

## Interwar (Be)longing: Transnational Currents and Small Immigrant Philanthropy between the US and Italy

### Motivation

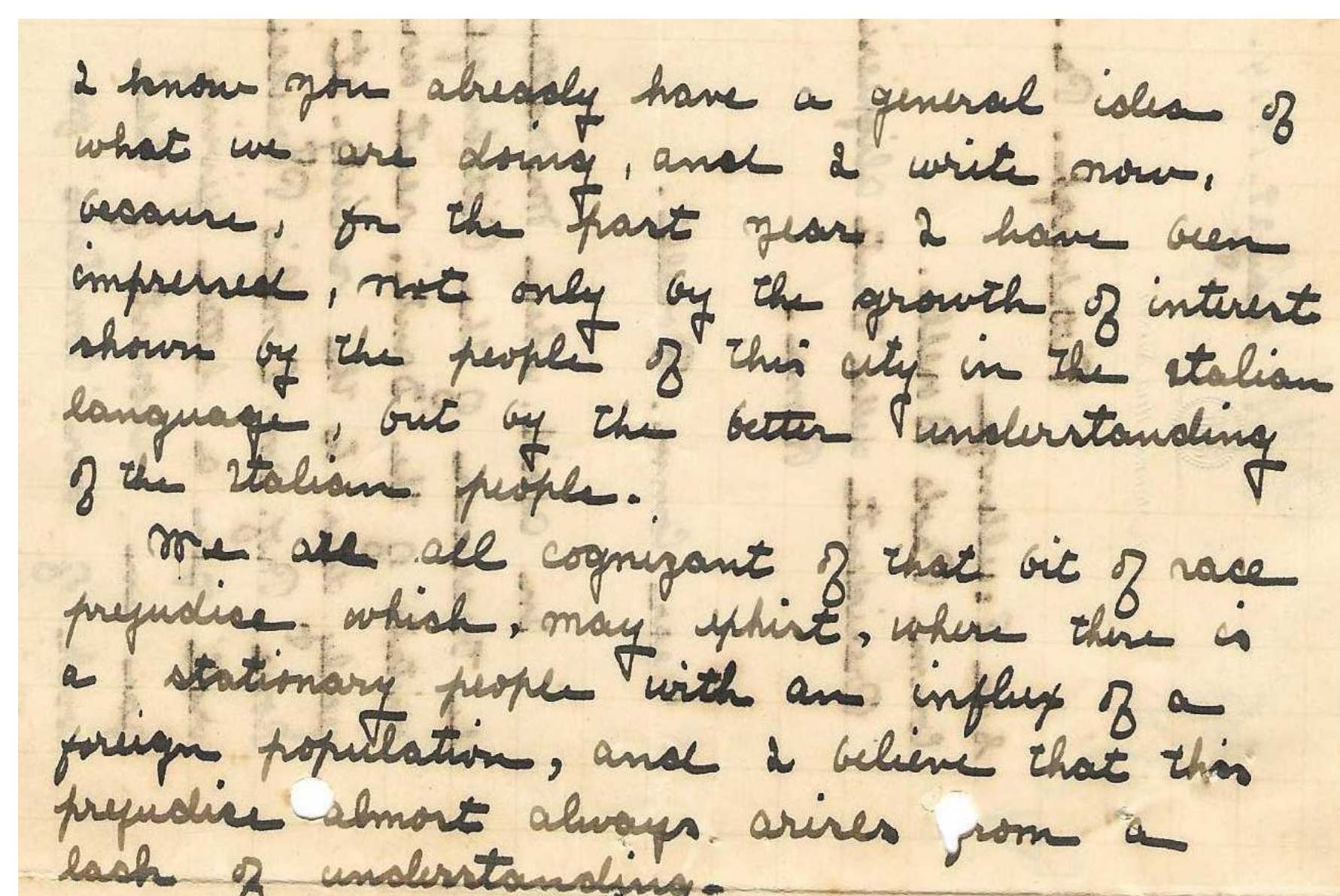
- Did cultural projects like statues and nationality rooms or gardens really emerge from poor laborer communities, as contemporary narratives contend?
- What kinds of philanthropy were Italian immigrants and their institutions engaging in? What did they think about icons of Italian culture and how did those icons mediate between diasporic subjects, on one hand, and their old and new homes, on the other?

### Project Description

- Explore archival materials to better understand the values, missions, and philanthropic activities of newspapers, beneficial and cultural “societies,” and cultural commemoration committees.

### Context

- Assumptions about cultural commemoration in this period are largely unquestioned in contemporary discourse.
- I propose an archival approach that examines how institutional values aligned with philanthropic activity, on one hand, and with stated institutional missions, on the other.



**Image 1:** May 29, 1914 letter from Isabelle McClung to the Società Dante Alighieri headquarters in Rome



This project aims to discover how a variety of immigrant **institutions** in the **interwar period** helped **Italian migrants and ethnics** negotiate their **belonging** to both Italy and the US; and to better understand the relationship between class, ethnicity, and the iconic historical figures that came to define the Italians of America—from Dante to Columbus.



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### Project Deliverables

- My Microgrant funding allowed me to travel to the *Società Dante Alighieri* headquarters in Rome this past May to review the archive documenting the Pittsburgh Chapter (or *Comitato*), as well as those documenting the early activities of Chapters in Cleveland and Detroit. My time there, as brief as it was, gave me a tantalizing taste of what is there, and allowed me to make important contacts in the association leadership (including with archival staff).
- I will use my time in Pittsburgh (and my undergraduate research “lab”) this year to explore some of the figures I discovered in the archive.
- The materials I discovered in Rome will further help me to craft a viable application to the American Academy of Rome, for a Rome Prize residential fellowship in 2025.

### Potential Impact

- There is a wide chasm between the scholarly world of Italian American or Italian Diasporic Studies and the communities that make up the *Italiani nel mondo*, or “Italians in the world” of the diaspora. Exploring the nuts and bolts of how Columbus veneration, for example, came to be might open the door to more productive conversations between the scholarly community and the ethnic one.
- The history of Italian American philanthropy—as a dimension of beneficial, social, and cultural institutions of belonging—has not yet been conducted. There is much to learn from this angle of immigrant and ethnic Italian communities.

### References and/or Acknowledgements

- The *Società Dante Alighieri* in Rome and their archivist, Giulia De Castro
- The students in my “Columbus, Interrupted” undergraduate research lab
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