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Review:

Unwanted: Italian and Jewish Mobilization against Restrictive Immigration Laws, 1882-1965

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Unwanted: Italian and Jewish Mobilization against Restrictive Immigration Laws, 1882–1965, Maddalena Marinari (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), ISBN 978-1-4696-5292-4, pp. 280, \$90.

Maddalena Marinari, of Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota, tackles a challenging research agenda in her analysis of Jewish and Italian opposition to restrictive immigration legislation in force in the United States in the period from 1882 to 1965. Marinari intertwines political, social, and transnational history to argue that prominent Italians and Jews organized and mounted a challenge to U.S. immigration policy that ultimately helped precipitate a limited modification of the discriminatory measures put in place to keep out immigrants both from Asia and from eastern and southern Europe.

Having passed the China Exclusion Act in 1882, the restrictionists in Congress turned their attention to the precipitous rise in the number of immigrants from Europe. They were more determined than ever to ensure that members of specific ethnic groups they considered “undesirable” did not come to the United States as immigrants. Rather than sit quietly by, Jewish and Italian Americans proceeded to challenge the ensuing discriminatory legislation not only on their own behalf, but also on behalf of other groups of potential immigrants affected by restrictive measures. They built grassroots ethnic organizations to lobby and enlist allies through national organizations such as the Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA), the non-sectarian group known as the National Liberal Immigration League (NLIL) and the American Jewish Committee (AJC).

The first quarter of the twentieth century was rife with xenophobia, and characterized by a steady escalation of congressional restrictions targeting “inferior” races. The Dillingham Commission Report issued in 1911 provided Congress with “proof” of the harms that would supposedly arise should more immigrants from the ethnic groups in question be admitted, and endorsed the restrictionists’ rationales for banning nearly all Asians and introducing the national origins quota system for eastern and southern Europeans.

Resorting to well tested lobbying techniques in the face of these draconian measures, the loosely connected coalition of Jewish and Italian anti-restrictionists managed to win a small victory by convincing legislators that family reunions should be prioritized alongside the quota

system. As they continued their fight for the cause of family reunion, Italian and Jewish leaders paved the way for new immigration laws after the Second World War that culminated in the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965, which effectively repealed the National Quota Act of 1924.

Then as now, undocumented immigrants posed problems for the anti-restrictionists who remained single-mindedly focused on the issue of family reunion. In their efforts to help unauthorized immigrants adjust their status and avoid deportation, Italian and Jewish activists balanced their advocacy for family union with support for tighter enforcement. Using arguments that are echoed in today's criticism of deportation, they maintained that "deportation would destroy families in the United States and endanger the future of children who were often American citizens" (p. 90).

Alongside their domestic activities, Italians and Jews issued transnational appeals to mobilize opposition to restrictive immigration laws. Marinari contends that Jews built global networks with other Jewish organizations worldwide, while Italians retained strong ties with their homeland even during the Mussolini years. Consequently, some Americans were suspicious of Italian immigrants' ties with Italy and of Jewish connections to "international Jewry". Italian and Jewish activists had to prove they were good Americans by balancing their commitment to America with their efforts to restrict anti-immigrant legislation.

Regrettably, the Immigration Act of 1924 conceded unprecedented power to State Department officials, some of whom were known anti-semites. As life grew worse for German Jews in the 1930s, Jewish proponents of immigration reform intensified their efforts to assist German Jews. Jewish activists pressed President Roosevelt to do more to help Jewish refugees, but he met fierce opposition from the restrictionists in Congress. Marinari argues that the number of European Jews admitted during the 1930s nevertheless increased because their skills favoured their admission. Others relied on family connections to enter the U.S. Thus, despite the obstructionism of the State Department, "immigration did continue during the most restrictionist years of the national origins quota system" (p. 88).

Italian and Jewish activists continued to challenge immigration restrictions in the 1950s and 1960s as Congress debated refugee resettlement in the U.S. John F. Kennedy's campaign pledge to abolish the quota system marked the final phase of the drawn-out process leading to its abolition.

After Kennedy's death, Lyndon Johnson worked with JFK's former advisers to bring about the changes Kennedy had endorsed.

Throughout the period from the late 1880s to the mid-1960s, Jewish and Italian activists maintained a consistent policy of putting pressure on Congress, educating the public, and keeping the issue of immigration reform on the political agenda. The cause of family reunion, which always remained at the heart of their arguments, eventually emerged as one of the few issues around which restrictionists and anti-restrictionists could find common ground. That Congress eventually passed the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965, effectively repealing the National Origins Act of 1924, was owed, in no small measure, to the tireless efforts of Italian and Jewish activists who persisted in challenging the earlier discriminatory laws.

Marinari has taken on an immensely complex topic, and successfully reconstructed the ways in which the efforts of Italian and Jewish anti-restriction activists contributed to a range of legislative, congressional, and piecemeal immigration reforms. Her book demonstrates that immigrants were not passive in the face of racist restrictions, but created coalitions and engaged in grassroots activities to pressure Congress for more equitable laws based on the principle of family reunification.

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