



# Trends, Characteristics, and Causes of Outward Migration in Italy: From Late 19th Century to Present

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**Abstract.** Beginning in the late 19th century, the industrialization of Britain, the United States, and France brought a large number of jobs to the world, while Italy was facing a domestic economic recession, and Italians came to the United States in search of employment with a wave of immigrants. Since the Mediterranean region is mostly islands, there have been frequent population exchanges between ancient Greece and Rome since the ancient city-state period, and there is also the practice of population movement between the north and the south within Italy. However, there is fewer data on Italian migration since before the 18th century, and research on Italy since the 19th century has focused on Italian economic issues, as this is something that many European countries can learn from. This paper will provide an overview of the trends and causes of Italian emigration in the context of the political and cultural context of Italy and the United States from the early 20th century to the post-World War II period.

**Keywords:** Italian immigration · American immigration · Racial discrimination

## 1 Introduction

Within Italy, due to the geographical and cultural differences between the North and the South, there were long-standing population movements, and the characteristics of immigrants' lives were strongly influenced by their cultural backgrounds. After World War I, Italy had serious historical problems due to the post-war economic crisis in the country. At the same time, the demand for labor generated after the industrial revolution in Europe provided an opportunity for out-migration. 1880–1920 reached the peak of Italian immigration, and Italians became the main immigrant population in the world, however, influenced by cultural perceptions and World War I, early Italian immigrants did not settle in the United States [1].

After World War II, Italian immigrants lived and settled in American ports and major cities, mainly as labor migrants. Some Italians brought their home country's farm business model to the United States and became farmers, gaining a better economic status, and some other farmers failed due to unfamiliarity with the American estate farming system [2]. After the enactment of the Immigration Act of 1924 in the United States, the contraction of immigration policies brought about adverse racial discrimination. Italians

in this period encountered extreme situations when integrating into American society. The study of the Italian immigrants is of great significance for understanding both the history of immigration and racial discrimination in the U.S. Italians have lived in the U.S. since the 20th century, and were scattered throughout the city by descent and culture, at the same period of Irish immigrants and other ethnic minorities of the same period formed “impurity” communities [3]. These immigrant communities served as a springboard for Italians to enter American society.

## **2 A Review of the Historical Agenda of the Migration Situation in Italy**

### **2.1 1880–1920**

Early Italian immigration to the United States occurred during the Columbian period, and between 1880 and 1920, with the economic decline in Italy and severe government taxation the United States saw a peak in Italian immigration. The immigrants of this period flocked to the industrial cities of the United States mainly as laborers, mostly of peasant origin, non-English speaking, Catholic, and economically poor. They entered from New York and lived mainly in the entry and port locations, while most of the rest settled in the Northeastern and Midwestern cities such as Philadelphia, Detroit, Boston, and Chicago [1]. According to U.S. census data, there were 439 Italian immigrants in 1820–1830, 11,725 in 1861–1870, and by 1880–1920 reached 4,114,603, accounting for almost more than 80% of immigrants throughout the 19th century [4]. Most of the immigrants were young and middle-aged men who traveled from country to country throughout the year, more like “hosts” than immigrants in the strict sense. The second generation of immigrants gradually abandoned the sense of “diaspora” as their economic level stabilized and became more mixed with immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe in the United States [1].

After the Irish immigrants, Italian farmers who immigrated to the United States after 1880 worked primarily in hard manual labor, such as construction and mine. Others achieved employment through farming activities, becoming western farmers with their experience in growing fruits such as grapes, citrus, and tomatoes and their traditional winemaking and honey-making skills, and generating employment for a significant proportion of foreign workers. These Italian farms not only engage in manufacturing food alone, but also in farming techniques, employee instruction and training, marketing of agricultural products, and other expansion of production [2]. But religious and cultural issues kept them away from integrating into American society. However, as the second and third generations of Italians realized the importance of assimilating into America, they attempted to minimize their reliance on their family by establishing their own immigrant networks and communities. With the gradual assimilation of Italian immigrants, their conflicts with mainstream American society have been eased [1].

### **2.2 1920–1945**

The beginning of the 20th century saw a major social transition and a change in the political ecology of Italy. The changes, centered on modes of production and land ownership,

flooded the country with intense political identity conflicts, increasing social pressures over a short period of time, and an increase in Italians' willingness to emigrate. [8] However, the immigration boom of the early colonial era had come to an end after the end of the World Wars, and with the enactment of the Immigration Act of 1924) by the U.S. Congress, which ended the lenient admission criteria of the early 19th century, Italians gradually decreased their tendency to emigrate [3].

### **2.3 Demographic Movement of Italians in the Second Half of the 20th Century - Present**

The American government continued to preach the fantasy of the "American Dream" in the middle of the 20th century, and some Italians who had enlisted in the American military decided to stay on America's land. At this time, an array of notable Italian-American leaders in American culture were born, including Frank Sinatra, a musician, and John Basilone, an honorary member of the US Marine Corps. Italy experienced a minor economic miracle during the century and a half that passed between the Second World War and its reunification in 1861. After 1970, with the Lincoln administration's forward implementation of Affirmative Action, discrimination and violence against immigrants lessened, and immigrants' scenarios improved. Immigrants' condition in Italy has improved. At the same time, as the economic dynamism of the 1983 tax reform was restored, the outflow of individuals from Italy decreased. However, the globalization movement in the 1990s exposed its ineffective institutions, and a lack of innovative processes caused Italian corporations to lag behind comparable nations in terms of size, governance, and supervisory methods. Poverty, marginalization, and labor outflow plagued Italy's rural areas, prompting the Italian agricultural business to hire foreign workers [10].

## **3 Attributes of Italian Immigrants**

### **3.1 Rely on Family Ties, Insufficient Political Participation, and Ethnic Strength**

Italy was long fractured after the breakup of the Roman Empire, and Italians relied drastically on the family. Italians depended more on their relatives to start their businesses. Early Italian immigrants came to the United States for purely economic reasons, with a strong local cultural identity and rural values of an agrarian society, and most of their savings were sent back home after their days of labor, making Italians the only group of immigrants who entered the United States in large numbers and then returned home [1]. At the same time, because of Italy's enormous land ownership system, there is a big unoccupied agricultural population that works as seasonal laborers during their farming idleness period; the uneven distribution of industrial resources within it also leads to the necessity of Italians to achieve employment through mobility.

Emphasis on family culture is a significant feature too. Southern Italian immigrants to the U.S. bring their traditional family network along, immigrants from the same family or village in the same area often live together in one place. But the strong sense of family hinders the ethnic identity of Italians, who do not have purely Italian communities (e.g.,

Chinatown, Koreatown, etc.). The population base of Italian immigrants was second only to Germany, but they did not form many “Little Italy” in American cities “instead of massive ethnic groups [1]. Italian children in the early 20th century had a relatively low willingness to enter further education and often dropped out of school to participate in the family economy. These characteristics of Italian result in their limited political participation and mainstream opinion power in the United States and their failure to participate extensively in local life.

Educational and occupational levels among second-generation Italian immigrants in the early 20th century were much lower than those of all other European and non-European ethnic groups. Early immigrants discouraged their children’s education, and most immigrant children dropped out of school after middle and high school to run the family business, so they faced significant resistance to becoming citizens and improving their standard of living [5]. However, when these children became economically independent and had a sense of local citizenship they began to survive independently from their ethnic groups and gradually began to integrate into American society [1].

### **3.2 Frequent Friction and Conflict Among Italian Immigrants**

Friction and conflict among Italian immigrants have a strong mother-country character, bringing with them the mafia culture of their country to the United States, where their criminal behavior is mostly family-based or clan-targeted. These gangs are well-organized, finely divided, and organized text as well as operational language [7]. These mafia forces entered American society with the wave of immigration and divided their respective activities by family to carry out large-scale illegal activities such as olive oil importation, gambling, and liquor smuggling. Intra-Italian conflicts and violence disrupted American society and increased the rejection of the Native whites.

## **4 Analysis of the Underlying Causes**

### **4.1 Italy’s Historical Tradition of Population Movement**

Throughout history Italy has experienced several periods of prosperity and decline, the Italian peninsula was the richest country in the Mediterranean during the time of Emperor Augustus, which attracted many outsiders and European traders, and many industrial and commercial workers traveled between their parent countries and their trading countries, becoming the first migrants [8]. The northern part of Italy has a gentle landscape with mild temperatures suitable for agricultural practices, while the southern region, with its many mountainous areas at the high altimeter, is inhospitable to industrial development and extensive agricultural activities, and many populations migrated to the north or to cities abroad in search of work. Thus, the Italian people have always had a continuous tradition of population mobility.

### **4.2 Italy’s Frequent Economic Changes, Internal and External**

The Italians of the late 19th century were mostly “political-economic immigrants”---“individuals driven by extreme socio-economic conditions to cross international borders”

(Achieme-E). Due to the extreme socio-economic difficulties in their own countries and the prosperity of the destination countries, Italians at the end of the 19th century began to look abroad for their work needs [9]. At the same time the international colonial system in Europe made the movement of people between Europe inevitable, and the unified international and bilateral laws between Europe, as well as international corporate agreements, facilitated the movement of people. Economically, Italy's overall GDP began to rise after Napoleonic unification, but the political unification of the country did not lead to a significant increase in the average income of its citizens, but rather to a slow and small increase in income. Italy's GDP increased as much as sevenfold after World War II (1861–1951), but population growth outpaced its economic growth during the same period, leading to a gradual decline in population income within Italy. The huge structural transformation of the economy became an opportunity for labor migration. The lack of natural resources and skilled labor, as well as a well-developed NIS structure (National Innovation System) in Italy, only filled the market gap by adapting imported technologies, and the lack of investment in science, technology, and education in the country caused a partial brain drain [9].

## 5 Conclusion

America is a major country of immigration, and the issue of Italian immigration is an inescapable part of the study of America and the world's politics.

From the late 9th century to the early 20th century, Italians endured a change in their identity from expatriates to immigrants, making great efforts to integrate into mainstream American society and bringing their country's winemaking, tomato-growing techniques, and Italian food culture to American society [5]. Today, Italian Americans are an important ethnic force in the United States, holding up the edifice of civilized American cities. In the context of globalization, the study of the motivations of Italian-American migration can help to solve the American racism problem and can avoid the polarized clashes, conflicts between social classes, immigrants and non-immigrants, etc.

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