

70. Ibid., 19 June 1902.
71. Ibid., 20 June, 23 June, 24 June, 25 June 1902; Railroad Commissioner's Report (Providence, 1903), p. 55.
72. Evening Telegram, 11 June, 13 June, 27 June 1902; Minutes of the Pawtucket Board of Aldermen, 12 June 1902.
73. Evening Telegram, 12 June 1902.
74. Ibid., 13 June 1902.
75. Ibid., 25 June 1902.
76. Journal, 28 June 1902.
77. Ibid., 15 June, 21 June 22 June 1902; Evening Telegram, 28 June 1902.
78. Journal, 26 June 1902; Evening Telegram, 25 June 1902.
79. Journal, 26 June 1902; Evening Telegram, 25 June, 30 June 1902.
80. Journal, 30 June 1902.
81. Ibid., 6 July 1902.
82. Ibid., 9 July, 12 August 1902; Evening Telegram, 5 July, 8 July, 9 July, 11 July, 15 July, 5 November 1902; Evening Times, 18 June 1902; News, 5 July 1902; Railroad Commissioner's Report (Providence, 1903), p. 67.
83. Railroad Commissioner's Report (Providence, 1903), p. 67. Providence Evening Bulletin, 6 June 1903.
84. Nelson, "The Influence," pp. 214, 227; Evening Telegram, 4 June 1902.
85. Journal, 12 June 1902.
86. Ibid., 29 May 1926.
87. Evening Telegram, 6 June 1908; International President and General Executive Board Report, 1901-1903, pp. 106-08; Motorman and Conductor, October 1902; Journal, 7 July 1902.
88. George N. Egnor, "Socialist Department," Labor World (Decatur, Illinois), January 13, 1903.
89. Interview with Fred Armstrong, Sr., January 18, 1977.

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## Our Own Kind: Family and Community Networks

### Judith E. Smith

The Rhode Island working class has been continually reconstituted by succeeding waves of immigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. First Irish, then French Canadian, then Italian, Jewish, and Portuguese: all have come from peasant communities to resettle in the mill towns and industrial cities of



the state. Listening to immigrants describe their daily life in the old country and in the New World, one is repeatedly struck by their frequent references to the family. Looking more closely at the process by which thousands of immigrants found their way to Rhode Island, one sees that family ties provided the links of the chain that extended from communities in Europe to communities in Rhode Island. The family stands at

the very center of their work and life. To focus on the immigrant family, then, is to begin to understand the texture of social life in immigrant communities transplanted in the New World.

Recent work in the history of the family has raised questions about the timing and character of change in family life. Standard views of this change held that the family began to lose its productive functions with the onset of industrialization and that this fundamental loss necessitated other changes: the family moved from an extended to a nuclear household, from a producer to a consumer economic unit, from a public to a private sphere.(1) New research, however, has provided examples of societies and families that defy this categorization. Nuclear families existed long before the beginnings of industrialization, just as family producer units continued to coexist with large modern industrial organization.(2) This research has generated a more flexible model of social change in which the family is seen as taking its particular form from the complex and shifting interaction of an inherited cultural tradition, the social relations of production, and the legal provisions of the state. By its challenge and adaptation to existing structures of production and social life, the family stands in a dialectical relation to its own history and to its environment.(3)

Immigrant families provide particularly rich material with which to explore the implications of this formulation. Immersed in a common cultural tradition, they moved abruptly to an alien one, where they confronted quite different structures of production. In effect, they experienced change in their own lifetimes that elsewhere required generations to unfold.

My work follows the reshaping of southern Italian and eastern European Jewish family traditions in a fast-paced, urban, industrial environment. The study is based on an analysis of the work and family histories of 160 Italian families and seventy-one Jewish families, who came to Providence between 1880 and 1914 and settled in the ethnic neighborhoods of Federal Hill and Smith Hill. These families were drawn from the 1915 Rhode Island state census and traced through state censuses, city directories, and birth, marriage and death records. The histories extend from the families' arrival in Providence to 1940, long enough in most cases to see the second generation married and settled into work. The restricted size and neighborhood setting of the group of families are

at once a problem and an advantage. As the numbers are too small to be conclusive, the experiences of these immigrants can only be suggestive. But the limited scale also means that I have been able to trace these immigrants in detail, situating them in the context of their lives in family and neighborhood networks, an important dimension of immigrant history often lost or ignored. Given the limitations of these public sources which systematically under-reported women's activities, I have attempted to trace whole families: mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, daughters as well as sons, in addition to cousins and grandparents. I have used traditional literary sources, oral history interviews, and collected family histories to give texture to the account gleaned from the public record.

The analysis of immigrant family traditions in Providence reveals neither a sharp uprooting nor a simple continuity. Italian and Jewish immigrants brought with them traditions of family and family work groups which had evolved in the particular agrarian economy of the south of Italy and in the artisan-commercial economy of Jewish communities in the Pale. Through the social and economic transformations taking place in Europe and the personal transformation undergone during migration, the family group proved to be the critical resource which facilitated both the migration to the U.S. and the reestablishment of immigrant communities here. Families migrated on the basis of kin ties and settled near relatives, recreating collective family economies and using the conditions in their new neighborhoods and workplaces to establish connections between households. The traditions of mutual support and obligations which operated inside families were embodied in the community institutions that immigrants built.

For both Italians and Jews in the different economic contexts of southern Italy and eastern Europe, the family group was the work group. Southern Italian immigrants to Providence came from towns in Abruzzi, Campania, Basilicata, Calabria, and Sicily. The economic structure of these regions depended upon the household as the primary form of economic organization. There were very few large estates in these regions still intact by the end of the nineteenth century. The break-up of the large estates did not lead to an equal land distribution, but it did increase the number of peasants who owned land. Generally, small, medium, and large holdings

ranged side by side in each district. Most of the land was divided into small parcels which were cultivated independently. Partible inheritance traditions and the role of land in marriage settlements led to increasing subdivision of the land. Land changed hands frequently and ownership, rental, sharecropping, and wage labor were all common.(4)

The small size of land plots in the south limited the size of the agricultural work group to an individual family, usually parents and unmarried children, although households sometimes included aging parents who could no longer work. Even when the families owned land, the plots were too small to sustain them fully, and most families combined agricultural work with non-agricultural pursuits. Cash was usually scarce.(5) One Italian immigrant from Sicily described how her family combined work in their own fields, work in other fields for wages, and craft work for the market: "Angelina, her siblings, and her mother and father all lived with her grandmother in a small farmhouse which had been passed down to them as family land. Although they did own the house and the land around it, their annual income was just enough to sustain them....The family lived from their own land and their job was to raise enough crops and produce to live on for the year....In days when there was little to do on the farm, Maria, the mother, would send the children to neighboring farms to help pick the vegetables and fruits for an average 3¢ a day, while she herself would do extra weaving to sell."(6)

The survival of the family was dependent on the work of all its members; this meant mothers as well as fathers, children as well as parents. Often wages were paid to the head of the household for the labor of all family members. Usually, all worked in the fields; additionally, women cooked, cared for children, washed and patched worn clothes, and marketed extra produce. Rarely did all members of the family work in the same place, since families frequently farmed several plots at some distance from each other. In some parts of western Sicily, women worked in nearby garden plots while men worked in fields at a greater distance from their towns. Family members did not necessarily do the same kind of work, since mothers, sons, and daughters were likely to be hired out as wage laborers if the family required additional income for food, fuel, and taxes for the year.(7)

The Jewish immigrants to Providence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came from

the western borders of Russia and from Poland, the area known as the Pale of Settlement. Laws in 1882 and 1891 forced the resettlement of Jews from rural villages, and from other regions of Russia, into the crowded cities of the Pale. By the census of 1897, Jews represented fifty-eight percent of the urban population in the northwestern provinces of Russia.(8) The law explicitly prohibited Jews from working on the land, and the settlement laws had the effect of keeping Jews out of the larger industrial establishments--sugar mills, mines, smelting and metal works, glass works--situated outside the towns. So Jews worked in trade, artisan crafts, and in small-scale manufacturing, disproportionately to their numbers; Jews made up only 11.6 percent of the population of the provinces which composed the Pale, but by 1898 were four-fifths of its commercial class, two-thirds of its artisan class, and one third of its industrial class.(9) At this point, both trade and the kind of manufacture in which Jews took part were organized on a small scale, and were frequently carried on in small shops in the front of, or nearby, people's homes. Most artisans were self-employed, and according to one account, "the artisan's home is the artisan's shop." Like Italians, Jews were mostly likely to work in family groups.

The settlement laws placed Jews in a marginal economic position. Even within the Pale, they were restricted to a few hundred larger and smaller towns that were not particularly well suited to either commerce or industry. Kiev, the most important commercial and industrial center, was closed to Jews. Without freedom of movement, the ability to earn a living in small trading or artisanship was limited, and Jews were forced into intense competition with each other. Seasonal unemployment and frequent periods of poverty resulted. By the 1890's, about twenty percent of the Jewish population in the Pale required charity to buy the matzoh with which to celebrate Passover; in Vilna, nearly thirty-eight percent of the Jewish population received charity for Passover.(11) These limits on their economic ability made Jewish households similarly dependent on the labor of all family members. As in Italy, women cooked, cleaned, cared for children, and produced and marketed home manufactured items. In the northwest provinces, especially, women worked as seamstresses, milliners, knit goods makers, and cigarette makers, in small shops and factories. The oldest daughter of a tailor, living in a small town not too far from Minsk, recalled the means by which her family managed to live, especially after her father was forced to leave home

to avoid conscription into the Czar's army: "As soon as we were able to hold a needle, we were taught to sew. Mother taught us how to spin...[the mother sewed for women in the village, and the blind grandmother knitted stockings to sell]. Of course, the stockings had to be looked over, the lost stitches found and mended carefully. That was my work...And Grandfather ...would go to the village to see if there were any pots to mend. Grandfather had clever hands. He could do anything with a pen knife and a piece of wood. And in mending pots he was a perfect artist."(12)

Complex social and economic changes were transforming southern Italy and eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century, unsettling ordinary family economic strategies, lending new urgency to the dependence of family members on each other, creating the conditions which prompted immigration of family groups. In southern Italy, population increases expanded the number of young men and women entering the labor market. Commercialization of agriculture in other parts of Italy made the traditional agricultural methods of the south less competitive, so that families' needs for extra, non-agricultural income were increased. But industrialization in other parts of Italy diminished the availability of the artisan work on which sons and daughters had depended to supplement the family budget. Although the broader diffusion of property rights held out the hope that families might be able to accumulate land and provide for their sons and daughters, the means of adding to family income in order to do this were diminishing.(13) One peasant from Abruzzi described both the raised hopes and the economic constraints which prompted his father's emigration to the U.S.: "The year before, my father had been trying to better our conditions. He had hired two large pieces of arable ground on which he had toiled every minute of daylight during that whole season. Having no money to make the first payment on the land, he had to borrow some at a very high rate of interest. At the end of that season, after selling the crops, he found that he had just barely enough to pay back the rest of the rent and to pay back the loan with the enormous interest....That season of excessive toil made my father much older. His tall strong body was beginning to bend. He had become a little clumsy and slower. And the result of his futile attempt made him moody and silent. He would sit on our doorstep in the evening and gaze out."(14)

Jewish families experienced new instability and uncertainty in their customary way of life. The abo-

lition of serfdom in 1861 dissolved the traditional relationship between nobles and peasants, and, with it, the place of Jews as agents and middlemen. The waves of pogroms, violent attacks on Jewish communities in the 1880's and 1900's, were brutal evidence of the new, more uncertain relationship between Jew and peasant. The introduction of modern industrial tools depressed, but did not displace, artisan craft, while the increased production of the machines, which forced manufacturers to seek wider markets, meant that artisans began to produce for stores rather than for individual customers. All through the last part of the nineteenth century, the economic position of the Jews in Russia deteriorated at the same time as their numbers increased. From 1847 to 1897, the number of Jews in the Pale tripled. The move from village to city undermined the traditional shtetl culture that had characterized the Jewish community for hundreds of years. But new ideas flourished in the vacuum: the religious enthusiasm of Hasidism, the modern enlightenment thought of Haskalah, the development of a secular Yiddish literature and cultural movement, Yiddishkeit, the political ideology of socialism, the notion of a Jewish rebirth through Zionism. Again, it was against a background of economic constraint and cultural transformation that the Jewish immigration, like the Italian immigration, took place.(15)

In the context of these shifting communities, the family economic unit was even more critical for survival in Southern Italy and Russia. Immigration was itself a family response to changing conditions. Young Italian men and women in search of new opportunities to supplement their family income came to the United States to work and start families here. Some did return to Italy, and many families continued to send money there to support family members who remained. But most families stayed in Providence, seeming evidence of a reorientation, a decision to sink roots here. Jews, in search of less circumscribed economic opportunities, and sometimes in escape from specific attacks on their communities, left their homeland when convinced that life there was hopeless, and they often pulled up stakes as family groups to resettle permanently in the United States.

The family was thus at the center of the migration process. The family economic unit was easily adaptable to migration. Migrants could look to brothers, sisters, and cousins who had gone before them to send passage money and to secure housing and jobs for the new arrivals.(16) Although migration

chains were based primarily on family groups, migrants did not all arrive at the same time, and migration had its own potentially disruptive effects on traditional family expectations. Parents too old to make the journey had to die alone in the old country. Men left wives and children behind while they came to America to earn the money to bring the others over. One brother stayed behind to cultivate the family land while another made the journey across the ocean. New-comers valued intensely whichever of their relatives were close by, as much for their connection to a familiar past as for their skills in negotiating the new environment.

Because of this structural relationship between families and migration, kinship ties connected much of the immigrant community. Over half of the Italians and one third of the Jews lived near kin when they first appeared in the Providence city records. By 1951, three-fifths of the Italians and nearly half of the Jews had brothers, sisters, parents, cousins, and married children in their own households or nearby.

The proximity of these relatives meant that extra connections between households compensated in part for incomplete family groups. Most of these relatives lived near enough to each other to meet daily to exchange news, gossip, meals, and child care. Of the Italians who had kin in Providence in 1915, three-fourths lived within one block of each other, and 94 percent were within walking distance, seven to eight blocks. As one Sicilian immigrant whose family settled in Rochester, New York, explained: "Most of my relatives lived within one neighborhood, not more than five or six blocks from each other. That was as far apart as they could live without feeling that America was a desolate and lonely place. If it could have been managed, they probably would have lived under one roof."(17)

The interaction between families involved immigrants in reciprocal obligations as well as expectations of support. An Italian immigrant to Providence, Maria A., described how she and her family lived with her uncle, his wife, father, and step-mother. "As I grew up, living conditions were a bit crowded, but no one minded because we were a family." Immigrants looked to their close kin for help in times of trouble. After Maria's mother died, her aunt helped her to take care of the younger children in her family, and she felt "thankful we all lived together." A Jewish immigrant to Providence who lived in a tene-

ment owned by his sister-in-law remembered how the children ran in and out of both families' apartments. His son recalled that the family paid no rent for several years when his father was out of work.(18)

The ethnic neighborhoods where immigrants settled provided a context in which traditional economic interdependence of family members could be recreated and new connections between families developed. The sheer concentration of immigrants in these neighborhoods made them cultural enclaves. The movement from Italy and Russia to Providence gathered momentum in the 1880's, reaching its peak for both groups around 1905. The steady stream of immigrants from regions in Southern Italy and provinces of the Pale created neighborhoods where families clustered together, surrounding themselves with familiar accents, sights, and sounds. By the 1890's, the Irish who had originally inhabited Federal Hill and Smith Hill had moved out to less densely populated sections of the city, abandoning these areas to Italian and Jewish immigrants.(19)

The needs of the crowded immigrant neighborhoods for goods and services provided a ready-made market for artisans and shopkeepers to sell their wares. Some immigrant craftsmen were able to establish themselves in their neighborhoods; by 1915, many had their own shops, or, at least, a front room in their tenements, and continued to work for themselves in or next door to their homes until they retired. Immigrants looked to their countrymen to cut a wedding suit, perhaps with a slightly more American style. Certainly one would look to a paesan or a landsgeman for mending shoes, sharpening knives, and buying fruit. Bakers made familiarly shaped loaves and grocers stocked favorite foods. Many kept accounts for credit, and shoppers could hear news of home and bargain in their own language. Some immigrant artisans moved beyond the world of the ethnic neighborhood; some of the tailors fitted suits in downtown department stores by 1930. But most continued to depend on the immigrant neighborhood for their livelihood. And, as in the old country, where craft skills were passed from generation to generation, artisan brothers worked with brothers, and shopkeepers looked forward to the day when their business could support a son or son-in-law.

For neighborhood artisans and their families, and for retail shopkeepers, the family continued to be the work group, as it had been in the old country. The overlap of home and workplace meant that women and children could work alongside their husbands and

fathers without neglecting home duties. One Italian immigrant daughter remembered combining school and work in a family bakery: "I can remember rising as early as five o'clock to make the bread and clean the trays before going to school. At home I was given a certain amount of time to do my chores and home work, and then my father would check to see what was accomplished. I received an eighth grade education and was satisfied to work in my father's business. Both of my brothers also worked in the bakery, although it was not demanded that we do so . . . . I also managed the books at work as I was very good with figures." (20)

The immigrant neighborhood provided women and children with another way to earn money at home. They might cook, and clean for boarders and lodgers, who were likely to be new immigrants working for the passage money to bring other members of their own families to this country. The needs of newer migrants for room and board meant that women could be economically productive by extending the services they were providing for their own families. One Italian daughter remembered: "Her mother took in boarders, three at a time: everyone ate together, she [the daughter] washed and ironed their clothes, and the boarders paid accordingly." Families used their living space as a resource to extend limited incomes. A Jewish salesman's daughter remembered that her family had met hard times by renting the room her invalid grandmother had been sharing with her aunt: "My grandmother and mother got my room and Ann [her aunt] and I shared the sofa in the living room." (21)

Industrial homework provided another way for women and children to earn money at home. Various Providence industries divided and subdivided the process of manufacture, resulting in the proliferation of small tasks which could be done outside the shops. Homework provided manufacturers with a cheap reserve labor force for the busy seasons. Snaps to card, chains to link, military buttons to stamp on a foot press, rosary beads to string, artificial flowers to stem, lace threads to pull; all were widely available in Providence on a seasonal basis. Often the work was subcontracted through neighborhood networks, with one woman acting as a distributor for families within several blocks. (22)

Most immigrant families needed more than one wage earner; as one homemaker explained: "We didn't have enough money with just one man working." Clearly, homework was an important alternative to going out to work for women who had children at home: "I have two

children and would rather be home to get them something to eat at mealtime." As little money as homework produced, it was a way for women to be economically productive, as this woman explained: "I like to have my own money. I like the work and would rather have \$50 earned by myself than \$100 saved out of my husband's pay." (23)

The Children's Bureau investigators who arrived in Providence in 1918 to report on child labor found to their dismay that children routinely helped their mothers with homework. They found homework most common in the Italian and French-Canadian neighborhoods, although they found evidence of it in most of the working-class neighborhoods of the city. One Jewish son remembered working on jewelry his father brought home from work in the busy season before Christmas. Children in the Italian neighborhood even brought chains to school to link at recess on the fine spring days, and the Children's Bureau investigators also found some teachers at those schools assigning homework at school so their classes could contribute to Liberty Bonds or Red Cross. (24) Homework provided a means of earning money which was taken for granted in the immigrant neighborhoods, part of a varied family-based economy.

Skirting the neighborhoods were the jewelry shops, machine shops, and textile mills which employed others of the immigrant generation. Where the size of fields in southern Italy and the overcrowded market competition of the cities in the Pale had discouraged the formation of work groups larger than one family, the recruitment methods of the factories lent themselves to developing connections between families. The factories were new work places for southern Italians and generally larger in scale and more modern in machinery than factories where Jews may have worked in Russia. But the immigrants made the factories more familiar by working in them with their brothers and sisters. The foreman's control over hiring made it relatively easy for immigrants to get jobs for one another. Men offered to speak to their foremen for newly arrived brothers, and if there was work, the brother usually got it. Sisters did the same for younger sisters. These kin connections at work were prominent in immigrants' descriptions of their jobs: In a rubber plant: "...A little later on, I was more in a position, you know what I mean, to help some of my relatives get a job. See? And so, I think I must have got at least seven or eight of them. I got Angelo a job over there, and my brother Michele the job, and my brother Albert, one time, and I think

there were a couple of others on the outside, too."(25)  
In textiles: "It was almost a family affair there, all cousins and relatives working there, everybody."  
(26) In an optical shop: "My uncle was foreman there....That was my first job. I worked there with my mother....My sister worked there a while, too."  
(27)

The connections between families which ran through neighborhood and workplace were extended beyond family to the level of community in the mutual benefit societies which Italian and Jewish workers organized in their own communities in Europe, and then in Providence. Immigrants looked to these societies, which distributed sickness and death benefits, as an extension of the mutual support and obligations they experienced in their own families. The mutual benefit societies, in turn, articulated the traditions of mutual obligation on a community-wide basis, thus providing a justification for punishment through collective action of those who operated outside of community norms.

Mutual benefit societies had proliferated in southern Italy in the last part of the nineteenth century, generated by the same social and economic changes that sparked immigration. In Palermo, Sicily, there were nine such organizations by the 1860's, including groups of fruit vendors, agricultural workers, and master shoemakers. The organizations were often commune-wide, and included important local or national figures as honorary members while restricting active members to working men, men who derived their livelihood from their own labor. The division in southern Italian town life often dictated that there be two local societies, one for the town workers who saw themselves as more of an entrepreneurial group, and one for agricultural workers. These societies engaged in educational self-help activities, and organized producer and consumer cooperatives as well as providing sick and death benefits for members.(28)

Transplanted in Providence, most Italian societies were formed along provincial lines. By 1919, there were one hundred societies in Providence, seventy of which were based on provincial loyalties, a common dialect, patron saint, and social and religious customs.(29) One Providence observer remarked, "A great number of organizations such as the Societa Arcese, Societa Teanese, Circolo Frosolone, and others initially constitute provinces of their own in the community. To attend their meetings and listen to their business conducted in a characteristic dialect

is like crossing from one Italian province into another."(30)

In addition to their function as a source of social and cultural roots for their members, the aid of the mutual benefit societies extended the resources of the hard-pressed immigrant families. The societies made payments if a member was sick and could not work, often providing the care of their own doctor. When a member died, the smaller societies at least insured that there would be proper ceremony at the funeral by paying the expenses of the band, and the larger and wealthier societies paid all funeral expenses. Each society also sponsored an annual feast day in honor of the patron saint of their village, and these celebrations, complete with band concerts, parades, and fireworks, were an important assertion of the Italian presence in Providence.(31)

In the Pale, mutual benefit societies called chevrahs had formed along trade lines as groups of men who prayed and read the Torah together. Mutual obligations of members began with night vigils with sick members and participation in the services for the dead, and naturally extended into sickness and death benefits. In the increasing economic crisis of the last half of the nineteenth century, chevrahs began to split along class lines. In one city, for example, there were separate chevrahs of independent craftsmen and workingmen of ladies' tailors, carpenters, dyers, and stove builders, and joint chevrahs for shoemakers, jewelers and watchmakers, tin workers, roofers, and locksmiths. The ladies' tailors' chevrah also acted as a union, negotiating for wages and hours. The Jewish labor movement, the bund, also provided organizational form to groups outside of the traditional crafts. Draymen in Pinsk and Berdichev, boatmen in Kovno, hotel attendants in Pinsk and Slonim, and domestic workers in Warsaw, Grodno, Mogilevm Bobruisk, Pinsk, and Dvinsk had organizations, which struck for higher wages and shorter hours.(32)

In Providence, chevrahs reappeared in different forms: as congregations based on provincial ties organized to read the Torah together and as local lodges of national Jewish organizations which provided sickness and death benefits. The first Russian chevrah in Providence, B'nai Zion, was started by immigrants from the northwestern provinces of the Pale in 1874; and in 1889 the Polish members split off to form their own congregation which would use their own more familiar form of ritual. Congregations from other provinces and from Austria formed in the follow-



ing years.(33) Huge parades, bands, and celebrations would accompany a chevrah as it moved from temporary quarters to a more permanent building, as occurred in 1906 when Congregation Sons of Jacob moved into a new building on Douglas Avenue. According to the newspaper, thousands were in the streets to celebrate the transfer of the holy scriptures from one place to the other, listening to Russian music, carrying red, white and blue streamers, American flags, and Jewish flags.(34) The chevrah B'nai Zion increased in size with immigration from the northwestern provinces: it grew to include a chevrah concerned with care for the dead in 1876, a chevrah responsible for care of the sick in 1890, and two chevrahs for study of different parts of the Talmud in 1892.(35) The local lodges included a workingman's circle and a Hebrew trades'

association which organized along trade lines for self-help and collective bargaining.(36) One Jewish daughter in New York described the importance of her father's chevrah to him: "Father belonged to a society of which he was an active member. The men often came to our house to talk things over with him, and he felt important and often offered our front room for committee meetings. Before they opened the meeting they always assured mother that they would not keep us later than ten. But when the time came they were always so deep in discussion that they never even heard the clock strike the hour. I used to sit in the doorway of the kitchen and front room from where I could see all their faces and listen to their heated arguments. Always it was a piece of burial ground that was the subject of discussion and when a member, or anyone belonging to his family, died, whether the rest of the members should contribute an extra dollar to cover burial expenses and whether as a society they should or should not employ a doctor and pay him out of the society fund. At twelve or even later they would at last break up with the question of the burial ground and the extra dollar and the doctor still unsettled.

"Then mother and I would go into the front room, coughing and choking from the cigarette smoke and open up the folding cots and carry the sleeping children to bed. The little ones often cried at being awakened to undress. But father, if he had succeeded in carrying a point, and in the knowledge that he had served the society in giving the room, went to bed smiling."(37)

The tradition of mutual support and obligation led the immigrant communities to apply collective pressure when they felt that individuals were neglecting their responsibilities and taking advantage of the support of the community. In August 1914, Italians attended two mass meetings protesting the high price of food before they took to the streets Saturday night, August 29, to mete out special punishment to a pasta wholesaler who had raised prices. The wholesaler, Frank P. Ventrone, was a prominent businessman in the Italian community who had come to Providence in the 1880's from Isernia, a city from which many Italians had emigrated to Providence. Over a thousand people marched through Federal Hill, shattered the windows in a block of property owned by Ventrone, and then dumped his stock of macaroni and staples into the street. The participants saw this as an internal community issue and resisted the intervention of the police. According to newspaper



accounts, "Jeers and catcalls greeted the police as they tried to clear the area," and "night sticks were freely used." "Every time the patrol was sent to the Knight St. station with a prisoner, it was a signal for the mob to hurl at the police anything they could grab." When the police returned to Federal Hill the next afternoon, ostensibly to make an arrest on a non-support charge, Italians again resisted the intrusion of the police in a three-hour struggle which the newspapers called "the worst riot in the annals of the city." (38)

On Monday, a meeting between the Italian Socialist Club and a representative of Ventrone negotiated an agreement which substantially lowered the price of pasta. The Italian newspaper, in its editorial the next week, articulated the basis on which community sanctions had been applied when they argued that "Signor Ventrone...owes everything to our colony," and thus had a responsibility to the community which he did not meet until pressure was brought to bear on him. "Our brave colony, when we all stand together, will be given justice." (39)

In 1910, women of the Jewish community in South Providence, a Jewish neighborhood similar to that on Smith Hill, took a similar action when they declared "war against the kosher butchers," because of price increases. The women planned to boycott meat sold by the kosher butchers in their community until "the meat has come down to the prices which the people could afford." The women picketed the shops, and dissuaded shoppers from buying meat. The butchers attempted to mobilize their own support by going on a house-to-house canvass to drum up business, in some cases bringing meat to families who had not ordered it. The women strikers sent delegates to the houses with an explanation of the boycott to persuade the families to rescind their orders, and "in every case, it was said, the butchers were instructed to send after the meat." (40)

More than simply prices were at stake. The strikers' demands included "respectable treatment of the customers," echoing demands of Dvinsk domestic workers for private rooms and Kishinev shop workers for "polite treatment of employees." Other demands insisted on "fresh meat wrapped in clean paper and not in newspaper as has been the custom in some of the shops," as well as a "reduction in the price of all cuts of meat." The police were called out to keep the women picketing the shops from blocking the entrances and biting prospective customers. The women won their

protest when another butcher opened a shop in the neighborhood, offering meat at the prices they demanded. The other butchers reluctantly lowered their prices as well. (41)

Both Italian and Jewish immigrants actively recreated their family traditions in the process of building a new life in Providence, and in so doing, participated in the transformation of these traditions. Over time, changes in work opportunities and family residence patterns loosened the closely-woven networks of kin and community which defined daily life in the old neighborhoods. The process of change involved both the shifting of external circumstances and the reordering of individual and family priorities.

The workplaces of the immigrant generation were profoundly affected by large-scale economic shifts in the twentieth century: changes in marketing and retailing, expansion of the white-collar sector, technological and management-oriented directions of production. Small craft shops suffered from competition with department stores and ethnic food shops lost ground to supermarkets. (42) The sons and daughters of self-employed tailors, shoemakers, and peddlars became salespeople and clerks in those department stores and supermarkets, or automobile and insurance salesmen, working in English-language worlds outside the experience of their parents. Sons and daughters of factory workers who themselves worked in jewelry shops and in the dwindling number of textile mills worked on new machines which made the skills of their parents obsolete, and at speeds which would have made their parents' heads spin.

Families continued to operate as interdependent economic groups, but changing working conditions altered the responsibilities that women and children held. Families still expected every member to work, but production moved out of the home with the decline of neighborhood craft and retail shops, the immigration restriction which cut down the supply of available boarders, and the decreased availability of homework after its prohibition in the National Recovery Administration codes. It was harder for women to combine productive work with child care, and the patterns and timing of mothers' work shifted. Instead of working when their children were young, and then turning to their children for supplementary wage earning when they were old enough to work, mothers waited until all their children were in school to work.

Family economic responsibility was still shared.

Even without counting the work of some married women, largely invisible in the public record, virtually all the Italian and Jewish families still in Providence in 1930 had an average of two wage earners per family, usually father and child. Sons and daughters still routinely gave their paychecks to their families, but the tradition of the children's contribution to the family began to encounter resistance. When children helped their mothers and fathers with boarders, homework, or by standing behind the counter in a shop, the income thus produced was clearly generated by family effort. But now sons and daughters were unmistakably working for their own wages. Sons and daughters had a stronger sense of their own needs, peer pressure towards certain kinds of consumption, and a feeling of entitlement to their own earnings. Some children arranged for a larger share of their wages indirectly: "Mary and her sisters resented turning over every cent they worked for and having a small allowance handed out to them to buy needed clothing, personal items, and for leisure activities. They became adept at sewing, knitting, crocheting, making do, and borrowing from mother."(43) Other children simply withheld part of their paychecks. While an older sister dipped into her wages only to treat herself to carfare on payday, her younger sister responded differently: "I'll never forget the time I got my first pay, you know, I'm altogether different from the way she [her older sister] is....I went downtown first, and I spent a lot, more than half of my money....I just went hog wild, I guess. And I came home, and we used to have to hand our pays in. So I gave my father what I had left and he threw it at me. So, I just picked it up and took the rest of it. The next week he didn't throw it at me, he just kept what I gave him."(44)

Families continued to build connections between households, but the community context which had supported and extended these relationships shifted. Families continued to live near enough to each other for help and support, and when the sons and daughters of the immigrant generation married, they frequently chose to live near their parents. In 1930, sixty percent of Italian married children lived at the same address as their parents, presumably in another floor of a triple-decker, and another twelve percent lived within four blocks. Only thirty percent of Jewish married children lived in the same building as their parents, but an additional forty percent lived within four blocks. But the Italian and Jewish communities as a whole had spread out over the city. Less than half of the Italians and Jews who had lived on Federal Hill and Smith Hill still lived there in

1930. Some families left the city altogether. Italians moved with their children to two houses next door to each other on a tree-lined street in Mount Pleasant, or to two houses around the corner from each other in suburban Cranston. Jewish families moved farther west on Smith Street, and to the less crowded blocks in South Providence. Families in these less ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods were less likely to come from the same province in the old country, less likely to share a common past. The loosening of neighborhood and provincial ties combined with the provisions of social security and company insurance plans eroded the traditions of the mutual benefit societies that had extended family relationships on a community-wide basis.

Though there were differences between the Italian and Jewish experience, both groups illustrate the manner in which immigrants used the family traditions they brought with them from Europe to shape their new environment. This transformation of immigrants' lives from generation to generation illuminated a process of family change which in other circumstances took longer to develop. As the settings of work and community changed, the context in which family networks operated was altered, and old networks were loosened. But at the same time, new possibilities were created for new kinds of connections, across ethnic lines, at work in the large companies and in factories, in the new industry-wide CIO unions, in leisure activities and political clubs in the newer ethnically-mixed neighborhoods. These new kinds of community, created out of a waning immigrant consciousness, must be the focus of investigations into contemporary working-class culture.

#### Notes

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6. GB, University of Rhode Island, New England Family History Collection, hereafter referred to as URI-NEFHC. The work of Sharon Strom, Jim Findlay and Valerie Quinney (members of the History Department at URI) in sponsoring the collection of oral and family histories has been invaluable to my research.

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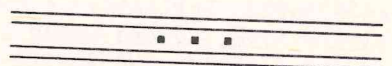
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26. M. Family interview, December 1, 1975.
27. N. Family interview, September 2, 1976.
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## Italian-American Radicals and Labor in Rhode Island, 1905-1930

### Paul Buhle

Within recent years the Italians have through force of character taken a place in the front ranks of the revolutionary movement which is so rapidly developing throughout the world. Especially is this true in the United States and Canada....The working class of America is indebted to the Italians and have cause to congratulate themselves that these people have come to this country in such large numbers bringing with them the heritage of centuries of civilization: the traditions, culture and refinement of a great nation, all of which will contribute to enrich the blood of the new race that is being born in America. The Italians have no deep-rooted racial prejudice. They readily mingle with other people, imbuing their surroundings with their native tenderness as well as force of character....

William D. Haywood, Il Proletario,  
May 3, 1913

Come, O May, and entertain the oppressed with the virile fanfare of the Ideal; these are the ones, don't you see, who did not listen to the fraternal voice that tried to lead them away from a slow death, who have no rest from backbreaking work and are damned to be modern slaves.

Come, O May, and in the powerful chorus of robust voices which calls you, may the downtrodden, may the weak of today hear clearly the bell that you ring to call them together; come, O May, harbinger of peace, of justice, of love and make each slave a free man.

Carlo Tresca, "Vieni, O Maggio!" Il Proletario,  
May 1, 1906

The history of "New Immigrants" in the American labor movement and their influence on the American social landscape remains, with few exceptions, little known and less understood. The institutional character of labor history, the biases against non-English language materials, the primitive state (and predominately