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## La Mano e il Braccio: Comparing Italian Immigrant Communities in Louisiana and Florida, 1880-1914

Keith Richards  
*University of Central Florida*



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LA MANO E IL BRACCIO:  
COMPARING ITALIAN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN LOUISIANA AND  
FLORIDA, 1880-1914

by

KEITH RICHARDS

A thesis submitted  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts  
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## **Abstract**

Italian immigration patterns to Louisiana and Tampa, FL have received a good deal of scholarly attention as two separate phenomena, but they are better understood as informing one another in the evolution of southern thought in regard to Italian immigrants. Italians were the second largest non-black minority group behind Mexicans to be lynched, and in understanding the circumstances surrounding those acts of extrajudicial violence, a pattern is apparent. Lynchings of Italians in Louisiana emerged out of fear of the Black Hand (La Mano Nera), and the Mafia, whereas the sole incident of an Italian being lynched in Tampa occurred as a result of a strike, and the larger specter of labor militancy. Lynchings and local newspapers are analyzed to see how perception of Italians changed over the decades and especially how discourse from one state could translate to the other. Furthermore, Italian interaction with black laborers in Louisiana and with Spanish and Cuban immigrants in Tampa become important in understanding how an organized labor movement – or the lack thereof – emerged.

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## Introduction

Italian immigration to the American South has been a matter of scholarly attention, much of it focusing on Ybor City, Florida and the lynching of 11 Italians in New Orleans on March 14, 1891. In isolating these locations and incidents, the larger historical picture is lost. While historian Donna Gabaccia wrote about Italian immigration in both Louisiana and Tampa in her 1988 book *Militants and Migrants: Rural Sicilians Become American Workers*, she did not compare their experiences and instead discussed the two communities in separate chapters. As such, there is a gap in the literature that could benefit from understanding how their experiences were similar and how they differed. While Italian peasants traveled to Tampa and to Louisiana's sugar parishes, artisans favored New Orleans.<sup>1</sup> Where they settled and what sort of work they did merits further research because those factors greatly affected their experiences.

The Italian experience in the Postbellum South is varied but, nonetheless, certain constants existed: they were the victims of extrajudicial violence, largely in the form of lynching, and they had extensive interaction with other minority groups. Although Patrizia Salvetti notes 10 lynchings with 34 Italians killed in both the South and the West, Clive Webb counts 29 killed in 9 instances specifically in the South.<sup>2</sup> Of the 29 killed, 21 were killed in Louisiana, and two in Tampa. These numbers make Italians, after Mexicans, the second-largest non-black minority to be killed by lynch mobs.<sup>3</sup> While lynchings in Louisiana began with the infamous lynching of 11

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<sup>1</sup> Donna Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants: Rural Sicilians Become American Workers* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Patrizia Salvetti, *Corda e sapone: Storie di linciaggi degli italiani negli Stati Uniti* (Rome: Donzelli editore, 2003), VIII; C. Webb, "The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910," *American Nineteenth Century History* 3, no. 1, (June 2002): 45-76, DOI: 10.1080/713998981

<sup>3</sup> Webb, "Lynching of Sicilians," 46-47.

Italians in New Orleans in 1891, the single lynching in Tampa's history did not occur until 1910. In both places, primarily white mobs resorted to extrajudicial violence to deal with Italian immigrants, the circumstances in which they were lynched differ; in Louisiana, the specter of the Black Hand and the Mafia is the cause of the white elite's ire, whereas in Tampa the local white elite feared class consciousness and leftism.

The experiences of Italians with African Americans were varied, not only between Tampa and Louisiana, but also within Louisiana. Historian Gary Mormino notes that in the cigar factories of Ybor City, Afro-Cubans worked alongside Italians, Spaniards, and white Cubans.<sup>4</sup> While few black people lived in Ybor City prior to urban renewal in the 1950s, between Afro-Cubans and the other groups, "there was a lot of respect, one for the other ... so it was no discrimination between the Latin whites and the Cuban blacks."<sup>5</sup> In Louisiana's sugar parishes, Italians did business with black customers and held a "significant number of 'colored saloon licenses.'"<sup>6</sup> This contrasts from when Italians worked as laborers in the sugar parishes, where Italians "maintained neutral relations to the Afro-Americans" but still "constituted separate communities, marrying and socializing among themselves."<sup>7</sup> This acts as a deviation from most other Italian-American communities, where they patronized African-Americans if not worked alongside them as is seen in Tampa and elsewhere in Louisiana.

While Louisiana has a very traditional southern racial dichotomy between white and black people, Tampa benefited from the presence of Spaniards and Cubans in addition to Italians. These three groups all worked together in the cigar factories and had extended interactions with

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<sup>4</sup> Gary Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 101.

<sup>5</sup> Gary Mormino, "Interview with Tony Pizzo," April 14, 1979.

<sup>6</sup> Jessica Barbata Jackson, "Before the Lynching: Reconsidering the Experience of Italians and Sicilians in Louisiana, 1870s-1890s," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 58, No. 3 (Summer 2017): 300-338.

<sup>7</sup> Gabaccia, "Militants and Migrants," 104.

each other. Because Tampa transformed “from an isolated, biracial village to an urban, ethnically diverse manufacturing center,” these three groups – collectively referred to as Latins in the historiography – formed a sort of solidarity in the wake of nativism and establishment violence intended to maintain the status quo of a typical southern town.<sup>8</sup> Despite this solidarity, certain conditions made it difficult for Italians to maintain their own sense of identity in Tampa. Norino Zenati, an Italian living in Tampa summarized this loss of identity in the Italian-language publication *Il Pensiero* in 1922:

Here in Tampa we do not see “Macelleria” below “Meat Market”; instead we write “Carnicería.” Nor do we write “Calzolaio” underneath “Shoemaker”; we put “Zapatero,” all the while we learn to say *ventana* for window instead of *finestra*. We are Americanizing, Cubanizing, Hispanicizing, but we do not have the power to Italianize anything.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the linguistic hegemony that Cubans and Spaniards exerted over Italians, this did not necessarily affect quotidian interactions. Italians learned Spanish and had extensive contact with their Latin neighbors.

The nomenclature used to describe Italian immigrants in the Postbellum South merits some degree of discussion, as well. Of the Italians who came to Ybor City, over 90 percent were from Sicily and the Italian quarter in New Orleans came to be known as “Little Palermo.”<sup>10</sup> As a result of the overwhelming proportion of Sicilians, many academics have opted to refer to these emigrations as Sicilian rather than Italian. While this distinction can be helpful, it also is affected by the discourse of American publications that justified extrajudicial violence against Italians. An article from the *Lake Charles Commercial* is one such example. The article, which was published in 1890 and simply titled “Mafia” sought to clarify that any Mafia activity should be

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<sup>8</sup> Robert P. Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa, 1882-1936* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), XVIII.

<sup>9</sup> Norino Zenati, “Coscienza Nazionale” in *Il Pensiero*, February 1, 1922.

<sup>10</sup> Gabaccia, “Militants and Migrants,” 99, 102.

attributed solely to Sicilians and not Italians as a whole. The author, using the pseudonym “Southern Watchmen,” continued by arguing that it would be “inexcusable” to say that Sicilians are “of the same race as the Italian people.”<sup>11</sup> This idea was not unique to the Southern consciousness and in fact had its roots in how the liberal Italian state conceived of the southern half of the peninsula, known as the *Mezzogiorno*. It was claimed that the *Mezzogiorno* – and especially Sicily – was “barbarous ... primitive ... violent ... irrational.”<sup>12</sup> The Dillingham Commission, a joint senate commission that reported on immigration to the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, similarly argued that:

It is generally accepted that North Italians make a most desirable class of immigrants. They are more progressive, enlightened, and it is claimed are more easily assimilated than their southern countrymen, who, because of their ignorance, low standards of living, and the supposedly great criminal tendencies among them are regarded by many as racially undesirable.<sup>13</sup>

The “Othering” of Sicily from the rest of Italy allowed Southerners to create a dichotomy between the “Good Italian” and the “Savage Sicilian.” This orientalist perspective pushed the author to use the term “Italian” to refer to any immigration from the then-recently unified Kingdom of Italy.

Four million Italians immigrated to the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, constituting 29 percent of the nation’s foreign-born population in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> Louisiana sugar planters specifically imported Italian laborers, using immigration agents on their behalf to direct Italians there, after the emancipation of slaves led to

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<sup>11</sup> Lake Charles, *Lake Charles Commercial*, November 29, 1890.

<sup>12</sup> John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Senate Documents Vol. XII, Reports of the Immigrant Commission: Emigration Conditions in Europe. 61<sup>st</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> session, Document No. 748 (1910-1911), p. 176.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Zanoni, *Migrant Marketplaces: Food and Italians in North and South America* (Urbana, Chicago, Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 45.

a labor shortage.<sup>15</sup> This shortage occurred for several reasons: sugar planters above all else wanted to pay workers lower wages than most other industries, which caused many people to leave and look for other work, and freedmen “held out for higher and more regular wages.”<sup>16</sup> As black laborers became more volatile, especially in the face of labor demonstrations, sugar planters began to look for more reliable sources of labor. After failing to attract Scandinavian and Chinese immigrants already living in the United States, and the Spanish and Portuguese governments giving lukewarm responses to planters’ inquiries, they finally struck a deal with the Italian government to import workers, attracting between 30,000 to 80,000 seasonal workers each planting season, known as the *zuccharata*.<sup>17</sup>

New Orleans acted as the starting point for many Italian migrants to the South. So many Italians lived in Louisiana that by 1930, “of the 16,000 foreign families in Louisiana, 44 percent were Italian.”<sup>18</sup> It served as a home base between planting seasons for those working in the sugar parishes, but many Italians living in the Crescent City would move to Tampa following the infamous lynching in 1891.<sup>19</sup> Many Italians in New Orleans worked at the docks or helped corner the fruit trade in the city, not unlike what they would later do in Tampa.<sup>20</sup>

In Florida, Vincente Martinez Ybor and Ignacio Haya, a Cuban cigar factory owner and a Spanish one based in Key West both wanted to relocate so as to temper the radical labor militancy of their Cuban workers.<sup>21</sup> They settled on Tampa, a small town situated along the Gulf

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<sup>15</sup> Cinel, Dino. "Italians in the South: The Alabama Case." *Italian Americana* 9, no. 1 (1990): 7.; Louisiana Sugar Planters’ Association Papers, *Minutes*, May 12, 1881.

<sup>16</sup> J. Vincenza Scarpaci, “Labor for Louisiana’s Sugar Cane Fields: An Experiment in Immigrant Recruitment,” *Italian Americana* 7, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1981): 19-41; Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 49.

<sup>17</sup> Scarpaci, “Labor for Louisiana’s Sugar Cane Fields,” 20.

<sup>18</sup> Cinel, "Italians in the South," 7.

<sup>19</sup> Gabaccia, “Militants and Migrants,” 101.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*,” 101.

<sup>21</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, “Immigrant World,” 64.

coast of Florida, in 1886, where they purchased 40 acres and set out to build a company town.<sup>22</sup> Soon, the town was filled with Spanish and Cuban immigrants, who turned the town from a traditionally southern town into an industrial center. Immigrants like Angelo Cacciatore who were living in St. Cloud, Florida heard news of opportunity in Tampa and decided to move there in the late 1880s and early 1890s.<sup>23</sup> Tampa not only attracted Italians from New Orleans, but directly from Sicily, from New York, and from Pennsylvania.<sup>24</sup>

Italians in both places worked in a variety of jobs. Italians in Tampa did not solely work in the cigar factories but also held jobs as fruit peddlers, barbers, butchers, dressmakers, and real estate agents.<sup>25</sup> Given their involvement in real estate, Italians bought up much of the property and in many cases acted as landlords.<sup>26</sup> This concept follows the Italian saying *chi ha prato ha tutto* (he who has land has everything).<sup>27</sup> As Paolo Giordano points out, Italians in Louisiana “had set out a goal for themselves – to be landowners.”<sup>28</sup> In places where this was less likely – namely, in the sugar parishes of Louisiana and in St. Cloud, FL – Italians would eventually move on to places where they could own their land.

These two different locations situated along the Gulf Coast would set the stage for a 30-year period marked by urban vigilantism and lynch mobs. These places did not exist in isolation, and through the study of their periodicals, it becomes clear that there existed an evolving rhetoric that both states leaned on in their justifications of extrajudicial violence against Italians. While

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>24</sup> Gary Mormino, “Interview with Domenico Giunta,” May 18, 1984; “Interview with Mary Italiano,” April 20, 1978; “Interview with John Grimaldi,” November 9, 1978.

<sup>25</sup> Italian Business Directory (Florida) – 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1909/1910.

<sup>26</sup> Gary Mormino, “Interview with Nick Nuccio,” June 10, 1979; “Interview with John Grimaldi.”

<sup>27</sup> John V. Baiamonte, Jr., “Community Life in the Italian Colonies of Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana, 1890-1950,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 30, no. 4 (Fall 1989); 365-397.

<sup>28</sup> Paolo Giordano, “Italian Immigration in the State of Louisiana: Its Causes, Effects, and Results,” *Italian Americana* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1979); 160-177.

threats of organized crime and leftism are certainly present, there is also the underlying concern within the Southern consciousness that Italians in part disrupted the rigid racial hierarchy of the region. As Webb notes, white Southerners did not regard Italian immigrants as black, but they nonetheless saw them as an obstruction in the consolidation of power under Jim Crow legislation.<sup>29</sup> This in-betweenness of race that Italians found themselves in helps set the stage for the complications that they experience; they were discriminated against by white Southerners, while not necessarily fitting in with the black population, either. These experiences are not unique to Italians in the South; it also was a situation that Mexicans, Cubans, and Spaniards all had to navigate as well. This explains the solidarity that formed in Tampa between Italians, Cubans, and Spaniards, while Italians did not make meaningful connections in Louisiana's sugar parishes with the black laborers, instead staying within their own communities.

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<sup>29</sup> Webb, "Lynching of Sicilians," 48.

## Chapter 1: Louisiana

The 1891 lynching in New Orleans of 11 Italians has received a good deal of attention in journal articles and monographs. A lot of the research examines the event itself but fails to understand its context. It is important to look at how Italians fit into American Postbellum society, instead of solely within the isolation of the infamous lynching. Looking at the 1891 lynching on its own also misses the evolving rhetoric that the local newspapers adopted; the New Orleans lynching was the first of four lynchings that occurred in Louisiana, making it the state with the most lynchings of Italians in the United States, both in number of people lynched and in number of incidents.<sup>30</sup> The ways that the press discussed Italians before the 1891 lynching greatly differs from after, and the press did not necessarily maintain the same type of discourse with each subsequent lynching. As Jessica Barbata Jackson argues, relations between Italians and southerners in Louisiana had been neutral if not cordial prior to the assassination of New Orleans police superintendent David Hennessy, whose murder precipitated the 1891 lynching.<sup>31</sup> Because Italian labor was filling a critical shortage of labor, there was a mutual need from both planters and immigrants to coexist. The idea that anti-Italian sentiment fermented beneath the surface years before the lynching uses frameworks that existed in northern cities like New York but did not necessarily reflect reality in Louisiana.

The specter of the Mafia emerged in the early 1890s in the months preceding the assassination of Hennessy, but most publications still maintained the veneer that any organized crime did not reflect upon every Italian. The aforementioned article in the *Lake Charles*

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<sup>30</sup> Webb, "Lynching of Sicilians," 47.

<sup>31</sup> Jackson, "Before the Lynching," 304.

*Commercial* qualified their statements on the Sicilian Mafia by stating that “it must not be supposed that Sicily ... is now merely a nest of assassins.”<sup>32</sup> This goodwill towards Italians, however, would disappear once Hennessy was killed and the 11 Italians strung up. The idea that not all Sicilians were associated with the Mafia quickly dissipated and was replaced with the notion that every crime committed by an Italian became associated with an Italian organized criminal underground.<sup>33</sup> Because Italians occupied a sort of in-betweenness between white and black people within the framework of race in American Postbellum society, Italians’ ethnicities were singled out in articles that reported any crimes committed by them. While the ethnicity of other white minority groups like French or Germans might not be mentioned, any crime committed by an Italian was clarified so as to ensure that the audience understood that Italians were criminals that could not be trusted nor assimilated.<sup>34</sup>

Most interesting in the David Hennessy case is the myth that surrounds it. Even within the literature, there are claims that he had “successfully exposed organized crime among a portion of the Italian immigrant population during the 1880s.”<sup>35</sup> This secret organization is given two different names by publications in the early 1890s and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Black Hand (*La Mano Nera*) and the Mafia. The latter had a more enduring impact on the nomenclature of Italian American organized crime, while the former has since faded into more relative obscurity. The Black Hand is best epitomized in the 1855 story of Fransisco Domingo, a Sicilian who was murdered and his throat slit. His widowed wife had in her possession a letter that demanded \$500

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<sup>32</sup> Lake Charles, *Lake Charles Commercial*, November 29, 1890.

<sup>33</sup> Michael L. Kurtz, “Organized Crime in Louisiana History: Myth and Reality,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 24, no. 4 (Fall 1983): 355-376.

<sup>34</sup> Christine DeLucia, “Getting the Story Straight: Press Coverage of Italian-American Lynchings from 1856-1910.” *Italian Americana* 21, no. 2 (2003): 214.

<sup>35</sup> David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 93.

for his life. At the bottom was the imprint of a hand in black ink.<sup>36</sup> This form of extortion is better understood to constitute the Black Hand, rather than an organized syndicate. The simplicity of the crime means that any petty criminal can extort someone, but Louisiana publications nonetheless would attribute it to a greater conspiracy of Italian underground organizations.

An article published in 1908 by Gaetano D'Amato, the former president of the United Italian Societies, attempted to dispel rumors of the Black Hand. He mentioned that his contemporaries alleged that the Black Hand operated out of Italy, sending members to the United States to kill and plunder its citizens. He argued that the society of the Black Hand was not even Italian, but Spanish, and was scarcely heard in Italy.<sup>37</sup> The *Lake Charles Commercial* in 1883, seven years before writing their article on the Mafia, mentions this Spanish organization that bears the same name, calling it a "revolutionary organization."<sup>38</sup> Other Louisiana publications mention this "society of the Black Hand," talking about their "anarchist" activity.<sup>39</sup> However, the Black Hand was not exclusive to Spain either. The Black Hand was used in several other European organizations, including the Serbian secret military organization Ujedinjenje ili smrt, which was responsible for the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914.<sup>40</sup>

D'Amato continues by arguing that these criminals are but a few bad people among "millions of honest and industrious Italians."<sup>41</sup> An article published in *The Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel* admits that employers of Italians found them reliable and able to "readily learn to work and can be depended on." Throughout the South, Italians had gained a positive reputation for

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<sup>36</sup> New Orleans, *True Delta*, January 4, 1855.

<sup>37</sup> Gaetano D'Amato, "The 'Black Hand' Myth," *The North American Review* 187, no. 629 (April 1908); 543-549.

<sup>38</sup> Lake Charles, *Lake Charles Commercial*, April 7, 1883.

<sup>39</sup> Opelousas, *St. Landry Democrat*, June 9, 1883.

<sup>40</sup> Kurtz, "Organized Crime in Louisiana History," 360.

<sup>41</sup> D'Amato, "Black Hand," 544.

their hard work, even though Southern newspapers often painted Italians in a negative light.<sup>42</sup> Despite D'Amato's positive depiction of Italian immigrants, he makes a statement about the composition of these criminals utilizing the symbol of the Black Hand: "There have crept into this country some thousands of ex-convicts from Naples, Sicily, and Calabria."<sup>43</sup> All of the locations that he mentions in his depiction of ex-convicts belong to the southern half of the Italian peninsula. While D'Amato attempts to defend his compatriots, he falls back on orientalist rhetoric inherited from northern Italy, further contributing to the othering southern Italians as being criminals. He does not mention where those millions of industrious Italians were from, but the implication is that they were not from those three areas that these supposed ex-convicts came from. D'Amato was not alone in his creation of a dichotomy between the "Good Italian" and the "Savage Sicilian;" *Le Meschacébé* reported that "Leading Italians" formed a secret brotherhood to "stamp out the Black Hand" in 1908.<sup>44</sup> Wealthy Italians fed into nativist rhetoric espoused by the white elite to stamp out an organization that existed only in isolated cases, and could not be at all considered an organization like the various publications depicted it to be. In doing so, they also hoped to win the acclaim of the English-speaking press and disassociate themselves from the so-called Savage Sicilian.

The literature largely agrees that most syndicate "families" emerged in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s and that any attempt to prove the existence of the Mafia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is backed by the unsubstantiated claims of contemporary journalists and politicians.<sup>45</sup> Despite this, the fear of an Italian criminal underground eroded the goodwill that the white population had for their Italian neighbors. Publications began to justify the lynching of the 11

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<sup>42</sup> Thibodaux, *The Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel*, November 28, 1896.

<sup>43</sup> D'Amato, "Black Hand," 544.

<sup>44</sup> Lucy, *Le Meschacébé*, October 3, 1908.

<sup>45</sup> Kurtz, "Organized Crime in Louisiana History," 356, 359.

Italians, and any hypothetical crime in the future. The lynching itself happened when the nine suspects of the Hennessy assassination were acquitted for a lack of sufficient evidence, and a mob formed to “exercise justice” against them and another two Italians who also were in the jail. The *St. Landry Clarion* claimed that the jurors who acquitted the nine Italians were paid off by the Mafia, rendering the lynching “as the only remedy to stop assassination by the Mafia.”<sup>46</sup> *The Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel* further elaborated, arguing:

The people of New Orleans on March 14, 1891, were right, and did what circumstances imperiously demanded, and they did it well. And none but the guilty were injured. No man’s property, no innocent man’s life was taken.<sup>47</sup>

These publications justified extrajudicial violence because they believed that the courts had failed them. The *St. Landry Clarion* claimed that an estimated 12,000 people showed up to discuss the lynching before swelling to a crowd 20,000.<sup>48</sup> While this claim is almost certainly hyperbolic, the overwhelming support for the lynching and the publications’ justifications for it and any further lynchings show the ends that the white population would go to in order to maintain control over their Italian neighbors.

Fear of the Black Hand was so great that some publications resorted to fabricating events to stir up fear about the “society.” An Italian reverend by the name of Rev. Manoritta supposedly received a letter from the Mafia that read: “Rev. Father. You make better stay homa and not goa to courta every day. You maka bad for the society. If you no lissena we killa you.”<sup>49</sup> The letter is most likely forged because it assumes that Italians would write in English in the way a stereotypical Italian accent sounds. These unsubstantiated claims of threats materialized

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<sup>46</sup> Opelousas, *St. Landry Clarion*, March 21, 1891.

<sup>47</sup> Thibodaux, *The Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel*, March 21, 1891.

<sup>48</sup> Opelousas, *St. Landry Clarion*, March 21, 1891.

<sup>49</sup> St. Martinsville, *The Weekly Messenger*, March 21, 1891.

immediately following the New Orleans lynching, further raising fear of Italian immigrants. Newspaper columns often reported on other instances of people receiving letters from the Black Hand, being extorted for money, but few went as far as this example. Most of these columns never followed up on what happened after the person receives the letter, and the editors of these publications did not necessarily care; in mentioning these instances, not only did they report the event, but they also had the effect of sowing fear, discord and distrust between the white population and their Italian neighbors.

So ubiquitous were these potentially falsified letters, that such a letter figured prominently in a piece of serialized fiction in the *St. Tammany Farmer*. The short story, titled “The ‘Black Hand’ at Tony’s: Dr. Furnivall in the Solution of a Perplexing Case” by George F. Butler and Herbert Ilesley recounts the titled protagonist’s investigation of an attack by the Black Hand against an Italian family in an unnamed Little Italy. It is also important to mention that the story uses the vague idea of a Little Italy because the authors want to create the impression that such an event could occur in any place where Italians live. It ignores geographic location because it implies the inherent criminality of Italians across the United States. Like the above example from *The Weekly Messenger*, “The ‘Black Hand’ at Tony’s” features an extortion letter that uses a stereotypical Italian accent in the letter itself:

Tony, you gotta four thous-a dollar wat we gotta get from you Wednesday, sure. We donna wan no foolin’. We needa da mon bad, an’ gotta get it by this-a time Wednesda’ da 10 July, or we kil-a you. We kil-a da boy fir’ an’ da wom’. Thursda’ we kil-a da boy if we donna getta da mon’ Wednesda’.<sup>50</sup>

This letter appeared so fake that even the detective, Dr. Furnivall surmises that “he would speak this way, but he would require some education to write this way.”<sup>51</sup> This begins to make the

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<sup>50</sup> Covington, *St. Tammany Farmer*, April 24, 1909.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

detective suspect that it was not the actions of the Black Hand, but rather one of the members of the Macalusco family, who had been the ones to receive the letter in the first place. At the end of the story, it is revealed that Tony's son, who was supposedly assaulted by the Black Hand at the beginning of the story had fabricated everything so that he could use his father's money instead of it being used to send him off to a seminary to become a priest.

What this story does, perhaps unintentionally, is show that claims of the Black Hand have the possibility of being completely fabricated by people in order to elicit a specific response. In this case, the authors cynically imply that Italians would fabricate these threats for their own gain, but it is more likely that journalists were doing this themselves to help spread fear about the Black Hand and the dangers of the local Italian community. The cynicism of the authors was not entirely misplaced: a presumably white man by the name of Henry Looney was tried for trying to extort a local Italian bank owner by the name of Paul Lisso for \$5000, threatening to murder his daughter if the sum was not paid.<sup>52</sup> It is difficult to draw a conclusion from this event; while it is possible that Looney wanted to leverage the perceived ubiquity of Black Hand extortions to make money while simultaneously pinning the crime on the Italian community, but it is far more likely that he thought that he could emulate the practice and make a sizable sum of money with little to no thought of the social implications. This action nonetheless showed that this form of blackmail was not exclusive to Italians, and that anyone, regardless of ethnicity, would use such methods if they planned to blackmail and extort.

The 1891 lynching of 11 Italians acted as the beginning of lynchings of Italians in Louisiana. Three more incidents occurred in the following two decades: Hahnville in 1896, Tallulah in 1899, and Chathamville in 1907. The first two incidents, as in New Orleans,

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<sup>52</sup> St. Joseph, *Tensas Gazette*, May 1, 1908.

happened under the pretenses of murder, but the third happened because of a labor dispute.<sup>53</sup> This fact helped in the stereotyping of Italians; while black people were lynched under the pretenses of rape, Italians were imagined to be murderers because three of the four instances in Louisiana happened for that reason.<sup>54</sup> Mentions of the Black Hand in relation to these lynchings decline, and in some cases disappear entirely, but all of them are constant in that the authors assume culpability when reporting the lynchings.<sup>55</sup> Perceptions of lynchings changed as the political climate did, especially with the rise of the anti-lynching movement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The lynching of three Italians in Hahnville on August 11, 1896 did not spark the same national outrage as the 1891 lynching in New Orleans had. Conspiratorial claims of an organized crime syndicate did not appear, and while the press still attempted to justify the actions of the lynch mob, those justifications did not fill every column of every publication. The three Italians were called “high-handed murderers” without any semblance of evidence against them and one newspaper stated that “the State or parish authorities can[not] reasonably be held responsible for the lynching.”<sup>56</sup> The usual argument, therefore, was made that the lynching was easily justifiable because the Italians were guilty. This rather bold claim was debunked one year later when a black man confessed to the murders that had resulted in the three Italians being lynched.<sup>57</sup> This “cruel mistake” made the press take a moment to ask themselves: “can Judge Lynch be trusted?”<sup>58</sup> Ironically, the press had fanned the flames of lynch law only six years prior, but when three Italians were erroneously lynched, they placed the blame not on themselves for helping to

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<sup>53</sup> Webb, “Lynching of Sicilians,” 47.

<sup>54</sup> Webb, “Lynching of Sicilians,” 48.

<sup>55</sup> DeLucia, “Getting the Story Straight,” 215-216.

<sup>56</sup> Colfax, *The Colfax Chronicle*, August 22, 1896.

<sup>57</sup> Opelousas, *The Opelousas Courier*, September 4, 1897.

<sup>58</sup> Colfax, *The Colfax Chronicle*, August 28, 1897.

create an environment that justified lynching, but rather on the lynch mobs that followed their nativist rhetoric.

The more important element of the 1896 Hahnville lynching was the Italian government's response. The Italian government demanded reparations for the families of the lynched Italians in 1891, which had caused a great stir between the United States and Italy before the United States relented.<sup>59</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the Hahnville lynching, Italian ambassador Baron Fava, who had similarly navigated the 1891 lynching, was tasked with investigating and trying to obtain reparations for the affected families. The investigation consisted of finding out if the lynched Italians were still citizens of the Kingdom of Italy or if they had been naturalized as citizens of the United States.<sup>60</sup> Fava's findings showed that they in fact were still Italian citizens and each family received \$5,000, then each received a \$2,000 bonus when they were found innocent of the crime that they had been lynched for.<sup>61</sup> While this proved to be a victory for the victims' families, the Louisiana newspapers viewed the Italian investigation as nothing less than an anathema; the press complained that they will "expect to hear of many incendiary articles in the Italian papers" while the Italian government investigated.<sup>62</sup> The Louisiana press contented itself with publishing fabrications and passing them off as true stories and justifying extrajudicial violence against Italians, but were upset that the Italian press might view American treatment of Italian immigrants in a negative light. *The Lafayette Advertiser* warned the Italian government that while they may seek reparations, it would not "deter indignant communities from continuing the employment of summary and extrajudicial methods of dealing with a despicable and

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<sup>59</sup> Lafayette, *The Lafayette Advertiser*, September 26, 1896.

<sup>60</sup> Lake Charles, *Lake Charles Commercial*, August 15, 1896.

<sup>61</sup> Opelousas, *The Opelousas Courier*, September 4, 1897; St. Joseph, *Texas Gazette*, July 16, 1897.

<sup>62</sup> Lake Charles, *Lake Charles Commercial*, August 15, 1896.

dangerous class of criminals who almost invariably escape detection and punishment under the ordinary processes of law.”<sup>63</sup>

This disdain for the Italian government intervening continued three years later, when five Italians were lynched in Tallulah. The 1899 lynching elicited the response of foreign minister Baron Fava once more, who not only requested reparations, but also that the federal government should punish those who participated in the lynching. Some publications simply stated that such matters were up to the state authorities – and even admitted that the investigation done by Louisiana was unsatisfactory – while others sought to attack Fava.<sup>64</sup> Fava attempted to have other diplomats assist in convincing the federal government to intervene and do a more thorough investigation, but the *New Iberia Enterprise* said that “Foreign Ministers and other representatives will do well to mind their own business,” and to not bother the United States with their “petty grievances.”<sup>65</sup> This particular phrasing made it clear that the publication did not see the lynching of foreign nationals as a matter of concern, and it comes as no surprise that two months earlier, the publication wrote an article that celebrated that three of the five Italians lynched were not Italian citizens, meaning that the federal government did not owe the victims’ families any reparations.<sup>66</sup> The article continued to attack Fava, saying that

Mr. Fava wants the constitution of the United States amended, in order to secure the hanging of a few score of Louisiana’s citizens for lynching a lot of Italian assassins. He is asking more than can be done. There is no power in the United States that can change the law to comply with his arrogant demand, save and except two-thirds of the States, and they will not do it. If the Italians are not sufficiently protected here, let them go elsewhere. The world is wide.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Lafayette, *The Lafayette Advertiser*, September 26, 1896.

<sup>64</sup> New Iberia, *New Iberia Enterprise*, January 20, 1900.

<sup>65</sup> New Iberia, *New Iberia Enterprise*, September 23, 1899.

<sup>66</sup> New Iberia, *New Iberia Enterprise*, July 29, 1899.

<sup>67</sup> New Iberia, *New Iberia Enterprise*, September 23, 1899.

This particularly tone-deaf passage shows that the Louisiana press saw Italian lives as lesser to that of Americans, advocating against any efforts to improve conditions for them. While they justified the lynching of Italians, they saw the hanging of Louisiana citizens as immoral acts of vengeance, ignoring that the use of lynch law was retaliatory and carried the connotation of justice when the law was unable to produce the desired results.

The Louisiana press expressed great revulsion to the idea of a federal bill condemning the lynching of foreign nationals, saying that it could only be done through an amendment. Ironically, several months after that claim was made, President McKinley proposed “the passage ... of a bill constituting the lynching of citizens of foreign countries a crime against the United States and cognizable in Federal courts.”<sup>68</sup> In his statement on the subject, McKinley stated that it was passed because “local justice is too often helpless to punish the offenders.”<sup>69</sup> The act of vigilante justice had resulted in the loss of three innocent lives in 1896, and the lynching of five Italians in 1899 resulted in international tensions; President McKinley was making significant steps to stop the lynching of Italians as a matter of appeasing the Italian government. This decision was an important step in the history of extrajudicial violence against Italians in the American Postbellum South.

The final lynching of Italians in Louisiana was in Chathamville on December 15, 1907. This event received scant coverage beyond the absolute basics: there was a labor dispute and then “two Italians were shot and killed by a mob, which attacked an Italian camp.”<sup>70</sup> Most interesting was the silence of the Italian government. Baron Fava had retired from being an ambassador in May 1901, and he had always been at the forefront of winning reparations when

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<sup>68</sup> Opelousas, *The Opelousas Courier*, December 23, 1899.

<sup>69</sup> New Iberia, *New Iberia Enterprise*, December 9, 1899.

<sup>70</sup> Opelousas, *St. Landry Clarion*, December 21, 1907.

Italians were lynched by mobs.<sup>71</sup> His absence meant that there were no Italian statesmen interested in fighting for the immigrants across the Atlantic who faced extrajudicial violence. Similarly, the press did not display much interest in the lynching. Given how common lynchings were, it was possible that newspapers had lost interest in the topic.<sup>72</sup> The denizens of the small town of Chathamville, which the *St. Landry Clarion* had to clarify was near Winnfield, also may not have let much information reach journalists. The article states that there were enough Italians there to constitute a camp, with two of them being shot over the labor dispute.<sup>73</sup> This possibility carries the implication that there were possibly many smaller communities where such lynchings occurred, and yet they never were reported. The scant coverage of the 1907 lynching seems to suggest that it is impossible to know how many Italians were lynched in how many instances in Louisiana, and that Chathamville is but one example of it.

Italians working in Louisiana's sugar parishes were subject to the largest likelihood of being lynched out of any other state in the United States – four out of nine lynchings happened in Louisiana, claiming the lives of 21 out of the 29 Italians lynched.<sup>74</sup> This violence was born out of fear of Italians, who were characterized as being inherently criminal, and stereotyped to be part of the Mafia or the Black Hand. These claims justified the infamous lynching of 1891, and subsequent crimes committed by any Italian were thought to be in connection with some form of organized crime. Despite this, the three other lynchings in Louisiana's history lacked those claims of the Black Hand's existence – instead the newspapers concerned themselves over the Italian government trying to win reparations for the unlawful killing of Italian citizens. The

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<sup>71</sup> Italian Government, "FAVA Saverio," *Senato della Repubblica*: <http://notes9.senato.it/Web/senregno.NSF/ed2182d507919709c12571140059a266/c599166a1a9a703c4125646f005b98ce?OpenDocument#>

<sup>72</sup> DeLucia, "Getting the Story Straight," 215.

<sup>73</sup> Opelousas, *St. Landry Clarion*, December 21, 1907.

<sup>74</sup> Webb, "Lynching of Sicilians," 47.

discourse that surrounded the lynchings changed and adapted, in some cases twisted from an extension of justice in the face of incompetent courts to the idea of a necessary evil.<sup>75</sup>

Justification for the lynching of Italians became more difficult with the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the wake of anti-lynching legislation, which began to spread across the South.<sup>76</sup> Most troubling is the uncertainty of how many lynchings actually occurred; if the 1907 lynching is any indication, such forms of vigilante justice may have happened all over Louisiana in smaller towns. The idea of the Black Hand disappeared from newspapers shortly after the lynching of 1891 but reappeared between the years 1908-1911. From there, *La Mano Nera* became a main fixture of Louisiana newspapers.

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<sup>75</sup> DeLucia, "Getting the Story Straight," 217.

<sup>76</sup> Lafayette, *The Lafayette Gazette*, August 21, 1897.

## Chapter 2: Ybor City

The sole recorded lynching of Italians in Florida's history occurred on September 20, 1910 in Tampa. Angelo Albano and Castenge Ficarotta were arrested for the fatal shooting of J. Frank Esterling, "an accountant for the Bustillo Brothers and Díaz Cigar Company." The horse-drawn cart they were being transported in was intercepted, they were taken to a grove and lynched. Pinned to Albano's belt was a notice which read: "Beware! Others take note or go the same way. We know seven more. We are watching you. If any more citizens are molested, look out – Justice."<sup>77</sup> A general strike had been declared in August which would last for six months, pushing "for a reduction in the number of apprentices and ... a union shop and formal recognition" for the Cigar Makers International Union (CMIU).<sup>78</sup> As newspapers noted when they reported on the lynching, it was more than just the murder of Esterling that precipitated the violence; it had happened explicitly because of the strike.<sup>79</sup> It had not been the first time in Tampa that lynch law had been threatened during a strike – there had been a threat during a strike in 1892 – but this event was the first and only instance of a Latin (Italians, Spaniards, and Cubans in Tampa) being lynched.<sup>80</sup>

The *Tampa Tribune* was quick to say that "There will probably be a suspension of 'Black Hand' activities in Tampa," conjuring forth the all-too-familiar specter of a secret criminal organization.<sup>81</sup> *The Ocala Evening Star* added to this conspiracy in October, complaining that "there is plenty of evidence that Black Hand methods flourish in Tampa" when strikers voted via

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<sup>77</sup> Stefano Luconi, "Tampa's 1910 Lynching: The Italian-American Perspective and Its Implications," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (Summer 2009); 30-53.

<sup>78</sup> Ingalls, "Urban Vigilantes," 89.

<sup>79</sup> Palatka, *The Palatka News and Advertiser*, September 30, 1910.

<sup>80</sup> Ingalls, "Urban Vigilantes," 52.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

secret ballot to continue the strike.<sup>82</sup> The mentioning of the Black Hand in the instance of Tampa contrasts starkly with that of Louisiana. Whereas mentions of the Black Hand in Louisiana were methods of extortion, supposed Black Hand activity in Tampa served to aid striking workers. Most interesting is that very few publications in Florida ever mentioned the Black Hand in Florida until Albano and Ficarotta were lynched.

Despite the superficial commonality of the Black Hand and Italians being accused of murder resulting in their lynching, the circumstances surrounding these situations greatly differ. While any and all crime committed by an Italian in Louisiana was attributed to the Mafia, Ingalls traces the formation of urban vigilante groups in Tampa specifically to times of strikes.<sup>83</sup> It should be understood that the abrupt mention of the Black Hand in Tampa is related to and, in many ways, informed by what had been happening in Louisiana for the past two decades. If there was little evidence of organized crime in Louisiana, there was even less evidence in Tampa, as reflected by the lack of journalistic attention until the lynching in 1910. In attributing the strike and any actions relating to it to the Black Hand, the local white elite sought to delegitimize any labor militancy that had been brewing in Tampa. Calling upon the specter of *la Mano Nera* took on contours of being conspiratorial, but it was also a tool to turn the average person against the strike.

As the Italian government attempted to investigate the incident as they had done in Louisiana, local authorities lied and said that “Ficarotta was a naturalized citizen and Albano had been born in the United States.”<sup>84</sup> Publications across the state reported this fact alongside columns that lamented the Italian government’s attempt to compensate the families of the

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<sup>82</sup> Ocala, *The Ocala Evening Star*, October 3, 1910.

<sup>83</sup> Ingalls, “Urban Vigilantes,” XVI.

<sup>84</sup> Ingalls, “Urban Vigilantes,” 98.

victims.<sup>85</sup> This once again followed in the footsteps of publications in Louisiana, who resisted and bemoaned any attempts by the Italian government to win reparations for the victims' families. Once the Italian government provided evidence that Albano was born in Sicily, they began their usual investigation. In it, the Italian official concluded:

From the opinion of the Italian colony at Tampa and from the result of my inquiry I have reason to believe that the lynching itself was not the outcome of a temporary outburst of popular anger, but was rather planned, in cold blood, to the most trifling detail, by some citizens of West Tampa with the tacit assent of a few police officers, all with the intent of teaching an awful lesson to the strikers of the cigar factories...<sup>86</sup>

This passage argues that the lynching of Albano and Ficarotta had been orchestrated not only to show the strength of the strike's opposition, but also to make an example out of them. Because Italians had been an "acceptable" minority group to lynch in the past, it was easy for them to do what had already been done eight other times across the South. The decision to lynch them instead of any Cuban or Spanish was because there was no precedent for the latter. They employed other means of dealing with Cubans and Spaniards, but the lynching of Italians had occurred in the past and with little repercussions. For this reason, they followed the actions of lynch mobs in Louisiana while evading serious consequences and sending a strong message to strikers.

Above all else, the local white elites in Tampa feared labor militancy and the possibility of leftism. While it might be hyperbolic to attribute any and all class consciousness to a left-wing movement, Tampa workers readily used the strike as a means of improving their working conditions. Ybor and Haya moved their factories to Tampa in order to temper the labor militancy that was present in Key West, but the cigar factories in newly established Ybor City ironically

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<sup>85</sup> Fort Pierce, *The St. Lucie Tribune*, September 30, 1910; Pensacola, *The Pensacola Journal*, October 23, 1910.

<sup>86</sup> Gaetano Moroni to Cusani Confalonieri, 11 October 1910, as quoted in Ingalls, "Urban Vigilantes," 99.

were delayed by a Cuban strike. So common were strikes in Tampa that “people date their lives from various strikes.”<sup>87</sup> The literature agrees that labor relations in the early years of Ybor City can be characterized by anarcho-syndicalism, which advocated for “education, local control, and nonpolitical direct action.”<sup>88</sup> Tampa’s radical nature came to be further characterized by other radical ideologies: “left- and right-wing socialists, ... revolutionary and Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) syndicalists, pacifistic and ‘propaganda of the deed’ anarchists, and a number of others as well.”<sup>89</sup> Anarchism seemed to have reached its zenith in the 1890s and begun to wane at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which allowed socialism to become the main driver of radical politics in Tampa by the early 1910s.<sup>90</sup>

The diversity in political opinions resulted in a variety of predominately anarchist and socialist publications. Most, like *El Internacional*, *El Obrero Industrial*, and *El Comercio*, published in Spanish and English. Italian publications like *L’Aurora*, *L’Alba Sociale*, and *La Voce dello Schiavo* published in all three languages. The omnipresence of Spanish in Tampa’s radical community meant that while Italian publications had the occasional article in Spanish, Spanish-language publications seldom had Italian articles, given that most workers in the cigar factories learned Spanish.<sup>91</sup> These newspapers talked about their respective ideologies, updates on strikes (most Italian radical newspapers thrived during periods of labor unrest), and radical politics in Cuba, Spain, Italy, and many other European countries. Among the subjects of political theory were famous writers like Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, whose work was

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<sup>87</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, “Immigrant World,” 101.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>89</sup> Philip V. Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer, *The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism: Politics, Labor, and Culture* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 255.

<sup>90</sup> Kirk Shaffer, “Tropical Libertarians: anarchist movements and networks in the Caribbean, Southern United States, and Mexico, 1890s–1920s,” in *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870–1940: The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution*, ed. Steven Hirsch and Lucien Van Der Walt (Boston: Brill, 2010), 290.

<sup>91</sup> Cannistraro and Meyer, “The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism,” 255.

often reproduced in the Tampa anarchist presses.<sup>92</sup> Because so many political factions existed, coupled with their respective publications advocating for their specific cause, some degree of infighting occurred. *La Voz del Esclavo*, the Spanish-language version of *La Voce dello Schiavo*, sided with the anarchist movement *La Resistencia* during the Tampa strike of 1901, putting it into direct conflict with the American Federation of Labor-backed *El Internacional*.<sup>93</sup> The fallout between the groups had occurred in the fall of 1900, when the “the two unions fought over turf and members.”<sup>94</sup> Both groups were unsurprisingly comprised of mostly Spaniards and Cubans, but *La Resistencia*, the larger of the two organizations, did boast 310 Italians.<sup>95</sup> While this number seems miniscule, it must be remembered that the 1900 census counts only 1,315 Italian immigrants lived in Ybor City, which means that over 20 percent of the Italian population at the time was involved in radical labor activity.<sup>96</sup>

These publications did not exist in a vacuum, and it is important to view Tampa not as an isolated town, but rather a part of a transnational network of leftist groups. This manifested in many ways: Cubans, Spaniards, and Italians having contact with other groups from their home countries, but also communicating with other networks within the United States. Tampa leftists not only read radical publications from their home countries, but also recommended that their readers subscribe to other leftist publications across the country. *La Parola dei Socialisti* in Chicago, IL and *La Fiaccola* in Buffalo, NY were among the publications that Italian socialist newspaper *L’Aurora* recommended to its readers.<sup>97</sup> Likewise, Tampa publications were read across the country and in Cuba, Spain, and Italy. Radicals still living in the Latins’ home

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<sup>92</sup> Tampa, *L’Alba Sociale*, August 15, 1901.

<sup>93</sup> Tampa, *La Voz del Esclavo*, November 17, 1900.

<sup>94</sup> Shaffer, “Tropical Libertarians,” 290.

<sup>95</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, “Immigrant World,” 116.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>97</sup> Tampa, *L’Aurora*, May 17, 1912.

countries wrote the occasional article in Tampa publications, helping to cement the idea that their fight was transnational in scope.<sup>98</sup> These articles were usually in the form of correspondence concerning domestic politics, helping to keep Tampa radicals informed. It is important, therefore, not to see Tampa as either completely informing their home countries, or being completely informed by them, but rather engaging in a dialogue where each part of the network contributed to the leftist cause.

Cuban anarchists kept in contact with Tampa anarchists, who were extremely helpful in the Cuban independence movement. By 1896, anarchist groups in Tampa “rais[ed] funds to support the fight, launch[ed] fundraisers to support deported anarchists’ families left behind in Cuba, and organis[ed] supplies for rebel forces.” Italian anarchist living in Tampa, Orestes Ferrara, invaded Cuba from Florida, helped the fight, and eventually stayed on the island post-independence.<sup>99</sup> José Martí, one of the most important figures in Cuba’s war for independence, had understood that to win the fight for independence, he had to harness the power of the exile and immigrant communities in the United States. Cuban immigrants always looked to their homeland, remembering it “not as an abstraction but as a real place: to return to, to reclaim, to redeem.”<sup>100</sup> This idea was further developed in the framework of anarchism; not only did they seek to free Cuba from the colonial state, but from the snares of capitalism as well. Martí did not just enlist not only the help of Cuban anarchists in Tampa, but also from Spanish anarchists as well.<sup>101</sup> Spanish anarchists also had a legacy of labor unrest, and Tampa anarchists quickly ran to their side, calling for Spaniards to “get rid of the tyranny of the government, the priests, and the

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<sup>98</sup> Tampa, *El Internacional*, October 30, 1914.

<sup>99</sup> Shaffer, “Tropical Libertarians,” 289.

<sup>100</sup> Louis A. Pérez Jr., *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purpose of the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 50.

<sup>101</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, “Immigrant World,” 80.

bourgeoisie!” Furthermore, Spanish anarchists used Tampa publications to express their views when the Spanish censor prevented them from using peninsular presses.<sup>102</sup>

Italian leftism in Tampa was no different from that of Cuban and Spanish anarchism at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; Italians similarly relied on transnational networks in order to spread their beliefs and ideology. The socialist organization *Gruppo Lorenzo Panepinto* operated out of Tampa, having been named after a schoolteacher and radical in Santo Stefano Quisquina, where most Italians in Tampa were from, after he was assassinated by the Sicilian Mafia.<sup>103</sup> This organization sent 1,200 lire to Santo Stefano each year for the continued propagation of leftist ideals in the area.<sup>104</sup> Giovanni Vaccaro, the man who founded the *Gruppo Lorenzo Panepinto* wrote after Panepinto was assassinated that: “The socialist *sezione* and the local *Gruppo Lorenzo Panepinto* are actively working to continue the emancipative work of the Teacher [Panepinto].”<sup>105</sup> This particular instance shows how Tampa and Santo Stefano adapted to changing circumstances; while Santo Stefano had initially given instruction to Italians in Tampa for radical activity, given that it was very active in the *fascio* movement that swept across Sicily, Tampa soon came to be a benefactor in the maintaining of leftist ideals in their hometown once the movement was violently crushed by Italian president Francesco Crispi.

The Italian Club (*L’Unione Italiana*) is another important source in understanding how Italians funded and participated in radical activity. Founded in April 1894, *L’Unione* would be joined by the other Latin organizations: *El Círculo Cubano*, *El Centro Asturiano*, and *El Centro*

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<sup>102</sup> Ana Varela-Lago, “Working in America and Living in Spain: The Making of Transnational Communities among Spanish Immigrants in the United States,” in *Hidden Out in the Open: Spanish Migration to the United States (1875-1930)*, ed. Phylis Cancilla Martinelli and Ana Varela-Lago (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2019), 44.

<sup>103</sup> Cannistraro and Meyer, “The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism,” 255.

<sup>104</sup> Danielle Fiorentino and Matteo Sanfilippo, *Stati Uniti e Italia nel nuovo scenario internazionale 1898-1918* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2012), 117; Tampa, *Il Martire*, May 16, 1911.

<sup>105</sup> Tampa, *L’Aurora*, May 17, 1912.

*Español*.<sup>106</sup> It acted as a mutual aid (*mutuo soccorso*) society, giving money to dues-paying members during times of unemployment, illness, or a strike.<sup>107</sup> It also provided a free burial for any paying member in the club's cemetery. These services, alongside the well-stocked library that contained "well-known works of literature, including plays, poetry, novels, and short stories," as well as radical literature written by the likes of Peter Kropotkin and Pierre-Joseph Proudon, helped to cement the Italian community in Ybor City, as well as better define its radical nature and make it a fixture of the mainstream transnational anarchist world.<sup>108</sup>

*L'Unione* helped pay for guests to come and speak in front of packed halls: "Club resources financed radical speakers and authors" and "Ybor City became a regular stop for radical luminaries."<sup>109</sup> Many of these guests were on speaking tours, known as a *giro di propaganda* where they discussed leftist theory, held "public debates" and "proselytize[d]." Well-known Italian anarchist speakers like Arturo Caroti, Luigi Galleani, and Errico Malatesta traveled to Tampa to speak at *L'Unione*.<sup>110</sup> These events were well-attended, not only by Italians but also by Spaniards and Cubans – for this reason, not all of the speakers were Italian. Socialist Italian-language newspaper *L'Aurora*, advertised that Francisco Domenech, a Cuban socialist, was coming to speak at *L'Unione*.<sup>111</sup> Unsurprisingly, Domenech's visit was conducted entirely in Spanish, the lingua franca of Tampa's Latin community. In this way, *L'Unione* not only served Italian interests in Tampa, but that of the entire Latin community.

The nature of *L'Unione*, however, was not inherently radical, but rather reflected the interests and aims of its members. Radicals generally separated themselves into smaller

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<sup>106</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, "Immigrant World," 188; Tampa, *La Voz del Esclavo*, November 17, 1900.

<sup>107</sup> "Statuto della Società di Mutuo Soccorso," September 1, 1910.

<sup>108</sup> George E. Pozzetta, "Italian Radicals in Tampa, Florida: A Research Note." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 22 (1982): 78.

<sup>109</sup> Cannistraro and Meyer, "The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism," 256.

<sup>110</sup> Pozzetta, "Italian Radicals in Tampa, Florida," 77.

<sup>111</sup> Tampa, *L'Aurora*, May 31, 1912.

subgroups where their specific ideas could be more precisely discussed: these included “socialist *circoli* (discussion groups) and *sezioni* (sections), anarchist *gruppi* (groups), debating clubs, speaking societies, and political organizations.”<sup>112</sup> Such groups existed early on in Ybor City’s history, already being developed and advertised by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>113</sup> These groups enjoyed support from the Socialist Party of America, who not only helped organize *sezioni* and other socialist groups, but helped create a sense of community through social activities like picnics. These social outings, while reprieves from the academic environment of the *circoli* and *sezioni*, nonetheless still discussed leftist causes and were organized to also recruit workers into the fold of Tampa socialist movements.<sup>114</sup>

This militancy manifested itself in strikes – most infamously in 1901 and 1910. Not only did they show the power of leftist organizations throughout Tampa, but also the power and willingness of the local white elite to put down any labor disputes by any means possible. The strike of 1901 stemmed from factory owners attempting to open factories in Jacksonville and Pensacola. The workers in Tampa feared that the opening of these would result not only in undercutting wages, but also undermine class consciousness among the working class because these factories did not have to obey the labor regulations that had been won in Tampa.<sup>115</sup> This movement was supported by Italian-language anarchist publications like *L’Alba Sociale* and *L’Aurora*, who supported *La Resistencia*. The strike was soon crushed when a Citizens’ Committee, composed of the wealthy white elite in Tampa, was formed and took thirteen of *La Resistencia*’s leaders, forcibly deporting them to Honduras with the threat to never return. Other acts like evicting striking workers, mass arresting those participating in the strike, and even

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<sup>112</sup> Cannistraro and Meyer, “The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism,” 255.

<sup>113</sup> Tampa, *L’Alba Sociale*, July 15, 1901.

<sup>114</sup> Tampa, *L’Aurora*, May 31, 1912; Tampa, *L’Aurora*, May 16, 1912.

<sup>115</sup> Tampa, *L’Alba Sociale*, August 1, 1901; Tampa, *L’Alba Sociale*, August 15, 1901.

resorting to violence constitute other ways in which establishment violence was used to temper labor militancy and end the strike.<sup>116</sup> These acts of vigilante justice resulted in the sudden end to the strike, leaving *La Resistencia* demolished, and cigar factory owners satisfied about having to grant no concessions to the striking workers, who throughout the entire situation had remained peaceful.<sup>117</sup>

The 1910 strike, which resulted in the lynching of Angelo Albano and Castenge Ficarotta mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, similarly experienced acts of vigilante justice. Beyond the lynching of Albano and Ficarotta, citizens raided the headquarters of the AFL-backed *El Internacional*, resulting in presses being destroyed, staff being intimidated, and “placing the editor under citizen’s arrest.”<sup>118</sup> Like the 1901 strike, the 1910 strike was connected to labor disputes pertaining to the cigar industry. Italian women, who outnumbered Italian men in the factories, were especially supportive of the leftist cause, some going as far as threatening to beat strikebreakers to death.<sup>119</sup> It is not a coincidence that many labor battles were fought in the factories, and it is important to understand that most of the labor militancy in Tampa centered around that industry.

Many of the leftist publications said that they defended all of the interests of the proletariat, but most of them dedicated a majority of their columns to issues surrounding the cigar industry. For those in the cigar factories who were illiterate, the *lector* proved helpful in the disseminating of leftist ideas. *Lectores* were paid directly by the workers to read anything from newspapers to novels to political treatises. This was done to alleviate the boredom of sorting

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<sup>116</sup> Ingalls, “Urban Vigilantes,” 74, 78-81.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>118</sup> Kirwin W. Shaffer, “Red Florida in the Caribbean *Red*: Hispanic Anarchist Transnational Networks and Radical Politics, 1880s-1920s,” in *Writing Revolution: Hispanic Anarchism in the United States*, ed. Christopher J. Castañeda and Montse Feu (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 252.

<sup>119</sup> Cannistraro and Meyer, “The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism,” 255.

tobacco leaves and rolling cigars, a task which quickly became repetitive. Because *lectores* were the only source of entertainment for the workers, cigar factory owners feared their influence. They made claims that the *lectores* consciously chose to read radical literature to the cigar rollers. Wilfredo Rodríguez, a prominent *lector*, said that “they [the owners] say we became too radical, reading the news from labor organizations and political groups. We read those things, it is true, but we read only what the cigarmakers wanted us to read.” *Lectores*, then, did not create the radical environment, but rather helped it flourish.<sup>120</sup> *Lectores* did not decide of their own accord to read those works; workers voted for the reading material that they wanted to have read to them. While most prominent *lectores* were of Cuban or Spanish origin, there were several Italian ones who rose to prominence. Onofrio Palermo, an Italian from Santo Stefano Quisquina in Sicily became one of the most prominent *lectores* in the cigar factories before they were permanently banned from the factories in 1931.<sup>121</sup> They acted as a scapegoat, but nonetheless held an important place in the radicalization of cigar factory workers who neither had the resources nor the abilities to learn about such ideas by reading the newspapers themselves.

While Italians certainly participated in strikes, ran leftist publications, and worked as *lectores*, it is important to question how many Italians actually had radical tendencies. With over 2,000 foreign-born Italians, and thousands more born in the United States, it is difficult to imagine that a majority of them supported any strain of anarchism or socialism.<sup>122</sup> Because the leftist movement was largely centered on the cigar industry, which most Italian men had abandoned in favor of owning grocery stores, fruit stands, barber shops, and acquiring real estate by 1910, the majority of Italians were most likely apathetic to the strikes if not hostile towards

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<sup>120</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, “Immigrant World,” 102-103.

<sup>121</sup> Lillie R. Tagliarini, “Letter to Dr. Mormino,” May 7, 1989.

<sup>122</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, “Immigrant World,” 55.

them.<sup>123</sup> The 310 Italians that supported *La Resistencia* became statistically insignificant, and even then had constituted about 23 percent of the then-Italian population – an impressive statistic, but far from a majority of Italians in Tampa.<sup>124</sup> Over the course of that decade, Italians began to buy and develop the land in Ybor City, eventually becoming “the biggest property owners.”<sup>125</sup> The anarchist newspaper *La Voz del Esclavo* wrote that: “The factory owners are not our only enemies; ... the landlords evict workers without any compassion.”<sup>126</sup> The anarchist newspapers, which argued against racism, calling it “the erroneous judgment of how we view ourselves,” believed that all manners of social and economic oppression were related to class.<sup>127</sup> In this way, they did not feel connected to wealthy Italians, as they believed them to be part of the bourgeois mechanisms that sought to suppress the proletariat.

Through *L'Unione* and their participation as *lectores*, Italians played a role in radical politics in Tampa. Despite having smaller numbers and having less representation in the cigar factories, Italians are the only non-black minority in Ybor City to have been lynched.<sup>128</sup> This does not mean that Cubans and Spaniards did not experience other forms of establishment violence; they were just as often the victims of eviction and threats as Italians were during strikes. Despite this, there is no other recorded incident of a lynching of any other non-black ethnic group in Tampa. Understanding why Italians specifically became the targets of lynching shines light on how lynchings elsewhere in the South affected relations between Italians and the local white elites. Because Italians had been the victims of lynching since 1886 and had suffered seven other incidents since then, Italians became easier targets in Tampa than Cubans or

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<sup>123</sup> Italian Business Directory (Florida) – 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1909/1910.

<sup>124</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, “Immigrant World,” 88.

<sup>125</sup> Gary Mormino, “Interview with Nick Nuccio,” June 10, 1979

<sup>126</sup> Tampa, *La Voz del Esclavo*, October 18, 1900.

<sup>127</sup> Tampa, *La Voz del Esclavo*, January 26, 1901.

<sup>128</sup> Bollettino dell’Emigrazione, “L’Emigrazione Italiana a Florida,” 1913.

Spaniards. The discourse surrounding the lynching – justifying the lynching, the threat of further action, and the mention of the Black Hand – all reflect themes that emerged following other lynchings across the South. In this way, the lynching in Tampa was following in the tradition of Italian lynchings, utilizing the same discourse and justifications. Their attempts to keep the Italian government out of local affairs would reflect similarities with other lynchings in Louisiana, as well.

Yet Tampa was still a distinct context and must be treated as such. While the Black Hand was briefly mentioned following the immediate aftermath of the lynching, the local elite feared leftism above all else. The Black Hand did not appear before the lynching, nor did it have much staying power in the press. The English-language press, which acted as a mouthpiece for the white elite in Tampa, tried to sow discord through misinformation campaigns and calls for vigilante violence during strikes. A pamphlet passed around by socialists during the 1910 strike mentioned that the non-Latin presses had been spreading the rumor that CMIU leaders were forcing “their opinion” of the strike on the union members, hoping to create a rift between the workers and its leadership.<sup>129</sup> Anarchists in 1901 similarly referred to the *Tampa Daily Times*’ articles as “venomous” and called it a publication so “wicked that it is treason to sign your name at the end of an article so cowardly and despicable.”<sup>130</sup> The *Tampa Tribune*, another English-language press that was critical of the Latin community’s strike had called for the violent repression of strike leaders, even as *La Resistencia* called for nonviolent protests.<sup>131</sup> The leftist and non-Latin presses clashed during every instance of labor unrest, each trying to paint the other as the enemy.

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<sup>129</sup> The Executive Committee of the Local Unions, “Al pueblo de Tampa en general y a los trabajadores en particular,” October 25, 1910.

<sup>130</sup> Tampa, *La Voz del Esclavo*, January 26, 1901.

<sup>131</sup> Ingalls, “Urban Vigilantes,” 60-61.

Genuine leftism did exist in Tampa at the turn of the century, and the city was part of a transnational network of leftists that expanded from Europe to the United States, and into Latin America. They had publications that outlined their political platforms and were large enough to develop disagreements and antagonisms with other leftist groups in Tampa. Above all else, fear of these groups gaining any semblance of power frightened the elite, as political gains could have proven disastrous for the traditionally Southern establishment. For this reason, the elite conspired not only with the press, but also the police in order to suppress radical activity. This culminated in the lynching of Angelo Albano and Castenge Ficarotta in 1910, whose deaths mark the only lynching in Ybor City and the final recorded instance of Italians being lynched in the United States. While the cigar industry would continue into the 1930s, the lynching in 1910 showed not only that Tampa's elites were willing to resort to extrajudicial violence to maintain control, but they had learned from the actions of Louisiana's elites in how to temper Italian militancy specifically.

## **Conclusion: Comparing Italian Immigrant Communities**

The lynching of Albano and Ficarotta mark the final recorded time that Italians were lynched in the South. Unlike in Louisiana, where 21 of 29 Italians were lynched, this was the only incident not only in Tampa, but in all of Florida. This alone sets the two states apart, but while both states attracted significant Italian populations, their experiences greatly differed. Among these differences is the reasons for lynching in the first place. While murder is superficially the reason for most lynchings of Italians, the underlying paranoia beneath the surface is what sets Louisiana and Tampa apart. The specter of the Black Hand or the Mafia is something that plagued Louisiana newspapers following the infamous lynching of 1891 and any crime committed by Italians after it; so pervasive was this idea that even the FBI believed there was Mafia presence in New Orleans as early as the 1880s.<sup>132</sup> It was not a convenient excuse to justify violence against Italians – sugar planters depended on them for labor as freedmen immigrated north and to Kansas. The “economic self-interest” that Jackson notes exists because sugar planters did not pay money to import Italians, simply to have them lynched.<sup>133</sup> This dependence would not be so easily forgotten if there was not a genuine fear of Italian organized crime.

In contrast, the lynching in Tampa was not related to the Black Hand nor the Mafia. Mentions of organized crime in Tampa were few and far between, and only spiked in the immediate aftermath of the 1910 lynching. As the Italian government noted, Albano and Ficarotta were lynched specifically because of the 1910 strike.<sup>134</sup> It was not the Mafia that concerned Tampa’s elite – it was the possibility of leftism. This concern was not exclusive to

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<sup>132</sup> Kurtz, “Organized Crime,” 356.

<sup>133</sup> Jackson, “Before the Lynching,” 304.

<sup>134</sup> Ingalls, “Urban Vigilantes,” 99.

Italians, given that Cubans and Spaniards also expressed an interest in radical labor movements, however the Southern precedent of lynching Italians made it more excusable. There were already frameworks in place that they could fall back on to justify such activity. The Black Hand was one such example. In attributing the Black Hand's presence in Tampa as a justification, they leaned on a 20-year-old history of using a nonexistent crime syndicate as a scapegoat.

The nature of the Black Hand in this instance, however, is completely different from the Black Hand that is conjured in the psyche of Louisiana journalists. Most allusions to the Black Hand in Louisiana publications mention some form of extortion, usually asking for money.<sup>135</sup> The supposed Black Hand in Tampa, however, had an agenda to continue the strike and support the leftist cause.<sup>136</sup> This conspiratorial depiction of the Black Hand shares no resemblance with that of Louisiana's, however the use of the name is understood to mean that the Italians, and by extension anyone participating in the strike, were not to be trusted. In simply saying that the Black Hand had come to Tampa, it becomes justifiable for Albano and Ficarotta to be lynched. Any mention of organized crime in Florida, furthermore, is a scapegoat when the actual concern of the Tampa elite was the increasing labor militancy of the working class. Therein lies the difference between lynchings in Louisiana and Florida: the Louisiana elite feared an organized Italian criminal syndicate, whereas the Tampa elite feared the possibility of leftism gaining a foothold in the city.

Another notable difference between Italian immigration in Louisiana and Florida is the failure of Italians in Louisiana to leave behind any legacy of an organized labor movement.<sup>137</sup> In many ways this is not the case for a lack of effort; Italians both in New Orleans and in the sugar

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<sup>135</sup> Thibodaux, *The Thibodaux Sentinel*, March 12, 1910.

<sup>136</sup> Ocala, *The Ocala Evening Star*, October 3, 1910.

<sup>137</sup> Gabaccia, "Militants and Migrants," 112.

parishes formed mutual aid societies; police rounded up suspected Italian anarchists; they “collected money for the imprisoned Carlo Tresca,” an Italian American labor organizer.<sup>138</sup>

Despite all of this, Louisiana is not remembered for having an enduring labor movement in the way that Tampa, Chicago, and New York are. There is very little evidence of any sort of labor demonstrations in Louisiana’s sugar parishes organized by Italian immigrants.

Thomas R. Chaney’s homestead provides a good example of this. Chaney, a former Union soldier from Connecticut who purchased land in St. James Parish in 1893, employed several Italians on his homestead.<sup>139</sup> In 1895, his associate Benjamin Pring mentions that heavy rain had made it difficult to work during the cultivating season and that they would have to cut wages for the second time that year. He says that the Italians had accepted the lower wages, but the pay cut down to 50 cents a day for male laborers, and 45 cents for female laborers resulted in the Italians threatening to go on strike.<sup>140</sup> This threat presumably never came to fruition, as Pring and Chaney’s letters never mentioned it again. The lack of solidarity among Italians in the sugar parishes made it difficult for them to make better wages, as they were earning 25 cents per day less than white laborers on Chaney’s plantation.<sup>141</sup>

The lack of solidarity in part has to do with the composition of the Italian laborers, and their relationships with black workers. Most of the migrants who worked in the sugar parishes were from Sambuca di Sicilia, and Gabaccia notes that not only did they have little experience in labor protest, but labor activists from Sambuca also did not ever travel to Louisiana.<sup>142</sup> Their status as temporary migrant workers who participated in the planting season before heading back

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 109, 111.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas Chaney, *Thomas R Chaney Papers, 1863-1916*, December 28, 1893.

<sup>140</sup> Benjamin Pring to Sean Chaney, *Thomas R Chaney Papers, 1863-1916*, January 28, 1895.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Gabaccia, “Militants and Migrants,” 101.

to Italy, New Orleans, or other places to find seasonal work also made it difficult to develop a sense of class consciousness. Furthermore, their relationship – or lack thereof – with black workers contributed to the lack of a labor movement. As Gabaccia notes, “ethnic loyalties prevailed,” meaning that black and Italian laborers had very little interaction with one another.<sup>143</sup> At times, they even felt like they were in direct competition with one another.<sup>144</sup> The linguistic barrier between the two groups made it especially difficult, and their contractors also did not give them living quarters near each other.

Ybor City, on the other hand, had a legacy of labor militancy that even precedes the arrival of Italians in the city. Cuban and Spaniards had been striking years before, even at the beginning of the factory town’s existence. Many of the Cubans were “committed anarchists and socialists,” who had emerged as early as the 1870s in Cuba.<sup>145</sup> The Spaniards, largely from Galicia and Asturias, had turned to anarchism as a result of “harsh living conditions among the poor” caused by *caciques* (bosses) who consolidated power in the regions.<sup>146</sup> Italians coming to Tampa were not strangers to leftism, either. The *fascio* movement in Sicily emerged as a response to all manners of issues ranging from taxes to expropriation of land and the decrease of wheat prices.<sup>147</sup> When the movement was crushed by Italian prime minister Francesco Crispi, who used military force to suppress the popular, Marxist uprisings, many of them came to Tampa. Italian anarchist Alfonso Coniglio is one such example, having fled Sicily in 1896 when the *fascio* movement was defeated.<sup>148</sup> As a result of their previous experiences with leftism,

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<sup>143</sup> Gabaccia, “Militants and Migrants,” 104.

<sup>144</sup> DeLucia, “Getting the Story Straight,” 215.

<sup>145</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, “Immigrant World,” 77.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>147</sup> Gabaccia, “Militants and Migrants,” 55.

<sup>148</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, “Immigrant World,” 116.

Latins in Tampa contributed to a transnational network of anarchists and socialists, who were willing to fight for the dream of abolishing capitalism.

These Italian immigrants brought their knowledge of labor organization with them and were joined by Cubans and Spaniards with similar experiences. This contrasts greatly with Italians in Louisiana's sugar parishes, who had no experience of their own and suffered from language barriers and could not organize with their fellow black laborers.

The experiences of Italians in Louisiana and Ybor City, FL have many differences which make them distinct, but they are nonetheless bound by several factors. They faced adversity in the form of the local elite, who tried to depict them as a savage, unassimilable race. These stereotypes of barbarity were questioned by the Italian government when they investigated these acts of vigilante justice, saying that: "Events such as have occurred in New Orleans, and now at Hahnville, cannot be tolerated by nations having any pretense of civilization."<sup>149</sup> The Italian government understood that the discrimination that Italians faced showed the hostility and savagery that the lynch mob could unleash was far worse than anything that the specters of the Black Hand or leftism could invoke. Despite the existential threat of the lynch mob, Italians were able to carve out a living for themselves, and at times even a sense of community. The resilience of Italian immigrants to pick up their lives, face discrimination by their new country, and still manage to provide a living for themselves and their family is something that were experienced in both Louisiana and Ybor City. Their experiences were in many ways different, but both communities were able to carve out their own niche and find a degree of success that they may not have been able to find elsewhere.

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<sup>149</sup> Shreveport, *The Progress*, August 15, 1896.

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