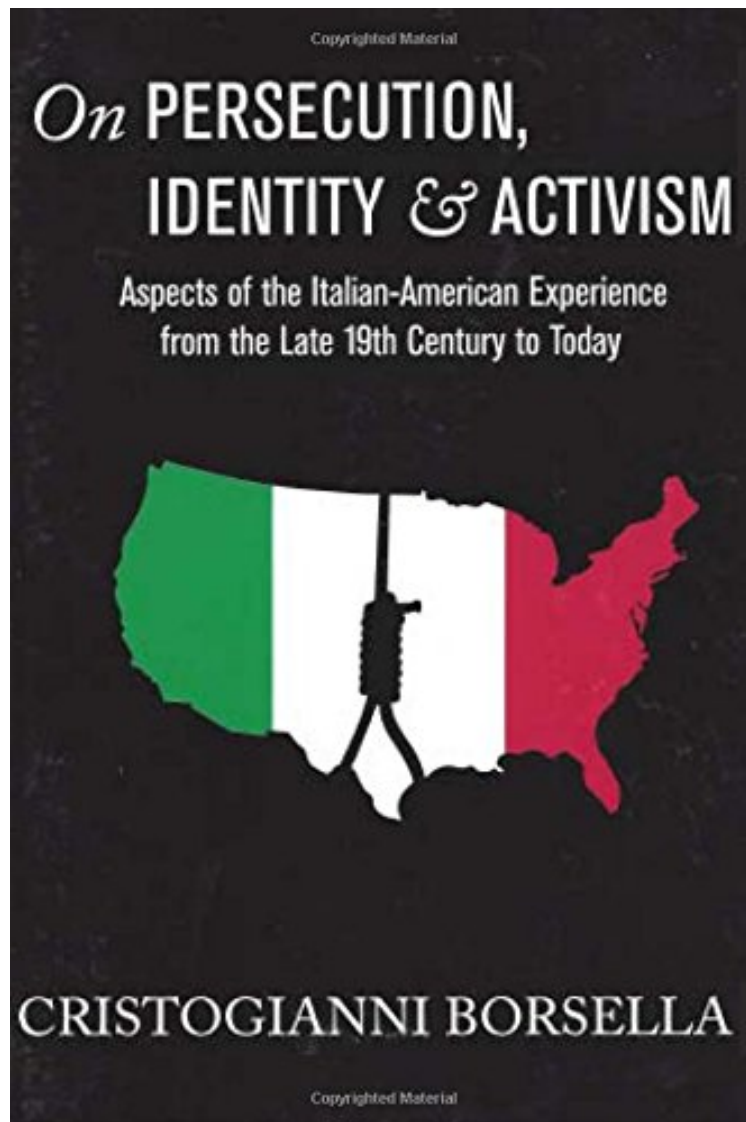


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## On Persecution, Identity Activism: Aspects of the Italian-American Experience from the Late 19th Century to Today

*Cristogianni Borsella*

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**Cristogianni Borsella : On Persecution, Identity Activism: Aspects of the Italian-American Experience from the Late 19th Century to Today** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised On Persecution, Identity Activism: Aspects of the Italian-American Experience from the Late 19th Century to Today:

2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. I fail to understand for what reasons other reviewers have ...By Marie Prudence GagneI fail to understand for what reasons other reviewers have rated this book so highly. It is being marketed as a serious cultural study, but in fact it is a self-serving exercise in ethnicity and its rediscovery - by the author. As such, it might be an entertaining and illuminating read for someone of American-Italian descent who knows little or nothing of the obstacles - economic, political, and racial - that Italian immigrants faced in the U.S., especially in the early decades of immigration and acculturation, but is not for the educated reader, since the book is little more than a collection of incidents, anecdotes, and personal opinions. It is not annotated, the bibliography is dated and weak, and the author has not contributed in any truly meaningful way to the topic suggested by the title. As a scholar and an American-Italian, I must suggest that anyone interested in serious and deeply researched cultural study of Italians in America look to other authors and works on the same topic.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. The Picasso of American historiesBy Biff Rocha"On Persecution, Identity Activism: Aspects of the Italian-American Experience from the Late 19th Century to Today," could easily be called a new classic of Cultural Studies. Containing contemporary sources of information such as chat room debates, listserv posting and web page persuasion, "On Persecution," reveals the past with present means to better the future. This book clearly dispels the politically correct myth of easy assimilation into the American Dream. By examining the history of the Italian peoples in America, Cristogianni Borsella enlightens the current debate on illegal immigration of Mexicans crossing our southern most border. They don't want to assimilate. They work the jobs no American wants. They're dirty, uneducated and criminals. These claims are not new or unique to the Mexicans. Borsella documents these same remarks as applied to the new immigrants from Italy of the nineteenth century."On Persecution" is a Picasso of American and American-Italian histories. Uneven and at times odd, the work contains many sharp angles that at first appear disjointed. Yet together the pages form a complete whole, a needed presence in contemporary ethnic scholarship. "On Persecution" contains six chapters, four appendices, endnotes, a bibliography and an index, so it could serve a teacher well in the classroom. It is easy to read, and at times the personality of the author is so immediate and delightful, the reader may sense he is prying into a personal diary. Such personality makes the book flow quickly even when the narrative evaporates into lists and documentation. The strengths of the book are many. First, Borsella sets forth a persuasive case that Italian immigrants have been a persecuted minority group in the United States. Over a hundred pages serve to chronicle cases of execution, lynching and defamations through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Second, this work illustrates that generalizations and contemporary categorizations seldom fit well upon the facts of history. Borsella uses the history of the Italian immigrants to discuss the social construction of race, white identity and assimilation differences by generations. His work is sure to disrupt the reader's assumptions concerning the working of the American society. Countering the notion of European white privilege, Borsella presents Italians as "historically black" documenting American societal segregation habits of preventing Italian children from attending white schools, requiring Italians to sit in the back rows of movie theatres, and American churches isolating Italians from the main fellowship by ushering them into garages and dank church basements. Third, the book raises serious questions concerning identity construction and negotiation, societal perception, and the media's role in influencing American culture. Specifically from a Communication perspective "On Persecution" would be an asset to any Com scholar's library for a variety of reasons. The work is a journey of discovery. The author describes his own, almost religious awakening to his ethnic heritage. This journey is unselfishly shared by an author who makes his thoughts most transparent. The genuineness of the tour guide provides and effective ethos to his overall argument. Furthermore, a gift of this text is the serious respect it gives to contemporary communication forms. Borsella's fruitful use of chat room debates and webpage postings challenge traditional scholarship's lack of attention to the same. Another aspect I enjoyed were the historic pictures and cultural snapshots of Italian Americans integrated throughout the book. The negatives of the book do not overshadow the many positives. His chapters are uneven, with chapter six containing four pages while chapter two is close to a hundred pages. The chapters are not units of thought - some contain one major idea while other contain several key ideas, and in other chapters I could discern no overarching theme. Chapter titles would have helped, and a better editor could have made organizational suggestions to strengthen and balance the chapters. Indeed, these are minor grievances, especially when one recognizes that this is Borsella's first nonfiction book. He begins his introduction of material with a discussion of several immigrant groups such as the Japanese, Chinese and the Jews to illustrate persecution in America is by no means rare. He then moves on to provide background for the marginalization of the Italian immigrants. Next Borsella offers a chronology of discrimination against Italians before discussing Senator Estes Kefauver's Crime Committee hearings of the 1950's that linked Italians and crime in the mind of the public. The fourth chapter deals with the construction of race and presents an online debate over the historical question of whether Italians are white. From there he examines the role of the media through television stereotypes, Mafia movies and news coverage of Columbus Day repudiations. The work ends with a reflective Epilogue on forgetfulness and the diaphanous nature of Italian inequity.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Borsella's Research Relevant to Today's Headlines on Immigration!By GlendaCristogianni Borsella is making a name for himself as a major research historian. In On Persecution, Identity Activism: Aspects of the Italian-American Experience from the Late 19th Century to Today, he not only again shares his brilliant research and writing

talents, but he also shares his personal thoughts and feelings on issues of racial prejudice and persecution, and how these issues are influenced and promulgated through the media. I enjoy reading Borsella's research. While his main goal is to highlight his Italian-American heritage, his research is well rounded and encompassing. And the proof of his efforts is that there is new information that will undoubtedly teach his readers, including myself, about the atrocities faced by Italians in America (as well as similar information on other groups, including African-Americans, American Indians, Jewish, Irish, Japanese, et.al., normally non-white. Indeed Part I of this book provides complete information documenting that Italian-Americans have been the third most persecuted minority in U.S. History! Here are just a few random selections of the little-known facts provided: From 1870-1940, Italians were the second most lynched ethnicity, second only to African-Americans. Sicilians were the largest group in New Orleans and were singled out as the most dangerous class and blamed for practically all the murders that took place. During the last decade of the 19th century, according to the Commissioner of Labor, "one-third of all Italians in the four largest cities in the country were living in deplorable poverty. The Mafia stereotype was greatly responsible for the many lynchings, and all Italians were accused either directly or by implication. During WWII, 600,000 people of Italian background had their rights besieged by the U. S. government. Part II of Borsella's book moves into greater detail about the identity and assimilation of Italians into America. I think the question "Are Italians White?" which is explored, is the most telling of the racism that continues even today. Borsella explores how the issue of "color" really has no bearing when discussing ethnic issues since immigrants from Italy, as well as other countries, have a range of skin colorings. In an unexpected twist, Borsella has included his own personal activism activities, including actual on-line arguments he has shared, which made his book just a little different and more interesting. When individuals choose to learn about their heritage and celebrate it, it is important that truthful, factual information is available. One of the controversial areas for Italian-Americans has been the exploration and call for the elimination of Columbus Day. Inclusion of these more recent issues brought a new understanding to Borsella's title! I sometimes wonder how we have come to be known as "the melting pot" when there are still so many fighting for vested interests by overriding historical fact. Indeed, Columbus was the discoverer of America. Just as all peoples have performed atrocities, this cannot and should not negate actual events. Borsella's inclusion of this issue is an excellent exploration of the arguments for and against the celebration of this day. Finally, Borsella takes issue with television, movies and other media who have stereotyped all Italian-Americans under the umbrella of being part of organized crime, highlighting that the latest series, *The Sopranos*, illustrates the continuous illusion that can only serve to continue the defamation of an entire ethnic group. Personally, I applaud everything that was covered in this book. Given the issues of immigration that are in today's headlines, this book just may be a must-read as you explore your own feelings about today and tomorrow's headlines.

*On Persecution, Identity Activism* is a definitive work on the many trials and tribulations that Italian-Americans have suffered over the past 120 years. While other books have focused on specific areas of anti-Italianism, Cristogianni's work encompasses the great bulk of persecution that existed in the United States, through the use of a historical timeline. The book also shows the reader how the Italian-American identity has evolved through the years. Modern activism is addressed as well, especially the ongoing anti-defamation campaign and the Columbus Day controversy. Due to the striking similarities between Italian immigrants of the past and immigrants of the present, *On Persecution, Identity Activism* is truly a must read for anyone wishing to better understand the vex-ing immigration questions of our own time.

About the Author Cristogianni Borsella is involved in various multicultural organizations and is deeply committed to anti-racist causes. Mindful of his Italian heritage, Cristogianni has developed a strong love for the Italian/Mediterranean cultures, and his love of heritage has provided him with the necessary resources to tully admire the backgrounds of others.