

**Italian Migration and Entrepreneurship's Origins  
In the United States of America.  
A Business History Analysis  
From the Post Second World War Period to The Present Day**

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**Abstract**

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*The opening of international markets following World War II highlighted the differences between territories at regional and national level in terms of the attractiveness of economic activities, investment and human resources. In this context, an important aspect concerned the entrepreneurial process: businesses and entrepreneurs have played a leading role in the activation of the paths of economic growth on the product value, employment and international competitiveness.*

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**Introduction**

From this perspective, the study of entrepreneurial dynamics - who the entrepreneurs are, their formation, the path followed for the creation of the enterprise, socio-economic and institutional context in which they acted - becomes crucial to understand the influence of economic and social conditions in the countries of origin as well as the employment and market opportunities, infrastructures and attractiveness of the destination countries. From this point of view, the entrepreneurial path is linked to the migration process and requires a study to highlight the relationship between these two phenomena and their impacts on the development and territorial competitiveness. Starting from the analysis of the literature and researches available at national and international level, in this paper we present the first results of a quantitative and qualitative research at the Archives of the American Chamber of Commerce in Italy, as well as in other American economic institutions. The study aims to highlight the scale of the phenomenon in the Italian-Americans economic relations after World War II, the characteristics of firms with immigrant entrepreneurs, as well as the relationship between immigrant entrepreneurship and entrepreneur training.

**1. People and goods in the relationship between US and Italy in the post Second World War period**

At the end of World War II, Italians needed food, raw materials and capital goods to replace destroyed or obsolete machinery. Almost everything had to be imported from abroad, there was a lack of funds since reserves of gold and foreign currency were exhausted, exports were poor, tourism languished for the destruction of a large part of the ways and means of communication. A third of the national wealth had been destroyed, the income earned in 1945 was halved compared before the war, the cost of living was increasing day by day and unemployment was rampant. The measures taken by the fascist government to prevent the emigration had fallen. The new government implemented a policy to facilitate and regulate emigration, in order to give an outlet to the burgeoning unemployment and recover foreign currency in the balance of payments.

From 1946 to 1947, the deficit of the balance of payments had jumped from 5 to 6.8 billion for the excess of imports over exports and the increased sea transport costs. Immediately after the war, in fact, imports had registered a strong growth both in relation to food needs, both for the essential requirements of economic recovery. Compared to the pre-war period, the balance food presented the most negative trend: in 1938, had been active for about \$ 70 million, while in 1946 he presented a deficit of approximately \$ 235 million, mainly because of large imports of cereals, sugar and milk. Traditionally, the so-called invisible receipts concurred to cover the trade deficit. Income from tourism had suffered a collapse in the early postwar years due to the lack of means of transport and prohibitions on leaving the country for tourism. The savings of emigrants could cover only 3 percent of the revenue of the balance.

To exit from the crisis, bilateral trade agreements were stipulated with several countries, the International Monetary Fund, the UNRRA plan drawn up by the United States and the plane ERP gave aids. At the same time, there were initiatives to liberalize trade and facilitate international payments. These initiatives allowed the settlement of the trade deficit and that of payments, but mainly they were used to repair the damage caused by the war and start the country's economic recovery. The deficit in the balance of payments disappeared in 1948 (at constant prices, imports had decreased by 8% while exports had increased by 58%) and a surplus of about one billion was recorded in 1949<sup>1</sup>. The contribution of migrants, as their remittances were able to cover only 5% of revenue in 1949 and approximately 4% in the following year.

Immediately after the war, the major protagonists of the migratory phenomenon were unemployed people of the northern regions and the relatives of migrants who were unable to leave Italy during the war. European countries were the favourite destinations. From 1946 to 1948, the number of departures almost increased threefold, rising from 110.000 to 310.000. But in 1950, arrivals went down to 200.000, and the movement took on the characteristics of the first fifteen years of the twentieth century, which was composed for the most part by Southerners who, unable to find work in the regions of origin, departed for overseas countries. Northerners, however, emigrated mainly in Germany and Switzerland to escape to a temporary labor crisis.

The decrease in 1950 was started slowly in the previous year and was recorded mainly in the direct flow in Belgium and Switzerland, where, due to excessive emigration in the previous two years, the jobs available were sold out, so governments were forced to put a stop to the movement. Even emigration to the United States decreased, due to a crisis of production in manufacturing industries and mining.

From 1950 to 1975, there was a significant change in the traditional patterns of Italian emigration. The expatriation of southerners joined the north in the increasing seasonal and temporary exodus to European countries. Since the early years of the century, emigrating to Europe became more convenient because social insurance for workers had improved and the prices of certain foreign currencies had increased against the Italian lira. The emigration of young people under the age of thirty years to European countries grew, and that of mature men, older than 50 years decreased. The reverse occurs for expatriates in overseas countries. The number of returns increased.

The causes of migration after 1950 are numerous, but at least three are to be mentioned: the search for a stable job and better paying, so the farming craft were abandoned; the increased use of female labor paid with low wages and mainly the type of industrial development adopted in Italy after the war. Essentially, it regarded the production of goods to be exported abroad, those of the chemical and steel industries characterized by high intensity of capital and poor workmanship.

Permanent migration was towards the overseas countries as a result of restrictions on immigration into the United States of America, Canada and Australia, as well as for the frequent currency crises, economic and political Latin American countries. Meanwhile, however, the sedimentation of arrivals during the first half of the twentieth century had produced some important social stratification. The first one was that of the great migration of the

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<sup>1</sup> The reduction in imports was mainly due to the absence of accumulation of speculative stocks of industrial raw materials because, as pointed out in the annual report of the Bank of Italy, failing the previous currency speculation among the determinants of their size, stocks were reduced to a level sufficient for the actual needs of the industry, demand that the increasing ease of supply had contributed to the low; the major exports were attributable to finished products and semi-finished industrial products. Their weight, compared to 1938, increased respectively from 36 to 48% and from 20 to 28%, while the food's influence went down from 34 to 20%. Thus, for the export trend was emerging that, as we will see in the future would characterize Italian trade balance.

descendants of immigrants who came between 1880 and 1920, a group that had been emancipated from their ethnic ambience thanks to university studies and who had reached positions of prestige within the State, the army, in the courts, in the political world. The second one collected those were coming at that time, which were beginning to acquire a specialization, trying to crown their American dream with the property of pizzerias, bars and grocery stores, but also becoming framers, barbers, skilled workers in the construction of galleries<sup>2</sup>.

The start-ups of Italian origin in the United States was particularly important at a time when trade liberalization, commissioned by the Italian government in the immediate post-war period, even under the influence of the conditions that the United States had placed at the base of the various aid programs, met with the opposition from some Italian producers who did not share the rapid implementation. The different positions reflected the specific interests of different sectors of activity. On the one side, in fact, there were representatives of small and medium industries in more traditional sectors, from textiles to light engineering, that based their competitiveness in international markets on the widest possible use of labor at low cost; on the other side, there were the representatives of big business, in favor of maintaining protectionist barriers. Even *Confcommercio* lined up in favor of a greater liberalization of trade, outside of individual industrial segments, always in line with the interests of their sector, expressing strong opposition to the import quota system.

## 2. Import – Export trends between Italy and the US from the Sixties.

The relationship between Italy and the United States in the years after World War II had gradually stabilized not only from the political point of view, but also from an economic and commercial perspective. In those years, the Italian foreign trade grew rapidly and it gradually extended its range. In particular, the interchange Italy-USA recorded a positive trend for the entire period of the Italian economic miracle and extending until the Seventies.

However, the export of the United States to Italy scored some contraction in 1962 (-3.4%). The export itself, in fact, decreased from 794 to 761.1 million dollars. However, exposing such numbers requires a qualification since that one relating to 1961 was particularly high because in that year supplies of American grain have been held to Italy for \$86 million with a nature quite exceptional. So, if we abstract from such supplies and confront each other only exports annually recurring, we have that in fact export from the United States to Italy has increased in 1962 compared to 1961 by approximately 8 % and that is even more than the total exports has risen from this country. Moreover, imports from Italy to the United States in 1962 has had a very favorable trend, rising from 376 to 452.4 million dollars, the most that has ever been achieved in a year. In percentage terms, the increase was 20.3%, higher than those that occurred in the importation from any other European country and almost double the increase in overall average (11.4%). The increase of import from Italy was quite uniform despite having registered in certain sectors, such as that of knitwear, special spikes. However, it is interesting to note that the Italian participation in the total imports of the United States is further increased from 2.6% in 1961 to 2.8% in 1962, an increase even more significant when you consider that it was achieved in a market where competition is particularly strong<sup>3</sup>.

As far as the sales from the United States to Italy, in 1962, they had been generally favorable, except for the end of the outstanding shipments of grain that took place towards Italy in 1961 and rather sensitive contractions occurred in exports of raw cotton (increased from 65.5 to 41.1 million dollars) and refined copper (38.1 to 32.7 million dollars). They are in fact increased exports of oilseeds (+10.6 million), raw coal (11.5 million), and especially of machinery and vehicles (+30.8 million). Among the latter, there had been significant increases in American expeditions to Italy of machine tools (5.7 million) and electronic instruments (+2.4 million).

In the metals sector and artifacts, there has been a decline in shipments of scrap iron and steel (2.6 million), iron (2.0 million), Tinplate (- € 1.9 million), and of refined copper (-5.4 million) but, on the other hand an increase in exports to our country of fabricated metal products (+2.2 million) and aluminum scrap (+1.7 million).

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<sup>2</sup> The third one, not concerning Italian Americans, might be that of managers, financial experts, entrepreneurs, scientists and contemporary cultural workers, transnational figures par excellence, that might work in New York as in London, Paris or Shanghai.

<sup>3</sup> Archive of American Chamber of Commerce in Italy, Milan (A.AmCham from now on), Italian American Business, the Monthly Review of the American Chamber of Commerce for Italy, Vol. XIV, July – August.

In general, in 1962, there was a further major claim of the United States on the Italian market in the capital goods and some raw materials, and was not noticed any substantial change in shipments in Italy of durable consumer goods (radio and tv, office machines, etc..) and goods for immediate consumption.

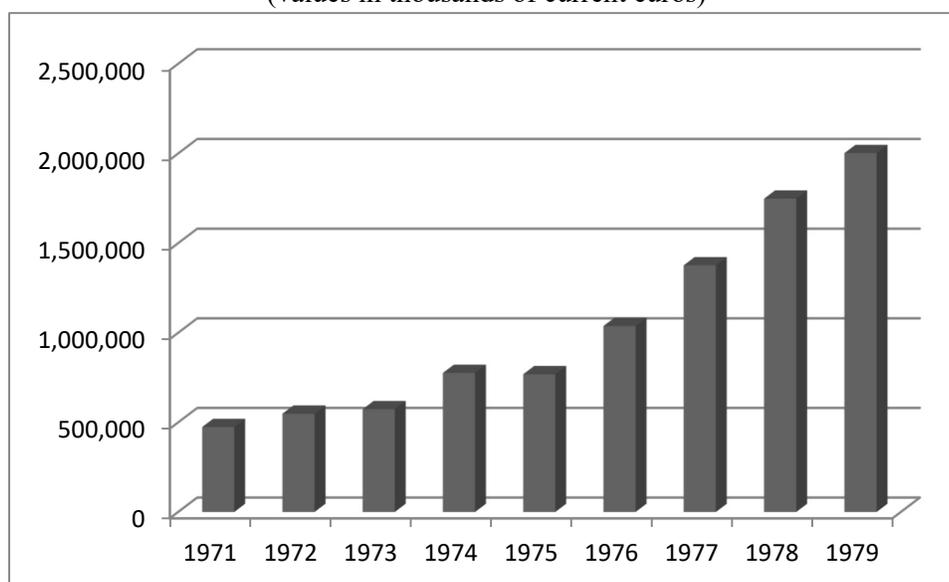
In the difficult period for Italy, both economically and socially, in the course of the Seventies, the US investment played a key role as it gave skilled labor to over 200,000 people (only 40,000 in the South), spending 500 billion dollars a year in new plants and equipment for 9% of total Italian exports<sup>4</sup>. As regards, in particular, the commercial relations of Italy with the United States, the 1977 was for the interchange Italy - United States the year in which Italy regained a surplus, after four years of deficit in bilateral trade balance. As can be seen from the analysis of ISTAT data on foreign trade, given in the following Table 2, Italian exports to the United States in 1977 almost doubled in value compared to 1975, recording a steady growth throughout the decade. As for imports, the most important values for Italy's foreign trade were recorded especially, and to a lesser extent than evident, just in relation to the USA.

Tab. 2.1 - Export from Italy to the main Countries outside the European Union (1971 – 1979).  
(values in thousands of current euros)

ANNI	Svizzera	Turchia	Stati Uniti	Cina	Giappone	India
1971	227.677	39.378	<b>474.344</b>	18.925	37.215	9.886
1972	252.222	46.773	<b>548.550</b>	23.173	45.872	15.639
1973	313.280	57.210	<b>573.896</b>	22.447	83.955	14.241
1974	426.197	136.496	<b>776.561</b>	35.357	109.103	28.856
1975	445.204	164.251	<b>768.995</b>	49.437	100.848	29.729
1976	599.094	235.889	<b>1.038.162</b>	58.962	138.437	28.465
1977	827.109	224.916	<b>1.376.938</b>	40.447	164.241	35.675
1978	1.009.336	202.268	<b>1.748.312</b>	82.505	226.349	55.795
1979	1.323.063	238.481	<b>2.002.221</b>	119.718	335.756	78.688

Source: ISTAT Archive, *International trade survey*.

Fig. 2.1 - Trend of exports from Italy to the USA, (1971 – 1979).  
(values in thousands of current euros)



Source: ISTAT Archive, *International trade survey*

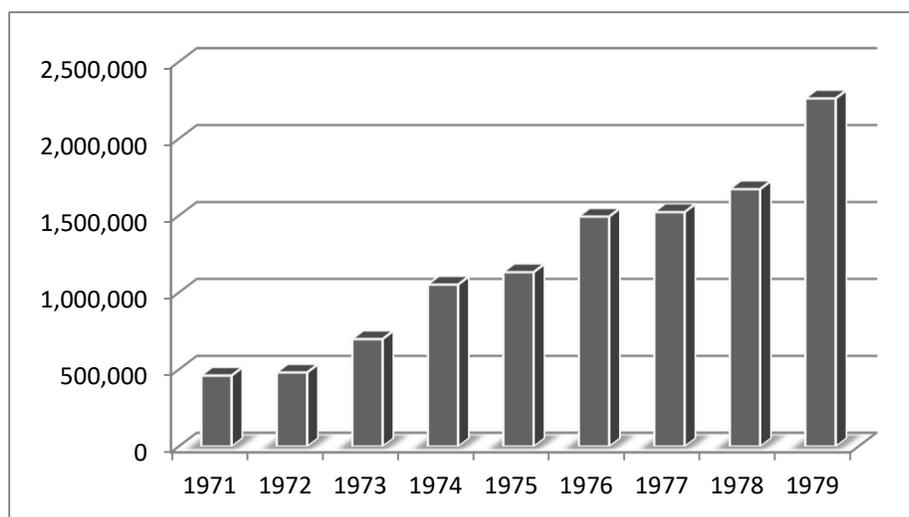
<sup>4</sup> A.AmCham, Italian American Business, Vol. XXIX, n. 3, March, 1978, pag. 2.

Tab. 2.2 Italian imports from the main Countries outside the European Union (1971 – 1979).  
(values in thousands of current euros)

ANNI	Svizzera	Turchia	Stati Uniti	Cina	Giappone	India
1971	109.441	19.454	<b>460.924</b>	20.594	63.978	10.260
1972	125.687	22.683	<b>480.743</b>	25.469	75.000	15.340
1973	191.501	49.554	<b>698.267</b>	38.849	111.757	25.231
1974	283.646	45.493	<b>1.052.262</b>	39.434	148.752	32.474
1975	301.321	35.234	<b>1.132.982</b>	43.734	154.444	28.824
1976	459.780	96.118	<b>1.494.280</b>	67.702	255.824	63.856
1977	595.552	93.518	<b>1.523.587</b>	74.269	291.039	76.672
1978	744.353	91.091	<b>1.672.770</b>	89.550	297.100	83.159
1979	915.618	128.368	<b>2.262.376</b>	169.166	379.757	125.207

Source: ISTAT Archive, *International trade survey*.

Fig. 2.2 Trend of Italian imports from USA (1971 – 1979).  
(values in thousands of current euros)



Source: ISTAT Archive, *International trade survey*

The increase in Italian exports to the United States in 1977, however, was less than the total American imports, thus continuing the escaping process of the Italian share of the American import market began in the late Sixties. The key sectors of Italian exports to the United States in those years, jewelry, wine, yarns and fabrics and organic chemicals, they did score significant increases, while the footwear and automobiles continued to lose weight in the total of Italian sales to USA.

In the early Eighties, the Italian export to the United States suffered a severe setback as a result of the intensification of the unfavorable economic situation, the continuing and general price increases which led to a loss of competitiveness in a wide range of Italian and more greater competition from other countries and then even by American producers, whose production costs were lower than those of many Italian products that had also to absorb the shipping costs.

As a direct consequence of these negative factors, there was a reversal in the trend of Italian exports to the United States for which the beginning of 1980, the foreign trade Italian - American closed with a deficit for Italy of 870 million dollars, against a surplus of 669 million dollars in the corresponding period last year, due to a decrease of 12% of Italian exports and an increase of 35.7% of American exports. The decline in Italian exports, which involved a reduction in terms of exchange of 446 million dollars over the previous year was mainly caused by a

reduction in exports of consumer goods. The sectors that were most severely affected by the American economic recession were footwear and jewellery<sup>5</sup>. As can be seen from the following table, in the mid-eighties, Italian exports to the markets of the Member States made a spectacular leap forward, coming to occupy first place among the major industrialized countries of the OECD and among the newly industrialized<sup>6</sup>.

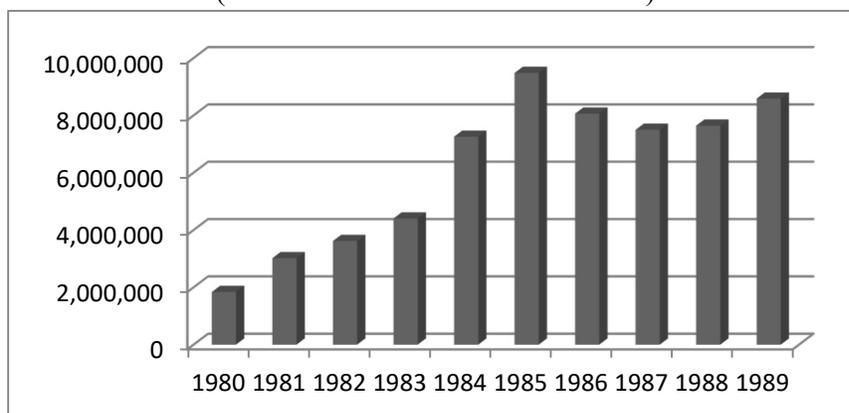
The global value of trade Italian - Americans reached the \$ 2.9 billion in 1984, increasing by 33% compared with the previous year. Italian exports to the United States rose to \$ 8.5 billion, an increase of 46.1% compared to 1983, while imports from the United States rose to \$ 4.4 billion, an increase of 12% compared to the prior year. Italy, exporting to the USA over 15,000 billion lire of goods thus came to occupy the tenth place among supplying countries the United States. This spectacular result can be attributed to the favorable effect of the high exchange rate of the dollar against the pound, but even the more shrewd promotional activities developed by Italian companies.

Tab. 2.3. Italian Exports to the main Countries outside European Union. (1981 – 1989).  
(values in thousands of current euros)

ANNI	Svizzera	Turchia	Stati Uniti	Cina	Giappone	India
1980	1.524.393	188.977	<b>1.835.747</b>	113.652	312.850	108.185
1981	1.784.338	275.594	<b>3.016.818</b>	189.842	393.897	153.527
1982	2.045.668	329.996	<b>3.614.834</b>	146.368	551.864	200.624
1983	2.362.284	433.999	<b>4.401.986</b>	208.193	620.631	208.632
1984	2.709.276	599.102	<b>7.253.796</b>	408.188	765.100	264.481
1985	3.135.049	695.482	<b>9.480.467</b>	778.496	911.769	270.092
1986	3.412.333	648.651	<b>8.059.127</b>	772.190	1.015.441	262.278
1987	3.666.081	704.796	<b>7.496.061</b>	729.844	1.244.117	303.766
1988	4.048.144	616.853	<b>7.639.148</b>	872.739	1.621.864	263.661
1989	4.450.438	714.541	<b>8.581.916</b>	876.622	2.274.552	330.302

Source: ISTAT Archive, International trade survey

Fig. 2.3. Trend of Italian export to the USA (1981 – 1989)  
(values in thousands of current euros)



Source: ISTAT Archive, International trade survey.

<sup>5</sup> A.AmCham, Italian American Business, vol. XXXII, n. 7-8, July-August 1981, pag. 13.

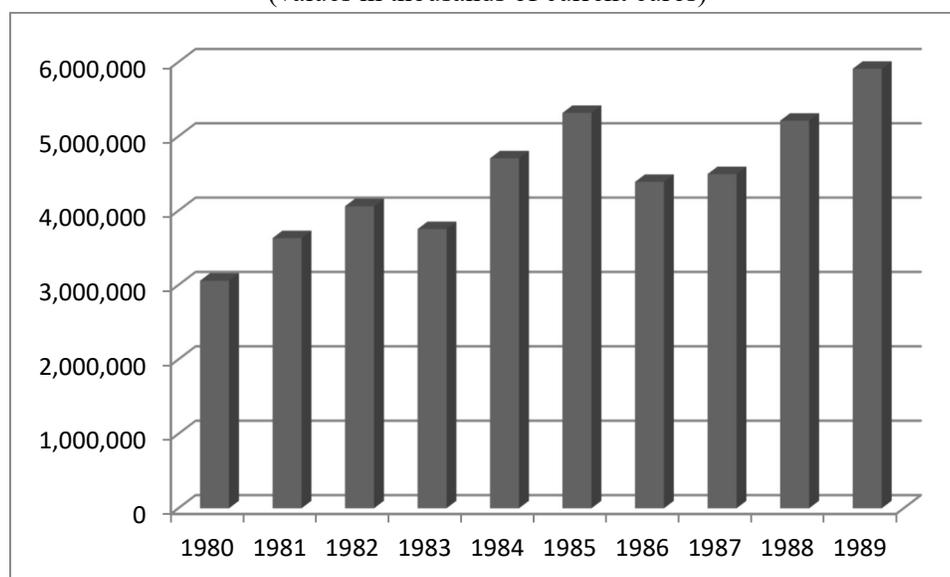
<sup>6</sup> <http://seriestoriche.istat.it>

Tab. 2.4. Italian Imports from the main Countries outside the European Union (1971 – 1979).  
(values in thousands of current euros)

ANNI	Svizzera	Turchia	<b>Stati Uniti</b>	Cina	Giappone	India
1980	1.123.469	124.261	<b>3.057.928</b>	193.485	573.670	117.046
1981	1.704.693	167.286	<b>3.631.738</b>	234.482	741.560	133.703
1982	2.057.592	213.808	<b>4.061.286</b>	297.790	762.915	153.487
1983	2.445.295	327.563	<b>3.752.773</b>	325.327	871.997	143.670
1984	3.150.190	491.138	<b>4.705.406</b>	395.114	1.224.816	227.010
1985	3.443.085	453.244	<b>5.316.528</b>	578.784	1.460.274	224.499
1986	3.349.383	394.660	<b>4.387.620</b>	525.075	1.611.162	193.123
1987	3.991.407	484.132	<b>4.493.519</b>	686.294	1.793.127	272.561
1988	4.162.309	642.567	<b>5.211.354</b>	962.129	2.349.563	307.559
1989	4.694.085	873.283	<b>5.910.128</b>	1.194.840	2.500.106	371.423

Source: ISTAT Archive, International trade survey

Fig. 2.4. Trend of Italian import from USA (1981 – 1989).  
(values in thousands of current euros)



Source: ISTAT Archive, International trade survey.

### 3. The American Chamber of Commerce in Italy

The American Chamber of Commerce for Italy was founded in Milan in 1915 by a group of merchants and industrialists who had business relations with the United States and who believed that a close cooperation between the Italian and the American economy would become more and more necessary, being Italy at the eve of the Great War<sup>7</sup>. AmCham met at once the favor of financial industrial and commercial circles, and by the end of that year,

<sup>7</sup> A.AmCham, Minutes of Board Meetings from 1915.

it had about one hundred members. The most important Italian companies became its associates and the importance of its function was recognized both by the Italian and American authorities. During the First World War, the Chamber actively collaborated to facilitate trade relations between the two countries and the USA's entry into the war in 1917 deepened the already very cordial relations between the two countries and led to a substantial increase in the number of members.

As observed by studying the balance sheets and minutes of board meetings of the Chamber, the serious economic crisis of 1930 and 1931, and, shortly after, the serious restrictions on trade flows with foreign autarkic program introduced by the government of the time, greatly influenced the development of the Chamber. The authority of the institution was in decline, the relationship with the United States became less frequent and the number of members was reduced to about 350. Practically, the membership of the Chamber meant more like a statement of sympathy to the United States, an expression of faith in the great principles of freedom of trade and international cooperation in the economic field.

With the beginning of World War II, the AmCham had to close its offices and executives took care only to preserve their archives and office equipment. After the war, the communications with the United States were re-opened, the Washington government began a wide and generous support and cooperation policy with Italy and, at the end of 1945, the practices to restore life the Chamber were started. The political and social climate had changed entirely, the urgent need to revive trade with America immediately assured the success of the initiative. Since then the development of the Chamber has been continuous and has shown that the importance of economic relations with the United States is deeply felt in Italy and how much interest our circles productive follow anything done in the United States and the progress that is performed in each field.

The American Chamber of Commerce in Italy is affiliated with the Chamber of Commerce in Washington D.C., the American Commercial Association composed of more than three million member companies. It is also a founding member of the European Council of American Chambers of Commerce, the organisation which protects free trade between the European Union and the United States. In addition to its headquarters in Milan, AmCham's presence extends throughout the major Italian and American cities by means of a network of local chapters. AmCham's aims to develop and promote economic and cultural relations between the United States and Italy, to support and protect the interests of its associates' commercial activities between the two countries, and to disseminate information concerning AmCham's own activities amongst its members.

As well as playing a key role as a facilitator of economic dialogue between Italy and the United States, AmCham regularly organizes meetings and conferences with key international decision makers in order to develop and maintain communication links between both institutions and businesses, as well as to promote the development of economic and managerial knowledge required to compete within international markets. Whether by means of business expansion overseas or the pursuit of strategic goals, rapid evolution and commercial sensitivity has become critical to business success. Thanks to a longstanding experience of almost one hundred years, AmCham may be the key partner to your business' success.

The American Chamber of Commerce in Italy is able to offer its members a wide range of business support services. From more general macroeconomic analyses to more focused assistance, including the provision of contacts specific to external know-how, AmCham can provide a comprehensive and integrated business support service. Moreover, thanks to our lobbying initiatives, AmCham can provide member companies a «fast track», enabling them to communicate directly with key representatives of both Italian and American economic and political institutions; this privilege due to AmCham's standing as an institutional authority, after 100 years of activity.

#### ***4. Italian American Entrepreneurs.***

Italian roots in most of the United States have had an essential role in the relationships established over the years between Italy and the United States. There have been many entrepreneurial initiatives started both in the US by Italian-American entrepreneurs, both in Italy thanks to the essential role of remittances from emigrants themselves, which sent home much of their savings, positively influencing the Italian balance of payments, but not affecting in a direct way on the socio-economic growth of the country. Very interesting is also how, in the paths of Italians abroad can be observed some well-defined territorial vocations; In fact, while the favorite destination for emigrants from northern regions were mostly European countries, Southern emigrants preferred definitely the transoceanic

routes. In addition, since the resumption after World War II, the South of Italy was definitely the most involved area by migratory movement. World War II emphasized the changes in the physiognomy and in the perspectives of the population of Italian origin in America. On one hand, about 3300 Italians were interned in detention camps for suspected fascist sympathies; on the other, more than 1.2 million Italian American soldiers, among 12 million, were engaged in the US Army during the conflict<sup>8</sup>. Emigration was a need not only of individuals but also of the entire country, and although not always Italian emigration has been a great success story, there have been many entrepreneurial initiatives overseas, over the years, thanks to the bravery and the ability of Italian immigrants, or at least people of Italian descent. Italy has become in recent decades a major immigration country, but at the same time has also continued to be an important country of emigration. Italian emigration, in fact, is not only a phenomenon in the history of the country, but a phenomenon that affects in a significant way, even the current situation of the country itself. This happens not only because there are still large communities of Italians abroad who identify themselves as emigrants, but there are still important migration flows between Italy and other countries.

Thanks to the skills brought from Italy, to their entrepreneurial talent and to the opportunities of the American market, many entrepreneurs were able to expand their presence in many sectors<sup>9</sup>. In many biographies, an ethnic trait of the entrepreneurial path taken emerges: Italian wine and food. Wine, in particular, has often been a trait of cultural continuity which gave place to the launch of the wine industry by Italian emigrants in many parts of the world (the United States, Argentina, South Africa, and Australia). More in general, the food industry explains other successful entrepreneurial events (fruit, sausages, chocolate, biscuits, and fish product)<sup>10</sup>.

As for the food industry in USA, for instance, in 1888, Amedeo Obici (Oderzo, Treviso, 1878 – Suffolk, Virginia, 1947) immigrated to the United States from Italy and went to live with his uncle in Scranton when he was 11, arriving from Italy with a tag on his coat to identify where he was going since he didn't speak English. He worked with his uncle at a produce stand while he went to night school to learn English. When he had enough savings, he opened his own fruit stand and bought a peanut roaster. He developed a special way to prepare nuts and decided to invest more in peanuts production. In 1906, Obici partnered with a fellow Italian immigrant, Mario Peruzzi, to rent a factory to produce peanuts; they called their business the Planters Peanut Company<sup>11</sup>. Obici realized that prices and first profits were not nearly so important as repeating business and he proved his operation based on quality and brand name were important for continued success. Two years later the business was incorporated as *Planters Nuts & Chocolate Company*<sup>12</sup>. In 1913, Obici built his first mass processing plant in Suffolk, VA. By 1960, there were almost 200 Planters store locations across the country and in 1961, the Planters Nuts & Chocolate Company was acquired for \$20 million by Standard Brands, Inc. who eventually, in 1981 merged with Nabisco Brands, which was integrated in Kraft Foods business worldwide in 2000. Today, Planters Peanuts and Mr. Peanut are seen everywhere because of one Italian immigrant who came to the United States not knowing a word of English. Even though he had very little formal education, his initiative, mind set, vision of potential, and ability to advertise boosted him to success. He took something so small, a peanut, and made it a commodity in a growing nation. From owning a small fruit stand to starting the largest peanut-processing company, Amedeo Obici lived the American dream.

Another interesting business history case in the food industry belongs to *Chef Boyardee*. Ettore Boiardi was born in Piacenza, Italy in 1897 and on May 9, 1914, he sailed to America on the French ship *La Lorraine*<sup>13</sup>. He arrived at Ellis Island following his brother Paolo to the kitchen of the Plaza Hotel in New York City, working his way up to head chef. While working at The Greenbrier hotel in Greenbrier, West Virginia, he directed the catering for the reception of President Woodrow Wilson's wedding in 1915. His entrepreneurial skill became polished and well known when he opened his first restaurant, *Il Giardino d'Italia*., in Cleveland, in 1926. When customers began

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<sup>8</sup> V.V.A.A., *Gli Italiani negli Stati Uniti d'America*, MAE, Osservatorio sulla Formazione e sul Lavoro degli Italiani all'Estero, 2003, pag. 6.

<sup>9</sup> B. Osborne, P. Battaglia, *Trovare l'America*, Modena, 2013, Pag. 184.

<sup>10</sup> F. Chiapparino (edited by), *The Alien Entrepreneur. Migrant entrepreneurship in Italian Emigration (late 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> Cent.) and in the Immigration in Italy at the Turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Milano, 2011, pag. 28.

<sup>11</sup> V.V.A.A., *The Italian American Experience. An Encyclopedia*, New York, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> J.J. Bonocore, *Raisend Italian-American. Stories, Values and Traditions from the Neighborhood*, Bloomington, 2005.Pag. 171

<sup>13</sup> B. Moreno, *Ellis Island's Famous Immigrants*, Chicago, 2008, pag. 38.

begging Chef Boiardi for either his spaghetti sauce recipe, or a sample to take home, he began filling old milk bottles with his sauce and giving them to customers<sup>14</sup>. By 1928, the demand increased to the point that factory production became necessary. Eventually the sauce sales surpassed even his restaurant's business. In 1938, Boiardi moved his factory to Milton, Pennsylvania and began to develop a national marketing strategy for his food.

Proud of his Italian heritage, Boiardi sold his products under the brand name "Chef Boy-Ar-Dee" so that his American customers could pronounce his name properly. During World War II, Boiardi's company was the largest supplier of rations for U.S. and allied forces and for his contribution to the war effort, Boiardi was awarded a gold star order of excellence from the United States War Department<sup>15</sup>. In 1946, Chef Boyardee sold his brand to American Home Foods for 6 million dollars. Boiardi invested much of the proceeds from his company's sale into The Milton Steel Company, which produced goods for the Korean war effort. Apparently, the investment paid off very well, making the already wealthy Boiardi even richer.

Italian-American food, like spaghetti and meatballs, had emerged from the isolation of small Italian neighborhoods in large cities into a general American culinary culture. Pasta and sauce were easy to produce en masse, and could be sold at reasonable prices at a time when the average American didn't have much money to spend on food. Boiardi died in 1985, but his face still appears on cans of *Beefaroni*, ravioli, and other canned Italianesque food. A successful Italian entrepreneur in the toy industry is Antonio Pasin. He was born in Venice, Italy in 1897, son of a cabinetmaker, he moved to America in 1913 when he was 16 to begin a new life in Chicago. He made his way through several jobs, and by 1917 had saved enough money to purchase some used wood working equipment and rented a one-room workshop. In this workshop, Pasin began fashioning wagons by night and selling them during the day. By 1923, Pasin's business grew to include several employees. They became known as the Liberty Coaster Company, named after the Statue of Liberty. In the Twenties, despite the rising pressures of the times, Pasin and the Liberty Coaster Company pushed forward, with the automotive industry as inspiration. Pasin began using metal-stamping technology to produce steel wagons and with his consistent eye for innovation, applied mass-production techniques to wagon-making, creating, in 1927, he first wagon, the Radio Flyer after his amazement of the radio and the wonders of flight. He renamed his company the *Radio Steel and Manufacturing Company* in 1930. The Depression years were surprisingly good for American toy manufacturers. With one-third of the total population out of work, the American country needed to be entertained. Inexpensive toys with high play value, such as the Radio Flyer Wagon, were very lucrative investments<sup>16</sup> and Pasin became the largest producer of toy wagons, producing 1,500 wagons a day<sup>17</sup>. After World War II, Mario Pasin, the founder's son took over the business and renamed the company Radio Flyer, expanding its offerings to include wheelbarrows, farden carts, and outdoor furniture. But its staple has always been wagons and, in 1987, Radio Steel was renamed Radio Flyer, after its most popular product.

Antonio Pasin died in 1990 but, in 2003, he was honored by becoming the 44th toy innovator to be inducted into the Toy Industry Hall of Fame. To keep up with the technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the company has released motorized All-Terrain Wagons and Sport Utility Wagons<sup>18</sup>. Today the Radio Flyer Company is still owned by the Pasin family and have a great success thanks to an Italian immigrant young man who was able to create a successful family owned company and create a product that became an American Icon from one generation to the next.

One of the first Italian American millionaires was Generoso Pope. He was born in Arpaize, a small town near Benevento in 1891 and emigrated to the USA in 1906. One of his first jobs was to deliver water to the construction workers, earning three dollars per week. In 1925 he was able to buy the Colonial Sand and Store Company, a company in which he had worked and that became the largest supplier of building materials in the United States, participating in projects such as the Empire State Building and the Yankee Stadium. In 1928, he acquired *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* along with many other ethnic newspapers. Furthermore, Pope was one of the most important Fascists propagandist, as publisher of pro-Fascism papers. His Fascist activities, however, were not

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<sup>14</sup> S. Cinotto, *The Italian American Table. Food, Family and Community in New York City*, Chicago, 2013, pag. 153

<sup>15</sup> S. Scardigno, *Mulfies, Stories of immigrants*, Bloomington, 2014, pag.169

<sup>16</sup> S.M. Scott, *Toys and American culture. An encyclopedia*, Santa Barbara, CA, 2010, pag. 24.

<sup>17</sup> V.V.A.A., *Sharing wisdom, building values. Letters from Family Business Owners to their successors*, New York, 2011, pag. 20.

<sup>18</sup> S.M. Scott, *Toys and American culture. An encyclopedia*, cit., pag. 257.

entirely subsumed by his newspaper. As a man of influence, Pope played a role in legitimizing fascism by his participation in public events that extolled Mussolini and Italian Fascism<sup>19</sup>.

One of Pope's ethnic newspapers was turned into the popular weekly *The National Enquirer*, directed by the son of Generoso, Generoso Jr., while his other son, Fortunato remained at the helm of *Il Progresso* which was an important part in the business history of another migrant Italian family, in particular two brothers, Agostino and Carlo De Biasi.

In 1872 Giuseppe De Biasi, then a prominent small town lawyer, married in Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi Maria Antonello. They raised eight children: Ida (1873), Agostino (1875), Pasquale (1876), Mario (1878), Flora (1882), Esther (1890), Bruno (1893) and Carlo (1896) the donor of the collection. Agostino was the first to immigrate to America. Apparently wishing to elude home-town intrigues, he arrived in New York in 1900. Already a seasoned journalist, he became associated with the Italian language daily *Il Progresso Italo Americano* assuming, a few months later, the post of editor-in-chief. He simultaneously served as editor of *Il Telegrafo* (1905-1907) and founded the Philadelphia daily *L'opinione*. In 1908 Agostino's father died and immediately thereafter his mother and sister Flora came to New York. In time, Mario, Bruno, Pasquale and Carlo joined them. The latter arrived in 1913. Bruno became a prominent physician, Pasquale a competent journalist associated at one time with *Il Carroccio* and with *Progresso Italo-Americano*. Mario started a successful business venture, the *De Biasi Advertising Agency*. The bulk of the material founded at the Center for Migration Studies of New York City, however, pertains to the journalistic careers of Agostino and Carlo De Biasi. Agostino De Biasi served his relationship with *Il Progresso* in 1911 and assumed the post of editor-in-chief of *L'Araldo Italiano*, another New York daily. In 1915, he founded the journal *Il Carroccio*, which for the next twenty years consumed all his energies and finances. A monthly review dedicated to the promotion of Italian national interests and culture, *Il Carroccio* served during the Mussolini era as a potent vehicle for fascist propaganda in the United States. Widely read, and highly respected, it numbered among its contributors some of the best journalists from both sides of the ocean. In spite of Agostino De Biasi's fierce Italian loyalties, he fell out of favour with the fascist regime in 1927<sup>20</sup>. *Il Carroccio* was banned from Italy and completely ceased publication between 1928 and 1931. When it did resume, it was only for a short while. Broken in spirit and financially ruined, Agostino gave up the venture in 1935. Withdrawing from active journalism Agostino continued, nevertheless, to write. During the war years – while still an Italian citizen – he contributed unsigned articles to *Il Crociato*, the catholic weekly founded and directed by his brother Carlo. Subsequently he wrote a weekly column which was carried by dozen of Italian American newspapers from coast to coast. He was, moreover, the author of several books, among them: *Tradition of Italian Nationalism* (1911), *The Gesture of Premuda* (1919), *In defence of victory* (1920), *Kara-kiri* (1922), *The battle of Italy in the United States* (1927). Agostino's main occupation after 1935 was, however, the management of the *De Biasi Advertising Agency* founded by his late brother Mario. Agostino De Biasi participated actively in the affairs of the Italian American community in New York. He was, for example, the moving force behind the Italy America Society and founded the Dante Alighieri Society in New York. The Italian government honoured him with the Order of the Crown of Italy in recognition of his many services. He died in 1964 at the age of 89. Carlo De Biasi, unlike his brother Agostino, took out American citizenship shortly after his arrival in the United States in 1913 and served during the World War I with the American expeditionary force in France. He was also a talented writer, translator, and journalist and actively collaborated on many books, journal and newspapers. Under the signature CDB he published a weekly column in the *Progresso Italo Americano* on subjects related to Catholic life and culture. He edited several books for the Vatican City Religious Book Company of New York, translated Archbishop Cicognani's book *Sanctity in America* into Italian and edited between 1920 and 1930 the magazine *La Voce dell'Emigrato* published in New York by Mons. Germano Formica. Carlo De Biasi's life work, however, was the catholic weekly *Il Crociato*, published in Brooklyn under the direction of Mons. Ciocia. He served as its managing editor from its inception in September 1933 through his retirement some three decades later. Carlo De Biasi was, moreover, like his brother, actively involved in Italian American community affairs. He presided over the "Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi Mutual Help Society" after helping to found it in 1925. From 1931 on, he served as secretary of the Italian Benevolent Institute and Hospital, and during the Second World War he worked on behalf of the Italian prisoners of war. His generous services to the community, the Catholic Church and to the diocese of Brooklyn were duly recognized as St. John's University conferred upon him the Doctorate of Letters

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<sup>19</sup> A.A. Block, *Space, time and organized crime*, New Brunswick, NJ, 1994, pp. 145-146.

<sup>20</sup> Center for Migration Studies - Archives, New York City, De Biasi Family Paper Collection, Series IV

and the Catholic Church made him a Knight of the Order of Saint Gregory the Great. After his death in 1971 at the age of 75, his widow generously donated this collection to the Centre for Migration Studies.

### **Conclusion**

A system of economic relations does not arise from nothing but it needs habits, relationships, strong shared interests. Companies established abroad by entrepreneurs of Italian origin increased considerably and engaged millions of people. The role of entrepreneurship in the Italian community abroad, however, was not limited in related annual product (the value of orders entrusted to Italian companies and industries). Through the activities of their companies and their image of successful men, entrepreneurs of Italian origin abroad had, in fact, also contributed to the spread of knowledge of Italian products and the Italian style in their migration countries. They favored the commercial success of Made in Italy, and the cultural success of Italian way of life, often supporting cultural initiatives of Italian origin (from libraries to schools). Still today their heritage help to strengthen the already strong commercial, cultural and social bond between Italy and the United States of America.

Anyways, it is well know that each business community, even if linked to more or less consolidated relation systems, basically remains stateless. It does not feel affected by national values but by a behaviour, a taste, a mentality. Big and small Italian brands affirmed themselves not only as Italians but also because they could convey a fantasy imaginary, a taste, those *savoir vivre & savoir faire* that characterize Italian people and can be reproduced everywhere.

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