LAURA E. RUBERTO
Berkeley City College

Creative Expression and the Material Culture of Italian POWs in the United States During World War II

> On weekends, my grandmother
> signed prisoners out to milk cows,
> prune fruit trees, work in her vineyards,
> young Italians captured in Africa
> who spoke her dialect,
> came from her village.
> Jennifer Lagier[i]

When the *New York Times* reporter, Meyer Berger, visited Italian prisoners of war at the Pine Camp in upstate New York in December 1943 he was part of a larger U.S. campaign to assuage any misgivings Americans still had about Italians as potential enemies, barely three months after Italy's surrender to the Allies. His characterizations of life at the camp resembles similar news pieces written in local press outlets across the United States which told readers that while Italian military prisoners were safely guarded behind barbed wire, they were also friendly, happy to be in the United States, concerned about their family back in Italy, hard-working and had somewhat peculiar inclinations. Among the peculiarities Berger describes is one that captures the basic topic of my research. He reports:

> noncoms and officers assigned to look after the Italians were enthusiastic over what these prisoners achieved with native stone and rock—little shrines, statuettes. These were buried under the snow on the little lawns outside the barracks. (Berger 1943, 3)

This brief aside highlights some of the ways Italian prisoners of war (POWs) shaped the physical spaces of their detainment: alluding to detail work, aesthetic choices, religious belief, and use of found materials. In this essay I consider some of these factors as I study examples of material culture crafted by Italian POWs in the United States during World War II.[ii] Such constructed objects, sites, and activities speak to ways Italian culture was transported and reshaped during the war and suggest broader ways we might consider Italian diasporic culture as well as wartime experiences.

In study after study of Italian POWs passing references are made to them as "gifted artists" (Fielder 2003, 20) who have a "keen artistic drive" (Keefer 1992, 148), including in "music, theater…. chorus groups, orchestras, and theater

troupes" (Fielder 2003, 20-21) as well as "artists, sculptors, wood carvers, painters, stained glass workers and other kinds of skilled craftsmen" (Keefer 1992, 148; see also Ferroni 2013, 157, 254, and 337).[iii] Some scholarship focuses on specific case studies involving creativity among Italian POWs (Williams 2017 and Conti 2021 on Texas; Barnes 2018 on Arkansas) but no study has comprehensively analyzed Italian POW artistry.[iv]

This study builds off of research in material culture, folklife, and ethnic studies in order to add to the growing body of what Gillian Carr and H.C. Mytum have called "POW cultural studies" (Carr and Mytum 2012, 1). As a cultural studies scholar engaging with Italian transnational concerns, my approach emerges from an interdisciplinary interest in the use of space, place-making, and the ways value and meaning are ascribed to the material world; that is, how objects communicate overtime and how individuals and communities use objects to mediate their lives and place, informing the present, past, and future. Influenced by a multitude of perspectives, including Michel de Certeau's focus on the everyday and Arjun Appadurai's narrativization of objects, I begin with the perspective that revealing creative acts and unpacking the relationships between individuals and objects can be a strategy for recovering stories otherwise not well documented (de Certeau 2011; Appadurai 1998). As such, through detailing and organizing the constructed material culture of Italian POWs, I consider how such examples demonstrate what Simone Bronner has described as the "human need for material means of capturing experience" (2004, 12). Bronner's concern with the "symbolic dimensions of material life" (2004, 15) helps highlight the way these prisoner-made structures become kinds of material culture synecdoches for the makers' war experiences, including possible senses of displacement, loss, reinvention, and belonging. In so doing, my project pushes material culture studies to a more inclusive perspective by broadening its application to expansive notions of internment as well as by furthering the discipline's connection to Italian migration studies.[v]

Included herein are creative expressions which are to some extent vernacular in conception and construction. My use of *vernacular* refers to structures (e.g., buildings, small objects, built environments, landscapes) that are not part of a formal, institutional system although some aspects of said structures might be (i.e., skilled work) and that can be understood as stemming from a set of community-specific interests and experiences (Vellinga 2006).[vi] For Henry Glassie, naming something as vernacular "highlights the cultural and contingent nature" of that object (2000, 21), a perspective that facilitates a recognition of the specificity of time, place, and people without which otherwise there would be no creation. Such a fluid definition of vernacular unifies many of the POWs' productions given the similarly shared sets of experiences they had even as it cannot comprehensively capture the nuances within each deliberate creation.

Their shared experiences as Enemy War Prisoners (or EPWs—one of their formal, albeit less frequently used, classifications) in the United States is compounded by their shared associations with Italy. An Italian sense of cultural identity has been collectively and profoundly developed outside of Italy, as immigration scholars have noted (Choate

2008). The art and architecture made by these men illustrates resourcefulness, adaptability, and other characteristics associated broadly with an Italian cultural ethos, including knowledge of and valuing of the decorative arts as well as experience and labor practices with skilled crafts. These characteristics around an ethnic work ethic and aesthetic are often also associated with Italian migrant culture and the Italian diaspora. In their reliance on salvaged materials, recycling, and an overall inventive approach to construction the men practiced "l'arte d'arrangiarsi" ('the art of making do'), a phrase first applied to Italian American culture by Pellegrino D'Acierno (1999) but more recently developed by Joseph Sciorra to characterize the folklife, material culture, and lived experiences he has researched (Sciorra 2011, 2014, and 2015). Sciorra's studies of expressive and vernacular culture among Italian Americans repeatedly calls "attention to artistry in everyday life," including the "admiration and pleasure in craft within Italian American cultural contexts" and he connects such perspectives to "Italian American place-making" (Sciorra 2014, 192-193; Sciorra 2015, xxiv, xxvii). His critical approaches to and theorizations of Italian American culture and history deeply resonate with and inform my project here.

This article offers an analysis of tangible and intangible creative objects, sites, and experiences. I introduce and contextualize this creativity by first laying out the historical context of Italian EPWs in the United States alongside that of other Italian identities in the United States during the war years. With that foundation, I critically categorize numerous examples of creative products and actions, concluding that POWs built a sense of self and place, an alternative or re-imagined Italian ethnic space within their confinement. These directed, creative actions reinforced cultural heritage, mediated personal and community identities, shaped evolving notions of self, and ultimately helped make sense of some of the trauma of their displacement and atrocities of war.

Such creative outpour while incarcerated is by no means unique to Italians nor to wartime or military-related captivity.[vii] A sense of endless time, coupled by infinite restrictions on liberties (to space, to movement, to activities, to oral expression) and minimal access to materials fosters imagination and creative actions: "creativity was practiced by nearly all POWs (to varying degrees of competency) and was a therapeutic outlet which enabled them to survive emotionally, psychologically, and in some cases, physically" (Carr and Mytum 2012, 2). The Italian case is not unique but illustrative of the roll of creativity during wartime, the effects POWs had on localized American landscapes and communities, and the dynamic possibilities of individuals and groups under restrictive lives. Their experiences expand our understanding of the Italian diaspora, Italian migration, and concepts of transnationalism, asking us to consider shape-shifting ways Italian identities on American soil were lived in the 1940s.[viii]

Historical Context

The history of Italian POWs is often confused with other stories about interned Italians on U.S. soil. During my research I have had to repeatedly clarify, sometimes even to World War II historians, that my focus is on military Axis soldiers taken prisoner in Europe, North Africa, or Asia and brought to the United States

as military prisoners of war.[ix] The confusion seems to lie in the multiple groups the United States targeted for (potential) detainment leading up to and during World War II. At one time or another, they arrested and/or restricted the activities of various groups of people associated with Germany, Italy, and Japan. These groups included: members of the military, civilians (e.g., foreigners found on U.S. soil or waters, such as cruise ship workers, as well as foreign-born legal U.S. residents), and U.S. citizens who were ethnically German, Italian, or Japanese.[x] Adding to the confusion is that the World War II Italian POW case is not a clear-cut case of EPWs given Italy's changing political relationship to the Allies. Indeed, the Allies did not treat all Axis POWs similarly (Krammer 1983, 1997, and 2020; Doyle 2010). In September 1943 General Pietro Badoglio of Italy signed the Cassibile Armistice with the Allied Forces, leading to, as we will see, a confusing status for Italian POWs. To muddle further, not all Italian POWs were Italian-born Italians: some were U.S.-born ethnic Italians and others were Slovenians who were conscripted into the Italian army.[xi]

Figure 1
American-born Italian POW, band leader, Nov. 24, 1943. Author's Collection

During World War II, the Allies held over half a million POWs; of these, over 480,000 were imprisoned in the United States (Moore 2015, 181; Conti 2012, 7; Doyle 2010, 179). Between 1942 and 1946 the United States held on American soil over 425,000 Germans, 5,400 Japanese and 51,000 Italians (Doyle 2010, 179; Conti 2012, 7).[xii] The United States held about 125,000 Italians in total, but only 51,500 were brought to the United States.[xiii] Italian POWs began arriving on American soil in December 1942, and by early fall 1943 they were scattered across at least 28 camps in 22 states (Keefer 1992, 41; Conti 2012, 506, 512).

By the time Italians arrived in the United States they would have already been under Allied custody for at least a month's time and in most cases for much longer. They were mostly captured in the African and Sicilian combat zones—some directly by Americans, others first by British soldiers and then passed to the United States.[xiv] After waiting days or weeks at or near the location of their capture, POWs were relocated to temporary camps, mainly in Algiers, Oran, or Casablanca (Keefer 1992, 32; Barbieri 1998). From there they were transferred again across the globe to India, South Africa, Scotland, and elsewhere. Those who ended up in the United States arrived by sea to one of a number of port cities and then were moved usually two or three more times throughout their stay on American soil.

Figure 2
Italian Prisoners of War, September 30, 1941. Author's Collection

Their movement even before arriving to a U.S. POW camp is important to recall as they help illustrate some of the constant uncertainties around place for prisoners. The tenuousness of their sense of place becomes clearer in juxtaposition especially to the permanent structures some of them later helped build. Gianinino Gherardi, Italian POW (first in Douglas, WY and later Camp Kilmer, NJ) explained imprisonment this way: it is "sicuramente la piu male condizione a cui si possa ridurre un uomo che è privato completamente della libertà ed è sballotato da un posto all'altro sempre e in ogni momento come un oggetto qualunque" ("certainly the worst condition a man can be reduced to, deprived completely of liberty and thrown around from place to place always and in every moment like some object") (in Della Torre 1997, 69).[xv] They did not know when the war would end nor how Italy's fluctuating political circumstance might affect them. They had limited, heavily censored news about Italy and communication with their families. Their livelihood was as precarious as their sense of place: many were captured already weak, and the United States and Britain did not always have consistent sanitation measures. Even their trip by sea to the United States was dangerous and they had to practice "fire drills, and what to do if [they] were torpedoed" (Keefer 1992, 44).[xvi] Oral histories and military documents again and again comment on their trauma—caused by fear of death, instability of place, and concern for their loved ones.

Even with such precariousness while living behind armed guards and barbed wire, most POW recollections describe a comfortable life once in the United States (Keefer 1992, 45)[xvii]. Mainstream American newspaper stories from the era back up this perspective as well as the fact that there were relatively few attempts at escape or revolt (Keefer 1992, 42–47). Italian American media suggests a slightly different perspective, one of overall concern for the POWs' well-being.[xviii] Italian American communities tried to improve POWs' general welfare. For example, the anti-Fascist Mazzini Society used their weekly *Nazione unite* to publish updates about Italian prisoners of war, especially with an interest in connecting them to possible American relatives ("Italians and Italian Americans political attitudes…").

Italian POWs had a unique relationship to their captors given the quasi-mythical position the United States had for many. Many POWs had relatives in the United States and thus held real, lived knowledge of transnational lives between the two countries.[xix] For many POWs reaching the United States was an event that matched those of their immigrant cousins who arrived previously through Ellis Island (Keefer 1992, 41). Take one POW's description: "Our arrival in the port of New York, a place that in our eyes was more like the center of the universe, is an indelible memory" (Keefer 1992, 41). Such descriptions of an idealized America

help clarify the symbolic position the United States held for many Italians. At the same time, such words also illustrate the stark differences in realities between the men's lives in battle versus in captivity, everyday differences that became even more pronounced for many POWs within less than a year of arriving in the United States due to the effects of the Armistice.

One of the negotiating details of the Armistice was the status of prisoners of war: All Allied POWs had to be released but it did not clarify what happened to Italian POWs (Moore 2015, 179).[xx] By December 1943 General Badoglio called for Italian POWs to collaborate with their new allies and by early 1944 the United States began to implement a plan (Conti 2012, 39–50). They screened each POW, offering them the opportunity to renounce Fascism and volunteer for noncombatant service, although they would remain under restricted custody until the war ended. The first such noncombatant Italian Service Units (ISUs) of collaborating Italians were formed in March 1944 (see Keefer 1992, 75). Ultimately over 32,000 became collaborators, were moved to one of 70 newly-formed ISU camps, and lived out the rest of the war with this vague prisoner status that included increased liberties and access beyond the camp (Conti 2012, 508–509).

Non-collaborating POWs, placed in one of 15 camps maintained for this group, remained under stricter control, with far fewer interactions with civilians and less freedom to move outside the camps. Their living conditions in those camps were comparable to the ISUs however their treatment worsened after news about Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration camps circulated widely—a detail we know from the most well-documented of the non-collaborating camps at Hereford, Texas (Williams 2017; Conti 2012, 510–511; Busco 1967, 63).

In comparison to the experiences of other detained and incarcerated peoples in the U.S. during the war, the Italian POW case gets recalled as mostly a harmonious affair, perhaps in part as a way to make sense of America's changing political relationship to Italy. My research around creativity likewise suggests a mostly positive experience. And yet we need to be mindful of other possibilities and readings: Italian POWs suffered from depression, feelings of isolation, and of guilt towards their families' and their fellow soldiers' wellbeing. Some became ill and at least 170 Italians died, mostly of natural causes, while in U.S. camps; some are still buried in United States military cemeteries.[xxi] Creativity and the everyday practices of a lived cultural heritage are some ways we might imagine they mitigated emotional vulnerability and physical suffering (see Jones 2001).

Figure 3
Tortisio Morretti Pvt. Italian June 21 1944, Benicia Military Cemetery

Photograph by Laura E. Ruberto, 2019

Even with, or perhaps in part because of, Italy's new relationship to the United States, the attitude towards Italian POWs remained mixed throughout the remainder of the war. The U.S. military received almost constant criticism from the general public (both before and after the Armistice) that Italian POWs were being "coddled".[xxii] This criticism sometimes led to tragic realities, such as when twenty-eight African American soldiers were unfairly convicted of lynching an Italian POW, Guglielmo Olivotto, near Tacoma, WA. The case around Olivotto's death demonstrates some of the racial inequities in twentieth century America and especially speaks to the complicated connections scholars have begun to unravel between African American and Italian/Italian American identities.[xxiii]

Competing Italian Identities in the United States

From the moment Italians ended up in American hands, even before they arrived in the United States, they were often met with Italian American GIs, many who acted as formal or informal translators—so much so that the oral histories of POWs are speckled with references to encounters with friendly Italian Americans (see Doyle 2010; Ferroni 2013; Keefer 1992). These interactions with Italian Americans only increased in the U.S. where Italian American GIs continued to be a part of their daily lives.[xxiv] In addition, especially as the war progressed, POWs had opportunities to interact with civilian Italian Americans. Italian EPWs upon arriving to the United States were met with what was at the time the largest, foreign-born American population,1.6 million Italian resident aliens (Keefer 1992, 41). Italian Americans frequently visited the camps, often with the hope of connecting with families or *paesani* (townspeople); ISU men were permitted to attend outside dinners and other outings hosted by Italian American families, social clubs, and parishes. These interactions also sometimes led to romances, the birth of children, postwar courtships, and marriages.[xxv] Family reunification stories highlight the contradictions of war as with the 1943 Ruberto family story covered in *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* where brothers were reunited after 32 years, when Italian American Pittsburgher, Pietro Ruberto, visited his younger brother, Donato, in the Camp Clark (Missouri) POW camp and then stopped to visit his son, Fortunato, in the U.S. Air Force in Alabama on the same trip.[xxvi]


SECOND NEWS SECTION

SATURDAY, JULY 3, 1943

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Son Fights for, Brother Against U. S.

Family Divided in World Conflict

Son in Air Corps, Brother War Prisoner in U. S.

Veteran of World War I on Way to Visit Maxwell Field and New Prison Camp

Figure 4
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette **clipping, July 3, 1943 (Bottom left portrait is**

wrongly described as Donato Ruberto; it is Pietro Ruberto from World War I). Courtesy of the Detre Library & Archives, Heinz History Center

The millions of Italian Americans had their own complicated relationship to the war. On the one hand, over 850,000 Italian Americans served in the U.S. Armed forces, with an unknown number fighting specifically in Italy (Pretelli and Fusi 2018, 302). But yet, when Italian prisoners first arrived on American soil in late 1942 restrictions for over 700,000 Italian resident aliens had only just been lifted on October 12, 1942.[xxvii] Those regulated constraints against Italian Americans pale in comparison to what happened to the over 110,000 Japanese American men, women, and children (Ng 2002). Nevertheless, they also impact and reflect the inconsistent racial and cultural biases in the United States.[xxviii] Overlapping this same era was the imprisonment, mostly in Missoula, MT, of about 1,500 non-U.S. resident, non-military Italian citizens (mostly merchant marines and World's Fair workers), who were found on American soil when World War II started but before the United States entered the conflict (Chopas 2017, xvi). These various trajectories of Italian identities on American soil all inform and reflect one another in immeasurable ways—from prisoner to enemy alien, from immigrant to war hero (Ruberto 2021a).

Creativity Behind Barbed Wire

Both non-collaborating and collaborating Italian POWs filled all kinds of labor needs. In their spare time, and with the skills and artistry they brought with them from home or took on while detained, they created a world for themselves where disparate traditions were confronted with new realities and restrictions. I suggest here sometimes overlapping categories through which we might better recognize the role vernacular culture and the aesthetics of everyday life played in constructing a productive and expressive sense of self, often in the service of community. Singularly or collectively, they crafted objects and built structures from found, borrowed, salvaged, or donated materials—everything from individual men making small secular items such as jewelry from toothbrushes, or shaping toys from wooden crates, to large-scale collectively made ventures, many religious focused. These constructions reflect POWs' personal experiences and cultural distinctiveness as well as their differing degrees of confinement, ambiguous political circumstances, and relationships to communities beyond the borders of the camps.

The reasons why such items, sites, and experiences were created vary. Some were made by request of American military personnel or civilians who came into contact with the Italians or were made by encouragement by organizations such as the YWCA.[xxix] Some were made with a sense of community in mind, e.g., invitations for outside guests to celebrate a holiday meal. Sometimes they were explicitly meant as gifts, other times to be sold or exchanged (Conti 2012, 265). Although some are personalized some, most are anonymous examples of creativity, resilience, and emotion.

I have documented countless examples of Italian POW creativity through online and in-person archival and library work, oral histories, field research, and collecting via eBay. My primary sources include period-specific photographs, samples of

the constructed objects themselves, military documents, newspaper stories, and oral history descriptions as well as contemporary photographs of still-existing sites I have taken during research field visits or that others have visually documented.[xxx] My research and collecting is comprehensive although not exhaustive given the lack of any institutional compilation or formal organization of this creative material.

The categorizations below help make sense of the overwhelming number of examples I have located but they are not intended to be a final guide for analysis. Grouping such creative examples inevitably favors certain perspectives over others: for instance, focusing on skilled labor and use value while making less visible the gendered conventions or realities around these products in their practice and use.[xxxi] The examples here are representative of the artistic work of thousands of men—for each documented example we can only imagine all those examples lost to us. When possible, I note if the creation occurred at a POW camp (meaning, before March 1944), a non-collaborating POW camp, or an ISU Camp.

As a way to demonstrate the creative work and offer a broader critical analysis, I have organized my examples around three general categories, each one overlapping with the other: 1. Tangible items, individually created; 2. Tangible items, collectively created; and 3. Intangible items, individually or collectively created/experienced. Regardless of such distinctions, these cases all share that they were created during detainment.[xxxii] A dedication to craft and an application of skilled labor went into all aspects of their lived experiences. Embedded within the tangible and intangible categories is a kind of a scholarly slipperiness that I embrace rather than ignore.[xxxiii] Tangible objects exist within intangible creations: i.e., an instrument for a song played, a cake baked for a meal eaten, a costume sewn for a theater performance. Similarly, the temporary embellishment of an altar with a candle or what is conventionally understood as a yearly creation of Christmas creche, or *presepe,*[xxxiv] suggests interpreting such sites as intangible given their fluidity and changing nature: to some extent they are ephemeral and thus intangible. Yet, when considering the insecure, transitory lives of the POWs, even such impermanent structures become forms of stability and place-making, and I have thus categorized them under tangible items.

Tangible, Individually Created

Italian POWs made countless small items, including toys, jewelry, paintings, and other crafted objects. Sometimes these were religious-based but often they were not. Similar to most of the larger tangible items, the makers' identities are by and large unknown to us. Such items were mainly made from salvaged materials—wood, metal, or paper—and they demonstrate a wide array of styles and creative approaches. For example, aluminum finger rings were fashioned by Italian POWs housed at the ISU camp on Governor's Island in New York City and given as gifts to an Italian American family. The family also had a ring made from plastic toothbrushes in the Italian tricolore colors of red, white, and green (Manna 1981; Ruberto and Sciorra 2018). Such personal items suggest a level of intimacy and friendship between civilians and the ISU men.

Sometimes the objects themselves tell us more of the story of its construction or

intentionality of the builder through imagery and inscriptions. Many tin cigarette holders, small wooden boxes and other mementos have images that appear to be reminiscent of the North African desert—were they made while men were in North Africa or were they souvenirs of their time there? Other items have inscriptions simply of P.W. (prisoner of war) or a short phrase, such as "Con affetto sempre vi ricordo" (I remember you both always with affection) on a metal picture frame. Given the lack of an institutional practice of collecting, documenting, or preserving such items it is near-impossible to track the histories of such suggestively marked items.

Figure 5
Italian POW-made photo frame, artist unknown. Author's Collection/Photograph by Laura E. Ruberto 2019

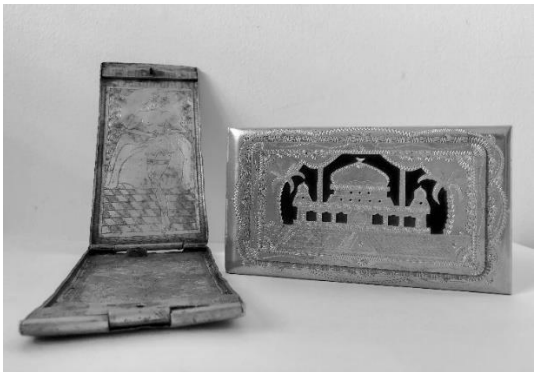

Figure 6
Italian POW-made cigarette cases, artist(s) unknown. Author's Collection/Photograph by Laura E. Ruberto, 2021

In rare occasions the maker himself offered more details built into the object proper. For example, my own grandfather's miniature tank inscribed to one of his Italian American nephews, i.e., "UN RICORDO LO ZIO RUBERTO DONATO P.O.W. AL NIPOTE FORTUNATO" (A MEMENTO UNCLE RUBERTO DONATO P.O.W. TO MY NEPHEW FORTUNATO) (Marinaro 2016). He was held in POW camps at Camp Clark, MO and Pine Camp, NY and later, at the ISU camp in Benicia, CA. At some point during his captivity he built this tank out of wood he salvaged from "dissamb[led] shell cradles" (Marinaro 2016, 20). The uniqueness of this piece lies less with the object itself than with the specificity of identification that the object tells us, which thus helps narrate a history of the POW.

Figure 7
Model replica of the Italian Army's Fiat tank, made by Donato Ruberto Courtesy of the Italian American Collection, Heinz History Center

In this instance I have more context to the piece in question. My familial insight

into Donato Ruberto's life before and after the war facilitates my consideration of how his time as a conscripted soldier and later POW might have affected his life after the war, including as an immigrant in both Caracas, Venezuela and Pittsburgh, PA. While I missed the opportunity to ask him directly about his wartime experiences he openly spoke about his time as a prisoner, recalling the great distances he traveled and the variety of places he visited. Curiously, he rarely if ever built such small, playful structures even though he had the skills to do so. He had been apprenticed as a cabinet maker in his native southern Italian village of Cairano (Avellino province), where he mainly built furniture and coffins before the war. After his postwar repatriation to Italy he continued this work until he left for Venezuela (July 1949) where he worked as a day laborer until he immigrated to the United States (December 1953). In the United States he eventually joined a local union and worked as a carpenter on large buildings as well as building houses, additions, and miscellaneous household items for his extended family. But he rarely, if ever, built other primarily impractical small structures, even though he kept a full garage-woodshop with his handmade wood-working tools throughout his life. At the same time, I know (from first-hand experience and by tracking the movement of the gifted tank itself) the effect this object had on supporting kinship across thousands of miles and multi-generations of his family.[xxxv]

The example of another prisoner of war in the United States, Alberto Burri, offers us other kinds of insight into an individual's relationship to his creative efforts. Born in Città di Castello (Perugia province), Burri volunteered for Mussolini's Fascist invasion of Ethiopia and later Yugoslavia. By 1942 he was a second lieutenant in the medical corps and was captured in May 1943 by the British while in Tunisia (Braun 2015, 26). He was eventually sent to the United States and later refused to sign allegiance to the United States, spending upwards of three years in the non-collaborating POW Camp at Hereford. Trained as a medical doctor but encouraged by his disposition and the resources the YMCA donated, he took up a paintbrush at the camp and learned to mix his own paint, using materials he found around the camp—egg whites, coffee grounds, herbs, and other natural objects. Instead of canvas, he used empty food sacks and burlap bags. After the war, living between Italy, California, and France he would go on to make numerous sculptures and installations and become a leader in the Italian postwar *arte povera* movement.[xxxvi] His identity as an artist as well as his most famous sutured-sack series, signatures of his art, emerged to some extent from his experiences in West Texas. Burri is remembered as having remained "impatient with the trauma interpretations that have accompanied the critical appreciation of his art" and yet it is hard to reject a correlation if not an emotional response (Braun 2015, 33). Informed by his culture of wartime quotidian experience and experimentation with found, material objects, Burri's life work, like that of many other unidentified Italian POWs, expresses the complexity of war on the development of self-expression.

Today pieces, such as those by Ruberto and Burri, that are easy to identify the maker or that are otherwise personalized, are difficult to come by.[xxxvii] Have they not survived or are they simply not in public circulation today? Perhaps more

personalized, signed items were less likely to be discarded, donated, or sold? The personal, individualizing of such objects are particularly difficult to understand today without the deep knowledge of family and context. As Carr and Mytum explain: "to us as researchers, the items of creativity that have survived into the present are not easy to understand individually, even at fixed points in their lives such as at the moment of creation" (2012, 14). Too often these smaller, tangible items, are only known to us today through photographs and written descriptions of group art shows and unidentified artists.[xxxviii]

Figure 8
Italian Service Unit soldier painting, Benicia, California, artist/year unknown. Author's Collection

The limited circulation and public presence today of such items begs the question of how and when they were transported from the camps.[xxxix] POWs were restricted in the mail they could send during the war as well as limited in how much weight they were permitted to carry with them upon repatriation at the war's end (see Keefer 1992, 149–150). Many had worked while in the United States and used the money earned to purchase American goods to bring back to their families. We can assume that large, cumbersome or weighty created pieces would not have been prioritized against American goods, especially considering Italy's realities of postwar destruction. In addition, the trip back to their hometowns was long and difficult, involving weeks of travel by train and sea before returning to an Italy whose transportation infrastructure had been destroyed—many men would have had to simply walk long distances in order to reach isolated villages and towns that had become inaccessible (see Ruberto 2010, 81). Such a scenario would have been impractical at best for carrying such crafted objects.

Tangible, Collectively Created

The most well-known creative products of Italian POWs are the tangible, generally vernacular, architecture collectively built across the United States. These are overwhelmingly part of the Catholic sacred arts: chapels, shrines, and altars. Many examples no longer exist but the few that do shape to a great extent how we understand the experiences of U.S.-incarcerated Italian POWs simply because their existence seems to have led to scholarly attention on those camps. Most of that attention has been on two main chapels and the experiences of those POWs: the small Camp Chapel in Hereford, TX and the Letterkenny Chapel in Chamberburg, PA. The histories of these two sites highlight some of the major distinctions between collaborating ISUs (Letterkenny) and non-collaborating (Hereford) camps (i.e., access beyond the camps; relationships with civilians), while at the same time illustrate that many of the same experiences occurred in both groups (Ferroni 2013, 305–320; Conti 2012, 284–328; Conti and

Perry 2016; Williams 2017; Conti 2021). A third, lesser-known chapel, Chapel-in-the-Meadow, also still stands at Camp Atterbury, in Ninevah, IN.[xl]

Religious and devotional spaces for prisoner use was a common element at the camps, reflecting certain standards taken from Geneva Convention guidelines of the camps but also the assumed Catholicism of the Italians. Some POW-built chapels no longer exist, including a Mother Cabrini Chapel near Honolulu, HI and a Chapel to the "Madonna del Prigioniero" (Madonna of the Prisoner) at the former Camp Monticello, AR. In the case of the Arkansas chapel, it was built by POWs sometime between 1943 and Spring 1944 using "packing boxes, asbestos tiles, and scrap lumber" (Barnes 2018, 561). The material used for the statue of the Madonna was, according to archaeologist Jodi A. Barnes, "crafted from Arkansas clay and painted a pink-tinted ivory," (Barnes 2018, 561) and according to historian Flavio Conti was made using "il gesso del reparto ortopedia dell'ospedale" ('the plaster from the hospital's orthopedic department') (Conti 2012, 266). Such scholarly discrepancies illustrate the great loss of information. For Barnes, the chapel suggests the "POWs' creative use of everyday items and the rituals of cooperation required to maintain their cultural traditions" (Barnes 2018, 575) a point Conti would no-doubt agree with given he notes that for the POWs at Camp Monticello "la religione era per molti la principe fonte di conforto spirituale" ('religion was for many the main outlet for spiritual comfort') (Conti 2012, 266). Also demolished, is the Cabrini Chapel in Hawaii, which was built using salvaged construction materials by non-collaborating POWs beginning some time in 1945, with a dedication on July 7, 1946:

> The public opening coincided with the canonization of Maria Francesca Cabrini by Pope Pius XII in Rome. The Bishop of Honolulu gave the sermon, and two brigadier generals, including the commander of Schofield Barracks, attended the mass. (Raduenzel 2015, 22)

The chapel, "with a beautiful altar and decorated with two large, magnificent oil paintings of Mother Cabrini, painted by the prisoners themselves" was razed within a few years and by 1976 a highway stood in its place (Raduenzel 2015, 23).

In some cases, Italians built or decorated altars inside or outside of the camps, including in Umbarger TX (where non-collaborating POWs from the Hereford Camp painted murals), Ogden, UT, and Benicia, CA (where ISU men decorated indoor devotional altars in pre-existing chapels within both of those camps) (Ferroni 2013, 335–353; Barbieri 1998). Outdoor altars or shrines, mostly built out of stone and salvaged materials, also existed although today they are mostly somewhat neglected, have deteriorated, or were purposely razed: an altar at Camp Raritan, NJ is now gone while shrines near Camp Lockett, Campo, CA and near Taunton, MA[xli] remain to different degrees of disregard.

Figure 9
Altar, built by Italian Service Unit members, near Taunton, MA. Photograph by Laura E. Ruberto, 2018

Christmas afforded a heightened opportunity for creative expressions around religious traditions more commonly associated with Italian families; actions that were adapted for the entire camp and even the community beyond the camp. Such adaptations to the dislocated space of the POW camp places them in line with Italian diasporic traditions, a point well illustrated through the bricolage and hybrid creations by POWs of *presepi*. The uniqueness of Italian POW nativity scenes aligns them very much with the ways Joseph Sciorra discusses the miniature Christmas landscapes found in Italian New Yorkers' homes, noting them as an ephemeral "fantasyscape ... enlivened by narrative and performance in the service of Christian pedagogy, autobiography, and family history, and the engendering and strengthening of community affiliation" (2015, 63). The POW-*presepi* illustrate some of the ways that craft and design helped men express their faith, share in cultural traditions, abate nostalgia or loss for home and family, and at the same time bear witness to the unique moment they were living. In 1943, in the POW camp in Douglas, WY, prisoner and sculptor Giannino Gherardi worked on the creche in his barracks which in his diary he distinguishes from a second one that his peers created in the main camp chapel:

> Nella chiesetta è stato preparato il presepe all'italiana, e anche nella mia camerata ne è stato fatto uno piccolino in cui anch'io ho lavorato con tanta passione perché riuscisse il meglio possibile. Fuori dalla grotta ho messo un prigioniero inginocchiato che prega fervorosamente a Gesù Bambino, mentre in piedi impalata vi è la immancabile sentinella col fucile. (Gherardi 2020, 374)
>
> A *presepe* was made in the chapel and even in my little room a small little one was made and even I worked passionately so that it would be the best possible. Outside the manger I put a kneeling prisoner feverishly praying to Baby Jesus while standing resolute was the inevitable sentry guard with his rifle.[xlii]

Such complex personal meaning for these Christmas creations were not easily accessible to Americans even when they were seen by them. They were commonly perceived as highly foreign and exotic expressions of Italian culture and Catholicism. Take this description of a POW at Camp Weingarten near St. Louis:

> The Italians went wild with creativity and effort at Christmas and were especially elaborate in constructing miniature scenes from Bethlehem, fashioning statues from clay as well as creating other lifelike figures by draping burlap bags over roughly human-shaped

> wooden frames and then covering the material with a thin layer of paint or cement. One of the scenes included a complete cityscape, with hotel, village, and manger, complemented by a sky made of backlit cardboard with holes cut out for stars. (In Fielder 2003, 97)

Similarly, at the Benicia ISU Camp in 1944, the men put up a 45-foot-high Christmas tree and built a *presepe*, or what local press called a "Holy Land Christmas diorama" on display for locals to visit. The *presepe* was twenty feet by twenty feet, with timed lighting, a host of animated statuettes, and running water was "built from salvaged material" and covered by Bay Area Italian-and English-language press, which noted the steady stream of visitors who came throughout the season ("Bethlehem Lives Anew in Miniature," "Miniature of Holy Land is Built By Arsenal Italians," and "La vita al campo italiano di Benicia"). Together, these sacred spaces and structures help illustrate the camps as sites of refugee, reprieve, and solace; by sacralizing their space the men created a sense of community that reaches beyond the mundane, beyond the war, beyond the earthly.

Figure 10
***Presepe*, created by Italian Service Unit members, Presidio of San Francisco, date unknown. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library**

Collectively made secular spaces and structures were also common. Italians shaped much of the general landscape of the camps and in some cases even constructed camp buildings. A handful of hardscape work, sometimes decorative, other times practical, is still in existence and mark those local territories by the historical realities of the people who were there before them, becoming a quiet but visible cultural heritage presence of the POWs. These structurers include a fountain and a sculpture near Honolulu, HI, a sculpture at Camp San Luis Obispo, CA, a fountain at Camp Roberts, CA, a brick wall near the former camp in Benicia, CA, and a now-dismantled "Star of Hope" fountain at Fort Benning, GA (Coker and Wetzel 2019, 100).

Figure 11
Stone and concrete retaining wall (detail), built by Italian Service Unit men, Benicia, California. Photograph by Laura E. Ruberto, 2021

In addition, vegetable and flower gardens are commonly noted in descriptions of

the camps and the items grown were dictated by seasonal constraints and cultural penchants of the POWs: former POW, Tom Barbieri recounts that in the ISU camp in Benicia, CA, the men requested seeds for growing basil and fresh tomatoes in the summer months (1998; see also "La vita al campo italiano di Benicia"). Most observations around such horticulture work connect it to an Italian cultural proclivity for agricultural labor: Sergeant Quinton Bianco at Camp Weingarten, MO described the Italians as having a "passion for plants," noting that "Many of the PWs are marvelous gardeners, and they have started numerous flower beds in the space between barracks buildings. The flower gardens are in all designs, one being a map of Italy" (Fielder 2003, 97).[xliii]

Italians also altered the camps' forms in significant ways through the construction of specific buildings. At the Letterkenny ISU Camp they built an "outdoor theater with Greek-Roman arches" (Conti and Perry 2016, 44), at an ISU camp near Baltimore, MD they built a dance pavilion, and in Benicia, a full dance hall. The dance hall was built mainly with ammunition crates which the men had taken apart at the nearby military arsenal. Everything, except for the floor and structural 2x4s (which were donated from locals) came from these crates (Barbieri 1998).[xliv] The hall also included a basement workshop the men dug out for use on personal projects (Barbieri 1998). Barbieri speaks to the precision and care in this construction, connecting it specifically to the Italian concept of "un lavoro ben fatto," (a job well done): "Italians…always being proud… *l'artiginato* [the artisan] … ah you know…being proud…for the job they do with their hands…so we was pretty particular and we did a beautiful job" (1998).[xlv]

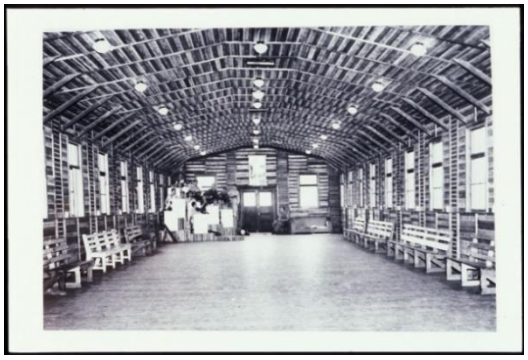

Figure 12
Dance Hall, built by Italian Service Unit members, Benicia, California (note inclusion of bandstand with musicians), circa 1944. Author's Collection

The outdoor structures they built also included numerous sports-related spaces, given the POWs "razioni abondanti" ('abundant rationing'), as Conti puts it, which led to them having time, space, and materials for such landscape modifications as bocce courts and soccer fields (Conti 2012, 223; see also Busco 1967, 66).[xlvi] In describing the tenor at the ISU Camp Letterkenny, Conti and Perry note that "in order to keep morale high," prisoners worked with the American military personnel and Corps of Engineers to eventually build courts and fields for soccer, bocce, volleyball and basketball (2016, 110). At the ISU Camp Benicia the San Francisco-based Italian-language paper, *La Voce del Popolo* noted the "elegante palestra all'aperto opera pure questa degli ingegnosi soldati italiani" (elegant sports field also built by these ingenious Italian soldiers) ("La vita al campo italiano di Benicia"). In camp after camp such moments can be documented

and represent the enactment of an Italian lived cultural heritage and the networks of influence on communities outside the borders of the camps.

Figure 13
Bocce court within the Italian Service Unit camp, Benicia, California, circa 1944. Author's Collection

Less visible parts of the camps were also decorated by POWs at times. At the POW camp in Douglas, WY, a group of artists were asked by their captors to paint murals in the American Officer's Club on site. The result was a striking set of seventeen Western-themed murals riffing off of the work of artists such as Charles Russell and William Henry Jackson. The identities of the muralists are mostly unknown but one of them, Enzo Tarquinio, was a trained artist and returned to Italy where he continued his painting and restoration work until he died (Ruberto 2020). Ten of the seventeen murals at Camp Douglas are signed by three different artists (L. De Rossi, V. Finotti, E. Tarquinio), suggesting possibly multiple hands at work on the remaining unsigned seven panels.

Figure 14
"Horse Round Up," by Enzo Tarquinio, Camp Douglas, Wyoming, 1943. Photograph by Laura E. Ruberto, 2020

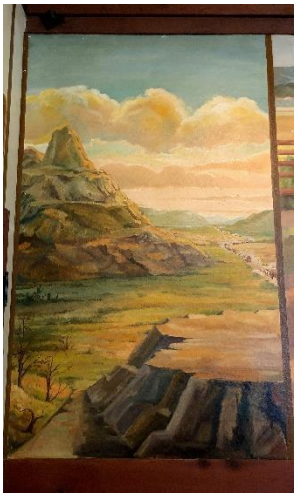

Figure 15
"Wagon Train and Mountain," artist unknown, Camp Douglas, Wyoming, 1943. Photograph by Laura E. Ruberto, 2020

Other kinds of creative products also exist that (similar to the Camp Douglas murals) balance individual craft and collective imagination: including Italian-language camp newspapers (e.g., *Domani* at ISU Camp Ogden, UT; *Noi* at non-collaborating POW Camp Schofield, Honolulu, HW) and a bound artistic volume (e.g., *Il Guado* at non-collaborating POW Camp Hereford, TX).[xlvii]

The bound collection of paintings, drawings, poems, songs, and stories, *Il Guado,* includes poetic and visual imagery evoking the men's longing for home as well as personal portraits and a few still-life images of barbed-wire camps (Valdettaro and Barocci).[xlviii] The volume also includes memoir-like stories about Italy's colonial mission and thus could be read with a pro- or sympathetic Fascist perspective, perhaps understandable given the non-collaborating status of those prisoners.

We might like to assume that since the majority of POWs eventually signed an allegiance to the United States and were deemed not to be a threat to national security that a pro-Fascist perspective was absent in their creative actions. In fact, few Fascist examples seem to exist. On June 1943 the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* was asked by the Provost Marshall General to censor a news report that showed Italian POWs near the Fort Leonard Wood and Wiengarten Camps with pro-Fascist imagery: "Italian prisoners had decorated the walls of their quarters with pictures of Mussolini, King Victor Emmanuel and with posters, and that outside the quarters the prisoners had used small pebbles to form fascist emblems, the letter M and a star and crescent." ("Office of War Information Correspondence"). Such examples suggest that Fascist-leaning creative efforts may have been otherwise squelched or censored.

The Intangible

Italian prisoners of war also expressed themselves through a number of less concrete pursuits, developed at times in conjunction with some of the structures and sites discussed above. These included foodways, sporting events, theatrical productions, music performances, tonsorial arts, and other activities ("Italian Prisoners in the United States"). Such often leisure-focused actions built and sustained community, highlighted their culture and personalities and comprise some of the "intangible heritage of prisoners of war" (Carr and Mytum 2012, 1).

POWs were in charge of preparing and serving their own food, including rationing the food they were given, items that were to some extent determined by their requests and assumed tastes (i.e., more rice to the Japanese, more wheat to the Italians). Similar to the artisan work, primary and secondary sources commonly refer to the Italian POWs "gift for creating wonderful dishes" as Fielder puts it, as they regularly prepared Italian-style breads, various pastas, and even on occasion sweets and homemade wine (2003, 18). Curiously, the differing regional culinary habits within Italy seems never to have been documented within the camps. Did the camps further the kind of nationalizing of Italians from different regions and class backgrounds that the Italian military would have already encouraged? Did the homogenization of food and the need to adapt to local ingredients mimic what occurred with respect to foodways within the Italian diaspora (Cinotto 2013)?

Not only did they cook for themselves but in the ISU camps U.S. military and civilians alike would sometimes join them at meals, as Barbieri recalls:

> we used to invite everyone we knew, people on the job...Italian families...they used to come up and we'd have spaghetti, meatballs...our allowance for food was

> the same as for American soldiers but the way we were cooking and what we were cooking...oh we had everybody...we didn't have too much butter, didn't have sweet stuff...it cost too much...just spaghetti and meat…oh we had a lot of people come up there...a lot of people. (1998)

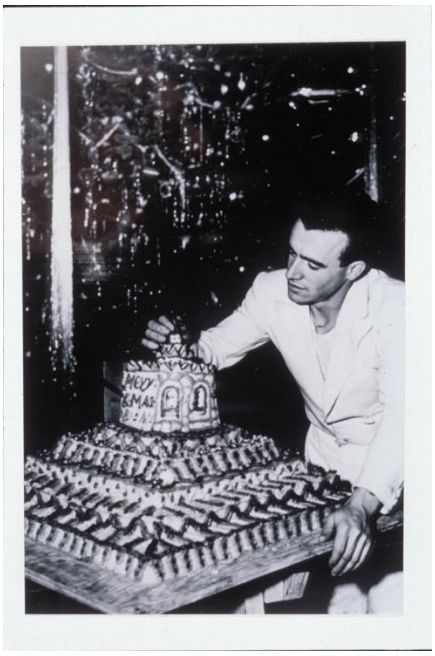

Figure 16
Merry Xmas/Buon Natale cake and ISU member, Italian Service Unit camp, Benicia, 1944. Author's Collection

ISU men also invited locals to watch sporting events, theatrical productions, musical performances and—especially civilian women—to take part in weekend dances. In Ogden, for instance, there were multiple musical ensembles, including a dance orchestra called Orchestrina Patrizia (Bruce 1943c).[xlix] In the San Francisco Bay Area a three-month long soccer championship was held including a number of ISU teams. The championship games, played at the Benicia camp, were attended by civilians from all over the region and covered by the *Voce del Popolo/L'Italia* who described the spectators as "un pubblico foltissimo e entusiasta" ('a crowded and enthusiastic public') ("La vita al campo italiano di Benicia"), once again evoking the idea that the POWs' actions connected them deeply to local communities.

Expanding the Italian Diaspora

The existence of POW-made objects, structures, and a host of lived experiences, sometimes known to us only in the form of an old photograph, remains one of a few ways to understand their lives, emotions, relationships, and values. In most cases the maker or makers in question are unknown, the specifics of their lives are also unknown. And so the material culture itself, or a faded image of it, becomes our key to understanding this cultural heritage. Such decontextualized ephemera becomes to some extent a fossil, a fragment of a cultural landscape of a singular moment and place as well as the people whose lives touched it. This material culture sustained a sense of identity, social cohesion, and continuity in the face of much instability and fragility of existence.

At the end of the war, POWs had to be repatriated to Italy as per the Geneva Convention. Some unknown number, though, left Italy again as emigrants as part of the country's massive post-World War II migratory flows (see Gabaccia 2000; De Clementi 2010; Tirabassi 2014; Ruberto and Sciorra 2017a). But an Italian immigrant veneer had been part of the POWs' experiences in the United States.

Take J. Campbell Bruce's 1943 multi-part *San Francisco Chronicle* series about Italian POWs in Ogden, UT. Bruce, a longtime news reporter, best known as the author of *Escape from Alcatraz*, uses the recognizable Italian ethnic San Francisco neighborhood of North Beach to describe the POWs themselves. For Bruce they literally embody the ethnic urban space: "Except for 'P.W.' stencils on their backs, they looked like a North Beach tableau" (Bruce 1943a, 9). He imagines the POWs in Utah as versions of Italian ethnics: "Drop them into the Little Italy of any American city and they would instantly become absorbed" (Bruce 1943a, 9). Importantly, his characterization of their seemingly self-sufficient collective prisoner community, evokes a tinge of xenophobia towards Italians who were often associated with anti-democratic movements (and who had only three months prior been an enemy) when he says that they "behave and work like colonist in some socialist project" (Bruce 1943a, 9).

The POWs themselves also embraced this immigrant persona to some extent. Gherardi's description of his New York City trip is reminiscent of the wonder and awe many immigrants have held:

> 18.6.44. Gita a New York. Dal giorno che giunsi in America prigioniero, ho sempre sognato, contro tutte le impossibilità, data la mia condizione di segregato, di vedere le grandi metropoli dei grattacieli e la statua famosa della Libertà. Il mio desiderio insperato si è invece compiuto oggi …. Passando da un'isola all'altra col 'Ferryboat' ho scorto la grandiosa statua della Libertà e l'ho guardata con una certa meraviglia questa Libertà che da oltre un anno non vedo più. (2020, 378)
>
> 18 June 1944. Trip to New York. From the day I arrived to America as a prisoner I have always dreamed, against all possibilities given my segregated condition, to see the big metropolis of skyscrapers and the famous statue of Liberty. My hopeless desire instead today became a reality…Passing from one island to another with the 'Ferryboat' (sic) I was accompanied by the grand statue of Liberty and I looked at it with a certain marvel, this Liberty which for more than a year I have no longer seen.

Gherardi's conflicted reaction to seeing the Statue of Liberty also echoes an immigrant's realization of the imagined construction of the so-called American Dream.

Studying the cultural outpouring by this group of Italian men outside of Italy helps redirect standard notions of a transnational Italy and the Italian diaspora. Their experiences as uprooted Italians with unstable, temporary relationships to the spaces they called home for the years they were in camps defines them as part of the Italian diaspora. As Carlo Ferroni has put it: "Now, for these soldiers of modern Italy, the war had led them into an unimagined and frightening Italian diaspora"; they became "an Italian diaspora beyond anyone's imagination" (2013, 149; 148). The creative outpourings and lived expressions of cultural heritage among POWS were not unlike what Paolo Bartolini has described as the "expressive processes and practices enacted

by migrants as they confronted an unfamiliar place" (Bartolini 2016, 13). Italian prisoners of war in the United States built a kind of Italian hybrid ethnic identity and a reimagined sense of their space and home within the confines of their camps, and in certain moments beyond those spaces as well.

Within the material and expressive culture I have documented here are what I have elsewhere called "edges of ethnicity" or "intermittent ethnic edges" that are not always visible or easily recognizable but that allude to an Italian cultural heritage (Ruberto 2019, 117). These "expressions of identities…can be seen as useful links between varying diasporic communities, cultures, and experience" (Ruberto 2019, 117). The experiences of Italian POWs in the United States—as well as those of Italian military internees and prisoners elsewhere—ask us to be mindful of the continual movement of Italians over generations and the notion that migration has never been unidirectional and finite but always have been consistent, porous, and dynamic. Doing so asks us to understand the role and influence of Italian ethnic identities both for the receiving country, in this case, the United States, and Italy. These 50,000 plus Italians materially altered the American cultural landscape in evolving and lasting ways. Recognizing the POWs experiences as part of a larger diasporic process pushes a re-evaluation of the concept of nation, home, and migrant and asks us to consider the role of creativity during wartime as central to the formation of a cultural ethos.

References

Appadurai, Arjun. 1998. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Barbieri, Tom. 1998. Interview with Laura E. Ruberto, May 9.

Barnes, Jodi A. 2018. "'Madonna del Prigioniero Prega per Noi': An Intimate Archaeology of a World War II Italian Prisoner-of-War Camp." *Historical Archaeology* 52 (3), 561–579.

Bartolini, Paolo. 2016. *Objects in Italian Life and Culture Fiction, Migration, and Artificiality*, New York: Palgrave.

Bellina, Elena. 2018. "Theatre and Gender Performance WWII Italian POW Camps in East Africa." *PAJ: Journal of Performance and Art* 40(3), 80-91.

Ben-Ghiat, Ruth and Stephanie Malia Hom, Eds., 2016. *Italian Mobilities*, London: Routledge.

Benuzzi, Felice. 2016. *No Picnic on Mount Kenya: The Story of Three POWs Escape to Adventure*. London: Maclehose Press.

Berger, Meyer. 1943. "Captive Italians Enjoy Life Here." Dec. 11, *New York Times*, 3.

"Bethlehem Lives Anew in Miniature." 1944. *The Oakland Tribune*. December 19, 17C.

Braun, Emily. 2015. *Alberto Burri: The Trauma of Painting*. New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications.

Bronner, Simon J. 2004. *Grasping Things: Folk Material Culture and Mass Society in*

America. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky.

Browning, Deborah L. 2018. "Life and Death in Sublimation: The Artistic Survival of Hans Reichel in World War II France." *American Imago* 75, no. 4: 563-609.

Bruce, J. Campbell. 1943a. "Italian War Prisoners" *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 27, 9.

------. 1943b. "Italian War Prisoners." *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 28, 5.

------. 1943c. "Italian War Prisoners." *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 30, 5.

Buchanan, Sherry, Ed. 2007. *Vietnam Zippos: American Soldiers' Engravings and Stories (1965-1973).* Asia Ink.

Bui, Cuong. 2018. "The Art in War: Exploring Trench Art, its Materiality, and the Human Side of War." *New Errands*, 20.

Burdett, Charles, Loredana Polezzi and Marco Santello. 2020. *Transnational Italian Studies*. Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press.

Busco, Ralph. 1967. *A History of the Italian and German Prisoner of War Camps in Utah and Idaho During World War II*. Master's Thesis, Utah State University.

Calamandrei, Camilla, dir. 2003. *Prisoners in Paradise*.

Carr, Gilian and H.C. Mytum, Eds. 2012. *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War*. New York: Routledge.

Choate, Mark I. 2008. *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad*. Boston: Harvard University Press.

Cinotto, Simone. 2013. *The Italian American Table: Food, family, and Community in New York City*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Coker, Kathryn Roe and Jason Wetzel. 2019. *Georgia POW Camps in World War II*. Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press (Arcadia Press).

Conti, Flavio G. 2012. *I prigionieri italiani negli Stati Uniti*. Milan: Il Mulino.

------. 2021. *Hereford: Prigionieri italiani non cooperatori in Texas*. Milan: Il Mulino.

Conti, Flavio G. and Alan Perry. 2016. *Italian Prisoners of War in Pennsylvania*. Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

Cooke, Ariel Zeltin and Marsha MacDowell. 2005. *Weavings of War: Fabrics of Memory*. MSU Museum.

de Certeau, Michel. 2011. (1980) *The Practice of Everyday Life.* Translated by Steven Rendall. London: University of California Press.

De Clementi, Andreina. 2010. *Il prezzo della ricostruzione: l'emigrazione italiana nel secondo dopoguerra.* Bari: Editori Laterza.

Della Torre, Oriella. 1997. "Il cataclisma è passato e sto per raggiungere la riva. Memorie di guerra e prigionia del geniere Giannino Gherardi." *Studi e ricerche di storia contemporanea*, (48): 55-76.

Denny, Harold. 1942. *Behind Both Lines.* New York: Viking Press.

Doyle, Robert. 2010. *The Enemy in Our Hands: America's Treatment of Prisoners of War from the Revolution to the War on Terror*. University Press of Kentucky.

Ensminger, David A. 2019. *Enemies in the Backyard: An Overview of Mid-America World War II Axis POW Camps*. Las Vegas, NV: Left of the Dial.

Ferroni, Carlo. 2013. *Italian POWS Speak Out at Last: Italian Prisoners of War Break Their Silence*. Amherst, NY: Teneo Press.

Fielder, David. 2003. *The Enemy Among Us: POWs in Missouri During World War II*. St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press.

Fogu, Claudio, Hom, Stephanie Malia, and Ruberto, Laura E., Eds. 2019. "Introduction to Italia senza frontiere/Borderless Italy." *California Italian Studies*, 9(1). Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/30j9m648, accessed January 5, 2021.

Gabaccia, Donna R. 2000. *Italy's Many Diaspora*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Gherardi, Giannino. 2020. "Memorie della mia vita di prigioniero," edited by Ermanno Arrigoni. In *Voci dal Inferno: Lettere, diari, memoriali, testimonianze e immagini di soldati della valle Brembana durante la Seconda guerra mondiale*, edited by Tarciso Bottani. Corponove, 365-380.

Glassie, Henry. 2000. *Vernacular Architecture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Grilli, Chiara. 2020. "The Making of the Italian American Colonizer Colonialism, Race, and the Italo-Ethiopian War." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 22 (6): 1-18.

Haman, Jack. 2007. *On American Soil*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books.

Hirasuna, Delphine. 2013. *The Art of Gaman*: *Arts and Crafts from the Japanese American Internment Camps 1942-1946*. San Francisco: Ten Speed Press.

Inguanti, Joseph J. 2011. "Landscapes of Order, Landscapes of Memory: Italian-American Residential Landscapes of the New York Metropolitan Region." In *Italian Folk: Vernacular Culture in Italian-American Lives*, edited by Joseph Sciorra. New York: Fordham University Press, 83-106.

"Italian Prisoners in the United States," undated. Film, Produced by The U.S. Office of War Information, Overseas Branch.

Jones, Michael Owen. 2001. "The Aesthetics of Everyday Life." In *Self-Taught Art: The Culture and Aesthetics of American Vernacular Art*, edited by Charles Russell, 47–90. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Keefer, Louis. 1992. *Italian Prisoners of War in America, 1942-1946: Captives or Allies?* New York: Praeger Publishing.

Krammer, Arnold. 1983. "Japanese Prisoners of War in America." *Pacific Historical Review*, February, 52 (1): 67–91.

---. 1997. *Undue Process: The Untold Story of America's German Alien Internees*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

---. 2020. *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

"La vita al campo Italiano di Benicia," 1945. *L'Italia e La Voce del Popolo*. 28 August.

Lee, Jessica. 2010. *The Coddling Controversy over Italian POWs and the Italian-American Community during World War II*. Master's Thesis, Columbia University.

Lombardi-Diop, Cristina and Caterina Romeo. 2012. *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lorenzon, Erika. 2018. *Lo Squardo lontano: L'Italia della Seconda guerra mondiale nella memoria dei prigionieri di guerra*, Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari.

Manna, Molly. 1981. Interview with Joseph Sciorra, Tape #14, July 22, Sciorra uncatalogued box, Library of Congress.

Marinaro, Melissa E. 2016. "Captive Expressions: The Wartime Experiences of Donato Ruberto," *Western Pennsylvania History*, Fall, 20-21.

Meyer, Gerald. 2003. "When Frank Sinatra came to Italian Harlem: the 1945 "Race Riot" at Benjamin Franklin High School." In *Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America*, edited by Jenniger Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno. New York: Routledge, 161-176.

"Miniature of Holy Land is Built by Arsenal Italians," 1944. *Benicia Herald-New Era.* December 21.

Moore, Bob. 2015. "Enforced Diaspora: The Fate of Italian Prisoners of War during the Second World War." *War in History* 22, no. 2: 174-90.

Ng, Wendy L. 2002. *Japanese American Internment During World War II: A History and Reference Guide*. United Kingdom: Greenwood Press.
Pretelli, Matteo and Francesco Fusi. 2018. "Fighting Alongside the Allies in Italy: The War of Soldiers of Italian Descent Against the Land of Their Ancestor" In *Italy in the Second World War: Alternative Perspectives*, edited by Emanuele Sica and Richard Carrier. Leiden: Brill Press, 299-325.

Pretelli, Matteo, Ed. 2019. "New Perspectives on the Italian American Diaspora," *RSAJournal (Rivista di Studi Americani)*, Vol. 30, 111-145.

Puzo, Mario. (1969) 2002. *The Godfather*. New York: Penguin.

Raduenzel, Jamie. 2015. "WW II POW Camp and Italian Chapel at Schofield East Range," EMP 60 (3): 18-23.

Reiss, Matthias. 2018. *Controlling Sex in Captivity: POWs and Sexual Desire in the United States During the Second World War*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Ruberto, Laura E. 2010. "Italian POWs in the United States: Creative Expression and Community Building," Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, September 15, https://soundcloud.com/laura-ruberto/italian-pows-in-the-united, accessed November 1, 2020.

------. 2019. "Cultural Studies and the Intermittence of Ethnicity in Italian Diaspora Studies," *RSA Journal (Rivista di Studi Americani)*, (30): 116-120.

------. 2020. "An Italian Painter in a Wyoming POW Camp," *Wyo.History: Encyclopedia*, November 2, https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/italian-painter-wyoming-pow-camp, accessed November 15, 2020.

------. 2021a. "Italian Internment During World War II and the Limits of Racism in America," *2020-21 Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg Holocaust Center and National Endowment for the Humanities Colloquium, March 3*.

------. 2021b. "Giannino Gherardi nel Wyoming, tra la Madonnina e la storia," *Quaderni Brembani 20*: 69-77.

Ruberto, Laura. E. and Joseph Sciorra, Eds. 2017a. *New Italian Migrations to the United States, Vol. 1: Politics and History Since 1945*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

------, Eds. 2017b. *New Italian Migrations to the United States, Vol. 2: Art and Culture Since 1945*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

------. 2018. Email correspondence, August.

------. 2021. "Gli oggetti e il quotidiano: Uno studio della cultura materiale della diaspora italiana negli Stati Uniti." In *Gli italiani in USA: nuove prospettive di una diaspora secolare,* edited by Anthony Julian Tamburri and Silvana Mangione. New York: John D. Calandra Italian American Institute.

Ruberto, Leonilde Frieri. 2010. *Such Is Life/Ma la vita è fatta cosi: An Italian American Woman's Memoir*. New York: Bordighera Press.

Schenderlein, Anne. 2017. "German Jewish 'Enemy Aliens' in the United States during the Second World War." *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 60: 101-116.

Sciorra, Joseph, ed. 2011. *Italian Folk: Vernacular Culture in Italian-American Lives*. New York: Fordham University Press.

------. 2014. "Why a Man Makes the Shoes? Italian American Art and Philosophy." In *Sabato Rodia's Towers in Watts: Art, Migrations, Development*, edited by Luisa Del Giudice. New York: Fordham University Press, 183-203.

------. 2015. *Built with Faith*: *Italian American Imagination and Catholic Material Culture in New York City*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

Thompson, Erin L, Charles Shields, and Paige Laino. 2018. "Ode to the Sea: Art from Guantanamo." New York: *CUNY Academic Works*.

Tirabassi, Maddalena and Alvise del Pra'. 2014. *La meglio Italia: Le mobilita italiane nel XXI secolo*. Turin: Accademia University Press.

Valdettaro, A. and F. Barocci, Eds. 1944. *Il Guado: Numero unico di arte e letteratura*. June. T. & L.R. Binding: Hereford, Texas.

Vellinga, Marcel. 2006. "Engaging the Future: vernacular architecture studies in the twenty-first century." In *Vernacular*

Architecture in the 21st Century: Theory, Education and Practice, edited by Marcel Vellinga and Lindsay Asquith. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 81-94.

---. 2011. "The End of the Vernacular: Anthropology and the Architecture of the Other Author(s)," *Etnofoor*, 23 (1) "Architecture": 171-192.

Venturini, Nadia. 1990. *Neri e italiani ad Harlem. Gli anni Trenta e la guerra*. Edizioni Lavoro.

Williams, Donald Mace. 2017 (reprint, 1992). *Interlude in Umbarger: Italian POWs and a Texas Church*, Texas Tech University Press.

Zwerger, Kalus. 2019. "Vernacular Architecture: A Term Denoting and Transporting Diverse Content," *Built Heritage*, 4: 14-25.

Archival Documents/Folders

Camp Douglas POW Folders, Wyoming Pioneer Memorial Museum, Douglas, Wyoming.

NARA, College Park, Maryland

"Italian POWs: Provost Marshall General" Record Number 389/464 Entry/Box No. 1468/RG 389.

"Italian book," Italians Excel in Arts and Crafts; Box 1634; 389 entry 459A.

"Scrap Book: Italian Service Units in North Africa," 389 Record Number,464 Entry Box. No. 1468, RG 389 Provost Marshal General, Decimal FileItalian POWs 014.33 to 062.2.

Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota

"War Prisoners Aid Helps Men Fill Vital Hours with Sports and Studies." In Miscellaneous YMCA papers and correspondence Darius A. Davis papers Y.USA.57, Box 1,2.

Online Federal Files

"Federal Bureau of Investigation report on general U.S. intelligence situation," FBI Reports of the Franklin D. Roosevelt White House, Harry Hopkins File, Folder: 016477-021-0616/ Jan 01, 1945 - Dec 31, 1945, https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=016477-021-0616&accountid=14496, accessed July 27, 2020.

"Italians and Italian Americans political attitudes and viewpoints on wartime developments and for postwar Italy," Folder: 001717-017-1501 / Date: Jan 01, 1943 - Dec 31, 1945 / U.S. Office of Strategic Services, Foreign Nationalities Branch Files, 1942-1945, https://congresional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001717-017-1501&accountid=14496, accessed July 28, 2020.

"Office of War Information Correspondence," Folder: War Department, 1942-45. 85 frames Jan 01, 1942 - Dec 31, 1945/Information Control and Propaganda: Records of the Office of War Information, Part 1: The Director's Central Files, 1942-

1945. https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=003444-012-0604&accountid=14496 accessed August 5, 2020.

"Yugoslavian American Partisan Strife and Ethnic Feuding" Folder: 001717-030-1000 Date: Jan 01, 1943 - Dec 31, 1944, U.S. Office of Strategic Services, Foreign Nationalities Branch Files, 1942-1945, https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001717-030-1000&accountid=14496, accessed July 29, 2020.

Acknowledgments:

This project, especially the time to write this essay, was generously funded by a Mellon/American Council of Learned Society Community College Faculty Fellowship. A research trip to Douglas, Wyoming was supported by the Wyoming State Historical Society's Lola Homsher Endowment Fund.

I am indebted to countless archivists, librarians, colleagues, friends, and family who helped me obtain resources, offered feedback, or otherwise supported this research; infinite gratitude to: Teri Ann Bengiveno, Fran Martinez Coyne, Luisa Del Giudice, Heather Dodge, Dina Fachin, Mia Fuller, Persis Karim, Thomas Kies, Jessica Lee, Gary McMaster, Claude Potts, Matteo Pretelli, Beatrice Ruberto, Joseph Sciorra, Jenna Thorburn, Jaclyn Willems, and Alejandro Wolbert Pérez. I also thank the extended families of some of the POWs referenced here, including that of Tom Barbieri, Giannino Gherardi, Enzo Tarquinio, and Donato Ruberto. Much appreciation goes to the River House Guild.

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Richard Vannucci (1937-2017).

[i] From "Guest of Honor," in Jennifer Lagier's poetry collection, *Second-Class Citizen* (Bordighera Press, 2000).

[ii] I focus on Italian POWs detained on American soil; the United States also held Italian POWs in North Africa. Italian POWs were also detained by the British throughout the Commonwealth and Italian Military Internees were held by Germany after September 1943. Countless creative constructions exist in these contexts but are outside the scope of this article.

[iii] Felice Benuzzi, in his astonishing memoir about three Italian POWs who temporarily escaped in order to climb Mount Kenya, offers a summary of Italian POW creativity, referencing their "prestige" and "ingenuity" across an overwhelming array of media (2016, 23).

[iv] David A. Ensminger (2019) offers a useful compendium to my study from the perspective mostly of German POWs in the United States.
[v] See Ruberto and Sciorra (2021) for a review of the field of material culture studies within Italian American studies.
[vi] See Vellinga (2011) for a critique of the concept and use of vernacular as potentially reinforcing reductionist and essentialist trends; on the problematics of the term, see also Klaus Zwerger (2019).
[vii] See, for instance, Hirasuna (2013); Cooke (2005); Buchanan (2007); Bui (2018); Browning (2018); Thompson, Shields, and Laino (2018).
[viii] Italian diaspora and transnational studies is an expansive field; for some recent interdisciplinary overview essays on the topic see the introductions to: Burdett, Polezzi and Santello (2020); Fogu, Hom and Ruberto (2019); Pretelli (2019); Ben-Ghiat and Hom (2016); and Lombard-Diop and Romeo (2012).
[ix]Since 1998 I have presented on Italian POWs at academic conferences and community events where I repeatedly witnessed Italian American community members recall the experience from first- or second-hand stories while academics were incredulous at the mere fact that there were enemy Nazis, Fascists, and Japanese soldiers housed on U.S. soil and/or they confused the POW case with the case of enemy alien internment and/or Italian civilian internment.
[x] See Chopas (2017); Schenderlein, (2017); Ng (2002); Doyle (2010); DiStasi (2001); and Krammer (1983).
[xi] Military records note at least forty "American born" Italian Service Unit members ("Italian POWs: Provost Marshall General"). For Slovenian soldiers characterized as Italian, see "Italians and Italian Americans political attitudes and viewpoints on wartime developments and for postwar Italy" and "Yugoslavian American Partisan Strife and Ethnic Feuding".
[xii] The Japanese case remains under-studied, but a Japanese military culture that dissuaded capture in part accounts for the limited number of Japanese POWs held by the U.S.; see Doyle (2010, 202–222) and Krammer (1983).
[xiii] The others were eventually scattered throughout the Mediterranean, including about 15,000 who remained in North Africa (Keefer 1992, 28–29; Moore 2015, 181).
[xiv] For the agreement around POW custody between Britain and the United States see Conti (2012); Doyle (2010); and Keefer (1992).
[xv] Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own.
[xvi] Their safety was threatened in different ways even after arriving on American soil; for example, the POW camp near Schofield Barracks on O'ahu, Hawaii was constructed on what was considered a Japanese target (Raduenzel 2015).
[xvii] Some of the more intimate nuances of this sense of, or lack of, said comfort is explored by Reiss (2018) in his study of sex and sexual desire among POWs.
[xviii] On *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*'s involvement after 1943 see Conti's Chapter Nine (2012).
[xix] This sense of cross-Atlantic connection between Italy and the USA existed even among American POWs in Europe (see Denny 1942, 200)
[xx] Italian American community members' lobbying efforts helped clarify the position of POWs. See, for instance, the work of the People and Freedom committee of the Americans of Italian Descent Group ("Italians and Italian Americans political attitudes…"). For Catholic parish initiatives and other community-led projects see Conti (2012,158). See also the FBI's tracking of "Italian American Communist infiltration" of the ISU camps ("Federal Bureau of Investigation report on general U.S. intelligence situation").
[xxi] The more traumatic cases were sometimes documented in the press, such as the *New York Times* on August 11, 1944, notes the death by hanging of Domenico Sagrini in Belle Mead, NJ and the *San Francisco Chronicle* on July 27, 1944, notes that an unnamed Italian POW was killed during a POW worker's strike in Yuma, AZ. Conti (2012), Appendix 7, lists the cause of death for 134 of these deaths.
[xxii]For a comprehensive study of the topic of coddling, see Lee (2010).
[xxiii] On Olivotto's case, see Haman (2007). For scholarship specifically on Italians/Italian Americans and African Americans during the 1930s and 1940s see Venturini (1990); Meyer (2003); or Grilli (2020).
[xxiv] For instance, Corporal Dino Borella, from Oakland, CA, worked as an interpreter in the Ogden, Utah ISU camp (Bruce, 1943a, 9).
[xxv] See Calamandrei (2003); Conti and Perry (2016, 89–91); and Reiss (2018, 87–92). Such connections also became part of Italian American literary and popular culture through the character of Enzo Aguello, the baker's daughter's lover in Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* (see Ruberto and Sciorra 2017b, 1–2). Aguello was

actually an ISU member, based on the description of the "green-lettered armband" that he wore (Puzo, 10).

[xxvi] Donato Ruberto is my paternal grandfather; see Marinaro 2016 and Leonilde Frieri Ruberto 2010. For similar stories see Conti (2012, 172–173).

[xxvii] By early 1940 all German, Italian, and Japanese citizens legally residing in the United States, had to register at local post offices under their new official designation of "alien enemies" (Chopas 2017, 41). Later, different restrictions, and in some cases incarceration, for each group came with that designation. No mass incarceration occurred for Italians or Germans. For Italians, especially on the West Coast, travel restrictions and a curfew were instituted; firearms, shortwave radios, cameras, and flashlights were confiscated. Prohibited zones were demarcated along the West Coast and about 10,000 Italian families, especially those who worked in the fishing industry, were forced to relocate. Fewer than 4,000 were at one point arrested, and fewer than 400 were incarcerated (DiStasi 2001; Chopas 2017).

[xxviii] Oral histories document the impact of Italian enemy alien restrictions on families (DiStasi 2001).

[xxix] The YWCA, YMCA, and the Red Cross hosted POW art shows, organized art sales, and/or donated materials to prisoners. These organizations recognized the benefits of the supplies they provided; as the YMCA noted: "Athletics are Safety Valves," "Hobbies Chase the Blues," "Music Brings a Touch of Home," "Studies Keep Minds Alert," and "Religion Gives Men Courage" ("War Prisoners Aid Helps Men Fill Vital Hours with Sports and Studies"). See examples of such involvement in the Douglas, WY POW Folders.

[xxx] Beyond standard Internet- and library-based research, interviews with POWs or their family in Italy and the United States, research for this project has included the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) as well as historical sites, military bases, local archives, and other site-specific field areas throughout California as well in Massachusetts, Montana, and Wyoming.

[xxxi] See Reiss (2018) for an analysis of the role of sexual desire in the USA camps. See Bellina (2018) for a gendered reading of POWs in East Africa.

[xxxii] Another category might be those postwar creations which explicitly represent or harken back to the period of incarceration. See, for example, Lorenzon (2018) for a critical analysis of such POW memoir.

[xxxiii] I borrow liberally from the Unesco distinctions between tangible and intangible cultural objects. See, for instance, https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003.

[xxxiv] Also *presepio* (singular) or the plural *presepi*.

[xxxv]See Marinaro 2016. The tank remained in possession of the giftee until many decades later when Fortunato's widow, Pat Ruberto, gifted it to my brother, Fabio Ruberto, Donato's only grandson. Fabio donated it to the Senator John Heinz History Center's Italian American Collection in 2014.

[xxxvi] Meaning "poor" or "impoverished" art, the *arte povera* movement critiqued Italy's postwar industrialization by emphasizing an exploration of space and nature through the use of simple tools and everyday objects, including natural ones and those that evoked a pre-industrial state.

[xxxvii] See Ruberto 2020 for the life story around creativity and another Italian POW, Enzo Tarquinio.

[xxxviii] For such general descriptions and photographs see, for instance, Fielder (2003, 97) and Conti (2012, 223). See also the "Italian Book" (of arts and crafts) and "Scrap Book," both housed at NARA. It is impossible to quantify the number of individually created, small, tangible objects made by Italian EPWs while held in the United States.

[xxxix] Braun observes that Burri, aided by the Red Cross, sent only one of the paintings he made in Texas to Italy (2015, 31).

[xl] See the Indiana Historical Society's 2018 exhibit "You Are There 1943: Italian POWs at Atterbury".

[xli] The date 1943 is engraved on the Taunton shrine but ISU men did not arrive there until March 1944. Perhaps the date commemorates the Armistice, but I have found no documented evidence of this or any other explanation of the date discrepancy.

[xlii] For more on Gherardi and his religious creations while a POW see Ruberto, 2021b.

[xliii] On Italian diasporic gardens and landscapes see Inguanti 2011.

[xliv] See a photo of POWs in the act of salvaging wood from crates: https://benicia.pastperfectonline.com/photo/99B9BA94-013A-4970-BBEB-217941005054, accessed November 1, 2020.

[xlv] On "un lavoro ben fatto," see Sciorra (2015, xxiii).

[xlvi] We can only assume that the Americans had no sense of how bocce specifically had been encouraged by Mussolini in an attempt to nurture a nationalizing "classless" past-time for Italians (De Grazia 2012, 169–176).

[xlvii] See Busco on some of the Utah newspapers, including published poetry (1967, 78–80).

[xlviii] I own a bound facsimile produced by offset lithography of *Il Guado*, gifted to me by Camilla Calamandrei, who received it directly from Armando Gnisci, a former non-collaborating POW at Hereford. I do not know of other copies or the whereabouts of the original.

[xlix] Bruce's description plays into the notion of swarthy Italians and Italian Americans: "Swing music with a garlic flavor…the musicians black-haired and dark-eyed" (1943c).