



Italy on the Pacific: San Francisco's Italian Americans (Italian and Italian American Studies)

Sebastian Fichera

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This book details the Italian immigrant experience in San Francisco from the Gold Rush to the Mayoralty of George Moscone—which is to say the entire life cycle of the Italian community. The concept of community is central and is defined in a way never seen before. The work portrays this immigrant experience within the context of such larger issues as the process of creating Americans in America versus the parallel process of creating Italians in Italy. It concludes that America in general and San Francisco in particular did a better job at creating Americans (out of an Italian emigrant human resource base) than did Italy at creating Italians out of that same type of base. San Francisco's Italian immigrant experience is shown to be the polar opposite of Chicago's. San Francisco's Italian immigrants are shown as reintegrating into the host society fairly smoothly, whereas the Chicago group's assimilation process broke down in dramatic ways. Most Italian immigrant experience falls somewhere in between these two polarities. Another important level of comparison is between the United States as a receiving country and Italy as a sending country and attempts to explain why there was this difference. Overall, this book uses the San Francisco Italian experience as a microcosm of the universal immigrant experience, addressing such questions as what constitutes "community," "national identity", and "assimilation" for any immigrant group, not just Italians.

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