candle factory. After nearly a year in New York Garibaldi grew restless and departed by ship for Latin America. He returned to Italy in 1859 to play a major role in the unification of the nation. Garibaldi’s host, Antonio Meucci, was a scholar and idealist “whose claims to be the original inventor of the telephone have found many supporters.” Unfortunately, few of these “supporters” stepped forward while this tragic figure was alive and needed their help.

In the nearly eight decades from the American Revolution to the Civil War a number of well-born Italian travelers passed through New York and other East Coast cities on their journeys around the country. Thus shortly after the end of the Revolution, Count Luigi Castiglioni, a renowned naturalist, came to the New World. The Milanese nobleman traveled in the United States from 1785 to 1787. On his return to Italy Castiglioni presented his observations on human, plant, and animal life in America in a well-received two-volume work. Count Paolo Andreani, another visiting Milanese aristocrat and naturalist, arrived in America in 1790 and traveled along the then Western frontier and was the first European to circumnavigate Lake Superior. On his return from the West in 1792 he was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia.

In the following years an increasing number of Italian travelers came to America. Like Castiglioni and Andreani, they generally were well-educated members of the upper class. The story of Italians in America is not, however, of these persons or of other members of Northern Italy’s social and economic elite who came to the New World as intrepid explorers, champions of American independence, or exiles from Italian political oppression. It is, rather, the experience of millions of unskilled and unlettered immigrants, most of whom came from the Southern provinces of Italy in the decades between 1880 and World War I, and of their descendants. For these immigrants the story had its start in nineteenth-century Southern Italy, the poverty-stricken land of *la miseria*.

More than five million Italians have arrived in the United States since 1820, when American immigration statistics were first kept. The peak period was in the years between 1880 and 1914, the beginning of World War I, when nearly four million Italians arrived. Eighty percent of the immigrants came from the Mezzogiorno, the provinces south of Rome and the island of Sicily. For the vast majority of Southern-Italian peasants, emigration offered the best, perhaps the only, hope for improving their lives. The grandeur and glory of the ancient Roman Empire had long since faded away, and Italy by the nineteenth century was a poverty-stricken land whose only major natural resource was people.

Overpopulation constituted a fundamental and chronic problem in Italy. In 1909 the population density in the Kingdom of Italy was 310 inhabitants per square mile. By the beginning of the twentieth century, among the nations of Europe only Belgium, the Netherlands, and England had greater population densities, and all three—unlike Italy—ranked as highly industrialized nations. Despite a large emigration (3,366,481 between 1881 and 1911), the population continued to grow. In 1881 it was 28 million, in 1901 it was 32 million, and by 1909 it exceeded 34 million. The birth rate was high. During the years between 1904 and 1908 the excess of births over deaths was 1,845,775, or an average of 369,155 for each year of the five-year period. Overpopulation alone, however,
did not cause emigration. Seriously compounding Italy’s problems was that it was also a very poor country, deficient in the natural resources necessary for industrialization.

Italy attempted to act like a great power without the necessary industrial resources. Unfortunately the nation lacked agricultural as well as industrial resources. Francesco Nitti, a prominent economist and member of the Italian Parliament who later would become Prime Minister of the Kingdom, noted in 1904 that “the territory of Italy is very small, but it is rendered still smaller by the fact that Italy is the most mountainous of the great countries of Europe.” More than three-quarters of the land is covered by mountains. Fertile farm land was, and still is, limited in extent, most of it in the northern parts of the peninsula.

The abolition of feudalism in the early nineteenth century, which was intended to benefit the people, and especially the poor, simply reinforced the existing order which was controlled by owners of large estates. The newly created Kingdom of Italy in the years after 1860 seized and sold the vast land holdings of the Catholic Church but instead of helping to improve conditions this simply compounded already existing problems. Nearly all the land was purchased by large landowners or by speculators instead of by the peasants, who could not afford the high purchase prices. The new owners exploited the land and turned heavily forested areas in the South to agricultural use. This in turn resulted in soil erosion and the creation of marshes in the valleys of the South. The marshes, in turn, became breeding places for malaria-carrying mosquitos, which infected at least two million people each year. Because of the menace of malaria, peasants could not live on the land they cultivated as low-lying land was the most malarial as well as the most fertile. It was therefore necessary for the peasants to live in villages and towns in the higher hills and travel to their farms in the valleys, a walk of several miles each day.

Although some of the towns held sizeable populations they were not industrial or commercial centers. That is, they were not urban in the usual sense of the word but rather were residential com-

pounds. The rural towns of the Mezzogiorno were, as Carlo Levi has described them in Christ Stopped at Eboli, miserable and wretched places in which to live. “The peasants’ houses were all alike,” Levi wrote, “consisting of only one room that served as kitchen, bedroom, and usually as quarters for the barnyard animals as well, unless there happened to be an outhouse.” The only light in the room “was that from the door. The room was almost entirely filled by an enormous bed, much larger than an ordinary double bed; in it slept the whole family, father, mother, and children.” Babies were kept in little reed baskets hung from the ceiling. “Under the bed slept the animals, and so the room was divided into three layers: animals on the floor, people on the bed, and infants in the air.”

Levi’s description was of peasant life in Lucania (or Basilicata) but it applied to the other provinces of the South as well. Writing of the towns in turn-of-the-century Sicily a visitor reported the dwellings of the peasants to be little more than hovels. They usually have only one room, often windowless, or lighted only by the door, for windows are a luxury in Sicily; good glass is very expensive and cheap glass cracks in the hot sun. (The floor is of worn stone, the walls are rudely plastered and the only heat in winter comes from the small charcoal brazier that is used in preparing the food.) An iron bedstead, a shaky table, and a few rude chairs cover the furnishings. The walls are decorated with political characters taken from the newspapers, advertisements of steamship lines to the United States and South America, and a wooden crucifix suspended in the corner.

A Calabrian peasant who returned to the town in which he was born after decades of living in the New World found it “impossible to breathe freely” in the home village. “It is dirty; you must always hide something or from some one; every one lies about everything: wealth, eating, friendship, love, God. You are always under the eyes of someone who scrutinizes you, judges you, envies you, spies on you, throws curses against you, but smiles his ugly, toothless mouth out whenever he sees you.”14
In the nineteenth century Italian observers such as Vincenzo Padula, a priest and poet of some prominence, found peasants in the South living at a bare subsistence level. According to Padula, “the peasant works in order to eat, he eats in order to have the strength to work; then he sleeps. This is his life.” Conditions in the Mezzogiorno by the 1880s were every bit as bad as those that caused the great migration from Ireland in the 1840s. The land was predominately divided into large estates with absentee landlords and supervision in the hands of overseers. Labor was performed by tenants who employed primitive instruments and practices, exploited the land, and prevented or slowed the introduction of modern machinery and farming methods. The result was a marginal existence. “Add to this the sloth and idleness of the ruling class,” a shocked and disgusted Francesco Nitti found, adding that “in some provinces every citizen who can count on 500 or 600 lire of annual income thinks himself justified in not working and, as they say, ‘lives on his rent.’” In Basilicata Nitti recalled visiting “a wretched village, very poor and miserable from malaria and emigration, in which of a population of about 5000 there were seventy-two priests,” most of whom were “living on their rents with no other occupation than village politics.”

The situation in the North began to improve in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the introduction of crop rotation, machinery, and fertilizers. Few modern farming methods penetrated to the South, where the only grain crop was wheat and field workers labored with hoes and spades and occasionally with hand plows. Artificial fertilizers were scarcely known in the South. Obviously, in these circumstances Southern Italy could provide no serious competition for United States, Canadian, or Argentine-grown wheat.

Throughout history Southern Italy was exploited by invaders and conquerors but none victimized the region more than the government of the new Kingdom of Italy controlled by fellow Italians from the North. As far as the Southerner was concerned the foreign domination continued, now in the form of a more efficient, oppressive, and ruthless government in Rome. The South, in fact, “contributed more to government revenues in proportion to its wealth, while at the same time benefiting less from government disbursements in proportion to what it paid.”

Unification also dealt a severe blow to Southern industrial development. Prior to 1861 industrialization had progressed almost to the North’s level, but in following years governmental policy discriminated against Southern provinces. By the turn of the century the North had made great advances in wealth, trade, and education, while the South remained almost stationary, if it had not, in fact, retrogressed. The reason for the difference in progress could be traced to the government, which lavished favors on the North and promoted its industry and trade by means of protectionist tariffs and other barriers to free trade, while turning its back on the problems and needs of the largely agricultural South. Tariff bills and other legislation enacted by the central government to protect and encourage emerging industry in the North benefited that part of the Kingdom at the expense of the South. In addition, when customs duties between the former Italian states were abolished, the South lost a great deal of revenue that now flowed to Rome.

In the decades following unification, Southern-Italian peasants fell deeper into la miseria. A repressive system of taxation and usurious interest rates further undermined whatever initiative remained and discouraged efforts at self-improvement. By the end of the nineteenth century, taxes in Italy were the highest in Europe and weighed especially heavily on those least able to pay, that is, on the contadini (peasants) and the giornalieri (or day laborers) of the South. Among these were taxes on land, buildings, and on moveable wealth. Excise taxes were placed on salt, sugar, tobacco, liquor, and other items over which the government exercised a monopoly. Some of the taxes, such as that on salt, comprised a very substantial portion of the price of the item. Not only did the
central government tax heavily but so did the provinces and the
communes. In fact, the bulk of the taxes was levied by the local
governments (the communes).

The South also suffered from a series of natural disasters that
included earthquakes, droughts, volcanic eruptions, landslides, and
plant parasites. The phylloxera plant parasite had a profound
effect on the South's economy. The parasite destroyed most of the
vineyards of Southern Italy and virtually annihilated the country's
wine industry for a time during the 1890s. An immediate result
was that French wines began to replace the Italian product in the
world market. A longer-term result was the displacement of thou-
sands of farm laborers who turned to emigration as an escape from
economic disaster.

Even more damaging, according to historians of Italy, was the
lack of rainfall. Some believe that the annual rainfall has declined
since ancient times when the South was "the garden of the Roman
Empire," and there appears to be some validity in this belief. Of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Winter</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Summer</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Total Yearly Rainfall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>North</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piedmont</td>
<td>120.8</td>
<td>265.3</td>
<td>152.6</td>
<td>192.2</td>
<td>731.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venetia</td>
<td>139.0</td>
<td>179.3</td>
<td>188.7</td>
<td>227.8</td>
<td>740.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liguria</td>
<td>350.9</td>
<td>319.5</td>
<td>179.5</td>
<td>487.7</td>
<td>1,307.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuscany</td>
<td>201.4</td>
<td>215.5</td>
<td>139.7</td>
<td>275.2</td>
<td>822.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campania</td>
<td>285.1</td>
<td>196.8</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>371.1</td>
<td>873.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apulia</td>
<td>208.0</td>
<td>140.3</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>219.0</td>
<td>622.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicily</td>
<td>290.7</td>
<td>149.8</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>240.6</td>
<td>718.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2. Median Temperatures in Italy 1871–1931 (Fahrenheit)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Winter</th>
<th>Summer</th>
<th>Annual Minimum</th>
<th>Annual Maximum</th>
<th>Differences in Degrees Between Winter and Summer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>36.38</td>
<td>73.40</td>
<td>55.40</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>96.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>52.12</td>
<td>75.20</td>
<td>63.50</td>
<td>38.58</td>
<td>113.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Land of *La Miseria* still greater importance, however, is the distribution of the rain
that does fall. The total annual precipitation in the South is not
significantly lower than that in the North but it falls during the
wrong seasons of the year for agricultural purposes. The rainfall in
the North is heaviest during the spring and summer when crops
need moisture for germination and fruition. By contrast, precipita-
tion in the South is greatest in the fall and winter when, instead of
nourishing the earth, it furthers the process of soil erosion. The
problem is compounded during the summer months by the lack of
irrigation and by the presence of the dry "sirocco" winds. Blowing
out of the African deserts and across Southern Italy during the
growing season, these winds dry up crops or cover them over with
sand and soil.

Another climatic problem affecting agriculture in the South was
temperature. Table 2 demonstrates that the South was not only
drier than the North but it also was hotter during both the winter
and the summer.

Socially and economically Southern Italy was a static, closed
society. A rigid caste system existed which made upward socio-
economic mobility extremely difficult for the vast majority of the
people to achieve. The population was divided between the few
who were wealthy, socially prominent, and politically powerful, and the many, who were poverty-stricken and powerless. "The majority of the great landed proprietors," wrote Englishman Richard Bagot, who traveled extensively through turn-of-the-century Italy, "have never possessed that sense of duty and of responsibility to their tenants and dependents which has almost invariably characterized their counterparts in England." Also, unlike England, the middle class in Italy was virtually nonexistent. Emigration was one of the few means available for ambitious young men to realize some degree of upward social and economic mobility. For the vast majority of Southern-Italian peasants, emigration was "the major source of achievement" available to them.

Among the few domestic means of "making it" were the Catholic Church or criminal organizations such as the Mafia. The Catholic Church was a central element of village life. It served as a social as well as a religious force, and because it exerted a wide-ranging and pervasive influence, the village priest played an important role in the community. Recognizing the opportunities the priesthood offered for improving their social status, some ambitious and intelligent peasant youngsters were attracted to the profession. In the decades after unification, "it was the height of a peasant family's ambition that one of its members should become a priest." The young men entered the clergy and served their parish well. Unfortunately, the number of openings available in the priesthood was limited and upward mobility within the hierarchy of the Church was severely restricted for the lower classes.

A chasm existed between the local clergy, who were often born and raised in the village they served, and the higher officials of the Church. The latter group generally came from upper-class families and in their official capacity in the Church took their place alongside military officers and governmental officials as important members of the state's power structure.

For some peasant youths far greater opportunities existed in crime than in the Church. In a speech before the Italian Parliament in the 1870s, jurist Diego Trajani, himself a Sicilian na-
favors and pledges of support and respect. In the process the patrons accumulated immense power and influence, and although they lived quietly, frugally, and inconspicuously, they also acquired great wealth. Functioning as the friend and champion of the oppressed, the *fiba*, like the Mafia, also allied itself with local landowners and politicians and exerted a generally decisive influence in elections in exchange for control of the local population. As Denis Mack Smith maintained, based on research conducted by Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino in Sicily in 1876, "crime was a means only; the chief object, as always, was to win respect, power and hence money."16

In the impersonal and hostile environment that existed in the South the ordinary peasant could place his trust and faith only in the nuclear family—that is, the immediate members of his household. Extended family closeness and supportiveness, an ideal much admired and desired in the Italian South, was seldom attained because of the harsh economic and social conditions. Each person was expected to mind his own business and that of the immediate family, which in the South comprised one and the same thing. Envy, jealousy, and suspicion typified contacts with and attitudes toward the wider family group—unts and uncles, nieces and nephews, cousins of varying degrees and closeness. The man of the family turned to relatives only when he needed a favor; but because his own prestige increased in proportion to the loss of a relative's prestige, and vice versa, he acted prudently if he did not completely trust kinsmen. A well-known Sicilian proverb with which the vast majority of Southern Italians could agree was that "the real relatives are those inside the house."11 One was wise, sociologist Joseph Lopreato has noted, not to place too much trust even in nuclear family members for "the nuclear family itself is not free from intense internal conflict."12

Although in Southern-Italian and Sicilian villages most residents were related, little closeness, cohesiveness, or feeling of unity existed among the villagers. A sense of community simply did not exist. Southerners had a fierce loyalty to their town, the so-called spirit of campanilismo (or localism), but this loyalty was not synonymous with a spirit of group cooperation or acceptance of responsibility for the needs and interests of the community. Residents simply did not recognize "the community," as the term is understood in the United States and elsewhere in Western Europe. "Like so many of the dreams of the Mezzogiorno," sociologist Francis Ianni has observed, "the harsh social and economic realities of the region have always kept the vision out of the reach of the peasant and the urban poor."13

That this situation has not yet changed was demonstrated in the aftermath of the earthquakes that rocked Southern Italy in 1980. Louis B. Fleming, a European correspondent for the Los Angeles Times, found that the quakes revealed a basic flaw in Italian society. "The cynicism, deceptiveness, peccadillos and worse of many politicians are also the characteristics of many of the Italian people," Fleming observed. They are "the fruit of a preoccupation with the individual, the family unit, the immediate circle of friends, at the expense of community, to say nothing of nation." The basic problem, as one prominent Italian acknowledged to Fleming, was that "there is simply no sense of community": in Southern Italy.14

The growth of a sense of community among Italian immigrants in the United States was not transplanted but, rather, resulted from settlement in the New World. Similarly, the cohesive, extended family, which was only a dream in Southern Italy, came closer to reality in the immigrant neighborhoods of American cities. Even there, Ianni notes, "the ideal of the closely knit, socially and economically integrated extended family remained illusory" for most of the immigrants, although "for some families, success in business whether legal, illegal or both, allowed them to realize the dream and to use their wealth and power to build a family business patterned on the extended family."15 The extended family has functioned most effectively, Ianni maintains, in the operation of criminal syndicates in America.

Emigration was a vital safety valve for dissatisfaction and discontent, and the Italian government recognized this fact. It looked
upon massive emigration as the easiest and most convenient means of relieving potentially disruptive socio-economic and political pressures in the South. Thus Luigi Bodio, a member of the Italian parliament, stated in 1895 that "emigration is a good thing for the mother country. . . . It is a safety valve, or security against envy and class odium, an efficacious instrument in the equalization of human forces." Legislation passed by parliament in December 1888 proclaimed the right of Italians to emigrate freely from the Kingdom, but the government did little of a substantive nature then or in subsequent years to protect or aid emigrants before their departure, during the arduous ocean voyage, or upon their arrival and settlement in the New World.

The attitude of the Italian government began to change after the passage of a new emigration law in 1901 that was intended to provide more effective protection for emigrants than had earlier legislation and, through the creation of a Commissariato Generale della Emigrazione (or Bureau of Emigration), to coordinate and unify services for Italian nationals in other countries. Neither the Commissariato nor the 1901 law lived up to the high hopes entertained for them. The government still showed more interest in the money emigrants sent or personally brought back to Italy than in the conditions under which they worked or lived while out of the country. After 1908 Italy entertained grandiose dreams of a vast colonial empire and emigration was a vital element in the plans. Until World War I intervened, Italians were still allowed to leave the country but the emigration was to be "undisguisedly temporary." Italians who journeyed beyond the nation's borders were to keep the homeland ever in their thoughts and were "some day to return," preferably with large amounts of capital earned abroad to pump into the Kingdom's economy.

"Purely economic causes" were responsible for "practically all emigration from Italy." The emigrants were driven by a desire to escape abject and wretched poverty and a vicious system of taxation, the burden of which fell almost exclusively on poor peasants. At the same time they were attracted by the hope of bettering their miserable conditions through seasonal or temporary labor elsewhere in Europe or overseas. In 1882 the Italian government requested provincial officials throughout the country to investigate their jurisdictions and provide accurate information as to the basic factors responsible for emigration from the Kingdom. The answers were nearly unanimous in ascribing emigration to three factors: "destitution, lack of work, and a natural desire to improve their condition." Despite the numerous factors working to dislodge the peasant from his village as well as the availability of economic opportunities in the New World serving to attract him, Southern Italians, like the Irish in the years before the Great Migration of the 1840s, were reluctant to leave their villages. In fact emigration from Italy began first from the North. Throughout most of the nineteenth century Northern Italians migrated across the Alps to Western and Central Europe or across the Atlantic Ocean to Argentina, Brazil, and other Latin-American countries, although a small number were diverted to the United States, especially to California. The limited emigration from Southern Italy in the years before unification was primarily to North Africa.

The flow of transoceanic migration varied according to the relative economic opportunities available in the receiving countries. The allure of Latin America decreased toward the end of the century, resulting in large part from the unsettled political and financial conditions in Brazil and Argentina. At the same time that economic opportunities for immigrants in Latin America diminished, industrial expansion in the United States required unskilled laborers. Moreover, transportation to the United States cost less than to Latin America and immigrants could earn more money in North America—two important reasons for emigration to the United States.

Italians still felt drawn to Argentina and Brazil, but by the time these countries had settled their immediate political and economic problems the mainstream of Italian migration had been diverted toward the United States. The movement to the United States
Background

differed in two respects from that to Latin America: place of origin in Italy and the size of the migration. While Northern Italians comprised some 90 percent of the emigration to Latin America, approximately 90 percent of the migration to the United States was from the Southern provinces. In addition, larger numbers of Italians went to North America than had reached the Latin countries. Rarely had a yearly total of immigrating Italians equaled or exceeded 100,000 in Argentina or Brazil; after 1900 this total was a yearly minimum for the United States and approached 300,000 in 1914, but World War I then intervened to effectively end further migration.

The Southern-Italian adherence to tradition and resistance to movement from the place of origin began to break down in the decades after unification. Emigration did not, however, flow evenly from all parts of the South. It came, rather, from those areas that experienced the breakdown of the old feudal system of class stratification, without compensating working-class organizations such as trade unions and cooperatives. Dissatisfaction with economic conditions, combined with fear of losing status in a society that had previously and traditionally been closed and unchanging, stimulated the desire to emigrate. Thus those who departed were not the drags, those at the bottom of the economic ladder, but sturdy and hardy peasants who were a step or two up and who feared impoverishment and the loss of status.

In a report to the Department of State prepared in 1885, Edward Camphausen, the American Consul in Naples, reported that "of the peasants, or those cultivating or working the soil, 90 percent are owners of some property, if only consisting of a small house." The fact that emigration offered an important means of upward mobility contributed to the disintegration of feudal-class distinctions. Those who departed came, according to the American Consul in Palermo, Philip Carroll, from "the more frugal, thrifty, and energetic" members of Southern society, a point that was confirmed and repeated by later observers. The Reverend N.

The Land of La Miseria

Walling Clark, who was for several years in charge of educational activities of the Methodist Church in Italy, told the United States Immigration Commission in 1911 that "the class of emigrants who go to the United States are unquestionably the more enterprising, the better element; only those would be able to go who have the money to get tickets; many are too poor to go." Allan J. McLaughlin, the surgeon in charge of the United States Public Health Station at Naples, stated in an interview with the chairman of the Immigration Commission: "I think that it is true that the United States gets the cream of those who have enterprise enough to exercise an initiative. In fact, one of the complaints of the present day of the Italian officials is that the very best young blood of the Italian plebes is going out of the country. They recognize that fact. It is the man with the initiative who leaves."

Emigrants from Italy and elsewhere in Southern and Eastern Europe benefited from the introduction in the late nineteenth century of the steamship for transatlantic travel. In fact, without the steamship it would have been almost impossible for most Southern and Eastern-European emigrants to have made the voyage to the United States. Previously the Atlantic crossing had taken a month or more by sailing ship from a British, French, or German port, and was a perilous experience. By steamship the same trip could be made in ten days to two weeks and was safer and far more comfortable than it had previously been. Furthermore, in the steamship era it was possible to travel from a port on the Mediterranean instead of having to journey overland to leave from a Northern European port.

Naples, Palermo, Messina, and Genoa were the Italian ports of embarkation for emigrants leaving for overseas destinations. After the turn of the century Naples emerged, according to the United States Immigration Commission, as the leading European port "in the number of emigrants embarking for America." Between twelve and fourteen steamship companies at various times offered direct service between Naples and New York City. The major
European lines operated out of Naples, including White Star, North German Lloyd, Navigazione Generale Italiana, Fabre, Lloyd-Italiano, and Hamburg-American.

Even with the improvements that the steamship brought the crossing was not a pleasant or enjoyable experience. Most of the peasants had never strayed far from their home village much less been on an ocean voyage. The trip itself from an Italian port through the Mediterranean and across the Atlantic usually took two to three weeks. For the emigrants, who traveled steerage, the voyage was harrowing. The quarters were overcrowded and badly ventilated, and there was limited access to deck space. Conditions were even worse during bad weather, which was a frequent occurrence on the turbulent Atlantic. The passage across the ocean "seemed to have been so calculated," one emigrant recalled, "as to inflict upon us the last, full measure of suffering and indignity, and to impress upon us for the last time that we were the 'wretched refuse' of the earth; to exact from us a final price for the privileges we hoped to enjoy in America." 228

In 1903 an American writer, Broughton Brandenburg, and his wife undertook an assignment from Leslie's Monthly to impersonate Italian emigrants and travel in steerage of a passenger ship from Naples to New York. The project resulted in a well-received book, Imported Americans. The Brandenburgs studied the Italian language and then moved into an immigrant neighborhood in New York. When "duly prepared and informed" they went to Europe "with some of the returning Italians" and after studying "the actual conditions" in the Southern Italian countryside began the journey back to America. In Naples they boarded a steamship with emigrants from all parts of the Kingdom: "If one looked carefully there were to be seen twenty different sorts of costumes of the contadini." 224

The "motley assemblage" was herded into huge compartments. All the women, young children, and babies were placed in one compartment, and the vastly larger numbers of men and older boys slept in the other compartments. There was serious overcrowding in all the compartments occupied by emigrants. Beds were double- or triple-tiered affairs with iron frameworks that supported burlap-covered bags of straw, grass, or waste which served as mattresses. As in most ships which depended on the emigrant trade, little thought or effort was devoted to the comfort or welfare of passengers in steerage. Thus few vessels provided enough space for steerage passengers to sit down at a table for their meals. "For such quarters and accommodations as I have described," Brandenburg noted with more than a trace of bitterness, "the emigrant pays half the sum that would buy a first-class passage. A comparison of the two classes shows where the steamship company makes the most money." 225 Brandenburg was correct in this observation. Although steamship companies lavished attention and services on the occupants of first-class accommodations, it was the masses packed in the steerage that provided the sizable profits made by steamship companies involved in the Atlantic passenger trade in the decades before World War I.

Crew members generally treated steerage passengers with contempt, on those occasions when they acknowledged their existence. Even the most unpleasant of voyages did, however, eventually come to an end and when the ship docked in an American port, usually New York, the weary and often sick passengers were ready to begin their experience as immigrants.