.\(^3\) In the United States, the press and the public prickled with anticipation.\(^4\) Richard Washburn Child, a member of the Chicago welcoming committee, was impatient, also.\(^5\) He telegraphed the White House on July the 11th: “Suppose President understands [B]albo delay means me here Hotel Sherman.”\(^6\) For once, Child was where Roosevelt wanted him: far from Washington, with nothing to do but wait.

On July the 12\(^{th}\), the Icelandic fog cleared and Balbo’s fleet took off from Reykjavik to face the toughest leg of their journey, over the Labrador Sea.\(^7\) The airmen stopped, serviced and refueled their planes three more times, in Newfoundland, New Brunswick, and Montreal.\(^8\) In the late afternoon of Saturday July 15, Chicagoans caught their first glimpse of the seaplanes, approaching Lake Michigan’s shoreline. The vision moved a Tribune reporter to lofty heights: “In formations at once proud and flexible

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\(^1\) “Twelve Flights Have Been Tried Over General Balbo’s Route from Europe to America, but Only Five Succeeded,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, July 9, 1933. Robert Whol, The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1920-1950 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 93. It was more difficult to fly across the Atlantic in an east to west direction than in the opposite direction; requiring close coordination, formation flights were much more difficult than solo flights.


\(^4\) “Italian Flyers Plan to Resume Trip Today,” Baltimore Sun, July 8, 1933; “Rain and Fog Again Hold Up Italian Flyers,” Chicago Daily Tribune, July 9, 1933.


\(^6\) Telegram, Richard Washburn Child to Marvin McIntyre, July 11, 1933; Folder: Child, Richard Washburn; President’s Personal File 1760; FDRL.


\(^8\) Segre, Italo Balbo, 241-42; Whol, Spectacle of Flight, 93.
they rode out of the evening clouds”; then the “silvery seaplanes” sunk “like swans to majestic rest on the sunlit bosom of the city’s water gate.”

On the evening of the airmen’s first full day in Chicago, five thousand guests, including Mayor Edward Kelly and Governor Henry Horner, gathered at the Stevens Hotel, for a dinner sponsored by the Italian-American society. Vast silhouettes of Mussolini and King Vittorio Emmanuelle III adorned the ballroom’s wall. Balbo wore a formal dress uniform, with a cropped white mess jacket; his aviators wore uniforms of white linen suits, white shoes, white gloves. When the airmen entered the ballroom, the guests rose for a fifteen-minute standing ovation; hundreds held their arms aloft in the fascist salute. Ceremonies and speeches followed. Maintaining a tradition established in the early squadrist days, Balbo called the roll. To the name Ugo Quintavalle, the mechanic who had died in Amsterdam, the airmen responded in chorus, “Presente!” Next, Balbo addressed the 5,000 guests. The objective of the flight, he said, was “to demonstrate Italy’s good will for America” and to strengthen “the ties of friendship” between the two countries. Richard Washburn Child read a telegram of congratulations from Franklin

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9 James O’Donnell Bennett, “Chicago Fetes Balbo Heroes in Heroic Style,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 17, 1933. The sexual connotations of Italian “swans” coming to rest in the “bosom” of Chicago were not unusual in descriptions of Balbo’s visit. Journalists frequently took a more direct approach when referring to the seductive powers of the Italian airmen. Some reports claimed that they were particularly attractive to Italian American women, like the one who swam out to Balbo’s barge in New York. See: “30,000 Greet Balbo’s Fleet on Arrival at New York Field,” *Baltimore Sun*, July 20, 1933. But other reports noted, quite pointedly, that the attraction crossed ethnic lines. See: James O’Donnell Bennett, “Balbo Flyers Take Off for East at Dawn,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 19, 1933. Bennet described Balbo as attractive to “women of many races”: “Nordic stenographers waft kisses to him from office windows,” he noted. Reports such as this suggest that Balbo’s successful flight contributed to a reassessment of nativist stereotypes about Italians as undesirable models of masculinity.


12 See: “Italian-Americans of Chicago Honor . . . ,” photograph, in Bennett, “Chicago Fetes Balbo Heroes in Heroic Style”; “5,000 Acclaim Balbo Flyers at Italian Dinner,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. John Hawkins, “A Sartorial Tale: Evening Wear for Men,” *World of Antiquities and Art*, September-December, 2013. In the early 1930s, the mess jacket was fashionable as evening wear in warm resorts, such as Palm Beach.

13 “5,000 Acclaim Balbo Flyers at Italian Dinner,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*.

14 “100,000 at Chicago Greet Balbo Fleet,” *New York Times*, July 16, 1933; “5,000 Acclaim Balbo Flyers at Italian Dinner,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*; “Aeronautics: Viva Balbo,” *Time*, July 24, 1933. *Time* claimed that Child, not Balbo, called the roll. This does not seem likely. The *Tribune’s* next-day report that Balbo had called the roll is far more credible.

15 “5,000 Acclaim Balbo Flyers at Italian Dinner,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. 

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Roosevelt. The crossing, wrote the President, marked a major step toward “the conquest of the air.”

Child added that all Americans could learn from the “practical bravery and discipline” of these Italian men.

Italo Balbo’s flying visit to the United States provided both Richard Washburn Child and Generoso Pope with moments of public visibility of the kind they craved. As the chairman of the New York welcoming committee, Pope had a particularly prominent role. The airmen visited New York after Chicago, and Pope was at Balbo’s side at every official engagement, in his orbit for every photo opportunity (Figure 11). Italo Balbo’s visit did wonders for Pope’s sense of individual self-worth. It also had meaning for Pope as a member of a frequently denigrated ethnic group. He echoed the sentiments of many in his community when he argued that Balbo’s flight meant that Italian Americans could be “prouder than ever” of their “italianità.”

But Balbo’s flight provided fascist sympathizers with more than these fleeting moments of celebrity, and with more than a source for ethnic pride. It gave them an opportunity to present fascism in terms that were appealing to many Americans, who, by the summer of 1933, seemed in need of diversions and reassurance wherever they might be found.

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16 Telegram, William Phillips to Richard Washburn Child, July 12, 1933; Folder, Italy, Government of 1933-1936; Official File 233; FDRL; “5,000 Acclaim Balbo Flyers at Italian Dinner,” Chicago Daily Tribune.
17 “5,000 Acclaim Balbo Flyers at Italian Dinner,” Chicago Daily Tribune.
19 Generoso Pope, “Sulla Via dell Ritorno,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, July 11, 1933. The airplanes flight to the “major metropolitan areas of the New World,” signaled the “rebirth of Italy, thanks to the genius of Mussolini,” wrote Pope. Guglielmo, White on Arrival, 117. Guglielmo writes: “Italian-language newspapers hailed Balbo as the ‘Modern Columbus,’ who along with his boss, Il Duce, was bringing long overdue prestige and praise to their motherland. . . . One Italian-American woman from the Near West Side remembers the day as ‘a beautiful and joyous occasion’ when Italians . . . finally ‘had something to be proud of.’ . . . Anti-fascists, to be sure, attended many of these celebrations as well— if only in an attempt to squash them. . . . Still, as was often the case, the fascists carried the day.”
First, the airmen affirmed a human capacity to contrive beauty. Their white suits, white hats, and white gloves were part of their choreography (Figure 12). Balbo himself was immensely photogenic, his appearance conjuring up a modern romanticism. He was the kind of man who changed in and out of his flying clothes in public but honored his fallen comrade with a roll call, in timeworn fashion.

The airmen’s beauty on land was only outdone by their beauty in the air. They flew the seaplanes in formation, in flights of three, each flight a triangle, each triangle part of a larger design. Soaring above Chicago’s Century of Progress exhibition and Manhattan’s skyscrapers, the seaplanes were visually stunning. “Our eyes,” wrote Generoso Pope, “have never seen such a spectacular sight.” As noted by a reporter for the Baltimore Sun, Balbo’s presence in the United States provided distractions from the problems of the day. But when the problems were the nitty gritty of “competitive business codes, stock markets, wheat prices” as well as the larger issues of poverty and unemployment, there was nothing superficial about light relief. It was good for the spirit, and good for the soul.

Second, Balbo’s successful flight demonstrated that man could overcome the most binding of constraints. Today, flight is so quotidian that many of us find it a banal experience. We may skim over a phrase like Franklin Roosevelt’s “conquest of the air” without really absorbing its meaning. But in 1933,}

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20 Throughout their visit, the airmen’s appearance was a focus of attention for American journalists. See, for example: “Gen. Balbo Given Wild Welcome in Washington,” Chicago Daily Tribune, July 21, 1933.
22 “La Partenza di S. E. Balbo Per Washington,” photograph, Il Progresso Italo-Americano, July 21, 1933. This photo showed Balbo at Floyd Bennett Field, putting on his flying clothes, with Pope at his side. “Balbo and His Men Honored in Capital,” Baltimore Sun, July 21, 1933. The article noted the crowd’s astonishment and delight with Balbo’s public costume change at Anacostia airfield. Segre, Italo Balbo, 52-53, 178-79. In Balbo, most Americans saw only beauty and grace. But he was responsible for some of the crueler aspects of squadrist violence in the early 1920s, and his petty cruelty remained engrained throughout his career.
25 “Balbo and His Men Honored in Capital,” Baltimore Sun, July 21, 1933. According to the Sun, it was 11 a.m. when the airmen arrived—a time when, typically, Washingtonians were either at work, or “looking for it.” But for once everyone was out on the streets, cheering.
observers used phrases like this in the truest of senses. They understood that the Italians had prevailed over powerful elements. Balbo and his men had successfully played with space and time in the air, and this seemed to give them ample license to play with space and time on land. In Chicago and New York, the Italians were often late, and they often skipped official engagements. But their recalcitrance provoked nothing but understanding. Those white linen suits were not only beautiful in appearance, they connoted transcendence: the usual constraints no longer applied.

Third, fascist sympathizers used Balbo’s flight to insist on the peaceful intentions of Mussolini’s regime. At the Stevens Hotel on July 16th, Balbo emphasized that the flight was a mission of “goodwill” and “friendship” between Italy and the United States. He frequently repeated this claim throughout his

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27 Whol, *Spectacle of Flight*, 93; “S. E. Balbo Esalta il Valore e la Disciplina dei Piloti,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*. Balbo was under public pressure to continue with the flight in Reykjavík. As quoted in *Il Progresso*, he justified his delay, arguing that man could “not fight the elements of nature with impunity.” Success hinged on a subtler approach, which recognized nature’s potentially overwhelming powers, harnessing them when possible, minimizing risks, and slipping in between the storms. Balbo, *Centuria Alata*, 262-63. It is perhaps in this context that we can best understand the awkward, and by Balbo’s own account uncomfortable, ceremony at the Indian village at the World’s Fair. Like the Sioux, these Italian airmen seemed keenly aware of the power of nature, taming it with reverence rather than battling it with hubris.

28 “5,000 Acclaim Balbo Flyers at Italian Dinner,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. On the 16th, the “fliers slept late and some of the events on their schedule for the day were omitted.” “100,000 at Chicago Greet Balbo Fleet,” *New York Times*. At 10 a.m. the Italians had been due at the World’s Fair “to thank the officials who met them” the prior day. They did not make this appointment. Bennett, “Chicago Fetes Balbo Heroes in Heroic Style,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. The airmen arrived half an hour late to a papal benediction at the Holy Name Cathedral, attended by Mayor Edward Kelly. The church waited. According to Bennett, “This is the first time in my experience,” whispered the mayor, ‘that the church waited for anybody.’” “1,000,000 in Chicago Bid Balbo Good-Bye,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1933. The official program for July 17 was reduced on Balbo’s request. By the new schedule, their first engagement was not until 5 p.m. Following the unscheduled trip to the Mid-Way on the night of the 17th, the fliers did not rise until 11 a.m. the next morning. “Balbo Plans Start for Home Monday,” *The New York Times*, July 21, 1923. After two very busy days in Washington DC and New York (July 20, July 21) the fliers reserved the next two days largely for “themselves” to “rest and prepare” for their return to Italy. “L’Italia all’Estero,” *Il Bollettino Degli Ministero degli Affari Estero*, July 1933, 730-736; Folder: Long, Breckinridge; President’s Personal File 434; FDRL. Balbo presented these demands for a reduced schedule as a necessary display of discipline, as demanded by Mussolini.

29 “Italian Flyers Win New Acclaim Here; Honored by Mayor,” *New York Times*, July 22, 1933. Balbo liked to reflect how Italian aviation itself was a story of breaking free of the limits imposed by nature. At the dinner at the Commodore Hotel, he noted that Italy’s relative poverty, forced on it by its lack of natural resources, had not stood in the way of the development of a world-class aeronautical program. “Il Contributo dell’Italia alla Navigazione Aerea,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, January 13, 1929. Similarly, at the 1928 Aeronautical conference in Washington, DC, Balbo had said that Italy’s progress in aeronautics was, “one might say, beyond the material potentials of our nation. But the Italian spirit has before overcome the deficiencies of nature.”

visit. Although Mussolini’s investments in aviation were inextricably linked to his ambitions to wage wars of conquest, American fascist sympathizers insisted that Balbo’s flight was an expression of amity toward the United States (and, in 1933, President Roosevelt was inclined to agree). In this context, those white linen suits took on additional meaning. They connoted more than beauty, and more than transcendence. They implied an innocence of purpose; they promised peace.

In short, fascist sympathizers represented Balbo’s 1933 North Atlantic flight as something beautiful and peaceful, in which man conspired with nature to surpass it and, in doing so, came that little bit closer to heaven. Paradoxically, the metaphor that most readily encompasses all this comes not from the air, but from the earth. The garden is a place of beauty and peace, where humans sensitively manipulate nature and find their god or gods. The garden is also the product of careful editing, and throughout Balbo’s visit, fascist sympathizers did their fair share of gardening of this kind, ignoring the uglier side of Balbo’s personality—his irritability and torpor—and cleansing their reports of anti-fascist protests.

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32 “Un Messagio del Presidente al Re,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, July 22, 1933; Letter, William Phillips to Franklin Roosevelt, July 21, 1933; Folder: Italy, Government of 1933-1936; Official File 233; FDRL. In a telegram to King Vittorio Emanuele, FDR wrote that Americans had welcomed the expedition as proof of the “goodwill and true friendship” that existed between their two people. Balbo had suggested that FDR telegram Mussolini directly, but Phillips advised that Long should deliver a message to the Prime Minister. “We can in this way take care of General Balbo’s desire to have some message go forward to Mussolini,” without breaking protocol, he advised. Letter, Franklin Roosevelt to Breckinridge Long, June 16, 1933; Folder: Long, Breckinridge; President’s Personal File 434; FDRL. In private, as well as public, the president was sanguine about the intentions of the fascist state: Roosevelt, at this stage, believed that Mussolini’s “honest purpose” was to “prevent general European trouble.”

33 “100,000 at Chicago Greet Balbo Fleet,” New York Times. The Times parenthesized the protests of Italian anti-fascists in Chicago on July 15 as a “jarring note” in an otherwise joyful day. “L’Italia all’ Estero,” Il Bollettino Degli Ministero degli Affari Estero, July 1933, 730-736; Folder: Long, Breckinridge; President’s Personal File 434; FDRL. In his official report on his crossing, Balbo wrote that in all his trips abroad he had never seen “a plebiscitary consensus” around fascism such as he saw in Italian Americans. Perhaps the policing of anti-fascists made their demonstrations imperceptible to Balbo, but he would also have wished to flatter Mussolini with such positive news. “100,000 at Chicago Greet Balbo Fleet,” New York Times. Only the Times reported that the “first message that the General delivered to Chicago was a rebuke...two sailboats had cut across his course a mile north of the Adler Planetarium.” Balbo, Centuria Alata, 247-48. Balbo later described his welcome in Chicago as clumsy, and implied that it was a product of American excess. “A series of small incidents that could have been avoided if, instead of a speedboat, a plain rowing boat had come to collect us: but it seems that in all this mechanized civilization, and across all of Lake Michigan, it was impossible to find a single one.” Henrietta Nesbitt, White House Diary (New
In 1933, American society at large echoed fascist sympathizers’ interpretation of Balbo’s flight. There were voices of criticism, both in the form protests on the streets of Chicago and New York, and in editorials in anti-fascist publications. But the mainstream press characterized the airmen as embodiments of physical beauty, conquerors of nature, and representatives of peace. As a welcome escape from reality, an act of transcendence, and a thing of beauty, Balbo’s flight seemed to sit comfortably within contemporary American culture: fantasy was a popular genre in books and films of the 1930s; and various forms of art and design—from swing dancing to streamlining—expressed an urge to break free from constraints. In 1933, it was easy for most Americans to celebrate Balbo’s feat.

Fascist sympathizers’ interpretations of Italo Balbo’s flight also signaled the start of a shift in how they represented Italy. At the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the New Deal, these observers had mined fascism for practical examples of human-scale responses to economic and social difficulties, which could bear lessons for the United States. In the mid- to late-1930s, their interpretations of Mussolini’s regime were not devoid of relevant implications for American policy. But, more than before, they invoked Italy and fascism to take Americans out of their own realities and to suggest that Mussolini’s regime transcended all constraints.

While it was easy for most Americans to agree with fascist sympathizers’ characterizations of Italo Balbo in July 1933, the claims that Italy represented beauty, peace and transcendence felt more

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34 Stefano Luconi, “Ethnic Allegiance and Class Consciousness among Italian-American Workers, 1900–1941,” *Socialism and Democracy* 22, 3 (2008), 138. Luconi cites an anarchist weekly *L’Adunata dei Refrattari*, published in New York, which, for two months, “detailed” Balbo’s “crimes against the Italian people” as a form of protest against his visit.

35 The press was obsessed with the airmen’s appearance, and in particular their white linen suits. For typical examples, see: Bennet, “Chicago Fetes Balbo Heroes in Heroic Style.” “Gen. Balbo Given Wild Welcome in Washington,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 21, 1933. For the idea of overcoming constraints see: “Cheat Perils.” For another very complementary reports see: “Balbo and His Men Honored in Capital.”

36 David Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 52-54; Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 426, 433, 436, 360, 524. The protagonists in the decade’s best-selling novels—*The Good Earth* (1931), *Anthony Adverse* (1933), and *Gone with the Wind* (1936)—struggled with familiar problems of poverty, scarcity, and hunger, but the drama played out in remote or bygone settings, a long way from home. This mixture familiarity and fantasy was present too in the 1939 film adaptation of the *Wizard of Oz*. Dickstein describes Ginger Rogers’ and Fred Astaire’s dances in terms reminiscent of airplanes in flight: “all circle and swirl, movement and flow”; the two dancers “locked together in breathtaking dips and turns.”
farfetched as the decade progressed. By coincidence, Balbo alighted in Chicago only a few months after
Adolf Hitler assumed dictatorial powers in Germany, and his flight helped to distance Italy under
Mussolini—seemingly so beautiful, peaceful and benign—from Germany under Hitler—blatantly brutal,
aggressive and threatening. These distinctions between Nazism and fascism became increasingly
important for fascist sympathizers over the course of the mid-1930s, under mounting evidence that the
two regimes were drawing closer together, both in style and in fact. Metaphors of the garden, which
seemed so natural for many Americans on the occasion of Balbo’s flight in 1933, felt increasingly false,
forced, and strained by 1937, given the realities of life in Italy and the foreign policy of the fascist state.

Wild Flowers and the Wilderness

One can understand the appeal of alternative worlds to Americans in the 1930s. The economy did
pick up slowly (before another recession in 1937) but joblessness was a stubborn problem, particular
among the ranks of the long-term unemployed. In the mid-decade, one in five Americans remained
without a job. Initial feelings of hope that Roosevelt would save the country gave way to the realization
that the United States could be in the economic doldrums for years to come. “Pessimism stalks upon us
at every turn,” wrote a columnist in the African American newspaper, the Atlanta Daily World, at the end
of 1934. Populism—of the kind offered by Upton Sinclair, Francis Townsend, Charles Coughlin, and
Huey Long—appealed to those who were convinced of, or at least hopeful for, simple solutions for the
economic crisis. But other Americans acknowledged that the issues they faced were of a deep-seated
and complex nature: there was no “fell-swoop solution” to the United States’ problems, wrote a
contributor to the North American Review in 1935.

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37 Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 218.
38 For a sample of ordinary people’s anxieties and disappointments in the mid-decade, see: Robert S. McElvaine,
Down & Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the “Forgotten Man” (Chapel Hill: University of North
1934. Jones believed that government aid had resulted in too much direct relief for able-bodied men, and inadequate
help for the truly destitute.
40 Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 219-42.
The ongoing conflict between capital and labor was one aspect of these problems. In 1934, there were strikes across the country, and the responses of local vigilantes, police and the national guard were often violent.\(^\text{42}\) The strikes confirmed that the NRA had not fulfilled its (unrealistic) promise of resolving industrial strife. A year before the Supreme Court struck it down, the NRA was unravelling: consumers blamed it for price increases; the left disliked it because it favored big business; and the right believed it encouraged labor militancy.

The Roosevelt administration worked to salvage the NRA’s guarantee of collective bargaining through the National Labor Relations (or Wagner) Act of 1935; and historians agree that the NLRA created a much firmer basis for industrial relations than the NRA.\(^\text{43}\) But for many Americans at the time, the NLRA seemed to leave unanswered more than it resolved. Lecturing in Rome in early 1936, Herbert Schneider said that the Wagner Act had “obvious limitations”: it did not address the “broader problem of class struggle” or “curb strikes.”\(^\text{44}\) Glaucus, the Il Progresso journalist who, in 1933, had predicted that the New Deal would usher in a permanent truce between capital and labor, painted an entirely different picture in 1937. He described the sit-down strikes in Michigan that year as an expression of a “bitter and unceasing” conflict between capital and labor in the United States, which had been “resolved in Italy for quite some time.”\(^\text{45}\) On these issues, fascist sympathizers seemed to voice the sentiments of many Americans: the majority of those polled argued that all sit-down strikes should be illegal and that the Wagner Act should be either repealed or revised.\(^\text{46}\)

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\(^\text{42}\) Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 292-96; “Minneapolis Under Martial Law . . . ,” photograph, Il Progresso Italo-Americano, August 5, 1934; “Lo Sciopero Generale dei Tessili E Incominciato Ieri Sera alle 11.30;” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, September 2, 1934. The strikes included an autoworkers strike in Michigan and Ohio in the spring, strikes of teamsters in Minneapolis and longshoremen in California in the summer, and a textile workers strike in New England, the mid-Atlantic states and the south in the fall.


\(^\text{44}\) Lecture notes, Herbert W. Schneider, “Industry and Labor Under the Roosevelt Regime;” part of lecture series “Lineamenti Storici e Ideali del Conflitto Economico-Politico Intorno di Roosevelt”; Folder, Manuscripts L; 107/3/5; HWSP.


\(^\text{46}\) George Gallup and Claude Robinson, “American Institute of Public Opinion-Surveys, 1935-38,” Public Opinion Quarterly 2, no. 3 (July 1938): 382. 67% of those polled in March 1937 said that sit-down strikes should be illegal. 43% of those polled in May 1938 said that the Wagner Act should be revised; 19% said that it should be repealed.
Fascist sympathizers presented the widespread strikes as just one aspect of an unsettled American landscape. Schneider identified the United States’ principal problem as the failure to agree. Americans, he said, had “a multitude of faiths; in other words, nothing but doubts.” Policymakers were “still hesitating, wondering, debating, or, at best, experimenting.” Schneider told his Italian lecture audience:

American morality is still a wilderness, where occasionally the wild flowers bloom (sweet, but essentially wild) amid vast stretches of desert sand.

Democracies are by definition pluralistic, people within them rarely agree. Instead of characterizing such democratic pluralism as a fertile orchard, with many varieties, ripe for the picking, Schneider described it as an arid desert, where the odd plant might self-seed. Schneider portrayed Italy, by contrast, as a well-established garden. The Italians, he said, had agreed upon “the fundamental lines” of their “new order”; “all that remain[ed] in Italy” was “the daily application of intelligence and labor.” In an era of uncertainty, clarity (even at the expense of pluralism) had a certain appeal.

Of course, there were also international dimensions to Americans’ sense of insecurity in the mid-decade, and the garden that fascist sympathizers designed catered to these anxieties, too. Public awareness of the threats presented by Germany, Japan (and Italy), was exceeded, and often overwhelmed, by the conviction that the United States should never again fight in Europe. At the end of 1936, ninety-five percent of Americans believed that the United States should not take part in another World War.

Fascist sympathizers keyed into their fellow Americans’ wishful thinking that Mussolini would help to moderate Hitler, and perpetuate the uneasy peace that had prevailed on the continent since the end of the Great War. Their agenda was made easier by the attitude of the Roosevelt administration, which premised much of its foreign policy in the mid-1930s on a belief that Mussolini was “anxious to avoid

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48 Gallup and Robinson, “American Institute of Public Opinion.” Steven Casey, Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War Against Nazi Germany (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 19-20. As Cordell Hull observed in October 1933, newspaper editorials tended to combine distaste for Nazism with “a unanimous opinion” that the United States should remain aloof from Europe’s troubles.
war”’ in Europe. Herbert Schneider’s 1935-1936 trip to Italy, sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, was itself an expression of the kind of blinkered optimism, vis-à-vis fascist Italy, which ran through policy circles. Schneider’s stay coincided with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, prompting a letter from Carnegie officials reminding him to “confine” his “public and private talks to non-controversial matters.” Schneider was there to promote and maintain “the friendly feeling” which existed between “the people of Italy and of the United States,” wrote the assistant of Nicholas Murray Butler (who was the Director of the Endowment, as well as President of Columbia University, and well-known for his fascist sympathies). When confronted with concrete evidence of fascist aggression, it seems that many Americans chose to ignore realities, or escape.

For their part, Italian propagandists familiar with the United States understood that the regime needed to tailor its image according to the specific sensitivities of American audiences. In 1935, Carlo Boidi, the head of the Italian Fascist Students’ Group informed Mussolini that Americans’ “confusion” of fascism and Nazism represented the “greatest danger” to Italy’s reputation in the United States. In 1936, Angelo Flavio Guidi, a fascist journalist whose work appeared often in Il Progresso, recommended that the regime send to the United States materials evoking “beauty and great works” in Italy, to help overcome “simplistic confusions between Nazism and Fascism.” Similarly, in a 1937 letter to the

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49 Schmitz, *United States and Fascist Italy*, 135-205, esp. 202. Schmitz tracks the administration’s attitude toward Italy between 1933 and 1939. For instance, he argues that the administration interpreted the Four Power Pact of 1933 as evidence of Italy’s peaceful goals, and that key figures in government preferred to see Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia as a mere parenthesis in a largely peaceful fascist foreign policy. By June 1939, Roosevelt recognized that William Phillips’ view that Mussolini was “‘anxious to avoid war’” in Europe was optimistic, but with few good alternatives, Roosevelt wrote that he would “‘hope and pray’” that Phillips was correct.

50 Letter, Henry Haskell to Herbert Schneider, November 16, 1935; Folder, Correspondence, 1930-1935; 107/1/4; HWSP. For Butler and fascism see, footnote 52, in Introduction, above.

51 Report, Carlo Boidi to Benito Mussolini, November 29, 1935; Sotto-fascicolo 36, On Boidi – Crociera del GUF in America: Busta 8; Ministero della Cultura Popolare Gabinetto 1926-1944; ACS.

52 Letter, Angelo Flavio Guidi to Ottavio de Peppo, 14 April, 1936; Fascicolo, Propaganda nel Nord America; Busta 220, Stati Uniti 1935-1936; Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS. Letter, Angelo Flavio Guidi to Francesco Grassi, December 19, 1933, in Giuseppe Grassi, *Un Prete a New York* (Self-Published, 2012), 330. Guidi described himself as an “Italian fascist journalist.” Matteo Pretelli, *La Via Fascista alla Democrazia Americana: Cultura e Propaganda nella Comunità Italo-Americane* (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2012), 78-79. Pretelli describes Guidi as an ex-squadrist who became a prominent figure in philo-fascist cultural circles in both the United States and Italy. Letter, Pietro Gorgolini to Dino Alfieri, September 29, 1936, Fascicolo 450, Centro Italiano di Studi Americani, Gorgolini prof. Pietro; Busta 74; Ministero della Cultura Popolare Gabinetto 1926-1944; ACS. By 1936, Guidi was also a member of the directorship of the Fasci all’Estero and on the board the Centro Italiano di Studi Americani in Rome.
 Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Press and Propaganda, the Italian Ambassador, Fulvio Suvich, suggested that propaganda bound for the US should emphasize “the dynamism of the Italian people in the fascist regime”; “the difference between what there was and what has been created”; and “peaceful works rather than military and warlike themes.”

American fascist sympathizers helped the regime in this regard. Herbert Schneider, who wrote his third book about fascism in 1936, later remembered that his “chief” objective had been to demonstrate fascism had “no relation to Nazism.” Often, these observers provided juxtaposing portraits, which suggested that German Nazism was sick, unnatural and bellicose, while Italian fascism was healthy, natural and peaceful. For instance, a 1934 editorial in *Il Progresso* described Hitler’s plan for autarchy as the product of a “diseased mind,” which aimed to make Germany dependent “on its chemists for food and “detach” Germans from “the rest of humanity.”

A contemporaneous image published in *Il Progresso* featured Mussolini participating in the wheat harvest in Littoria—connecting with nature, connecting with men. On more than one occasion, Anne O’Hare McCormick invited Mussolini to spell out the differences between Nazism and fascism for American readers. In 1936, she reported that the Prime Minister had told her that there were “profound” differences between the two regimes, and that the Italians were “not a warlike people” and would never become one. As constructed by these observers,

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53 Letter, Fulvio Suvich to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Press and Propaganda, February 4, 1937; Fascicolo, Propaganda Straniera Negli Stati Uniti; Busta 222, Stati Uniti 1937; Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS. Suvich also warned that to be effective in the United States, fascist propaganda had to appear natural: any impression of heavy handedness would likely backfire. See also, Augusto Rosso to the Undersecretary of Press and Propaganda, December 10, 1934; Fascicolo; Materiale di propaganda per gli Stati Uniti; Busta 219, Stati Uniti 1935; Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS. Pretelli, *La Via Fascista alla Democrazia Americana*, 83-98. Based on a very close reading of archival sources, Pretelli makes similar observations about the regime’s efforts to develop a form of “Propaganda Americana.”

54 *Reminiscences of Herbert Wallace Schneider.*


57 See: Mariano Pierro to Giuseppe Sapuppo, March 17, 1934; and Anne O’Hare McCormick to Galeazzo Ciano, April 9, 1934. Both in Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. McCormick asked, “What, for example, are the principle points of difference between Italian fascism and the fascism which is developing in Germany”? McCormick never received the regime’s answer to this question, as someone within the regime deemed the response “unsatisfactory” (or perhaps too controversial).

58 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “New Italy: Fact or Phrase,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1936. See also: Generoso Pope, “Hitler and the Jews,” March 26, 1933. “Hitler says that Mussolini is his idol. But the Duce has given Italy
the garden of fascism did not just look beautiful, it produced the kind of sounds that most Americans wanted to hear.

**Urbe as Orta—City Planning in Italy and the United States**

Ideas of the garden had the most literal of manifestations in Italian and American cityscapes of the 1930s, since in both countries planners envisaged greener inner cities, and airier and more verdant suburbs. Angelo Flavio Guidi described Mussolini’s program of urban landscaping in Rome for readers of *Il Progresso*. By 1934, the government had created twenty-five new gardens and more than one hundred and fifty kilometers of tree-lined streets in the capital, Guidi claimed.\(^{59}\) According to sympathetic observers, the regime did not only turn Rome into a greener city, it improved urban dwellers’ access to nature beyond the city limits. In 1928, the government had built a “speedway”—the Via del Mare—between Rome and the ancient seaside town of Ostia; by 1934 it had lined the route to the sea with 6321 elms, oaks and pines, according to Guidi.\(^{60}\) That same year, Mussolini discussed his love of skiing with Anne O’Hare McCormick. He promised that, within a year, a new road would make the Appenine mountains accessible to all.\(^{61}\)

Fascist sympathizers claimed that by creating gardens in the city and access to nature beyond, the regime mitigated the harshness of the urban environment: thanks to Mussolini, the Roman breeze was more refreshing, the city streets cooler, and the air smelt of mimosa flowers.\(^{62}\) They argued that these changes created respite from the most grating aspects of modernity: the regime moved factories to the religious peace, among other things. The Jews have never been ill-treated in the Peninsula and the Lateran Pact has brought peace between the Vatican and the Quirinal and put an end to anti-clericalism in Italy. If Hitler were to follow the example of Mussolini even in this, he would be stronger at home and less unpopular abroad.”

\(^{59}\) Angelo Flavio Guidi, “La Roma Verdeggiante; la Città delle Piante e dei Fiori,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, October 18, 1934. Previous Italian governments had done nothing to control urbanization, Guidi wrote. They had allowed buildings to encroach upon the city’s open spaces, much in the same way that a negligent gardener would turn a blind eye to the spread of weeds, he suggested.


\(^{61}\) McCormick, “Mussolini Willing to Guarantee Enforcement of an Arms Treaty.”

outskirts of the city and banned car horns, turning Rome into a peaceful sanctuary. The impact of these policies seemed evident on contemporary Romans themselves, who suffered fewer of the tensions associated with modern life. McCormick wrote that the sporty Mussolini, whom she met in 1934, was more “physically fit” and “cheerful” than ever before. By building a road to the mountains, the Prime Minister would extend the benefits of fresh air and exercise to all, she suggested. “You see happy and satisfied faces everywhere” in Rome, wrote Generoso Pope, following a visit to the capital in 1937. Removing the sources of urban strain and giving Italians air, space and, light, the fascists seemed to provide a refuge from the ills of modernity.

The fascist project for Rome entailed more than creating green space in the city and transportation networks to get out. In McCormick’s telling, it also included the construction of a “modern city on the periphery of the old.” Fascist sympathizers stretched the idea of the garden of Rome from the literal to the metaphorical realm, observing that the government took control of the urban environment. In the fall of 1934, Il Progresso described how Mussolini took the lead in slum clearance in one of the “filthiest quarters” of the medieval city. The Prime Minister climbed on to the roof of one of the decrepit homes and ripped up the tiles with his bare hands. McCormick’s 1934 Ladies Home Journal article included a photograph of a modern apartment complex, which the regime had built in the suburbs of Rome. The building had almost more windows than stone, and curved around a wide street, basked in daylight. All Italian families wanted to exchange their medieval hovels in dark alleyways for “large buildings exposed to the sun,” fascist sympathizers implied.

67 “Modern Apartment House in Ancient Rome,”” photograph, in McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.”
68 “Rome Magnificent Under Fascist Rule,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, June 14, 1936. The regime also built homes for the middle classes, reported Il Progresso: planned communities for government employees close to their
There were parallels between the ideas of Italian and American urban planners in the 1930s. In both Italy and the United States, landscapers and architects reacted against density, envisaging greener cities and more spacious, horizontal buildings. And in both countries, the governments conceived of suburban development as a healthier alternative to life within cities. At times, fascist sympathizers appreciated these parallels. Thanks to New Deal projects, American cities offered “more public gardens” than they had in the past, wrote McCormick in 1934. Two years later she noted that the “gentle putting” of the WPA and Civilian Conservation Corps had helped to beautify the suburbs. McCormick suggested that, in a similar fashion to fascist policies, the New Deal had helped to soften some of the sharp edges of urban life.

But these observers also suggested that the United States lagged behind Italy in urban planning, especially with regard to the provision of low-income housing. Both McCormick and Pope remarked on the prevalence of slums in the United States. Pointing to “zone[s] of dilapidation and decay” in Cleveland, Chicago, and Detroit, McCormick argued that the “margins” of American cities were “the ugliest in the world.” Pope described New York’s housing conditions as a source of “deep shame for metropolitan America.” Why, he wondered, did a city as wealthy as New York still have slums while Italian cities like Milan and Rome had done so much to increase their stock of popular housing? In June 1934, Pope welcomed a public housing project in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, as the first step toward the “transformation of unhealthy neighborhoods into oases of health, peace, and happiness.”

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McCormick, “This America: A Re-Discovery.” Giudi, “La Roma Verdeggiante.” Other fascist sympathizers pointed out how the United States lagged behind on urban landscaping. Guidi wrote that for New York to have the same proportion of green space as Rome, it would need “21 million square meters of parks and gardens…and 1,200,000 trees.”


McCormick, “Fear Over Europe—Hope Here.”

Pope’s hope that all New Yorkers would soon have decent housing was not realized. As documented by historians, with WPA funds, the Williamsburg public housing project went ahead, alongside a smaller project in East Harlem. But at the end of 1937, New York still offered only 2,330 public homes to a city of seven million people. New York’s limited progress providing low-income housing was replicated in other American cities, and reflected multiple factors, including New Dealers’ slow uptake of the issue, the resistance of conservatives in Congress, and the vested interests of private sector groups.

Writing in Il Progresso at the start of 1935, Glaucus described some of these obstacles to housing policy in the United States. He argued, quite correctly, that the low priority afforded to public housing at the start of the New Deal was reflected in the small budget and weak leverage of the housing division of the PWA. By 1935, initial complacency in the administration had given way to a consensus that some form of intervention was required to relieve the housing problem. But, as Glaucus observed, New Dealers failed to agree on a policy approach. Glaucus pointed to various positions in the government: Harry Hopkins, the FERA chief, called for nine billion dollars of public spending to build rural and semi-rural homes; Harold Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior, suggested a program of about half that size, to be administered through the PWA; James Moffett, head of the FHA, advocated for government interventions in the mortgage market to stimulate private purchases. Just as Herbert Schneider would argue that New Dealers’ “multitude of faiths” left them “hesitating,” Glaucus implied that a variety of positions within the government resulted in paralysis. To employ Schneider’s imagery, it seemed that wild flowers bloomed in government, while on city streets the wilderness prevailed.

76 Marcuse, “The Beginnings of Public Housing in New York.” 354; Radford, Modern Housing For America, 177-198, esp. 192, 198. Senator Wagner’s 1937 housing act enabled the construction of 10,000 more units of public housing in New York over the next four years. But stringent caps on construction costs (imposed by conservatives as the bill proceeded slowly through Congress) meant that these new homes lacked the spaciousness or the amenities of the PWA projects. For more on the political economy of Wagner’s bill, see, footnote 85 of this chapter below.
77 Radford, Modern Housing for America.
But even Glaucus himself acknowledged that there was no easy way forward in housing policy in the United States. In his view, any intervention would entail unintended consequences (or, as economists say, negative externalities). For instance, by encouraging near-subsistence lifestyles in rural areas, Hopkins’s proposal could depress consumer demand, Glaucus observed. Employing hundreds of thousands of men on “relief wages,” both Hopkins’s and Ickes’s programs could undercut private sector salaries, he noted. Meanwhile, Moffett’s preferred course of action would entrust recovery to the kinds of “speculators” who had provoked the boom to bust cycle of the 1920s, Glaucus argued.79

This kind of analysis represented a significant change from Il Progresso’s earlier position on government responses to the depression. In the New Deal’s first eighteen months, the newspaper had supported unequivocally programs of rural resettlement and public works.80 Two years on, Glaucus still argued that government action was preferable to inaction. But he also highlighted the downside risks of every possible course of action. The chastened tone of his analysis was at one with other articles in Il Progresso in the mid- to late-1930s, which stressed the complexity of policy options in the United States, and the negative externalities that might accompany public interventions.81 For instance, whereas Generoso Pope had once welcomed unconditionally New Deal public works, arguing the more, the better, from 1935 onward, he expressed anxieties about a mounting budget deficit, rising taxes, and the danger

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79 Glaucus, “Vasto Programma Edilizio Americano.”
80 Glaucus, “Il ‘Labor Day’ Trova gli Stati Uniti in Piena Lotta Contro la Crisi.” For instance, as noted above in Chapter 4, in 1933, Glaucus had anticipated that the PWA would affect an almost instantaneous economic recovery.
81 “Qual’è la Via Che Dovrà Battere il Nuovo Congresso Per Superare la Crisi Attuale?” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, January 13, 1935. This article emphasized the difficulties of passing New Deal policies through Congress, and the differences between FDR and staunch fiscal conservatives. “The Federal Work Program,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, May 5, 1935. While praising the April 1935 work relief bill, the editors criticized low wages for public works for incentivizing men to stay on the rolls of the unemployed. It contrasted the US approach with Italy’s claiming that in Italy, men employed on public works were “paid prevailing wages.” “Aboliamo la Discoccupazione,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, June 6, 1937. Despite the title, this editorial emphasized the various barriers to forging recovery and the negative externalities that attended interventions—such as reduced working hours—which the newspaper had previously advocated unconditionally.
that public spending would crowd out private sector investment. So while Pope continued to lament the housing crisis, and in particular the persistence of “old, lurid, unhygienic hovels” in urban areas of the United States, he no longer argued that a solution to the housing problem, or indeed the larger crisis, was a simple question of government spending.

*Il Progresso Italo-Americano* shed light on some of the real constraints under which the New Deal operated in the mid-decade. Housing policy was in disarray within the administration in late 1934 and early 1935, just as Glaucus described. And conservative instincts, of the same kind that Glaucus and Pope expressed, held the government back from developing a more comprehensive approach to public housing. The administration’s most important contribution to public housing came in the form of the Housing Act of 1937. As originally conceived by Senator Wagner, the Act would provide low-interest federal loans to local authorities to enable them to build homes for low-income families. With equivocal support from President Roosevelt, Wagner’s bill drifted for two years, and when it finally passed into law,

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82 Generoso Pope, “Ciò Che il Popolo Attende,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, June 23, 1935. Pope expressed frustration that “weeks and months” had “passed” while Congress discussed how the relief money would be allotted. But he also expressed anxiety about a growing fiscal deficit. He stated that the government alone would not be able to resolve the unemployment crisis, which he argued was dependent on private sector recovery, and worried that tax increases to fund public spending could dampen the private sector. He restated these views in: Generoso Pope, “Ritorno al Lavoro,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, July 28, 1935. Generoso Pope, “Provvedere e in Tempo Utile,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, November 22, 1937. Pope argued that public works spending was unsustainable in the long term and that higher taxes had hindered private sector recovery. In a similar vein, see: Generoso Pope, “Lavoro Per Tutti,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, December 12, 1937. Generoso Pope, “La Politica dei Lavori Pubblici,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, May 16, 1937. In May 1937, Pope wrote a more favorable editorial in support of the President’s demand for a $1.5 billion budget for the PWA. Letter, John Freschi to James Farley, May 20, 1937; Letter, James Farley to Franklin D. Roosevelt, May 22, 1937; Letter, Franklin D. Roosevelt to Generoso Pope, May 25, 1937; all in Folder, Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File, 4671; FDRL. Via John Freschi and James Farely, Pope sent the English translation (published on May 23, 1937) to FDR to garner his approval (not coincidentally Pope was at the time campaigning for a liberalization of immigration restrictions). FDR responded, complementing Pope on “an able piece of writing” which uttered “truths” with “clarity.” But even this most complementary editorial was cautious in tone. Pope described progress on job creation as “gradual” and looked forward to a time when “the bitter struggle between Capital and Labor” had “lessened.”


84 “Job Relief Drive of Nine Billions Up to Roosevelt,” *Washington Post*, January 12, 1934. Glaucus was certainly correct in viewing conflict within the administration about which was the best course of action. The *Post* described a “deep cleavage” in the administration between the Ickes and Hopkins factions and “controversy” between Ickes and Moffett, (the latter “opposed . . . Government activities in fields” belonging “to private enterprise” and “appeared chastened” after a meeting with the President). There was “confusion” about which part of the Ickes’ proposals for low cost housing and slum clearance the President had actually approved in January 1934. Both Hopkins’ and Ickes’ proposals were in a “nebulous stage”; and, according to the *Post*, conservatives within the administration were “disturbed” by the nine-billion-dollar price tag of the Hopkins proposal, and wanted to focus instead on private sector recovery.
Congress had deprived it of its most forceful elements. Real world economic and political constraints hit housing and urban policies hard in the United States.

In contrast to the all too evident limitations of urban planning policies in the United States, fascist sympathizers offered Rome as a place that defied constraints entirely. For example, they presented Rome as a city where policies went into effect “at once without the slightest delay.” The idea that policymaking was faster in fascist Italy was not a new one: since the early 1920s, fascist sympathizers had argued that Mussolini’s dictatorship represented the height of administrative efficiency. But, increasingly, such claims assumed a paranormal quality. Words like “miracle,” “magic” and “supernatural” appeared frequently in sympathetic observers’ descriptions of fascist Rome, to refer to phenomena that defied conventional expectations of space and time. The regime decided to develop gardens, parks and tree-lined streets in Rome, and “straight away” the city turned green, eliding the time it took to implement policy, or even the time it took for seasons to change, for trees to grow, and for flowers to bloom.

The regime’s archeological program also demonstrated its time-bending capacities. Fascist-sponsored archeology, skipped over problematic eras—post-imperial decline, competitive city-states, and

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85 Badger, New Deal, 241-42. Badger writes that “only 117,755 units of public housing were built under the 1937 act.” United States Housing Act of 1937, as Amended (Washington, DC: Federal Works Agency, United States Housing Authority, 1939). Amendments halved the budget of the program, ensured that no state received more than ten percent of the total funds, capped costs at a paltry one thousand dollars per room, and limited family dwellings to four rooms. For a contemporary critique of the conservative impetus behind amendments, see “Whittling Down the Housing Bill,” New York Times, August 7, 1937. According to both this opinion piece and Badger, the limit on a single state’s share of funds was aimed again populous north-eastern states, and particularly New York. “Senate Passes Housing Bill with $4,000 a Family Limit,” New York Times, August 7, 1937. As Senator Wagner argued at the time, the spending cap was too low to allow for the construction of decent public housing in North Eastern cities; and the four room limit risked perpetuating slum-like conditions in new homes.

86 “Extensive Improvements in All Towns Are Accomplished,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano.

87 See: Guidi, “La Roma Verdeggiante,” for the reforestation “miracle”; Morgan, “Once the Noisiest City,” for the “magic” of a silent Rome; and “Rome Magnificent Under Fascist Rule,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, June 14, 1936, for Mussolini’s “almost supernatural” achievements. “Extensive Improvements in All Towns Are Accomplished,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano. Although the fascists expanded Rome, it was possible to cross the entire city, not just quickly, but “without loss of time,” according to Il Progresso. “La Riorganizzazione della Vita Civile nei Territori Conquistati in Etiopia,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, January 5, 1936; “Italy Transforms Addis Ababa From Native Hut Village Into Roman City,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, October 11, 1936. Similarly, fascist sympathizers frequently referred to the “miraculous speed” with which the Italian colonizers brought roads, planned cities, order, and health to Ethiopia.

88 Guidi, “La Roma Verdeggiante.”

89 McCormick, “Dreams of Empire Kindle Rome.” Mussolini wanted to “free the past from the overlay of centuries,” according to McCormick.
liberal democracy—to draw a direct line from ancient to contemporary Rome.\textsuperscript{90} American fascist sympathizers saw nothing artificial in this program (although both Schneider and McCormick recognized the political value of reviving imperial Rome as “a symbol of unity”).\textsuperscript{91} Instead, they argued that the fascists resuscitated Rome’s ancient past as “the natural and organic structure out of which the present” would grow.\textsuperscript{92} In 1935, McCormick observed that Trajan’s market was once more an “emporium,” that the Circus Maximus hosted public expositions, including a recent modern housing fair, and that the forum was again a “Civic Center.” McCormick implied that by reviving the past, the regime recovered part of Italians’ authentic identity, which had been neglected by previous governments; Rome was made whole again, and, with it, Italians too.\textsuperscript{93}

These observers claimed that the regime had bolstered Rome’s long-standing status as the Eternal City: Schneider argued that, under Mussolini, Rome “more than ever, was “assuming an ‘eternal’ aspect and temper.”\textsuperscript{94} The regime intentionally blurred the lines between imperial, Catholic and fascist Rome, and foreign sympathizers willingly consumed the resulting hybrid—part pagan, part Christian, part statist.\textsuperscript{95} McCormick described a sunny Sunday morning that she spent in Piazza dell’Esedra (now Piazza della Repubblica). She stood in the center of the square, sprayed by water from the fountain, taking in the Christian Basilica of Santa Maria and Diocletian’s baths on one side, the massive train station, and the “fleet” of “shining” new buses on the other. “It was a lusty scene. Everything was mixed up in it: Christ,
Caesar and Mussolini,” she wrote.96 One contributor to Il Progresso described how it was easy to “find religion in Rome”: thanks to fascist town planning and archeology, the city was more beautiful than ever before; and thanks to the ban on car horns, it was more peaceful. On a “wonderful spring morning” this observer felt “reborn” as he listened to “the silver music of Rome’s thousand bells.”97 To sympathetic observers the city was “Roma cristiana, cesarea e fascista”; its bells rang for God, the gods, and Mussolini.98

For its part, the regime endorsed for American consumption portraits of fascist Rome as both a triumph of urban planning and a place of spiritual fulfillment. For instance, in 1935 the Ministry of Popular Culture asked the Luce Institute to send films about Rome to the Italian Embassy in Washington, for distribution in the United States.99 The precise content of these films is unknown, but recent Luce productions included “Demolition of Slums . . . and the Building of New Homes,” “Sunny Days in Roman Winter,” filmed at the seaside in Ostia, and “Excavation of the Roman Forum.”100 The regime used portraits of fascist Rome to portray Italy as a carefully tended land, which both ensured a good quality of life and elevated human existence above a material world.101

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96 McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.” McCormick, “Dreams of Empire Kindle Rome.” McCormick conveyed a similar feeling of cohesion following a concert she attended in the forum in 1935. The concert was one of a summer series sponsored by the government, she told her readers. The orchestra played Beethoven, and McCormick, seated with ten thousand Italians, described a sense of connectivity that ran between humans, history, nature, and art: “It was full moon, and the sound was like the moonlight put to music, the silver voice of the silver light that flooded the vast arches [of the Basilica] overhead, poured down the deep hollow behind, swept the ancient terraces beyond so that each cypress and stone pine stood listening in a separate radiance.”

97 “Italy, the Country of Harmony, is a Famous Land Everyone Admires,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano.


99 Telespresso, Under-Secretariat for Press and Propaganda to Luce Institute, June 22, 1935; Fascicolo Pellicoli di Propaganda per gli Stati Uniti; Busta 219, Stati Uniti 1935; Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS.


101 Letter, Augusto Rosso to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 29, 1933; Fascicolo, Movimento Fascista negli Stati Uniti; Busta 218, Stati Uniti 1934; Ministero della Cultura Popolare. Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS. The Italian Embassy helped to calibrate the images of Rome that the regime propagated in the United States. Ambassador Rosso wrote to the Ministry of Propaganda regarding a recent project to promote the “Universality of Rome” in the United States. Rosso cautioned that such an idea should be strictly limited to the “intellectual” realm and not be promoted as a “popular” movement in the Italian American community. If it were “presented without sufficient clarity or profound thought” it ran the risk of “provoking reactions which in the last analysis will undermine the cause it sets out to serve.” Rosso’s intention was to ensure
The regime was also conscious that such images of Rome could help to distinguish the Italian form of fascist totalitarianism from the German strand. Anne O’Hare McCormick echoed the regime’s line, using metaphors of space and place to designate fascism as welcoming and welcome, and Nazism as beyond the pale. After visiting Germany in 1933 and 1934, McCormick described it as a barren land. She found physical parallels to the destructive spirit of Nazism in Hitler’s “modernistic” office, cleansed of books, history and art, and in the demolition of Munich’s Königsplatz, including its lawn, to make way for the party headquarters.

The fate of German Catholics and Jews worried McCormick immensely: although Hitler had made overtures toward the Catholic Church in early 1933, he proceeded to attack both Catholic and Jewish institutions, and during the Night of the Long Knives, in July 1934, the Nazis murdered Dr. Erich Klausener, the leader of the Catholic Action. Reaching for architectural metaphors to describe Nazi Germany, McCormick situated the regime in the dark, middle ages. Years before the construction of physical ghettos, she wrote that the Third Reich was “erecting a social and spiritual quarantine as dividing as medieval walls.” McCormick insisted that the different aesthetic forms of the two fascisms were expressions of fundamentally different regimes. Nazism was, in her mind, “humorless-Gothic,” whereas Italian fascism was “mellower and more humane,” softened by history and brightened by the occasional “flourish of the baroque.” She suggested that the difference between Nazism and fascism was the difference between a wasteland and a garden.

Rome, as represented by fascist sympathizers, gave health to modern bodies and peace to modern souls. It was a very different city from the one the fascist government actually created. Not all Romans were happy to be transferred from their existing homes in the central city; not all Romans found modern

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amenities, spacious architecture, and transportation infrastructure in their new neighborhoods. Often, working-class Romans interpreted rehousing as an attempt to break up left-leaning communities; sometimes, their new homes had no more facilities than their old ones, and cut them off from their city and from one another. Instead of connecting Italians with their history, many Italians felt that the fascist regime had deprived them of it. Known as a “disemboweling” (svetramenti), Mussolini’s archeological and construction program tore up vast swathes of medieval Rome. Rome’s “great parkways” and newly open spaces, which looked so beautiful to Anne O’Hare McCormick, felt like “scars” to many Italians—emblems of the regime’s readiness to raze all that stood in its way.

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Sympathetic American observers ignored the darker side of fascist Rome to produce an imaginary place that differed in quality and kind from cities of their own. Both the fascist regime and the US government reckoned with problems related to urbanization in the 1930s. Both looked to solutions in the form of public spaces and parks, accessible cultural events, suburbanization, and public housing. But Mussolini appeared to offer more complete solutions to these problems in Rome: a place that was greener, culturally richer, and with better amenities than any American city. At times, and particularly in the early days of the New Deal, these observers drew comparisons between Rome and American cities to argue that their own government should and could do more. But at other times they seemed to offer Rome up as a pure escape. There was magic to Rome, just as there was to Italo Balbo, and his team of airmen, dressed in white. Fascist sympathizers understood that when real-world solutions to real-world problems were elusive, people craved magic.

107 The borgata (suburban community) of Primavalle was particularly notorious in this regard. See: Ghirardo, Building New Communities, 39-40, 192; and Borden W. Painter, Mussolini’s Rome: Rebuilding the Eternal City (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 94-95.

108 McCormick, “Dreams of Empire Kindle Rome.” See also, McCormick, “Seven Capitals in Search of a Policy” for references to the creation of “‘zones of respect’” around monuments and “thoroughfares . . . through the maze of ancient streets.” This article, written in 1937, represented a shift in tone from McCormick’s coverage of Rome in 1934 and 1935. There was an implication—and only an implication—that the regime had overstepped the balance, making the “‘zones of respect’” and “thoroughfares” too wide, and cutting too deeply into the fabric of the city, and its past. The observation that Italians feel Mussolini’s renovation of Rome as they would “scars” on their body was made by Marta Marsili, a local historian and guide, who showed me the physical results of the fascist project for Rome on April 18, 2017.
The Valley of Youth

When fascist sympathizers criticized urban conditions in the United States 1930s, their voices merged with other Americans who argued that inner cities were breeding grounds for juvenile delinquency. In the 1920s, sociologists had developed an “ecological theory” of crime, which described the environment as the chief factor in criminal behavior. Highly influential in the field of criminology, these ideas led the Wickersham Commission—a 1931 government-sponsored investigative committee—to conclude that juvenile delinquency resulted “not from any racial disposition toward crime but from the influence of the social environment.” Although the “ecological theory” of crime had its detractors, by the mid-1930s it was well-entrenched in the American public consciousness. Put simply in the New York Times in 1935, most Americans understood that criminals were “made, not born.” When McCormick lamented the zones “of dilapidation and decay between the business district and the suburbs” of Detroit, Cleveland, and Chicago in 1934, she was referring to the “back of the yards” zones identified by sociologists as breeding grounds for young criminals. And when Generoso Pope stated (as he did

109 Marilyn D. McShane and Frank P. Williams III, eds., Encyclopedia of Juvenile Justice (London: Sage, 2002), 365. These ideas were closely associated with the work of the University of Chicago sociologists, Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay. See: Clifford Shaw et al., Delinquency Areas: A Study of the Geographic Distribution of School Truants, Juvenile Delinquents, and Adult Offenders in Chicago (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929).


112 McCormick, “Fear Over Europe—Hope Here.” “Let Laboratory Find Crime Cure, Scientist Says,” Chicago Daily Tribune, April 7, 1930. Shaw and McKay, “Social Factors in Juvenile Delinquency,” 34, 45, 55, 76, 128. Shaw and McKay demonstrated that crime rates were highest in “back of the yards” areas—in inner-city residential zones that lay, quite literally, on the wrong side of tracks, stockyards, or other physical boundaries. They provided a compelling illustration of their theory, in the form of a map of Chicago, which showed that delinquency rates decreased in concentric circles, moving out from the city center.
frequently) that Italian Americans were not criminals by nature, he could claim that social science was on his side.  

Fascist sympathizers used these environmental explanations of delinquency to argue that Mussolini’s regime was nurturing young men and women to develop into socially adjusted, responsible adults. Writing in *Ladies Home Journal* in 1934, McCormick quoted her “friend,” an Italian man called Carlo Bonfigli. Carlo had been eighteen when the fascists seized power in 1922—a little too old to benefit from government youth training programs. But Carlo’s younger brother, Vito, was a product of fascist youth. Carlo admired Vito and his friends; he described them as “‘a better generation . . . simpler, healthier, more at home in their world.’” In Carlo’s mind, Vito and his friends were “‘like saplings growing in the new forests . . . growing straight because they have the air and soil most favorable to their development.’”

Sympathetic American observers argued that the fascist regime channeled natural adolescent instincts that would otherwise be consumed by a life of crime. Herbert Schneider had already praised fascist Italy’s education policy and youth training programs in the late 1920s. In 1936, he described the fascist athletics program as “little short of spectacular.” The goal of such programs, Schneider wrote, was to direct the energies of young people toward a “healthy outdoor life to diminish the sickly fruits of private passion.”

The fascist state succeeded, these observers argued, first because it pursued its sports program wholeheartedly—providing magnificent free training grounds, and making athletics a central aspect of

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114 McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.”
115 These arguments were again based on sociologists’ findings that young people had a natural instinct to form social groups. See: Shaw and McKay, “Social Factors in Juvenile Delinquency,” 3, 4, 327, 333. Shaw and McKay stressed the importance of social bonds for children, whether through family or “play groups.” The “gang” provided “primary group relationships,” in the absence of close family bonds, they wrote. “Turning the Flank of Crime,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. Based on Shaw’s ideas, this opinion piece argued that the gang was “the boy’s drive toward a self-organized society in an environment that offers no good substitutes.”

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public life—and second, because it offered activities that genuinely appealed to young people. Through the balilla (the fascist boy scouts) the government provided a “substitution for the gang to come,” wrote one contributor to Il Progresso. Like the gang, the balilla offered “companionship.” Like the gang, the balilla provided a “program and code of ethics.” But unlike the gang, the balilla shaped young people into “good citizens,” this writer maintained.

McCormick, Schneider and contributors to Il Progresso observed that, in addition to the weekly activities of fascist youth groups, the government provided summer camps for young people at the mountains or by the sea. As interpreted by these observers, the principal purpose of these camps was to remove children from potentially damaging urban environments. According to one contributor to Il Progresso, the state had taken control of these camps (which had once been run by private organizations) to ensure that all children—and the poorest in particular—could “benefit from the cures of the climate.”

Angelo Flavio Guidi portrayed the camps as health resorts: children ate an enviable diet of pasta, cheese, tuna, and meat, prepared by a chef from a grand hotel; they returned to their families physically stronger and tanned—the contemporary emblem of excellent health. These observers argued that the healthy effects of fascist summer camps extended from the “physical” to the “moral” sphere. Removed from urban environments that were breeding grounds of bad behavior, young Italians were nurtured along a straighter and narrower path.

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118 Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 146. Schneider wrote that the Foro Mussolini, with “its gymnasia, baths, athletic field and stadium” was a “heroic symbol of the government’s interest in athletics, and that almost every other Italian city” had a “new and capacious athletic center.” The outdoor stadium of the Foro Mussolini was surrounded by colossal statues of athletes, which both referenced classical sculpture and superseded classical ideals with stockier and stronger-jawed male forms—a kind of idealized Mussolini. “Fountains, Stadiums of Rome, Recall Periods of Old History,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, September 29, 1935. According to Il Progresso the statues “spur[red] Italian youth to reach, through hard and constant training, the most harmonious expression of beauty and strength.”

120 McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.”; McCormick, “The Average Italian is Still Himself”; Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 46.
Weekly youth activities and summer camps furnished fascist sympathizers with very obvious examples of the gardening principle: young Italians grew up healthily in outdoor stadiums, on hillsides, and by the sea, they argued. But these observers also applied an environmental understanding of youth development in less direct ways. For instance, McCormick and contributors to *Il Progresso* suggested that the government had revived religious practices among Italian youth. McCormick noted that there were 10,000 chaplains assigned to the fascist boy scouts and “even a Bishop of the Balilla”; photographs in *Il Progresso* featured Catholic prelates performing masses at youth camps. McCormick again referred to her friend, Carlo Bonfigli, and his brother, Vito, to demonstrate the effects of fascist youth organizations. “‘Like many of my generation, I don’t practice my religion,’” Carlo confided, but, “‘with all his comrades [Vito] goes to church as naturally as he eats and breathes.’” McCormick suggested that fascism had effected a transformation in the values of young men. While Carlo had some of the skepticism associated with the modern condition, Vito was an idealist, through and through. She had Carlo convey this idea in two words, made more powerful by their simplicity. “‘Vito believes.’”

These observers also identified maternity and infant care as another way in which the fascist state successfully applied an ecological theory of youth development. As *Il Progresso* correctly recognized, one of the main purposes of the *piccole italiane* and *giovane italiane* (the female fascist youth groups)

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124 For photographs, see for example: “The 50,000 ‘Avanguardists’ of Camp Dux, at the Holy Mass, Celebrated in the Open Air,” photograph, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, October 1, 1933. McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.” McCormick glossed over a much deeper controversy between Church and State over youth training, writing: “The state claims the children, and on this point there was a sharp controversy between the government and the church authorities. It takes possession of the youth on Sundays—one of the Pope’s objections—but it sends them to church first.” See also: McCormick, “The Average Italian is Still Himself.” The “same young men” who attended fascist youth groups “crowd[ed] into the churches on Sunday morning,” she wrote. Herbert Schneider, *Fascist Government of Italy*, 20-21, 152. By 1936, Schneider was much more conscious of the competing demands of church and state, and argued that fascism had “robbed” the Church of “popular enthusiasm and loyalty.” But Schneider welcomed the discipline of religion and religious-like ceremonies, whether they were provided by the Church or the State. Schneider and Clough, *Making Fascists*, 73. The following formulation, written by Schneider and his co-author, was typical: “The most far-reaching aspect of Fascism’s attitude toward religion . . . is the success of the movement in building up its own religious atmosphere and rites. Fascism claims to be not a mere political revolution but a spiritual revolution, initiating a new era in the culture of Italy, if not of the world. As such, it has the rudiments of a new religion. Whether or not these will grow remains to be seen, but certainly there can be no doubt that already this new cult has taken hold of the Italian heart and imagination.” Schneider’s arguments foreshadowed those of Emilio Gentile. See: Gentile, *Il Culto Del Littorio*.

125 McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.” See also: “Come Il Fascismo Dà alla Gioventù Italiana il Senso Collettivo della Patria,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, September 4, 1933. Similarly, *Il Progresso* translated and reprinted an article from Paris *Temps*, which argued that fascism had provided young Italians with “a spiritual physiognomy” bound up in idealist notions of “purpose” “unity” and a “sense of their future.”
was to prepare girls to become mothers. But rather than presenting such groups as loci for indoctrination, the newspaper portrayed them as sensitively compensating for the effects of modernity, since maternal knowhow, which was readily transferred in traditional societies, could be lost in contemporary environments. Mussolini had identified a lacuna in modern society, wrote the editors of Il Progresso, and used the state to fill the void. On her tour of Littoria in late 1933, McCormick saw the House of Motherhood and Infancy, which she described to Ladies Home Journal readers as a “combination of baby clinic, nursery, school and hospital for mothers.” Such provisions were available throughout Italy, Il Progresso observed, offering advice, health care, and even square meals, to women and their children. Fascist nurseries enabled a woman to work if her family’s “economic status” necessitated it, while providing the tender administrations of the ideal mother, even in her absence. As rendered by these observers, the fascist maternal state would ensure that children got the best possible start in life.

According to fascist sympathizers, the effects of the state’s efforts to nurture and develop youth were evident in the human results. Il Progresso cited Italy’s success in international athletics as proof that the fascists had molded a new generation. A 1935 cartoon illustration featured three Italian cycling champions—alert, strong-jawed, highly muscled. In the same cartoon, a diminutive Uncle Sam asked, “Where do they come from?” In the center of the composition, Mussolini provided the answer: the men were the “sons of sunny Italy”; a product of their environment.

Fascist sympathizers insisted that the effects of fascist youth programs extended also beyond the physical realm. Contributors to Il Progresso argued that low crime rates in Italy were the product of youth

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127 “Training Italy’s Future Mothers.” For very similar sentiments, see Glacus, “Nel XII Annuale della Marcia Su Roma Marconi Inaugura l’Ora Italiana,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, October 28, 1934.
130 “Il Ciclismo Italiano Tuttora all’Avanguardia,” illustration, Il Progresso Italo-Americano, February 10, 1935. Generoso Pope, “Il Primo Campione Italiano,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, July 1, 1933. Similarly, Generoso Pope wrote that Primo Carnera’s victory as world heavyweight boxing champion in June 1933 was proof of the “magical mussolinian impulse” at work on the youth of Italy.
training and maternity programs. By offering summer camps and weekly activities the state provided boys with a moral framework and took youth “off the street.” By teaching women maternal arts, the regime ensured that mothers were more protective of their children, especially in “big cities” where temptations abounded. And by providing nursery care to vulnerable infants and children, the state had “rescued” thousands “from vice.” In short, the fascist state appeared to have abolished juvenile delinquency by following the methods that sociologists prescribed: reforming “the environment in which the phenomenon . . . formed.” In place of cramped cities and absent parents, the fascists offered spacious landscapes and loving authority, according to these observers. And instead of the juvenile delinquent, they produced young men like McCormick’s earnest and virtuous Vito Bonfigli—a surname that, perhaps not coincidentally, meant “good son.”

All these observers suggested that the United States could learn from the Italian regime’s approach to youth training. Indeed, Il Progresso Italo-Americano argued quite directly, that “America, rich in material and spiritual resources, could readily follow” the Italian example. In early 1937, Generoso Pope launched a “crusade” against juvenile delinquency in the United States. Week after week, Pope’s newspaper described how interlocking problems of slum housing, scarce amenities, low income, and working mothers had shaped American urban youth.

Il Progresso argued that private organizations in the United States had developed the correct approach to tackling the problem of juvenile delinquency, by providing after-school activities to channel

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131 “Italian Youth Movement Is Patterned on Roman Method,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano.
132 Glaucus, “Nel XII Annuale della Marcia Su Roma Marconi Inaugura l’Ora Italiana.”
134 “La Crociata del Gr. Uff. Generoso Pope Per Prevenire la Delinquenza Giovanile,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, July 11, 1937. Il Progresso also observed that the Italian government had reformed the criminal code and improved law enforcement. But its predominant emphasis was on preventative measures to reduce crime. See: “La Delinquenza in Italia,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, August 9, 1936.
135 McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.”
“pent-up emotions,” and countryside camps to improve young people’s physical and moral conditions.\textsuperscript{138} The principal problems were related to supply: the boy scouts and most summer camps required fees, which most poor families could not pay; as a result, low-income youth depended on piecemeal programs offered by charities.\textsuperscript{139}

Generoso Pope funded one summer camp, Villa St Joseph, in the “green, woody mountains” of New Jersey. Every summer, groups of Italian American children left their “asphyxiating hovels” in New York, \textit{Il Progresso} reported, to spend fifteen days in the “oxygen and sunshine” of the countryside.\textsuperscript{140} Under the moral guidance of a kindly priest, Father Congedo, and the care of two matronly women, these children developed in body, spirit, and mind.\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Il Progresso} presented Villa St Joseph as a bucolic escape from the ills of modernity—the run-down tenements of New York City, and the families stretched so thin that they could not supply the education or love required for children’s healthy growth.\textsuperscript{142} Villa St Joseph was a “Paradise,” according to Generoso Pope, but it was “little Paradise” that could only extend as far as the generosity of Generoso allowed.\textsuperscript{143}

Pope and other fascist sympathizers suggested that as long as the efforts to combat delinquency remained piecemeal, the United States would continue to suffer its consequences. Arguing that the fascist government had eradicated the problem by intervening systematically in the environment that shaped youth, they used Italy to suggest that the state and federal governments ought to do more in the United States.

While the fascist government’s approach to youth training, summer camps, and nursery care functioned as a practical reference point in the mid- to late- 1930s, it also provided opportunities for

\textsuperscript{138} “Campaign Opened to Assist Young People,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, October 25, 1936.
\textsuperscript{140} “Un Escursione a Villa Saint Joseph, Oasi di Amore e di Pace, Nido Giocondo,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, August 19, 1934.
\textsuperscript{142} “Un Escursione a Villa Saint Joseph,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}.
\textsuperscript{143} Pope, “Pel Campeggio di Villa St. Joseph.”
escapism. Italy, as rendered by fascist sympathizers, was not just a country that had reduced crime, but a country entirely without organized or systematic crime. Images published in *Il Progresso* reinforced a sense of a miracle at work, in a land of perpetual sunshine. In the Foro Mussolini, in the summer of 1935, thousands of white-shirted young men stood in preternaturally tidy lines. In the middle of the Borghese gardens, in the summer of 1936, perfectly choreographed athletes, dressed in white, auditioned for a place in the Berlin Olympics. At an exhibition on child welfare, in summer of 1937, a carousel in motion carried toddlers in white clothes on miniature mules, as the Prime Minister padded gently by (Figure 13). There was a beauty to these images, but it was a very particular kind of beauty. Photographs are always still, and they are always silent, but these photographs felt still and felt silent, almost uncannily so.

By reproducing these images, fascist sympathizers aided the regime in its efforts to minimize the bellicose spirit of fascist youth policies. The regime was concerned that Americans would (correctly) interpret fascist youth activities as militaristic in intent and oppressive in spirit. For instance, in September 1937, Luigi Villari, a fascist propagandist familiar with the United States, wrote to the Ministry of Propaganda. He cautioned that some Americans were under the misapprehension that Italian children were “taken from their families at the most tender of ages and closed in institutions to be trained in arms.” The Ministry of Propaganda needed to work at softening the image of its youth programs for an

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144 “Crime Waves, Rackets Are Unknown in Italy Under Fascist Regime,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, April 15, 1934. “La Delinquenza in Italia.” The latter article recognized precipitous declines in most crimes under the fascist government, before stating that “Italy is almost immune to the most socially dangerous forms of delinquency, which is to say, habitual, professional or repetitive delinquency.” In 1928, Richard Washburn Child had written about Prefect Mori’s apparent success in fighting the mafia. See, Richard Washburn Child to Mr. and Mrs. H. Walter Child, February 11, 1928; Folder “1925-1930”; Reel 2; RWCP. Child wrote of his return from a Sicilian mountain village which he had first visited when he was the Ambassador in Rome. “Mussolini and Prefect Mori are breaking up most effectively” the mafia her wrote. “I am writing an article on this subject and it is fascinating.” For an historical assessment of the fascist record in fighting the mafia, see Christopher Duggan, *Fascism and the Mafia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), esp. 253. Duggan notes that most of Prefect Mori’s fabled successes in fighting the mafia was due to extra-judicial arrests, torture, show trials, and that these methods did not suppress organized crime. Duggan, who saw copies of Child’s article on the Mafia in Mori’s manuscript collection in the State Archives of Pavia, describes Child’s account as “sensationalist” and frequently “fictitious.”


American audience, Villari maintained.\footnote{Letter, Luigi Villari to the Director General of Propaganda, September 25, 1937; Fascicolo Propaganda negli Stati Uniti Nuovo Centro Italian Library of Information; Busta 223, Stati Uniti 1938; Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS.} McCormick, Schneider, and Pope’s newspapers all helped the Ministry of Propaganda in this regard, arguing that the regime did not infringe on the private relationship between parents and their child. McCormick’s formulation was typical: parental consent was required before a child could join the fascist youth; the state did not “detach” children from their families, she reassured the readers of \textit{Ladies Home Journal}.\footnote{McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.” De Luca, “Maternity Centers in Italy.” Similarly, this writer was keen to disabuse readers of the notion that the state took children away from their families. Mothers could eat with their children at the nurseries, which ran from morning to early evening, he observed. No children were kept overnight. Schneider, \textit{Fascist Government of Italy}, 20. Schneider noted that parents could “request that their children be excluded from religious instruction” in schools.}

More generally, these observers emphasized the natural settings and maternal spirit of fascist youth programs to suggest their innocent purposes.\footnote{McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E. F.” McCormick listed the “extra-curricular” activities provided by the government: “physical training, medical and hygienic assistance, camps and seaside colonies, pre-professional courses in all branches, sex education and pre-military exercises” Her placement of “pre-military exercises” at the end of the list does not seem to have been accidental, the militaristic purposes of the balilla were in her view less important than the civilian ones.} These features were especially prominent in their descriptions of camps designed for Italian boys living abroad. In the summer of 1934, \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano} published a photograph of one such camp at the “Alpine summer resort” of Cortina. The image was horizontal and wide—as wide as full page of the newspaper—conveying a sense of openness and space. The figures—more than a hundred boys and a dozen or so grown men—took up only the bottom third of photo. The loose formation of the assembled group carried little suggestion of regimentation. The boys convened in clusters, snaking around a valley floor in a pattern that echoed the curves of the hills behind them. They were gentle, rolling hills; hills that welcomed, without imposing a shadow on the sun-filled valley below (Figure 14). Angelo Flavio Guidi argued that for the foreign boys who attended the fascist camps, Italy was “Mamma twice over”: Mother Nature of “power and beauty”; and Mother nurture of “plenty and grace.”\footnote{Guidi, “Giovani Italiani di Tutto Il Mondo.”} According to these formulations, fascist training programs were as healthy as the alpine air, and as innocuous as a mother’s embrace.
Regime propagandists were at pains to characterize government-run camps in Italy as harmless, natural, and nurturing to distinguish them from their Nazi equivalent. In this respect, too, American fascist sympathizers echoed the regime’s goals. In contrast to healthy and fully realized young Italians, McCormick described young Nazis as physically and spiritually “undernourished” by a state that propounded unnatural theories of racial hatred and throttled synagogues and churches. She implied that German youth programs were unfit for human consumption; even the brown shirts of young Nazis suggested something indigestible, like an acerbically “strong mustard” or a rancid, “green beer.”

McCormick argued that while the National Socialist regime superimposed unnatural organizations onto German youth, the Italian state supplied institutions that met young Italians’ physical and spiritual needs. “Youth in movement,” was “the most formidable sight in Italy—not the heavy arterial excitement, the racial passion of Germany, but a flourish of young life,” she wrote in the spring of 1934. Like the regime itself, she wanted to send the reassuring message that fascism, unlike Nazism, was not bellicose in nature or intent.

In short, sympathetic American observers fashioned the fascist approach to youth as a kind of gardening project, nurturing children as they grew. Italians’ actual experience with these programs differed from sympathetic portraits in many respects. The conditions at fascist summer camps were far from idyllic; even the balilla’s own inspectors frequently found them to be “marginal.” Although Anne O’Hare McCormick argued that participation in fascist youth groups had made young Italians more...

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154 McCormick, “New Italy: Fact or Phrase.”

155 McCormick, “Italy in the Year XII E.” See also: Anne O'Hare McCormick, “Behind Germany's Elemental Upheaval,” New York Times, September 24, 1933. “The youth of Germany is nothing like the youth of Italy. There is no suggestion of the Italian bravura in this parade. Rather they suggest the marching youth of Russia, not quite so self-confident, so arrogant, but the same effect of crude power.”

156 See for instance, Telespresso, Augusto Rosso to the Undersecretary of Press and Propaganda, December 10, 1934; Fascicolo; Materiale di propaganda per gli Stati Uniti; Busta 219, Stati Uniti 1935; Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS. Rosso included the clipping from the Baltimore Sun of a photograph of fascist youth carrying guns, inspected by the Austrian Chancellor von Schuschnigg on his visit to the Foro Mussolini. Rosso wrote that such images were “not useful for the effects of propaganda on this country.”

Catholic, there is little evidence to suggest that this was the case. It was certainly not the intention of the regime, which aimed to displace the Church as young people’s principal source of authority. Fascist youth programs did not tread lightly around families’ private spheres, as fascist sympathizers argued. Although membership of the balilla was officially voluntary until 1939, parents faced economic incentives to enroll their children, and risked censure if they did not. Parents signed their children up for fascist youth activities, just as mothers availed themselves of the services of day nurseries, for a number of pragmatic reasons—of which free healthcare and food were the most obvious. But this does not mean that they loved their state, or approved of its broader childrearing objectives.

When we consider what fascism’s broader childrearing objectives were, it is easy to imagine that many Italians resented the state’s approach. The state did not design its nurseries around the emotional and practical needs of working women, whose contribution to their families’ economic survival it only grudgingly recognized. Rather, nurseries were another expression of fascism’s ambition to produce a generation large enough, and strong enough, to fight and win a war. Historians have pointed out that the state was not particularly effective in indoctrinating young Italians, many of whom participated in pre-military training without absorbing pre-military mentalities. But preparation and indoctrination for war was certainly the regime’s goal. As noted by the historian Richard Bosworth, at fascist camps, “sports and other leisure activities were always meant to have a militant, pugnacious and xenophobic purpose.”

The fascist state did not, it is true, achieve similar levels of discipline and obedience in youth as the National Socialist state. But this was due less to lack of intention and more to a failure to execute

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158 Gentile, Il Culto Del Littorio.
159 Koon, Believe, Obey, Fight, 95-96. Balilla leaders were usually also children’s school teachers; enrollment forms were sent home from school with children; and parents had to provide a “written explanation” if they opted not to enroll their child.
161 Koon, Believe, Obey, Fight, 96.
162 De Grazia, How Fascism Ruled Women, 111
163 Bosworth, Mussolini’s Italy, 291.
164 The regime fostered links between fascist and Nazi youth programs and welcomed comparisons between the two. Koon, Believe, Obey, Fight, 101. In 1937, 450 members of Hitler Youth participated in the Avanguardisti parade at Campo Dux. Letter, Dino Alfieri to Benito Mussolini, August 24, 1938; Sotto-sotto fascicolo 8.2, Campo Dux; Sotto-fascicolo 8, Campeggi della G.I.L; Fascicolo 528, Busta 84, PNF, 1935-1942; Ministero della Cultura
policies effectively. If the state modelled itself on any woman at all, this woman was neither Mother Nature, nor mother nurture, but Bellona, the Roman goddess of war. And if the valley of youth had any color, it was not green but gunmetal grey.

**Escape to Abyssinia**

Just as they did for Rome and youth training programs, American fascist sympathizers used gardening metaphors to reconfigure the fascist invasion of Ethiopia as a thing of beauty, transcendence and peace. In October 1935, after months of Italian incursions along Ethiopia’s border with Somalia, Italy launched a full-scale invasion of Ethiopia. Within days, the League of Nations voted for the imposition of sanctions against Italy. As a *Times* reporter noted, the Geneva vote demonstrated that “[f]ifty-one governments representing four-fifths of mankind,” considered Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia illegal (only Austria and Hungary opposed sanctions; Germany abstained).\(^{165}\)

Far from Geneva, the United States invoked neutrality legislation, which blocked the sale of arms to either side in the war. To the administration’s evident discomfort, US neutrality legislation did not prevent the shipment of oil, or other necessary war supplies, to Italy. Roosevelt and Cordell Hull encouraged oil companies to conduct a self-imposed “moral embargo.”\(^{166}\) American manufacturers and oil companies ignored these pleas, and by the winter of 1935 the State Department and a few members of Congress were pushing for further formal sanctions against Italy.\(^{167}\)

In the face of international opprobrium, fascist sympathizers used metaphors of the garden to legitimize Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia. Employing arguments that were familiar to all imperial powers, both McCormick and contributors to *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* presented Ethiopia as untamed

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territory. McCormick, who had never set foot in Africa, described Ethiopia as neglected land in a “dark but almost empty continent.” Il Progresso consistently presented Ethiopia’s sophisticated, adaptable and diverse agricultural systems as primitive, careless and fatalistic. Incorrectly, contributors to the newspaper claimed that Ethiopians had not controlled their forests, drained their swamps, irrigated their lands, or bred and fed their herds to produce higher yields of milk, meat and hide. The Ethiopians, wrote one contributor, were unable to “bend nature”; “chance” was their “only cultivator.”

Sympathizers of the regime’s invasion suggested that Ethiopia was untamed, too, in a figurative sense: a land where disfiguring diseases—leprosy, syphilis and elephantiasis—spread unchecked; and a place where the government had made no effort to eradicate “barbaric” customs. According to Generoso Pope, in a typical article, Ethiopia remained shut off from “any civilizing influence, under the most retrograde feudal system, exposed to the horrors of slavery and even cannibalism.” Pope’s claim of cannibalism merged with feature stories and photographs in his newspaper, which recounted legends of an Abyssinian queen who bathed in human blood, and a light-skinned, “beautiful dancing slave” who escaped to Italy. It was all fiction. And it all served to form a portrait of Ethiopia as wild, decadent, going to seed. Some observers even likened Ethiopian society to the most avant-garde expressions of

173 “La Regina Etiope Che, Per Serbarsi Bella, Predeva il Bagno nel Sangue Umano,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, August 18, 1935. “Ugandha Asura, Once the Favorite Slave Dancer of the King of Kings of Ethiopia, Who Has Escaped From Her Banishment From the Royal Court and Made Her Way to Italy,” photograph, Il Progresso Italo-Americano, October 20, 1935.
174 McCormick, “As Italy Faces the Test of Sanctions.” Ethiopia was, she wrote, an “infernal country, which sounds more like Dante’s hell the more you hear of it.”
modernism. In their minds, both lacked order.\footnote{175} According to these interpretations, there was too much freedom in Ethiopia—“secular abandon” as the Italian Secretary of Press and Propaganda, Dino Alfieri, termed it—just as there was too much freedom in modernists’ visions of unrestrained art and an open society.\footnote{177} Ethiopia, as portrayed by fascist sympathizers, was a country in which lepers lived among the healthy, a country where the diseased, the lame, the blind and the disabled were allowed to approach kings.\footnote{178} It was a country where nothing seemed cleaned, contained, or controlled.

Into the Ethiopian wilderness stepped Italy, as a cultivator, healer, and civilizer, according to fascist sympathizers. The idea of imperialism as the taming of wild land—a literal and figurative gardening project—was, of course, not unique to fascist Italy.\footnote{179} And, by using this idea, American observers facilitated Italy’s claim to equivalency with (and demands for noninterference by) other great powers.\footnote{180} Prior to the invasion, McCormick met with Mussolini. Claiming that roaming Ethiopian bands

\footnote{175} “Ethiopian Soldiers Desert to Italians; Show Fealty, Dancing,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, April 5, 1936. This journalist compared the dance of Ethiopian warriors to a “Harlem Tango,” and described their ceremonial speeches as “a Gertrude Stein-like repetition of words and phrases.”
\footnote{176} Benelli, “Come Amano e Come Odiano gli Etiopi.” Benelli cited Ethiopians’ acceptance of their poverty and women’s tolerance of their subordinate position in society as examples of relativism. Benelli was an influential figure in the futurist movement, and his arguments were demonstrative of the complex relationship between fascism, futurism and modernism. Although futurists, like modernists, strove for unconventional expressions of individualism, they did not tolerate the modernists’ celebration of human frailty. Futurists and fascists shared this intolerance for the purportedly decadent (and feminine) aspects of modernist art. See: Cinzia Sartini Blum, \textit{The Other Modernism: F. T. Marinetti’s Futurist Fiction of Power} (Berkley: University of California Press, 1996), 6, 32, 45 (on the equation between weakness and femininity); Adrian Lyttelton, “Futurism, Politics, and Society,” in \textit{Italian Futurism 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe}, ed. Vivien Greene (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2014), 58-76 (for the complex and often contradictory relationship between futurism and modernism).
\footnote{177} Telegram, Dino Alfieri to Galeazzo Ciano [undated, but probably late October 1935]; Sottofascicolo 1, Primo Viaggio; Fascicolo 283; Busta 47, Corrispondenza Africa Orientale, S. E. Ciano; Ministero della Cultura Popolare Gabinetto 1926-1944; ACS.
\footnote{180} Guglielmo, \textit{White on Arrival}, 120. As noted by Guglielmo, Italian Americans used the claim to Italy’s “civilizing mission” in Ethiopia to demonstrate that they should be recognized as equals in a society that often denigrated them as barely civilized. “Long scarred by restriction, racialism and criminalistic stereotyping, all of which branded them as undesirable and inferior, some Italians no doubt responded by claiming Ethiopian backwardness and Italian
threatened Italian Somalia and Eritrea, he asserted that Italy had a right to protect its colonies against “savage attack,”” adding, that this was “a point that Americans, remembering their own history, should understand.” A January 1936 cartoon in Il Progresso featured Christopher Columbus and a Native American standing on a shoreline. “What have I come here for? To discover America,” said Columbus.

“But did you receive permission from the League of Nations?” asked the Native American. This cartoon implied that it was absurd for Americans to sanction Italy for taming savages in Ethiopia, when Americans celebrated Columbus and the settlers for doing the same thing in the United States.

Fascist sympathizers provided ample examples of the ways in which Italy, following in the footsteps of other imperial powers (beginning with Rome), tamed the wilderness in Ethiopia. Italy’s goal, wrote Generoso Pope in November 1935, was to turn Ethiopia’s arid spaces into “productive fields, in perpetual fertility.” Following the cues of regime propaganda, sympathetic observers stressed the importance of road-building both to the war effort and Italy’s colonization plans. Roads would be followed by dams, irrigation systems, land reclamation, labor-saving farm machines, and scientific civilization, believing that the more barbaric Ethiopians appeared, the more civilized and desirable their own people would become in the eyes of Americans,” Guglielmo writes. “Italian Soldiers Have Proven Their Invincible Spirit,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, May 10, 1936. “What Italy Thinks of Sanctions,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, December 1, 1935. Italy, according to Il Progresso, held a place “in the annals of time” as a promoter of “civilization”; its “progressive” people brought “art, science, law, beauty, goodness,” wherever they lived.


Fascicolo, Invio di Materiali varie negli Stati Uniti; Busta 222, Stati Uniti 1937; Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS. This folder contains two undated photographs of roadbuilding in East Africa, to be distributed in the United States. Telespresso, Raffaele Casertano to the Minister of Press and Propaganda, November 1, 1935; fasc 298, Ufficio Stampa A.O. Fascicolo General; Busta 48; Ministero della Cultura Popolare Gabinetto 1926-1944; ACS. Includes the text of a radio broadcast, by Floyd Gibbons, of International News, which must have pleased the regime. In the broadcast, Gibbons said: “Fine Roman roads now wind across plains and over mountains which never knew the track of a wheel before. . . the Italian road workers have actually dignified their labor. Honestly they don’t look like laborers but like Olympic athletes engaged in games. In the first place they are not the old men one ordinarily sees engaged in road building. They are strong young huskies wearing athletic shorts and bronzed torsos gleaming with sweat and bulging with muscles (sic).” Telegram, Dino Alfieri to Galeazzo Ciano [undated, but probably late October 1935]; Sottofascicolo 1, Primo Viaggio; Fascicolo 283; Busta 47, Corrispondenza Africa Orientale, S. E. Ciano; Ministero della Cultura Popolare Gabinetto 1926-1944; ACS. As part of the advice Alfieri offered to Ciano for his upcoming radio transmission to the United States, Alfieri wrote: “Insist on the character of peaceful systematization of the occupied territory—roads.” McCormick, “New Italy: Fact or Phrase.” The “road-builders,” wrote McCormick, were “the real heroes of the African campaign.
breeding, wrote one journalist in *Il Progresso*.\(^{185}\) In contrast to Ethiopians’ primitive and fatalistic approach to their surrounds, the Italians would care for the conquered territory, demonstrating man’s capacity to mine nature for all that it was worth.

Fascist sympathizers applied the idea of taming the wilderness in Ethiopia in a metaphorical sense too. They repeatedly claimed that the Italians were improving the health of Ethiopians.\(^{186}\) Whereas the previous rulers of Ethiopia had fatalistically accepted the illnesses in their midst, the Italians were quarantining, vaccinating and curing so as to gain control of the environment.\(^{187}\) A garden, after all, was not a place where things survived or died according to the whims of nature. Rather, it was a place where man tended to life, to ensure that it thrived.

This same kind of intentionality was evident in fascist plans for Ethiopia’s cities. In the fall of 1936 *Il Progresso* published plans for the transformation of Addis Ababa from a “Native Hut Village” into a “Roman City,” of wide boulevards and neoclassical monuments. At the root of the idea of the planning was a philosophical opposition to the purportedly lax attitude of Ethiopians to fate, *Il Progresso* implied. The newspaper claimed that the atmosphere of the capital transformed upon the Italians’ arrival: there was no more loitering or ambling in Addis, because everyone had a place to be and a sense of something to strive for.\(^{188}\) Dino Alfieri, the Minister of Propaganda, described this phenomenon as one of “arranged fate,” in contrast to “secular abandon”: the fascists took control of processes that Ethiopians had abandoned to nature, to chance, and to time.\(^{189}\)

These observers consciously employed ideas that were familiar to all imperial powers, insisting that, by gaining control of a neglected environment, the Italians had earned the right to settle in Ethiopia;

\(^{185}\) “Ethiopia’s Virgin Territory Same as During Queen Sheba’s Reign,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*.


\(^{188}\) “Italy Transforms Addis Ababa From Native Hut Village Into Roman City,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*.

\(^{189}\) Telegram, Dino Alfieri to Galeazzo Ciano [undated, but probably late October 1935]; Sottofascicolo 1, Primo Viaggio; Fascicolo 283; Busta 47, Corrispondenza Africa Orientale, S. E. Ciano; Ministero della Cultura Popolare Gabinetto 1926-1944; ACS.
the United States, they suggested, should not interfere in the war. They further bolstered the case for American non-interference by employing an equally familiar argument that colonies would relieve the metropole of pressing constraints of land and raw materials. McCormick, Pope and Schneider all insisted on the (perfectly true) notion that Italy was a narrow peninsula, scarce in natural resources, and teeming with people. They insisted, too, on the (far more fanciful) idea that Ethiopia would release Italy from these biding constraints. Herbert Schneider wrote that Ethiopia would provide Italy with outlets for labor, supplies of cotton, and perhaps even oil and gold. McCormick predicted that the colony would provide permanent settlement for between two and three million Italians. Il Progresso’s estimations of the settlement opportunities in Ethiopia were more fantastic still: the country, wrote one contributor, could “easily be home to 30 million more inhabitants.” In Glaucus’ words, the Ethiopian conquest would ensure that the Italians would never again “be strays of the world, in search of bread and work.”

The notion that Ethiopia would relieve Italy of the constraints forced upon it by nature had a bearing on the fate of all of Europe and the United States, fascist sympathizers claimed. McCormick first floated the idea that a war in Ethiopia would be conducive to peace in Europe in the spring of 1935. Following a meeting with Mussolini in May, she sent him an “unfinished” draft of an article, assuring him that she welcomed his “corrections” and “amplifications.” In this draft she quoted the Prime Minister: “Our African colonies must form the background of Italy. They must become increasingly important to us if we are to work for the general peace by relieving the intolerable pressure in Europe.” In response to this...

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190 Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 12. Iron mining was “not profitable” in Italy, other metals had to be imported, and oil wells in Emilia were “scarcely worth mentioning,” Schneider wrote. McCormick, “Dreams of Empire Kindle Rome.” McCormick observed that Italy’s geographical constrains were compounded by migration restrictions in Europe and the United States. McCormick, “Dreams of Empire Kindle Rome”; “Ethiopian-Italian Problem; Improvements a Reality,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, November 3, 1935. Both McCormick and contributors to Il Progresso described Italy’s existing African territories (of Libya, Somalia and Eritrea) as of little value, composed of “mostly sand.” See also: Generoso Pope, “Fine della Prepotenza Inglese,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, August 22, 1935.

191 Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 139-41, also 12.

192 McCormick, “As Italy Faces the Test of Sanctions.”


195 Letter, Anne O’Hare McCormick to Benito Mussolini, May 21, 1935; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna,” Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD.
draft, Mussolini (or his press office) seems to have corrected McCormick not at all, and amplified her quite a bit. Her final article differed from the draft in only one respect: she emphasized Mussolini’s earnest desire for peace. “That is one thing we want—peace in Europe,” she added to the quotation. It was the most memorable sentence in the piece, although it seems unlikely that Mussolini ever uttered it to his interviewer.196

The regime, and its sympathetic observers, believed that the notion that war in Ethiopia would preserve peace in Europe could sway American policymakers’ responses to Italian aggression. They insisted upon this argument, through 1935 and 1936. A month after her spring interview with Mussolini, McCormick repeated the idea that Italian expansion in Africa was a feasible (and preferable) alternative to an intra-European conflict over living space and raw materials.197 That winter, as Secretary of State Cordell Hull explored the possibility of expanding the American embargo to encompass oil, McCormick argued that, by blocking Italian action in Ethiopia, such actions would increase the likelihood of a European war.198 Concurrently, Generoso Pope launched an unremitting editorial campaign against any changes to American neutrality laws, and encouraged Italian Americans to write to their Congressmen, reminding them that 1936 was an election year.199 “Neutrality Means Peace” insisted Pope.200

Arguments like this shifted the onus for peace-inducing behavior away from the fascist regime and on to American policymakers to accept the Italian conquest of Ethiopia as a price for peace elsewhere.201 This, of course, was the logic of appeasement—an idea that appealed to many Americans,

196 McCormick, “Africa Plan Final, Mussolini Insists.”
200 Pope, “Neutralità Significa Pace.”
and not just those who actively sympathized with fascism, in the mid-1930s. At the end of January 1936, Generoso Pope went to Washington to meet with President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Hull. There, Pope received the message he wanted to hear: the United States would continue to allow Italy to buy the oil and other supplies necessary to prosecute its Ethiopian war. Pope did not singlehandedly sway American policy, although the protests of the Italian American community against changes to neutrality legislation certainly gave a Democratic administration pause for thought. But by and large, Pope and McCormick’s vision for American foreign policy coincided with the administrations in 1935 and 1936. As Herbert Schneider recognized, the United States’ primary concern in the mid-1930s was to “safeguard its own peace”; and the most obvious way to do that was by preventing a war in Europe. This meant granting Mussolini his empire in Ethiopia so that the rest of the world could remain a garden of sorts—albeit a compromised, fragile, and sullied Eden.

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202 “Il Gr. Uff. Generoso Pope a Colloquio Con Roosevelt,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano. “Un’Intervista Del Gr. Uff. G. Pope Col Segretario Degli Esteri on. Hull,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano. According to these articles, both the President and the Secretary of State said to Pope “‘Italy can buy whatever she wants from the United States, except those items that would risk involving the United States in the war.” In late January 1936, it seemed likely that the existing Neutrality Act would be replaced by a more punitive bill tabled by Congressman Sam McReynolds. When Hull and Roosevelt reassured Pope, it was with respect to the McReynold’s Bill, which would have prevented exports to Italy above normal peacetime levels. In February 1936, the existing neutrality legislation was extended, due to isolationists’ opposition to the McReynold’s bill. See: Cordell Hull and Andrew Henry Thomas Berding, The Memoirs of Cordell Hull, vol. 1 (New York: MacMillan, 1948), 464-65.

203 Robert A. Divine, The Illusion of Neutrality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 150-52. Hull and Berding, Memoirs of Cordell Hull, 464-65. Letter, Angelo Flavio Guidi to Ottavio de Peppo, 14 April, 1936; Fascicolo, Propaganda nel Nord America; Busta 220, Stati Uniti 1935-1936; Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS. Writing to the Secretary for Press and Propaganda, Guidi argued that Pope had swayed President Roosevelt’s policies on sanctions during the war. As a “great friend of the Post Master General Farley,” Pope was able to influence the President as no one else could have, Guidi claimed. This claim was probably exaggerated, to help Pope win a knighthood from the regime.

204 Letter, Herbert Schneider to Nicholas Murray Butler, January 25, 1936; Folder, Correspondence, 1936-1941; 107/1/5; HWSP. Explaining why he avoided talking directly about Italian foreign policy in his lectures, Schneider wrote that “such polemics could scarcely be supposed to promote peace.” Schneider wrote that “neither international law nor politics is as closely related to international peace as is a reciprocal respect among nations for one another’s institutions, ideas, and needs.” Lecture notes, Herbert W. Schneider, “Survey of Various Interests and Traditions in U.S.” part of lecture series, “Lineamenti Storici e Ideali del Conflitto Economico-Politico Intorno di Roosevelt”; Folder, Manuscripts L; 107/3/5; HWSP. According to the text of the lecture itself, Schneider told his Italian audience that the Great Depression had “compelled” Americans “to face the problem of national economy in domestic terms” and that foreign policy was as a consequence subordinate. The United States was “aloof” from Italy’s “struggle and from world affairs in general,” not because of “a lack of human sympathy or indifference to justice” nor “traditional isolationism,” but due to “sheer necessity, the mother of all invention,” Schneider said.

205 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Vatican Disturbed by Geneva Moves,” New York Times, October 15, 1935. McCormick drew on the authority of Pope Pius IX, who in interview suggested that the onus was on international statesmen to meet Italy’s demands for land and resources. The Pope, she wrote, warned that it was “not enough to abhor war. . . . [Statesmen] are bound to deal with the causes of conflict.” Anne O’Hare McCormick, “The Pope
While American fascist sympathizers aimed to contain the American embargo, they continued to protest the League of Nations’ sanctions. Not for the last time in history, sympathetic observers used sanctions to claim that the aggressor was the injured party, by portraying Italy, a country with few natural resources of its own, oppressed by a punishing sanctions regime. “Italy Squeezed,” read one of McCormick’s headlines. Both she and Pope argued that the Italian people banded together to overcome these constraints imposed by the sanctions regime. McCormick watched women forming queues outside the fascist headquarters in Rome in December 1935 to donate their wedding rings to the war effort. She likened these women to Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi—an archetype of feminine beauty, who saw her sons, not her jewels, as her only treasures.

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Steers a Course Amid Storms,” New York Times, December 15, 1935. “Italy is clearly wrong in her method of seizing by force what she needs, [the Pope] seems to say; but what right means has the society of nations devised to deal with a problem like Italy’s?” For the position of the FDR administration, see Schmitz, United States and Fascist Italy, 153-71.

206 “50 Nations Vote Boycott of All Italian Exports; Cut Off ‘Key’ Materials,” New York Times, October 20, 1935. League of Nations sanctions prevented member states from lending money or importing goods from Italy, leading to foreign exchange shortages, and blocked the sale of rubber, and some metals such as tin and aluminum. They stopped short of an embargo on oil sales.

207 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Italy Squeezed,” New York Times, November 24, 1935. Written the week that the League of Nations sanctions went into effect, the bulk of this piece gave a heroic portrait of Mussolini, drinking hot milk as the heat went out the in Palazzo Venezia. See also: Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Mussolini is Aging Under War Strain,” New York Times, November 20, 1935. Anne O’Hare McCormick to Benito Mussolini, November 14, 1935; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. McCormick met with Mussolini in preparation for these pieces, and followed their meeting with a questionnaire, as was her habit. She conceived of the article as an opportunity for Mussolini to release a statement on sanctions “since the American public must be considering the whole question raised by the League policy.” She prompted him with specific questions: “Do sanctions constitute war on the civil population?” “Will they lead to blockade?” “Your Excellency said the moral effects of sanctions, in Italy and Europe, are more dangerous than the material effects. Please enlarge on that point—and on Italy’s power of resistance.” Memorandum, Ministry of Press and Propaganda, Foreign Section, for the Attention of Il Duce, November 12, 1935; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. The regime decided that it was impolitic to offer the Times a statement on sanctions. The Ministry of Press and Propaganda argued that “the New York Times, to which the declaration is destined, is the only big New York daily that is banned in Italy due to its systematic antifascist and anti-Italian attitude. Therefore, to concede a declaration of H.E. to said journal would produce in other organs which until now have been sympathetic or neutral toward our cause a displeasing effect.” While the regime did not grant McCormick her exclusive statement, her questions indicate that she wanted to act as a mouthpiece for Mussolini with regard to sanctions, to enable him to receive a sympathetic hearing in the United States.

208 McCormick, “Italians Prepare for Sanction War.”

209 McCormick, “Italians Prepare for Sanction War.” The Italian response to sanctions also demonstrated the regime’s capacity to overcome external constraints, according to these observers. See, Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Europe: Italy Boasts That Sanctions Only Made Her Stronger,” New York Times, November 20, 1937. McCormick described a recent exhibition in Rome that showed that the sanctions prompted Italy to innovate new forms of production, for example in synthetic textiles. Memorandum, Ministry for Press and Propaganda, foreign press section, for the attention of the Minister, November 23, 1937; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda
brought men and women to a purer state. *Il Progresso* quoted the futurist poet Benedetta Cappa. Upon giving, Italian women realized that true beauty was found not in their worldly possessions, but in nature. Benedetta wrote: “‘We have the blue of the sea, the roses from our gardens. . . . And on our hair the sunshine.’” They needed nothing more.  

Generoso Pope garnered Italian Americans’ financial support for the war, by arguing that they could help Italy to overcome the constraints imposed by external forces, and participate in something greater than their daily travails. *Il Progresso* responded to the League’s sanctions with a highly effective fundraising campaign.  

On the same day that the sanctions went into effect, November 17, 1935, the newspaper submitted a one hundred thousand dollar check to the Italian Red Cross. There would be seven such checks over the course of the next year.  

In addition to calling on Italian Americans to donate their dollars, the newspaper encouraged them to engage in symbolic acts of sacrifice. The newspaper published the names of individuals who had given gold to Italy: men like Edoardo Lettieri, who gave two rings and one tooth; women like Elvira Foglia, who gave her wedding ring and a pendant on a long chain.* Il Progresso*’s fundraising campaign suggested that Italian Americans could experience transcendence twice over: by giving their money, they could help Italy break through the economic barriers imposed upon it by the League of Nations; by giving

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210 Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. The regime approved of the coverage: “her most recent article for the New York Times, on the occasion of the second anniversary of sanctions, had a quite sympathetic tone, especially in its conclusions, in which she affirmed that the process of autarchy, stimulated by sanctions, has had the result of making the country more productive and its economy healthier.” See also: “Wool Made Out of Milk Is Superior to Natural Product,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, September 6, 1936.  


212 All’Appello della Patria Tutti Gl’Italiani Rispondono ‘Presente!’” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, November 8, 1935. Alluding to the traditional squadrist roll call, a November 8 headline read “To the Call of the Country, All Italians Respond ‘Presente!’” It is noteworthy that *Il Progresso* had used the same formulation to rally Italian Americans behind the NRA. See: “Presente!,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, August 13, 1933.  


their treasured possessions, they could feel the spiritually elevating effects of sacrifice. Pope’s efforts pleased the regime, which bestowed upon him another knighthood when he visited Rome in July 1937.

Fascist sympathizers suggested that feelings of spiritual edification on the home-front were matched by scenes transcendence on the frontlines. Glaucus found beauty in the most warlike of places. As the Italians rained bombs down on civilians in Ethiopia, Glaucus homed in on Mussolini’s sons, Bruno and Vittorio, and son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano, as the beautiful heroes of the Italian campaign. When the engines of Bruno’s, Vittorio’s, and Galeazzo’s airplanes blasted through the sky, they “left an echo in the hearts of the people of Asmara,” wrote Glaucus. And as the young men flew overhead, the Asmarans lifted “their vision…high, high, high.”

Easter Sunday, 1936, provided Il Progresso’s editors with the opportunity to make a pairing in the newspaper’s illustrated section that seemed far from accidental. A reproduction of a painting of Christ, triumphant and resplendent in light, “Surrexit Sicut Dixit” (Risen Again, as He Said), appeared alongside a photograph of Italian airplanes after battle, flying in nearly

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215 See: clipping from Il Messagero, June 12, 1937, in Oggetto:1928 Onorificenza, Raccomandato Pope, Generoso New York; Fascicolo H407; Busta 18; Segretari Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario; ACS. Letter, Angelo Flavio Guidi to Ottavio de Peppo, 14 April, 1936; Fascicolo Propaganda nel Nord America; Busta 220, Stati Uniti 1935-1936; Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS. Guidi had pressed the case for a knighthood for Pope. Writing to the Secretary for Press and Propaganda he noted that the “Italian-language press . . . has worked with great enthusiasm,” to drum up support for the war in Ethiopia, “increasing its coverage and doing such a work of patriotism, as demonstrated by the immense quantity of money and gold collected.”

216 Glaucus, “Le Ali d’Italia nel Cielo d’Etiopia.” Bruno, Vittorio and Galeazzo occupied the place that only a few years before had belonged to Italo Balbo; like Balbo, they promised to inspire all who encountered them. Segre, Italo Balbo, 277, 281-83. Balbo’s charisma had posed such a threat to the Prime Minister that Mussolini had planted him at a safe distance in Libya after 1933. Ciano was particularly photogenic, and became the poster child of Italy’s Ethiopian campaign. Il Progresso reproduced images. For example: “H. E. Count Galezzo Ciano,” photograph, Il Progresso Italo-Americano, September 8, 1935. Smiling, his goggles pushed up on his forehead, Ciano appeared confident and relaxed in an apparently candid picture, taken during a flight. “Il Conte Galeazzo Ciano . . .,” photograph, Il Progresso Italo-Americano, October 13, 1935. Staring directly into the lens, his chin resting on his hand, a suggestion of playfulness in his mouth and eyes, he connected directly with his viewer in his studio close-up. Telegram, Galeazzo Ciano to Dino Alfieri, November 2, 1935; Sotto-fascicolo 1, Primo Viaggio; Fascicolo 283, Corrispondenza Africa Orientale, S. E. Ciano; Busta 47; Ministero della Cultura Popolare Gabinetto 1926-1944; ACS. In this telegram, Ciano expressed his discomfort with the exposure: he was doing no more than the other pilots in East Africa, he wrote (others argued he was doing a lot less); and the troops were feeling resentful about all the coverage. See also, “Report 8, [British] Foreign Office on the Reception accorded to Ciano on his Return to from East Africa” [undated but probably 1936]; Fascicolo 28, S.E. Alfieri; Busta 8; Ministero della Cultura Popolare Gabinetto 1926-1944; ACS. “The Italian Air Force, remain I am told, unimpressed [with Ciano, and Vittorio and Bruno Mussolini]. It has been said that Count Ciano was never more than a passenger in a machine that carried two other pilots and according to one account no Air Force officers were present to welcome the returning aviators apart from those who had been officially instructed to be present. Whatever the quality of the war service of these ‘heroes’ it has not increased their popularity with the Italian Air Force.”
perfect formation, the sky flooded with light (Figure 15).\(^{217}\) Together, these images suggested any suffering was eclipsed by a state of grace.

In sum, fascist sympathizers employed various gardening metaphors when they described Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia. The Italians were cultivators in Ethiopia, and peacemakers in Europe, according to fascist sympathizers. By claiming that Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia was both the legitimate act of a civilizing nation, and a necessary precursor to a broader peace, they hoped that the Roosevelt administration would maintain its policy of *de jure* neutrality (which, in practice, enabled Italy to prosecute its war). The administration’s limited response to the war fulfilled fascist sympathizers’ hopes, although it is unlikely that they had a tangible effect on the direction of policy: in 1935 and 1936, the American foreign policy establishment did not need to be convinced on the logic of appeasement.

Like any good garden, the one that fascist sympathizers created in Ethiopia also functioned as a place of escape. It suggested that man could overcome external constraints and seemed to lift up all those who participated in its production—supporters on various home-fronts, airmen, even their victims—toward heaven. The counter-image of this garden was a place where man was overwhelmed by forces beyond his control and unable to access God. The counter-image of this garden felt a lot like the modern world.

If gardening is partly a work of pruning and artful disguise, then these observers did a great deal of gardening too, to produce this image of an Ethiopian wilderness tamed and nurtured by Italian hands. They maligned Ethiopia as “barbaric” and “savage,” sidelining sophisticated indigenous systems and rulers’ successful contributions to modernization and reform.\(^{218}\) They ignored the brutality of the

\(^{217}\) “The Resurrection,” image; “After the Victorious Battle of Lake Ascianghi . . . .” photograph. Both in *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, April 12, 1936. Suggesting that Italy’s remaining military tasks were to clean up a messy terrain, the caption for the latter photograph described how Italian machine-gunners, pictured on the rugged land below the airplanes, were “mopping up in the gorges and ravines” of the surrounding region.

\(^{218}\) For Ethiopian’s adaptable, diverse, and environmentally sustainable system of agriculture, see: McCann, *People of the Plow*. For the efficacy of both traditional and modern medicine in Ethiopia, see: Makonnen Bishaw, “Promoting Traditional Medicine in Ethiopia: A Brief Historical Review of Government Policy,” *Social Science and Medicine* 33, no. 2 (1991): 193-200. Bishaw recognizes the efficacy of some traditional practices, which emphasized hygiene and isolation and plant-derived medicinal cures, as well as the expansion of modern medical facilities during the early twentieth century under Menelik II and Haile Selassie. See also, Richard Pankhurst, *An Introduction to the Medical History of Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea, 1990), 169-221.
invasion, finding beauty in the choreography of airplanes that rained bombs, some filled with poison gas, on civilians as well as soldiers, long after the hostilities came to an official end.\textsuperscript{219} And they vastly overestimated Italy’s capacities to cultivate, cure and create in Ethiopia. The country was under formal Italian control for only five years, but they were five long years for the Ethiopians who faced skyrocketing inflation, the collapse of local businesses, and scarcity of basic commodities, such as wheat and other grains.\textsuperscript{220}

Italian Abyssinia was certainly not a paradise on earth for the Ethiopians. Nor did it function as any kind of a garden for the Italians. It was never a fertile supplier of raw materials: the Italians found neither oil in Ethiopia nor sufficient gold for export; even coffee was in short supply by the decade’s end.\textsuperscript{221} It was not a place where large numbers of Italians escaped to, to lay down roots of their own: according to historians’ best estimates, the total number of Italian workers across East Africa in the late 1930s never exceeded 200,000, the vast majority of whom were repatriated; only 400 or so Italian farmers settled in Ethiopia, 150 of whom were joined by their families.\textsuperscript{222} Even plans to bring tree-lined boulevards to Addis Ababa never left the drawing board.\textsuperscript{223}

The wishful thoughts of fascist sympathizers were an extension of the chillingly optimistic visions of the fascist regime itself. They imagined that Italy could create a productive colony, but Ethiopian resistance and Italian mismanagement ensured that the short-lived empire drained, rather than


\textsuperscript{222} Gianluca Podestà, “L’Emigrazione e Colonizzazione in Libia e Africa Orientale,” \textit{Altreitalia} 42 (2011), 40. According to Podestà, Italian civilians across Italy’s east African empire totaled 165,000 in 1939. For numbers of Italians settlers in Ethiopia, see: Larebo, “Empire Building and Its Limitations,” 90-91. Many colonists faced a sharply rising cost of living and “extreme poverty”; “between six and seven thousand unemployed Italians lived in great squalor in a camp” outside of Addis Ababa. Larebo concludes: “As an outlet for [Italian] emigration . . . Ethiopia was a failure.”

contributed to, the metropolitan economy. Abyssinia was less of a garden, and more of a quagmire, for Italy.

**The Over-Stretched Metaphor**

In the mid- to late-1930s, American fascist sympathizers used the metaphor of the garden to reconfigure some of the most intrusive and aggressive aspects of Mussolini’s regime’s policies, so that they might appeal to their fellow countrymen. They presented urban planning in Rome, youth training, and the invasion of Ethiopia as organic, wholesome, and life-affirming projects. And they argued that all of these programs were compatible with, or even conducive to, peace—whether manifested in the map of Europe or in the edification of the human spirit. At times, these observers used the seemingly positive examples provided by fascist Italy to nudge New Deal policies in an interventionist direction, much as they had done in the early 1930s. But they also held fascist Italy up as an example of transcendence of the constraints which bound Americans, and as a flight of fancy from the realities of democratic compromise, economic scarcity, and global instability.

It is worth questioning whether metaphors of the garden had their intended effect on an American audience. When they offered Italy as an escape from the realities of the United States, American fascist sympathizers were exercising other forms of escapism—from the realities of fascist power, from Mussolini’s totalitarian and expansionist ambitions, and from the impact of state-sponsored violence on Italians and East Africans. The more grotesque the regime became, the more fascist sympathizers had to stretch the metaphor of the garden as a place of beauty and peace. When airplanes rained bombs on Ethiopian villages, Glaucus elevated the garden above ground level, into the sky where the airplanes soared. Such representations were surely an overstretch for most Americans. Indeed, while fascist sympathizers’ representations of Italo Balbo’s 1933 flight as an expression of beauty, transcendence and peace had coincided with most Americans’ interpretation of the event, support for Italy’s empire in

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Ethiopia was strong only within the Italian American community.\textsuperscript{225} Perhaps we should understand the garden as fascist sympathizers’ way of doing their best with bad material; there is no question that, by 1936, most of the material they had at their disposal was pretty bad.

As the decade wore on, Americans became more and more skeptical of characterizations of Italian fascism as wholesome, peaceful, and fundamentally different from National Socialism. The observations of various fascist officials that the regime must carefully calibrate its propaganda for an American audience were themselves signals that, by and large, the regime was failing in this regard. For instance, Ambassador Rosso lamented that American newspapers published preponderantly militaristic images of Italy in the mid-decade, while his successor, Fulvio Suvich observed that most Americans associated fascism with “authoritarianism, the negation of all liberties, dictatorship, militarism, preparation for war.”\textsuperscript{226}

In the meantime, the activities of militant American fascists undermined any efforts to soften the image of Mussolini’s regime. In July 1937, black-shirted Italian Americans marched alongside brown-shirted German Americans at the opening ceremonies of Camp Norland, a New Jersey summer camp, organized by the German American Bund.\textsuperscript{227} And later that summer, at a twelve-thousand person rally at Camp Norland, Donald Shea—a man who described himself as “founder of the National Gentile League, Inc.,” (and whose black military cap was decorated with the words “‘American Fascist’)”—called for “a


\textsuperscript{226} Telespresso, Augusto Rosso to the Undersecretary of Press and Propaganda, December 10, 1934; Fascicolo; Materiale di propaganda per gli Stati Uniti; Busta 219, Stati Uniti 1935; Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS. Rosso included photographs from the US Sunday papers. “First Lessons in the Art of War,” featured a photograph of pupils at a school in Rome, receiving training from a man in military uniform. At the blackboard, one student drew Mussolini in a metal helmet, another a horse-drawn munitions wagon of the kind used in World War I. “Lessons in Heaving Messengers of Death” showed Italian infantrymen throwing grenades in military exercises near Rome. Rosso noted that there was an “abundance and almost exclusivity of this type of subject,” regarding Italy in the United States. Letter, Fulvio Suvich to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Press and Propaganda, February 4, 1937; Fascicolo, Propaganda Straniera Negli Stati Uniti; Busta 222, Stati Uniti 1937; Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Dir. Gen. Servizi della Propaganda Archivio Generale (1930-1943); ACS.

boycott against all Jewish merchants,”’ to cheers of “‘Viva Mussolini!'” and “‘Heil Hilter!'”228 While McCormick, Pope, and Schneider presented Italian summer camps as Alpine health resorts and insisted on the difference between fascism and Nazism, the likes of Donald Shea created a very different impression.

It became harder and harder for American fascist sympathizers to configure fascism as a garden. Herbert Schneider wrote his last words on fascism while in Rome in 1936, in The Fascist Government of Italy—a book aimed at American undergraduates. In keeping with the intentions of the Carnegie Endowment, there was little in this publication that would have offended Schneider’s hosts. Schneider maintained his characterization of fascist Italy as well-established and well-tended: institutions of the corporate state were fully operational; and the government was manned by competent executives, he insisted.229 Schneider’s Italy was a relatively gentle place: he cautioned the “inexperienced reader” against interpreting totalitarianism too literally; in Italy, just as in the United States, government actions had an “incidental, occasional, possibly crucial, but never all-inclusive” impact on private citizens, he argued.230 Writing during Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia, Schneider could hardly ignore fascist imperialism. But he did ignore fascist militarism: he dispensed of the blackshirts in a single paragraph, mentioned the army and navy only in passing, and the air force not once.231 Schneider’s work seems not to have impressed his contemporaries in American academia: Fascist Government of Italy received one bland

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229 For the corporate state, see Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 66-100, esp. 66 and 97. Schneider conceded that the “new order” was “still in process of creation and its operation still in its infancy” but then described the institutions of the corporate state in so much detail as to make them seem highly operational. “In practice . . . the whole scheme is intelligible” he maintained, in amongst all the confusing and distracting details and tables. For competent executives, see Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 47-51, esp 50. Schneider described the Grand Council as “composed of highly ‘responsible’ officials” and wrote that “it is more probable that the Prime Minister will be the spokesman of the Grand Council than vice versa.” Reminiscences of Herbert Wallace Schneider. In 1976, Schneider claimed that Fascist Government of Italy had been highly critical of the regime: “the Van Nostrand people [the publishers] asked me to write something on the fascist government, and by that time . . . I could write about how it had failed.” The book does not read like a reflection on the failure of fascism, either to our contemporary ears, or to those of reviewers at the time. See, footnote 233 in this chapter below.
230 Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, ix.
231 For imperialism, see Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 133-41. For the single paragraph on the militia, see Schneider, Fascist Government of Italy, 47. On p. 33 Schneider promised that he would “consider in turn” “the army, navy and royal police.” He did not.
review in the *American Political Science Review* and one stunning rebuke in *Public Opinion Quarterly*. The latter was the sort of review that could leave a self-respecting academic cringing for decades, and perhaps it had this effect on Herbert Schneider, since he never wrote about fascist Italy again.

At the end of January 1937, Anne O’Hare McCormick penned her last article that would garner the blessing of Mussolini’s regime. The piece had many of the hallmarks of the fascist garden. McCormick had met with Mussolini earlier in the month. “Fresh from skiing in the mountains near Rome,” he looked “bronzed and hard,” she informed her readers. The accompanying photograph of a bare-chested Mussolini in the Alpine snow probably struck many *Times* readers as absurd. But it must have pleased the regime, since it showed Mussolini battling nature and winning—“Il Duce defies weather,” read the accompanying caption. Mussolini, a man of nature, was also Mussolini, a man of peace, according to McCormick’s construction. At the height of Italy’s intervention in the Spanish Civil War, the Fascist Govern

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232 Henry Spencer, review of *The Fascist Government of Italy*, *The American Political Science Review* 30, no. 5 (October 1936): 991-92; Herman Finer, review of *The Fascist Government of Italy*, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (April 1937): 148-50. Finer was a Fabian socialist, a Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics, and author of *Mussolini’s Italy* (Henry Holt: New York, 1935). (For a review of Finer’s book, see: “A Hostile But Searching Study of Mussolini’s Italy,” *New York Times*, November 3, 1935.) Finer’s review of Schneider’s *Fascist Government of Italy* was sufficiently perceptive to merit quoting at length. Schneider, Finer wrote, focused on irrelevant details, such as the “pecuniary provisions” of the King and the budget of the Grand Council. “These and numerous other details are out of place, since they crowd out really important things. And Professor Schneider crowds them out.” “The moving, kinetic element is the part of a government that determines all else. In the Fascist government of Italy this element is discoverable in the dictator’s character, the work of the Party, the nature of the Party’s propaganda, the various economic strangleholds which force even the brave to be silent and obedient, the police and other repressive agencies. Schneider’s book is totally inadequate on these themes: he describes the features, sometimes down to a wart, but omits the heart. He includes the gestures, but ignores the mind.” “Mussolini recognizes that the essential institution of the regime is the militia, that is the organized fighting force of the Fascist Party, numbering about 400,000. Schneider, who in the pages on the Corporations displays whole tables of figures . . . here omits any statistical inquiry, and in the half-page which he devotes to this force, he does not reveal its true nature.” “Schneider says that this book is written for young students. Soit! Is it not especially important, then, for those who have not yet been taught by experience to learn the quintessential punitive costs of government? How about the activities of the 100,000 police and more (nearly twice the number in England)? Are these not at least mentionable things in a description of Fascist government? Mussolini would laugh at anybody who left them out, for he knows that without them the Fascist state would cease to exist.” “In the Preface the author has some obiter dicta about government and professors of political science—nothing very complimentary about the latter. He says, ‘It is important, therefore, to look beyond the artistry of the politician’s rhetoric, which captivates professors, and to study the art by which he persuades his fellow citizens to give him on the average from 10 to 30 per cent of their income.’ Well, this book, whether in the political or economic sections, does not tell the professors how this is done in Italy; the secret has been well kept. Nor does the book, in the midst of its devitalized detail, tell young students that the issue in government is not merely how the politician takes your money, but what he does to your soul.”

233 Letter, Anne O’Hare McCormick to Benito Mussolini, January 27, 1937; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD.

War, she described the Prime Minister as anxious to end the conflict, so as to prolong peace in Europe. McCormick saw nothing in the recently announced Rome-Berlin axis that made this outcome less likely. Mussolini, she observed, thought of the axis as a “bridge” that would enable communication across the continent. According to McCormick, the Prime Minister showed a “lively” interest in President Roosevelt’s tentative idea of a conference of great powers to promote peace. Roosevelt and Mussolini, she suggested, had more in common than Hitler and Mussolini. McCormick sent Mussolini a draft of this article on January 27, 1937. “[Autorizzazione a pubblicare” (“authorized for publication”) read a hand-written note on McCormick’s cover letter. Those words would not appear on her writing again. Although McCormick continued to hope for the best in fascist foreign policy, after the winter of 1937, she no longer defended it in terms that were acceptable to the upper echelons of the regime.

While McCormick gradually separated herself from the fascist regime after January 1937, Generoso Pope helped to maintain the garden of fascism for a while longer. Pope and his editors obfuscated Italy’s involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Italy did not furnish any aid to the Spanish

235 The “axis” of 1936 was a deliberately vague construction, open to interpretation. It came about following Ciano’s meeting with Hitler in October 1936. “Text of Mussolini’s Milan Speech,” New York Times, November 2, 1936. Mussolini himself first described it as “an axis around which all European states animated by a desire for peace may collaborate.” At the time, it did not garner much attention in the United States. (A search for the terms “axis” “Italy” and “Germany” across the Baltimore Sun, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, New York Times, and Washington Post, between November 1936 and January 1937 yields only seventeen results.) The notion of the “axis” became far more significant in 1938, when Mussolini gave way to the Anschluss, and continued to develop gravity and meaning until Italy’s entry into World War II.

236 McCormick, “Mussolini Anxious Over Spanish War.” Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Rome Swings Its ‘Axis’ From Berlin to London,” New York Times, January 31, 1937. In this nearly contemporaneous article, she argued, similarly that while the axis was certainly a “real line of policy” it was a “tentative line, held on both sides with large reservations.” Mussolini has not embraced the turn toward Germany with any “real enthusiasm,” she argued, and had “no intention of being left stranded alone with the Third Reich.”

237 McCormick, “Mussolini Anxious Over Spanish War.” It is likely that McCormick got more information for these interviews from fascist propaganda than she did from Mussolini himself. Although the two met on January 23, 1937, it does not appear to have been a meeting with much substance. In a letter to Mussolini on January 27, she wrote “I regret very much that Your Excellency is not disposed to grant me at this time a serious interview on the momentous questions disturbing Europe.” She also met with Galeazzo Ciano on January 25. See: Letter, Alfredo Rocco to Anne O’Hare McCormick, January 23, 1937; Letter, [Name illegible] to Anne O’Hare McCormick, January 23, 1937; and Letter, Anne O’Hare McCormick to Benito Mussolini, January 27, 1937. All in Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD.

238 Hand-written note on, Letter, Anne O’Hare McCormick to Benito Mussolini, January 27, 1937; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD.
rebels, lied the newspaper’s editors.\(^{239}\) Even as the regime sent airplanes, munitions, and men to Franco, Glaucus implied that the fascist government’s only contribution to the rebel side was as an exemplar. According to this construction, in Spain, as in Italy prior to fascism, the government had neglected to reform and modernize the country; and in Spain, as in Italy prior to fascism, the Bolsheviks threatened to raze history, tradition and religion to the ground. Fascist Rome, provided Spain with a shining example of a “new system of government” that was both updated for modernity and respectful of religion and history, according to Glaucus.\(^{240}\) He suggested that Mussolini’s only role in Spain was as a distant teacher, who could show his apprentice how to create a “new civilization.”\(^{241}\) Only brazen lies about Italy’s actions in Spain enabled *Il Progresso* to continue to characterize Italy as a force for peace.

Meanwhile, events at a May 1937 rally for Spanish relief, in Madison Square Garden, set alarm bells ringing for Generoso Pope. Almost every one of the fifteen thousand Americans who attended the gathering was sympathetic to the rebels in Spain. But, as Pope noted, several speakers used the platform not only to call for help for Spanish noncombatants, but also to condemn religious discrimination in Nazi Germany, and to “bind Nazi and fascist politics together in a single bundle (“un sol fascio”).\(^{242}\) That more than one orator could suggest before a crowd of socially conservative Catholics that Germany and Italy were converging did not bode well for Generoso Pope. It clearly worried him a great deal. Pope had spent the best part of a decade arguing that Italian Americans’ support for fascist Italy was perfectly compatible with their identity as loyal Americans; the speakers at the May rally challenged this argument more effectively than left-wing anti-fascists could ever have done. Pope responded head on. It was time to end the “unfair and foolish confusion” between Italy and Germany, he wrote. Italian fascism was “against any


\(^{242}\) Pope, “L’Italia e la Libertà Religiosa.”
kind of racial discrimination.” Pope cited the 1929 reconciliation between Church and State and the legal equality of Jews in Italy as concrete evidence that Nazism and fascism were not alike in spirit or intent. In May 1937 he must have been hoping that this would always remain that case. But gardens do not survive on hope alone.

Figure 11. Pope and Balbo Get a Police Escort, July 1933

Figure 12. The Men in White, 1933
“A Group of Officers in the Church,” photograph, Il Progresso Italo-Americano, July 23, 1933. This photograph was taken at the Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago, on July 16, 1933.
Figure 13. Mussolini at the Child Welfare Show in Rome, 1937

Figure 14. The Valley of Youth
Figure 15. Risen Again
Epilogue. Sympathizers No More

Richard Washburn Child, Anne O’Hare McCormick, Generoso Pope, and Herbert Schneider came to fascism at different times, sometimes for the same reasons, and sometimes for different ones. They also withdrew their support from the regime in a divergent fashion, as dictated by their interests—including their social positions in the United States—and extraneous circumstances—such as changes in the regime’s policies. While a combination of interests and external forces explain Schneider’s, McCormick’s and Pope’s decisions vis-à-vis Mussolini and fascism in the late 1930s, extraneous circumstances hit Child hard at the start of 1935.

Richard Washburn Child Caught a Bad Cold

Richard Washburn Child caught a very bad cold in late January 1935. ¹ That cold turned into pneumonia. On January 30, Child requested a Catholic priest. The priest performed a baptism and, less than twenty-four hours later, Child died. ² Among those who attended the funeral, at St. Vincent Ferrer’s Church, New York, were Antonio Grossardi, the Italian Consul General, Dorothy Everson, Child’s fourth wife, and Anne and Constance, Child’s two daughters from his marriage to Maude Parker, who, as young girls in 1922, had dressed up as fascisti and sung marching songs. ³

Child was 54 when he died, and his last years were not his most productive ones. He never gained an in with FDR. The President gave him some token assignments to keep him quiet. But they were not enough to satisfy Child, who threatened to criticize publically the New Deal if Roosevelt did not give him a top position in government. ⁴ Roosevelt seems to have calculated that Child’s threats, though real, were not worth his bother. Charm flowed easily in FDR’s White House, but, by the summer of 1934, Roosevelt did not seem to think that Child was even worthy of a little presidential charm. Child made his last journey to the White House just two weeks before he died. It was the third time had had come to

¹ “Child Gets Final Call,” Los Angeles Times, February 1, 1935.
⁴ See, footnote 162, Chapter 4, above.
Washington that winter, hoping to see the President. But Franklin Roosevelt no longer had five minutes for Richard Washburn Child.⁵

Although President Roosevelt did not take Richard Washburn Child seriously, as historians, we must. In his expressions of sympathy toward Italian fascism, Child gave voice to multiple strains in American thought in the interwar years. Like all the American sympathizers with fascism in this study, Child appreciated fascism as an antidote to the ills of modernity, at a time when the United States was grappling with immense cultural, political and economic change. In the early 1920s, as Ambassador to Rome, Child felt a visceral attraction to fascist youth as embodiments of aggressive authenticity in a world that felt soft, easy, and mundane. To Child, Mussolini seemed to be the one leader alive in the world who combined a modern capacity to manage complex problems with Victorian ideals of manliness. Child’s portrait of Mussolini pointed Americans to what they were missing in their own leaders in the 1920s, and, perhaps also, in their own lives. Child suggested that it was all too easy to get caught up in the mechanics of modern life; it was harder, but possible, to be someone like Mussolini—at ease in the modern world yet able to step outside of it at will.

It would be inaccurate to dismiss Child’s admiration for Mussolini as pure opportunism, although book deals and articles were Child’s bread and butter, and writing about Mussolini paid. The fascist leader appears to have genuinely captured Child’s imagination. On many occasions, Child compared Mussolini to Theodore Roosevelt—a man whom Child also admired throughout his life (and constancy was a rare quality in Child). In Child’s mind, Mussolini and TR shared qualities that were needed in the modern era: a physical energy that counteracted the air of malaise; a stocky frame, suggestive of a man who could withstand external forces; and an aura of spirituality, demonstrating that there was more to life than an increasingly material existence. It could not have escaped Child’s attention that both Roosevelt

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⁵ Richard Washburn Child to Franklin Roosevelt, January 12, 1935; Folder: Child, Richard Washburn; President’s Personal File 1760; FDRL. As was so often the case in Child’s letters to Roosevelt, this one bristled with indignation, bordering on psychological pain. “I came over from New York on a firm engagement to see you this morning. This is the third occasion when I have made the journey. . . . I would ascribe the fact that nearly a year has passed without seeing you to a loss of confidence, interest and perhaps friendship were it not for the fact that you have written me that you wanted to see me.”
and Mussolini were also very self-conscious men, who hewed and honed their own images to meet the perceived needs of their societies. But such observations would have undermined Child’s arguments, so he left them unsaid.

To Child, too, we owe the image of the fascist state as a machine with a soul, an idea that he, in turn, attributed to Mussolini. Child claimed that the fascist state was a powerful and effective machine, in large part because it was not bogged down by frequent elections and long-winded parliamentary debates, which many contemporary observers (including those who felt no sympathy toward fascism) thought were futile. Child argued that fascism was a machine with a soul, because it did not merely take votes away from men but channeled popular energies into mass politics far more effectively than any liberal democracy. He suggested that in an era of democratic disillusionment, Americans could learn a lot from the corporate state. Although wrong on every count about fascism in the late 1920s, Child was not altogether incorrect about American democracy: Americans did feel skeptical about their institutions of government for a long decade following the First World War. But the salve to the disillusionment did not lie in the fascist state. Instead, the rise of totalitarian regimes in the 1930s—Mussolini’s included—helped Americans to value their democracy once more.

**Herbert Wallace Schneider Changed Subjects**

Herbert Wallace Schneider did not write about Italian fascism after 1936. He lived on for five more decades, researching and teaching in the fields of religion, moral philosophy, and ontology. Schneider’s interest in religion had developed in parallel to his work on fascism, and although he left fascism behind, in intellectual terms, after 1936, one can see continuity between his theoretical approaches to fascism and his approaches to religion. In many ways, Schneider assessed fascism as he would a religion. He examined its rituals, its ceremonies, and customs. He measured its success based on its apparent capacity to inspire, galvanize and bind its followers. He even examined the sometimes overlapping, sometimes competitive relationship between fascism and Catholicism as he would analyze

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two religions that coexisted within one state. Schneider adopted an air of moral neutrality around fascism, much as he adopted an agnosticism with regard to various religions.  

At least with regard to fascism, this approach was problematic. Schneider never considered the toll that fascism had on human beings, perhaps because this might have required him to adopt a moral stance that he was steadfastly unwilling to take. He built his observations on the evidence that he had at his disposal: fascist propaganda; the various charters and laws of corporate state; the words of friendly government officials. His methodology was the equivalent of researching Christianity by going to church, reading the bible, and talking to some priests. The news was almost always good, and the distance between myth and reality often great. 

Academic sloppiness does not explain Schneider’s attraction to fascism in the 1920s and early 1930s, although his assessment of Mussolini’s regime would certainly have been more nuanced if he had dug a little deeper to find more varied sources, and spoken better Italian. Schneider’s appreciation of the fascist state in the late 1920s and early 1930s coincided with a conviction among many political scientists that a good form of government was one that effectively met contemporary challenges. A good government, by this standard, managed complex economic problems, appealed to a public whose capacity to process information was limited, and constructively channeled the otherwise wayward energies of youth. A nearly universal conviction that democracy was failing on all these counts encouraged some philosophers and political scientists—including Schneider’s mentor John Dewey—to search for recourse within democracy itself, largely through civic education. But plenty of other intellectuals—including Walter Lippmann—suggested that the best solution lay in greater elite control. Lippmann, and many other intellectuals who expressed such deep cynicism about democracy in the 1920s were not fascist.

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8 Reminiscences of Herbert Wallace Schneider. In between his 1927 and 1935 trips to Italy, Schneider helped to develop courses on religion within Columbia University’s Department of Philosophy. He later explained that the objective of these courses was to help students understand religion’s place in history and culture. Schneider examined how the various religions of the world answered societies’ social, cultural and spiritual needs. He had no interest in judging one religion as better than another.

9 Reminiscences of Herbert Wallace Schneider. Schneider spoke no Italian when he went to Italy in 1927. He learned the language in Florence over the course of one month. He remembered: “The countess who was running the pension there spent the whole morning reading and in conversation with me. It didn’t take long. Then I read the newspapers conscientiously.”
sympathizers. But they contributed to an intellectual atmosphere in which it was acceptable—and perhaps *de rigueur*—to suggest that a form of government, other than democracy, might be better adapted to meet the challenges of the modern age.

As late as 1976 Herbert Schneider refused to accept that there was anything intrinsically wrong with fascism. The “theory of the corporate state” was “quite sensible,” he maintained. Fascism had failed because Mussolini was intoxicated by power, had tried to search for economic solutions through empire, and had made the fateful decision to ally Italy with Germany, he argued. Bad leadership and bad decisions explained the failure of fascism, according to Schneider. In 1976, Herbert Schneider, a moral philosopher, still refused to make any kind of moral judgment about the fascist state. This refusal made him an outlier in academia in the post-war United States. But as an American intellectual in the interwar years, Herbert Schneider had been very much a product of his place and time.

**The Dying Days of Domestic Policy**

Anne O’Hare McCormick and Generoso Pope continued to write about fascist Italy in the late 1930s, sometimes, although not always, in sympathetic terms. But from 1937 onward, Americans’ concerns about global security eclipsed any interest they might have had in Italian domestic policy. McCormick and Pope could no longer write about the cultural, political, and economic aspects of the fascist regime that had animated them in the 1920s and early 1930s.

In those days, McCormick had expressed admiration for fascism for what it appeared to do to the human spirit. McCormick and Child were attracted to the *fascisti* for similar reasons at the start of the 1920s. Like Child, McCormick argued that the fascist squads revived war-time values and generated excitement. And, like Child, she used their example to suggest that Americans were drifting after the Great War, padded by material comforts and lulled into selfish complacency. McCormick’s and Child’s analysis of fascism converged at other times too. They both portrayed Mussolini as a corporate executive with soul in the mid-1920s. They each suggested that the corporate parliament was more representative of the people than a democratic parliament. And they both argued that Italy had devised humane responses

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10 *Reminiscences of Herbert Wallace Schneider.*
to the global economic crisis in the 1930s. That two individuals as politically unalike as McCormick and Child could find so much common ground in fascism is in itself a testimony to fascism’s capacity to span conventional divides between left and right.

But Anne O’Hare McCormick was also sympathetic toward fascism for different reasons than those presented by Richard Washburn Child. Unlike Child, McCormick was a Catholic from birth. She was neither blind to the tensions between the Church and State following the Lateran Accords, nor naïve about the contradiction between Mussolini’s totalitarian ambitions and the Pope’s spiritual claims. But her response to fascism was quite typical of many Catholic Americans, who felt goodwill toward Mussolini following the Lateran Accords. McCormick seemed to realize that fascism, if carried to its extreme, would collide with religious freedom in Italy, but she was hopeful that an apparently pragmatic Mussolini would not take fascism to this extreme. McCormick’s calculation was once more the calculation of many Roman Catholics. The Vatican seemed to have more room for maneuver during the 1930s than it had had prior to 1929, so she succumbed to a belief that the Church was better off with Mussolini than it had been without him.

McCormick’s Catholicism also informed her ideas of social justice. Encouraged by some very non-committal statements by the Prime Minister, in the 1920s and early 1930s she imagined that the fascist state was always on the verge of moving toward the left of the political spectrum. For instance, she suggested that by effectively representing workers’ interests, the corporate parliament would enable a fairer balance between capital and labor. And she praised the fascist state for delivering the kind of public goods that progressives had long championed in the United States, including social insurance, maternal and infant care, and organized recreation for youth. As late as March 1934, McCormick praised the fascist state’s policies of ruralization and public works for protecting Italians from the ravages of the economic crisis. But, increasingly, she refrained from suggesting that the Italian regime was doing a better job of managing the depression than the government in the United States. McCormick loved FDR, and wanted to do all she could to help the New Deal succeed. She understood that the President’s political position
was not aided by direct comparisons between Roosevelt and Mussolini or between Italian corporatism and the NRA.

This was not the case for Generoso Pope. Through *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, Pope expressed pride in fascist Italy’s apparent achievements and argued frequently that the United States could learn from the Italian experience. Sometimes, Pope and contributors to *Il Progresso* asserted that the American government should follow specific fascist policies by implementing a comprehensive back-to-land program, investing heavily in public works, and using the corporate state as a model for the NRA. At other times, *Il Progresso* suggested a subtler way to import the apparent virtues of fascist Italy into the United States. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Mussolini was the personification of Italy, according to both fascist propaganda and fascist sympathizers in the United States. It followed that the characteristics, which Mussolini embodied—austerity, commitment to family, humanity, even religiosity—belonged to all Italians, Italian Americans included. *Il Progresso* presented Italian Americans as salves to the “acids of modernity”—acids which seemed to have corroded responsibility, family, community, and even souls in the United States.¹¹

With the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, both McCormick and Pope turned their attention to fascist foreign policy. They justified appeasement of Italy in Ethiopia by suggesting that it would enable Mussolini to both promote peace in Europe and return to progressive domestic battles—the “wars” that he “prefer[ed].”¹² On both these counts, they were wrong. As fascist foreign policy after 1937 brought Italy closer to Nazi Germany, it became more of a stretch for these two observers to present Mussolini’s policies as peaceful in intent, and impossible for them to devote attention to Italian domestic policy issues. An unstable international environment, which was partly of Mussolini’s own making, eclipsed all else. McCormick and Pope responded accordingly.


The Turning Axis, 1937

At the beginning of 1937, Anne O’Hare McCormick had written that Mussolini conceived of the Rome-Berlin “axis” as a “bridge”—a structure to promote dialogue, and even peace, in Europe. But developments over the course of that year gave no evidence that this would be the case. The Nazi and fascist regimes drew together, without giving any significant sign that their alliance would enable peace; instead, they continued to fuel a bloody war in Spain. The axis—a term, which Mussolini had coined to describe Italy’s informal agreement with Germany in 1936—acquired a durable, metallic, and ever more threatening character. Both McCormick and Generoso Pope continued to argue that the axis alliance did not represent a threat to European stability over the course of 1937, but their arguments rested on increasingly shaky ground.

The same month that McCormick described the axis as a “bridge” to peace, Herman Goering, the Nazi Minister of Aviation, met with Benito Mussolini and Galeazzo Ciano in Rome. Reports in a number of American newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times and Baltimore Sun, emphasized the significance of Goering’s visit: the Germans and Italians discussed “far-reaching plans” to ensure General Franco’s victory; and Goering predicted “an eventual showdown” between fascism and communism in Europe. But writing from Rome for the New York Times, McCormick tried to down-play the significance of the occasion: the Italians gave Goering an “almost conspicuously official” welcome; behind the “facade” of a united front, the two powers had little in common, she maintained. McCormick saw little in Goering’s visit to suggest that the “axis” was even an “alliance,” still less an “alliance for war.”

13 McCormick, “Mussolini Anxious Over Spanish War.”
14 For “far-reaching plans,” see: “Italy and Germany Ready to Aid Franco,” Los Angeles Times, January 16, 1937. For “eventual showdown” see: “Goering Predicts Showdown on Reds,” Baltimore Sun, January 19, 1937. See also: “Reich Holds Talks Cover Wide Field,” New York Times, January 15, 1937. According to the Time’s Berlin correspondent: “In authoritative quarters [of the Nazi regime] it is admitted that the trip is really a step toward carrying out the Berchtesgaden October protocols in which Chancellor Adolf Hitler and Count Galeazzo Ciano agreed that their two countries should consult with a view to common action on all major European questions.”
Over the rest of 1937, it became increasingly difficult for Anne O’Hare McCormick to simultaneously defend Italy and remain credible to her readers. She managed to do this, after a fashion, but not in terms that the regime found acceptable. McCormick argued that Mussolini and the Italian people were pulling in alternative directions. She observed, quite correctly, that neither the Italian intervention in Spain nor the alliance with Germany was popular in Italy. But she used these observations to imply that Mussolini—responsive to “outside” and “inside opinion”—would not persist with unpopular policies; here, she was wrong.  

In September 1937, Mussolini met with Hitler in Munich. Hitler announced that the private meeting of two fascist dictators spoke “for itself” as an expression of their ever tighter bonds. McCormick tried to pierce this claim, by reverting to old formulations of Mussolini and Hitler as pragmatist and prophet—“divergent in tastes, temperament, appearance, manner, mentality, habits, methods, range of interests.” “[A]lliances of convenience,” she reflected, usually ended in “divorce.” In her eagerness to separate fascism from Nazism in the fall of 1937, McCormick claimed that, as late as 1936, Mussolini had agreed that “the worst thing that ever happened to fascism was Hitler” (an opinion she had not recorded at the time). McCormick aimed to characterize Italian policy as changeable and, quite possibly, changing; as the “supreme opportunist among the wind-blown weathercocks” of Europe, Mussolini could soon turn his back on Germany, she implied.
There was plenty in this coverage that could, and did, anger senior members of the Italian government, including the claim that Italians *en masse* opposed fascist foreign policies, and the notion that Mussolini was vacillating and two-faced in his attitude toward Germany. McCormick tried to justify her critical coverage, so as to remain in the regime’s good favor. Visiting Rome in November 1937, she stopped in first at the Ministry for Press and Propaganda, to request a meeting with Mussolini. There, an official pointed out that she had not expressed her usual “sympathies” for fascist Italy in her recent journalism. McCormick defended herself, arguing that, in the United States, “friends of fascism” had “sometimes to be critical so as to avoid being labelled propagandists.” But the regime rebuffed McCormick’s requests for interviews with Mussolini or, as a second best, his son-in-law and the Foreign Minister, Galeazzo Ciano.

Perhaps more revealing than the regime’s rebuff was the discussion that McCormick’s requests prompted between various members of the Italian government. From Washington DC, Ambassador Fulvio Suvich advised the Ministry of Press and Propaganda that McCormick ought to be granted a meeting with Mussolini: her journalism was influential, Suvich noted, and she could help the regime to present its alliance with Germany in a favorable light. In Rome, Guido Rocco, the head of the Directorate General of Foreign Press, wrote to Ciano, in support of McCormick: she was “undoubtedly sincere in her friendship and admiration” for the regime, he argued. Suvich’s and Rocco’s interventions hint that some members of government wanted to maintain an open approach toward the United States, and perhaps even hoped that McCormick’s perspective on the “debatable points” of Italian policy could

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21 Telegram, Dino Alfieri to Fulvio Suvich, November 4, 1937; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popopolare; ASD.
22 Letter, Anne O’Hare McCormick to Benito Mussolini, November 11, 1937; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popopolare; ASD. In face of official rebuffs, McCormick persisted, writing again to tell him that she wanted to talk about the “debatable points of Italian policy.”
23 Telegram, Fulvio Suvich to Ministry of Press and Propaganda, November 5, 1937; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popopolare; ASD.
24 Memorandum, Guido Rocco to Galeazzo Ciano, November 13, 1937; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popopolare; ASD. Since a meeting with Mussolini was not possible, McCormick had suggested an interview with Ciano.
convince Mussolini that Italy’s future was not intertwined with Nazi Germany. Whatever hopes Suvich and Rocco had were in vain. Their superiors in government would not give McCormick any more access. Apparently Mussolini was less sensitive to either “inside” or “outside” opinion than McCormick had given him credit for.

While Anne O’Hare McCormick employed the tried-and-tested characterization of Mussolini and Hitler as the odd couple, destined for divorce, to diffuse the threatening nature of their September meeting, Generoso Pope reverted to another customary formula of Mussolini as a force for peace. Both Pope and Il Progresso’s director, Italo Carlo Falbo, presented the Munich meeting as proof of Italy’s unprecedented influence in Europe, which Mussolini could then leverage to promote a continent-wide peace. Although such claims seem absurd in hindsight, in the fall of 1937 they had just enough credibility to appeal to wishful thinkers everywhere. While Germany and Italy strengthened their alliance, the fascist government pursued a simultaneous rapprochement with Britain, prompting some observers

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25 For “debatable points, see: Letter, Anne O’Hare McCormick to Benito Mussolini, November 11, 1937 Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. Guido Rocco continued to serve in the Italian government after the fall of Mussolini and Italy’s declaration of war on Nazi Germany. Briefly nominated to be the Minister of Popular Culture, he became instead the Italian Ambassador to Turkey. Suvich had been Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, while Mussolini was the nominal Minister of Foreign Affairs, between 1932 and 1936, immediately prior to his appointment as Ambassador to Washington. Michael A. Ledeen, “Italian Jews and Fascism,” Judaism: A Quarterly of Jewish Life and Thought 18, no. 3 (1969): 294-95, 297. According to Ledeen, who cites De Felice as his principal authority, Suvich represented an older way of thinking within the foreign service, which opposed “the concept of warm Italian-German relations.” See: Renzo De Felice, Storia degli Ebrei Italiani Sotto il Fascismo (Torino: Einaudi, 1988), 182-83. These authors argue that Suvich’s replacement as Foreign Minister, Ciano, advocated for stronger ties with the Nazis and paved the way for the adoption of racial laws, as a way of strengthening those links. Both Ledeen and De Felice argued that whatever its “loathsome” aspects, Italian fascist racial doctrine had a “relatively benign nature” when applied in practice. This has been challenged by more recent historians. See, Giorgio Israel, Il Fascismo e la Razza: La Scienza Italiana e le Politiche Razziali del Regime (Bologna: Mulino, 2010), 7-10.

26 Handwritten note, November 10, 1937; Fascicolo “Ministero Per la Stampa e Propaganda Mac Cormick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 597; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. This note, made by an official within the Ministry for Press and Propaganda observes that an official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had “telephoned, informing that Mc Cormick will not be granted an audience with the Duce.”

27 McCormick, “Italy Woos English Opinion by Outraging It.”

(including William Phillips, the American Ambassador in Rome) to hope that Mussolini might be in the
process of reviving the lapsed Four Power Pact between Great Britain, Italy, Germany and France.29

But the notion that Mussolini could moderate Hitler, and use the axis alliance to promote peace
was losing credibility by the day. President Roosevelt, for one, had become more skeptical of such
optimistic interpretations of Italian policy. FDR’s “quarantine speech” in Chicago, on October 3, 1937,
signaled a shift in the President’s attitude. Without naming Germany, Italy or Japan, Roosevelt made
bedfellows of them all, suggesting that superficial differences between the dictators, and equally
superficial lip-service to peace, counted for less than their flouting of international boundaries and
international law.30

In fall of 1937, McCormick and Pope could continue to excuse Mussolini without running too far
afoul of mainstream public opinion: as evidenced by negative responses to Roosevelt’s “quarantine”
speech, many Americans still resisted the idea that the axis tilted the world toward war.31 But times were
changing fast; and American sympathizers with Italian fascism would soon have to come down on one
side or another.

Responses to Fascist Anti-Semitism

While Pope and McCormick continued to misread and misrepresent the significance of
Mussolini’s and Hitler’s relationship, one manifestation of the regimes’ strengthening rapport was deeply
troubling to both of these observers, albeit for different reasons. In the spring of 1937, the fascist regime
sent the first of many signals of pending policy changes with regard to race and religion. On May 25,
Mussolini’s Milan newspaper, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, published an editorial stating that Italy’s Jews should
not criticize Hitler’s racial policies. The story made it on to the front page of every major American


newspaper the following day: Americans were watching Mussolini’s attitude toward Jewish Italians closely, both for what it meant for Italy’s Jews, and for what it implied about the axis alliance.\footnote{Jews in Italy Told to Curb Anti-Naziism,” \textit{Baltimore Sun}, May 26, 1937; “Jews Must Back Duce or Leave, Paper Asserts,” \textit{Washington Post}, May 26, 1937; “Duce Orders Jews to Back Fascism or Leave Italy,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, May 26, 1937; “Italian Jews Told to Uphold Fascism or Leave Country,” \textit{New York Times}, May 26, 1937; “Join Fascists or Quit Italy, Duce to Jews,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, May 26, 1937; “Mussolini Warns Jews,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, May 26, 1937. The story was on the front page of all these papers, save the \textit{Los Angeles Times}.}

The headlines of May 26, 1937 were the kind that Pope dreaded, since they challenged his frequent claim (made as recently as May 23) that Italy and Germany were unalike in their approaches to religion and race.\footnote{Pope, “L'Italia e la Libertà Religiosa.”} The next month Pope went to Italy for a post-Ethiopian war tour: he expected, and received, a hero’s welcome for his fundraising efforts on Italy’s behalf.\footnote{See for example: “Il Gr. Uff. Pope Ricevuto dal Ministro Pietro Parini e dall’Ambasciatore degli SU,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, June 8, 1937; “Alta Onorificenza Conferita dal Re a Generoso Pope,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, June 10, 1937; “Il Comm. Pope Ricevuto dal Re Imperatore,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, June 14, 1937.}

Pope probably wished that his June 10 meeting with Mussolini needed only to consist of pro forma expressions of mutual admiration, but Pope had a serious issue to attend to.\footnote{“Generoso Pope, la Consorte e i Figli Ricevuti dal Duce,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}. Initially \textit{Il Progresso} conveyed the impression that the meeting had consisted of the formal exchange of “cordial conversation.” Clipping from \textit{Il Messaggero}; fasc H407; Raccomandato Pope, Generoso New York; Oggetto:1928 Onorificenza; Busta 18; Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario; ACS. The Italian press maintained this impression. According to \textit{Il Messaggero}, “The Duce expressed his pleasure with Gr. Uff Pope, who was accompanied by his family, for the fervid works of italianità, undertaken by him and all Italian Americans during the war in Ethiopia.” Generoso Pope, “Gli Ebrei in Italia,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, July 4, 1937; Generoso Pope, “The Jews in Italy,” \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano}, July 4, 1937. Pope’s account of the meeting conveyed his own discomfort about the discussion; he told his readers that he first apologized to Mussolini for his “indiscreet” request.} He wanted Mussolini to make a declaration that would reassure Americans about the status of Italy’s Jews.

In late June, Pope returned to the United States on board the SS Rex. As soon as the Rex docked in New York, he spoke to the \textit{New York Times}. In a scene that reads now like a minor foreshadowing of Neville Chamberlain, standing on the tarmac, waving a flimsy piece of paper in his hand, Pope informed the \textit{Times} that Mussolini had assured him that Italian Jews would be “treated just like all other Italians.”\footnote{“Generoso Pope Returns,” \textit{New York Times}, June 25, 1937.}

A fuller enunciation followed in both \textit{Il Progresso Italo-Americano} and \textit{Il Corriere d’America}. Mussolini had authorized Pope to tell all Americans that “the Jews in Italy have received, receive, and will continue
to receive” the same treatment as every other Italian citizen, the publisher reported. The statement allowed Pope to continue to defend fascist Italy in the United States, since he could claim that the head of the government had provided him personally with an assurance of Italian religious freedoms. More than ever before, Pope vested his own credibility into the claim that there would never be “persecution of race or religion in Italy.”

Changes in Italian policy and law in the second half of 1938 exposed Mussolini’s 1937 statement as hollow. In mid-July 1938, a government-sponsored report asserted that Jews and Africans living under Italian rule did not “belong to the Italian race.” Rather than disavowing the regime, Pope tried to wish away reality. While the headline in the African-American Chicago Defender read, “Italy Plans Racial Terror A La Nazi,” the headline in Il Progresso read, “Italy will not Alter its Policies toward the Jews.” There could be “no talk of persecution” of the Jewish people of Italy, Pope wrote in August, reminding his readers of the promise that Mussolini had given him the previous year. Only four days after Pope’s message to his readers, on the first of September 1938, the fascist government announced that all Jews who had entered Italy since 1919 had six months to leave the country. The next day, it banned Jewish students and teachers from any legally recognized school or university. While most American papers reported the news objectively, Il Progresso did its best to bury it under innocuous titles. “Italy Exiles Jews” headlined the New York Times; “New Measures Adopted Yesterday” headlined Il Progresso.

40 “Italy Plans Racial Terror à la Nazi,” Chicago Defender, July 30, 1938. “L’Italia Non Altera la Sua Politica Verso gli Ebrei,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, July 16, 1938. The newspaper argued that the professors’ report was only relevant on the “cultural” level, and would not result in any persecution of Italian Jews. “The declarations the Duce gave in his meeting with Grand Uff. Generoso Pope in June of last year remain firm.” There was no merit in the claims of some foreign press that Italy and Germany were drawing closer together. See also, “L’Italia Non Intende Iniziare un’Era di Persecuzione Contro gli Ebrei; I Loro Diritti Civili Sono Rispettati,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, July 31, 1938. Based on a recent article in Giornale d’Italia, this article relativized Italy’s anti-Jewish policy by comparing it to the United States immigration restrictions of 1924. It argued that democracies, too, had “racial policies.”
“Schools of Italy to Keep Out Jews,” headlined the Times; “New Measures of the Council of Ministers,” headlined Il Progresso.43

In the meantime, the tensions induced by Italian racial laws played out in New York City.44 While the majority of Italian Americans tried to distance themselves from fascist anti-Semitism, a minority felt emboldened by the news from Italy to express racial animosity: Il Grido della Stirpe—a newspaper that had always been far to the right of Il Progresso—expressed open antisemitism, and some Italian Americans joined Father Coughlin’s Christian Front.45 Jewish Americans expressed their concerns by informally boycotting the services and products of Italian Americans.46 These local tensions prompted Pope to address his readers again, on September 11, 1938. Instead of denouncing the regime’s policies toward the Jews, Pope argued that Italian and Jewish Americans must rise above “the turmoil of Europe” and embody the values of the “American melting pot.”47 Pope’s motives were transparent. He expressed concern that American Jewish organizations would organize a formal boycott of Italian imports, which would inevitably impinge further on Italian American businesses and service providers.48 As always, Pope wanted to ensure that his identity as a proud Italian did not hinder his progress in the United States.

number of measures decided upon by the Council of Ministers. It discussed in detail new norms for promotion for government bureaucrats, which meant that employees who were unmarried at 30 would not be eligible for promotion. While the discussion of the promotion law made it onto the front page, the law exiling non-Italian Jews slipped onto the back page.


44 Stefano Luconi, “The Response of Italian Americans to Fascist Antisemitism,” Patterns of Prejudice 35, no. 3 (July 2001): 3-23. Contrary to historians who emphasize the very positive relationships between the two ethnic communities, Luconi argues that the news from Italy exacerbated underlying tensions caused by depression-era competition for jobs, housing, relief benefits and political patronage, as well as the mutual distrust that lay beneath Jewish and Italian Americans’ partnerships in labor unions.


47 Generoso Pope, “Nervi a Posto,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, September 11, 1938. As always, Pope invoked American ideals when they served him, arguing that a “race war in the United States would be a grave offense to the Constitution and the traditions of the Republic.” He made no mention of any increase in anti-Semitism within the Italian American community, suggesting that all of the onus was on Jewish Americans to refrain from “discriminatory politics and a boycott.”

48 Pope, “Nervi a Posto.” Pope wrote that such a boycott would would “would probably not stop at the importation of products from Italy,” suggesting that it would likely feed in to a broader boycott of Italian American businesses and service providers. Luconi, “The Response of Italian Americans to Fascist Antisemitism,” 8. Luconi writes that
The Italian Embassy in Washington DC considered Pope’s September 11 editorial to be telling, and sent it on to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Popular Culture. The Embassy’s chargé d’affaires, Giuseppe Cosmelli, interpreted Pope’s editorial for his colleagues in Rome. Cosmelli observed that Pope had “found himself in a quite delicate personal situation,” since the regime’s policy changes toward Jews. By Cosmelli’s estimation, the sentiments expressed in Pope’s article corresponded “to the intimate attitude not only of Pope but of the majority of Italian Americans.” Feelings of “perplexity,” and “incomprehension” about the recent iterations of fascist racial policies abounded among Italian Americans in New York and Chicago, Cosmelli observed. Cosmelli could not add that these feelings reached into the Embassy itself, although perhaps they did, since Suvich was known for his opposition to closer ties between Italy and Nazi Germany and, like Pope, had staked his credibility on the claim that the fascist policies were not anti-Semitic. Cosmelli used Pope’s article to warn the regime that its anti-Jewish policies risked alienating Italian Americans; but the warning fell on deaf, or at least uninterested, ears.

Pope must also have been aware that his power within the Democratic Party could only be damaged by tensions between the two ethnic communities.

49 “Suvich Will Head Insurance Firm,” New York Times, September 13, 1938. Suvich was on annual leave, he never returned to the post of Ambassador or another post in government. Suvich’s departure represented the distancing of the old (and more moderate) guard of the foreign policy establishment from the regime. Suvich’s next job was as the President of Reunione Adriatica insurance company, replacing its previous president, Arnaldo Frigessi di Rattalma, who was Jewish. De Felice, Storia Degli Ebrei Italiani Sotto il Fascismo, 283. Gerald D. Feldman, “Competition and Collaboration Among the Axis Multinational Insurers: Munich Re, Generali, and Riunione Adriatica, 1933-1943,” in European Business, Dictatorship, and Political Risk, 1920-1945, ed.s Christopher Kobrak and Per H. Hansen (New York, 2004), 44-45. Frigessi and Suvich were friends, and while Suvich became the nominal president of the company, Frigessi continued to call the shots, until he was forced to go into hiding in 1943.

50 Telespresso, Giuseppe Cosmelli to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 13, 1938; Fascicolo “Ebraismo”; Busta 47; Affari Politici, Stati Uniti; ASD. 
52 Telegram, Giuseppe Cosmelli to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 14, 1938; Fascicolo “Ebraismo”; Busta 47; Affari Politici, Stati Uniti; ASD. The day after he transmitted his analysis of Pope’s “Nervi a Posto” article, Cosmelli wrote again to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “I consider it my duty to report that the provisions regarding Italian Jews, considered as measures that will precede more comprehensive acts, has created a very delicate collective psychological attitude among Italian Americans, which is susceptible to developments.” “Until now Italians and Jews have felt a lot of communality, as minorities vis-à-vis Anglo-Saxons,” Cosmelli noted, hinting that this was changing. Italian Americans, according to the chargé d’affaires, were anxiously awaiting the Grand Council’s deliberations on the matter but the prevalent sentiments of Italian Americans were “not only of momentary uncertainty and perplexity but . . . a deeper incomprehension.”
Pope, alongside other Italian American prominenti, tried to use any leverage he had with the regime to change its policies, but to no avail. No sooner had Cosmelli transmitted Pope’s September 11 editorial to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the chargé d’affaires cabled again. Pope had unexpectedly asked the Embassy to pass on an urgent telegram to Mussolini, requesting a meeting in Rome between the Prime Minister and a committee of both Italian and Jewish Americans “to ensure continued good relations in business.” The regime did not entertain Pope’s request. Less than a month later, and one day after the Grand Council issued the first of Italy’s formal racial edicts, Pope’s friend, the New York Supreme Court Justice, Salvatore Cotillo, tried to reach out to Mussolini once more. Cotillo warned the regime that relations between Italy and the United States were at a tipping point, and asked for a meeting in Rome. “I am sure when all the facts are presented before you, Your Excellency would possibly modify the strong terms of the [racial] edict,” Cotillo wrote. Cotillo’s message made it as far as the Foreign Minister, Galeazzo Ciano, who observed that it was a “similar proposal to the one made by Pope.” Using a phrase familiar to human rights abusers, wherever they are located in space and time, Ciano noted that any “international initiative to interfere with Italian internal politics will be decisively rebuffed.” By the fall of 1938, Ciano was far less interested in courting the favor of Italian Americans, or any Americans, than he was in cultivating a robust relationship with Nazi Germany.

53 Telegram, Giuseppe Cosmelli to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 15, 1938; Fascicolo “Ebraismo”; Busta 47; Affari Politici, Stati Uniti; ASD.
54 Telegram, Galeazzo Ciano to Italian Embassy in Washington DC, September 19, 1939; Fascicolo “Ebraismo”; Busta 47; Affari Politici, Stati Uniti; ASD.
56 Telegram, Salvatore Cotillo to Benito Mussolini, October 7, 1938; Fascicolo “Ebraismo”; Busta 47; Affari Politici, Stati Uniti; ASD. Unlike Pope’s request for an interview, which was kept secret, Cotillo transmitted his request in the New York Times. See: U.S. Asks Italy to Respect Rights of American Jews; Retaliation Here Hinted,” New York Times, October 8, 1938.
57 Telegram, Galeazzo Ciano to Giuseppe Cosmelli, October 8, 1938; Fascicolo “Ebraismo”; Busta 47; Affari Politici, Stati Uniti; ASD.
Writing in 1972, John Diggins praised Generoso Pope’s response to fascist Italy’s racist and anti-Semitic policies. Arguing that Pope’s stance was principled and “courageous,” Diggins misread history. There was nothing principled in Pope’s stance. In the face of declarations from the fascist government that Italian Jews would be divested of their political, economic, and civil rights, Pope’s newspaper obfuscated, relativized, and diminished the significance of the regime’s policies. For instance, in the week following the Grand Council’s racial edict of October 1938, Il Progresso claimed the regime would provide homes for Italian Jews in sunny Ethiopia, that the Council had exempted tens of thousands of Jewish people from restrictions, and that “only” ninety-eight university professors had “left” their jobs. Privately, Pope lamented fascism’s anti-Jewish turn, but for entirely selfish reasons: he had staked his credibility on claims that German and Italian fascism were opposite in their approaches to race and religion, and he feared the repercussions of fascist policies on the social, economic, and political status of Italian Americans.

Pope never made a definitive statement against fascist anti-Semitism. Instead, he tried to distance himself from the fascist persecution of Jews for motives of self-protection. Diggins cited Generoso Pope’s message to his readers of December 25, 1938, as evidence of his “courageous” stand against Mussolini’s repression of the Jewish people. In this message, Pope wrote that while the “anti-Semitic campaign in Europe” persisted, Americans must retain their commitment to non-discrimination.

It was Christmas Day, 1938—the end of a year in which the fascist government had passed legislation to exile 8,000 Jews from Italy, bar Jewish children from schools, exclude Jews from public life, ban intermarriage between

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58 Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 342-43. “[W]hen Mussolini aped Hilter’s ‘solution’ in 1938, the publisher did not hide his disgust,” according to Diggins.
59 “L’Italia Provvederà alla Sistemazione degli Ebrei,” *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, October 7, 1938. This article acknowledged the laws against mixed marriages and expulsion and schools, but the headline focused on an apparently benign solution of providing homes for Italian Jews in “certain areas of Ethiopia.”
Gentiles and Jews, and divest Jews of their businesses and property.\(^6\) In his Christmas message to his readers, Pope did not even name the fascist regime as responsible for anti-Semitism in Europe, still less denounce its policies. There was nothing "courageous" in his actions or his words.\(^6\)

Anne O’Hare McCormick’s interventions about fascist anti-Jewish laws, although far less frequent than Generoso Pope’s, were much more robust. McCormick encouraged her readers in the *Times* to see the significance of the government-sponsored report on race as soon as it was published in July 1938. Rather than dismissing the manifesto because Mussolini did “not believe in race theory,” she argued that the report mattered precisely because the Prime Minister had previously dismissed such ideas. She suggested that her readers should not seek solace in Mussolini’s past utterances about the “childishness” of Nazi-style racial theories; instead, they should focus on his volte-face, and what that meant for Europe.\(^6\)

Writing from Rome in January 1939, after the Grand Council’s racial edict had gone into law, McCormick urged Americans not to underestimate the new policies, even if they were unpopular among ordinary Italians and executed only half-heartedly on the ground. Italian Jews had been excluded from “every branch of public service . . . shut out of the universities,” and their businesses had been “turned over to others.” Americans should be aware that the discriminatory legislation inflicted very real “material and moral suffering” on Italian Jews, she wrote.\(^6\)

This January 1939 article earned McCormick the unequivocal animosity of the regime, perhaps less because she charted the effects of its anti-Semitic policies, and more because she described these policies as “universally unpopular” among ordinary Italians.\(^6\) The regime knew of the article before it

\(^{64}\) Anne O’Hare McCormick, “In Europe: Anti-Jewish Decrees Displease and Puzzle Italian People,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1939.
\(^{65}\) Translation of McCormick’s article, “In Europe: Anti-Jewish Decrees Displease and Puzzle Italian People,” January 29, 1939; Fascicolo, “Direzione Generale per il Servizio della Stampa Estera, McComrick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 554; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. An official had underlined McCormick’s statements that no one hesitated to speak openly against the racial laws and that if a “fair plebiscite” were held on the policy, 89
was published, since it intercepted a *Times* correspondent, Camille Cianfarra, telephoning the text to New York. In a series of errors, the regime assumed that Cianfarra was responsible for the article and moved to expel him. Cianfarra corrected the Ministry of Popular Culture: it was not he, but McCormick who had written the article, which Cianfarra “recognized was full of inaccuracies and malevolence”; he had tried to dissuade McCormick from sending it, but to no avail, since she was both “stubborn” and powerful in her position on the *Times* editorial board. Cianfarra’s deference to the regime was representative of the constrained position of in-country correspondents in dictatorships: they could not write or speak the truth and keep their jobs. McCormick was not so bound. By the time the regime had reorganized itself to expel her, she was in Hungary. “It is not possible to proceed with her expulsion because she has already left Italy,” wrote an official in the Ministry of Popular Culture. She would be back.

The fascist regime’s initiation of anti-Jewish policies and laws horrified Anne O’Hare McCormick and Generoso Pope, for different reasons. As the effects of fascist anti-Semitism reverberated in the United States, they threatened to undermine Pope’s position as a business leader and powerbroker. Since 1937, Pope had feared this outcome, and vested his credibility in the assertion that fascism was not anti-Semitic. More than any previous policy of the Italian government, the turn toward official anti-Semitism undermined Pope’s dual identity as a loyal American and a fascist sympathizer. Rather than accepting that these two identities were irreconcilable, Pope attempted to patch them together by claiming that little had really changed for Italy’s Jews, while working behind the scenes, with no effect whatsoever, to moderate the regime’s policies.

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66 Interception of McCormick’s article, Rome, January 29, 1939; Fascicolo “Direzione Generale per il Servizio della Stampa Estera, Cianfarra, Camillo”; Busta 556; Ministero Cultura Popolare; ASD.
67 Memorandum, Director General of Foreign Press, for the Attention of the Minister of Popular Culture, January 30, 1939; Fascicolo “Direzione Generale per il Servizio della Stampa Estera, Cianfarra, Camillo”; Busta 556; Ministero Cultura Popolare; ASD.
68 Memorandum, Ministry of Popular Culture, Dir. Gen. Stampa Estera, for the attention of the Minister, February 1, 1939; Fascicolo, “Direzione Generale per il Servizio della Stampa Estera, McComrick (sic) O’Hare Anna,”; Busta 554; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD.
69 Memorandum, Ministry of Popular Culture, Dir. Gen. Stampa Estera, for the attention of the Minister, February 1, 1939; Fascicolo, “Direzione Generale per il Servizio della Stampa Estera, McComrick (sic) O’Hare Anna,”; Busta 554; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. This memorandum was stamped, “Seen by the Duce” (“Visto dal Duce.”)
McCormick’s position was much simpler; her identity, her credibility, and her professional reputation were not so deeply attached to fascist Italy (in part because public memory tends to be short and forgiving). In 1938 and 1939, McCormick felt able to criticize the regime openly, without so much as acknowledging her previous failures of perception. But while McCormick was closing the door on fascist Italy she did not slam it shut for a few more years.

**Anne O’Hare McCormick and the Road to War**

Despite her unvarnished assessment of the meaning of fascist racial laws for Jewish Italians and European geopolitics, McCormick continued to put a hopeful gloss on fascist foreign policy at the decade’s end. She persisted with two well-worn, and related, themes: first, of the Rome-Berlin axis as a weak partnership, which could disintegrate at any time; and second, of Mussolini as the key to European peace. Given what we know now about Mussolini’s place in the history, such ideas seem remarkably naïve. But McCormick was not anomalous; other members of the American foreign policy establishment voiced these ideas too, not out of admiration for fascism but due to an absence of feasible alternatives. Hope is not naïve when it is the only option available.

Since Hitler had come to power in 1933, McCormick had argued that temperamental differences between Hitler and Mussolini reflected an ideological divide between Nazism and Fascism. For her readers in the *Times*, she interpreted many of the major events in Europe in 1938 through this lens. She assessed the Anschluss of March as a blow to Italy, which cracked “wide open the Rome-Berlin axis.”70 A meeting between the two dictators in Rome, in May 1938, did nothing to alter McCormick’s belief that Italian-German relations were poor.71 And in September 1938, she characterized Mussolini as working in

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concert with Chamberlain, Daladier, (and Roosevelt, from afar,) to make Hitler see sense in Munich, enabling the prolongation of European peace.\textsuperscript{72}

As Czechoslovakia, and then Poland, shuddered under the weight of invading Nazi troops, the basic tenets of McCormick’s analysis changed very little: while Nazism was irredeemable, the Fascist regime could still be detached from the axis, she argued throughout 1939.\textsuperscript{73} Rather than interpreting Italy’s invasion of Albania in April as evidence of fascism’s similarities with Nazism, McCormick argued that by taking over Albania, Mussolini’s goal was to protect the Adriatic against German expansion.\textsuperscript{74} Citing the Nazi-Soviet pact as both an expression and a source of the widening gulf between the two right-wing dictatorships, McCormick wrote that “[n]o man in Europe” was expending more effort “to prevent a war” than Benito Mussolini.\textsuperscript{75} And when (in spite of Mussolini’s presumed efforts) the war came, she characterized Italy as a “pendulum,” which might swing either way. McCormick even allowed her readers to imagine that Mussolini might use the axis “to pivot” Italy into a powerful position, so that it would exert more sway when it entered the war on the allies’ side.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{72} Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Europe: The President’s Timetable in the Munich Crisis,” New York Times, October 31, 1938. Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Europe Weighs Strength of Berlin-Rome Axis,” New York Times, April 30, 1939. McCormick described Munich as the “one instance” beyond Spain “of open collaboration” between Mussolini and Hitler, and in the case of Munich, Mussolini intervened not to facilitate war alongside Germany but to prevent “a military march into the Sudetenland.”

\textsuperscript{73} Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Europe: Mussolini Has the Chance to Aid Cause of Peace,” New York Times, January 28, 1939. McCormick wrote that although there was no concrete evidence to support the hypothesis that, with Franco’s victory in Spain, Mussolini would become a foreign policy moderate, nothing “would make Mussolini a hero in the eyes of his own people so surely as [a conference] that gave promise of peace.” Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Europe: Relief Felt in Italy Over Tone of Mussolini’s Speech,” New York Times, April 22, 1939. On April 14, 1939, Roosevelt had issued a public letter to Mussolini and Hitler, calling upon them not to invade the independent countries of Europe and North Africa and to seek peaceful settlements of any issues. McCormick argued that the message had prompted Mussolini to sound “a softer note than was expected to be pleasing to Berlin.” One month before Mussolini and Hitler announced the “Pact of Steel” she wrote that there were “faint signs on the horizon that [in Rome] the Axis may be beginning to turn” away from Berlin.

\textsuperscript{74} McCormick, “Europe: Relief Felt in Italy Over Tone of Mussolini’s Speech.”

\textsuperscript{75} McCormick, “In Europe: In the Final Test One Man Stands Against the World,” New York Times, August 28, 1939.

1939 gave way to 1940, and McCormick persisted in her argument that fascist Italy could be separated from Nazi Germany. In Rome, that January, she emphasized the “common interests” of the “greatest of the world’s neutrals”—Italy and the United States—and suggested that the two nations were “destined to work together” in shaping the post-war peace.\(^77\) It was not until April, when the Italian press adopted an intensely pro-German stance, and Nazi officials arrived for military talks in Rome, that McCormick’s predictions assumed a far more pessimistic tone.\(^78\) But still, on May 10, the same day that Germany invaded Belgium, she wrote that Italian officials were considering “the possibility of closer relations with the United States.”\(^79\)

If McCormick’s analysis of the events of 1938 to 1940 seems absurd as we look back at the pre-war years from our present perch, it is worth remembering that a number of American policymakers shared her views. For instance, the American Ambassador to Italy, William Phillips, argued that Anschluss drove a wedge between Mussolini and Hitler, and that, behind the formalities of Hitler’s May 1938 visit to Rome, there was no love lost between the two leaders.\(^80\) President Roosevelt and some of his advisers believed that Mussolini was instrumental in Hitler’s acceptance of a “peaceful” solution to the Czechoslovakia crisis at Munich in September 1938.\(^81\) And while Italy’s annexation of Albania in the spring of 1939 gave some policymakers, including the President, pause for thought (as proof of the very obvious contention that Mussolini, like Hitler, was bent on aggressive expansion), the Nazi-Soviet Pact that summer weakened any supposition that like attracted like.\(^82\)

\(^{77}\) Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Europe: Italy Now Turns Toward Us, Seeing Some Like Aims,” \textit{New York Times}, January 8, 1940. See also: Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Italy Turns from War Cares to Domestic Problems,” \textit{New York Times}, January 13, 1940. McCormick detected a revival of the spirit of pre-axis era fascism, of domestic “battles” for economic development rather than wars abroad. Peace, she implied, was Italian fascism’s more natural state.


\(^{80}\) Schmitz, \textit{United States and Fascist Italy}, 193.

\(^{81}\) Schmitz, \textit{United States and Fascist Italy}, 194.

\(^{82}\) Schmitz, \textit{United States and Fascist Italy}, 201, 203. The Assistant Secretary of State, Adolf Berle, for one, argued that the treaty between Hitler and Stalin would “‘shake’” the Axis alliance between Mussolini and Hitler “‘to its very base.’”
Above all, there was nothing naïve in McCormick’s assertion that Italy might remain neutral in the Second World War. Rather, she was acting as an informal agent of official policy in this regard. Roosevelt met with McCormick in January 1940, just before she left for Italy, and asked her to convey to the regime that he valued good relations between the United States and Italy, which were of course contingent on Italy remaining “neutral” in the war. Upon reaching Rome, McCormick stopped in to the Ministry of Popular Culture to request meetings with Mussolini and Ciano, as was her custom. And, as had become its custom, the Ministry of Popular Culture refused her request. But an official at the foreign press section, passed on McCormick’s reflections to Alessandro Pavolini, the Minister of Popular Culture, emphasizing that they were based on her recent meeting with Roosevelt. McCormick had “insisted” that both American public opinion and the President were firmly opposed to intervening in the war, this official wrote.

Just as she had been instructed to do, McCormick communicated to the fascist regime Roosevelt’s hope that both countries could stay out of the war. And although she was denied direct access to the upmost echelons of the fascist hierarchy, she used her journalism from Rome in January 1940 to convey American policy, confident that officials in the regime read her words. When she painted idealistic images of two great “neutral” powers, united in their non-belligerency, and working side by side

83 Schmitz, *United States and Fascist Italy*, 205. As Schmitz observes, Franklin Roosevelt “hoped to build upon Italy’s non-belligerent status to split the Axis.”
85 Memorandum, Directorate General for Foreign Press, for the attention of the Minister of Popular Culture, January 12, 1940; Fascicolo, “Direzione Generale per il Servizio della Stampa Estera, McComrick (sic) O’Hare Anna,”; Busta 554; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. The official (perhaps Guido Rocco) wrote that he awaited orders regarding the possibility of an audience between McCormick and Pavolini, the Minister of Popular Culture. The archives do not show whether this meeting was granted. McCormick, “Europe: Italy Now Turns Toward Us, Seeing Some Like Aims.” She wrote that “a high official of the fascist government spoke of ‘parallel lines’ in discussing the aims of Italian and American policy.” See also: Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Europe: Hitler Extends the Axis to Fit a New Time-Table,” *New York Times*, September 28, 1940. Months later, she wrote that while German policy makers had long seemed disinterested in American policy (based on the assumption that the US would not intervene in the war), “[f]or a time some in the Duce’s entourage, if not Mussolini himself, were swayed by the fear that an extension of the war would bring in the United States.”
86 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Europe: Tragic Paradox in Italy’s Arguments for War,” *New York Times*, June 3, 1940. In this article, she reflected back on a conversation she had had with “an important official” (again, perhaps Guido Rocco), in January 1940 regarding the likelihood of the United States’ entry into the war. Upon his inquiry, she had told him that the United States’ policy of non-belligerency would likely change if Italy went in on Germany’s side.
to shape a postwar world, she wrote less for her broad American audience, and more for her very narrow Italian one.87

Back in Rome, once more, in the spring of 1940, and refused, once more, a meeting with Mussolini, McCormick wrote the Prime Minister a long letter. It was April 30, the last day of a month that had seen Nazi technical experts and military representatives in Rome, and a sharp uptick in Italian anti-allied propaganda. After apologizing for any offense that her recent journalism had caused, McCormick lamented that she had not been allowed to meet with Mussolini:

I am deeply concerned about the relations between our two countries. Your Excellency knows better than I do that public sentiment in the United States is violently and almost unanimously anti-German, and that the better feeling towards Italy since the war grows out of two facts: first, that Italy is not in the conflict on the German side, and second, that for the first time in several years[, W]ashington and Rome have a strong bond of common interest in their desire to limit the conflict and to uphold certain non-belligerent rights.

McCormick understood why the regime felt affronted by her characterization of Italian mass opinion as anti-German and anti-war. But she argued that “the best thing that can be said to increase sympathy for Italy in the United States is that Italians do not support Germany policy and action.” As both the Nazi and fascist regimes signaled the imminent start of a more active phase in their partnership, she realized that the world was at yet another crossroads:

My own country, I am always repeating in print, is not prepared to enter the war, militarily or psychologically, but if Italy goes in with Germany . . . I am firmly convinced that such action will powerfully affect our policy and eventually lead to our participation. This is the reason—because Italy is the brake against illimitable war; because . . . the Powers that succeed in keeping out of this exhausting and revolutionary struggle will be the strong powers at the end, the only powers

87 McCormick, “Europe: Italy Now Turns Toward Us, Seeing Some Like Aims”; McCormick, “Italy Turns from War Cares to Domestic Problems.”
capable of shaping the future—this is the reason that I pile up evidence to prove that your
country, and consequently mine, may not be dragged in.

McCormick may have written her final words to Mussolini to appeal to his own sense of greatness, but
there is no doubt that she also truly believed that upon his decision rested “what chance there [was] of
saving the civilization of Europe.” “Believe me, Your Excellency,” she signed off, with words that felt
less like a formality, and more like a prayer.88

In sum, McCormick’s characterization of Italy, as late as the spring of 1940, as a possible source
for peace in Europe was an attempt to convince the fascist regime that this policy was in its best interests.
By the late 1930s, McCormick was an establishment insider in the United States. And like a number of
other establishment insiders, she argued that Mussolini could be split from Hitler not because she
believed that this outcome was highly probable, but because it was a possibility in a world of shrinking
possibilities. In so far as McCormick could contribute to this outcome, she did so, communicating FDR’s
hopes for Italian and American neutrality, and arguing (correctly, and insistently) that neither the Italian
nor the American people were eager for war. McCormick projected a vision of Italy and the United States
as two great neutral powers shaping the postwar world not because this was a likely scenario, but because
she hoped it would strike Mussolini as the most appealing one.

McCormick’s journalism from Rome in January 1940 was tinged with a nostalgia for the days of
fascism past, which, she argued, could be retrieved if Italy remained neutral in the war. She played almost
every hit in her decades-old repertoire. Thanks to Italy’s non-belligerent status, Rome was bustling and
alive in 1940, she claimed, painting scenes of “crowded restaurants” and “well-stocked markets”
reminiscent of the early 1920s, when she had argued that fascism had reawakened Italy.89 Romans were at
“peace with themselves again, and in harmony with the policy” of neutrality, she wrote in 1940, reverting
to formulas from the early 1930s, when she had described the Italians under fascism as fully-rendered

88 Letter, Anne O’Hare McCormick to Benito Mussolini, April 30, 1940; Fascicolo, “Direzione Generale per il
Servizio della Stampa Estera, McCormick (sic) O’Hare Anna,”; Busta 554; Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD.
89 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Italy Turns From War Cares to Domestic Problems,” New York Times, January 13,
1940; McCormick, “The Revolt of Youth.”
versions of themselves.\textsuperscript{90} The regime was “concentrating on domestic problems with a zeal unknown since the first years” of fascism, she claimed, returning to the idea that “battles” for wheat, land, and the lira were the wars that Mussolini preferred.\textsuperscript{91} As for Rome itself, the government’s renovation program was proceeding at top speed in January 1940, according to McCormick. Rome felt grand, and imperial, she argued, suggesting continuity with the urban planning miracle of the mid-1930s.\textsuperscript{92} It seems unlikely that McCormick, who had been in Rome Italy for four days when she wrote this article, really perceived a “return” to the “original program” of fascism, which she claimed to be witnessing.\textsuperscript{93} Rather, she wanted to remind the regime of all it could regain if it stayed out of the war, and all it stood to lose if it entered on Hitler’s side. McCormick used her journalism, one of the few channels she had available to her, to communicate with the regime. But if some fascist officials, at least, read her words, their superiors absorbed none of their intended meaning.

Suffice to say, you did not need to be a fascist sympathizer to make sympathetic-sounding noises about fascist Italy in 1938, 1939, and 1940, you just needed to be a sensible strategist, who recognized that it would be self-defeating to preemptively foreclose an option, however remote its possibility. McCormick, by the late 1930s, had become this kind of a strategist. Certainly, neither Mussolini nor Ciano considered her a “friend” of Italy any longer: she was far too critical of dictatorship, the suppression of freedoms, and the growing distance between official policies and public opinion to count as a “friend” in their minds.\textsuperscript{94} While too disorganized to expel McCormick for her criticism of its anti-
Jewish policies in January 1939, the regime (in its often haphazard fashion), kept an eye on McCormick’s
cominings and goings over the next eighteen months, suggesting politely, pointedly, and probably quite
intimidatingly, that she would be better off going than coming, and, better off still if she stayed away for
good.  
McCormick’s love affair with fascist Italy was well and truly over, and yet, one can sense her
own feelings of sadness as she mulled over what had come to pass. Upon her return to New York, in the
spring of 1940, she reflected upon the scenes in Rome as she departed. It was the 25th of May, exactly
three weeks before Mussolini declared war on Britain and France. Consciously or not, McCormick’s
description of the city she left behind echoed a scene that she had described so vividly for Times readers
almost twenty years earlier. In the spring of 1940, she watched masses of young men—“boys,” really—
streaming down the Via Veneto. On the face of it, these young men were not unlike the young fascist,
whom McCormick had watched descending from the Capitoline and into the narrow Via Aracoeli in the
spring of 1921. But for McCormick, the tragedy lay in the differences between these two parades. In the
spring of 1921, the young fascists had, in her mind, embodied all that was good about war-time—vigor,
patriotism, and higher ideals—without the threat of war. In the spring of 1940, the young men’s battle
cries were real, all “too real,” the “shrill tuning up for a summons” to an imminent war. In the spring of

95 See: Fono-Bollettino, n. 113, April 22, 1939. In April 1939 the Ministry of Popular Culture first learned that
McCormick was in because the Italian Embassy in Washington forwarded a summary of an article that she had
written from Rome. Someone in the Ministry scribbled “She’s in Rome?” (“È a Roma?”) under the Embassy’s press
summary. See also: Name illegible, handwritten note, 24 April 1939. This note read, “Mrs. Mc Cormick is passing
through Rome on her way back to America.” It was stamped “Seen by the Duce” (“Visto dal Duce”). Letter, Anne
O’Hare McCormick to Benito Mussolini, April 30, 1939. McCormick subsequently sent Mussolini a letter asking
for an interview. Letter, Name illegible to Anne O’Hare McCormick, May 2, 1939. Her request was again denied.
See: Telegram, Ascanio Collona to Alessandro Pavolini, November 16, 1939. The Ambassador telegraphed the
Minister of Popular Culture, informing him that McCormick was travelling once more to Italy and had requested an
audience with Mussolini and the Minister. Collona wrote that taking account of ministerial orders, he “immediately”
counselling McCormick against travel to Italy. But, he added, McCormick ignored his advice, insisting that she was
a “friend of our country.” Memorandum, Directorate General of Foreign Press, for the attention of the Minister of
Popular Culture, April 23, 1940. On McCormick’s last stay in Rome before Italy’s entry into the war, an official in
the foreign press section asked the Minister of Popular Culture, Pavolini, whether they should “invite her to distance
herself from any territory of the Kingdom,” or whether McCormick’s assurances that she was only in Rome on a
holiday with her husband, would not be filing any correspondence, and would be leaving in the first half of May
were a sufficient check on her activities. Whether due to bureaucratic inertia within the regime or an official
decision that she could stay, McCormick remained in Rome, and filed a news story, just before she departed. All in
Fascicolo, “Direzione Generale per il Servizio della Stampa Estera, McComrick (sic) O’Hare Anna”; Busta 554;
Ministero della Cultura Popolare; ASD. For McCormick’s story, filed contrary to her promise to the Ministry of
Popular Culture: see, McCormick, “Italian Not Surprised.”
1921, she had believed that the fascists had spoken for Italy; they were cheered along by adoring crowds. In the spring of 1940, the young marching men elicited only feelings of disgust and dismay from passersby on the streets. Twenty years earlier, McCormick had used the words of a “starry-eyed” woman from Piedmont to sum up Italians’ view of fascism as a “‘glorious . . . resurrection’” of their country. In 1940, she cast a taxi driver in the spokesperson’s role, as he “cursed under his breath,” and muttered, “‘Young fools!’”

Rather than seeing fascism as wrong from the start, McCormick seemed to think that there had been a corruption of its initial promise and ideals. If Italy entered the war on Germany’s side, she wrote on June 3, 1940, it would be due to the influence of “reckless elements” within the party—a minority of “extreme Fascists under the sway of the Nazis.” McCormick’s belief that Italian fascism’s extremism, chauvinism and violence was not inherent to Italian fascism perhaps also explains why she was able to distance herself from the regime without explicitly acknowledging her past errors of judgment. She did not see that fascism of 1940 was the natural extension of fascism of 1922. How far fascism had fallen, she believed, and how far it still had to fall.

Generoso Pope and the Finest of Lines

At the end of May 1938—a month that had begun with a meeting between Hitler and Mussolini in Rome—Generoso Pope received a letter from Frank E. Mason, the Vice President of the National Broadcasting Company. Mason and Pope were friends, and Mason wanted to offer Pope some friendly advice. In a polite, but direct, way, Mason told Pope to shut up. Italian Americans were in a delicate situation, Mason noted, due to the “apparent integration of Italian interests with Germany.” Mason warned:

There is no question that there is a rapidly growing sense of nationalism in the United States. You as a good fascist nationalist cannot object to that. And with the growing nationalism,

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97 Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Europe: Tragic Paradox in Italy’s Arguments for War,” New York Times, June 3, 1940.
unfortunately comes a certain xenophobia. . . . Gene, you can’t identify Rome with Berlin in the minds of America, as has been done so recently by your own spokesmen, without creating in the minds of our people [the idea] that you are endorsing and are taking responsibility . . . for your allies’ activities, philosophies and ideologies.

Gallup opinion polls showed remarkably high anti-German attitudes among Americans, wrote Mason.  

While Americans were less anxious about Italian fascism, either at home or abroad, these feelings would shift if influential men, like Generoso Pope, continued to affirm the axis alliance in Americans’ minds. Mason noted that Pope was one of the few Italian Americans who had gained entry into “the salons and drawing rooms of the leaders of industry, the press, of thought and of government.” Mason cautioned Pope that his consistent defense of fascist Italy risked undermining all that he had worked for, and built up, in the United States.

Mason’s letter is a fascinating source for a number of reasons. First, it is a restatement of the observation (made as early as 1934 by Italian officials) that ties between the fascist and Nazi regimes were detrimental to the reputation of fascism in the United States. Second, it offers an unusually frank description of Pope as a “fascist nationalist” by an American who was “very fond” of Pope. Such labels were usually the preserve of Pope’s anti-fascist opponents, who used it to question his credentials as a loyal American. The assumption that this letter was a private correspondence, between friends, allowed Frank Mason to describe Pope frankly. It thus offers us a rare insight into how Generoso Pope’s friends saw him, and probably how he saw himself.

Finally, Mason’s letter is a remarkable source because it did not remain private. Pope forwarded it to Fulvio Suvich, the Italian Ambassador in Washington, who passed it onward to Dino Alfieri, the

98 Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 334-35. Diggins cites an October 1938 Gallup poll which asked “If you absolutely HAD to decide which dictator you liked best—Mussolini, Stalin, or Hitler—which would you choose?” 53 percent of respondents chose Mussolini, compared to Stalin (34 percent) and Hitler (13 percent).

99 Letter, Frank Mason to Generoso Pope, May 31, 1938; Fascicolo 300, Articoli Offensivi Contro L’Italia; Busta 48; Ministero della Cultura Popolare Gabinetto 1926-1944; ACS. Pope had contacted Mason regarding recent articles by the journalist Westbrooke Pegler, in the World Telegram, which were offensive to Fascist Italy. He wanted Mason to intervene on his behalf with the Telegram’s publisher, Roy Howard, to try to prevent Pegler from writing these kinds of stories. Pope also wanted to write to Pegler and meet with him himself. Mason’s response advised against intervention, especially because it bordered on a suppression of freedom of expression. Mason also suggested, more broadly, that Pope should tone down his editorial support for fascism.
Minister of Popular Culture in Rome. Suvich’s correspondence with Alfieri indicates that by May 1938, if not before, Generoso Pope was acting on the specific orders of the fascist government. Pope had passed Mason’s letter on, in a request for further instructions from the regime: should he follow Mason’s advice, or did the Italian government want him to proceed with his interventions, as planned? By coincidence, May 1938 was the same month that Congress passed the Foreign Agents Registration Act, which defined a foreign agent as someone who worked at the “at the order, request, or under the direction or control” of a foreign government. Pope certainly fit this description; the regime even had a code name for him. It was not one that would have flattered his outsized ego. In May 1938, the fascist government referred to Pope as Camerata Casagrande—a Small Room in a Big House. 

Generoso Pope walked the finest of lines from 1938 until the United States’ entry into the Second World War in December 1941. As the exchange between Suvich and Alfieri demonstrates, he was an agent of the Fascist government; “a good fascist nationalist,” in Frank Mason’s words. But Pope also enjoyed, and wanted to retain, his influence among the power elite in the United States. Between 1938 and 1941, Pope used *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* to advocate for Italian irredentism, avoided criticizing Nazi Germany, and argued that the United States should remain militarily neutral and morally aloof from European events. As Frank Mason observed, Pope’s identity as a fascist sympathizer called into question his credentials as a loyal American, and undermined his claim to enter the “circles” of “leadership” in the United States.

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100 The Fascist Government had instructed Pope to counteract and try to suppress both Pegler’s and Ernest Hemingway’s critiques of fascist Italy. Letter, Fulvio Suvich to Dino Alfieri, June 16, 1938, Fascicolo 300, Articoli Offensivi Contro L’Italia; Busta 48; Ministero della Cultura Popolare Gabinetto 1926-1944; ACS.

101 Foreign Agents Registration Act, chapter 327, Statute 52, Section 631.

102 Letter, Fulvio Suvich to Dino Alfieri, June 16, 1938; Fascicolo 300, Articoli Offensivi Contro L’Italia; Busta 48; Ministero della Cultura Popolare Gabinetto 1926-1944; ACS. Pellegrino Nazzaro, *Fascist and Anti-Fascist Propaganda in America: The Dispatches of Italian Ambassador Gelasio Caetani* (Youngstown, New York: Cambria Press, 2008), 165-66. In addition to the correspondence of May 1938, Pope wrote to the Ministry of Popular Culture twice in 1939, reminding the regime that his dailies were “at the service of the Fascist regime and Italy,” and that Pope was “available personally and through his newspapers” to advance the fascist cause. Nazzaro cites letters from Pope and *Il Progresso*’s Rome correspondent, Vincent Giordano, to the Ministry of Popular Culture, of March 3, March 7, May 21, May 25, and June 2, 1939, from World War II captured enemy records.

103 Letter, Frank Mason to Generoso Pope, May 31, 1938; Fascicolo 300, Articoli Offensivi Contro L’Italia; Busta 48; Ministero della Cultura Popolare Gabinetto 1926-1944; ACS.
Generoso Pope’s journalistic interventions in late 1938 show how far he was willing to go on behalf of the fascist regime. In a similar fashion to McCormick, Pope claimed that Mussolini was the principal peacemaker at Munich: the Prime Minister had saved Europe from the “seemingly inevitable catastrophe” of war, wrote Pope. But unlike McCormick, Pope also used the precedent set by Germany’s acquisition of the Sudetenland to demand further revisions of the Treaty of Versailles in Italy’s favor. In a December 1938 editorial in Il Progresso, Pope revisited the theme of Italy’s “mutilated victory” after the Great War. Europe would not know a “secure and lasting peace until the injustices of the past” were “rectified,” he wrote. Pope’s editorial was destabilizing, and intentionally so: he aimed to whip up irredentist sentiments among Italian Americans, with a view to pressurizing the US government to accept the regime’s demands for territories along the Adriatic.\footnote{Generoso Pope, “I Diritti dell’Italia,” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, December 4, 1938.} Unwittingly, Pope suggested that the critics of appeasement were right: peace of the kind secured at Munich came at a mounting price.

The German invasion of the rump state of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 elicited no condemnation from Generoso Pope. He expressed his sadness—modern warfare, after all, was a terrifying thing—without acknowledging that the Nazis were to blame for the state of affairs. Pope argued that the “crisis” (he refrained from using the word invasion) was a “wholly local, wholly European” affair. While McCormick would soon exert any influence she had to keep Italy out of the war, Pope’s principal concern was to ensure that the United States would not intervene, should a war come to pass. And, in contrast to McCormick, who backed an American policy of “so-called” neutrality (which made it abundantly clear which side the US was on), Pope insisted that neutrality should be conceived strictly, for the United States’ own good.\footnote{McCormick suggested frequently that no country was really morally, or even strategically, neutral, in the war. See: McCormick, “Europe: Pressing of War Still Awaits Final Line-Up of Neutrals”; McCormick, “Italy Faces Decisive Hour.”} “Any pronouncement of the United States, in favor of one group of powers or against another, could precipitate events and thrust on this country an enormous responsibility,” he wrote.
The best way for the United States to avoid war was for it to remain both materially and morally detached from events in Europe, Pope argued.\textsuperscript{106}

On September 2, 1939, the day after the German invasion of Poland, Pope once more refrained from any criticism of Hitler. His editorial lamented the start of hostilities, while suggesting that invader and invaded were somehow equally responsible.\textsuperscript{107} Pope blamed Britain and France for escalating the “Polish-German struggle” into an “international conflict.” And, in a mirror image of McCormick’s journalism from Italy, Pope emphasized all that the United States stood to lose if it joined the war. The wounds inflicted by the Great War had not yet healed: “disabled veterans” burdened American institutions; soldiers’ pensions drained national resources, Pope wrote. He suggested that to enable a full recovery from the Great Depression, the American government had to keep the country out of war.\textsuperscript{108}

Pope’s position on neutrality differed from McCormick’s in another regard. McCormick was motivated by strategic concerns: she projected an image of Italy and United States as the world’s great powers in a last-ditch effort to convince the fascist regime that its interest lay outside the axis. But for Pope, the idea of the United States and Italy as fellow neutrals had intensely personal dimensions. The only way that he could reconcile his own identity as both a fascist sympathizer and a loyal American was by claiming, against the mounting evidence, that the US and Italy were on the same side as two truly neutral powers in the war.\textsuperscript{109} It was, then, with heartfelt regret that Pope acknowledged Mussolini’s declaration of war on Britain and France, on June 10, 1940. His hope that Italy and the United States would continue their “cooperative” relationship had not come to pass, he wrote. Pope still did not disavow the axis powers.\textsuperscript{110}

Pope’s editorials fueled the indignation of anti-fascist intellectuals in the United States. There was nothing new in Italian fuorusciti’s (exiles) condemnation of Pope for using his influence to promote

Mussolini’s interests in the United States. New, however, was the willingness of native-born Americans to take anti-fascists’ complaints about Generoso Pope seriously. *Il Mondo*, a monthly journal published between 1938 and 1941, by Giuseppe Lupis, a politically moderate anti-fascist, was particularly influential, since the mainstream press used it as a source for their own investigations into fascist sympathizers. For instance, in November 1940, *Fortune* published articles that criticized Pope’s muted Americanism following Italy’s entry into the war, and praised *Il Mondo* as the “finest” anti-fascist paper in the United States.

Running from 1938 until 1944, the House Committee of Un-American Activities whipped up further suspicions of foreign agents of the fascist regime. Italian Americans had been effectively immune in an earlier congressional investigation, chaired by Samuel Dickstein of New York—a representative who depended on the Italian American vote. But under the leadership of Martin Dies, a representative from Texas, HUAC heard testimony about the long reach of Italian propaganda. In 1938, the chairman of a New York anti-fascist group testified that all the major Italian American dailies were “under dictation from fascist agents.” Other stories of fascist radio and information networks surfaced over the committee’s long life-span. In this charged atmosphere, in June 1941, J. Edgar Hoover launched an investigation into the activities of Generoso Pope.

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116 Letter, J. Edgar Hoover to William Hassett, October 4, 1944; Folder: Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File 4617; FDRL.
Although it would take more than three years for the FBI to complete its investigation, law-enforcement’s scrutiny had an almost instantaneous impact on Pope. Upon realizing that he was under investigation in July 1941, Pope met with Max Ascoli, a prominent anti-fascist intellectual and exile, who together with Lupis had founded the liberal anti-fascist organization, the Mazzini society, in 1939. As the FBI reported, at this meeting, Pope agreed “to discontinue” Il Progresso’s “pro-Fascist editorial policy.” The same month, Ascanio Colonna, the Italian Ambassador to the United States, reported back to Rome that Pope’s newspaper’s English-language editorials had become critical of Mussolini. Colonna described Pope as a political opportunist who could not be trusted. It was a fair assessment.

In September 1941, Pope strengthened his anti-fascist rhetoric, to make his allegiances evident to his American watchers. As a “loyal American,” he wrote in Il Progresso, he stood with the United States, “against any government” that opposed the American government, and against the “diffusion of any foreign or anti-American ism,” on American soil. Beyond the pages of his own newspaper, Pope was clearer still. In September, Pope appeared on the front page of the New York Post. “The quicker Hitler and the Axis powers are destroyed the better off the world will be. And when I say Axis powers that includes Mussolini,” said Pope. Time magazine celebrated this statement, snarkily, as evidence of the tardy “Americanization of Mr. Pope” at the hands of anti-fascist Italians.

Generoso Pope worked hard to get back into the good graces of the American government, and Franklin Roosevelt, in particular. He telegrammed FDR following Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, writing that he prayed for the President’s strength, “so that the world will be freed from the shackles of the

117 Letter, J. Edgar Hoover to William Hassett, October 4, 1944; Folder: Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File 4617; FDRL.
119 Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, 349, citing captured records, July 25, 1941.
120 “Is Mr. Pope A Fascist?” Il Mondo, July 15, 1941. As Il Mondo observed, and Colonna implied, Pope tried to have it both ways, publishing editorials that were critical of Italy in English, and articles that were far more forgiving in Italian. “Americanization of Mr. Pope,” Time. According to Time, Pope avoided writing editorials that were critical of Mussolini in Italian until Il Mondo challenged him to do so, in mid-September 1941.
122 “Americanization of Mr. Pope,” Time.
barbarian dictators.”123 A week later, he wrote to the White House again: “Will you please tell the President for me that if I can be of service to him personally or through my newspapers, I am at his command.”124 Unbeknownst to the White House, Pope had used the identical formulation in a letter to the Italian Minister of Popular Culture, in July 1939.125 But by December 1941, the United States was at war. Pope no longer hedged in his assessment of the axis powers, or drew distinctions between Hitler and Mussolini. He assured the President’s secretary, Stephen Early:

Italians and Americans of Italian extraction feel an intense hatred for Fascism and for Mussolini who has drawn Italy and the Italian people under the yoke of Germany and forced them to live under the bondage of Hitler’s heel.126

Although Pope did not acknowledge the ongoing FBI investigation, he attempted to forestall its findings. At the end of December, he sent the President a statement of loyalty, signed by all his newspapers’ staff. Roosevelt passed it on to Early, but not before he scribbled on a note: “I don’t believe it.”127

Franklin Roosevelt did not trust Generoso Pope. While the FBI investigation proceeded slowly, the White House ordered the Office of War Information to come up with a faster report. The OWI report used articles from Il Mondo and a letter from Max Ascoli of the Mazzini Society to assemble evidence on Pope’s prior sympathies for fascism. The most striking evidence that these Mazzini society intellectuals provided was a photograph, taken during Pope’s 1937 trip to Rome. Standing at the tomb of the unknown soldier, in between the founder of the Fascist League of North America and the current director of the fascists abroad, Generoso Pope raised his right arm in a fascist salute (Figure 16). Luckily for Pope, by the time this image reached the White House, the story was six years old.128

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123 Telegram, Generoso Pope to Franklin D. Roosevelt, December 8, 1941; Folder: Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File 4617; FDRL.
124 Letter, Generoso Pope to Stephen T. Early, December 16, 1941; Folder: Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File 4617; FDRL.
125 Nazzaro, Fascist and Anti-Fascist Propaganda in America, 166. See footnote 102 in this chapter, above.
126 Letter, Generoso Pope to Stephen T. Early, December 16, 1941; Folder: Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File 4617; FDRL.
127 Hand-written note, attached to letter, Generoso Pope to Franklin D. Roosevelt, December 27, 1941; Folder: Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File 4617; FDRL.
128 Memorandum, William D. Hassett, March 15, 1943. Hassett wrote: “For many months Generoso Pope has been persistent in seeking to re-establish himself in the good grace of the White House and to gain recognition for himself.
Franklin Roosevelt did not trust Generoso Pope, but nor could the President afford to live without the publisher. The main thing that protected Pope’s position during the Second World War was Roosevelt’s reluctant acknowledgement that in every even-numbered year, on a Tuesday in early November, the Democratic Party depended on Generoso Pope. 1940 was one of those years. Roosevelt’s speech upon Italy’s invasion of France on June 10, 1940 had alienated Italian Americans, who did not appreciate the image of Italy as “the hand that held the dagger,” which struck into its neighbor’s back. It was probably with the November elections in mind that Roosevelt called Pope to the White House in late July. 129 By September, the Democratic National Committee had created a new organization, the Democratic Council for Americans of Italian Origin, to campaign for Roosevelt and Wallace. The leader of the Council was Generoso Pope. 130

1944 was another presidential election year, and the dynamics were again illustrative of the mutual dependency between FDR and Pope. In late September, Oscar Ewing, a DNC official, contacted the President. It was “terribly important,” that FDR meet with Pope, who could help the Democrats “more on the Italian situation than any other single person in the Italian group,” Ewing urged. 131 Roosevelt refused at first. “I do not want to see him,” he notified his secretary. 132 Ten days later, another DNC official, Ed Flynn telephoned the White House, twice, to “urge that the President let Generoso Pope come and for his newspapers.” “Accordingly, I asked the Office of War Information to give us the summary of Pope’s activities, attached herewith.” The report later fed into an assessment of whether Pope should be allowed to participate in fundraising for the Italian relief effort. See Memorandum, Franklin D. Roosevelt to James M. Barnes, Eugene Casey, Jonathan W. Daniels, David K. Niles, April 4, 1944. Both in Folder: Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File 4617; FDRL.
129 Memorandum, Franklin Roosevelt to Edwin Watson, July 31, 1940; Folder: Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File 4617; FDRL.
130 For Pope’s new role within the DNC, see: “Democrats to Join Labor on Electors,” New York Times, September 23, 1940. Stefano Luconi, “The Impact of World War II on the Political Behavior of the Italian-American Electorate in New York City,” New York History 83 (2002): 406-9, 413. The Italian American vote for the Democratic Party none the less fell off dramatically in 1940. For instance, in New York, only 42 percent of Italian Americans voted for FDR in 1940, “a slump of 37 percentage points from the previous presidential election.” 131 Memorandum, Oscar Ewing to Franklin Roosevelt, September 23, 1944; Folder: Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File 4617; FDRL.
in just for a handshake and to be seen coming out of the White House.”¹³³ On October 17, against his will, but in the light of his better judgment, Franklin Roosevelt met with Generoso Pope.¹³⁴

The Federal Bureau of Investigation finished its report on Generoso Pope in October 1944. The report did not reveal anything that the White House did not already know about Pope. The FBI found no clear-cut evidence, such as a money trail, to prove that Pope was a foreign agent; it found less, in fact, than the future historian could find in the Italian government archives. In any case, by October 1944, the atmosphere in the United States was less suspicious, and more secure. Italy had surrendered to allied forces the previous year. Mussolini was hemmed in as the nominal head of a fiefdom in the North of Italy, protected by German arms. Nothing in the FBI report would change Roosevelt’s overly-generous assessment of Generoso Pope, of April 1944:

> It is perfectly true that he was friendly to Mussolini and his gang while the latter were in control of Italy. So were the great majority of Americans of Italian birth who had to maintain relations with Italy and its de facto government. I do not think it is true that Pope had Fascist tendencies. He merely ‘hunted with the hounds’ chiefly as a business proposition. . . . The point is that at no time has Pope been accused of working against the United States.¹³⁵

Generoso Pope had walked the finest of fine lines. He survived the war years because a Democratic administration depended on him, as he depended on it, and because US government officials were never aware of the extent of his links with the fascist state.

**For Their Sins**

The ideas of American fascist sympathizers evolved over the 1920s and 1930s, in response to events in Italy (as mediated through regime propaganda) and changing social and cultural contexts in the

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¹³³ Transcription of Edward Flynn’s telephone calls, Edwin Watson to Franklin Roosevelt, October 9, 1944; Folder: Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File 4617; FDRL. For the relationship between Flynn and Pope, according to anti-fascists, see: “Is Mr. Pope A Fascist?” *Il Mondo. Il Mondo* claimed that while Flynn needed Pope to get out the Italian American vote, Pope had relied on Flynn and other “Tammany connections” to increase the price of sand and gravel in the Bronx and Manhattan, to Pope’s great benefit.


¹³⁵ Franklin Roosevelt to James M Barnes, Eugene Casey, Jonathan W. Daniels, David K Niles, April 4, 1944; Folder: Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File 4617; FDRL.
United States. In the very early 1920s, sympathetic Americans framed the violence of fascist youth as vital and refreshing, as the United States reckoned with a seemingly soporific transition from war to peace. After Mussolini seized power, these observers constructed the Prime Minister as a modern businessman with old-fashioned ideals, at a point in time when Americans expressed anxiety about the deleterious effects of modernity on women and men. And at the end of the 1920s, these observers argued that the fascist corporate state was both an efficient machine and an inspiring form of government, so as to participate in a much broader critique of liberal democracy as unsuited to the challenges of the era.

As the United States faced a severe economic depression, American fascist sympathizers reconfigured earlier, austere portraits of Mussolini to emphasize his warmth and humanity, pointing to the kind of leader, and form of government, which they believed Americans needed. And, as the fascist state became increasingly totalitarian in the mid-1930s, these observers used metaphors of the garden—as a place of beauty, transcendence, and peace—to provide Americans with an escape from their own anxieties and to separate fascist Italy from Nazi Germany in the minds of the American public.

By the time Italy and Germany formalized the axis alliance, Richard Washburn Child was dead, and Herbert Schneider was silent on the subject of fascist Italy. Anne O’Hare McCormick and Generoso Pope developed positions on Mussolini and fascism in the run up to the United States’ entry into war that reflected each of their relationships with power structures in Italy and the United States. McCormick extricated herself quickly from her fascist-sympathizing past. For Pope, the process was more gradual, which was understandable, given the deep investment of his own identity and credibility in the fascist regime.

If any of these individuals believed that they had made mistakes when they sympathized with fascism, they never recognized their errors, at least publically. Herbert Schneider asserted that there was “nothing” he would “change” in the books he wrote about fascism. Generoso Pope lied, allowing his newspaper to claim that it had “consistently and vigorously denounced Mussolini and his fascist cohorts

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136 *Reminiscences of Herbert Wallace Schneider.*
for the misery they inflicted upon and the bloodshed they caused the Italian people.” Only Anne O’Hare McCormick ever came close to expressing regret, and this in private, in a 1941 letter to Franklin Roosevelt, half a year before the United State entered the Second World War. McCormick addressed the President:

I can only pray for you when I realize that your judgment and your decision are the fulcrum on which our future turns. The future, indeed, because I am more and more certain that about the only thing worth saving is the idea and the pattern we stand for—not just democracy but this democracy, which has no counterpart anywhere. I hope God will forgive us our sins against it—and give us another chance. 

Figure 16. “A Good Fascist Nationalist,” 1937
“A Good Fascist Nationalist,” photograph, in Folder: Pope, Generoso; President’s Personal File 4617; FDRL.

137 “The Death of Fascism.” Il Progresso Italo-Americano, July 26, 1943.
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