

Introduction

Hope in a Sociological and Community Context

In his travels throughout Europe, John Braithwaite speaks of the time he spent with his children and their playful attempts to guess the vices and virtues represented in the medieval sculptures and paintings encountered along the way.¹ Gluttony was the easiest to identify, to see objectified in the stone carvings and framed canvases. The most difficult was hope. As Braithwaite offers, this may be due to the modern temper that sees hope as passé, for the present-day world has given itself over to cynicism and skepticism. At the same time, these artisans may have faced an impossible task. The uncertain, dreamlike, and futuristic character of hope made it less amenable to a shared, outward manifestation.²

Along with this elusive objectification, hope has also escaped an easy characterization as a virtue or a vice. While acknowledging hope's benefits, classical scholars warned against the dangers in committing to hope to further the good life. They pejoratively categorized hope as "false dreams" or "false pleasures." Hope was thought to be intricately bound upon with fear, riddled with mistaken assumptions, and an exceedingly poor guide to a clear-headed adaptation to the present.³

Hope took a virtuous turn in the following centuries as both Christian writers and secular philosophers dissected its underlying assumptions and possibilities. From a Christian perspective, hope and faith were joined—with this alchemy leading to the creation of a theological path wherein one could achieve Grace in the face of earthly evidence to the contrary. John Milton's epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, speaks of this otherworldly mingling of faith and hope. Though Satan is defeated, the price is an expulsion from Paradise with the consolation that faith and hope, sent via the Archangel Michael, will bring salvation. "A Paradise within thee. Happier by far."⁴

The Enlightenment thinkers also embraced hope as a virtue. However, as an antidote to these religious dogmas, they perceived hope in secular terms. It was not premised upon an article of faith but upon reason. Rational thought was the liberating force that overcomes bias and immature ideas and frees humankind to pursue better lives. Robert Nisbet suggests that the rise of democracy, progress, and reason during the nineteenth century led many to speak of the “Century of Great Hope.”⁵ This Enlightenment conception freed hope from its otherworldly moorings and the shackles of tradition. Consequently, hope was welcomed into a host of earthly matters—medicine, politics, education, the economy. In the words of Richard Rorty, hope with its attendant mundane vocabularies became ubiquitous. These vocabularies became so many “stories about future outcomes which compensate for present sacrifices.” They were stories tied to the temporal world with the counsel that “things might get better.”⁶

A notable and recognizable manifestation of this worldly hope emerged in the social spaces of immigration, a connection that took root in the mid-nineteenth century. Previously, a broad and common response to the drudgery and misery in earthly matters involved a patient waiting for a religious salvation. Individuals were held captive and found this deliverance through dreams of a better life in heaven. This was countered by the development of a capitalist labor market, the rapid growth of cities, and increased means of transportation. Each set the stage for a secularization of hope. Individuals could improve their lot in life by struggling against and opposing oppressive forces in their home country. Less dramatically, they could transport themselves and their families to a better life and richer opportunities in other parts of the world.⁷

Most immigration narratives, accordingly, focus upon misery and then hope as the springboards to a geographic and consequential social mobility. As a presumed innate human universal, hope goes a long way toward explaining the massive movement of millions of people in the Western world over the last century. In the face of highly disparaging and life-threatening circumstances, individuals from vastly different cultures and historical situations leave their native lands because of hope and the prospects for social advancement. They leave with the expectation that a better life is possible, though by no means certain, in another country. In the American context, Ellis Island, the major immigration entry point in the United States for over half a century, was christened “the Island of Hope.” Oscar Handlin’s classic *The Uprooted* grounded the story of immigration to America in the psychological quests for “new worlds, new visions.”⁸ Stephan

Thernstrom explored the ideological assumptions underpinning the “promise of mobility.” He argued that middle class opinion makers offered up one success story after another to minimize dissent and nurture “the hope that opportunity was just around the corner.”⁹ More recently, Richard Alba and Nancy Forner present the empirical observation that “most immigrants come to the rich societies of the West with the hope of dramatically improving their economic prospects.”¹⁰

Thus hope, social mobility, and immigration are constitutionally joined. However, the central argument here is that these connections are messier and more complex than typically depicted. It is by no means clear that hope precedes the decision to migrate or that it is a motivating force thrusting the immigrant forward. This mechanistic conception is suspect because it assumes a purposive striving toward a steadfast, clearly defined goal or a push from within (or behind). Hope is a fixed element within some people and not others. On the contrary, and to paraphrase John Dewey’s discussion of motive, hope may not exist prior to a set of decisions. “It is an act plus a judgement upon some element of it, the judgement being made in light of the consequences of the act.”¹¹ At the same time, the painting of hope and mobility along a singular pathway, or at least common jumping-off point in vastly different local contexts, subordinates historical complexity to a general idealized casual model.¹² It reduces this complexity to one of a number of possible roads forward.

Further, even the assumption of social mobility as the steadfast goal orienting the actions of immigrants is also debatable. This one-dimensional focus upon social advancement may impose its own “alien conceptual framework” on a range of cultural aspirations and conceptions of success.¹³ To be sure, hope may be a motivating force that guides action in search of economic or social mobility. However, a closer look may reveal that the association of hope and social mobility may also be a foremost example of what Lauren Berlant labeled as “cruel optimism” or a socially approved outcome that in reality few have the opportunity to achieve. That is, mobility is depicted in such hegemonic terms that it magnetizes “a cluster of promises” that are quite varied but that are recast, with the aid of others, as the socially sanctioned object of desire.¹⁴

Indeed, immigration may be prompted by a range of social forces that have little to do with hope and may be pursued (or not) at the expense of social mobility. James Henretta alerts us to the possibilities that “whatever their hopes for themselves, these migrants were not atomistic individuals, with an intense and over-riding goal of social advancement, but responsi-

ble participants in a trans-Atlantic kinship network with strong family ties and communal values.”¹⁵ Nancy Green and Roger Waldinger also stress the highly contingent and especially political character of migration such that the migrant’s decision to depart one country for another “is not simply an individual, economic act but also ultimately a collective and political one.”¹⁶

These questions regarding hope and social mobility arose out of *The Neighborhood Outfit: Organized Crime in Chicago Heights*. In that study, I offered an explanation of a long-standing, successful organized crime operation in this suburban city, a key component of the Chicago Outfit. The Chicago Heights crew consisted almost exclusively of Italian immigrants. Following upon and extending Daniel Bell’s classic argument that characterized organized crime as a ladder of social mobility, I sought to distance Italian participation in these criminal affairs from the timeworn and self-referencing explanations based upon genetic predispositions, cultural affinities, or innate criminal motives.¹⁷

In the course of this study, I continually came up against the fact that the overwhelming majority of Italian immigrants did *not* attempt to climb that “crooked ladder.” They failed to do so despite the dire circumstances they faced in America. Overcrowding, discrimination, substandard housing, dangerous workplaces, industrial pollution, low wages, high infant mortality, cultural affronts, and unsanitary living conditions were common. In such circumstances, questions as to whether this new life was better than the one left behind were never far from the surface.¹⁸ Hope for a better life moving forward was existentially challenged and put into doubt. Yet, for many of these immigrants hope did not disappear. Giovanni Schiavo characterizes both the plight and the resilience of the Italian immigrant in the Chicago area. “He knew that his life in the new world would be one of sorrows, of sacrifices, of humiliations, of self-denials. But the desire to change his economic status was by far much stronger than any obstacle he was to overcome.”¹⁹

I was faced, therefore, with a number of theoretical and practical questions. Why did hope persist? And why did it not succumb to the reality of the immediate circumstances? Why was hope and desire “far much stronger” than the here-and-now existence these immigrants experienced? As the trope of the “golden door” in America began to fade, how did immigrants maintain hope in this increasingly *terra amara* or bitter earth?²⁰ How and why did so many Italians maintain a sense of hope in an otherwise mundane world that objectively lacked promise for so many? Why did they continue to espouse hope in social mobility when “the climb up was often slow and

gradual rather than a matter of giant leaps forward” and often punctuated with “painful setbacks and difficulties along the way.”²¹

Simply stating that these Italians, or immigrants more generally, were in possession of a deep reservoir of hope is unsatisfying, if too convenient. As such, the standard narrative on hope as an explanatory variable in this immigration context—that is, hope as the “most human of all mental feelings,” a form of mental energy, an innate attribute—became too strained.²² These characterizations obscured and left unanswered a number of important questions. Most importantly, how is hope situated in the particular historical context? What are its social roots and functions? Whose aims and interests are furthered through the propagation of hope?

With these issues in mind, I approach hope and social mobility from a sociological perspective, as both a complement and challenge to the rich literature on hope from the more traditional sociological and psychological perspectives. In this analysis, I am guided by the sociohistorical field approach of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu provides a most useful analytic framework with a conceptual scheme that highlights the tension between habitus and field (or social spaces), or more broadly the individual and society. Since hope may be at one and the same time an individual disposition and social fact, Bourdieu’s analysis allows us to consider both and discover their contingent connections. In short, the aim is to reconstruct the social spaces of immigration for Italians in the Chicago Heights context and to show how hope and social mobility within these various social spaces were “produced, constructed, and perceived.”²³

Three orienting issues take center stage in light of this approach. First, following Bourdieu’s general and innovative insight, hope is viewed as a cultural resource or a type of cultural capital.²⁴ It is a cultural asset or a practice that people learn to display and feel as they move through the processes of immigration. In the American context, immigrants realized with various degrees of intentionality that the framing of their experiences through the idioms of hope and social mobility worked best in advancing their acceptance in the society. Viewed from this perspective, hope and the attendant quest for mobility were elements of a language, parts of the cultural code, which allowed immigrants to distinguish themselves from the least favorable alien statuses and gain a cultural advantage in the social spaces of immigration. In Wittgenstein’s terms, “the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life.”²⁵ Their meaning and use begs the question as to a larger, expansive set of experiences and contexts they reference.

Second, hope was a contested ideological practice and, as such, a method of domination. Immigrants did not have exclusive control over their social relations or the strategic manipulation of hope. At various social locations along the immigration path, politicians, officials, concerned citizens, the press, and others molded and shaped the hopes and social mobility aspirations of the newcomers. Thus, the arrival in large numbers of culturally alien strangers posed challenges to the economic and social dominance of the native population. As such, social control mechanisms were in order. These mechanisms took various forms from legal remedies to cultural criticism and physical attacks. Yet, cultural assimilation was the most common and effective tool. And the most effective and intrusive assimilation practice was to reach inside individuals and structure their expectations, aspirations, and feelings in line with the dominant assumptions and values. In this sense the cultural encouragement of hope and social advancement took on disciplinary aspects. These were practices used to normalize and classify the alien newcomer. Borrowing and adapting Foucault's famous idiom regarding punishment, the institutionalization of hope was not to control less, but to control better.

Finally, hope is inherently fragile. Its dreamlike, voluntarist character makes it susceptible to doubts and uncertainties. Hope fades without worldly, tangible referents. As such, hope must be objectified in the social world both for the immigrant's own self-motivation and for the dominant groups' social control and assimilation interests. It must be made visible and accountable in some public capacity outside the mental images of the individual. The fulfillment of (or at least the path toward) hope needs to be codified and institutionalized in some predictable and recognizable fashion. This raises questions regarding what counts for success or the objectification of hope in particular historical contexts. Is it gainful employment, a recognizable occupational mobility, the purchase of a home, the acceptance into higher-level status groups, or the success of one's children? These raise further questions as to whether these paths were chosen by the immigrants themselves based upon their emerging cultural beliefs or formulated by more powerful interests as objective and ideologically marked criteria of success and control.

Hope and Classical Sociological Thought

The ability to ask these sociological questions requires first the extraction of hope from its individualistic assumptions. If hope resides only or pri-

marily within the individual psyche or the “hard, unchangeable core of our anthropological specificity”²⁶ then the social world can only have a limited (if any) impact upon its genesis, strength, or development. Not too surprisingly, the classic social thinkers challenged these person-driven conceptions. Marx, Durkheim, and Weber all had something to say about hope, though rarely did they examine it directly.²⁷ In part, this inattention may have been brought about by the close relationship between hope and religion.²⁸ All three theorists sought to distinguish, if not radically critique, the theist conception of life on earth from their more empirical, secular explanations. From their perspectives, hope was too irrational, too individualistic, too faith-based to systematically include in their mature sociological theories.

All the same, in a world strongly imbued with religious beliefs, practices, and questions of salvation, Marx, Durkheim, and Weber were compelled to understand hope as an empirical fact. As one might expect, Marx was most dismissive of hope as an individualistic quest for a better life. The “privatization of hope” in the capitalist era undercut the necessary collectivist, class-based effort required to overcome the objective, socioeconomic conditions that imprisoned the working class. Still, Marx understood that the ideologies of hope found expression in a mundane world. Objectified in the form of religious doctrine and practices, hope or more properly religion was the “fantastic realization of the human essence . . . the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions.”²⁹ In this sense, Marx saw religion as a reflection of a distorted and alienating social order. In and of itself, it was an illusion that over time would succumb to the material conditions and contradictions in capitalist society. When this took place, a person would not need daydreams, wishes, or “fantastic” desires to realize species being, for then one would be able to “think and act and shape his reality like a man who has lost his hope and come to reason.”³⁰

Durkheim was primarily intent upon understanding hope in the context of his general discussion of happiness and the division of labor in society.³¹ He argued that happiness was not a natural or inevitable consequence of the movement from a mechanical to organic society, with its increasing division of labor. Instead, happiness was a variable product of the social environment and the ability of people to turn their focus to the future. In particular, when misfortune surfaces, individuals will likely have learned that their present sufferings will reasonably give way to a better life. In other words, they will have developed a collective sense of hope as a social fact. As Durkheim said, hope “has not miraculously descended from

heaven into our hearts, but it has to be formed, as all sentiments, within the action of the facts.”³² In this formulation, hope is not an illusion, not an empty promise, something Marx would have argued. And it is not a pure sentiment that arises solely for biological or psychological reasons. It is very much a social phenomenon produced by collective action and to be understood on these terms.

The most sophisticated and well-developed conception of hope belongs to Weber. In his analysis of status and social standing, Weber made a distinction between those who were “positively privileged” and those who were “negatively privileged.”³³ The former derives their honor and respect from the world as it is, from their being or existence in this world. The latter must turn their gaze elsewhere, to lives that they do not now possess. They must generate the hope for a better life, a life of righteous status and respect in the Kingdom of God.

Weber took his sociological account of hope a step further, and in a somewhat different direction, in his classic work, *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*. In this study, Weber concluded that capitalism and Protestantism were joined. They were joined not in a constitutional or endemic fashion but as a consequence of the “psychological sanctions” many Protestants (and Calvinists, in particular) adopted on their way toward discovering their state of grace. It was Weber’s great insight to see that the spirit of capitalism—the productive investment of capital, the acquisitive activity, the moral righteousness of wealth—was motivated by the unknown distribution of salvation. That is, the Calvinist believed that one’s salvation owned nothing to one’s own achievements or cooperation but was “hidden in dark mysteries” of “His Majesty.”³⁴ It was based four-square on hope and faith. As such, Weber surmised that the Calvinists experienced an “unprecedented inner loneliness” in their search to determine if they were one of the elect. Unable to change their destiny, Protestants took to the “market place of life” in an attempt to discover signs or evidence of their “certitudo salutis.”³⁵ They needed to objectify or ground hope. While this search took several forms, the most pronounced involved the acquisition of wealth. The rational, systematic pursuit of wealth, along with an avoidance of idleness and the sinful enjoyment of life, was assumed to be the most virtuous way to live in accordance with God’s will. Most importantly, wealth was tangible proof of one’s salvation status; it was an objective feature of the world, beyond individual desires and motivations, which would convince believers that they were among the chosen.

With these sociological perspectives in hand, the links between hope, social mobility, and immigration can be examined with fresh insights. Most immigrants are “negatively privileged” based upon their socioeconomic standing in their own country. And as they proceed along the immigration path and experience the context of reception in their new home, whatever status and honor they possessed beforehand is effectively nullified as they sink near the bottom of the immigration hierarchy. In one situation after another, they are at a personal, structural, and cultural disadvantage and are likely to adopt hope as a *stance* or a form of life to ameliorate their predicament. In this sense, hope is not random; it has not “miraculously descended from heaven” nor has it solely emerged from the “hard unchangeable core” of our psyche: it has social structural roots.

At the same time, there is a structural component not only to the sources of hope but also to its objectification. Immigrants may occupy variously disadvantaged positions in terms of their ability to witness their hope manifested in the “market place of life.” Those toward the bottom of the immigration hierarchy may not have readily available and meaningful real-world references to sustain hope or confer on it the “accent of reality.”³⁶ For example, if patterns of residential segregation create exceedingly high unemployment rates in a community, then it may be difficult for a person who lives in this community to hold out hope and secure a good job. This structural inability to ground hope in the here and now may cause it to dissipate. Conversely, if the immediate social environment provides objectified signs or representations that hope can move beyond a wish or desire and reach into the everyday world—for example, if the person down the block got a new job or a friend moved up to foreman in the factory—then hope will be emboldened.

Finally, as Marx said famously, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”³⁷ In this sense, immigrants make their own history. They are not driven by the naturalistic or “animal spirits” of hope but shape their reality based upon what they perceive to be the demands of the situation.³⁸ Hope and the quest for social mobility, therefore, are practical and rational strategies immigrants adopt to further their wide-ranging goals and aspirations. But “under circumstances existing already” suggests that those in more powerful positions exert considerable influence upon these practices. They seize upon these practices in an ideological fashion and turn hope and the

quest for social mobility “toward the maintenance of the existing order.”³⁹ Taken all together, therefore, and following upon the singular insights of Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, hope has social structural origins, requires an objectification in the social world, and is susceptible to ideological manipulation by those in positions of power and influence.

The Community Context

This study will focus upon Italian immigrants in Chicago Heights, Illinois, during the first half of the twentieth century. It attempts to contribute to a rich tradition of scholarship in the field of Italian immigration. Since the emergence of a number of “Little Italys” across America, a store of detailed studies characterizing these settlements has emerged. Sociological and historical accounts provide a locally differentiated but common picture describing the communal satisfactions of living among fellow Italians but also the oftentimes miserable conditions associated with these enclaves.⁴⁰ Following this, most studies pay homage to the Italian immigrants for their grit, perseverance, and hope for a better life going forward. Stephen Puleo’s study of Italians in Boston is representative. It draws a nearly linear connection between these impoverished conditions, social mobility, and hope when it states that Italian immigrants arrived in Boston “with little more than the clothes on their back and a flicker of hope in their hearts.”⁴¹

In the Chicago region, Harvey Zorbaugh’s *The Gold Coast and the Slum* was the starting point for a sociological analysis of these Italian areas. He suggested that the Italians were the dominant group that occupied the “slum” or “Little Sicily.” He spoke of their presence through the imagery of the Chicago School’s ecological perspective and talked of the near predatory character of Italians who engulfed, penetrated, or took possession of the area. There was little discussion of hope or social mobility per se because of the heavy weight Italians presumably placed upon their traditional and provincial culture.

This viewpoint was challenged by Humbert Nelli’s *Italians in Chicago, 1880–1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility*. Nelli saw these local, Italian communities as playing a critical role over time in the ethnic adjustment of the Italians to American life. Crediting Italians with an abundance of hope and extensive social networks fueled by religious and community ties, Nelli documents the upward movement of Italians who were “spurred on by economic success and a desire for better living conditions.”⁴²

This upward movement, however, was not uniform. This was a central point of Rudolph Vecoli's review of Italian settlements in Chicago. Vecoli argued that in the opening decades of the last century multiple Italian enclaves spread across Chicago and the surrounding communities—from Little Sicily, to Taylor Street, Grand Crossing, Twenty-Second and Oakley, Pullman, Cicero, Melrose Park, Chicago Heights, and so on. Each area had different patterns of mobility. Vecoli eschewed deterministic models that sought to explain mobility or its absence in terms of blind economic or ecological forces. At the same time, explanations that relied too heavily upon personal characteristics such as the differential distribution of ambition, hope, or desire were also suspect. Along these lines, Vecoli questioned Nelli's oversimplification of success in terms of the crude distinction between northern and southern Italians. Instead, Vecoli held that if we are to understand Italian immigration in all its complexity each of these settlements should be studied in ways that "allow for the play of contingency, cultural preferences, and human agency."⁴³ Indeed, Vecoli pointed to Chicago Heights as one of the settlements in need of further study in the service of offering a dense, multifaceted history of Italian immigration.

Several decades later, Thomas Guglielmo took up this challenge with a broad, historically driven examination across a range of Chicago's neighborhoods and suburbs, including excerpts from Chicago Heights.⁴⁴ Guglielmo reveals the differential treatment of northern and southern Italians across these different settings. He offers compelling evidence that this discrimination was blunted because Italian immigrants were largely viewed as "white on arrival." Specifically, being placed on this side of the color line allowed Italians to escape the cruelest forms of discrimination, most poignantly in comparison to nonwhite groups. Put differently, though Italians (mostly southern Italians) often found themselves at or near the bottom of the ethnic and nationality hierarchy, this hierarchy was essentially transformed following the restrictive immigrant legislation of the 1920s and the Great Migration of African Americans to Chicago in subsequent years. A new overlapping hierarchy, one that merged race *and* color, became a more ruthless basis for allocating the valued resources and positions in society.

Guglielmo provides rich, analytic insights that apply to the Chicago Heights context. Still, the broad, analytic focus adopted by Guglielmo did not allow for the "play of contingency" that characterized the Italian immigration experience in the Heights. To fill this space, newspaper articles have emerged periodically with journalistic accounts of these immigrant stories in the city.⁴⁵ These have been complemented by a recent spate of

books focusing narrowly upon organized crime in Chicago Heights.⁴⁶ And most significantly, Dominic Candeloro has carried out detailed studies of Italians in the Heights in several pivotal articles and excerpts.⁴⁷ His work is invaluable, and I draw heavily upon these sources. The study here has a different focus. It attempts to place these descriptive histories of the city into the larger analytic frameworks and theoretical clues provided by Bourdieu and his analysis of social spaces, habitus, and cultural capital. It attempts to provide a more sociologically informed discussion of the dialectic between these Italian immigrants and the contingent, historical context of Chicago Heights.

Even so, why Chicago Heights? Perhaps a less than satisfactory answer is that it is my hometown and the hometown of Michael Fisher, who has provided trusted assistance in the collection of data and the substantive development of this study. Together, we have personal attachments, memories, experiences of the Heights—most of them good. Because of these personal ties, we also have an entrée into a set of connections and relationships that provide insight into the Italian immigrant experience. My paternal grandparents were Italian immigrants, my father a second-generation Italian American, and most of our friends and relatives were Italians. Michael's personal history is also steeped in the Italian culture of Chicago Heights. His descendants arrived in the United States from Sicily in 1917. Over the years the family grew such that Michael's relatives include people that stretch far beyond his immediate family—including, the Fushi, Concialdi, Sorrentino, Prospero, and Narcisi clans. Based upon these ties, we were able to talk with and informally interview over forty people regarding their family histories and immigration experiences in Chicago Heights. Apart from the distractions that come with the emotional ties connected to this personal history, these associations provided access to stories, a ready cooperation of many Italian residents, and a subtle feel for the Italian culture that characterized the Heights for decades. These experiences certainly create blind spots. And like all case studies issues of generalizability are present. Still, our experiences proved to be a firm starting place.

Hometown ties, no doubt, are not enough. Chicago Heights recommends itself because it was at the forefront of the leading historical processes that dominated the greater part of the early twentieth century (and at the back end of these processes in the latter part). First, it experienced a rapid urbanization and an early suburbanization. Thus, in 1890, the village of "Bloom" was not much more than a sleepy hamlet located some thirty miles south of downtown Chicago. The 1890 census listed just over fifteen

hundred residents. By 1910 it had been pulled into the burgeoning Chicago metropolitan area and had a population of 14,525, nearly a tenfold increase. By 1920 it increased again to 19,653. These transformations made Chicago Heights one of the most populous cities in Illinois in the first decades of the last century.

Second, Chicago Heights was also an industrial town. This was due in large part to its ideal location near railroad transportation lines and the heavy industrial core of Gary, Indiana, and south Chicago. As Robert Lewis argues, the Heights, and generally the Lake Calumet region, was at the heart of the industrial push outward from the centrally located manufacturing plants in Chicago. Here, these open prairie regions provided new spaces and opportunities for networked, industrial growth free of the more fixed, constraining elements of the older factory districts in Chicago.⁴⁸ Specifically, spurred on by the Chicago Heights Land Association and led principally by Chicago developer Charles Wacker, Chicago Heights became home to some eighty active factories producing everything from pony wagons, to pianos, bricks, chemicals, automobiles, railroad cars, steel, and zeppelins. At its peak, the city could boast that it was “the best manufacturing city of its size in America.”⁴⁹

Closely related to these population and industrial developments, the Heights was socially, culturally, and demographically transformed by the ongoing processes of immigration. During the latter half of the 1800s, the city was dominated by native whites of Scotch-Irish and German ancestry. However, by 1910 foreign-born whites constituted 42 percent of the city’s population, the vast majority of these second-wave immigrants coming from eastern and southern Europe. Among these new immigrants, Italians were by far the most numerous and had the most prominent cultural presence. Again by 1910, over 22 percent (or 3,244 people) of Chicago Heights’ population was made up of Italian immigrants and their children. In Illinois, the Heights ranked only behind Chicago, though obviously far behind, in terms of the *absolute* number of residents with Italian ancestry. And in terms of percentages, Chicago Heights was clearly the most Italian city in Illinois and one of the most Italian cities in the country.⁵¹ Dominic Candeloro estimates that by 1970, roughly 40 to 50 percent of the Chicago Heights population had Italian lineage.⁵¹

These Italians migrated to Chicago Heights for a variety of reasons. Many women had little choice: they were placed aboard a ship sailing to America and found their way to the city as a part of an arranged marriage. Others came for the sense of adventure and roguishness that America

offered. Many came to simply escape the abiding poverty of southern Italy. For example, when I asked Marie Iafollo, a lifelong resident in the Chicago Heights area, why her father would leave the picturesque small hill town of Italy, she said her father always responded, “*non puoi mangiare le montagne*” (You can not eat the mountains).⁵² Dominic Pandolfi explained his father’s migration to Chicago Heights almost as an afterthought. “He and his brother came across to the United States in 1890 or 1893. They came during the world’s Columbian expedition. . . . They heard about a town on the outskirts of Chicago, Chicago Heights. They went there and discovered there were a couple of Italians there. They decided to stay.”⁵³

This influx of Italian newcomers into the region paralleled the geographic and social mobility of other ethnic and racial groups.⁵⁴ The Polish immigrants faced comparable opportunities and challenges. Thus, by 1930, 3.2 percent of the city’s population consisted of “foreign born” Poles and another 6.1 percent were second generation Polish residents.⁵⁵ Similar to their Italian neighbors, the vast majority of these Polish men and women emigrated based upon the promise that America would provide relief from the distressing circumstances in Europe. As Wonzy contends, many were ready to take on the challenges of life in America for “being poor or poorer was the same” and hoped to climb the same mobility ladder and compete in the same immigrant field as their Italian counterparts.⁵⁶

For the majority of Black migrants from the rural south the reception in Chicago Heights overlapped with the experiences of the European immigrants. Early on, the presence of Blacks in the city was negligible. Thus, in 1910 Blacks constituted less than 1 percent of Chicago Heights residents, barely over one hundred people. However, by 1930 Blacks made up close to 10 percent of the city’s population, a number that remained stable in the 1940 census.⁵⁷ In ways similar to the Italians and Poles, the Black exodus from the South was driven by discrimination and poverty. And labor agents lured these Southern workers with “fraudulent promises” regarding conditions in the Northern cities and work places.⁵⁸ Once in the city, Blacks took up residence among the Italians and Poles in the crowded, industrial East Side.

However, the experiences of these Black migrants was qualitatively distinct from the Italians and Polish immigrants. The poverty in the South was infused with violence and threats that were a continual assault upon the dignity and physical presence of the Black citizen. And the reception in the North, including Chicago Heights, was often only marginally better. Thus, in response to a Chicago Heights manufacturer who requested help from Clarke Howell, editor of the *Atlantic Constitution*, on how best to recruit

Blacks to his manufacturing plant, Howell replied that many Southerners would “hesitate long before advising them to go north for work at the present time . . . the ideas of the labor rights of negroes in that section are antagonistic and dangerous.” “And remember also,” said Howell, “that there are many towns in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois where a negro is not permitted to live, or even get off a train at their town railway station.”⁵⁹

Needless to say, Blacks experienced a systemic racism that was incomparable to other racial and ethnic groups. In the terminology of Emirbayer and Desmond, they were at the lower end of the racial order or field.⁶⁰ Chicago Heights Italians, especially the southern Italians, were also pulled into this field and suffered disadvantages given their “swarthy” and “in-between” status.⁶¹ Still, as Guglielmo said previously, they were predominately perceived as white and thus the beneficiary of this white “racial capital.” Their whiteness gave them a modicum of power to move within the established social circles of the Heights and escape the most noxious characteristics of the immigrant and racial hierarchy.

These opportunities and sources of power were not available to Black citizens. The Black-white binary was pernicious in Chicago Heights. With but few exceptions, the Black citizens were unable to objectify hope. As Emirbayer and Desmond argue, “Fear, anxiety, cruelty, hope, joy, and desire are central to racial domination and progress.”⁶² Unable to cash in their hopes for success and gain recognition and value from other racial groups and mainstream society, Blacks distanced themselves as a means of protection and survival. As one Chicago Heights observer noted, “There has been an accomodation on the part of the Negroes. They have isolated themselves more so than before, and in this manner have been instrumental in preventing the renewal of racial hostilities.”⁶³

Chicago Heights, then, was a meeting ground for the defining economic, social, and cultural movements of the last century. It developed and prospered amidst a tangled web of urbanization, suburbanization, industrialization, immigration, and racism. It was a small town in demographic terms but large enough to reveal the interplay between these larger forces and the life-world experiences of Italians bent upon finding a place in a new and challenging social order, guided by the “gleam of light for a better day.” “They came,” the *Chicago Heights Star* continued, “with the hope for the realization of their dreams and faith in their ability to make good.”⁶⁴ It is not clear if the elements of “hope,” “realization,” or the “ability to make good” were strategically alligned as commonly thought, but the Chicago Heights context provides a singular setting for an investigation of these processes.

With this focus upon Chicago Heights, we explore these critical immigrant connections by combining several social scientific methods—historical research, qualitative interviews, and census data. Thus, the story of the Italian immigrants will be told on the basis of the informal interviews I have collected over a twenty-year span and the conversations Michael Fisher and I have had with various members of his extended family. At the same time, I have relied a great deal upon interviews conducted as a part of the Italians in Chicago Oral History project at the University of Illinois at Chicago between 1979 and 1980. Eleven of these oral histories were from residents of Chicago Heights. In addition, the Casa Italia Cultural Center in Stone Park, Illinois, has a trove of relevant material related to the immigrant experience in Chicago Heights—these include additional interviews, personal letters, newspaper articles, and other documents.

The chapters to follow will draw upon this data and present a sociology of hope as it relates to the Italian immigrants in Chicago Heights. Chapter 1 focuses upon Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of social spaces, cultural capital, and habitus. Bourdieu did not explicitly focus upon hope as a cultural resource. Nevertheless, his analysis of field and social spaces provides a useful analytic scheme for understanding how hope was a practice or strategy that immigrants used to navigate the hierarchies of immigration. Bourdieu's framework roots hope in a sociological context and allows us to distinguish this practice from the less sanctioned forms of resignation and dissent.

Chapter 2 begins to construct in substantive detail the field or social spaces for Italian immigrants in this Chicago Heights context. It provides a broad description of the sociohistorical conditions that prompted the decision to emigrate. It then demonstrates how a series of officials, migrant brokers, steamship agents, inspectors, padroni, employers, and reformers played a role in framing the aspirations of these Italian natives toward geographic and social mobility.

Chapter 3 turns to the immigration work experiences of Chicago Heights Italians. By relying upon census data, historical materials, and interviews, the chapter argues that the hopes of alien newcomers were steered toward the pursuit of occupational mobility. While hard work was a cultural resource demonstrating a commitment to the emerging ethos of the American Dream, the pursuit of further advancement or the steps taken in bettering one's position would cement one's status as an American, for it signified an underlying personal commitment to the cherished values of hope and optimistic striving.

Chapter 4 contends that homeownership, as opposed to the more transitory aspects of renting, became yet another objectified sign of the commitment to an American identity and the shedding of an ethnic affiliation. Though owing a home had significant use value in economic terms, it had significant cultural capital in that it established a permanence in the country and an alignment with the American ideals of independence, pride of ownership, and loyalty. It represented these socially approved hopes with an objectified presence beyond the clapboard or brick and mortar materials.

Chapter 5 contends that if the social affirmations of hope and mobility were not readably available, then immigrants resurrected these cultural values in the lives of their children. Specifically, hope was pushed forward by investing these aspirations in the status advances of their sons and daughters. Immigrants secured a more favorable position for themselves in the spaces of immigration by reconstituting their relationship to their children. Children provided a malleable, elastic canvas for demonstrating the proper cultural codes of hope and social advancement in American society.

Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main themes of this sociological look into hope, mobility, and immigration. While acknowledging the strides that Italian Americans have made in overcoming their most humble beginnings, what was the price for this assimilation? Given the communal legacies and traditions of Italians, would individualized hopes be more meaningful and fulfilling if they were contextualized in terms of the wider community or what Robert Bellah and others describe as the “communities of hopes.”⁶⁵ Would the “good society” be pushed forward by a dialectic that nurtured not only personal dreams and aspirations but also an interchange with communal hopes?