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Voices of Italian America: A History of Early Italian American Literature with a Critical Anthology

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Voices of Italian America: A History of Early Italian American Literature with a Critical Anthology
Voices of Italian America presents the first authoritative study and anthology of the largely Italian-language literature written and published in the U.S. from the heydays of the Great Migration (1880-1920) to the almost definitive demise of the cultural world of the first generation soon before and after WWII. The volume resurrects the neglected and even forgotten territory of a nation-wide "Little Italy" where people wrote, talked, read, and consumed the various forms of entertainment mostly in their native Italian language, in a complex interplay with native dialects and surrounding American English.

In the anthological sections we read, among others, excerpts from the ethnically-tinged thrillers by Tuscan-born first-comer Bernardino Ciambelli, as well as the first short-stories by Italian American women, set in the Gilded Age. The fiction of political activists such as Carlo Tresca coexists with the hard-boiled autobiography of Italian American cop Mike Fiaschetti, fighting against the Mafia. Voices presents new material by English-speaking classics such as Pietro di Donato and John Fante, and a selection of poetry by a great bilingual voice, the champion of the masses and IWW poet Arturo Giovannitti, and by a lesser-known, self-taught, satyrical versifier, Riccardo Cordiferro/Ironheart. Controversial documents on the difficult interracial relations between Italian- and African Americans live side by side with the first poignant chronicles from Ellis Island.

The goal of this study is to shed light on the "fabrication" of a new culture of immigrant origins pliable, dynamic, constantly shifting and transforming itself and to do that focusing on stories, genres, rhythms, the"human touch" contributed by literature in its wider sense. Ultimately, through a rich sample of significant texts covering various aspects of the immigrant experience, Voices offers the reader a literary history of Italian American culture. It lets American readers be acquainted with a history very ideologically and artistically diverse, issued from a collective experience full, at the same time, with tragedy and fun. Such a literature is an eye-opening testimony of what happens to a culture when it migrates, and of how, in what form, both linguistically and rhetorically, it expresses itself, in the long and often unnoticed way toward assimilation.

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