

Crossings 29

The Transplants

The Transplants

Giuseppe Prezzolini

Edited and translated by

Fabio Girilli ~~Garassi~~ e Garasi (with one ss)



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Coelum non animi mutant qui trans mare currunt.

HORACE

FOREWORD

In this volume I collected some of my writings about the Italians who migrated to North America. I decided to compile them here for I believe they contain observations that differ from other/more conventional approaches and analyses. Most of those who have come to know and have written about these migrants and their descendants have been impressed by their economic success. I certainly do not deny the end result, and I am happy for it. However, I have been struck mostly by the price they had to pay to achieve it. A large portion of them has triumphed over the trials of migration, but at the cost of becoming mutilated in the language and, therefore, the spirit. At the same time, their vanity has been enlarged by the newly acquired economic status that, in their eyes, is higher than what they would have ever achieved in yesterday's Italy, a country that doesn't exist anymore and in whose recent development they have not taken part.

I also believe that the term *Italo-americani* does not reflect their true nature in that they are not the children of a mixing of races and cultures. Rather, they are the product of adaptation. In this process they have simultaneously lost touch with the people they originated from without melting with the people who took them in. The result, therefore, is not the fusion of Italian and American qualities; it is instead the confusion of different habits and the smoothening of sharp edges by two cultures that are complete strangers to each other. In other words, they are not the sum of two wholes, but, rather, the remainder of two subtractions. The migrants have not preserved Italy inside nor have they added America. They are like a seed that, planted in the soil, decomposes in order to give birth to a new plant. I have no doubt that something new and important will be born of them, as several examples already suggest, but in this moment the Italian seed is only in the process of decaying.

When I am asked for a definition of the term Italian American, I don't indulge in the lawyerly and superficial criterion of citizenship, according to which Italian Americans are people who were born in Italy¹ or children of Italian-born parents who were in turn born in this country. To me, Italian Americans are those who cannot speak well any

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of the two languages, either Italian or English, and are satisfied with a vernacular of a few hundred words dealing with the daily material existence, with no nuances or emotions, often pronounced with a bruish accent, unappealing both to Italian and to American ears.

The majority of Italian Americans, after leaving an ungrateful nation and finding an even harsher one, could no longer keep up with the events and the transformations of the country of origin, and often not even with those of their new home. Nothing had prepared them for the new land. They shared no common ideals with it; no moral, religious or political perspectives and not even similar customs in sports, food or religion. Their economic status improved mostly because America was growing and becoming richer, carrying along on its drive for wealth and power those who could survive; the very same ones who had contributed as raw material to fuel its rise.

Freedom, the most precious legacy left by the Founding Fathers and of which America is enormously proud, was an alien concept to their minds. It was a kind of freedom that had nothing positive to offer to the newly arrived. It was a vacuum. In this vacuum they had to keep going, under the strain of hunger and poverty. The fact that only a few of them, often the most courageous ones, ended up choosing crime is truly admirable. As I wrote in several occasions, any Italian who migrated to the United States and did not become insane or turned out a criminal, or did not get killed as a young man, is truly worthy of admiration.

Those who did survive, even if they were good people, still carry the scars of the trials they had to face. First of all, let me say that all the *transplants* (my definition) are—to a certain degree—a little strange, touchy, almost paranoid and always defensive in front of every criticism. They are also very insecure, as is typical of those who speak a poorly-learned language; or use unfamiliar instruments; or walk along an unknown path they had never seen before. Mine is more a feeling than clinical, demonstrable observations, but I happened to notice these aspects many times in the course of my contacts with them. Only someone who has lived in an Italian American environment without becoming one of them and without their language and behavior can be aware of it.

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Another aspect that was noticed as far back as last century is a sort of arrogant nationalism displayed especially by the children of migrants. Edmondo De Amicis¹ observed this phenomenon in the Italians that had migrated to Argentina but the same holds true also for those who came to North America. This is probably the response to the fear of being considered foreigners, a perfectly reasonable fear in that, despite the protestations of equality by the American ruling class, the immigrants; their descendants ~~and whoever else belongs~~ to a race other than the Anglo-Saxon¹ ~~has a foreign accent and does not belong to one of the Protestant denominations~~ has always been considered a second-class citizen.

The premise of my writings is that I consider emigration to be a tragedy. (Probably it is also the first time that anyone has stated this fact unequivocally.) There are many reasons, both intrinsic and historical, that make the condition of being a migrant a tragic one. Certainly this doesn't reflect the impression of the non-migrant Italians who visited America between 1880 and 1930. In this volume I discuss some examples of how Italian travelers and journalists have described the experience of migrants, in a mixture of comments, reporting and, sometimes, caricatures.

I also denounce Italy's official policies which, in my opinion, are at odds with Italy's interests in her relation with the United States. These policies have been limited to securing the easy loyalty of the ~~transplanted~~ who, as I already said, are insecure representatives both of Italy and the United States. I have said and reported all this without a hidden agenda: with no desire to attack anyone; without rancor and with a bit of sadness. I would have been happier to report only success stories (and some instances of success indeed appear in these pages). But that is a subject that has already been covered by many others.

Notice to the Reader: Many of my observations on Italian Americans also apply to other ethnic groups in the United States, the so-called

¹ Edmondo De Amicis (1846-1908). Novelist, essayist and journalist. He is best known for the international bestseller *Cuore* (Milano, Fratelli Treves, 1886) (*Heart: A School-Boy's Journal*); and numerous travelogues including *Sull'oceano* (*On the Ocean*) (Milano, Fratelli Treves, 1889), a reportage on his journey to Argentina with Italian emigrants.

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hyphenated? There are two partial exceptions to this generalization: Jews and Irish. European Jews came to America in conditions that were completely different from those of rural populations from other countries. Most of them were modest merchants with a greater respect for intellectual life and with an understanding of ~~what~~ ^{how} important education was for survival. The Irish came to America with the ability to speak English and with centuries-long experience in politics, an experience gained in the struggle against England.

* * *

I have often been asked by Italians: "Who are these Italian Americans? Why don't they speak Italian like us? Why don't they read the same books we read? Why don't they behave like us? Why do they serve a lunch of spaghetti with meat balls as if it were an Italian dish instead of the sorry marriage of a Swedish recipe with an Italian one?" As I said earlier, Italian Americans bear the wrong name. They are not a mixture of Italy and America: they are Italians lost in America. With the ~~exception~~ ^{of very rare instances}, there is no trace of Anglo-Saxon blood in them, just a veneer of learned behaviors applied over an Italian way of life. Millions of Italian migrants, although tossed in and mixed in the American salad, are actually a barrier or a geological fault between the two countries. For a long time they have prevented Americans from learning what Italy really is. Between 1880 and 1922, Italy sent to the United States and into the world, ~~millions~~ ^{millions} of people who did not represent Italy as a cultivated country; rich in monuments and noble traditions; endowed with an intellectual elite that was on a par with the French; with industries, railroads, universities and social mores equal to those of the rest of Europe. The migrants were called *Italian* but they weren't *Italian*. They weren't the product of a national educational system that later transformed rural populations, saddled with a parochial or provincial perspective, into citizens of a country with a unique place in the world and with the legacy of a great civilization.

2 For a comprehensive discussion about the issue of hyphenation, see Anthony Tamburri's *To Hyphenate or Not to Hyphenate?: The Italian/American Writer: An Other America*. Montreal, Guernica, 1991.

The poor farmhands that left southern Italy (and often also ~~from~~ central and northern Italy) were completely ignorant of this civilization. They only knew their little villages and their only aspiration was to escape hunger. Each one of them only felt a connection with the *paesani*. The only form of social life that elevated them above those almost sheep-like forms of group identity was the Catholic religion, although its ministers were not particularly well educated and often did not live up to the ideals of a Christian life. And let's not talk, please, about the Italian diplomatic and consular authorities who, with few exceptions, from the height of their sophistication regarded this mass of migrants as an annoyance to be kept as distant as possible.

These things need to be said, albeit without hostility toward the migrants who were often good and courageous people. Italy sent these people to the United States almost like an afterthought, without thinking that in fifty years they would become the equivalent of commercial samples, used by the American ruling class to form a judgment on today's Italy! It is not these immigrants' fault if today they speak a broken Italian and their children don't speak it at all. I have long maintained that if an Italian immigrant didn't end up in an insane asylum or didn't become a gangster it was a miracle; and these miracles are millions. Their overriding goal was to escape the poverty of their forbearers and achieve positions that fulfilled the ambition to be relevant in their communities. The first generation is still present today and has shaped the Italian model in the collective mind of Americans who don't travel much abroad. Hence, the widespread representation in America of the Italian as an insignificant man with earth-tone complexion, short, poorly dressed, with huge handlebar mustache, with an organ grinder on his back in the company of a small monkey, begging for money while playing querulous Neapolitan songs. Our of the need for survival and because of lack of education, in the largest cities the first generation of Italian immigrants had to resign to jobs that Americans regarded as humiliating, such as rag picker, waiter, barber or shoeshine. Relegated to the same jobs were also people of color such as Blacks and Chinese. Only those Italians who—by luck or wisdom—settled down in the countryside were able to achieve human respectability in addition to a dignified economical position. The second generation, which in general no longer speaks the parents'

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dialects, was educated in American schools. In its midst some leaders emerged who established connections with the Republican or, more frequently, the Democratic party and became de-facto representatives of electoral clienteles identified as the Italian vote. In the last few decades the interests of Italian Americans have been represented in general by discredited individuals who stand in low esteem in the community. Their power in the Italian communities was not the result of respect or affection. Rather, it comes from the privileges and ~~hopes~~ the Italian government bestows on them. In fact, the Italian government has embraced these individuals with honors and rewards, giving them the kind of legitimacy and relevance that they could not achieve by their own merit. All Italian governments and political regimes, from the pre-Fascist liberal to the Fascist and finally the Christian Democrat³ have persevered in the same error.

In all major American metropolises that have been invaded by foreign peoples, with their differences in culture, language, religion and political customs, even those where the Italian vote is irrelevant, there are numerous ties between politicians and organized crime. Often these secret connections are denounced by the media and have thus become a sort of legend, in all likelihood darker than reality. The word Mafia today has taken the place of what was once called racket. These were loose associations of criminals who extorted illicit gains by offering protection to all sort of activities—some illegal themselves. The protection, in turn, was obtained by bribing the police, politicians and political groups and associations that benefited from those profits. This form of criminal system was not brought to America by Italians. They found it here. They simply trained at this school and perfected it. Thus, when people ask me: “What kind of people are these Italian Americans,” my answer is: “They are what you made them: America enlarged them and the Italian government legitimized them as representatives of America.”

New York, 19 dicembre 1958

³ Pre-Fascist liberal: the so-called *Giolitti Era* from 1892 to 1921 during which Giovanni Giolitti was prime minister in five different governments.

• Fascist: the Mussolini regime lasted from 1922 to 1943.
 • Christian Democrat: the largest party in every coalition government from the end of World War II (1946) until the party dissolved in 1992.

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LAMENT ON THE DESTINY OF THE EXILED¹

It is hard

to remove one's roots and rip them up from the ground / This verse goes in a separate line

where our deaths lie.

Ah, scrawny tree. / remove and replace with dead

May you not be a You are not

like the wild flower in a meadow

or the cherry tree that at ripening blushes with red pearls / This verse goes in a separate line

always there,

to die and be reborn.

It goes

from land to land

from sea to sea

and after each rip

it leaves a piece of its roots

and carries away

the naked weight of what remains

until it dies, shriveled up,

and is reborn again.

In all places abandoned:

it's the destiny of the exiled

on the sand of the shore.

ANTONIO BAROLINI²

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never to be reborn

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1 *Poesie alla Madre*, Venezia, Neri Pozza Ed., pp. 60, 1960

2 ~~Note from the Author~~: This beautiful poem by Antonio Barolini, an Italian writer who now resides in the United States, opens my book. It is, in a way, the summary of my ideas and feelings. I thank the author for his kind permission to print it here.

on the sand of the shore.
It is the destiny of the exiled
In all places abandoned:
never to be reborn.

until it dies, shriveled up,
the naked weight of what remains
and carries away
it leaves a piece of its roots...

and, at each rip
from sea to sea
from land to land
it goes

to die and be reborn.
always there,
blushes with red pears:
or the cherry tree that at ripening
like the wildflower in a meadow
You are not
Ah, scrawny tree.

where our dead lie.
rip them up from the ground
to remove one's roots and
It is hard

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Part One

~~Italian American~~

~~The Electorate and The Elected~~

The Italian American Electorate
and the Elected

NEW YORK'S EMINENCE GRISE

The long, ongoing fight in New York's political world to dethrone Carmine De Sapio¹ from the leadership of the Democratic Party, and consequently from the city's secret government, got nastier. The fight is now involving Mayor Robert Wagner² who is wrapping himself in the mantle of honorable causes, both ethical and political. But the true prize is the distribution of positions in the administration, or, to use the local term, *patronage*. The maelstrom created by the contenders has sucked in even President [John F.] Kennedy³ who is trying to stay as much as possible above the fray while at the same time keeping an eye on what is going on between his party's factions. In European countries, where the populations have been stable for centuries and national unity is a done deal, political fights tend to have a *regional* character (and Italians know this pretty well.) In America, instead, racial unity has not been reached yet. Thus, the stocks of European bodies, removed from native lands, are caught in *racial* wars, rather than *regional* ones. The current fight in New York fits this pattern: De Sapio's base is composed of Italians while the competitors are generally Irish, Jews and Anglo-Saxons.

It doesn't matter that the propaganda themes discussed in public by the political bosses are morality, democracy, the electoral systems and hegemony. The only thing that matters is the spoil system, which means jobs and prestigious posts. Something similar also happens in some European countries where the state is not the product of a true national unity. This is the case of Belgium, for instance, where political fighting often boils down to the reciprocal animosity of two races forced to live under the same roof.

Twenty years after Fiorello La Guardia⁴ had defeated it, Tammany

1 Carmine De Sapio (1908-2004). Last boss of the Tammany Hall political machine that dominated municipal politics in New York.

2 Robert Wagner, Jr. (1910-1991). Mayor of New York City for three terms, from 1954 to 1965.

3 John F. Kennedy (1917-1963). Senator from Massachusetts and 35th President of the United States from January 1961 until his assassination in November 1963.

4 Fiorello La Guardia (1882-1947). Mayor of New York City for three terms,

Hall's came back thanks to the efforts of the suave persuader Carmine De Sapio. In 1953 he supported Robert Wagner and managed to get him elected city mayor. The following year he did the same with the millionaire Averell Harriman⁶ for the governorship of the State of New York. It was an enormous success. From then on, he was considered the most powerful boss of the Democratic Party in New York and, consequently, one of the most powerful in the entire country. Tammany Hall is the common name of the Democratic political organization in New York County. Similar to Lorenzo de' Medici⁷ (no offense to Lorenzo is intended,) De Sapio doesn't care about being mayor, governor, senator or congressman. All he wants is to be the boss. He doesn't care about being popular, but he wants congressmen, senators, mayors and others to take orders from him, regardless of their political orientation, right or left. Tammany Hall has always included people with reputations for being socialists as well as reactionaries. For De Sapio it suffices that when he wants something done, the thing gets done without too much fuss. When he talks about the *organization*, it sounds like he is talking about the sacrament of the Eucharist.

He speaks in velvet tones, walks with a gliding stride and bows with curial deference. These, at least, are the personal impressions I recently gathered when I attended a ceremonial banquet. After the usual speeches were over, De Sapio came to our table to greet the big wigs. He glided around the table and it felt as if his velour-lined wings cast a reassuring shadow over us. Ostensibly, he was coming to pay homage to the people at the table, but it was rather clear that he was like the shepherd who keeps an eye on his flock. He couldn't

from 1934 to 1945.

5 Tammany Hall, founded in 1789 as the Tammany Society, was the Democratic Party's political machine that played a major role in controlling New York City's politics and promoting immigrant involvement, predominantly Irish, in New York politics from the 1790s to the 1960s.

6 Averell Harriman (1891–1986). He served as secretary of commerce under President Harry Truman and later became governor of New York (1954 to 1958).

7 Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–1492). The de-facto ruler of Florence at the peak of the Renaissance is known as *Lorenzo il Magnifico* [Lorenzo the Magnificent]. He was a politician and patron of the period's greatest artists, poets, philosophers and intellectuals.

understand exactly what I was doing among those powerful people but nevertheless he paid homage to me too. Then he moved on to the next table, to review his troops, weighing precisely the smiles, the handshakes, the words and their sincerity.

Tall, with a handsome Italian face (he shows resolve, in comparison to the faces of Irish, Anglo-Saxons and Jews in circulation,) he sports gray hair and a pair of big dark eye glasses. Given my suspicious disposition toward politicians, I thought they were a screen to hide his *window to the soul* and to prevent his true feelings from transpiring. I later discovered that he suffers from a condition that causes the irritation of the iris, called iritis. This is also the reason why his office is the only one among all New York politicians² not to be filled with smoke—like those that appear in political cartoons portraying the bosses of American democracy: De Sapio dresses like a British gentleman, smartly, without ostentation and without the histrionics of Fiorello La Guardia with his cowboy hat and Italian-anarchist cravat. Apparently, he does not own a car and lives on a modest salary from the party. He has the good taste of living on Washington Square which in my opinion is the most beautiful and poetic square in New York. Nobody has ever challenged his personal honesty. There is a curious anecdote, however. It so happened that one day a taxi driver went to the police to report that a client had left on the back seat an envelope with \$40,000 in five and ten dollar bills. Sums of cash of this entity usually pertain to illicit transactions, so this aroused some interest. This is the way gangsters and extortionists handle their accounts, since larger-denomination bills are marked by banks. Moreover, the taxi driver said he *thought* De Sapio was the client who forgot the money. De Sapio denied it and the thing died there. I don't know if anybody else came forth to claim the money or if the taxi driver ended up keeping it.

De Sapio is said to be tough when it's necessary for the good of the party. But he is also said not to harbor rancor and to be a master in the art of compromise. Like all politicians active in democratic systems, he has an excellent memory and remembers every single person he met even for a few minutes; and he remembers if they are married and have children. If he were an opera singer his natural role would be the

caricature Don Basilio.⁸ He is sharp, intelligent, a quick study and a hard worker. His usual workday lasts fourteen hours between office, meetings, visits and events. He has no days off, as is the case for all top leaders in business and politics (who are even more dedicated as workers than Marcus Aurelius⁹). His greatest passion, he claims—and it's hard to deny it—is people. He likes people. He likes to meet people. Among the various ways to meet people are lectures and speeches he gives to colleges or clubs, despite the fact that he doesn't even have an undergraduate degree. Some mean-spirited commentators alluded to the possibility that those speeches may be written by someone else. First of all, having a speechwriter compose a speech is standard operating procedure for American politicians, presidents included. Second, speeches and lectures by De Sapio on *good government* don't stray much from the usual string of boilerplate rhetoric about the ideals of democracy (as opposed to the reality of democracy, as denounced by Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michels,¹⁰ and others).

He became the head of the Democratic organization in 1949, after it suffered a severe loss at the hand of Fiorello La Guardia in 1934 and after the election of William O'Dwyer,¹¹ a non-Tammanist independent Democrat. De Sapio knew how to move comfortably behind the scenes in the hallways of power and in the local clubs. He was totally devoted to politics and struggled to get to the top. In

⁸ Character in Gioacchino Rossini's opera *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.

⁹ Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus (121–180). Emperor of Rome from 161 until his death in 180. He is regarded as one of the most important stoic philosophers. His work, *Meditations*, written in Greek, is still revered as a great literary achievement and a tribute to duty and public service.

¹⁰ Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923). Italian industrialist, sociologist, economist, and philosopher. He made several important contributions to the study of economics, particularly income distribution and analysis of individual choices.

• Gaetano Mosca (1858–1941). Italian political scientist and journalist. He is credited with developing the theory of elitism and the doctrine of the political class.

• Robert Michels (1876–1936). German sociologist. He wrote about the political behavior of intellectual elites and contributed to the theory of elitism. He is best known for the book *Political Parties* (1911), which contains a description of the “iron law of oligarchy.”

¹¹ William O'Dwyer (1890–1964). One-hundredth mayor of New York City, he held office from 1946 to 1950.

some circumstances he wasn't helped by his principles, or by luck. He supported the election to mayor of Judge Ferdinand Pecora who was defeated by Vincent Impellitteri,¹² an absolute zero whose only skill was to move to tears the hearts of New Yorkers playing the part of the poor victim. De Sapio had his revenge when he mastered the victory of Robert Wagner, thus interrupting the Irish domination of the city administration. The first one who had succeeded against the Irish political machine was La Guardia, who clearly had both ambition and abilities far in excess of what was needed to be the head of New York City. His election, however, was a huge disappointment for Italians. For the longest time, Italians had complained about the distribution of perks and offices in the spoil system, and in particular there had always been bad blood between them and the Irish (which is curious, since they are both Catholic). With La Guardia's election things didn't improve much for Italians, at least if we pay heed to their complaints. La Guardia wanted to choose people on the basis of their abilities and not their race. In the end, though, it was the Irish and the Jews that came out ahead.

With De Sapio the Italian faction felt protected. The unjust wheel of fortune that assigns favors to the winners (in every country in the world, Russia included) stopped by the Italian houses for the first time. Today this supremacy is once again under attack and the recent election of President Kennedy strengthens the faction dominated by the Irish. In the following chapters we will see how this has come to pass.

New York, February 5, 1961

¹² Ferdinand Pecora (1882-1971). Born in Sicily, he was a lawyer and judge who became famous in the 1930s as chief counsel to the senate's banking committee during the investigation of Wall Street's banking and stock-brokerage practices.

• Vincent Impellitteri (1900-1987). Born in Sicily, he was elected mayor in 1950, serving one term.

FOR THE FIRST TIME DE SAPIO LOSES A BATTLE

The first battle, or, should we say, the first skirmish between the Irish and the Italian factions ended on February 1, 1961, with the defeat of Carmine De Sapio. It is not a final defeat, but it is a red flag. Defections among his allies indicate that the rats are sensing that the ship may be in danger of sinking and are hurrying to jump onto another boat. The skirmish did not directly involve De Sapio and the faction that wants to get rid of him; rather, it was between De Sapio and New York's Mayor Robert Wagner. Wagner has distanced himself from De Sapio (to whom he owes his election) only recently and, as is his style, after a long hesitation. The clash did not happen in the name of De Sapio's adversaries, the so-called Reformists, but as a show of force between the mayor and De Sapio. It was a little like two fighters who, before a match, sit down at a table and, almost as a game, start arm wrestling. They clasp their hands together, place the elbows on the table and, both smiling and clenching their jaws, try to win the opponent's resistance. Naturally, around the table there gathers a small crowd of experts and friends, quiet and fully vested in the outcome. When the match is over, they spread the news. And now the news is out: Carmine De Sapio did not prevail in choosing the Manhattan deputy mayor. He was sure he had the votes, but, surprisingly, he lost. Rumors have it that De Sapio was betrayed by Daniel Weiss.¹ I don't know this individual personally, but it seems to me he is equipped with very long antennas and sensitive political radar. Carmine De Sapio is the secretary of Tammany Hall, the Democratic Organization of New York County. Basically he is the party's puppeteer in New York while Wagner is the city's mayor. Now, the Democratic system in America presents some feudal characteristics, namely loyalty to the leaders by the subordinates and protection of the subordinates by their leaders. These relationships are not codified by law but by culture and tradition and as such they are even more relevant. Elected officials have the power of appointment for several positions. President Kennedy, for instance, will have six thousand positions to fill, many of which are

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¹ Daniel Weiss (1910-1996). Elected city councilman in 1953, he was appointed judge in 1965.

highly covered. If Kennedy were to anoint De Sapia as his representative in New York, the latter would have at least some say in the president's local appointments. Again, this is not a codified role, but all presidents, with few exceptions, would be careful not to appoint anyone who has not been *approved* or *proposed* by his representative in the New York area. But now that the power of patronage is no longer in De Sapia's hands there is no reason to fear him and, consequently, De Sapia might disappear from the map of power. A boss is a boss only as long as he can dole out appointments and command obedience. (Usually he bestows onto his under-bosses the privilege of choosing or approving second-tier appointments, just like in Charlemagne's era.) It so happened recently that Mayor Wagner revolted against De Sapia and wanted it to be known that he, not De Sapia, is the boss in charge of patronage. Apparently, the move succeeded. Politics is a cruel and cynical activity and even President Kennedy in several recent cases showed that powerful allies can be used and later dumped without second thoughts, providing examples worthy of Machiavelli's ² the best pages. Before the presidential election, Kennedy came to New York and sent his brother [Robert] to mend the rip between De Sapia (and other Italian American bosses) on one side, and the Reformist faction (Irish-Anglo Saxon, Jewish) on the other. Nobody knows what kind of promises he was instructed to make on behalf of the president. What is known is that, as soon as Kennedy won the primary election, he threw De Sapia overboard (in a classy way, of course). The margin of Kennedy's win in New York took everybody by surprise. The victory was due to De Sapia's support, in opposition to the Reformists who endorsed Adlai Stevenson⁴ in the primary election. Nobody can be

2 Charlemagne (c:742-814). King of the Franks. He unified most of Western Europe under his rule and was consecrated Emperor of the Romans by Pontiff Leo III in 800 C.E.

3 Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). Renaissance politician, writer, historian and philosopher. He is considered the founder of modern political science. His masterpiece is the treatise *Il principe* [*The Prince*] (1532).

4 Adlai Stevenson (1900-1965). He served one term as governor of Illinois and was the Democratic Party's nominee for president in 1952 and 1956. Both times he was defeated by Eisenhower. He sought the Democratic presidential nomination for a third time in 1960, but was defeated by John Kennedy.

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certain, but it is arguable that without De Sapio's machine Kennedy would not have won the nomination. But electoral gratitude only lasts until Election Day. Once on shore, we pray no more.⁵

The Reformists have now been fighting De Sapio for the last two years. Their leaders are Senator Herbert Lehman (Jewish, highly respected), Ms. [Eleanor] Roosevelt (Anglo Saxon) and Thomas Finletter,⁶ a lawyer (probably Irish). What are their accusations against De Sapio? That he is a *boss* and a dictator; that he does not use democratic methods; that he chooses unworthy people based not on merit but on their loyalty in dirty-politics affairs. That is exactly De Sapio's idea of politics: forget about the character and competence of the candidates to be elected and protected. What matters is that they act like foot soldiers, obedient and loyal servants of the organization. Until recently the Reformist faction did not have what it takes to attract a majority of party members and elect its members to positions of leadership at the precinct level. De Sapio used to laugh at the Reformist agenda, but with the election of President Kennedy the situation has changed. Soon after he took office, Kennedy clearly indicated his preference for the Anglo-Saxon, Jewish and Irish reformist faction. Among the various appointments one was particularly significant: Thomas Finletter, one of the leaders of the De Sapio's opposition, was appointed Ambassador to NATO, a plum job that was given out without even bothering to notify De Sapio. The mayor, who until that moment had maintained a balanced distance between the two factions despite the fact that he owed his election to De Sapio, when he saw this, took a decisive position against one of De Sapio's candidates and managed to get his own man elected. Among those who control the elections in the electoral clubs in New York as well as in other parts of the United States where the Italian vote dominates, there is widespread suspicion that Kennedy does not like Italians. Many have

5 The original Italian proverb is: *Passata la festa, gabbaro lo santo*.

6 Herbert Lehman (1878-1963). Governor of New York from 1933 to 1942; U.S. senator from 1949 to 1957.

• Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962). Politician, diplomat and activist. She was very influential in Democratic Party's affairs and actively participated in the nation's political life. She was the wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

• Thomas Finletter (1893-1980). Lawyer, politician and statesman.

complained that Kennedy has not appointed a single Italian American to a high-level position. (Several years ago I asked a Catholic bishop how come Italian American clergymen were excluded from the top echelons of the American church. He answered: "Do you know any who are actually able and worthy of being bishops?") In a report from Washington published by *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*⁷ on January 8, the rabble-rouser Drew Pearson⁸ wrote: "People begin to notice that President-elect Kennedy has yet to nominate an Italian American to a high position. This is causing resentment among the Italian American leaders who have worked tirelessly for the Kennedy-Johnson⁹ ticket. Among them are Mike De Salle¹⁰ [sic], Governor of Ohio, one of the first politicians to endorse Kennedy; Tommy D'Alessandro [sic], the former mayor of Baltimore who convinced Maryland Governor Millard Tawes to withdraw his candidature and bow to Kennedy; Cleveland's mayor Anthony Celebrezze, credited with the landslide victory for Kennedy in his city; and Louis Mariani [sic], mayor of Detroit, who contributed to Kennedy's victory in Michigan. In addition, in

7 *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*. Daily newspaper published from 1880 to 1988. In the early 20th century it was the most popular of New York's Italian language newspapers, selling between 90,000 and 100,000 copies daily. Generoso Pope bought the newspaper in 1928 and assumed the direction. Shut down after a union dispute in 1989, most journalists united to found the new Italian daily *America Oggi*.

8 Andrew Pearson (1897-1969). Syndicated columnist.

9 Lyndon B. Johnson (1908-1973). U.S. senator from Texas, senate majority leader, vice president in the Kennedy administration. He became president after the assassination of John Kennedy and was later elected president in 1964.

10 Michael DiSalle (1908-1981). Democratic politician, served as governor of Ohio from 1959 to 1963.

• Thomas D'Alessandro (1903-1987). U.S. representative from Maryland from 1939 to 1947, he subsequently was mayor of Baltimore from 1947 to 1959. His daughter, Nancy Pelosi, is the first woman and first Italian American to become speaker of the House of Representatives, elected in 2008.

• John Tawes (1894-1979). Governor of Maryland from 1959 to 1967.

• Anthony Celebrezze (1910-1998). Mayor of Cleveland from 1953 to 1962. In the Kennedy and Johnson administrations he was secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (now Department of Health and Human Services). In 1965 he was appointed judge to the U.S. court of appeals where he served until 1980.

• Louis Mariani (1897-1987). Mayor of Detroit from 1957 to 1961.

New York there is Carmine De Sapio, the boss of Tammany Hall, who worked hard—at least during the campaign—for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket alongside former Governor Lehman and Tom Finletter. De Sapio buried the hatchet but rumors circulating in Kennedy's headquarters are sending the message that he should be ignored. The issue has been discussed recently when Carl Soreli (a Washington-based Italian American journalist with an important role in the office of ethnic minorities in Kennedy's electoral committee) was mentioned as a possible candidate for head of the consular division of the State Department. The position, which is far from being the most desirable, deals with all the U.S. consular offices abroad and the issuing of entry visas. Years ago, during the Eisenhower administration, the Republican Edward Corsi, former labor commissioner of the state of New York, was appointed assistant to Scott McLeod, who was director of the consular division. Several Italian American congressmen, including Peter Rodino¹¹ of Newark, N.J., have come out in favor of Soreli. However, it is reported that the Kennedy clan holds the opinion that all Italian Americans are "Appalachig [sic]."¹²

A very authoritative Boston weekly, the *Gazzetta del Massachusetts*¹³ (despite the Italian name the publication is written primarily in English) attributed Kennedy's negative attitude toward Italian Americans to his political fight against Governor John Furcolo¹⁴ (January 13). "It is not a secret that Italian Americans have voiced their criticism of President Kennedy for the exclusion of representatives of this powerful

11 Edward Corsi (1896-1965). Republican candidate in the 1950 New York City mayoral election. In 1954 he became special assistant to the U.S. secretary of state for refugee and migration problems.

• Peter Rodino (1909-2005). Congressman from New Jersey from 1949 to 1989. He was the chairman of the House judiciary committee in the impeachment hearings of President Richard Nixon.

12 Reference to the town of Apalachin in upstate New York where in 1957 a meeting of several dozen Mafia bosses took place.

13 Published continuously since 1896, its name was recently changed to *Post Gazette*. The original name was spelled *Gazzetta*. In 1905 it was bought by James Donnamma who turned it into the most successful and authoritative Italian American newspaper in Boston and surrounding region.

14 John Furcolo (1911-1995). U.S. representative from 1949 to 1952; governor of Massachusetts from 1957 to 1961.

voting block from the team he has assembled to govern the nation. How can one reconcile the fact that not even one Italian American has been mentioned as possible candidate for high office, with the other fact that Italian American voters have contributed so much to Kennedy's election... " etcetera. In *Sons of Italy Times*,¹⁵ another similar publication, on January 16 [1961] I found an ironic letter to the editor from an Italian American reader: "I noticed with great interest that, once again... Italians came out looking like the usual dumb Bertoldo,¹⁶ the nickname they were given—deservedly—years ago. I looked far and wide in the newspapers for news that a Salvatore or a Pasquale has been nominated to this or that position. It goes without saying that the administration has demonstrated the willingness to take into account other minorities, like Blacks and Jews. Well, in the end we can still console ourselves with spaghetti, pizza, Joe Bellino and Frank Sinatra."¹⁷

These examples document the state of mind of people of Italian descent who believe that official positions are not to be assigned based on merit, but rather as shares of the loot stolen from the enemy. I am not condemning Italians.¹⁸ Even in the Italian democracy, before Fascism, several regions complained that they were neglected if none of their representatives was part of the government. In America instead of regions there are races. Better yet: in addition to regions there are races and religions. In the end, because of all these complaints, a college professor from New York, Edward Re,¹⁹ was appointed under secretary

¹⁵ *Sons of Italy Times*: Published in Philadelphia, it currently has a circulation of approximately 15,000 copies.

¹⁶ Bertoldo is the main character of the novel *Bertoldo, Bertolino e Casanova* by Giulio Cesare Croce (1550-1609). He represents the witty peasant, with no scholarly education but full of common sense. The term is sometimes used, quite inappropriately, to indicate an easily-fooled simpleton.

¹⁷ Joseph Bellino (1938-). Former football player for the New England Patriots. Winner of the Heisman Trophy in 1960.

• Frank Sinatra (1915-1998). Arguably the most famous Italian American singers, actor, entertainer of his era and one of the greatest stars of twentieth century America.

¹⁸ Should be: Italian Americans.

¹⁹ Edward D. Re (1925-2006). Born in the Aeolian Islands, off the Sicilian

of Health and Human Services. Also, an accountant with an Italian name was appointed by the central administration. Still noteworthy is the exclusion of the most prominent Italian American politicians.

New York, February 12, 1961

P.S. In July 1962, President Kennedy appointed a notable individual of Italian origin to the important position of secretary of Health and Human Services: Anthony Celebrezze, famous for his nine scandal-free years as mayor of Cleveland. He is an honest politician, raised in a shack in a poor neighborhood, the ninth of thirteen children of an Italian family from Anzi (in the province of Potenza,²⁰ in Calabria [sic]). He was born in Italy where his parents had returned for a temporary stay. His appointment is due primarily to his active participation in the Democratic Party where he supported the Kennedy candidature against Stevenson.

coast, he was a law professor at Saint John's University before being appointed under secretary in the department of Health and Human Services by the Kennedy administration in 1961. In 1968 he was appointed to the Customs Court and in 1977 became chief judge. He served on the federal bench until 1991.

²⁰ Potenza is the capital and main city of the Basilicata region.

THE NEW YORK MAYORAL ELECTION

Carmine De Sapio, with his black eyeglasses, tall stature, light step, suave and velvety voice; but most of all with his little secret conversations not even a whisper of which reaches the public, in this moment dominates the electoral scenario of the largest American city. In a few days registered Democrats will be asked to choose the party's candidate [for mayor]. The primary elections are one of the remedies that the American democracy is trying to adopt to prevent *organizations* (a fact) from dominating the *free choice* (a myth) of the electorate. *Partitocracy* has been denounced in the United States as the nullification of democracy much earlier than in Italy, for the simple fact that the American democratic system is older. Currently, the Democratic party of New York, which dominates the political scene, is split into several factions due to the lack of a strong unifying personality. This is the result of a series of scandals, revelations and reciprocal accusations among the various contenders, the most prominent being De Sapio—who is not a candidate for office. De Sapio stays away from direct political responsibilities and is satisfied with his role as leader of the Democratic Party of Greenwich Village (a neighborhood that aspires to compete with Montmarre and via Margutta¹). As secretary of Tammany Hall he is accused of reserving for himself the power of dispensing big and small political appointments, no-show jobs, sinecures, concessions, contracts, commissions, recommendations, favors and awards. The money is hidden in the creases and wrapped in the shadows of New York City's budget, which is larger than that of the Italian state.

What have we learned from the ongoing controversy? De Sapio has been the target of accusations that he wants to be a *boss*. In politics this word comes from the history and political sociology of the United States and has a precise metaphorical meaning. It refers to local political dictatorships that were common in the middle of the nineteenth century and that continue to this day, albeit with less frequency. An example

1 Montmarre: via Margutta. Bohemian neighborhoods respectively in Paris and Rome. In the 1960s they were hangouts for artists and intellectuals; and locations of avant-garde art galleries and music clubs.

of a classical boss is James Curley² in Boston. This phenomenon is one of the many betrayals of the democratic system that flourished in particular in large cities overflowing with masses of people who did not speak English, were disenfranchised from the institutions and were willing to exchange their votes for a minimum of protection in order to survive. *Bossism* [sic] was the remedy that social reality imposed on the democratic theory according to which citizens are independent and their votes are based on conscience and knowledge. Contrary to these principles, even today these citizens vote only in order to gain favors since they do not possess the kind of conscience and knowledge that democracy presupposes. Naturally, the boss dispenses unjust protections as well as just ones. At times he is forced to use immoral or even outright illegal means. At times he has to make compromises even with the criminal element. However, over time the entire enterprise reaches some kind of natural equilibrium, so natural in fact that it is reproduced in city after city. And it tends to return even in those cases where it is temporarily uprooted by reformers, as was in the case of Fiorello La Guardia. In New York the system is at least a hundred years old (the Tweed Ring³ dates back to 1870). In a city like New York, with so many races, this physical and historic element has great importance. It is noticeable, in fact, how an Irish boss was followed by an Italian one: De Sapio.

Harlem has a Black boss, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.⁴ In thirty years, when, according to projections, the majority of the city's citizens will be Black, he may be able to see one of his successors become mayor, as happened to Fiorello La Guardia who represented Italians and Jews. In the Democratic Party, in the recent past, a coalition against De Sapio has emerged. At the helm of this Jewish-Irish opposition are

2 James Curley (1874-1958). Mayor of Boston for four terms, he also served as U.S. House representative and governor of Massachusetts. During his last term as mayor he was convicted and served time in prison.

3 The reference is to William Tweed (1823-1878). He was at the head of the Tammany Hall political club and wielded enormous power and influence in New York City's politics.

4 Adam Clayton Powell (1908-1972). He was the first African American from New York to be elected to Congress. He served in the House of Representatives from 1945 to 1971.

Ms. Roosevelt and Senator Lehman. On February 3, 1961, the current mayor of the city, Robert Wagner, joined the opposition. This is an important development since Wagner owes his election to De Sapio; and, even more damning, Wagner's mayoralty was literally one of De Sapio's creations. Ingratitude being a common feat in life and even more so in politics, this thing did not scandalize anyone. The origin of the divisions among the Democratic party's bosses is to be found in the past presidential election: some supported Kennedy, others Adlai Stevenson and others Stuart Symington.⁵ This had nothing to do with ideals: what mattered was feudal loyalty to the candidates. When his adversaries accused him of being the boss of New York, De Sapio had plenty of arguments to defend himself. With his velvety voice he reminded Senator Lehman that he heeded his requests to find a couple of positions for his nephews or cousins and the senator could not deny it. He also reminded Mayor Wagner whom he should thank for his election and the mayor did not dispute this point either. It is the typical justification used by the thief: "Yes, I stole but you held the bag." Mayor Wagner is generally considered an honest person because he didn't enrich himself through politics. However, the common complaint about him is that he has been a weak mayor. During the eight years of his administration he turned a blind eye to the festering scandals that have just now blown up (obviously, the person who lit the fuse is another candidate for mayor) while the conditions of the city have become deplorable. Criminality is up, women and children do not feel safe walking in the streets and even the police are targets of assaults and attacks by hordes of hoodligans. Disturbances with the use of firearms are growing; gangs of teen-age thugs are ever more aggressive; school buildings are decrepit, while a large number of cases of corruption among building inspectors has been discovered and tried in court. Investigations targeting the police (which are controlled by the city) have led to the dismissal of entire groups of

5 Stuart Symington (1901-1988), U.S. senator from Missouri and a strong ally of President Truman. He was one of the leading candidates for the vice presidency when John F. Kennedy was elected. Kennedy in the end opted for Senator Lyndon Johnson (Texas), who at the time was Democratic majority leader in the Senate, to secure support from the electorate in the south.

corrupt agents and officers. Lately, the mayor forced the resignation of the commissioner of the city's power and gas agency when it was found that he kept in his home, in his piggy bank, more than \$60,000 whose origin he could not explain. After he resigned, he accused the mayor of charging the city for his clothes and for Florida vacations with his family. This is incredible stuff; yet, the mayor has not sued him. For eight years none of these scandals became public. And now the firings of dishonest city employees look like a ruse for election's sake or scenes from an electoral drama. At the same time, we saw the mayor and his opponents visit the poorest and most depressed areas of the city to take stock of the situation personally. The mayor showed up in a special car, a convertible limousine that allows people to see him and approach him with complaints and pleas similarly to what used to happen with the kings of yore. His opponents do the same thing and also make promises: public housing, safety, tax reform. The press plays along with these pantomimes worthy of Aristophanes.⁶ But does it matter? The public pretends to believe; or, maybe, like people who buy lottery tickets, they think "you never know," while they crowd around the mayor or his opponents with their pleas. To be noted: in this country, where the constitution, the judiciary, teachers, preachers and even politicians are all in agreement (so they claim) in their condemnation of racism, there is visible reliance on the race factor for electoral purposes. Competing slates of candidates always contain at least an Irish, a Jew and an Italian. And the person who, more than anyone else should be against racism, Mr. Powell, the Harlem representative, has used most of his time complaining that there are too few Black candidates, in a percentage that is much lower than that of the Black population. The theoretical premise of democracy is merit not race or religion: we can thus conclude from this that political education has not penetrated very deeply.

When the scandal of the horrible conditions of school buildings came to light, many members of the board of education were forced to resign by the governor. That is when we found out their names: complete mediocrities. In a great city that is a major hub of the film

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6 Aristophanes (446-386 BCE). Playwright in ancient Athens also known as "the father of comedy." His works ridiculed the rich and powerful.

and television industry; where the most important publishing houses are located; where some of the greatest newspapers are published; with the headquarters of the best and most popular magazines and with some of the best schools of education in the country, the board did not have one single eminent personality. One more interesting detail: membership in the board is a non-paid position. Yet, the members make decisions about millions and millions of dollars on education-related contracts, from construction projects to the purchase of books, pencils and notebooks. What is one supposed to think?

American metropolises have attracted heterogeneous masses of foreigners; unfocused and disorganized; distant both in spatial, cultural and religious terms from their origins; uprooted from their traditions and not yet fully integrated in the new venues. The democratic system is simply inadequate to the task of selecting the best and the brightest. The job of politician is at the same despised and feared and people think that a jack-of-all-trades who decides to pursue a political career is up to no good. However, people are glad someone is doing the job and takes care of deciding, bossing, opposing and pushing. Since the official salary of politicians is very low, people tolerate it when they make money on the side, provided that they do not cause a scandal. Based on what we heard in this period of electoral revelations, the practice of kickbacks, cash donations and shady deals is rather common among vendors and suppliers on one side and public employees on the other, even between criminals and law enforcement agents. It's understandable why many try to fatten their paycheck: taxes are so high that nobody could survive only on a salary. So, everyone pads expense accounts and overcharges private or public employers. Each abuse encourages the next abuse, and soon it's all downhill, careening toward the very serious ones. The entire system encourages lies and the all-pervading lies ensure that corruption does not bother any conscience.

There are other competitors in the battle between Arthur Levitt—the De Sapio-Tammany Hall candidate—and the incumbent Mayor Wagner. Judge Louis Lefkowitz⁷ is the Republican Party's sacrificial

⁷ Arthur Levitt (1900-1980). New York state comptroller from 1955 to 1978. In 1961 he challenged unsuccessfully incumbent Mayor Robert Wagner.

• Louis Lefkowitz (1904-1996). Member of New York state assembly and

lamb, with zero possibilities of winning. There is also an Italian, an honest person, Lawrence Gerosa,⁸ who was and still is city comptroller and who, in the last couple of years, has been opposing the ~~anything-goes~~ fiscal policy of the mayor and has scored a significant success in a referendum concerning the issuing of city bonds. The mayor wanted to float a bond for school buildings (from which, as we can guess, many would have profited handsomely). Despite the fact that Gerosa is personally very popular, it is rather improbable that he will be able to get the Democratic nomination for the simple fact that the Democratic Party's machine is not in his hands.

In the smallest Swiss cantons and in small communities in America, like Vermont, where everybody knows everybody else, where the citizens come from a homogeneous background and the problems are not particularly complicated, direct sovereignty by the people is simple, natural and beneficial. But in American cities, those huge caldrons that are similar to imperial Rome, the system is less and less able to work without big unbalances. One of the true counterebalances is a free press, and often this works well. But how many people in this city, so frazzled and high-strung; so rude and badly put-together; so scarred by primitive passions and fertile with bright minds (too bright and therefore sterile); how many will be moved to action or even empathy by an article in a newspaper? Or more precisely: how many actually read the newspapers' opinion pages or the editorials? But then, maybe this is why living in New York is so exciting. It is enjoyable because the city is not made of model citizens. If it were dominated by the spirit of the Salvation Army, it would be morally boring. Fiorello La Guardia was certainly an honest person and he was the only administrator who did not allow the city's treasury to be looted—with the help of another honest Italian administrator, Portfolio⁹ [sic]. Mayor James Walker¹⁰ was

municipal judge. He served as New York state attorney general (1957 - 1969).

8 Lawrence Gerosa (1894-1972). Businessman, city comptroller under Mayor Robert Wagner. Dropped by Wagner in 1961, Gerosa ran as an independent as the candidate of "God and the Good People."

9 This name is most likely the result of an oversight by the author or the proofreader.

10 James Walker (1881-1946). In 1926 he became mayor of New York City after

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a merry and funny Irishman who accepted \$50,000 from friends as if it were a necktie, and in turn gave away cars to actresses and other beautiful women as if they also were neckties. All things considered, the people of New York loved Walker more than La Guardia.

New York, September 3, 1961

P.S. Carmine De Sapio was beaten not only in Tammany Hall but even in his own Greenwich Village district. He has since disappeared from the scene.

defeating incumbent John Hyland in the Democratic primary. In 1929 he was re-elected after defeating Fiorello La Guardia.

HIS NAME IS FOX BUT HE WILL BE A WOLF

The Italian Governor of Massachusetts

The governor¹ was punctual for the interview and he stayed longer than he had originally scheduled for the interview, a sign that he was interested in my questions and was enjoying answering them. He only refused to answer one of them. Later, I will explain why.

In a large, white square room the governor was sitting with a portrait of President Dwight Eisenhower² behind him. He is a Republican. His secretary's last name is Ghibelline [sic]. When I asked if she knew what that meant, she blushed and said yes, but since I am a professor and I am entitled to show off, I went on to provide a lengthier explanation. The waiting room is open to the public and accessible through an unmanned elevator. A police officer in a white shirt standing in front of the building gave me directions to the floor and the room number. No one stood on ceremonies. In the waiting room there were two couches, a couple of chairs, the secretary's table, three gentlemen who were talking in hushed tones and two women sitting quietly on a couch. From the wall the portraits of former governors were looking down on us: Tobin, Allen, Bradford.³ In a few years John Volpe will join them. The electorate chose him because he is a *wolf* (not a *fox*) who promised to scare off the corrupt who have dominated after the solemn and boring but honest Yankees had disappeared from the political scene replaced by the cheerful and dishonest Irish. (Not all of them are, of course, but so many that Boston has become the standard background for novels and academic studies on corruption in major American cities.)

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1 John Volpe (1908-1994). Governor of Massachusetts from 1961 to 1963 and from 1965 to 1969. He was U.S. secretary of transportation from 1969 to 1973 when he was nominated ambassador to Italy, a position he held until 1977.

2 Dwight Eisenhower (1880-1969). President of the United States for two terms from 1953 to 1961. A five-star general, during World War II, he was supreme commander of the Allied Force in Europe

3 Maurice Tobin (1901-1953).
• Frank Allen (1874-1950).
• William Bradford (1590-1657) or Robert Bradford (1902-1983).

4 *Volpe* in Italian means fox.

My first question was: "In your opinion, what is the major contribution made by Italians to the United States?" I came up with this question because in the course of *colonial banquets*,⁵ the cliché of Italians' *contribution* is always present. My impression is that the issue is always handled with great exaggerations, maybe due to the banquets' *communicative warmth* and also as a result of the combination of two national rhetorical standards of excess: the Italian and the American. In certain occasions I reacted to the rhetoric saying: "If I may, why don't you talk about the *contribution* that the United States has made to Italian immigrants, helping them up the economic ladder and giving their children a free education, the kind of education that their parents and grandparents never received?" The governor answered: "In the initial phase of Italian immigration the contribution was primarily in the form of sweat and hard labor. Most of them were poor and uneducated and their main concern was to provide sustenance to their families and give their children the basic education they lacked. Their devotion to family life was exemplary, dominated by the attachment to their faith and with of so many examples of honesty and decency. In those years the contribution was smaller than what the size of the population could have given. But in recent years things have changed. Italians have come of ages; they participate in the political and cultural life and have achieved prominence in the arts and music. Many second-generation Italian Americans have positions in the sciences, many are engineers and a large number—women as well as men—are in the medical profession. Others in the legal field have given America outstanding lawyers and judges, worthy of those from the ancient University of Bologna..."⁶

⁵ The term refers to the Italian *colony* in America. The term *colony* derives from ancient Greek and it originally indicated a new settlement of people coming from a different land and still maintaining strong ties with the country of origin. The term took on a new meaning with the rise of European colonial empires in the world. *Colony* then came to indicate a land and a people subjugated by a foreign power and deprived of political self-determination in its own land. Most likely here the term sarcastically points to people stranded far away from the home country, relics of a past and distant culture.

⁶ The University of Bologna was founded in 1008 and is the world's oldest institution of higher learning with continuous operation without interruptions.

This answer was both sober and realistic with a distinction between the first extraordinary efforts of the poor immigrants, primarily focused on giving a leg up to their children, and the following efforts of the new generations with their diplomas. I liked it. The governor, however, skipped my second question. “Which is stronger among immigrants: the bond with the Catholic Church or that with their country of origin?” It was a provocative question and of course I knew it was. But I didn’t want to limit myself to questions that would only provide the opportunity to open the faucets of clichés. A press secretary had already warned me that the governor probably would not answer because “it wasn’t sufficiently clear.” I remarked that I do have a lot of faults, but lack of clarity is not one of them. If anything, I have a reputation for being even too clear, so clear in fact that sometimes people get offended. The secretary was a bit of a hypocrite for she knew very well what I wanted to know. In any case, I have already come to my own personal conclusions on this: I have always maintained that Italian immigrants in America were helped much more by the Church than by the [Italian] state, more by priests than by consuls. I am referring here to the first period of immigration, the oceanic current that ripped away from the Italian nation the living and the dead, the healthy and the rotten, the honest and the criminal. Although the immigrants did not have an education, their religious culture was superior to their civic culture. The governor realized he had to provide an explanation for his reluctance. He told me what I already knew: that in America religious issues are not to be discussed and everybody must accept the premise that all individuals are equal, regardless of their faith... This was not a real answer, but it revealed his abeyance to this American taboo, necessary to ensure that so many peoples from all corners of the globe, with different ideas and faiths, can live together.

My third question was: “You have been elected with a *personal vote* and as a protest against the general corruption of the public administration. Now, what will you be able to accomplish, and what do you intend to do?” Here the governor was on friendly ground. It was the kind of question he would get from one of his voters. He acknowledged that there was little he could do, but that he would try hard nevertheless, with diligence and conviction. How would he do

it? The readers should know that John Volpe's victory was personal and not a victory of the Republican Party. Boston has a majority of registered Democrats and is the incubator where President Kennedy grew up. Volpe won because of his charisma and because he is a new face in politics, despite his long activity in Republican circles. "Vote for the Man" was his campaign slogan. In American politics there is always a substantial group of independent voters who end up deciding the outcome of elections, often switching from one party to the other. Moreover, in every party there are voters who, regardless of their registration, often ignore affiliation and follow other principles. It is likely that in the case of Volpe a few hundred thousand voters of Italian origin officially registered as Democrats chose to vote for the Republican candidate. After all, he is Italian and he has charisma. While I usually do not have much feeling for politicians, this time I felt an attraction for this *abruzzese*,⁷ not particularly tall but solid and similar to the Roman soldiers carved on Trajan's Column.⁸ Apparently he blames his stature on the fact that as a child he used to carry a *còfano*⁹ on his head, as in the past both men and women in Abruzzi used to. The women acquired from this practice a solemn and stately posture and sometimes I still see examples of it in older women in the streets of Little Italy. Men became stocky with powerful backs and shoulders.

"What can I do?" he continued. "Not much. First of all, I promised to myself that I will give an example as a person who does not use political power for his own personal interest, but governs in the interest of the people. I hope this example will inspire others to do the same. I would also like to inspire a sense of responsibility among public employees who are paid by the people to serve the people. I will try to eliminate waste and spend public money with caution. I requested that all the administrators abide by a code of ethics. I pushed for tough rules: I didn't get everything I wanted, but at least we made some

7 *Abruzzese*: adjective; from the Abruzzi region of Italy.

8 The Trajan's Column, located in the Trajan's Forum in Rome was erected in honor of Emperor Trajan in 113 to celebrate his conquest of Dacia (now Romania).

9 *Còfano*, is the term used locally to indicate either wicker baskets or water jugs (copper or terracotta) that people—mostly women—used to carry balancing them on their heads.

progress. Just look at what kind of position I find myself in. I am the only politician from my party to get elected [to a state-wide position]. Everybody else, literally every single one of them, is from the other party, the party that I consider responsible for the corruption I want to fight. How can I get them to go along with condemning the state of affairs they are responsible for?"

With these words I took leave of the governor and I am also going to take leave of the readers. The issue is important and it deserves to be discussed. Boston, which once upon a time was the center of Puritan morality, has become one of the worst venues of state and municipal corruption. How did this happen? And how is it possible that the voters' protest elected to the helm of state an honest man like Volpe while at the same time surrounding him with a lieutenant governor, a senate, a house and elected magistrates who belong to ~~and~~ were put in power by ~~the very political groups responsible for the corruption?~~

Boston, July 5, 1961

P.S. Unfortunately, Volpe was defeated for a few votes in the 1962 election.¹⁰

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¹⁰ John Volpe was reelected governor for another term from 1965 to 1969.