

Yans-McLaughlin, Virginia. *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977. Pp. 286. \$12.50

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Family and Community argues that Italian immigrants did not drop their culture into the sea when they came to America. Their cultural traditions, instead, played an important role in shaping the nature of their adaptation to industrial capitalism. Thus, the immigrant family did not disintegrate. Rather, despite the strains to which it was subjected, it survived remarkably well.

The book uses manuscript census data, newspapers, oral history, and a variety of other sources. Its attempt to study the interrelation of life-experience and culture through an intensive focus on one community should be emulated.

However, much in the book should not be copied. The quantitative evidence is used in a haphazard fashion, presented ambiguously, and is entirely inconclusive. The measures of fertility, for instance, are not adequate. Professor Yans-McLaughlin offers several gratuitous insults to quantification in history, though she herself has spent a good deal of time counting. She sets up a strawperson who believes that only numbers are evidence. I never met anyone like this, but I do increasingly encounter historians who fail to use the quantitative material they gather very well and then attempt to damn those who are trying to do similar things better.

Rather startlingly, the author does not use the source that would shed light on many of the problems about which she speculates. These are the extensive port-of-entry records, particularly valuable for the period after the mid-1890's in the United States. From them she could have studied the propensity of Italians from the same village to migrate together, the occupations and marital status of immigrants, the extent of family migration, and the proportion of immigrants met by relatives. She comments on all of these matters with little evidence.

The book also neglects the extent of return migration. It was very high among Italians. However, the phenomenon fits badly with her thesis. So does the high population mobility within North American

cities. This she dismisses on wholly inadequate grounds as probably an artifact of bad data. That simply won't do.

The book also waffles on its major arguments. The author would like to argue that the Italian experience had unique elements which reflect the particular components of Italian culture. But she is forced to admit there may have been certain commonalities in the experience of immigrants. Also, the extent of continuity between the old and the new world is strained. Is working in a cannery--albeit in a family group--really just a continuation of working the family farm? It is essential here to have comparative information about other immigrant groups. The author does state that the Italian experience was different than the Polish, but she provides almost no evidence.

It is doubtful that earlier historians were quite as insensitive as those plying the new ethnic history would like to imagine them. Surely, Oscar Handlin never believed that immigrants came to America with no culture or tradition. Despite its problems, moreover, Handlin's Boston's Immigrants remains by far the best study of the immigrant experience in a North American city.

Family and Community is gracefully written. It is full of many interesting observations and provocative ideas. In fact, it will seduce most readers. But it should be treated with caution and care.

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Brownell, Blaine A., and Goldfield, David R., eds. The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South. "National University Publications." Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1977. Pp. 228. \$7.50.

The City in Southern History consists of six essays, some jointly-authored, by Blaine Brownell, David Goldfield, Carville Earle, Ronald Hoffman, Howard Rabinowitz, and Edward Haas. An introductory