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From Dago to White: The Story of Sicilian Ethnic Evolution in New Orleans Amidst the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1905

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by

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ABSTRACT

The story of the Sicilian immigrants' experiences in Louisiana is a tale of racial and ethnic evolution in the face of physical threats. With the end of the Civil War, many emancipated slaves migrated to other parts of the country, which left Louisiana planters in need of laborers. Planters turned to European labor to fill that need, bringing thousands of Sicilian peasants to work on their plantations. Extreme poverty and oppression made the opportunity to emigrate highly attractive, but Sicilians found problems in Louisiana as well. In addition to low wages, crowded living conditions, discrimination, and violence, the immigrants faced the threat of disease.

Yellow fever was a recurring threat to the city of New Orleans, striking the city seemingly at random. The 1905 yellow fever epidemic dealt a heavy blow to this ethnic community; an unpredictable killer that tended to hit newcomers the hardest. This fact, along with Sicilian cultural beliefs, language barriers, and the racial tensions of the times influenced how the Sicilian immigrants reacted during the yellow fever epidemic. For the most part, the Sicilian community was insular and distrustful of outsiders, especially the doctors and authority figures. During the epidemic, efforts to educate the public about the disease slowly began to influence a transformation within the Sicilian community. This transformation influenced their racial and ethnic evolution from Dago to white, leading to, at least a partial, assimilation into American culture. This thesis is the story of that transformation.

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Special thanks also go to the New Orleans Public Library and the staff of the Louisiana Collection at the University of Tulane for their help and assistance in locating the archival materials needed for this project.

DEDICATION

This work is affectionately dedicated to Ray, Jacob, Katherine, Rosie, Caleb, Ethan and all my extended family. *Mio sempre*. It is also dedicated to the memory of my parents, Joseph and Loreta LoPresto, who would have loved it, and in honor of my Sicilian grandparents, Salvatore (Sam) and Giovannina (Ginnie) Barrale LoPresto; two among the many.

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

"Their [Italian immigrants] struggles in a new land contained more than just tales of the immigrant experiences in a strange country; they were a story of survival in a hostile environment based on their ethnic background and their inability to conform to the prejudices of whites" (Gauthreaux 2014, 14).

Overview

As Gauthreaux (2014) argued in the above quote, Italian and Sicilian immigrants faced a hostile environment that threatened their survival; however, this thesis proposes that the tale goes beyond that survival. The story of the Sicilian immigrants' experiences in Louisiana is a tale of racial and ethnic evolution in the face of physical threats. At the end of the nineteenth century, thousands of Sicilian peasants were recruited from Sicily and brought as immigrants to Louisiana to replace former slave labor. With the end of the Civil War, thousands of emancipated slaves either migrated to other parts of the country or demanded improvements on the plantations where they worked as share croppers (Baiamonte 1969; Durso 2012; Edwards-Simpson 1996; J. A. Scarpaci 1972; and V. Scarpaci 2003). Louisiana planters saw the recruitment of European labor as a means to replace the numbers of black workers who left the area for better living conditions, the possibility of higher wages, and other benefits (Baiamonte 1969; Edwards-Simpson 1996; J. A. Scarpaci 1972; and V. Scarpaci 2003). The need for cheap labor eventually convinced plantation owners, and railroad investors, to actively recruit Sicilians, and non-Sicilian Italians, to fill those labor needs (Durso 2012, 2).

Planters first looked to northern European countries for workers; however, Sicily proved a viable source of laborers because extreme poverty and political oppression made the opportunity to emigrate highly attractive to Sicilian peasants (Baiamonte 1969; Durso

2012; Edwards-Simpson 1996; J. A. Scarpaci 1972; and V. Scarpaci 2003). The call of the Louisiana planters offered an end to the plight of the Sicilian farmer, and enticed thousands of peasants to board hundreds of ships bound for the United States. After arrival, some immigrants remained in the United States, worked the harvest and then found other work. Others stayed only long enough to save enough of their meager wages to buy land back in Sicily and get out from under the control of the landowners (Durso 2012; Edwards-Simpson 1996; J. A. Scarpaci 1972; and V. Scarpaci 2003). Despite the odds against them, many immigrants managed to amass enough money to purchase land and start their own businesses in the United States (Durso 2012, 2).

Among the troubles and dangers faced by Sicilian immigrants was the threat of disease; in 1905, it was yellow fever (Durso 2012, 2; Edwards-Simpson 1996; J. A. Scarpaci 1972; and V. Scarpaci 2003). Yellow fever is a viral infection that is transmitted via the bite of the female of the mosquito species *Aedes aegypti* (Bryan et al. 2004; *The Great Fever* 2006; Humphreys 1992; Patterson 1992). It was the most terrifying disease at the time, a seasonal foe that struck the coastal cities in the United States seemingly at random, occurring one summer, but not the next. Further, although it had been proven to be carried by mosquitoes, this fact was not yet well established in 1905 New Orleans. Yellow fever was still considered unpredictable, and it could be devastating.

The 1905 occurrence, while not one of the worst epidemics in history, still dealt a heavy blow to the Sicilian community and one could argue that it had a profound effect on the immigrant community. Prior to, and during, the epidemic the Sicilian community was insular and distrustful of outsiders, especially the doctors and authority figures

(Edwards-Simpson 1996). This behavior, along with other traditional Sicilian cultural beliefs, language barriers, and the racial tensions of the time, influenced how the Sicilian immigrants were treated and how they reacted to the rest of the community (Durso 2012; Edwards-Simpson 1996; J. A. Scarpaci 1972; and V. Scarpaci 2003). Fortunately, the persistence of city and government officials in educating the public, specifically the immigrant population, slowly began to influence a change in the community. Sicilians began to accept the help of the doctors and to follow the recommended steps to eradicate the mosquitoes in their homes and in their communities (Carrigan 1988; Durso 2012; Edwards-Simpson 1996). This relaxation of cultural barriers on the part of the Sicilian community began a transformation from within that helped to shape Sicilians' assimilation into American culture as Italian Americans.

This thesis examines the role of the 1905 yellow fever epidemic in the ethnic development of the Sicilian community and argues that, along with other influential factors, the yellow fever epidemic helped to precipitate a transformation in the ethnic identity of the Sicilian community. Materials examined included primary sources such as books, articles, government documents, newspapers and publications of the day. These materials provided the means to detail the history surrounding Sicilian immigration, background information about yellow fever and its eradication, as well as how these events brought about changes in the Sicilian community.

Chapter one provides a brief overview of the story being told. It also provides the research questions and a list of the definitions used in the body of this work. Chapter two provides the literature review. It examines the anthropological concepts on race, ethnicity, and identity construction; and Italian American ethnicity used in this thesis. It

also provides a review of sources on the history of Sicilian immigration, particularly the factors that influenced emigration and immigration, as well as those on the threats faced by the immigrants after their arrival in Louisiana. Each of these topics is then expanded upon in the subsequent chapters. Chapter three details the methods and materials used in creating this thesis. It includes a brief overview, a section detailing the archives and repositories consulted, and the scope of materials used. It also discusses the process and methodology utilized in building this work. Chapter four begins detailing the story of this thesis. It provides a deeper interpretation of the factors that influenced emigration from Sicily and immigration into Louisiana, as well as a look at the prejudices with which Sicilian immigrants became viewed once ensconced in the work of the plantation. It also examines the political and economic environment in play in the late eighteen-hundreds, both in Louisiana and in Sicily. These factors played a major role in the evolution of Sicilian immigrants' ethnic identity. Chapter five examines yellow fever including its epidemiology and symptoms, through the various theories that have been believed through the years, to the discovery of the mosquito connection. Chapter six brings the previous chapters together to build a picture of the Sicilian immigrants' experiences during the 1905 yellow fever epidemic and how those experiences connect to the evolution of Sicilian ethnic identity from Dago to White. Chapter seven provides a synthesis of the concepts argued in this work. It pulls from theory and history both to reveal the evolution of Sicilian ethnicity from Dago to white.

Research Questions

1. What factors influenced Sicilian emigration from Sicily and immigration into Louisiana?

2. What dangers or threats did the immigrants face and what forms did these threats take? How did these threats influence Sicilian ethnic evolution?
3. How did native Louisianans perceive the Sicilian community?
4. How did city authorities manage the 1905 yellow fever epidemic and how did this affect the Sicilian community?
5. What is yellow fever and how did it impact the city of New Orleans in 1905?
6. How did yellow fever impact the Sicilian immigrant population and what role did the epidemic play in the Sicilian community's racial and ethnic evolution?

Definitions and Terms Usage.

1. Contagious also describes a disease that is transmitted on contact (Augustin 1909, 3).
2. Dago was a derogatory term used to refer to both Sicilians and Italians. Some sources say it derived from the Spanish name, Diego, and was used to disparage those of Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese descent (*Times-Picayune* 1898).
3. Economic mobility refers to a person's ability to move up or down between higher or lower levels of economic stature in areas of income, education, type of employment and standard living conditions (Gans 2007, 154).
4. Endemic applies when a disease is prevalent or permanently established in a particular location and local conditions enable its existence (Augustin 1909, 2).
5. Epidemic refers to any disease that infects many people in a particular location and time that spreads rapidly despite extensive efforts to stop or contain it (Augustin 1909, 1).

6. Ethnicity is used to distinguish between groups of people with shared cultural traits, and common ancestral origins.
7. Fomites are the physical materials, such as bedding or clothing that were believed to absorb or retain germs, thus enabling the spread of disease from infected persons to healthy persons (Augustin 1909, 2).
8. Infectious refers to any disease that can be transmitted through the air, water, or fomites (Augustin 1909, 3).
9. Italian when used is referring to those who emigrated from mainland Italy, both northern and southern regions. Where sources used both Italian and Sicilian to refer to the same immigrant group, I have kept to the term used by the source.
10. Negro is used in context of the historical records from which the information was taken. Where necessity called for it, the term black or blacks is used rather than the term African American to keep to the historical feel of the story being created. Use of the more modern term African American is used when referring to modern times.
11. Quarantine originally referred to the forty days that a ship had to remain isolated if anyone on board was ill, or if the ship had come from a place believed to have pestilence present. The length of time allotted for quarantine in the United States ranged from about one week to twenty days (Augustin 1909, 6).
12. Race is used as it was in 1905; to denote different groups of people based on skin color.

13. Sicilian refers to the majority of the immigrants who lived and worked in New Orleans during the yellow fever epidemic; therefore, it is used in this work as the main ethnic group of study.
14. Social mobility refers to a person's ability to move up or down between higher or lower levels in social class, status, or position (Gans 2007, 154).
15. Sporadic refers to occurrences when a disease occurs in isolated cases and in irregular patterns and its spread is easily remedied (Augustin 1909, 2)

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Secondary materials included books, articles, theses and dissertations that provided the preliminary background information about the era, the people, and the events that were the focus of this study. These sources also included anthropological discourse concerning "race" versus "ethnicity", discussions on racial and ethnic categorization, as well as ethnic development and identity construction. These theories laid the foundation on which was built the framework of ethnic identity construction amidst issues of racial and ethnic categorization and physical threat.

Anthropological Concepts

Race versus ethnicity. The terms race and ethnicity can be confusing and difficult to grasp however, having a clear definition for these terms was crucial for understanding the processes that shape racial or ethnic categorization and identity construction. Therefore, it was necessary to examine how race and ethnicity have been defined in the past. Some secondary sources used the terms race and ethnicity as synonyms. Others argued that historically, the term "race" has a biological basis on skin color while "ethnicity" refers to cultural differences (Bartlett 2001; Gravlee 2009).

Bartlett's (2001) work examined historical views of race and ethnicity. He argued that in the past, different people saw the distinctions between the two terms in different ways in contrast to modern social science's view that race is a social construct while ethnicity is not (Bartlett 2001, 3). Expressing his own opinion, he argued that race and ethnicity "both refer to the identifications made by individuals about the groups they belong to" and should be used as synonyms (Bartlett 2001, 41). Bartlett argues that the

term “race” should be “reclaimed from the racists”; that it can be made clear that race is not a biological category (Bartlett 2001, 41). Bartlett makes a valid point, however, as he also points out, there are biological differences between peoples (Bartlett 2001, 41). Some more obvious that others, especially skin color. It is those obvious differences that led to conflicts between different groups of people in New Orleans in 1905.

Conversely, Gravlee (2009) argued that one should ask if race is a “natural biological division” or a “sociocultural phenomenon” (Gravlee 2009, 47), and proposed that “social inequalities shape the biology of racialized groups, and embodied inequalities perpetuate a racialized view of human biology” (Gravlee 2009, 48). This idea allows the interpretation of the Sicilians situation in New Orleans in 1905, when people perceived natural biological differences like skin color to denote racial categorization. This makes Gravlee’s concept the most useful for this work because in 1905, social inequalities were in play, and at that time, the term “race” was seen as applying to those with similar biological attributes. The Sicilians, with their darker skin tone, were perceived as racially different from whites and black. It was the racial views of the times that fueled the political and social inequalities that served to divide whites, blacks and Italians; immigrants and citizens. Further, these social inequalities played a significant role in the development of the immigrants’ Italian-American identity, and their subsequent racial categorization as white.

Racial categorization. The racial categorization of individuals and groups can change through experience and education. In other words, experience or education can alter how one is categorized by others, as well as how one categorizes those same others in return. For example, Burkholder (2010) argued that during WWII educational

institutions in the United States affected change in the way school children racially categorized their neighbors (Burkholder 2010, 327). She cited Gillum's (1941) classroom experiment on racial tolerance. Gillum taught during World War II and at that time the term "race" was being used to denote people from different ethnic groups like Italians, Jews, Germans, French, and so on (Burkholder 2010, 327). This is an example where confusion about the two terms can arise. Gillum's use of the term "race" to denote ethnicity differs from New Orleans in 1905 when "race" was associated with skin color. Gillum's lesson was intended to teach students racial tolerance for the European descendants living in the neighborhood (Burkholder 2010, 324). The discussion taught about European-American contributions to the United States. It also discussed the idea that there were different hues of "whiteness" (Burkholder 2010, 325). This experience was meant to influence students to change the way they categorized their neighbors.

Burkholder (2010) argued that by asserting that people of European descent were Caucasian, Gillum only strengthened the association between race and color (Burkholder 2010, 327). Further, she argued that divisions between colors, even in degrees of whiteness, were common in the United States during the twentieth century (Burkholder 2010, 325). These degrees of whiteness came into play during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in New Orleans. The Sicilians, the Irish before them, were seen in this divisive manner, not quite white or black. This racial categorization put them somewhere in between the two, placing them within their own category of whiteness. Events like the yellow fever epidemic highlighted those differences and helped prompt Sicilians' desire to be seen as white.

Ethnic categorization and identity construction. Like racial categorization, ethnic categorization can be influenced by experiences. For example, Gans (1979) argued that ethnic development is influenced by what goes on "in the larger society" as well as what occurs among the ethnics themselves (Gans 1979, 16). In other words, the "motivating force of experience and local circumstances", plus social relationship patterns influence ethnic development (Barth 2000, 27). Gans (1979) also argued that how ethnics are treated by society in future encounters plays a part in ethnic development (Gans 1976, 16). Experience and education, however, are not the only stimulus to change in how individuals or groups racially or ethnically categorize others. Jaspal and Cinnirella's (2011) Identity Process Theory is based on understanding the motivations behind identity construction. Identity Process Theory proposes that "structure is regulated by the assimilation-accommodation process and the evaluation process" (Jaspal and Cinnirella 2011, 505). In other words, ethnic identity develops through the process of becoming a part of a community, as seen through one's own interpretive lens and motivations, amidst those outside forces [or threats] that inspire change. Further, they argued that one needs to consider the motivations and "identity threat" that lie behind the construction of one's ethnic identity (Jaspal and Cinnirella 2012, 504).

Writing in a similar vein, Nagel (1994) offered the opinion that ethnic identity resulted from individual choice as they defined themselves and others (Nagel 1994, 152). One can argue that Nagel's (1994) "choices" are similar to Jaspal and Cinnirella's (2012) "motivations" that inspire one to choose one path over another. Becker (2015) also proposes that people's choices play an important role in their ethnic identity construction. For example, his study found that Albanians in New York City, motivated by a desire to

work in the Italian area, assumed an Italian ethnic "persona" in order to do so (Becker 2015, 111). This example of assumed ethnicity is evidence of how an individual, or group of individuals from one ethnic group, can choose to "transition" into another ethnic group. It was their own personal choices or motivations, influenced by their economic environment that prompted the change.

Italian American ethnicity and assimilation. There are several works that specifically study Italian American ethnicity (Alba 1999; De Fina 2014; Vecoli 2000), as well as linguistics and identity construction (De Fina 2008). De Fina's (2014) article examines ethnic identity construction and discusses prior studies including Alba's 1999 study on assimilation among groups of European descent, and Vecoli's 2000 study in which he asks, "Are Italian Americans just white folks?" (Alba 1999 and Vecoli 2000, as cited by De Fina 2014, 254). Further, De Fina's 2008 work on narrative and language discusses how stories shared among Italians help members with identity and association with being Italian (De Fina 2008). De Fina speaks to how Italian Americans maintained their cultural identity while "cultivating their Italian-American identity" (De Fina 2014, 259). Several scholars argue that the formation of American identity is influenced by "assimilation" experiences (Alba 1999; De Fina 2008, 2014; Vecoli 2000).

History of Emigration and Immigration

Emigration from Sicily. Forces beyond the control of Sicilian peasants influenced emigration from their homeland (Baiamonte 1969; Benjamin 2006; Durso 2012; Edwards-Simpson 1996; Gauthreaux 2014; Scarpaci 1972; Scarpaci 2003). First, the peasants lived in extreme poverty caused by agricultural problems and oppressive taxation imposed by the Sicilian government (Baiamonte 1969, 2; Benjamin 2006).

Some scholars argued that Sicily's agricultural woes could be partially blamed on the United States, whose post-Civil War exports to Europe led to a decreased need for Sicilian products (Benjamin 2006, Kindle 5784). Second, most of the land was managed by oppressive overseers [the *gabellotto*], for wealthy owners, under a corrupt system that peasants could not afford to join (Durso 2012, 13). This left them indebted to both the *gabellotto* and the usually absentee owners (Durso 2012, 13). Third, Sicily's export business had taken another hit when European markets went into recession causing Sicily's export of wheat and sulfur to drastically decrease (Benjamin 2006, Kindle 5784). These falls in export meant less work and more dire poverty for the Sicilian peasant, which naturally increased the lure of emigration.

Immigration to Louisiana. The end of the Civil War also led to the labor dilemma that plagued southern American planters (Baiamonte 1969; Durso 2012; Edwards-Simpson 1996; Gauthreaux 2014; J. A. Scarpaci 1972; and V. Scarpaci 2003). Emancipation gave former slaves choices they never had before; they could choose where to live and work. Many left Louisiana for Chicago and other cities, seeking better economic opportunities (Durso 2012, 10). Those who remained in the state demanded better wages and benefits, threatening strikes if their demands were not met (Durso 2012, 10). This migration of former slaves was often cited by planters as the catalyst to the labor problems they faced after the Civil War (Baiamonte 1969; Durso 2012; Edwards-Simpson 1996; Gauthreaux 2014; J. A. Scarpaci 1972; V. Scarpaci 2003). Planters claimed a need to seek workers from other places in the United States and northern European nations and began to actively recruit people from these areas. Eventually, Sicily was added to the list of viable sources for laborers from among the peasantry and

efforts to bring in Sicilian immigrants began to increase (Baiamonte 1969; Durso 2012; Edwards-Simpson 1996; Gauthreaux 2014; J. A. Scarpaci 1972; and V. Scarpaci 2003). Sicilians responded by the thousands; they came expecting new opportunities and found them but, those new opportunities came with unexpected risks as well.

Threats faced after immigration. The immigrant community faced discrimination, prejudice and violence, as well as racial ambiguity that in some cases led to the lynching of Sicilian immigrants. (Baiamonte 1969; Durso 2012; Edwards-Simpson 1996; Gauthreaux 2014; J. A. Scarpaci 1972; V. Scarpaci 2003; Vellon 2003). Edwards-Simpson's (1996) work provides a glimpse at the violence faced by Sicilian immigrants in 1891 (Edwards-Simpson 1996). She recounts the events that led up to the lynching of eleven Sicilian immigrants. The Sicilians had been accused of murdering the police chief David Hennessy; they were found innocent by a white jury on March 13, 1891, which enraged the public. On March 14, prominent New Orleans citizens led a vigilante mob to the prison, overwhelmed the deputies and gained access to the prisoners (Edwards-Simpson 1996, 115). Edwards-Simpson's description of what happened next reads like a modern thriller as, "the self-appointed avengers then broke into small groups in search of their prey" (Edwards-Simpson 1996, 115). Some were shot where they were found; one other was dragged from the building and hung on a lamp-post (Edwards-Simpson, 115). Other sources describing this same incident tell how that particular body had also been used for target practice (Durso 2012; Gauthreaux 2014).

The Sicilian community was now seen as a group of criminals capable of any kind of illegal or monstrous act. The native-born of New Orleans aimed their anger at the entire Sicilian community. The phrase, "Who killa da chief?" became almost a slogan,

being demanded of Sicilians of all ages and genders (*The Great Fever* 2006*).* The violence perpetrated against Sicilian and non-Sicilian Italians, fueled distrust and reinforced barriers between the immigrants and the native population. These barriers played a significant role in the later 1905 yellow fever epidemic.

Discrimination in the form of low pay, poor housing, and social exclusion also plagued the newcomers (Durso 2012; Edwards-Simpson 1996; Gauthreaux 2014; J. A. Scarpaci 1972; V. Scarpaci 2003; Vellon 2003). Their willingness to work alongside African-Americans in the fields and on the docks, and their unfamiliarity with Jim Crow Laws left them as vulnerable to discrimination as their African American co-workers (Baiamonte 1969; Durso 2012; Edwards-Simpson 1996; Gauthreaux 2014; Scarpaci 1972; Scarpaci 2003). This placed them in the lowest hierarchy in the society of New Orleans, either just below or just above African-Americans in status, but most definitively non-white (Durso 2012; Edwards-Simpson 1996; Gauthreaux 2014; Scarpaci 1972; Scarpaci 2003; Vellon 2003).

Vellon's study of immigrants in New York also looked at the immigrants' personal interpretation of race, particularly how they viewed themselves racially upon coming to America, and the many factors that contributed to their becoming white (Vellon 2003). He argued that "internal and external events" convinced Italians of the need to perceive themselves as "white" (Vellon 2003, 196). He also argued that the lynching of immigrants revealed to the immigrant population how racial hierarchies in the United States worked, which reinforced the idea of becoming white (Vellon 2003, 5). In other words, the immigrants learned that if they wanted to be accepted by the

American-born residents, they needed to change the native Louisianans perception that Italians and Sicilians were just another black race.

Connections

The anthropological concepts above helped frame the story of the Sicilian community's transformation from Dago to white. To put it in perspective to the time frame of this thesis, I propose that the evolution of Sicilian ethnic identity from dago to white resulted from the choices that Sicilian immigrants made about their own ethnicity, the racial tensions of the day, their experiences during the yellow fever epidemic, and their personal motivations to change their standing in the community.

Prior research and historical documentation provided a basis for interpretation of the experiences of the Sicilian immigrants within the historical setting, while allowing for anthropological interpretation of those experiences. This thesis argues that the combined influences of poverty, discrimination, prejudice, and violence drove the Italian immigrants' response to the yellow fever epidemic, which in turn influenced the development of the community's ethnic identity. This new identity was one which then allowed them to carve out their own "niche in society" (Durso 2012; J. A. Scarpaci 1972) as Italian-Americans.

Part of the goal of this project was to examine the assimilation or anti-assimilation attitudes of the Sicilian community as evidenced by its reaction to city officials handling to the yellow fever epidemic. Newspaper articles, public health reports, and other documents of the time, made it possible to examine the changes that influenced Italian American ethnic identity development, and how the Sicilian community viewed their place in the larger community.

CHAPTER III – METHODS AND MATERIALS

Overview

Methods involved searching historical documents such as newspapers, journals, public health reports, print and video sources, and government documents including city records, ordinances of the day, and other historical archival materials. These were accessed through various archival sources, both in person and through online databases. Documents on Italian and Sicilian immigration, city documents, census records, newspaper articles, and official health records were used. Census, immigration, and death records were used to compare death rates between the target community and the rest of the city.

Archives and Repositories

Archival sources in New Orleans included the New Orleans Public Library, the Louisiana Division/City Archives and Special Collections, the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library of Tulane, and the Historic New Orleans Collection. Online repositories and databases provided access to both primary and secondary sources. These included GenealogyBank, HathiTrust, The Internet Archive, Library of Congress-Chronicling America, NCBI-PubMedCentral, Openlibrary, and the United States Census Bureau.

Scope of Materials

The scope of the primary materials included journal articles, books, reports, United States Census records, Louisiana State Government documents, newspaper articles, and artwork. Primary books dated from 1844 to 1909, while primary reports included items dated from 1902 to 1906. Each of these provided first-hand knowledge and observations essential for this study. Early government documents spanned the years

1879 to 1913; these provided essential documentation by official authorities that provided the needed statistics to support this thesis. Primary source journal articles were dated in the target year, 1905, although one could argue for the inclusion of one from 1925 as its historical proximity and topic make it a vital source of information. These journal articles provided first-hand experiences as well as time-sensitive scholarly works. The last significant primary source materials were newspaper articles dated from 1880, 1898, and 1904 to 1905. These provided essential commentary and facts about events prior to, during, and after the 1905 yellow fever epidemic that are the supporting evidence in this thesis.

Process

After perusing the literature, I made visits to the New Orleans Public library where I examined the Louisiana Division/City Archives and Special Collections. There I discovered that much of what I needed from that location, such as public health records or city ordinances, could be accessed as easily online as on-site. Other on-site locations included the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library at Tulane and the Historic Louisiana Collection. These locations provided some books, both primary and secondary. As with the Louisiana Public Library, I found that much of what I needed could also be found in online databases or archives. While at these locations, however, I took notes, and phone shots from yellow fever sources, which I also later found in online repositories or databases.

Methodology

The scope of this study required a flexible methodology utilizing three areas of anthropological thought encompassing race, ethnicity, and identity. First, Gravlee's

(2009) concepts about race and ethnicity and the workings of social inequalities facilitated the interpretation of the political and social inequalities affecting the Sicilian immigrant community in New Orleans in 1905. Second, Burkholder's (2010) work facilitated the interpretation of the ways that divisions of "whiteness" in New Orleans marginalized the Sicilian community in the early 1900s, contributing to racial categorization. Third, Jaspal and Cinnirella's (2011) theory about the importance of "motivation", plus Nagel (1994) and Becker's (2015) on "choice", facilitated for interpretation of those internal and external and forces that may have influenced change within the Sicilian immigrant community. Fourth, Alba's (1999) ideas about assimilation facilitated the interpretation of Sicilians' integration as Italian-Americans. These concepts were used to interpret the experiences of the Sicilian immigrant population of New Orleans as found within the historical records housed within various archival resources.

CHAPTER IV – GREAT MIGRATIONS

"At the end of the American Civil War in 1865, the southern economy lay in ruin and thousands of freed black slaves sought to exercise their newly granted freedom" (Gauthreaux 2014, 17).

Overview

Several factors, both in Sicily and in Louisiana, combined to bring Sicilians to the state. What follows below outlines those factors such as economics, politics, and needs of both planters and Sicilian that together acted as a catalyst to the immigration of thousands of Sicilians. Also discussed are the conditions that immigrants discovered upon their arrival to the plantations and those social threats that plagued them as they adjusted to life in Louisiana.

Sicily to Louisiana

Economics in Louisiana. The end of the Civil War brought significant changes to the economic environment of the state. Planters who had once relied on slave labor found themselves faced with freedmen who quite naturally took advantage of their emancipation to seek out better opportunities. By 1864, the number of sugar plantations in Louisiana had dropped from the pre-war statistics of 1,200 to 175 (Durso 2012, 9). To make things even more difficult, under Reconstruction, planters were required to make a new pledge of allegiance to the United States before they could continue in business (Durso 2012, 9). Planters also found that under the Reconstruction plan, planters were required to make a new pledge of allegiance to the United States before they could continue in business (Durso 2012, 9). Additionally, Reconstruction took away the State's power to govern itself and placed that power in Federal hands. In *New Orleans as It*

Was: Episodes of Louisiana Life, published in 1895, Henry Castellanos provided a first-person description of the plantation owners' situation. He referred to the time as "an age of so-called advancement and progress" and argued that the "staple productions of Louisiana" were being threatened by the Federal tariff reforms (Castellanos 1895, 177). Castellanos' (1895) depiction reveals how Louisiana citizens in the late 1800s viewed Federal involvement in the state. His sardonic rhetoric provides a glimpse into the mindset of citizens affected by Federal involvement in the state.

Emancipation of the slaves further acerbated the planters' perceived plight. As stated earlier, emancipation allowed the freed men the choice to stay or to go, which in turn led to a perceived scarcity of labor resources for the planters (Durso 2012, 9). Therefore, planters began to re-think the practically of relying solely on the use of black labor. A contemporary of the day, Walter L. Fleming (1905) gives a blunt and derogatory example in his article about immigration into the South. "The negro cannot furnish either in quality or in quantity the labor necessary to develop the South. By its lack of initiative and inventive genius the black race has acted as a hindrance to progress" (Fleming 1905, 279). Fleming's derogatory statement is evidence of the state of affairs in Louisiana, or at least of how it was perceived at the time, namely that former slaves were, at the least, unreliable. Furthermore, there was a strong belief among the plantation owners because former slaves were steadily leaving the state, plantations could not be sustained without bringing in laborers. According to Baiamonte, "Almost all contemporary reports, except those of Federal officials, maintained that the freedman could not supply the needs of the South" (Baiamonte 1969, 18). Evidence for this view

can be seen in newspapers that denounced the black laborers, adding fuel to the growing sentiments of planters and the public alike. For example, The *Lafayette Advertiser* stated:

> For years negro [sic] labor in the South has been growing more worthless and unreliable. With plenty of work to do at good wages the negroes will not accept employment, but on the contrary the tendency among them is to leave the country and seek the cities where they eke out a miserable existence (Durso 2012, 11; Scarpaci 1980, 2-3; Margavio and Salomone 2002, 35; *Lafayette Advertiser* 1904)

On January 3, 1880, *The Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel* blamed the situation on "Kansas fever" (the mass migration of blacks from Louisiana to Kansas), which was precipitated by the Democratic win in the Louisiana State elections for 1879 (*The Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel* 1880). Whether or not the labor issue was a real is irrelevant; the result was the same. The plantation owners wanted more reliable (at least in their view) workers and they were willing to go overseas to get them. As we will see, the Sicilian peasant was quite willing to answer that call. They came by the thousands, bringing their own beliefs and expectations, seeking land and respectability. Each group was successful to a certain extent; however, each group was also in for few surprises.

Economics in Sicily. The "new immigration period" in the United States took place between 1880 and 1925 (Durso 2012, 2). Sicilian peasants made up a large portion of these immigrants for many reasons. Sicily's economy, at least for the peasant, was at best a poor one. It relied in a large part on the ability to export fruit to the United States and France. Also, the recession in Europe caused Sicily's export of wheat and sulfur to drastically decrease (Benjamin 2006, Kindle 5784).

Two major changes in world economics had a drastic effect on Sicily's rural population. First, Florida and California began to produce subtropical fruit, which greatly lowered the need to buy lemons and oranges from Sicily (Baiamonte 1969, 3).

Second, France levied a tariff against Italian wines, affecting both mainland Italy and the island of Sicily (Baiamonte 1969, 3). These two events ruined growers all over the island and made poor farmers even poorer.

The poverty experienced by Sicilian farmers was caused by agricultural problems, politics, and unfair land laws (Baiamonte 1969, 9). Feudalism had been abolished (Baiamonte 1969, 9), but the peasant was still essentially the serf in the system. According to Baiamonte:

> Under the Bourbon rulers the division of the lands was obviously uneven…the larger proprietors acquired most of the acreage…what land the poor did receive had to be sold for lack of capital or seized by the government for failure to pay taxes (Baiamonte 1969, 9)

The peasants simply could not afford to either buy into the system, or even keep what they had due to the oppressive taxation and unbalanced system of land distribution. Even when the government distributed the lands of the Roman Catholic Church, it did not help as two-thirds of it went to the wealthy (Baiamonte 1969, 9). The auction process was also prohibitive, requiring one-tenth of the price at the time of the auction, with the rest paid at six percent interest over a period of eighteen years (Baiamonte 1969, 9). In addition to the unfair taxes and land distribution, the peasants faced forced conscription, lack of educational opportunities, and natural and agricultural crises (Durso 2012, 30). It is easy to see how this kept the poorer peasant population from making a bid at a better life in the country of his birth.

The island was also experiencing a time of political change and upheaval. While the unification of Italy was a political reality, it was not a physical reality because it failed to join the different regions into an interconnected whole (Durso 2012, 29).

Northern Italy enjoyed the fruits of modern industrialization, while southern Italy and Sicily suffered destitute conditions under the system of absentee proprietors (Durso 2012, 29). The inability of the Sicilian peasant to prosper under such a system, and the stories (Baiamonte 1969, 15) heard from those who had already emigrated, impacted the massive response to the call for laborers in the United States. As Di Palma Castiglione said, "to these people emigration offers the only relief" (Di Palma Castiglione 1905, 186). Emigration not only offered peasants a chance to move beyond subsistence living, it also offered them a chance to pursue their own dreams of proprietorship as farmers or other business owners.

Recruitment of Sicilian peasants. Sugar Planters Association began to pressure the state legislature for a solution; on March 17, 1866, the Louisiana Bureau of Immigration was formed with the hope of bolstering "the number of white laborers" in the state (Durso 2012, 11). At the 1867 conference, planters began to look to Sicily as a possible solution to their labor needs (Durso 2012, 14). The chief officer of the Louisiana Bureau of Immigration, James C. Kaufman, was placed in charge of publishing circulars targeted at drawing both Americans and Europeans to Louisiana (Durso 2012, 11). These circulars, or pamphlets, praised Louisiana's fertile soil, climate (comparing it to Sicily), and provided information about the type of work available (Durso 2012, 11). Advertisements, like the one shown in Figure 1, were a common sight, promoting "cheap and convenient transportation" and "the spirit of adventure" to entice Europeans to emigrate (Baiamonte 1969, 14-15; Durso 2012, 17).

L'ITALO-AMERICANO

LABOR BUREAU !

For the past ten years there has been a large [illegible] into the State of Louisiana. In this decade there disembarked at the port of New Orleans, 4500 ITALIANS. These emigrants are mostly STRONG, HEALTHY, ABLE BODIED INDUSTRIOUS MEN. As LABORERS THEY HAVE NO SUPERIORS. Attracted by our temperate climate and the fertile resource of our State, they have come here in search of homes. CAPITALISTS, PLANTATION OWNERS, RAILROAD CONTRACTORS, AND, IN FACT, ALL PERSONS WHO WORK LABORERS IN GREAT NUMBERS, FIND THE ITALIAN IMMIGRANT A VALUABLE ACQUISITION, BECAUSE OF HIS WILLINGNESS AND HIS PECULIAR ADAPTABILITY TO HARD WORK. A WELL EQUIPPED AND RELIABLE LABOR BUREAU IS WANTED

This want L'ITALO AMERICANO PURPOSES TO SUPPLY.

We will furnish Laborers to Proprietors, and employment to Laborers. Our position is one which eminently qualifies us for the office we have elected to fill. Our circulation is not confined within narrow limits. It embraces nearly the entire United States, and our acquaintences with the Rail Road Authorities, Plantation Owners and Contractors gives us special facilities for serving satisfactorily and justly both employer and laborer.

L'ITALO AMERICANO

LABOR BUREAU

Will be in charge of a thoroughly competent person, who will devote to it his constant and undivided attention. Our charges will be moderate whilst our services will be found to be of great value.

CORRESPONDENCE SOLICITED.

ADDRESS:

L'ITALO AMERICANO,

23 POYDRAS STREET,

NEW ORLEANS, LA

Figure 1. *L'Italo Americano* Labor Bureau recruitment poster.

Source: Durso 2012, 19.

In fact, the "new immigration" from Southern and Eastern Europe can be attributed to the efforts of steamship and railroad companies' advertisements (Baiamonte 1969, 14). These advertisements worked very well at recruiting potential workers. It was not long before the lure of land ownership and the respect that comes with it (Durso 2012, 12-13) drew Sicilians to seek new opportunities in Louisiana. Three steamships per month were running between New Orleans and Sicily by September of 1881 (Durso 2012, 17). At a cost of only forty dollars per person (Durso 2012, 17), the resulting mass emigration is not surprising. The Louisiana Immigration League, formed in 1905, not

only printed brochures in Italian and German, but also hired English-speaking Italians as "labor agents" to extol the virtues of emigration (Durso 2012, 17). Sometimes, these agents worked out of Ellis Island recruiting Italians, who entered the United States via New York, for work in Louisiana (Durso 2012, 17). Some arrivals to New Orleans found work as laborers and craftsmen while others found opportunities to open grocery stores or shops (Baiamonte 1969, 33-34). However, most Sicilians and Italians were peasants or laborers and mostly illiterate, though there were those who were "merchants, shoemakers, barbers, carpenters, bricklayers, sailors, fishermen, and farmers" (Baiamonte 1969, 33).

The number of Sicilian immigrants arriving in the Port of New Orleans per ship could range from a mere dozen, to over 1000 (Baiamonte 1969, 33). According to the United States Census records for 1880, the number of foreign-born Italians in Louisiana was just under 2500, by 1910 that number had risen to over 20,000 (Durso 2012, 18; Tenth Census of the United States 1881, 511-12; Thirteenth Census of the United States 1910, 838). Durso points out, however, that these records do not account for those temporary workers who came to Louisiana only during harvest season; she estimates those numbers range from about sixty to eighty-thousand (Durso 2012, 20). Even though many immigrants ended up working in New Orleans, the arrival of at least 20,000 foreign-born Italians (and Sicilians) within two decades suggest recruitment efforts were successful.

Arrival of Sicilian Immigrants

Locations in the state. Plantations were located throughout the state; however, this thesis was focused on areas in and around New Orleans. Following is a brief

explanation of where these areas were and the parishes that were involved. Bertrand's map, shown in Figure 2, depicts ten different rural areas in the state (Bertrand 1955, 13).

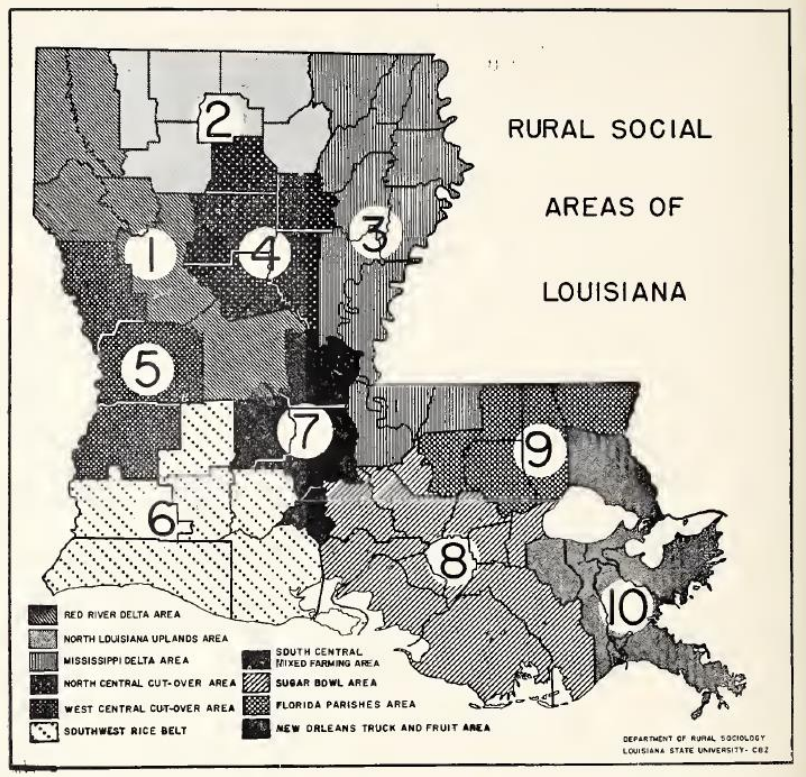

Figure 2. Map of Rural Areas of Louisiana as Identified in 1955.

Source: Bertrand 1955, 13).

This thesis is concerned with two of these areas: area eight, called "The Sugar Bowl Area", and area ten, called "The New Orleans Truck and Fruit Area" (Bertrand 1955, 13). The Sugar Bowl area, so named for the large sugar plantations, includes the parishes of "West Baton Rouge, Iberville, St. Martin, Iberia, St. Mary, Assumption, Ascension, St. James, St. John-the-Baptist, Lafourche, and Terrebonne" (Bertrand 1955, 17). The New Orleans Truck and Fruit farming area includes the parishes of "St. Tammany, St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, and St. Charles" (Bertrand 1955, 19). Unlike Bertrand's work, Orleans parish is also a focus of this study. Many Sicilian

immigrants worked alongside the native black population on these plantations. Others began working in the more urban area of Orleans parish, eventually saved up to buy into the sharecropping system or accepted the housing offered by some plantation owners (Durso 2012, 34).

Work conditions. Sugar harvesting, considered the dirtiest and most physically demanding type of work, occurred from October to January, while the less demanding season of cultivation occurred from February to July (Durso 2012, 36). Generally, Sicilians worked as unskilled cane cutters, making from $1.10 to $1.50, depending on the success of the harvest (Baiamonte 1969, 35; Durso 2012, 37). A 1911 survey revealed that on plantations with over 5000 workers; 52% of the employees received less than $.90 daily, 40% received $.90 to $1.50, daily, and only 8% more than $1.50 (Baiamonte 1969, 35). When one realizes that these wages were nearly twice what they were in Sicily, it is not surprising that Sicilians chose to emigrate (Baiamonte 1969, 35).

Sicilians were also sometimes offered rent-free cabins (most likely those once inhabited by slaves), with one or two rooms and a wood-burning stove (Baiamonte 1969, 35-36). The immigrants often planted vegetable gardens behind their cabins which supplied them with food such as, various kinds of potatoes, and other vegetables, including beans, squash, or greens (Baiamonte 1969, 37). But no Sicilian or Italian home would be complete without bread and pasta. It was usual to see home-made pasta hanging up to dry outside (Baiamonte 1969, 37). Bread would have been baked in hand-made, domed ovens, built as they had been for centuries, with a single door and a floor of baked earth (Costello 1998, 72). The aroma of fresh baked bread must have filled the air

with its appealing scent. Families also raised chickens, which provided eggs, and goats, which provided milk (Baiamonte 1969, 37).

At first, the Sicilians were considered better workers than African Americans because they tended to produce more product (Durso 2012, 37). They were considered "peaceable, and industrious…and cultivated their crops better than the Negroes" (Baiamonte 1969, 39). Their willingness to suffer the dirtier and more difficult jobs (Durso 2012, 36) while working in the heat and pestered by mosquitoes (Baiamonte 1969, 38-39) bolstered the belief in their admirable character. As Baiamonte put it, "They were industrious, ambitious, very thrifty and not resigned to remain common laborers for the rest of their lives" (Baiamonte 1969, 38-39). The immigrants worked alongside the black workers; however, they did not always interact with them. There was a tendency in some cases for Sicilians to keep to themselves. The Italian word, c*ampanilismo* refers to this Sicilian tradition to keep to themselves. In Sicily, it meant that one disregarded "everything outside of their village" (Durso 2012, 39). On the plantations, *campanilismo* meant that the immigrants did not mix with "outsiders" like the native whites and blacks (Durso 2012, 39). Therefore, little conflict occurred between Sicilians and blacks as they were willing to work alongside each other (Durso 2012, 39).

However, Baiamonte asks a pertinent question: "Did the Italians supplant the Negro in the sugar cane fields?" (Baiamonte 1969, 209). The simplest answer is "no." According to United States census records for the years 1880 through 1910, the population of native blacks far outnumbered the numbers of immigrants coming from

Italy. Table 1 provides the population data for the years 1880 to 1910 that I gathered from United States Census' online database library.

Table 1 *Population of Italian/Sicilian & Blacks in LA, 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910.*

Ethnicity/Race	1880	1890	1900	1910
Blacks	493,655	559,193	650,804	713,874
Italian/Sicilian Immigrants	2,527	7,767	17,431	20,233

Source: U. S. Census.gov; US Census records 1880 (387, 494); 1890 (414, 608); 1900 (cxii, cixxiv); 1910 (778).

As Table 1 clearly shows, for the year 1880, native blacks numbered 493,655 as compared to only 2,527 immigrants from the whole of Italy; this represents 195 times the number of Italian and Sicilian-born immigrants. While the numbers of immigrants from Italy and Sicily steadily rose, so did the native black population, although not at the same accelerated rate. By 1910, the native black population numbered 713,874, still more than thirty-five times the number of Italian-born immigrants (US Census records 1880, 387, 494; 1890, 414, 608; 1900, cxii, cixxiv; 1910, 778). With these numbers of native blacks remaining in the state, it hardly seems realistic to believe that Sicilian immigrants could have supplanted the black workers despite implications that foreign labor could do so (*The Grenada Sentinel 1905).*

Political environment. The political atmosphere in Louisiana from 1880 through 1910 was shaped by several events. For example, in 1879, Article 185 was added to the Louisiana State Constitution, which gave immigrants the ability to vote (Baiamonte 1969, 40). Specifically, it gave:

> …all alien males who were twenty-one years or older the right to vote if they had legally declared their intention to become United States citizens and had met the necessary residency requirements (Louisiana Constitution 1879, Article 185: 45)

Thus, foreigners who had lived in Louisiana for one year, had spent at least thirty days in the ward, and at least six months in the parish in which he planned to vote had suffrage rights (Louisiana Constitution 1879, Article 185: 45). Then, in 1892, the sugar planters successfully urged thousands of Italians and blacks to vote for the Democratic ticket in efforts to ensure the election of Democrat Murphy J. Foster as governor (Baiamonte 1969, 40). While successful in getting Murphy J. Foster elected through encouraging both Italians and blacks to vote democratic, the main motivation for getting the Italian votes was to increase white solidarity in the state (Baiamonte 1969, 41).

Unfortunately for white supremacists, Italians and Sicilians were not responding in the way they expected (Cunningham 1965, 25). According to Cunningham, "They were not assimilating into the southern culture fast enough…this was reflected by the acts of violence perpetrated against the Italians" (Cunningham 1965, 25). Because the Sicilians and Italians were more apt to side with the blacks against those who marginalized them, they became targets for violence in the same way that blacks were targeted. The later violence that began to happen to Sicilians and Italians is evidence of the negative impact that this association had within the immigrant community.

In 1894, Governor Foster proposed a suffrage amendment "which would disfranchise" blacks by requiring educational and property qualifications (Baiamonte 1969, 43). By doing so, the Republican and Populist parties would lose the Black vote (Baiamonte 1969, 43). The debate became national news, being written about in papers such as the *Cleveland Gazette*, which quoted the amendment for all to see:

> This proposed amendment to the constitution provides that the voter:
> Shall be an intelligent person, understanding the principles of our government, and understand or interpret the constitution of this state when read to him, or shall be a bona fide owner of property, real or personal, located in the state and assessed to him for the year next preceding the election at a cash valuation of not less than $500 (*Cleveland Gazette* 1894)

Further, the *Cleveland Gazette* (1894) quoted two southern papers: "it is frankly admitted by the *New Orleans Times-Democrat* and the *Picayune* that this is an attempt to disfranchise the greater part of the Negro" (*Cleveland Gazette* 1894). The amendment was still a hot debate in 1896 when Populists and Italians argued against it. Despite their earlier opposition to the amendment, the *Times-Democrat* denounced the Italians for their part in the debate stating:

> …when they [Italians – emphasis mine] interfere in American politics…they must arouse a very strong feeling against themselves and against those who would stir up these race prejudices, and organize the foreign-born population against the natives, in order to foster their own personal interests (*Times-Democrat* 1896 as quoted by Baiamonte 1969, 43).

The Sicilians and Italians paid a high price for their participation in the protests; three were lynched in St. Charles Parish in 1896. An article in the *Times-Democrat* described the scene at the funeral, "…a large number of Negroes and Italians were present at the burial, and went home from the scene almost terror-stricken" (as cited by Baiamonte 1969, 44). The tensions between the immigrants, blacks, and native white, would continue to grow as those in government circles continued to try to control who could, and who could not, vote.

On June 30, 1896, a bill requiring that the registrant had to complete the application in his own handwriting (Baiamonte 1969, 45). The bill served as a "literacy test" because it required the voter to write not only his name, but "his age in terms of

years, months, and days" (Baiamonte 1969, 45). The Election Law of 1896 was an obvious attempt by the Democratic Party "disfranchise many Negroes" (Baiamonte 1969, 45). Since the wording of the 1896 law meant that many whites were also disfranchised, the convention two years later, in 1898, aimed to "enfranchise propertyless [sic] and illiterate whites" (Baiamonte 1969, 45). Therefore, the following amendment was added which provided that:

> No male of foreign birth, who was naturalized prior to the first day of January 1898, should be denied the right to register and vote…by reason of his failure to possess the educational or property qualification…' (Louisiana Constitution 1898, Art. 197, Sec. 5, 227)

The convention also passed the provision that allowed "illiterate and propertyless [sic] whites to vote if their grandfather or father had voted prior to January 1, 1867" (Baiamonte 1969, 46). This blatant favoritism for literate foreigners over illiterate natives angered many people and set the native New Orleanians, both white and black, against the Sicilian immigrants. Delegates from the black parishes argued against what they called the "grandfather-father clause" (Baiamonte 1969, 46; Cunningham 1969, 34). Despite this attempt to gain white solidarity through the emancipation of naturalized immigrants, it soon became obvious to the convention that Sicilians [Italians] were "the real problem" (Baiamonte 1969, 47; Cunningham 1965, 34). The immigrants did not have the same mind-set as native whites. They did not support the suppression of their black neighbors and this unwillingness to support white solidarity, along with their lack of prejudice against blacks, made them a target for racial discrimination.

Discrimination, prejudice, and violence. The Sicilians in Louisiana began to experience the same kind of discrimination and violence that blacks had endured for

decades. According to Baiamonte, the southern Italians and Sicilians "were subjected to the most severe treatment" of all the immigrant groups (Baiamonte 1969, 79). Many in the South viewed the southern Italians and Sicilians as just as black as any former slave. Evidence of this can be found in records of the day. For example, in 1906 Luigi Villari, an Italian diplomat, toured the area and had this to say:

> The Italian is neither loved nor respected in the southern states. He is desired as a useful and exploitable instrument of labor, but personally he is considered a sort of white-skinned negro [sic] who is a better worker than the black-skinned negro [sic]. (Villari as cited by Edwards-Simpson 1996, 1)

However, the Sicilians did not behave in expected ways. For one thing, they were very independent and driven to succeed, and Americans, both white and black, began to resent them. Baiamonte phrased this way:

> The 'Americans' thought that they could handle the Negroes and keep them subservient. But, this was not true with the Italians and this was what angered the native whites. The Italians did work that only Negroes would do, but through thrift they managed to save their money. Even though the Italians did 'nigger work,' they would not allow themselves to be treated like the southern Negroes. When called 'dagoes,' they would fight. If they were shot at, they returned their fire. The Italians resisted any attempt to keep them in a lowly position, socially or economically (Baiamonte 1969, 95)

In 1891, one of the most hate-filled, mob-led executions in the history of the South was perpetrated against Sicilian immigrants in New Orleans, a culmination of events that stemmed from the murder of the local police chief some months prior. On October 15, 1890, then police chief David C. Hennessy was shot outside his home. His murder was believed to have been a Mafia hit in retaliation for his involvement in the arrests of two Mafia members. Several Sicilians were rounded up and questioned. Despite damning testimony, the defendants were acquitted due to lack of evidence. The jury's decision enflamed the public and sparked the rage of thousands of New Orleanians.

On March 14,1891, a mob of angry citizens estimated at over five-thousand (Gauthreaux 2014, 13), led by prominent community leaders, stormed the prison and forced their way inside. Leaders of the mob forced their way in, hunted down the Sicilians and began to slaughter them. A graphic description is provided below:

> The mob arrived at the Parish Prison at 10:20. They demanded entrance and were denied it. Avoiding the locked gate, they sawed down a telegraph pole and used it as a battering ram on a wooden door located on a side-street. They thereby gained access to the prison complex through the warden's on-site apartment. By 10:30 a group of twenty-five to thirty armed leaders of the vigilante mob entered the prison. The crowd tried to surge in, but Wickliffe told them that "cool action" was needed and they stayed back. The prison deputies were overwhelmed by the armed band and provided keys to any locked doors in the prison complex. The self-appointed avengers then broke into small groups in search of their prey. (Kendall 1939, 492-530 as cited by Edwards-Simpson 1996, 115)

Newspapers across the nation were on both sides of the issue, some condemning the lynching, others praising it. For example, *The Nashville American* described the lynching as "'one of bloodiest and most brutal butcheries on record'" (*The Nashville American* n. d. as cited by Baiamonte 1969, 82). While the *Times-Democrat* asserted that "Desperate diseases require desperate remedies…Our justification was – necessity; our defense is – self-preservation, nature's primal law" (*Times-Democrat* n. d. as cited by Baiamonte 1969, 82). It is evident from these two examples that the nation was divided into two sides of the issue; one condemning the lynching, another praising it.

Unfortunately, the incident in 1891 was not an isolated one. Between the years 1886 and 1910, 42 Italians were lynched across several southern states including Louisiana, West Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, Florida and Mississippi (Durso 2012, 66). Despite the dangers, however, southern Italians and Sicilians continued flocking to the state in response to the need for labor (Durso 2012, 66).

Connections

As this section indicated, several factors contributed to the immigration of Sicilian peasants. The economic conditions in Louisiana created a need for laborers while the economic conditions in Sicily created a need for work. It was fairly simple to connect the two. Nothing was simple however about the conditions under which the Sicilians lived once they arrived in the state. The racial tensions of the times placed the Sicilians in between two rival factions of the public, and the fact that they did not hold the same racial views as native Southerners of the time made their place in society questionable. This racial categorization and the social imbalances of the times set the stage for the Sicilian community's ethnic identity evolution to come. However, it would take involved processes throughout some years before those conditions improved. Furthermore, those conditions took a drastic turn for the worse in 1905 when Yellow Jack came on the scene.

CHAPTER V – ENTER YELLOW JACK

"…a fearsome disease, characterized by high fever, chills, purplish bruises, jaundice, and vomiting of black, blood-filled bile lasting a week to 10 days" (Abrams 2015, 51).

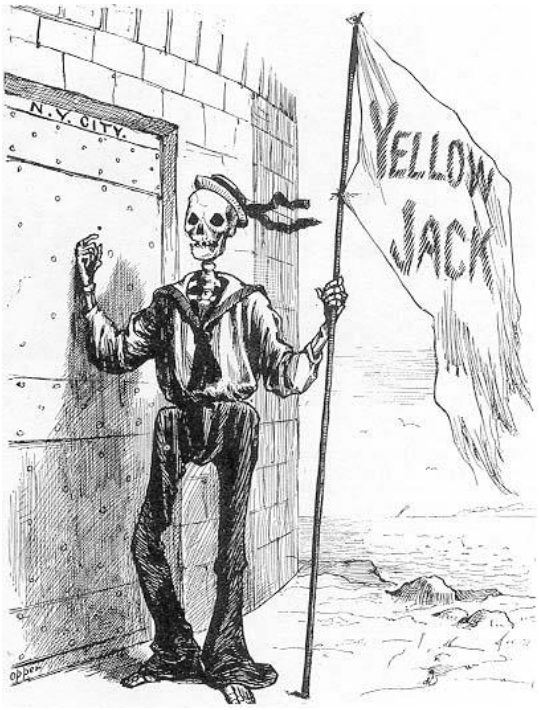

Figure 3. Cartoon depicting the arrival of yellow fever to New York City, 1883.

Source: Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, September 21, 1883 as cited by Fee and Fox 1988, 184.

Overview

Historically, yellow fever has had many names, each with its own fearful connotation. Augustin's encyclopedic work on the history of yellow fever provides over 150 pseudonyms (Augustin 1909, 84). It has been called the yellow plague, the saffron scourge, the visitor, the stranger's disease, and the invader (Carrigan 1959, 1963, 1970; Engineer 2010; *The Great Fever* 2006; Humphreys 1992; Pain 2000; Patterson 1992; Pritchett and Tunali 1995). Its Spanish names, "*vomito negro* and *vomito prieto*, (Engineer 2010, 5-6; Humphreys 1992, 6) translate as one of its symptoms, "the black

vomit" (Carrigan 1959, 339; Carrigan 1963, 5). However, Yellow Jack is the most *apropós* name for the New Orleans 1905 epidemic as it was believed that the disease was imported by a sailor or passenger onboard one of the incoming ships, a direct correlation to the importation theory listed below. This appellation for the disease had been known prior to 1905, as shown in Figure 3. Originally printed on September 21, 1883, the image of a skeletal sailor bringing Yellow Fever into New York can just as easily apply to 1905 New Orleans. It quite appropriately represents how people viewed yellow fever, namely, that it was a frightening, deadly disease brought by sailors aboard ships arriving at ports like New Orleans. These fearful images of the disease, coupled with Sicilians' fear of authority figures helped to fuel their resistance to sanitation efforts.

To develop an understanding of how the Sicilian community would have viewed yellow fever and how the 1905 epidemic affected them requires an examination of the history of the disease. The following paragraphs discuss previous outbreaks of yellow fever, its impact in the number of deaths, and various early theories about the disease. These sources provide the basis for later argument in this thesis: that the yellow fever's presence influenced the Sicilian community's actions in 1905. The last section details the accomplishments of the Reed Commission that proved the mosquito connection in the transmission of yellow fever, a pivotal scientific breakthrough that led to the eradication of the 1905 yellow fever epidemic through the efforts of the United States Marine Hospital.

History of Yellow Fever

Much has been written about the spread of yellow fever in America, it's devastating impact, and how it was finally eradicated. Outbreaks of the disease were

recorded in 1649 [Spanish Florida], 1668 [New York], 1691 [Boston], 1693 [Philadelphia], and 1699 [Charleston] (Abrams 2015; Fossier 1942, 320; Patterson, 2004). Even New Orleans had prior experience with the disease in 1796 when it was called the yellow plague (Fossier 1942, 322). Philadelphia would experience another yellow fever epidemic in 1793 (Abrams 2015). Weather played a part in the severity of the epidemic; a wet spring followed by a hot summer provided ideal breeding conditions for mosquitoes; the unknown carrier of the disease (Abrams 2015, 50). All that is needed is the vector; this occurs when an infected person gets bitten by mosquitoes that then bite healthy individuals, who then contract the disease. The 1793 epidemic was attributed to the arrival of a small group of infected travelers on ships coming from tropical locations (Abrams 2015, 51). Forty percent of the total population of the city would flee; 10% of whom would die in only four months' time (Abrams 2015, 50).

Fear of the disease was driven by the fact that no one understood how the disease was transmitted (Abrams 2015, 50). Some blamed the epidemic on Frenchmen who had traveled through Haiti in their flight from the French Revolution (Abrams 2015, 55). Others believed that miasmas, or bad air, that emanated from the ground brought on the epidemic (Abrams 2015, 55). The mosquito connection would not be discovered for more than 100 years. Those victims who were healthy and strong prior to contracting the disease, and had access to good care, stood a better chance of survival (Abrams 2015, 51). Those with pre-existing conditions that lived in over-crowded, unsanitary homes, and subsisted on poor, insufficient diets, were the most susceptible (Abrams 2015, 51). Ten to sixty percent of those infected in the city that year died (Abrams 2015, 51). The

epidemic peaked in August and only November's lower temperatures stopped its spread (Abrams 2015, 50).

This was the typical scenario when yellow fever struck, first some few victims were infected, then a few more and the number grew until panic ensued and people began to flee sometimes taking the disease with them. It was an event that would occur again, and again. Philadelphia endured another round with yellow fever in 1798 that killed 5,000, New Orleans met the disease in 1853 when it killed 8,000, Norfolk lost 2,000 lives in 1855, and the Mississippi Valley was devastated by the disease in 1878 when it took a staggering 20,000 lives from New Orleans to Memphis (Abrams 2015, 53). These facts were well known in 1905, and especially in New Orleans. Only 27 years had passed since the 1878 epidemic, which was recent enough for locals to still remember, and stories would have been told, igniting fears across the city that even the newly arrived immigrants would sense.

Early Theories about Yellow Fever

Two early beliefs about the disease were closely linked in theory, the belief that the disease was imported and the idea that the yellow fever 'germ' could be transmitted via personal contact (Carpenter 1844, 32; LalDAnnual 1934, 1). The Importation Theory and, consequentially, the Personal Contact Theory, were proposed as early as 1793 (Carpenter 1844, 32). Scientists and doctors agreed that the disease was an imported infection, carried into the country via fomites, or clothing and other contaminated items, by infected travelers or sailors onboard incoming ships (Carpenter 1844, 32). This naturally led to the Personal Contact Theory; the belief that healthy individuals who then come into contact with infected persons or things are susceptible to the disease

(Carpenter 1844, 32). Efforts were then made to prevent travelers and sailors from bringing "ship fever" into the cities (Carpenter 1844, 32). The trade connection between the United States and places like the Caribbean, where yellow fever was endemic, fed the importation theory and led to belief that the institution of quarantine laws would be an effective measure in preventing yellow fever outbreaks (LalDAnnual 1934, 1).

Another transmission theory called the Miasma Theory was proposed by Drs. Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster in the 1790s (LalDAnnual 1934, 1). They argued that yellow fever came from the "local miasmas" arising from dead plants and animals as they decayed in the hot, humid weather (LalDAnnual 1934, 1).

Epidemiology of the Disease

Today, scientists know that yellow fever occurs naturally in Africa and South America; however, it travels wherever the mosquito goes; being transmitted from one infected person to another (Barnett 2007; Carrigan 1963, 1970, 1988; Carrol 1905; Finlay 1903; Guiteras 1905; Humphreys 1992; Kohnke 1906; LalDAnnual 1934). In 1905, as mentioned earlier, New Orleans was connected to South America, Haiti, and Cuba, where yellow fever was endemic (LalDAnnual 1934, 1). It was only a matter of time before infected individuals would board a ship bound for New Orleans to start another outbreak.

New incoming Sicilian immigrants would not necessarily have known much about yellow fever, its transmission or its prevention. For them, it would have been just another thing to fear. These fears were not unfounded. Even if one survived the illness, the symptoms were terrifying: headache, high fever, jaundice, internal and external bleeding, nausea, and worst of all, black vomit (Abrams 2015; Barnett 2007; Bryan et al. 2004, 275; Center for Disease Control n. d.; *The Great Fever* 2006; Humphreys 1992;

LalDAnnual 1934; Mayo Clinic n. d.; Pain 2000; Patterson 1992; Pritchett and Tunali, 1995). Other symptoms include back pain, bruising, and chills (Abrams 2015, 50; Bryan et al. 2004, 275; *The Great Fever* 2006; Mayo Clinic n. d.). As the disease progresses it causes heart, liver, and kidney problems (Bryan et al. 2004, 275; Mayo Clinic n. d.). Abrams (2015) describes it as "a fearsome disease, characterized by high fever, chills, purplish bruises, jaundice and vomiting of black, blood-filled bile lasting a week to 10 days" (Abrams 2015, 50). Symptoms can begin three to six days after contracting the disease from an infected mosquito and can then progress to the toxic phase, coma and death (Bryan et al. 2004, 275; Center for Disease Control n. d.; *The Great Fever* 2006; Humphreys 1992; LalDAnnual, 1934; Mayo Clinic n. d.; Pain 2000; Patterson 1992; Pritchett and Tunali, 1995). Death can occur in a little as a week (Humphreys 1992, 6). It is no surprise that the people of New Orleans, citizens and immigrants alike, were afraid.

The Reed Commission

The discovery that mosquitoes carried the disease would have an important impact on the 1905 epidemic in New Orleans. Cuba would prove to be the place where the final pieces of the puzzle would be put together.

In 1872, Dr. Carlos Finlay of Havana, Cuba began to study yellow fever (Gorgas 1905; *The Great Fever* 2006; Kelly 1906; *Lafayette Advertiser* 1905b; Warren 1951). He studied changes in temperature, altitude, and alkalinity of the atmosphere in his attempts to isolate the cause (*The Great Fever* 2006; Kelly 1906). Then, in 1879, an American scientist sent Finlay a set of photos of slides containing tissue from victims of yellow fever (*The Great Fever* 2006; Kelly 1906). These slides led him to believe that yellow

fever was transmitted through "lesions in the blood vessels" (*The Great Fever* 2006; Kelly 1906). He concluded that only a biting insect could cause these lesions and began to research how. In a spark of genius, Dr. Finlay thought to map out where the various species of mosquitoes were to be found, as well as the locations of yellow fever outbreaks. He found that the two maps matched perfectly (*The Great Fever* 2006; Kelly 1906). On August 18, 1881, he presented his findings at the International Scientific Conference in Havana, unfortunately, no one accepted his theory (Gorgas 1905; *The Great Fever* 2006; Kelly 1906). It would be nearly twenty years before someone re-examined Finlay's work (Warren 1951; Kelly 1906).

In July of 1900, an outbreak of yellow fever in Cuba prompted the United States Surgeon General George Sternberg to appoint Major Walter Reed to oversee investigations into a solution (Gorgas 1905; *The Great Fever* 2006; Kelly 1906; *Lafayette Advertiser* 1905b; *The Rice Belt Journal* 1905a). Major Walter Reed and his assistants, Drs. James Carroll and Jesse Lazear, traveled to Cuba and began their studies, however, they were unsuccessful and eventually consulted Dr. Carlos Finlay (Boyce, 1906, 6; *The Great Fever* 2006). Finlay's work in 1881 and Ross and Carter's discovery of the connection between mosquitoes and malaria influenced the team's own work on yellow fever (Finlay 1903, 2; Boyce 1906, 6). It was now much more believable that mosquitoes could be the link to yellow fever that had eluded researchers for so long.

Finlay explained his theory, and provided Reed's team with mosquito eggs so the experiments could begin (Gorgas 1905; *The Great Fever* 2006; *The Rice Belt Journal* 1905a). A breakthrough was not long in coming as Major Reed returned to Washington and left his two colleagues working. Dr. Lazear started his own experiments after Reed's

departure which would prove both groundbreaking and tragic. With mosquitoes obtained from the rooms of known cases of yellow fever, he tried to inoculate (infect) volunteers as well as himself, but to no avail. On August 27, Lazear noticed one mosquito seemed in need of blood and "fearing it would die, asked his colleague Carroll if he would allow it to feed" (*The Great Fever* 2006). Carroll did so and two days later he became ill (*The Great Fever* 2006). Using the same mosquito, Lazear asked young soldier named Dean if he would allow himself to be bitten; he also developed yellow fever. Fortunately, these two brave volunteers recovered, but the same would not be said for Lazear. Without telling anyone, Lazear allowed himself to be bitten by the same mosquito (*The Great Fever* 2006). On September 18, Dr. Lazear was taken to the hospital where he later died (*The Great Fever* 2006). It was his sacrifice, however unintended, that finally gave the scientists the evidence needed to prove the mosquito theory of transmission of the yellow fever virus (*The Great Fever* 2006). Lazear's death led to the team's full acceptance of the mosquito connection to the transmission of yellow fever.

Major Reed returned to Cuba, now convinced of the mosquito connection (*The Great Fever* 2006). He studied Lazear's notes, made his case before the Army Medical Board, and got permission to set up a scientific experiment (*The Great Fever* 2006). Major Reed set up a camp (named Camp Lazear) and built two one-room cabins (Gorgas 1905; *The Great Fever* 2006; *Lafayette Advertiser* 1905b; *The Rice Belt Journal.* 1905a). Cabin One contained bedding and belongings of yellow fever patients, while Cabin Two was divided by a mosquito-proof screen (Gorgas 1905; *The Great Fever* 2006; *Lafayette Advertiser* 1905b). One side of Cabin number two housed volunteers and no mosquitoes, while the other side of Cabin number one held volunteers and inoculated (infected)

mosquitoes (Gorgas 1905; *The Great Fever* 2006; *Lafayette Advertiser* 1905b). The results were definitive. Only those in the room with mosquitoes contracted yellow fever (Gorgas 1905; *The Great Fever* 2006; *Lafayette Advertiser* 1905b). They had finally connected the dots. The results convinced Chief Sanitation Officer Major William Gorges to order troops throughout Havana to go to each infected home, screen in the infected person, and fumigate to kill the mosquitoes. It was a huge success. "In 1900 there had been 300 yellow fever deaths; in 1901 there was only one" (*The Great Fever* 2006). Still, even with this evidence, Major Reed had trouble convincing health officials in Washington to control the mosquitoes. Unfortunately, he would not be the one to do so; Major Reed died in 1902 from complications from appendicitis (*The Great Fever* 2006). It would be left to Dr. Carroll to present the stringent preventive measures which, had they been in practice in New Orleans prior to the epidemic in 1905, would have greatly curtailed the yellow fever outbreak, and perhaps, spared lives both in the Sicilian community and the city at large (Carroll 1905, 274). A copy of Carroll's list appears in Appendix A.

Today, yellow fever is defined as a viral infection or hemorrhagic fever spread through the bite of the female mosquito of the species *Aedes aegypti* (Augustin 1909; Barnett 2007, 850; Bryan et al. 2004, 275; Finlay 1903; *The Great Fever* 2006; Humphreys 1992; Mayo Clinic n. d.; Patterson 1992). In 1905, the fact that mosquitoes carried yellow fever was still relatively unknown among the public, and Sicilian immigrants were especially ignorant of this fact. For many, the disease was a plague visited upon them from unknown or nefarious origins, its very name a source of fear.

Connections

The history of yellow fever in the United States is a vital part of the story of the 1905 yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans. Through understanding how past epidemics were viewed and managed, one can better imagine the terrifying effect it had on the Sicilian immigrants. Further, having a basic knowledge about the mosquito connection to the disease enlightens one to the importance of the steps taken by city officials and Marine doctors during the epidemic. The connection of the epidemic to the Sicilian population is discussed further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VI – FROM DAGO TO WHITE

"I remember one day, my father refused to have any other papers except American papers, newspapers. He was going to learn English and he refused to have any Italian papers in the house" (Marianne Riga as cited by Coan 1997, 67).

Overview

Many factors and traumatic events influenced Sicilian immigrants' ethnic transformation from dago to white. These factors and events fueled the racial and ethnic categorization and assimilation of Sicilians into American society. These factors and events, poised against the backdrop of the yellow fever epidemic, reveal the processes that influenced change within the Sicilian community. What follows below discusses the racial and ethnic ambiguity faced by the Sicilian community, their place in New Orleans, in both a physical and social sense, the events of the 1905 yellow fever epidemic, and its connection to the evolution of Sicilian ethnic identity.

Dago, Negro, or White?

The Sicilian community came from a country that was, in a broad sense, homogenous in ethnicity. When they arrived in Louisiana, they found that the native-born population was "stratified along racial lines" (Edwards-Simpson 1996, 2). Their willingness to do the same work as the black community placed them at the same low status and limited residential and occupational opportunities (Edwards-Simpson 1996, 2). This led native New Orleanians to categorize them as racially inferior to other whites (Edwards-Simpson 1996, 2), or as Gauthreaux described it, as "negroes with white skin" (Gauthreaux 2014, 14). This racial image of the Sicilian immigrant was no doubt

partially influenced by the publications of the era. For example, both the *Times-Democrat* and the *Franklin News* published the following statement:

> The political bosses of New Orleans want to make the Dagoes citizens and disfranchise the Negro, and God knows if there is any difference between them it is largely in the darkies' favor, if we may judge the quality now being imported here as plantation laborers (quoted in the *Times-Democrat* 1898 as cited by Cunningham 1965, 34).

It is impossible to know how many people shared the belief that Sicilians were less "favorable" than blacks in quality, but certainly any negative publicity did not help how they were perceived. It also would not have endeared them to the black community, as such comments were not actually praising them either.

Another paper, *The Homer Clipper*, was even more harsh in their assessment of the Sicilian and Italian population:

> They are corrupt and purchasable and according to the spirit of our meaning when we speak of white man's government, they are black as the blackest Negro in existence (quoted in the *Times-Democrat* 1898 as cited by Cunningham, 1965, 34)

These disparaging remarks, having been published for all educated people to read, surely encouraged more prejudice and violence against the immigrant population. The lynching of Sicilians during the dispute over the disenfranchisement of native blacks taught them a painful lesson. According to Cunningham:

> They had better adopt the customs, prejudices, and way of life of white Louisianans as soon as possible. They must look with loathing upon everything that the native whites loathed. Once they did so, the Italians could gain acceptance among the native whites, though not at first on a basis of complete equality (Cunningham 1965, 35-36)

Their reputation was being tarnished by what their association with, and their lack of prejudice against blacks, as well as their perceived association with the Mafia.

Sicilians were perceived as dishonest, racially inferior people living on an inferior social level (Durso 2012, 39). This negative image was a dishonorable state in which to live. For Sicilians, family honor was very important (Edwards-Simpson 1996; Durso 2012). When they realized this honor was being threatened by their "lack of Jim Crow prejudice" (Edwards-Simpson 1996, iv), they began to change their views (Durso 2012, 39).

Little Palermo

Sicilian immigrants came into the United States without knowledge of the racial, ethnic, and social divisions they would experience or the prejudicial attitudes that would marginalize them as dagoes. This marginalization began almost the moment they stepped off the ships. It is evidenced in the way they congregated in little ethnic conclaves set within larger cities like New York or Philadelphia. Those who migrated to New Orleans behaved no differently when it came to community. They built their own village within the larger surrounds of the city, further setting themselves apart. Many of the Sicilian immigrants to Louisiana either migrated to New Orleans from their work on the plantations or New Orleans was their original destination. Some of those who immigrated to New Orleans were wives and children of men who worked the plantations while they resided in the city. Others, as mentioned earlier, worked on the docks. These families settled in the oldest, cheapest, part of the city, giving it a new name, Little Palermo.

Little Palermo was situated in the *Vieux Carré*, also called the French Quarter (Edwards-Simpson 1996, 51). The French Quarter is a ten by thirteen block district bounded by the Mississippi River, Canal Street, Rampart Street, and Esplanade Avenue

(Edwards-Simpson 1996, 51). It is a collection of planned streets, buildings, and open spaces that has an air of times past to residents and visitors alike. The aerial view of the French Market depicted in Figure 4 gives a sense what the area would have looked like during the time.

Figure 4. Aerial view of the French Quarter, ca. 1851.

Source: Library of Congress; Bachmann, John, 1851.

The Sicilian area was like a tiny village situated within the heart of the city. It served as a natural extension of life as it had been lived in the old world. Families lived together in cramped spaces, continued the same cultural traditions and assisted newcomers as they arrived. The men worked in the city, or on outlying plantations as discussed above. In the city, men were dock workers, fruit peddlers, and sometimes owners of their own ethnic grocery stores, or restaurants (Edwards-Simpson 1996, 51). They stayed connected through community and familial bonds and formed several ethnic beneficent societies, generally named after their home villages (Margavio and Salomone 1981, 349). These societies served as support resources for themselves as well as for newcomers (Edwards-Simpson 1996, 51; Margavio and Salomone 1981, 349).

The social hierarchy in the communities that surrounded Little Palermo was more diverse and consisted of people of various origins including those of Creole, Anglo, African-American, Irish, German and mainland Italian ethnicity (Edwards-Simpson 1996, 9). The mainland [non-Sicilian] Italians included educated diplomats, priests, and nuns, who were sometimes supportive of Sicilian immigrants, and sometimes not (Edwards-Simpson 1996, 9). It is possible that the ethnic diversity of the surrounding city blocks facilitated the ethnic evolution of the Sicilian community over time through reciprocal associations and interactions.

Even though most Italian immigrants were in fact Sicilian, most New Orleans residents called them all "Italians" or "Dagoes" (Edwards-Simpson 1996, 10). Some believe the term "Dagoes", used to disparage those of Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese descent, developed from the Spanish name Diego (*Times-Picayune* 1898). Others claim it came from the practice of the Sicilians working "by the day", so-called "day goers", and developed from Sicilian traditions or habits, such as described by Di Palma Castiglione, "…the peasants walk morning and night several miles to and from the fields. They leave their homes long before dawn and return after sunset" (Di Palma Castiglione 1905, 203). In either case, the term "dago" was as insulting to Sicilians, as the word "negro" was, and still is, to African Americans, today.

Still the question remains as to how Sicilians saw themselves. Luconi (2004) argued that Sicilians and Italians did not have a sense of their own ethnic identity until they came to America (Luconi 2004, 162). This argument is based on the homogeneity of their homeland. Everyone was from Italy. Everyone was from Sicily. Only in America did the "view of being Italian", of being different, become starkly apparent

(Luconi 2004, 162). It can be argued that immigrants felt a strong need to become Americanized as soon as possible. An example taken from the book, *Ellis Island Interviews* (Coan 1997) makes this quite apparent:

> I remember one day, my father refused to have any other papers except American papers, newspapers. He was going to learn English and he refused to have any Italian papers in the house (quote from Marianne Riga as cited by Coan 1997, 67)

Here is an example of immigrants making a conscious choice to become part of American society. The father's declaration clearly had an impact on the child, reinforcing the notion that learning English was an important step in adjusting to their new lives as U. S. citizens. His refusal to even have Italian newspapers in the home indicates his choice to shed a vital part of his ethnic heritage, his language. Furthermore, his actions impacted not only his own behavior, but that of his family members as well.

In another example, Mario Vina, who immigrated in 1909, relates what happened when his father met them in New York:

> Then we went to Middletown by train and when we got there he had a present for me. A baseball bat and a glove, which I had never seen before. 'What are these for?' I asked him. "You play with these," he said. "It's a game. It's called baseball." (quote from Mario Vina as cited by Coan 1997, 40)

It seems that even in 1909, America's national game was baseball, and by giving his son this gift, he was giving him a means to interact with American boys, to fit in and become American himself. These two stories illustrate that immigrants felt the desire to adopt American ways as soon as possible.

Still, Sicilian immigrants faced unique obstacles in the southern states when it came to the issue of race. As has been discussed earlier, the Sicilians became caught up in the race war between whites and blacks. With their dark complexions, and lack of

prejudice towards blacks, they soon found themselves classified somewhere in between the two. This realization of difference amidst the horror of the yellow fever epidemic, influenced New Orleans Sicilians to move toward whiteness, as well as assimilation into American society.

The 1905 Yellow Fever Epidemic

The sub-tropical climate of New Orleans is hot and humid, which allows for the growth of tropical flora such as "sugar cane, bananas, bougainvillea, hibiscus, and passion fruit" (Engineer 2010, 1-2). Unfortunately, its climate also made it a perfect breeding ground for the mosquito, and its bustling port brought in hundreds of visitors from far away ports where yellow fever was endemic. Add several hundred new immigrants and visitors without immunity to yellow fever and it is have the perfect setting for an outbreak. All that is needed is one person infected with the disease to encounter the local mosquitoes, which then carry the disease to residents across the city.

In 1905, the New Orleans Port welcomed ships from various cities in Mexico, Cuba, and Central America (Boyce 1906, 2). It is not surprising that passengers or crew members may have arrived in New Orleans infected with the disease. It is also known that infected mosquitoes have been found within the ships, having survived in water stored onboard ship. Boyce relates incidents from 1902:

> Dr. Souchon instituted an examination of the fruit vessels during the quarantine season of 1902, and as a result found that out of 12 vessels making 180 trips between New Orleans and Central American ports, the *Stegomyia fasciata* was present 5 times and on vessels running between Havana and New Orleans 10 times (Boyce 1906, 3)

It is interesting to note that the ships themselves could have brought the *Stegomyia fasciata* mosquitoes into the city, which then carried the disease from infected sailors to

workers on the docks. There is a clear link between those infected sailors to the skeletal image of Yellow Jack as a bearer of the disease.

As of the year 1905, New Orleans, known as the "Necropolis of the South" (Carrigan 1963, 7) due to its death rate having exceeded its birth rate, had not had an outbreak of yellow fever since 1878. Health officials would not have the knowledge to combat the disease until Walter Reed's commission "clearly demonstrated the role of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito in transmitting yellow fever" (Carrigan 1988, 5). However even after Reed's discovery and the formulation of a committee to map out mosquito breeding grounds in the city in 1901 by the New Orleans Parish Medical Society (Boyce 1906, 10), the Board of Health's attempts to begin an "anti-mosquito campaign" failed to generate support from residents and government officials until yellow fever once again made its presence known in 1905 (Carrigan 1988, 5). However, the New Orleans Parish Medical Society did form a committee to map out mosquito breeding grounds in the city in 1901 (Boyce 1906:10). This map (Figure 5) would prove highly useful in 1905 sanitation efforts.

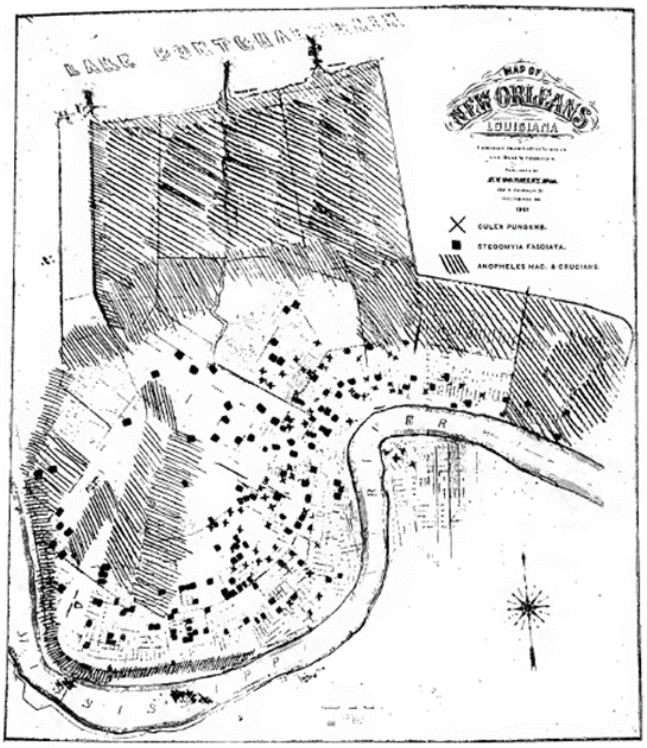

Figure 5. 1906 Map depicting the distribution of Mosquitoes in New Orleans.

Source: Boyce, Robert William. 1906, 10.

The population of New Orleans in 1905 was approximately 325,000 (Boyce 1906, 3-4; Carrigan 1988, 5) and "less than one-fourth" were immune, which left most of the residents susceptible to the disease (Carrigan 1988, 5). To combat an epidemic in the city would prove to be a monumental task, requiring co-operation between city officials, governmental agencies, the clergy, and citizens of all ethnicities and social standing. It was the first time that city officials attempted to combat the disease through eradication of the mosquito and would prove to be a turning point in the way that government entities would combat environmental threats to public health (Boyce 1906; Carrigan 1988; Engineer 2010; Fossier 1942; Pain 2000; Pritchett and Tunali 1995; and Warren 1951).

No one knows when the first person, or persons, became infected with the dread disease. Anyone from any of the ships coming into the city, both legally and illegally,

could have been infected. As Boyce put it, "the possibility of a sailor or passenger eluding vigilance early in the year and reaching New Orleans and infecting the *Stegomyia* in the City cannot be altogether excluded" (Boyce 1906, 2). Furthermore, conditions in the city were ideal in the spring of 1905 for breeding *Stegomyia fasciata*. According Boyce, the city was "ripe for an epidemic":

> The essential factors were at hand to favour [sic] an outbreak (Boyce 1906, 5). [The]…paving of the roads…allowed of the formation of numerous pools after rain…an open drain on each side of the roadway contained…slowly moving or stagnant water…No proper drainage existed in the yards, the closets were very dilapidated, and were constructed on the cess pit [sic] or pail system…every yard contained one or more unprotected water receptacles which gave rise to immense numbers of the *Stegomyia fasciata*… (Boyce 1906, 4)

The presence of standing water and the conditions of the cisterns provided all that was needed for the mosquitoes to breed. It is not certain where the mosquitoes first spawned, or from whom the yellow fever first originated. What is certain is that on July 12, 1905, "two very suspicious cases" in the Sicilian quarters were quietly reported (Boyce 1906, 51). Dr. Quitman Kohnke investigated the two cases and found the disease "in spots…over an area of about five squares" (Kohnke as cited by Boyce 1906, 17). He also found that the history of infection had "dated back several weeks" and had not been "recognized by patients, and attending physicians" (Kohnke as cited by Boyce 1906, 17). Kohnke's observation then, supports the idea that by that time "the disease had a firm hold" in Little Palermo, and probably had been present since "sometime in May" (Carrigan 1988:6), possibly "as early as May 13" (Boyce 1905, 17). It was also supposed that the disease had been imported to the city from Central America (Carrigan 1988:6). By July 22, when the official announcement was made, there were approximately 100

cases of sickness that had already resulted in twenty deaths (Boyce 1906, 17; Carrigan 1988; *The Great Fever* 2006).

Most of the Sicilians were recent arrivals who did not speak English, and were unfamiliar with yellow fever. The immigrants' distrust of authority figures when added with their cultural traditions made them unlikely to seek medical assistance (Boyce 1906, 4; Carrigan 1988). According to Boyce, "The whole neighborhood [was] overcrowded, foreign, insanitary, and superstitious" (Boyce 1906, 5). Figure 6 provides a look at the inner courtyard of an immigrant's home in 1905.

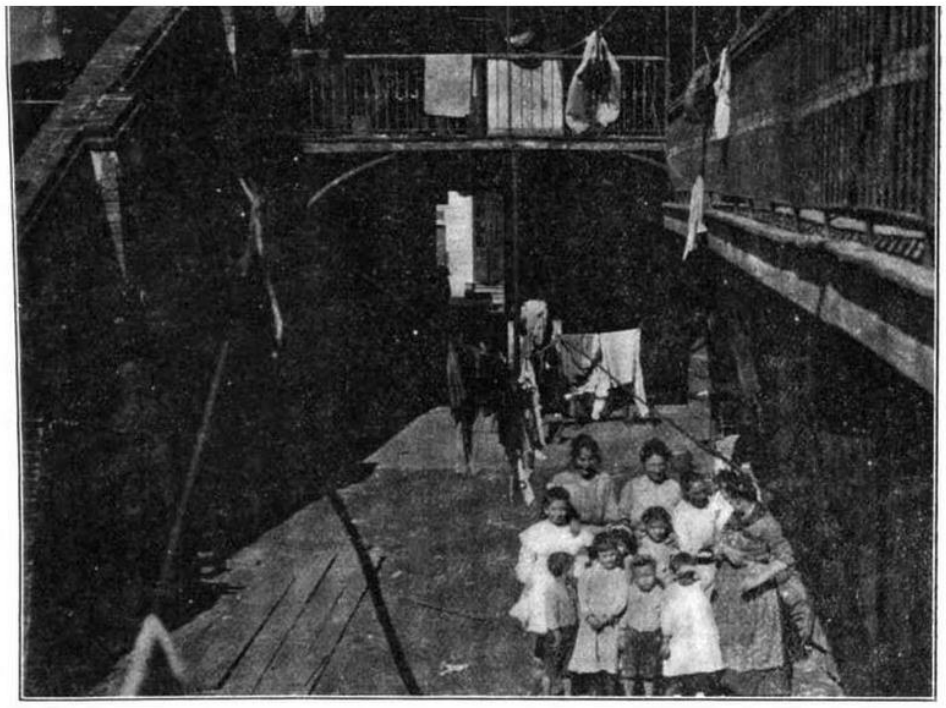

Figure 6. Photograph of a home in Little Palermo, ca. 1905.

Source: McMain 1905, 153.

Further, as it would be later discovered, "the fever centred [sic] amongst the Italians" (Boyce 1906, 5). Thus, most of the cases and subsequent deaths were amongst the Sicilians and Italians. The most likely reason for the high number of Sicilian and

Italian deaths was that many of the men worked on the docks unloading fruit from the cargo ships. These jobs brought them into contact with likely carriers of the disease. To get a sense of the scope of the impact of the epidemic, the map in Figure 7 depicts the locations of yellow fever deaths.

Figure 7. Map of the Infected Block in the Italian Quarter in New Orleans in 1905.

Source: Boyce, Robert William. 1906, 5.

The area with the highest concentration of dots represents the highest number of deaths. As can be seen, the highest number of yellow fever deaths occurred within the French Quarter; i.e., "Little Italy" (Boyce 1906) also known as "Little Palermo" (Carrigan 1988; Edwards-Simpson 1996).

Dr. Kohnke urged the city to institute a program of mosquito control; however, the threat of a yellow fever outbreak was not taken seriously (*St. Tammany Farmer* 1905; *Times-Picayune* 1905d). In March 1905, Dr. Kohnke began to give lectures at Tulane to urge the abolition of cisterns. He demonstrated how copper sulphate [sic] could not kill mosquitoes, but that "by putting a few drops of oil on the water", the mosquitoes died for lack of oxygen (Kohnke 1906, 89-94; *St. Tammany Farmer* 1905; *Times-Picayune* 1905d). He explained that *Stegomyia* mosquitoes carried both malaria and yellow fever, and that swamps, stagnant water and cisterns were the perfect breeding grounds (*Times-Picayune* 1905d). He argued that by ridding the city of the mosquito, they would eliminate the need for the quarantines that hindered the "free exercise of trade" (*Times-Picayune* 1905d). To do this, he argued, meant the destruction of the city's cisterns; "the most important sanitary measure of the day" (*Times-Picayune* 1905d). However, the cisterns in 1905 New Orleans were vital as they were main source of drinking water (Augustin 1909, 1038). While destroying the cisterns, and any other possible standing water, would be the ideal way to eliminate the mosquito problem, it was not a realistic option at the time. Other methods would have to be pursued. George Augustin explains his first-hand knowledge of the methods used as follows:

> …it was decided that the first thing to be done…was to make our cisterns impossible to the *Stegomyiae* as breeding places. To do this…it would be necessary to oil them (pour upon the surface of the water a small quantity of coal oil) and next to cover their tops in such a way that no opening larger than one-sixteenth of inch square should remain unclosed. Secondly, that all premises should be frequently inspected and all standing water poured out, drained away or oiled, and all cesspool, and privy vaults cleansed and oiled not less than once a week (Augustin 1909, 1028)

Early actions by the public most likely assisted in slowing the spread of the 1905 yellow fever epidemic. While it is not measurable as such, one can argue the point due to the final number of deaths in the 1905 epidemic as compared to the total death count from the disease in 1898. A comparison of these numbers is discussed in later sections of this work. What follows in the next sections are images of the city during the epidemic of 1905. These provide a vivid look at the types of standing water present and show the actual work that was done to rid the city of the dreaded mosquitoes. Photographs of the cisterns, open drains, and the work crews are found in Figures 8, 9, 10 and 11.

Figure 8. Home with Water Cistern in New Orleans, 1905.

Source: Boyce, Robert William. 1906, 11.

Figure 9. Street Gutter in New Orleans, 1905.

Source: Boyce, Robert William. 1906, 9.

Figure 10. Steam Fumigation in New Orleans, 1905.

Source: Boyce, Robert William. 1906, 46.

Figure 11. “Oiling Gang” Responsible for placing oil in cisterns in New Orleans, 1905.

Source: Boyce, Robert William. 1906, 47.

Even before the official notice of yellow fever, quarantines were initiated by Alabama, Texas, and Mississippi against persons and baggage from New Orleans. No passengers would be allowed to disembark any trains in those states though through fares and freight would be allowed (*Times-Picayune* 1905f). According to Boyce, the State and City Boards of Health, along with the Public Health and Marine Hospital Services, and various state Health Officers, met on Friday, July 21, to make an official declaration to reassure the public and “to check the stringent and onerous quarantine precautions which had, on the rumours [sic] of the presence of Yellow Fever, been promptly taken by the surrounding States [such as Mississippi] against New Orleans” even though an official declaration had not yet been made (Boyce 1906, 18). The city of Lafayette also put a quarantine into effect against New Orleans and officials were charged to guard transports coming into the town, allowing no “passengers with or without baggage” to be admitted, and only merchandise certified by the U. S. Marine Hospital Service as fumigated would be admitted (*Lafayette Advertiser* 1905d).

On July 22nd, an Advisory Board was appointed to work with health authorities; members included Chairman Dr. Le Boeuf and three other members of the New Orleans Medical Society (Boyce 1906, 18). Then, on July 23, a public address signed by Dr. Kohnke, and Dr. J. H. White announced the "existence of an emergency" that "required the attention of every individual" (Carrigan 1988, 6). A transcript of the official notice is included below in Figure 12.

An emergency exists in our City to-day which demands the attention of every individual, with the view to limiting and preventing the spread of epidemic disease. It has been scientifically proved that the mosquito is the only means of the transmission of Yellow Fever, and measures should be especially directed against them. It is especially urged by the undersigned that the following simple directions be followed by the householders of this City for the summer months:

First. —Empty all unused receptacles of water. Allow no stagnant water on the premises.

Second. —Screen cisterns, after placing a small quantity of insurance oil (a teacupful in each cistern) on the surface of the water.

Third. —Place a small quantity of insurance oil in cesspools or privy vaults.

Fourth. —Sleep under mosquito nets.

Fifth. —Screen doors and windows wherever possible with fine screen wire,

(Signed) Quitman Kohnke,

Health Officer.

J. H. White,

Surgeon, U.S.P.H. and M.H.S.

Advisory Committee,

Orleans Parish Medical Society (Boyce 1906, 19).

Figure 12. Official Transcript of the public address by Dr. Quitman Kohnke, 1905.

Source: Boyce 1906, 19.

Every effort was made to put these measures in place. In New Orleans citizens formed groups of volunteers to go out into "the seventeen wards of the city" to oil and screen cisterns as well as clean premises (Carrigan 1988:7). Augustin relates his experience as follows:

> On July 21st the news reached my ears; on Thursday, the 25th, it was unobtrusively published in the newspapers. That night I received a note asking me to meet certain neighbors on the evening of the 26th in the basement of Trinity Church…the meeting…was to devise a means to place our immediate surroundings in the best possible sanitary condition with the least possible waste of time. The Tenth Ward of New Orleans, you must know, runs from the river to the swamp, and from Felicity to First Streets. Meetings of citizens had already been called and volunteer work had already begun in several of the other wards (Augustin 1909, 1027)

This quote is further evidence of the point discussed above, that early preventative measures helped to slow the spread of the disease. Through cooperation of the public, steps were put in place quickly once confirmation of the presence of yellow fever was announced. Groups of volunteers began organizing meetings and preparing premises against the contagion.

As shown in Figure 11, oil gangs poured kerosene into cisterns to kill eggs and larvae and covered the cisterns with screens to keep out the pests (Carrigan 1988, 7; *The Great Fever* 2006). Doors and windows were screened as well (Carrigan 1988,7; *The Great Fever* 2006). The New Orleans Health Board hired men to find fever cases and screen and fumigate as appropriate (Carrigan 1988:7, *The Great Fever* 2006). Steps were taken to help those infected; a "Fever Isolation Hospital" was set up in the Italian District (*Times-Picayune* 1905a; Boyce 1906, 19). Detention camps were set up in the adjacent communities of Avondale, Kenner, and Slidell (*Times-Picayune* 1905a). People who went to these detention camps were quarantined for five days, after which they were

given certificates of health and allowed to travel (*St. Tammany Farmer* 1905). Also on July 24, 1905 another case among the Sicilian community in Bunkie, Louisiana was reported. Those Sicilians who were exposed were taken to a detention camp (*Times-Picayune* 1905a).

Despite all these efforts, by July 25, 1905, over 50 cases had been reported and New Orleans Mayor Behrman "issued a proclamation, supplemented by Dr. Kohnke giving simple instructions, urging the importance of combating the mosquito" (*Lafayette Advertiser*. 1905c; *St. Tammany Farmer* 1905; *Times-Picayune* 1905a). It was promptly issued along with several others on July 24, 1905. Appeals to physicians were also issued. Titles of the official appeals and brief descriptions of those appeals are listed below:

1. "The Mosquito Campaign" (July 24, 1905) – an official notice of the situation, calling for the public to cooperate with health officials and detailing the steps previously listed above for combating the mosquitoes (Boyce 1906, 21-22).
2. "Appeal for Early Notification" (July 24, 1905) – a notice to medical profession to "report all cases of fever, regardless of type, or certainty of diagnosis" (Boyce 1906, 22-23).
3. "Appeal for Immediate Screening of Suspected Cases and Fumigation" (July 24, 1905) – a notice also sent to doctors calling for them to immediately "screen off any patients and to fumigate another room with Sulphur, screen it…to allow no mosquitoes in the room", when it is prepared "remove the patient to it, fumigating the room just vacated in the same manner" (Boyce 1906, 23).

4. "Appeal for an Educational Campaign" (July 24, 1905) – urging the help of the clergy "The clergyman, during his rounds and from his pulpit, should be a valuable agent in the dissemination of this knowledge" (Boyce 1906, 24).
5. "A Warning to beware of the Danger of overlooking the less obvious Breeding Places of the *Stigma*" (July 24, 1905) – Appeal to the public to "empty indoor water vessels" like pitchers, vases, etc. and to "make sure outside urns in cemeteries are empty of water" (Boyce 1906, 25).

The City Council met and made plans "to protect the city from yellow fever" through sanitation. Notice in the *Lafayette Advertiser* "called for a Board of Health Meeting" to "put town in the best sanitary condition" (*Lafayette Advertiser* 1905e). July 26, 1905, saw the organization of the cities sixteen Wards "under the charge of…Dr. Warner…the Citizens' Volunteer Ward Organization" (Boyce 1906, 28).

The Sicilian community, as noted previously, was not seeking medical help. Col. A. R. Blakely, Boniface of the St. Charles Hotel was quoted in the July 30 *New Orleans Item* as saying that "they [Italians] were of a "suspicious nature" and "are not familiar with our people nor our customs and are prone to imagine we wish to do them harm. They secreted the fever for weeks, some of them died, many got well, but unfortunately, they established the pest" (*New Orleans Item* 1905). The Sicilians' fear of authority figures was stronger than their fear of yellow fever and this contributed to the spread of the disease. It also contributed to higher death rates among the Sicilian population. Historical accounts revealed tales of Sicilians who refused to admit they were even ill. Eleanor McMain, president of the Woman's League, documented experiences of the Italian Relief Committee. She recorded the story of Tonio, a Sicilian immigrant who had

been saving his earnings to bring his wife over from Sicily but unfortunately fell victim to yellow fever. McMain recorded the conversation between Tonio and the worker who found him ill in his cot:

> 'I no sick – I no sick! But I tell you something!'
> 'My poor friend! You are burning with fever. Now lie quiet till I get you a doctor.'
> 'No, no. I go to my work! I no sick, but I tell you something.' [Tonio then hands the worker the three-hundred and seventy-five dollars he has saved]
> 'There, you, my friend – for my wife in Sicily' (McMain 1905, 152).

According to McMain, Tonio was forcibly taken to the hospital where he continued to claim he was not ill and repeatedly refused to drink anything given to him by the nurses until he saw his friend drink from the same cup (McMain 1905, 154). Before succumbing to the disease, Tonio again told his relief worker friend, "'I no sick, I go to my work!' Then, again, 'You won't forget – the money – for my wife in Sicily?'" (McMain 1905, 154). Tonio's story provides a vivid example of the Sicilians' fear of the doctors and nurses. Some culturally ingrained belief system was clearly at work. To explain how this belief may have come to be, McMain noted a legend that illustrates how this fear may have originated in Sicily:

> The Sicilians, I am told, have a legend that when the cholera occurs in their country they are poisoned to death by the authorities, if they are considered hopelessly ill. The yellow fever coming upon them, from they know not whence, has been regarded by them as the same thing, or something similar, and they have been distrustful and suspicious of the many efforts that have been made to help them (McMain 1905, 154)

Fear is a strong motivator. It is not surprising that Sicilians would not trust the health officials in New Orleans. Fearful tales of sick people being murdered by their own government would make anyone look askance at uniformed officials demanding to oil and screen one's cisterns. It could that they thought the oil in the water was making them

sick instead of the yellow fever virus. The Italians, however, were not the only ones resisting the efforts of the relief workers and the official sanitation crews. Augustin (1909) related an incident among the relief workers:

> One hard-headed old Irishwoman obdurately refused to allow her cistern to be oiled. When finally persuaded by one of the most diplomatic of our foremen she exclaimed; "Well, come in and do it, if yez [sic] is bound to but I don't believe yez [sic] can keep the Lord from gittin' [sic] those He wants by puttin' [sic] a little ile [sic] on the cistherns [sic] (Augustin 1909, 1043)

The stubbornness of the Irish woman in the above story is a comical example of how people of different ethnic groups had their own views about the effectiveness of the sanitation crews' efforts.

On July 26, 1905, the *Lafayette Advertiser* reported that although "every means known to science" was being used to "restrict the disease to the infected section and stamp it out", there had been 50 cases of yellow fever in New Orleans, seventeen currently under treatment, and 6 deaths (*Lafayette Advertiser* 1905a). Unfortunately, despite all these efforts, the city of New Orleans found they could not eradicate the disease on their own.

On August 4, 1905, the city called for the assistance of the "Public Health and Marine Hospital Service of the United States" (Boyce 1906, 26; *The Great Fever* 2006; *The Rice Belt Journal* 1905b). This governmental agency was established in 1798 "for the purpose of the care of disabled sailors at ports in the United States" (Boyce 1906, 35). Its functions and responsibilities were expanded in 1875 when it became more involved in the administration of local health and quarantine administration (Boyce 1906, 35). The surgeon general authorized Dr. Joseph White to take control (Carrigan 1988). Dr. White's re-structured system "became so efficient that a screening wagon usually arrived

within thirty-minutes" after a new case was reported (Carrigan 1988). In New Orleans, Dr. White established a Marine Hospital Surgeon at the head of each ward and in the French Quarter formed a depot led by Surgeon Berry (Boyce 1906, 37). He also set up a main headquarters in the city center with his assistants, Surgeons Richardson and Lazard (Boyce 1906, 37). From these locations, the doctors could focus on assigned areas, combating the disease by organizing by wards.

Several meetings were arranged to educate the public and alleviate resistance to the necessary treatments and preventive measures. Churches, classrooms, halls and various clubs were utilized (Boyce 1906, 28). The Women's League also arranged meetings (*Times-Picayune* 1905e). The City Health Officer, Dr. Kohnke, and yellow fever expert, Dr. O. L. Pothier participated, outlining the source of the yellow fever, and discussing Dr. Reed's work in Cuba (Boyce 1906; *Times-Picayune* 1905e). Boyce gives a detailed description of Dr. Kohnke's presentation:

> The City Health Officer was especially active in giving almost every night to large audiences a lantern demonstration of the life history of the *Stegomyia*, throwing upon the screen by means of the lantern the 'wiggle waggles' kept alive in a water cell….lectures were given in English and there languages, and no section of the very mixed population of New Orleans was left out…all religious denominations co-operated…lent their churches...the coloured [sic] people were organized and many meetings were held among them (Boyce 1906, 29; Kohnke 1906, 89-94)

Dr. Kohnke's slide presentation and Dr. Pothier's talks were apparently very popular and led to many Sicilians being convinced of the importance of following the sanitation measures. Dr. O. L. Pothier, besides providing his yellow fever expertise, also noted the Sicilians "intense fear of the fever and of the measures necessary to stop its spread" (*Times-Picayune* 1905e). He urged the native population and educated Italians,

such as priests, nuns, and civic leaders to help educate those immigrants who were still unwilling "to submit to the proper treatment and take the necessary measures" (*Times-Picayune* 1905e). With the help of these presentations, and assistance from "their own priests, and leading men [Italian civic leaders], they, too, became more amenable" (Boyce 1906, 28). Due to these educational efforts, many Sicilians began to see the benefits, and by September 11, 1905, many of them began "to ask that their homes be fumigated" (*Times-Picayune* 1905b).

Unfortunately, some still refused to listen. Dr. V. O. Schayot, Health Officer, filed a written complaint on September 24, 1905, to District Attorney Wilkenson that a group of Italians on Point Celeste Plantation refused treatment and "threatened to shoot any doctor who crossed their fence line or came on their premises" (*Times-Picayune* 1905c). Wilkenson advised Dr. Schayot to "allow no one in and no one out" and to advise the "Negro population there to fumigate as they could" (*Times-Picayune* 1905c). No arrests were made, for to have done so would have risked bringing the carriers of yellow fever into healthy communities; therefore, they would wait until the yellow fever had ended (*Times-Picayune* 1905c). Clearly, the fears of the immigrants proved an extremely difficult obstacle to overcome. Still, a large effort was made to reach across racial and ethnic barriers, as well as those of religion, class and language (Carrigan 1988, 11). Businessmen and professionals of all races, and ethnicities, including women's clubs, politicians, and various religious leaders joined the cause (Carrigan 1988, 11). Italian societies appointed committees and went door-to-door to explain to their countrymen what needed to be done (Carrigan 1988, 11). Unfortunately, the Sicilians

still tended to keep fever cases quiet; therefore, the residents of Little Palermo made up 51% of the city's fever mortality rate until late August (Carrigan 1988, 12).

In the middle of that same month, the epidemic hit its peak, with 100 people diagnosed in one day (Carrigan 1988, 16; *The Great Fever* 2006). Over September and October, cases gradually diminished and disappeared, when the weather turned cooler (Carrigan 1988, 15). At the epidemic's end, there had been 3,400 cases with a total of 452 deaths from yellow fever in New Orleans (Carrigan 1988, 15; United States. "Public Health Service Annual Report 1905-1906"; 145) Throughout the state, yellow fever had claimed over 500 lives out of nearly 6,000 cases (*New Orleans Daily Picayune*, October 11, 16, 1905 as cited by Carrigan 1988, 15).

The persistence of some residents to stay quiet about cases of illness kept the epidemic, and the possibility of its spread, alive. This in turn, led to stronger efforts of the Marine Hospital Surgeons that finally helped the decline in yellow fever cases as well as deaths. However, when federal health officials in New Orleans realized that the mosquito doctrine was still not fully accepted, they created a circular titled, *No Mosquitoes, No Yellow Fever,* and published 100,000 copies (Carrigan 1988, 8). These coupled with other available forms of communication, such as radio, pamphlets, fliers, buttons, posters, telegraphs, and more meetings designed to reach those who did not read (Carrigan 1988, 10). Newspapers also kept up a "steady stream of editorial propaganda", promoting the proper "expert management" of the "war on the mosquitoes" (Carrigan 1988, 8). An example of the type of advertisements printed at the time is reproduced in Figure 13.

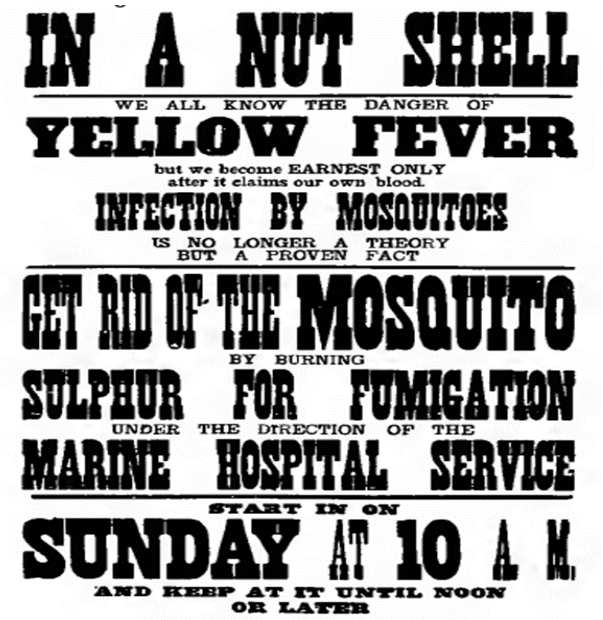

Figure 13. Mosquito Campaign Poster in New Orleans, 1905.

Source: Boyce, Robert William. 1906, 58.

These efforts made an impressive difference in combating the disease. The Mosquito Education Campaign, along with the work of the United States Marine Hospital, reached into peoples' homes and saved lives. With the help of local health officials, Italian priests and nuns, they crossed language, and cultural boundaries to create trust in a distrustful ethnic group. These efforts helped to influence the Sicilian populations' move toward Americanization by opening the door to communication and future interactions, with native New Orleanians. I argue that it was through those later interactions that Sicilians began to relax their suspicious ways and native New Orleanians began to lose some of the prejudices that kept them apart.

Finally, the effort to eradicate the mosquitoes during the 1905 epidemic represents the first successful battle against yellow fever in the United States. It is also an example of what can be achieved when governmental agencies work together toward a common goal regarding managing major health crises. The profound difference in the number of

deaths from the scourge during the years 1898 and 1905 serves as testimony to this fact as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 *Comparison of Total Yellow Fever Cases and Deaths for 1898 and 1905.*

Year	Number of Cases	Number of Deaths
1898	13,817	3,984
1905	3,384	443

Source: Boyce 1906, 52.

As the chart shows, the 1898 yellow fever epidemic resulted in nearly 14,000 cases of yellow fever, and nearly 4,000 deaths; meaning that approximately 28% of all of those who were infected died from the disease. In comparison, in the 1905 epidemic, approximately 3,400 people were infected resulting in almost 500 deaths, meaning that 13% of those infected died. In simpler terms, in 1898, 28% of all cases resulted in death, as compared to 1905 when only 13% of all cases of infection were fatal. Therefore, the efforts of the Marine Hospital Surgeons, other governmental officials, and sanitation crews during the 1905 yellow fever epidemic successfully reduced the number of deaths per cases of infection by nearly half, essentially ending the threat of future yellow fever epidemics in the United States; 1905 was the last time Yellow Jack would bring an epidemic to the United States.

The Yellow Fever Connection

The events during the yellow fever epidemic worked to highlight the differences between the Sicilians and their neighbors. Their cultural beliefs, especially those of *campanilismo,* and their distrust of authority figures left them more vulnerable to yellow fever. It is evident that the yellow fever epidemic, coupled with the ongoing

discrimination and violence perpetrated against Sicilian immigrants, served as motivators that opened Sicilian immigrants' eyes to the realization of their differences. This awakening, in turn, prompted the immigrants to declare themselves "white". Thus, began their assimilation into the white society around them.

Connections

The transformation of Sicilian ethnic identity from dago to white was facilitated by the adaptations forced upon the Sicilian community by outside forces. The political machinations of the white majority placed the Sicilian and Italian community in a precarious position; considered by many as neither white, nor black but somewhere in-between the two. This ambiguous racial situation led to acts of discrimination, prejudice and violence against members of the Sicilian community. These politically charged events coupled with the yellow fever epidemic, led the Sicilian community to re-evaluate their societal position.

CHAPTER VII - CONCLUSION

"…the success of Italian immigration was transforming the new visitors from Europeans to Americans" (Gauthreaux 2014, 25)

This story about Sicilian immigrants' experiences in Louisiana is ultimately about identity transformation and assimilation into a new society. Assimilation can be defined as a "process of simplification", where "ethnic minorities shed themselves of that which makes them distinctive" (Alba 1999, 7). The experience of the Sicilian community in New Orleans is an example of this assimilation process. By shedding their fear of the authorities, and allowing government and local officials to oil their cisterns, screen their homes, and treat their sick (*Times-Picayune* 1905b), the Sicilian immigrants let go of a part of their cultural distinctiveness. Furthermore, by declaring that they were not "white-skinned negroes" (Villari 1906 as cited by Edwards-Simpson 1996, 1), and by not allowing Louisianans to treat them the same way as the treated native blacks (Baiamonte 1969, 95), they were insisting on their "whiteness." They proclaimed themselves more European than Mediterranean, placing themselves firmly among the majority. As soon as 1908, the Sicilian and Italians were becoming a more respected part of the community as evidenced by an article in dated June 8, 1908. In relating the Italian Society's sixty-second anniversary celebration, the article describes the Society's members as having a "great love for liberty" (*Times-Picayune* 1908). It also quoted Mayor Behrman who praised the "thrifty disposition" and "good works" that had been accomplished by the Italian Society in the city (*Times-Picayune* 1908). These descriptions were far more positive than those from just a few short years before.

Utilizing the concepts by Gravlee (2009), Burkholder (2010), and Jaspal and Cinnirella (2011), it was possible to interpret the experiences of the Sicilian immigrant population in New Orleans during the 1905 yellow fever epidemic to show that it was a combination of things that influenced the evolution of Sicilian ethnic identity. First, ethnic identity construction is influenced by one's choices, experiences, and personal motivations. How people see themselves within their own cultural mindset provides a foundation for their behavior and actions. This thesis argues that Sicilians' choices began this journey of ethnic transformation. Their original choices about their personal identity were ultimately changed through the social inequalities they faced and the identity and physical threats they experienced. Their desire for economic success also drove them to change not only how they viewed themselves, but how they were viewed by others. These concepts framed the story of the Sicilian community's transformation from Dago to White. Prodded by traumatic circumstances and motivated by the desire to succeed in New Orleans society, Sicilians opened their closed-off, insular society and began to transform their identity. Figure 14 provides a graphic representation of this concept.

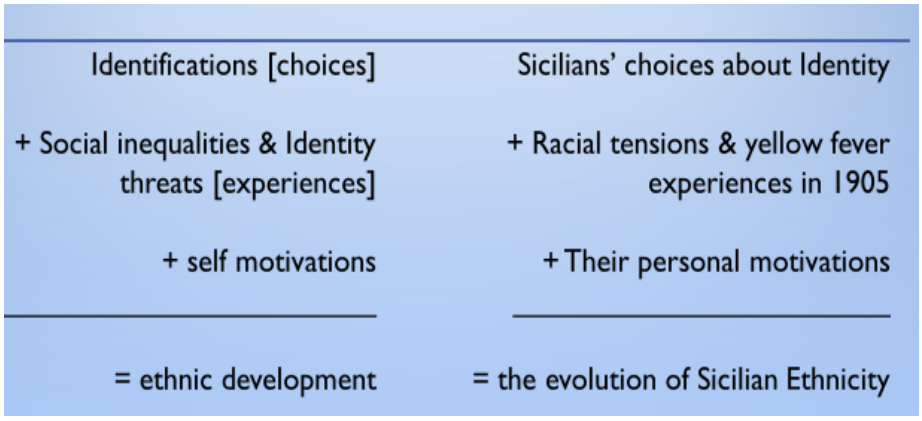

Figure 14. Ethnic Development Formula.

Sources: Becker 2015; Jaspal and Cinnirella 2011; Nagel 1994 [Formula my own].

It was through a combination of social inequalities in the form of racial, ethnic and political discrimination, the joint threats of disease and physical harm, and the transformative power of need in the face of the epidemic that influenced Sicilian ethnic evolution. This thesis argues that Sicilian immigrants were driven by experiences and the personal desire to change how they were viewed by others. The events prior to, and during the epidemic, highlighted the perceived differences that set the Sicilian apart from their American neighbors. The devastating effect of the yellow fever epidemic upon the Sicilian community placed them in desperate need and forced them to open their closed-off society to those who were trying to help. This opening of their society, coupled with their desire to become economically successful Americans, broadened their interaction with native New Orleanians. This interaction facilitated the Sicilian community's transition from "Dago" to "white." Although the transformation did not happen overnight, this "racial whitening" of the Sicilian community continued throughout the early twentieth century. As Edwards-Simpson so aptly stated, "by the 1920s, Sicilians had become white" (Edwards-Simpson 1996, 2). They were Dagoes no longer; along with the rest of their non-Sicilian compatriots, they had become Italian-Americans

APPENDIX A – Steps to Prevent the Spread of Yellow Fever (Carroll, 1905)

1. Our physicians, or at least those who are in control, must disabuse their minds of the impression that black vomit necessarily occurs in the majority of cases of yellow fever.
2. During the epidemic season, viz.: from May 1 to October 31, and in the epidemic zone, physicians should be required to report to the health authorities, immediately, all cases of fever of any kind that come under their observation, whether among their patients or not, and failure to do so should be made punishable under the law.
3. The board of health should be authorized to appoint, with proper compensation, a commission of three experts, all of whom should be men of high reputation as diagnosticians. It should be the duty of this commission to visit without delay all cases of fever reported to the health authorities, and the onus of diagnosis should rest upon the commission and not upon the attending physicians. They (the commission) should visit each patient daily until the diagnosis is established or the patient sent to a hospital, and they should forward promptly to the health department a written report at each visit. The commission should determine whether or not the patient shall be treated as a possible case of yellow fever and their decision should be final and obligatory upon all concerned.
4. All patients presenting the symptoms of yellow fever, and all cases not diagnosed but remaining under suspicion, should be promptly removed for treatment to a hospital especially located and provided with wire screens and mosquito nets, and the whole or a portion of which has been set apart for that purpose. The yellow

fever wards or hospital should be under the direct control of the senior diagnosis commission and the patients should be treated by physicians appointed only on their recommendation and acting under their direction.

5. In exceptional cases, to be determined by the commission, patients under observation awaiting diagnosis could be treated in their homes beneath mosquito netting, and in rooms properly protected with wire screens, until the nature of the case had been finally settled to the satisfaction of the commission.

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