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The Publisher of the Foreign-Language Press as an Ethnic Leader? The Case of James V. Donnaruma and Boston's Italian-American Community in the Interwar Years

By

Benedicte Deschamps and Stefano Luconi

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Scholars have often depicted the publishers of U.S. foreign-language newspapers as potential ethnic leaders who shaped their respective immigrant communities into cohesive groups, stood by the interests of their members, and voiced their claims. In particular, as newcomers were usually unacquainted with English and had to rely on newspapers published in their native country as a major source of knowledge and interpretation about politics in their host society, previous studies have generally contended that the foreign-language press could in theory enjoy significant influence on the political experience and electoral behavior of the nationality groups of European descent in the United States before World War II.¹

¹ Robert E. Park, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control* (New York, 1922); Marcus Lee Hansen, "The History of American Immigration as a Field for Research," *American Historical Review*, XXXII (1927), 512; Oscar Handlin, "The Immigrant and American Politics," in his *Foreign Influences in American Life: Essays and Critical Bibliographies*, ed. David F. Bowers (Princeton, NJ, 1944), 88; John M. Allswang, *A House for All Peoples: Ethnic Politics in Chicago, 1890-1936* (Lexington, 1971), 10; Sally M. Miller, "Introduction," in

This article will discuss such assumptions using James V. Donnaruma, the owner and editor of the Boston-based Italian-language weekly *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, as a case study. The ambiguous role that Donnaruma played as both a spokesperson for his own immigrant community and an ethnic political broker in the interwar years will be analyzed, in an attempt to unveil the often underestimated complexity of ethnic journalism.

A former barber from San Valentino Torio, an Italian village in the province of Salerno, Donnaruma came to the United States in 1886 and settled in Boston. He purchased *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* in 1905 and made it the leading Italian-language newspaper in New England. Distributed both in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, Donnaruma's weekly served primarily the Italian-Americans of Boston, and could boast a circulation of over 13,000 copies throughout the 1920s and the 1930s.²

The Ethnic Press in the United States: A Historical Analysis and Handbook, ed. Miller (Westport, CT, 1987), xv-xvi; Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Italian Immigrant Press and the Construction of Social Reality, 1850-1920," *Print Culture in a Diverse America*, ed. James P. Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand (Urbana, IL, 1998), 19. For the specific case of the editors and publishers of Italian-language newspapers, see, e.g., Arthur Mann, *La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, 1882-1933* (Chicago, 1958), 279; Pietro Russo, "La stampa periodica italo-americana," in Rudolph J. Vecoli et al., *Gli italiani negli Stati Uniti: L'emigrazione e l'opera degli italiani negli Stati Uniti* (Florence, 1972), 511-512; John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton, NJ, 1972), 84; Philip V. Cannistraro, "Generoso Pope and the Rise of Italian-American Politics, 1925-1936," in *Italian-Americans: New Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity*, ed. Lydio F. Tomasi (Staten Island, NY, 1985), 264-88. For the characteristics of ethnic leadership, see John Higham, "Introduction: The Forms of Ethnic Leadership," in *Ethnic Leadership in America*, ed. John Higham (Baltimore, 1978), 1-18; Victor R. Green, *American Immigrant Leaders, 1800-1910: Marginality and Identity* (Baltimore, 1987).

² Ario Flamma, *Italiani di America* (New York, 1936), 132; *N. W. Ayer and Son's Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals* (Philadelphia, 1920-1939); Anna Maria Martellone, "Italian Immigrants, Party Machines, Ethnic Brokers in City Politics, from the 1880s to the 1930s," in *The European Emigrant Experience in the USA*, ed. Walter Holbling and Reinhold Wagnleitner (Tubingen, 1992), 183-87. For sketchy information about *La Gazzetta del*

Totalling about 80,000 people of Italian stock in 1920 and above 90,000 twenty years later, Boston was home to the fourth largest Italian-American settlement in the United States in the interwar years after New York City, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Roughly half of the city's population of Italian descent lived in two districts: the North End, where the residents from Italian background were about 27,000 in 1920 and 18,000 in 1940, and East Boston, where the number of individuals of Italian extraction rose from 21,000 in 1920 to 24,000 in 1940. Semi-skilled and unskilled laborers made up the bulk of the Italian-American community. Actually, in 1910, only 23 percent of Boston's workers of Italian ancestry held skilled jobs and a mere twelve percent were employed in white-collar occupations. The remaining 65 percent were manual laborers.³

Boston's Italian-Americans matched the picture of a community whose members depended on their native language for information in the interwar years. Indeed, on the eve of the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor and Italy's ensuing declaration of war on the United States in early December 1941, only thirteen percent of the local population of Italian descent did not read an Italian-language newspaper, while 27.1 percent even tuned to Italian-language programs broadcast from their mother country. Still *Donnaruma* hardly fulfilled the role of political ethnic broker that scholarship ascribes to the editors of foreign-language newspapers.⁴

Unlike a vast majority of Italian-American commercial newspapers which tended, in the first decade of the twentieth century, to carry more

Massachusetts, see also Giacomo Grillo, *Cronaca che non a un epitaffio: I settantacinque anni della Gazzetta* (Boston, 1971).

³ Anna Maria Martellone, *Una Little Italy nell'Atene d'America: La comunita italiana di Boston* (Naples, 1972); William M. De Marco, *Ethnics and Enclaves: Boston's Italian North End* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1981); Gerald H. Gamm, *The Making of New Deal Democrats: Voting Behavior and Realignment in Boston, 1920-1940* (Chicago, 1989), 79-80; Stephan Thernstom, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970* (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 135-36.

⁴ Jerome S. Bruner and Jeanette Sayre, "Shortwave Listening in an Italian Community," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, V (1941), 645; Jeanette Sayre Smith, "Broadcasting for Marginal Americans," *ibid*, VI (1942), 589.

news on Italy than on American events or even on Italian-American matters, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* always dedicated most of its columns to the small and great happenings affecting the life of Boston's Italian community. However, despite his obvious interest in Italian-American problems, Donnaruma contrasted with other immigrant editors because he did not use his newspaper to praise incessantly his fellow countrymen's achievements. Indeed, he was quite critical of Italians and blamed them for being a pitiful sight for Americans. In 1910, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* thus lamented that "Boston's Italian colony had never thought of undertaking even one action which could give the measure of its dependability or of its concern for the collectivity."⁵

The owner of the main Italian-American newspaper in the Boston area, Donnaruma probably liked to picture himself as a sort of guide for his community. He showed a constant desire to reform the behavior of Italian immigrants and thought that he could lead them on the way to Americanization. While New York City's largest Italian newspaper *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* insisted on the greatness of Italian culture, Donnaruma praised the traditions of New England and advised Italians to blot out their "old country" manners to honor their adopted land. It is thus hardly surprising that Donnaruma chose to take the stand for Fascism. Indeed, Italian-Americans in general were quite pleased with the fact that, after the rise to power of Fascism with the March on Rome of October 28, 1922, the international press presented Italian dictator Benito Mussolini as a remarkable statesman whose tough, yet supposedly wise, leadership would transform Italy back into the great nation it used to be.⁶ *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* thus proudly reported, for example, that the Harvard students had elected Mussolini the second greatest personality of the year 1928 (just behind aviator Charles A. Lindbergh).⁷

⁵ Fra Cavicchio, "Sarebbe il nostro dovere," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, June 11, 1910.

⁶ See, for example, Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*; Philip V. Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy: Italian-Americans and Fascism 1921-1929*, (West Lafayette, IN, 1999).

⁷ "Gli studenti della Harvard vincono il dibattito su Mussolini e il Fascismo," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Mar. 17, 1928.

However, what attracted Donnaruma was less what the Blackshirts could offer Italy than what Mussolini's emigration policy could bring to Italians in the United States. At a time when Italian-American immigrants were severely discriminated against, Fascism restored their ethnic pride, and gave them a mission as ambassadors of "Italianness" and supporters of the Duce's economic and foreign policy.⁸ Through such institutions as the Fascist League of North America, Mussolini's efficient propaganda aimed at persuading both Italian immigrants and American authorities that Italy would supervise and discipline her children abroad. That aspect of the Fascist program proved convincing to many observers. American businessman James Roe, for example, congratulated the Fascists in the United States for offering immigrants the "guidance" they needed and "supplying [American] needs among our Italian brothers."⁹ The idea that Mussolini could, as American banker Otto Khan explained, "insufflate to its people a spirit of order, discipline, work, patriotic devotion and faith" greatly appealed to Donnaruma, who believed Fascist teachings would help Italian-Americans show themselves worthy of the United States.¹⁰ In 1926, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* commented on the celebration of the fourth anniversary of the March on Rome by Boston's Italian-Americans in the following terms:

According to all observers, and even to the Americans who have attended the celebration, the event was one of those rare occasions in which our colony offered a magnificent demonstration of unity, enthusiasm,

⁸ "Il messaggio di S.E. Mussolini agli Italiani d'America," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, Nov. 5, 1922; Stefano Luconi, *La "diplomazia parallela": Il regime fascista a la mobilitazione politica degli italo-americani* (Milan, 2000), 62-84.

⁹ James Roe, "Shall We Tolerate the Fascisti in the United States?," *Il Carroccio*, XVII (1923), 411.

¹⁰ "Il fascismo e una necessity della vita moderna italiana," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, May 10, 1926.

elegance and perfect order, a sight that impressed quite favorably the native element.¹¹

Adhering to Fascism was therefore an attempt to seek the approval of the American local authorities by eliminating any trace of provincialism and disorganization within the Italian community. *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* claimed that “Fascism was a necessity of modern life,” and Donnaruma believed that adapting to “modern life” was precisely the first step toward integration. In other words, the weekly’s owner used Fascism as a means and not as an end. In supporting the Fascists, Donnaruma was certainly representative of the majority of its fellow countrymen, but it cannot be said that he was leading the way. Rather, he was following a more general trend. Indeed, a fair share of the pro-Fascist articles featured by *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* were actually translations from American newspapers’ items. Donnaruma also had a very personal way of expressing his support to the Fascists, which included harsh criticism of his community that could not be appreciated by his readers. Condemning his own kind while presenting Fascism as an instrument of redemption was a tactics meant to gain the favors of Boston’s American leaders, who included, for example, the Lodges, a family of Bostonian conservatives whose name was associated with the Immigration Restriction League and the passing of the discriminatory Literacy Test. Voted three times by Congress and finally passed over President Woodrow Wilson’s veto in 1917, this latter measure barred from the United States the prospective immigrants who were unable to read and write at least in their native language and was intended to affect southern and eastern Europeans, who had a lower literacy rate than newcomers from northern Europe. Actually, in Henry Cabot Lodge’s own words, the Literacy Test would “bear most heavily upon the Italians, Russians, Poles, Hungarians, Greeks and Asiatics.”¹²

¹¹ “Il IV anniversario della marcia su Roma festeggiato solennemente dalla colonia di Boston,” *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Oct. 9, 1926.

¹² Martellone, “Italian Immigrants, Party Machines, Ethnic Brokers,” pp. 184-86; Barbara M. Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* (Cambridge, MA, 1956); Henry P. Fairchild, “The Literacy Test and Its Making,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, XXXI (1917), 447-60; Henry Cabot Lodge, “The Restriction of Immigration,” *Congressional Record*, 54th Congress, 1st session, Mar. 16, 1896.

In that context, Donaruma's courtship of the Lodges revealed that serving the community was not his sole priority and that his quest for personal power at the political level always came first.

The treatment of the Sacco-Vanzetti case by *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* offers another example of Donnaruma's ambivalent position vis-a-vis his community. In 1921, when Italian anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were found guilty of killing two employees of the Slater and Morill Company at South Braintree, Massachusetts, one of the most famous and controversial episodes in American judicial history began. As the crime had been committed in Massachusetts and the defendants were Italian, it seems quite natural to assume that the trial, held at Dedham, would have been carefully covered by *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*. Given the real doubt as to the two men's culpability and considering the rules of ethnic solidarity still prevailing at the time, one might have expected Donnaruma to support Sacco and Vanzetti, or at least to open the columns of his weekly to conflicting viewpoints. However, Donnaruma did nothing of the kind. Between 1921 and 1926, the contribution of *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* to the cause celebre was limited to small and extremely neutral reports on the development of the case, with a blatant effort on the editors' part to avoid any comment.¹³

¹³ "Il Processo contro Sacco a Vanzetti per il 7 marzo," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Feb.12, 1921; "Il Processo di Sacco a Vanzetti," *ibid.*, May 25, 1921; "La terza settimana del processo Sacco-Vanzetti," *ibid.*, June 18, 1921; "L'auto-difesa di Vanzetti davanti alla corte," *ibid.*, July 9, 1921; "La tragica fine della causa Sacco-Vanzetti," *ibid.*, July 23, 1921; "Un altro avvocato si ritira dalla difesa di Sacco a Vanzetti," *ibid.*, Dec. 13, 1924; "Joseph J. Etorr parla in un comizio pro Sacco-Vanzetti," *ibid.*, Jan. 31, 1925; "Il fato di N. Sacco a B. Vanzetti nelle mani della Corte Suprema," *ibid.*, Jan. 16, 1926; "La prossima udienza per Sacco a Vanzetti," *ibid.*, Sept. 11, 1926. The literature on the Sacco-Vanzetti case is quite extensive. For more details, see Herbert B. Ehrmann, *The Untried Case: The Sacco-Vanzetti Case and the Morelli Gang* (New York, 1960); Herbert B. Ehrmann, *The Case That Will Not Die: Commonwealth vs. Sacco and Vanzetti* (Boston, 1969); Francis Russell, *Tragedy in Dedham: The Story of the Sacco-Vanzetti Case* (New York, 1971); Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht, *Justice Crucified: The Story of Sacco and Vanzetti* (New York, 1977); Nunzio Pernicone, "Carlo Tresca and the Sacco-Vanzetti Case," *Journal of American History*, LXVI (1979), 535-47; Francis Russell, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Case Resolved* (New York, 1986); Paul Avrich, *Sacco and*

With the progress made by the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee in persuading prominent American and international figures that the two Italians were innocent, Donnaruma's insistent silence resulted in a tacit approval of the prosecutors' version of the crime. Actually, the weekly's owner was fiercely opposed to radicals in general and to anarchists in particular. Yet that was not his only motivation for neglecting to report seriously on the case.

Donnaruma was on the side of the Bostonian establishment. Breaking the rules of ethnic loyalty, and alienating himself from the Italian community -- which generally supported the two anarchists, in spite of the defendants' political opinions -- Donnaruma wanted to show his allegiance to American authorities, and to the powerful Massachusetts Republicans who contributed through advertising to the income of his newspaper. In 1927, while Sacco and Vanzetti were hitting the front pages of the world press, the pressure on Republican Governor Alvin Fuller to use his clemency privilege was increasing. By then *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* could no longer relegate the news related to the two anarchists' fate to the small prints. Indeed, Donnaruma started commenting on the case in his English editorial, on page one of his newspaper. Nonetheless these articles did not discuss the odds of the trial but blamed the turmoil caused by Sacco and Vanzetti's advocates, whose behavior supposedly harmed the cause and jeopardized the well-being of the Italian American communities. As *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* explained in February 1927,

Repetitions of the attacks upon official representatives of the United States in European and South American countries by anarchists and fanatics who have seized upon the Sacco-Vanzetti case as an excuse for violence may endanger the standings which law-abiding and respectable Italians have attained in America.¹⁴

Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background (Princeton, NJ, 1991); Philip V. Cannistraro, "Mussolini, Sacco-Vanzetti, and the Anarchists: The Transatlantic Context," *Journal of Modern History*, LXVIII (1996), 31-62.

¹⁴ "Violent outbursts Harm Sacco-Vanzetti Chances," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Feb. 26, 1927.

Donnaruma was all the more concerned as Congressman Hiram Johnson used the case and the agitation it generated as a further excuse to justify the Immigration Quota Laws and to threaten with deportation any newcomer not yet naturalized who would participate in the pro Sacco-Vanzetti demonstrations. Yet, instead of attacking Johnson as *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* did, Donnaruma took a stand that was quite unexpected for an alleged ethnic leader and claimed that the congressman's "warning" was nothing but "relevant." He also vilified radical immigrants for hindering the assimilation process of their fellow countrymen.¹⁵

After the execution, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* reaffirmed Donnaruma's belief that Sacco and Vanzetti had been tried with all the necessary "impartiality" by fair institutions. The weekly also declared that the two men had "died serenely" -- a rather unusual statement, considering that they were killed on the electric chair.¹⁶ Once again, while thousands of Italian-Americans paraded through Boston's North End to protest the electrocution of Sacco and Vanzetti,¹⁷ Donnaruma showed in his dealing of this case that the defense of Italian-Americans' interests came second, after the devotion he owed to the American politicians whose campaign he had supported. He also demonstrated that he was ready to risk the alienation from his community when the needs and claims of his fellow ethnics were in conflict with the interests of his American friends.

Deference to the Bostonian establishment to the detriment of the interests of the Italian-American community had already characterized the editorial policy of *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* in the early years of Donnaruma's ownership. In 1909, the Italian-language weekly did not come out against a campaign that the Good Government Association had launched to revise Boston's charter, abolish the ward-based 87 member bicameral City Council, and replace it with a single chamber of nine

¹⁵ "Avvertimento agli stranieri," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Aug. 13, 1927.

¹⁶ "Sacco a Vanzetti morti serenamente," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Aug. 27, 1927.

¹⁷ Recollections of Phil D'Alessandro as quoted in Anthony V. Riccio, *Portrait of an Italian-American Neighborhood: The North End of Boston* (Staten Island, NY, 1998), 109.

members who would be elected at large. Boston's Brahmins conceived this reform in the fruitless effort to end Irish Democratic politicians' influence on the city's administration. The change in the rules for the election of the council was of no avail and Irish bosses retained their control of Boston politics. Yet, since Italian-Americans were concentrated only in a few districts in the North End and East Boston, the repeal of the ward representation and the significant reduction in the number of the councilmen swept away the Italian-American presence from the City Council for thirty years, until the election of Joseph Russo in 1939. By failing to defend an electoral system that had let Italian-American politicians from North End's ward 6 sit on the City Council since the late nineteenth century, Donnaruma suited the will of Boston's social elite and did not help his fellow ethnics' quest for political power at the local level.¹⁸

Indeed, in politics, too, Donnaruma undermined his credibility as a potential ethnic leader for the Italian-American community in Boston and does not seem to have exerted a significant hold over the city's Italian-American voters. *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* generally came out for the Republican party throughout the interwar years.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the endorsement of Donnaruma's newspaper was of little avail for the GOP among Italian-American voters in Boston. Actually, the great bulk of the local electorate of Italian descent usually cast ballots for Democratic candidates in the 1920s and the 1930s with the only leading exception of the 1920 contest for the White House.

¹⁸ Martellone, *Una Little Italy nell'Atene d'America*, pp. 515-517, 537, 564-565; Geoffrey Blodgett, "Yankee Leadership in a Divided City: Boston, 1860-1910," *Journal of Urban History*, VIII (1982), 371-96; Anna Maria Martellone, "La città nella Gilded Age: Crescita a problemi," in *Città a campagna nell'età dorata: Gli Stati Uniti tra utopia e riforma*, ed. Valeria Gennaro Lerda (Rome, 1986), 69-70.

¹⁹ "I connazionali d'America ripagheranno Woodrow Wilson degli oltraggi commessi contro l'Italia a le sue aspirazioni," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Oct. 20, 1920; "Un candidato pericoloso!," *ibid.*, Nov. 1, 1924; "Immigration Policy Will Aid Republican Victory," *ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1928; "Forecast Predict Hoover -- Ely to Win," *ibid.*, Nov. 5, 1932; "Prima di esercitare il diritto di voto," *ibid.*, Oct. 31, 1936; "Willkie Is Capable of Being President," *ibid.*, Oct. 26, 1940.

In 1920, Republican presidential candidate Warren G. Harding received 53.7 percent and 70.1 percent of the vote in the city's "Little Italies" located in East Boston and in the North End. Both Republican majorities resulted primarily from the backlash of Italian-Americans at the Democratic party for President Woodrow Wilson's failure to accommodate the claims of their mother country -- primarily Italy's demand for the annexation of the city of Fiume -- at the peace conference in Paris that followed the end of World War I. In the hope of keeping the local community in the Republican camp in the subsequent elections for the White House, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* made a point of reminding its readers in both 1924 and 1928 that it was a Democratic president who had refused to place Fiume under Italian sovereignty at the end of World War I. Yet Republican Calvin Coolidge obtained only 33.1 percent and 38.7 percent of the Italian-American vote in East Boston and the North End in 1924, and Democrat Alfred E. Smith carried both districts by 92.6 percent and 94.5 percent in 1928.²⁰

Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt followed suit, notwithstanding the pro-Republican bent of *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* in the three subsequent presidential contests. In 1932, East Boston's Italian-Americans cast 94.5 percent of their ballots for Roosevelt, while 93.2 percent of their fellow ethnics voted for the Democratic party in the North End. Support for President Roosevelt in those Italian-American districts was 84.9 percent and 86.0 percent, respectively, four years later. Though by a smaller plurality, Roosevelt managed to carry the Italian-American vote in 1940 as well. He obtained 62.9 percent in East Boston and 51.1 percent in the North End.²¹

²⁰ "Cosa dice l'elettore straniero prima di votare," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Oct. 4, 1924; "L'opinione dei democratici sugl'Italiani," *ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1928; J. Joseph Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics, 1919-1933* (Cambridge, MA, 1959), 20-22, 42. The percentages of the Italian-American vote are calculated from data in Gamm, *The Making of New Deal Democrats*, 83. For Italian-Americans' criticism of Wilson attitude toward Italy at the peace conference, see in general John B. Duff, "The Italians," in *The Immigrants' Influence on Wilson's Peace Policies*, ed. Joseph P. O'Grady (Lexington, 1967), 111-139.

²¹ The percentages of the Italian-American vote are calculated from data in Gamm, *The Making of New Deal Democrats*, 83.

In a 1936 letter to Giovanni M. Di Silvestro, the director of the Italian-American Division of the Foreign Language Bureau of the Republican National Committee, Donnaruma maintained that “national advertisements should be given to newspapers that have been doing work for the Republican party in the past years.” His involvement in Republican campaigns, therefore, resulted directly from his belief that his newspaper would be financially rewarded for its endorsement of the GOP. Donnaruma similarly admitted to U.S. Representative Joseph W. Martin Jr., the Eastern manager of the National Committee of the Republican party, that “the proper kind of consideration by leading Republicans in procuring some national advertising which would increase my income” contributed to the Republican allegiance of *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*.²²

Donnaruma’s words help explain the conflicting political statements of his newspaper in the previous years. For example, quite naturally, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* complained that President Coolidge had signed the 1924 Johnson-Reed National Origins Act, the second statutory ceiling on immigration after the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, without expressing any concern for the plight of the tens of thousands of prospective Italian newcomers this new restrictive measure would bar from the United States. Indeed, the 1924 law slashed the annual number of Italians who were allowed to enter the United States from 42,057 to 5,802, although as many as 349,042 Italians had come to the United States in 1920 alone before the enforcement of immigration restriction the following year.²³

²² James V. Donnaruma to Giovanni M. Di Silvestro, Boston, Apr. 7, 1936, Giovanni M. Di Silvestro Papers, box 10, folder 11, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; Donnaruma to Joseph Martin, Jr., Boston, July 14, 1936, James V. Donnaruma Papers, box 5, folder 47, Immigration History Research Center.

²³ “Errori politici dei legislatori,” *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Apr. 19, 1924; “Il cervello di coloro che dirigono le sorti degli S.U.,” *ibid.*, May 3, 1924; “Il Presidente firma la legge restrittiva,” *ibid.*, May 31, 1924. For Italy’s quota, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1966* (Washington, DC, 1966), 92. For Italian immigration to the United States, see Anna Maria Martellone, “Italian Mass Emigration to the United States, 1876--1930: A Historical Survey,” *Perspectives in American History*, New Ser. I (1984), 392.

Yet, a few months later, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* urged Italian-Americans to vote for Coolidge because, as the weekly argued, the president's reelection would supposedly ensure the liberalization of U.S. immigration legislation. Likewise, after having criticized the federal administration for the failure to enact such liberalization, Donnaruma's newspaper again contended that Republican Herbert Hoover's election to the White House in 1928 would pave the way for a revision of U.S. immigration legislation.²⁴

In fact, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* clearly distorted the stand of the Republican party in both cases. Actually, the 1924 platform of the GOP portrayed the Johnson-Reed Act as a necessary protection for U.S. workers, who would not have to face what was seen as unfair competition from an influx of cheap European laborers. The 1928 Republican plank on immigration similarly read that restriction was "in the interest of both native and foreign-born wage-earners," whereas Democratic presidential candidate Smith at least acknowledged that the national origins system was prejudicial against prospective newcomers from eastern and southern Europe and suggested a modification of the existing legislation that could help family reunions.²⁵

Notwithstanding its previous reprimand of the enforcement of Prohibition on the part of the Republican administrations in the 1920s, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* also held that President Hoover's reelection in 1932 would speed up the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, a measure that many Italian-Americans abhorred, while the GOP platform in fact confined itself to transferring the powers to legalize or outlaw the production and sales of alcoholic beverages to the single states. Instead, it was the Democratic platform which called for the outright repeal of Prohibition.²⁶ In the light of Donnaruma's previous

²⁴ "Un candidato pericoloso!," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Nov. 1, 1924; "Immigration Policy Will Aid Republican Victory," *ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1928.

²⁵ "Republican Platform [1924]," in *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and Fred L. Israel, 9 vols. (New York, 1985), VI, 2516; "Republican Platform [1928]," *ibid.*, VII, 2638; Alfred E. Smith, "Acceptance Speech," *ibid.*, VII, 2698.

²⁶ "The Wet Issue of the Democratic Party," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Nov. 5, 1932; "Republican Platform [1932]," in *History of American Presidential Elections*, VII, 2758-59; "Democratic Platform [1932]," *ibid.*, VII, 2743-2744.

criticism of Republicans, the average reader of *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* could hardly understand such pre-election changes of attitude toward the GOP and, thereby, the endorsements of the newspaper appeared temperamental and hard to share.

Donnaruma's unconditional support of the GOP at the times of elections often prevented him from assessing his fellow ethnics' priorities. Thus, for example, on the eve of the 1936 presidential vote, in an attempt at placing the Italian-American community in the Republican column, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* stressed GOP Representative Joseph W. Martin's efforts to prevent Congress from passing sanctions against Italy the previous winter after her unprovoked invasion of Ethiopia. In this instance, Donnaruma probably thought that he was using a powerful issue because many Italian-Americans in Boston had endorsed Italy's attack on Ethiopia, rallied to support the colonial venture of their ancestral country, and rejoiced in the proclamation of an Italian Empire in eastern Africa by Mussolini's Fascist regime. Still Donnaruma failed to realize that U.S. foreign policy was no longer a paramount issue to his fellow-ethnic voters by election day, as most Italian-Americans were more concerned about the Depression and more appreciative of the relief measures of the New Deal than grateful for the neutrality of the United States during the Italo-Ethiopian War. Some of them complained about being discriminated against in the allotment of jobs with the Works Progress Administration because the Democratic party favored Irish applicants to the detriment of Italian-Americans. This argument may have been exploited to have Italian-American voters go over to the Republican party. But, demonstrating to be out of tune with his own fellow ethnics, Donnaruma decided to play on foreign policy.²⁷

²⁷ "Colui che diresse la lotta pro neutralita," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Oct. 31, 1936; U.S. House of Representatives, 74th Congress, 2nd Session, *Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs on H.R. 422 to Maintain the Neutrality of the United States in the Event of War or Threat of War Between or Among Foreign Nations* (Washington, DC, 1935), pp. 183-99; Fiorello B. Ventresco, "Italian-Americans and the Ethiopian Crisis," *Italian-Americana*, VI (1980), 15, 18; John F. Stack, Jr., *International Conflict in an American City: Boston's Irish, Italians, and Jews, 1935-1944* (Westport, CT, 1979), 78-84; Charles H. Trout, *Boston, the Great Depression, and the New Deal* (New York, 1977), 192-93, 197, 301.

In 1940, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* again urged its readers to cast their ballots for the GOP because Massachusetts' Republican Governor Leverett Santostall "granted members of our race more appointments than all the other governors had done in the history of Massachusetts." Yet, one year earlier, *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* itself had harshly criticized Santostall for his refusal to award "citizens of Italian extraction in Massachusetts [...] proportional representation in the appointive offices of this state." Donnaruma's 1940 call for a Republican landslide was intentionally deceiving because in reality he himself was convinced that Santostall was unfair to the Italian people and complained in his correspondence of 1942 about the governor's "failure to give one Italian a laborer's job." As he confessed to Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., Santostall had "practically done nothing for the Italians in this State during his four years in office."²⁸

Donnaruma's efforts did not prevent Bostonians of Italian ancestry from making up their own minds. The latter were fully aware of the lack of a sizeable number of appointments of their fellow ethnics to state positions in part because *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* itself had reported about the few Italian-Americans who had managed to secure jobs in the state administration. Once again Donnaruma misjudged the real concerns of the members of his community. In 1940, they were much more worried about Roosevelt's foreign policy than about Santostall's nominations. For instance, many Italian-Americans deeply resented Roosevelt's stigmatization of Italy's eleventh-hour declaration of war on France in June 1940 as a "stab in the back" of her neighbor. They also hoped that the United States would remain neutral in the European conflict because they realized that the American intervention would be against Nazi Germany and her Italian ally.²⁹

²⁸ "Martedì 5 Novembre parleranno col voto le masse insultate," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Nov. 2, 1940; "More Appointments But No Italian Names," *ibid.*, Apr. 15, 1939; James V. Donnaruma to Louis Giovinco, Boston, July 8, 1942, Donnaruma Papers, box 5, folder 44; Donnaruma to Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., Boston, Oct. 8, 1942, *ibid.*, box 6, folder 50.

²⁹ "Popolazione beneficiata da promesse mancate," *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, Oct. 26, 1940; William F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structures of an Italian Slum* (Chicago, 1943), 230; Stack, *International Conflict in an American City*, 114-17.

Therefore, interestingly enough, the Italian-American electorate sanctioned both the Democratic and Republican parties for their neglect of its own interests, respectively at the national and local levels. Actually, the Democratic share of the Italian-American vote was larger in the state elections than in the presidential contest. A gubernatorial race was not held in Massachusetts in 1940, but the elections for the state senate could have provided an opportunity to reward the Santostall administration. Nonetheless, contrary to Roosevelt's 62.9 percent in East Boston and 51.1 percent in the North End, the Democratic party received 80.9 percent and 76.3 percent, respectively, among Italian-Americans in the contests for the Massachusetts Senate in those two districts.³⁰

In other words, the decline of the Italian-American vote for Roosevelt between 1936 and 1940 was hardly related to Santostall's appointments. Conversely, it resulted from fears that the president's reelection would lead the United States to fight against Italy in World War II. Indeed, while one third of Boston's Italian-Americans still approved of the New Deal legislation, 73 percent thought that the United States should not take sides with France and England in the European conflict.³¹

At the time of the 1938 gubernatorial campaign, an aide to Democratic candidate James M. Curley paid Donnaruma 220 dollars to prevent *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* from publishing a political ad that the Republican party had already purchased to lure Italian-American voters.³² That Donnaruma accepted this contribution provides additional evidence that financial motives played a significant role in shaping the political stand of his weekly.

Selling the endorsement of *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* to the highest bidder helped Donnaruma make a living. After all, the career of Louis Hammerling, who established the American Association of Foreign Language Newspapers at the turn of the century in order to purchase the support of hundreds of immigrant periodicals published in as many as twenty-nine languages for Republican candidates in election

³⁰ The percentages of the Italian-American vote are calculated from data in Gamm, *The Making of New Deal Democrats*, 83.

³¹ Sayre Smith, "Broadcasting for Marginal Americans," 589.

³² Martellone, "Italian Immigrants, Party Machines, Ethnic Brokers," 187.

campaigns nationwide, offers a leading example of the extent to which party organizations exploited the financial constraints of hyphenated editors to influence the political stand of the ethnic press.³³

Indeed, Donnaruma's strategy was widespread among the owners of the Italian-language press in New York City in the 1910s. Similarly, as the two major parties were struggling over the vote of Catholic groups in 1928, Cairoli Gigliotti, the former editor of *The Newcomer*, a defunct Chicago-based Italian-American newspaper, offered GOP presidential candidate Hoover to resume publication in exchange for a subsidy of 10,000 dollars in order "to conduct exclusively a campaign of education in support of Republican policies" among Italian-Americans. As late as 1940, Joseph J. Lughino, the publisher of Buffalo's *Il Corriere Italiano*, let the Republican State Committee know that "we have published from time to time in our newspaper many releases which have come to us from the Republican National Committee." He thus concluded that "we should be included in the list of publications which will carry the state and national political advertisements."³⁴

However, Donnaruma's expediency also involved supporting candidates who did not represent the interests of Italian-American voters and taking stands that conflicted with the needs and expectations of Boston's Italian-American community. The position of *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* on politics and the Sacco-Vanzetti case was detrimental to either editorial consistency or the expectations of his readers. As a result, Donnaruma missed any serious opportunity to exert a major influence on the Italian-American electorate in Boston and to become an authoritative spokesperson for his own ethnic community, although his

³³ Park, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control*, 377-411; Maldwyn Allen Jones, *American Immigration* (Chicago, 1992), 203-204. For an example of the widespread financial difficulties of the owners of Italian-American newspapers, see Gary Ross Mormino, "The Immigrant Editor: Making a Living in America," *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, IX (1981), 81-85.

³⁴ George E. Pozzetta, "The Italian Immigrant Press of New York City: The Early Years, 1880-1915," *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, I (1973), 38-39; Cairoli Gigliotti to Herbert Hoover, Chicago, August 10, 1928, Herbert Hoover Campaign and Transition Papers, box 28, folder "Gigliotti," Herbert Hoover Library, West Branch, IA; Joseph J. Lughino to Republican State Committee, Buffalo, NY, October 10, 1940, Anthony Maisano Papers, box 1, folder 3, Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, Philadelphia.

weekly still enjoyed a circulation of over 10,000 copies as late as 1941 despite the nationwide decline of the Italian-language press following the appearance of a native-born and English-speaking second generation of Italian-Americans. Many Bostonians of Italian descent continued to purchase *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* because this newspaper covered events of ethnic interests -- including news about Italy and the life of the local Italian-American social clubs, mutual aid societies, and religious associations -- that the English-language press ignored or overlooked. But they hardly relied on their Italian-American weekly as a mouthpiece or for political clues. Remarkably enough, unlike other ethnic periodicals, Donnaruma's newspaper did not even include a section for letters to the editor. The relatively high circulation of *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts* (serving a community that was three times larger than that of Boston, Philadelphia's only Italian-language daily, *Il Popolo Italiano*, sold as few as about 16,000 copies per issue in 1941) was hardly representative of Donnaruma's ethnic leadership or political influence.³⁵

In a recent volume on Progressivism in Boston, James J. Connolly has once again credited the editors of the city's foreign-language press, including Donnaruma himself, with significant clout as ethnic leaders in their respective communities.³⁶ However, it appears that such an interpretation is not always relevant and sometimes needs a reassessment.

³⁵ Edward Corsi, "Italian Immigrants and Their Children," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, CCXXIII (1942), p. 104; *N. W. Ayer and Son's Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals* (Philadelphia, 1941), 404, 835.

³⁶ James J. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston, 1900-1925* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).