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May 5, 2015

“No Wonder Pizza is already as American as Apple Pie!”  
The Integration of an Ethnic Dish into 1950’s America

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## I. Introduction

What is the first thing to cross your mind when you see the word *pizza*? What are you imagining? Now, picture an *American pizza*? Does the original image you had in your head change at all? If the two pictures in your head were not the same, there is a reason for that. The history of pizza in America reveals that Americans have bound the dish ethnically to Italian immigrants, even long after the ties were severed. Until the post-World War II, specifically the decade of the 1950s, pizza was mainly produced and consumed by poor Italian immigrants in larger American cities. However, once the war ended, the United States experienced two massive waves. The first, was a wave of Italian immigrants who were leaving Italy in large masses to escape poverty, and chase the fantastical *American Dream*. The second wave, being a massive wave of change in American food interests. As Italian immigrants were flooding American cities, claiming entire blocks to create their own secluded, ethnic communities, an American interest in ethnic dishes spiked. These two events in correlation is what this paper will prove to be the primary factors in drawing attention to the pizza. This paper observes these two waves, and explores the relationship between this mass Italian immigration alongside the growing popularity of pizza as an ethnic dish within twentieth century American food culture. In order to properly supplement the argument, this paper also discusses: ethnicity and immigration conflicts in America, the history of pizza in America, the relationship between Italian immigrants and pizza, and finally, regional variations of pizza across the United States. The aforementioned sub-topics have been analyzed in order to prove that although pizza in America derived from Italian-

America cultural and occupational practice, the dish became so popular within the United States that it was completely adopted in American food culture as an American dish.

## II. Not Quite Italian, Not Quite American: A Brief History of the Italian Immigration to America, 1924-1960

The rise of pizza in America should be credited to the culture motivations of small Italian-American communities which encouraged many immigrants to establish businesses and restaurants to serve the delicious and inexpensive dish. A particularly significant example is Gennaro Lombardi's pizzeria in New York City. To exaggerate the suffocation of Italian-American culture, forces the insinuation that these immigrants, as individuals and communities, were given absolutely no space to allow their new variation of Italian culture to thrive and progress. To assume this, would be to wrongly denounce the root of many Italian immigrant run pizzerias scattered throughout New York City, New Haven, Detroit, Chicago, Buffalo, Rochester. These cities are all rapidly growing cities with large condensed Italian immigrant populations that were being constantly replenished with incoming immigrants for a solid thirty years. In these cities especially, but not exclusively, Italian-American culture expanded in spite of the "regular mass media bombardment of negative stereotypes" that forcibly confined Italian immigrants to the "*basciuments*" of Little Italy neighborhoods.<sup>1</sup> Within Italian-American communities, immigrant families were able to shelter their tradition from the judgmental American eye. Where ethnic culture still thrived, immigrants of all sorts remained unassimilated, and therefore continued to be un-American.

*A fear of the unknown*, a simple but sweet phrase that identifies one of the main influential ideologies that defined mid-twentieth century American thought. In close observation of one specific ethnic group, it is clear that a majority of the stereotypes that were created for Italian-American immigrants were created as a result of fear. Italian-Americans, specifically

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<sup>1</sup> Fred L. Gardophe, *Leaving Little Italy*, 19.

those from Southern Italy, were viewed as uncivilized.<sup>2</sup> As being deemed “uncivilized” by a majority of society often has poor connotations, Italian-Americans were characterized by all terms synonymous with the image of being unfit for American society: “The Italian people were seen as dishonest, mendacious, immoral, lazy, dirty, degraded, sensual, theatrical, and childlike.”<sup>3</sup> Although, this stereotype seems quite unethical and harsh, there was some truth to it. In a book written by Fred Gardophe, *Leaving Little Italy*, there is much discussion of the socioeconomic motivations for an Italian diaspora in the early twentieth century. Here, it is made clear that much of Italian immigration to the United States consisted of poor and politically isolated Italian peoples. Also, the development of fascism and communism ultimately affected not only Italians under the strict fascist rule of Mussolini, but also those who had already immigrated to America. These developing political schools established a true distinction between Italians and Italian-Americans.

In 1924, one of the U.S. immigration quotas was altered, now allowing Italians to enter the United States in order to flee fascism. The image Italians in Italy had of Mussolini was quite different than that of Italians who had migrated to America before he took power. Sicilian-American writer and former professor of literature at University of Pennsylvania, Jerre Mangione, provides much evidence of this complicated relationship between Italian-Americans and their homeland in his 1943 memoir, “In my years of becoming an American, I had come to understand the evil of fascism and hate it with all my soul. One of two of my relatives argued with me on the subject because they had a great love for their native land and, like some men in

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<sup>2</sup> Maria Laurino, *Were you Always an Italian?* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph P. Cosco, *Imagining Italians: The Clash of Romance and Race in American Perceptions, 1880-1910*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003.

love, they could see nothing wrong.”<sup>4</sup> Mangione, according to his relatives, would appear to be turning against his country. The issue here is for intellectuals that are sprouting out of Italian American households, faced with circulating American ideals and propaganda. The children of the stubborn elder Italian immigrants are placed at the front line of a battle between family and personal intellectual progress. Making the situation worse were the growing concerns of communism, which was often the label attached to those who openly professed their anti-Mussolini opinions, such as Mangione. There is a significant distinction being made here, the Italian-American was no longer Italian anymore. The Italian-American, as seen in the example of Mangione’s family, no longer shares the same ideals with Italians in Italy. It appears that these immigrants, for the first time, were finding themselves truly stuck between betraying their homeland, and accepting their new one. In America, newly immigrated Italian men and women were continually being rejected because they were still too Italian, and yet they still felt this extreme detachment this part of themselves. As each day passed, immigrants were slowly losing touch with their ancestry, and the rapidly growing culture in Italy. However, there was not much progress being made in the other direction, becoming more American, which left immigrants lost, isolated and nostalgic. Not just for a country and a people, but for a home.

Leaving one’s homeland is never an easy decision to make, but the opportunities for prosperity in America were often too appealing, maybe even too good to be true. Gardophe touches on this idea in his discussion of America as Metaphor: “Like any good metaphor, America has always been subject to many interpretations; the struggle for identification with America was one of the immigrant’s first battles. Even at entry to America, immigrants were immediately aware of their differences, their un-Americanness.”<sup>5</sup> In this section, Gardophe

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<sup>4</sup> Gardophe, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Gardophe, 14.

discusses the mythical motivations for Italian immigration to America as discussed in Pietro Corsi's novel, *La Giobba*. Gardophe states three realizations of Italian immigrants that unraveled the fantasy of America, "(1) the streets were not paved with gold; (2) few if any streets had been paved at all; and (3) the Italian was expected to pave them."<sup>6</sup> Poor, vigilante southern Italians piled into ships hoping to step foot into a heavenly country; believing they would be freed of any and all economic, political and social dissatisfaction. The first step in understanding the Italian American culture, is understanding what these people had hoped to find in America, and how their hopes were continually shattered as they began settling in their Little Italy communities. In these urban villages, immigrants were subject to seclusion and stereotype, as they quickly fell into the category of "un-American" peoples.

The American understanding of what it means to be "un-American," can be traced back to 1930s America, amidst continual waves of immigration to America. This decade, which ended on the eve of the Second World War, proved to be quite productive for the establishment of a centralized American political thought (based greatly on fear). The House of Representatives created a committee strictly to monitor mostly political relations between Germany and German-Americans. The creation of this committee can define the 1930s as a period of American self-identification. With the rise of fascism and Nazi-ism, Americans were becoming more familiar with what it meant to be American. If this were not true, there would be no way of interpreting what activities were to be accepted as American, ultimately proving the committee to be useless.

On the brink of war, American self-identification was mustered up for the first time, mainly in defiance of insularity. The rest of the world, for the first time, became wholly dangerous to American superiority and prosperity. Desmond King defines the twentieth century

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<sup>6</sup> Gardophe, 15.

by “the formation and revision of the ‘one people’ ideology.”<sup>7</sup> In his interpretation of this ideology, King identifies a historical conflict that has been an obstacle for assimilation, the relation between group distinctions and the establishment of nationhood. The ethnic groups that scattered throughout the United States, were establishing nation-hoods in accordance to their ethnicity, which became significantly detrimental to the overall process of assimilation. Complete assimilation became nearly impossible for ethnic groups that formed densely populated communities. As fear of the unknown increased, it became an American act of self-defense to contain all un-wanted secularity on American soil. Those being characterized as American would appear white, often Protestant, and fully un-ethnic. In order to contain ethnic influence and prevalence, ethnic variation had to be monitored, secluded and, when necessary, eliminated. Ideally, these ethnic individuals would live their lives blissfully ignorant, aspiring to one day be an American. But for many immigrants, there was a lesser amount of effort as a majority of these ethnic communities just couldn’t comprehend why they could not be ethnic *and* American.

To the average American citizen, any first, second or third generation ethnic individual that appeared to be inferiorly American, would be deemed the most un-American of a *citizen*. The condemnation of various ethnicities in America can be especially accredited to the federal government. As a result of both necessary fears and over-exaggeration, the committee of un-American activities was founded. As an outlet for centralizing American political thought and surveillance, the House of Representatives sought the power to indirectly target and fault ethnic groups for all cases of suspicious un-American activity. It wouldn’t be outrageous if the words—*just in case!*—were stamped across the top of each congressional hearing led by this committee.

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<sup>7</sup>Desmond King, *The Liberty of Strangers: Making the American Nation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005.



In the core of American politics throughout the 1930s and long after, there is an identifiably massive fear. Every single unfamiliarity presented to American society became stereotyped as inferior, filthy, unworthy, useless—“Immigrants on the street not speaking English, or dressed differently are impossible to miss”.<sup>8</sup> The most powerful of these stereotypes highlighted the verbal, textual, and ideological persuasiveness of the notoriously proto-typical post-World War II American belief. Xenophobia<sup>9</sup> transformed into a belief that all ethnic groups and their comprising individuals, posed an uncontrollable and permanent threat to the stability of American society. As a whole, and individually, ethnic variation increased through the twentieth-century, as xenophobia simultaneously clouded the minds of Americans. This is surely an exemplary factor in the legitimizing the characterizing traits most commonly associated with Italian-Americans as one of these targeted ethnic groups.

It became easier for Americans to decide what they thought it meant to be an American *citizen* once a portion of the twentieth-century American identity became foundationally dependent on understanding what Americans thought it meant to be American.<sup>10</sup> According to Christina A. Ziegler-McPherson, one must be “recognized by other citizens as belonging to the nation.”<sup>11</sup> It can certainly be said that many newly immigrated ethnic communities were viewed as foreign, and consequently un-American, therefore they were not viewed as citizens. On this premise alone, Ziegler-McPherson is providing evidence for the idea that ethnic groups were not

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<sup>8</sup> Bill Ong Hing, *To Be An American: Cultural Pluralism and the Rhetoric of Assimilation*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 1997, 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Xenophobia*, is being used as to compliment the argument. It is in no means being used to define American ethnic ideology. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term *Xenophobia*, was created specifically to define, “a deep antipathy to foreigners”. This term did not appear until later in the twentieth century.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that here, American citizenship is not being discussed in legal terms. Rather it is used to serve the purpose of identifying a less obvious American ideology that revolved around the social (and very loose) interpretation of the legal term.

<sup>11</sup> Christina A. Ziegler-McPherson, *Americanization in the States: Immigrant Social Welfare Policy, Citizenship, & National Identity in the United States, 1908-1929*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2009.

treated as fellow Americans. Even after legal citizenship was obtained, several ethnic groups were continually discriminated and framed for being the source of expansion for pro-foreign propaganda. This discrimination was established according to standardized appearances of ethnics in America. Surely, individual circumstances have revealed examples of this type of ethnic involvement with un-American propaganda, however this was in no way common enough to be considered a typical activity within immigrant communities.

A second factor for understanding this anti-ethnic and anti-immigrant consciousness, is the shift in American composition. At some point in American history, which reasonably would be the end of the nineteenth century, Americans corrected the phrase “we are a nation of immigrants” by adding on, “but the times have changed; they take away jobs, they are costly, the non-English speakers make life complicated, new immigrants don’t have *our* values.”<sup>12</sup> Here, the concept of being American, is transitioning from a physical citizenship, to a deeper, intrinsic concept of what it means to be an American. Now, being American is not something that can be given, it is taught through values, in English, alongside recently established American customs. There came a time when the immigrant was no longer beneficial to the generationally rooted American, and so the immigrant is no longer welcomed because there is little opportunity for ethnic customs and values to be integrated into the established American ones (which consist of a conglomeration of over one hundred years of various immigrant traditions). This belief that immigrants are incapable of adopting American values and traditions, can be highlighted in Kentucky Senator Garrett Davis’ words, aimed to speak out against immigration and to propose new naturalization requirements:

[M]ost of those European immigrants, having been born and having lived in the ignorance and degradation of despotisms, without mental or moral culture, with but

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<sup>12</sup> Bill Ong Hing, *To Be An American: Cultural Pluralism and the Rhetoric of Assimilation*, 13.

vague consciousness of human rights, and no knowledge whatever of the principles of popular constitutional government, their interference in the political administration of our affairs, even when honestly intended, would be about as successful as that of the Indian in the arts and business of civilized private life... The system inevitably and in the end will fatally depreciate, degrade, and demoralize the power which governs and rules our destinies.<sup>13</sup>

A bias against ethnic groups and their individual members ultimately began to develop in America, and it truly abided by a standardized understanding of what it meant to be American morally and culturally. Immigrants were viewed and depicted as unintelligent, “those who came hither are generally the most stupid of their nation,”<sup>14</sup> and so they were simply regarded as a burden, and a threat to newly found American stability. Immigrants of all kinds, those who appeared communist, fascist, too German, too Catholic, they all melted into one image. Individuality was removed, and ethnic groups were all-together, something different, and it was too powerful and unfamiliar to displace the fears of anxious *Americans*. It is safe to say that, because mid-twentieth century Italian-Americans were too Italian to be accepted as Americans, they were subsequently categorized as being a typical un-American and condemned to be seen and treated as an immigrant forever.

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<sup>13</sup> Bill Ong Hing, *To Be An American: Cultural Pluralism and the Rhetoric of Assimilation*, 14; Edith Abbott, Historical Aspects of the Immigration Problem 125 (1969), Garrett Davis, speech delivered to the Convention to Revise the Constitution of Kentucky, December 15, 1849.

<sup>14</sup> Bill Ong Hing, *To Be An American: Cultural Pluralism and the Rhetoric of Assimilation*, 14; Beverly J. Armento, et al., *America Will Be* (1991).

### III. Dissolution of Italian-ness

Pizza should be celebrated in the Italian-American community as an achievement, however it should be done without glorifying the terrible social and political circumstances that Italian-Americans were confined to in large-scale American city slums. In Fred Gardophe's eighth chapter, *We Weren't Always White*, he makes the very significant argument that Italians were in fact considered inferior to whites. Mary Bucci Bush is referenced in this chapter as she discussed Italian Americans and their place on Southern American plantations during the 1900's.<sup>15</sup> Studying the history of pizza in America sheds light on a deeper understanding of the complex and ambiguous American ethnic ideology in relation to Italian immigration and how it varied over the course of the twentieth century. It is quite difficult to discuss the achievement of the pizza without emphasizing the ethnic factories responsible for its success. Due to the lack of wealth among Italian immigrants, they began settling in the slums of big cities, creating the Little Italy communities. In these communities, tradition was intense, allowing an Italian alternative to American culture to thrive. As the twentieth century progressed, Italian-American communities became larger, and their culture was slowly beginning to familiarize itself with American society, mostly through media, where Italian stereotypes were maintained and virtually uncontested. The most distinguishable one of these stereotypes appeared in the headlines of the *New York Times* year after year, decade after decade: Italians and their pizza. During the mid-twentieth century, a time of increasing fear of ethnic culture, Americans began ironically embracing the pizza for its ethnic and exotic ties.

Historians such as Fred L. Gardophe focus their social histories of Italian-Americans on the dissolution of Italian-ness as these peoples became more American. However, most media

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<sup>15</sup> Gardophe, 130-133.

coverage of pizza during its rise to fame, specifically the 1950's, seemed to cherish the *authentically Italian* roots of the pizza. Salvatore J. LaGumina's text discusses the political and cultural motivations that led to Gardophe's stated dissolution of Italian-ness. The significance of these arguments should by no means be disregarded, however they both seem to shed light only on the obstacles that have ultimately led to a threatened extinction of Italian-American society. Neither LaGumina nor Gardophe make an effort to discuss what factors of Italian-American society became too powerful to silence, and so they were adopted into American culture completely.

One of the most popular food dishes among Italian-American communities became American in spite of the maintained image of Italian-Americans as unfamiliar, foreign, and un-American. This moment can be seen as quite transitional in the progress of Italian-American culture. The hope of one day being American was revived among communities of Italian-American immigrants as they discovered an escape from their ethnic lives into American society. Pizza, can surely be identified as a useful source of assimilation for mid-twentieth century Italian-American immigrants. Italian-American culture thrived within the safe zone of close-knit Italian-American communities, and it became increasingly important for these Italian immigrants to disguise themselves and their foreignness when wandering outside of their neighborhoods; that is, wandering through streets that lacked the mouthwatering aroma of fresh tomato sauce, where being American was vital. In Fred L. Gardophe's book, *Leaving Little Italy*, he discusses what it means to be a "good immigrant", and how even those who mastered this art, still failed to un-Italianize themselves.

I believed that my maternal grandfather, an immigrant from southern Italy, was not American. I was convinced that the good immigrants were those who struggled to be American with the knowledge that the past contained much of what was not

considered to be American. At least, I thought, the good immigrant realized the need to disguise or better yet erase all traces of un-Americanness: stop speaking one's native language, rid one's self of accented American English, start dressing in the latest American fashions, and spurn Italian restaurants and eating Italian food in public. However, I would find that all these material things were easier to dispose than the spiritual. When it came to things such as the family, dignity, self-respect, my grandparents' *Italianità* could not be smothered. In terms of Italianate values they revealed *Italianità* in spite of conscious attempts to control or mask it.<sup>16</sup>

As a result of oppression, discrimination and stereotyping, Italian-Americans were often determined to rid themselves of all Italian-ness. The only way to be accepted as an American *citizen* was to appear more American than other ethnic individuals; relying on a strength in assimilation. The children and grandchildren of these immigrant families were struggling greatly with the issue of appearing American; being raised at home, according to *mezzogiorno*<sup>17</sup> tradition. Italian-American immigrants were cautiously making efforts to preserve the traditions of their ancestors. However, without the effort of future generations, the second and third generation Italian-Americans, this culture would inevitably disappear. Each effort made by the parents of Italian-American children to traditionalize them was counteracted by the American culture they were required to become a part. Due to this cultural struggle, the 1920s is seen as a decade of "rampant delinquency", as pressured Italian-American teens began rejecting both cultures of influence in their lives: Italian and American.<sup>18</sup> This situation sheds light on the extreme consequences of twentieth-century American ethnic ideology. Not only are first generation immigrants forced to endure extreme discrimination, but their future generations would likely face similar circumstances. Throughout the twentieth century, Italian-Americans

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<sup>16</sup> Fred L. Gardophe, *Leaving Little Italy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>17</sup> Referring to the Southern part of Italy.

<sup>18</sup> William Pencak, Selma Berrol, and Randall M. Miller, eds. *Immigration to New York*. Philadelphia: The Balch Institute Press, 1991.

were kept away from American society; they were robbed of their ethnic identities and were never fully accepted as American *citizens*.

A primary example of this can be seen in Maria Laurino's revelation, "If the cause of being called smelly were my Italian roots, then I would pretend not to be Italian."<sup>19</sup> Laurino, a third generation Italian-American, was confronted with her own un-American-ness before she was capable of realizing where she fit into American society. According to the government, Laurino was an American citizen, and yet to the American majority, she was never going to be more than an ethnic other, an immigrant.

The ultimate ethnic struggle is exemplified in Laurino's struggle to be American in a society where she was continually identified with her "ethnic self." As in Laurino's case, and undoubtedly in the case of many other ethnic individuals, ethnicity became more than just a way of distinguishing immigrant groups, it became a source for division of American society. There were Americans, and there were ethnics (un-Americans). Americans developed a solid sense of what it meant to be American around the start of the twentieth century, when they established a distinction between themselves, and ethnic others. Immigrants who remained too ethnic were not accepted as Americans, therefore not viewed as American *citizens*. The long-term consequence of this ideological establishment is the pressure placed upon ethnically diverse American citizens, condemned to the fate of their immigrant ancestors.

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<sup>19</sup> Maria Laurino, *Were you Always an Italian?* 23.

## IV. An Inexpensive Dish for an Impoverished People

Pizza may not have been the most consumed dish for Italian immigrants in the United States, however, it is evident that it was consumed and produced regularly, especially in northeastern industrial cities housing large populations of impoverished Italian immigrant communities. Prior to the post World War II, pizza gained its popularity first within Italian communities, where it was celebrated at street fairs, on street corners, and in the basements of many Italian-American families. It was not until around 1950 that American interest truly began to catch fire. So, the question being answered here, is why pizza became a part of the Italian-American identity.

Carol Helstosky discusses the significance of the by observing that, “pizza was not so simple a food; it was actually quite complicated in that it told us as much about the society that ate the pizza as it did about the pizza itself.”<sup>20</sup> The flexibility of the pizza is what seems to attract Helstosky the most, “As it moved into different societies, pizza came to mean different things to different people, taking on more significance than a simple snack perhaps out to have... for Italian emigrants, pizza became a way to connect back to one’s homeland as well as a way to earn a living. And for non-Italians, pizza was both an ethnic food and a blank canvas, open to all forms of culinary experimentation.”<sup>21</sup> Helstosky’s argument highlights the significance of pizza to both “Italians” and “non-Italians”, where she categorizes the consumers of pizza in America to either be Italian or *other*. This contrasts the previously discussed division of American society: Americans, and un-Americans.

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<sup>20</sup> Carol Helstosky, *Pizza: A Global History*. China: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2008, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Carol Helstosky, *Pizza: A Global History*, 9.



When Helstosky discusses the pizza in direct reference to Italian-American culture, she emphasizes the significance of food origin. When the pizza first gathered the attention of the American public, it was often advertised as being Italian, or *authentically Italian*. An advertisement submitted by the YWCA, Young Women's Christian Association, headquarters in New York City featured "Italian Masterpieces for meatless days," which was released on April 11, 1960, just in time for Good Friday.<sup>22</sup> By observing the idea of meatless meals during a time of Lent, it can be assumed that the advertisement appealed to a wider audience, not excluding the Italian-American population, which was often Catholic. Roman Catholicism is a sect of Western Christianity, and so most practicing Catholics will observe the Lenten holiday. In order to attract a wider audience, of all ethnicities, this advertisement relied on religious familiarization with the consumer with the producer. The advertisement reads, "Marinara Sauce: Authentically Italian as only Buitoni knows how. Made with imported Italian olive oil and Italian peeled plum tomatoes!"<sup>23</sup> The brand, Buitoni began in 1827 in Sansepolcro, Italy. At the time this advertisement was released, the company was surely established as a reliably authentic source of Italian canned goods, offering a familiar and secure Italian option to weary Americans.

It is important to identify the emphasis being placed on authenticity of production. This is an idea that still accompanies pizza to this day. In other similar cases, Italian-American culture became increasingly represented in television advertisements, Hollywood productions, and in national newspapers, familiarizing Americans with Italian-ness in order to dissociate negative ethnic prejudice from pizza. Helstosky discusses the many factors that may have been at work to

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<sup>22</sup> Display Ad 37, "Italian Masterpieces: *for meatless days*," *New York Times*: April 11, 1960; The YWCA claims to be a "pioneer in race relations, labor union representation, and the empowerment of women." In 1858, the YWCA was first established under the name, U.S. Ladies Christian Association, in New York City. Shortly after, the association opened a boarding house for females, a place for them to learn, teach, and find shelter after long days of factory work; Good Friday is the Friday before Easter Sunday, celebrated in Western Christianity as a part of Lent. The article features meatless Italian options as those who observe Good Friday, and all other Fridays of Lent, will abstain from eating meat.

<sup>23</sup> Display Ad 37, "Italian Masterpieces: *for meatless days*."

allow for the pizza to become relevant to Americans after World War II. According to Helstosky, much of pizza's popularity is attributed, by both pizza critics and historians, to soldiers returning home from Italy after the war.<sup>24</sup> After spending time in Italian trattorias, where they became familiar and enchanted by Neapolitan pizza, these soldiers eventually began “nostalgically patronize[ing] Italian-American restaurants,” the same restaurants that were “dark and cramped neighborhood affairs...open late... [with] few non-Italian customers.”<sup>25</sup>

The close relationship between Italians and pizza is also discussed in Helstosky's book. In the chapter titled, “Pizza Americana”, she discusses the pizza in America prior to the pique of American interest.

It is no coincidence that pizza surfaced in areas where there were large concentrations of southern Italian immigrants, many of whom flocked to north-eastern cities where jobs in factories were available for unskilled workers. An inexpensive food, pizza was prepared at home by immigrants, or it was made in bakeries and sold whole or in portions, depending on how much customers—usually factory workers or Italian-American housewives on meatless Fridays—could afford...North-eastern cities like New York, Boston, New Haven, and Trenton, New Jersey attracted southern Italian immigrants, who provided both the consumer and entrepreneurial base for pizzerias. Prior to World War II, however, the food remained within ethnic enclaves in the north-eastern states and few Americans outside this area had even heard of pizza.<sup>26</sup>

Prior to the 1950s, Italians were not only the only producers of pizza in America, but they also made up a majority of the consumer base as well. This sheds light on the close connection to pizza that southern Italian immigrants established throughout the twentieth century. From a dish utilized for its relatively cheap ingredients, to a tool of assimilation for Italian immigrants, the

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<sup>24</sup> Helstosky, *Pizza*, 56.

<sup>25</sup> Helstosky, *Pizza*, 57.

<sup>26</sup> Helstosky, *Pizza*, 54-56.

pizza played a major role in the lives of Italian-Americans, especially those in the north-eastern region of the United States, throughout the twentieth century.

Due to several factors: inexpensiveness, familiarity, and large immigrant communities—the pizza became a huge part of north-eastern Italian-American culture. It was not long until Americans in this region became attracted to the pizza, and the Italian culture to which it was closely identified. The concept of the pizza in America truly began as an ethnically rooted dish, one cherished in Italian immigrant communities before it was ever heard of in the sphere of American mainstream food culture.

## V. American Obsession with the Exotic

It may seem miraculous that Americans developed such a contagious fascination with an Italian-American dish, but the pizza is only one piece of Italian culture that has piqued the interest of American society. Dating back to the nineteenth century, Americans had an intellectual obsession with Italy. In Joseph P. Cosco's, *Imagining Italians*, he discusses the unstable relationship between Italy and America, and his insights prove to be quite helpful in understanding how it is possible for Americans to be passionately tied to a culture and simultaneously repulsed by it. "Americans embraced and appropriated different aspects of Italian culture and customs both abroad and at home... However, there [were] also reactions against this passion for things Italian."<sup>27</sup> The ripples of this internal conflict are most definitely exemplified in the adoption of pizza into American culture as an American dish. Although this paper is focused solely on the period encompassing the decade of the 1950s, it is necessary to discuss the history of American interest in exoticism and ethnicity which goes back much further in time.

The period following the civil war was the pivotal moment in American history, a moment when the American culture became identifiably American. The United States became an established country in 1776, but it was not until almost one hundred years later, by means of the industrial revolution, that America truly began to develop an identity. This created a sort of mirror for Americans, giving any citizen the ability to look around and understand that most of the people around them were identifiably American, so that being "American" actually took physical form. Taking this a step further, in the late 1800s, Americans were not only comfortable with their American identity, but they were also very protective of it. As the Industrial Revolution began to develop in American cities, such as New York City, Chicago, Buffalo,

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph P. Cosco, *Imagining Italians*, 6.

Detroit, etc., American citizens were not the only people flocking to these large American cities looking for economic opportunity. Immigration spiked rapidly, causing many Americans to fear foreignness on very extreme levels. Before 1861, about 14,000 Italian immigrants had arrived in the United States, however from the years 1880 to 1900, at the developmental height of the Industrial Revolution, the United States had received a total of 1,040, 479 Italian immigrants.<sup>28</sup>

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an acceptable use of the term *exotic* is “Outlandish, barbarous, strange, uncouth. Also, having the attraction of the strange of foreign, glamorous.”<sup>29</sup> Exotic food, language, people and culture, became increasingly attractive to the white man during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In Mark Goldman’s article, “The Pan American Exposition,” he notes that, “[John] Milburn was proudest of the education features of the Midway, especially the ‘transplanted native villages with real natives in them.’”<sup>30</sup> John Milburn was the chair of the board of directors which allowed him to establish prominence, especially as he developed close relationships with President William McKinley, and vice president Theodore Roosevelt. Due to Milburn’s position, his opinion was surely taken into account by many, and even respected. Therefore, Milburn’s fascination with the “native villages with real natives in them” should be viewed as a representation of American idea towards some ethnic peoples during the transition into the twentieth century. The 1901 Pan American Exposition, located in Buffalo, NY, was created to be a symbol of “progress”. According to Goldman, McKinley was quite fond of world fairs, as he believed them to be “the timekeepers of progress... They record the world’s advancement”. What really stood out to Goldman about the Buffalo Exposition, was the flash of color, the desire to push away from the *White City*—which served as the theme for the Chicago World Fair in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas L. Purvis, *A Dictionary of American History*: "Italian immigration", Blackwell Publishing: 1997.

<sup>29</sup> "exotic, adj. and n.". OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Goldman, “The Pan American Exposition: World’s Fair as Historical Metaphor,” PDF.

Through observation of the world fairs held in the United States, an idea can be developed regarding exoticism, and American interest in the so-called “transplanted native village,” with “real natives”. Although, these fairs do highlight a clear American interest in the exotic, it does not prove that Americans were any less xenophobic, or fearful of the strangers entering their country. For Americans, it was acceptable to be exotic, and foreign only under certain conditions, such as the World Fairs in Buffalo, and Chicago. The relationship between Americans, and immigrants however is far more complex. Foreign peoples entering the United States as immigrants, with the intention of living among Americans, became troublesome as they began flooding into American cities, threatening the balance of American life and opportunity.

An exemplary representation of this ambiguity is the story of the 1891 lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans. The basic ideas surrounding the lynching are mirrored in Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, highlighting extreme American racism and anti-Italian bigotry. According to Joseph P. Cosco, “In the South, the [Italian immigrant]’s ‘in-betweenness’ seemed a double threat. He might endanger not only the purity of the white race, but also its solidarity.”<sup>31</sup> So, as Twain portrays with the main characters of *Pudd’nhead Wilson*—the Italian twins,—“[they] mirror the Italian immigrants of the late nineteenth century who were twinned with Negroes in tangled Siamese bonds of slavery, savagery, and social contract through violence.” At the same time, the twins develop to become “polar opposites,” according to Cosco, emphasizing another mirro-like relationship. This second relationship embodies the American attraction to the Italian, and the American hatred for him, as one twin represents the earlier Italian immigrant, “the artists, artisans, and political refugees of the earlier Italian emigrations to America,” while, the other twin represents the “impractical” southern Italian. Cosco spends a great deal of time emphasizing

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<sup>31</sup> Joseph P. Cosco, *Imagining Italians*, 156

the established differences between the Northern and Southern Italian immigrant, even highlighting the difference in skin, eye, and hair color that seems to be a general occurrence.

A relevant example of American interest in Italian cultural habits arises in May of 1960, when the *New York Times* released a food focused article titled, “Café Espresso”. The first paragraph of the article truly speaks for itself, as it highlights the American understanding that Italian culture is very capable of assimilating quickly into American society:

Naples, which contributed the pizza to American cookery, is also the originator of café espresso. That strong, black brew, although it has not yet taken over the country to the extent that pizza has, is rapidly gaining popularity.<sup>32</sup>

The article not only acknowledges the overwhelming American interest in espresso, an Italian favorite, but also speaks very highly of the pizza and its “rapidly” growing popularity in America. As the article continues, June Owen states that, “Four or five years ago, a shopper had to hunt out a specialty store to find dark, roasted, finely ground coffee necessary for the espresso machine. Now almost every supermarket here displays several different brands of vacuum-packed dark Italian roast coffee.”<sup>33</sup> As this paper aims to understand the correlation between the large wave of Italian immigrants between 1945 and 1970, and the rising popularity of pizza as a dish of assimilation, Owen’s article highlights exactly how quickly Italian cultural goods were being regularly circulated within the sphere of mainstream American consumerism. This paper establishes that pizza became an American favorite in the earlier half of the 1950s, which seems to have set off a trend allowing Italian espresso to rise in popularity shortly after.

For further examples, one may look at an article from the *New York Times*, dated February 12, 1956. The article titled “Pizza a la Mode,” places a spotlight on the first pizzeria in

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<sup>32</sup> June Owen, “Café Espresso: Most Stores Now Sell Italian Coffee But Machine Determines Grind to Buy,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1960.

<sup>33</sup> Owen, “Café Espresso”.

America, Lombardi's Pizzeria founded in 1905 by Gennaro Lombardi<sup>34</sup>. The image above the article is of John Lombardi, the son of Gennaro, as he "knuckles pizza dough into the air," which is "part of the lore of pizza."<sup>35</sup> This article discusses Lombardi's occupation, *pizzaiuolo*, which translated into English as *pizza chef*, while emphasizing the "Italian lore" of the dish and the act of producing it. The article discusses the popularity of pizza, and also questions why pizza was the chosen ethnic dish to win the hearts of Americans, "why not, say, Mexican enchiladas?" Well, good question, the author of the article, Herbert Mitgang speculated that pizza was able to become to overwhelmingly popular among Americans because of "the growing number of Americans of Italian origin, aided by advertising and refrigeration." The actual root of American interest in pizza is surely more complicated than this, nonetheless Mitgang's speculation is useful to some extent. It is evident that Americans are not simply falling head over heels for a pie shaped crust with a few toppings— which varied depending on the region—but as Americans began accepting the dish, they also began transforming it into one of their own. Although, this is where a distinction must be made. John Lombardi is offering pizza, the Neapolitan way—no show or event out of it, no excess of ingredients, just the consistent and well-cooked pizza created by his father over fifty years prior.

When Mitgang was able to speak with Gennaro Lombardi, he begins talking about the famous people who were devoted to Lombardi's pizza. Before he was able to fix up his restaurant, to appear more appealing and distinguished, Lombardi would try to place a few table cloths over the tables when Enrico Caruso<sup>36</sup> called to tell Gennaro he would be coming by

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<sup>34</sup> Herbert Mitgang, "Pizza a la Mode: In many variations, Italy's famous pie now rivals the hot dog in popularity," *New York Times*, February 12, 1956; Lombardi's Pizzeria is further discussed in the section discussing regional variations of pizza in America.

<sup>35</sup> Mitgang, "Pizza a la Mode."

<sup>36</sup> Enrico Caruso, an Italian operatic tenor known across Europe and the Americas, was a loyal customer of Lombardi's Pizzeria.



with some friends. When Caruso arrived and saw the tablecloths he said, “Lombardi, what’s this on my table... Lombardi, when I come here I don’t come to eat tablecloths, I come to eat pizza.”<sup>37</sup> This is important, as it reflects a comment made by John Lombardi earlier in the article, that he and his father are serving “truthful pizza,” not the pizza show. “They say you can buy the pizza show in many places,” John states to Mitgang, “—the *pizzaiuolo* in the front window, dressed in a chef’s hat, tossing the dough into the air, spreading it thinner and thinner, putting body English on it, catching the dough shell on the knuckles—the the pizza itself isn’t so hot.”<sup>38</sup> The Lombardi’s have worked hard to produce truthful pizza, it is not for show, or to please the American, it is to make real, good, Neapolitan pizza. Mitgang’s article delivers a much larger message than one may initially think—sure, all of those who have read this article probably walked away thinking one thing, “I want a Lombardi’s pizza,” but there is much more behind the Lombardi family and their pizzeria. In creating the first pizzeria in America, they are responsible for what pizza meant to those in the neighboring regions, as Lombardi’s pizza was the model for many others. In being that model, Lombardi’s stayed true to their interests in creating an authentically Neapolitan pizza, where authenticity lied in the means of production, and the modesty of the *pizzaiuolo*.

As discussed with Twain’s Italian twins, American perception of the Italian immigrant was far from simple in construction. The complexity of this perception reveals that Americans were in fact able to both adore and admire the Italian for his cultural decadence, but that same Italian will also be oppressed if his skin is a bit darker and his language is unfamiliar. The Italians, like many other ethnic peoples entering the United States during the end of the nineteenth century, were feared because the immigrant became a potential danger to American

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<sup>37</sup> Mitgang, “Pizza a la Mode.”

<sup>38</sup> Mitgang, “Pizza a la Mode.”

continuity, and the power of the white American. Adding a bit of color and spice to the American pallet is just the beginning of a long road Italian immigrants faced in efforts to live unoppressed by Americans who simultaneously feared and cherished Italian culture. In the case of Gennaro Lombardi, and the pizzeria mostly operated by his son John during the 1950s, pizza was being cherished as an ethnic dish, one of authentic production. The American interest in the exotic, particularly Italian culture as exotic, is much deeper than just appearance. Once pizza becomes more widely-known to Americans, it becomes less about the show, and more about the dish. It must have been pretty difficult for Americans to love an authentic Neapolitan pizza, but fear or reject the culture that created it.

## VI. “Pizza Pie”: Regional Variations of Pizza throughout the United States

Today, pizza can be considered a staple of the American diet. According to an article featured in the February 2014 issue of *The Atlantic*, statistically, one in every eight American citizens is consuming pizza on any given day.<sup>39</sup> However, prior to 1950, not many Americans were jumping at the sight or smell of pizza, as many were unaware of its existence. Prior to the post World War II wave of Italian Immigration, pizza was generally created, consumed and cherished within the safety net of close-knit Italian-American immigrant communities. As a result of anti-Italian prejudice, many Americans were inspired to reject and fear Italian-American culture and food. After World War II, American perspectives on ethnicity and ethnic culture became more complicated. On the one hand, xenophobia continued to sweep the nation, and yet this ideology failed to rid Americans of their interest in the exotic. In spite of ideological uncertainty surrounding Italian immigrants and the new Italian-American culture that was being cultivated, pizza managed to secure a spot in American mainstream food culture. In time, pizza lost a great deal of its ties to Italian-American culture, as it transformed into one of the most popular American dishes. Cultural ties were not the only diminishing aspects of the dish, as its strictly Italian characteristics also began to dissipate with the introduction of new American variations of pizza. In this paper I explore the question of how an ethnic dish won the hearts of Americans, enough to be completely adopted into American tradition as an American dish.

A massive wave of Italian immigrants that flooded into the United States in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, which is almost directly correlated to the rapid rise to

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<sup>39</sup>Derek Thompson, “New Report: Americans Love Pizza,” *The Atlantic*, February 10, 2014.

popularity of pizza.<sup>40</sup> This wave allowed for the establishment of Italian-American culture and community within the United States. Among these immigrants was New York City resident Gennaro Lombardi, the man who owned the first licensed American Pizzeria. The business had opened in 1897, however Lombardi did not obtain licensing until 1905, when the City of New York allowed his business to operate as a pizzeria.<sup>41</sup> Lombardi's is much more significant though, in understanding the relationship between America and pizza, as it was home to the first documented American variation of an Italian dish—the New York Style Pizza. A pizza that is often thin crusted, quite oily, and served in large slices. A style of pizza that is widely known, loved, and mimicked 110 years later in pizzerias and pizza franchises across the United States.

Lombardi's Pizzeria is a primary example of how Italian-American culture influenced pizza variation in the United States. At first, this American influenced style of pizza attracted mostly Italian immigrants as customers, as New York City held one of the largest Little Italy neighborhoods in the country at the beginning of the twentieth century. Until the decades following World War II, American interest in pizza as a dish and an industry was quite minimal. In Barbara Hunt Lazerson's, "Is Pizza a Pie?," she discusses the lengthy time span between the introduction of pizza in the late nineteenth century, and the noticeable spike in American interest, "It was not until four decades [after Lombardi's Pizzeria opened its doors]... that 'American marketing wizards went to work and the juggling pizza maker in a chef's hat was born.'"<sup>42</sup> In this case especially, pizza was being sold not only as a food, but as an image of Italian-American stereotype. In order to appeal not only to the bland American taste buds and the judgmental American eye, Italian immigrants began to reshape the original Neapolitan pizza. American

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<sup>40</sup> Italy, A Country Study. *Area handbook series*. 1985, United States Government.

<sup>41</sup> Miller, Hanna. "AMERICAN PIE." *American Heritage* 57, no. 2 (April 2006): 30-36. *America: History & Life*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 2, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> Barbara Hunt Lazerson, "Is Pizza a Pie?" *American Speech*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Summer 1980), pp. 146-149

familiarization only proved to be minimally influential in convincing the American public to try new things. Americans would be relatively unenthused by pizzas made in America at the beginning of the twentieth century. The original Napolitano pizzas that were made and consumed in America by Italian-Americans were smothered with garlic and oregano. This quickly identified the dish as “foreign”, which instantly turned away many fearful natives.<sup>43</sup>

In 1905, the first year of business for Lombardi’s, the pizzeria was selling what Lombardi termed “pizza pies”, introducing the phenomena to America. After analyzing the phrase, this very concept of “pizza pie” proves to be quite helpful in answering many questions about the dish. As the concept of pizza was first introduced to Americans, “pizza pie” was used as an integration phrase. Pizza, the Italian word for “pie”, would appear far too exotic for an American during the nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> And so the phrase “pizza pie” was born, which became quite controversial.

Americans were given a dish with reference to a pie, but had no way understanding of how to compare it to their traditional eating habits. One might ask how a pizza could be compared to an apple pie, or how the two shared any character traits. For much of the 1950’s, cookbooks, such as *Better Homes and Gardens*, featured articles discussing “Italian pizza” recipes. The March 1961 issue was titled, *Favorite Recipes with an Italian Accent*. Let’s think about that phrase. As immigrants are flooding the city streets, speaking American English with and Italian accent, the dishes being presented in this issue are American, but with and a pinch of Italian. In this issue is an article titled, “Italian food that Americans love,” which was written by Myrna Johnston. Johnston chose to list easy pizza snack recipes that are supposedly Italian, but

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<sup>43</sup> Miller, Hanna. "AMERICAN PIE." *American Heritage* 57, no. 2 (April 2006): 30-36. *America: History & Life*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 2, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> Lazerson, “Is Pizza a Pie?”

placed them next to a large picture of what appear to be dessert pies. Due to the versatility of pizza, Johnston writes, “No wonder pizza is already as American as apple pie.”<sup>45</sup> In the 1968 edition of *Betty Crocker’s Pie and Pastry Cookbook*, there is yet another emphasis on comparing pizza, a food dish, to pies and pastries, which are mainly dessert dishes. The cookbook reads, “To Pizza People everywhere, with love—Italy’s delectable contribution to the world of pie and pastry.”<sup>46</sup> In American popular culinary culture, there was an effort to introduce Italian dishes that are familiar to Americans, while also spicing up American dishes with authentically Italian ingredients.

Integration of exotic and familiar became the go-to method for introducing pizza to the American population. The comparison of pizza to pies, offered a comfortable zone for Americans to expand their pallets without diving into an unknown sea of sauce, cheese and garlic. If immigrants, such as Gennaro Lombardi, sold pizza under the phrase “pizza pie,” there must have been a conscious effort to integrate Italian culture with American culture, establishing a dish that was no longer Italian, but Italian-American. This dish would eventually grow out of its elementary term, to be known just as “pizza,” once Americans became familiar with the dish and the culture that created it. However, pizza was perceived quite differently around the country as demographic, population density and ethnicity varied. In places such as New York City, pizza became popular after decades of Italian immigrants devoted their time to creating an Italian-American variation of the dish. Under these circumstances, however, pizza was being advertised and appreciated as an ethnic dish. This was not the case in places such as Chicago, Illinois and

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<sup>45</sup> Myrna Johnston, “Italian food Americans love!” *Better Homes and Gardens: Favorite Recipes with an Italian Accent*, Vol. 39. March 1961.

<sup>46</sup> Lazerson, “Is Pizza a Pie?”

Wichita, Kansas, where Americans became familiar with truly Americanized variations of the dish.

In the American Midwest, the Chicago-deep dish pizza established itself as one of the most beloved American variations of an ethnic. It can be traced back to 1943, only thirty years after Lombardi's pizzeria opened its doors in Manhattan, New York. Ike Sewell and Ric Riccardo created the second largest variation of pizza in America, the deep-dish. The Chicago deep dish is sold and celebrated through Sewell's franchise, Uno® Chicago Bar and Grill. The franchise was established by Sewell in 1943, not too long after Sewell and Riccardo paid a visit to Italy and fell in love with the dish.<sup>47</sup> It wasn't enough to bring the idea and the recipe back to Illinois, so they sought out to create their own pizza, thus creating the deep dish; a buttery crust enclosing three inches of cheese and tomato sauce. This dish was truly an Americanized version, as Italian-style pizzas were not known for their buttery crusts. However, there were other attempts to preserve the authenticity of the dish. Reva Rose, a partner in Manhattan's Goldberg Pizzeria, describes New York pizzas as she finally asserts that, "They just don't make pizza here like they do in Chicago." In her efforts to defend this, Miss Rose states that, "In Chicago, the pizzas have light flaky crusts, real *Italian* tomatoes and big chunks of sausage meat." Based on Miss Rose's descriptions, it can be said that pizza, according to a Chicagoan, depends on quality, but also authenticity. The Midwest, pizza was rarely viewed as an Italian dish, but an American dish using wholesome Italian ingredients. The Chicago deep dish is exemplary of what *Betty Crocker* might consider to be a favorite recipe with an Italian accent.

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<sup>47</sup> Miller, Hanna. "AMERICAN PIE." *American Heritage* 57, no. 2 (April 2006): 30-36. *America: History & Life*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 2, 2014).

As previously discussed, in 1943, pizza was still left out of mainstream culinary thought and discussion in the United States, however the Chicago deep-dish is one of the sparks that ignited the grand spike in popularity surrounding pizza in the following decade. This idea serves to oppose the typical New York Style of pizza which is equally dependent on the pizza maker as the pizza quality. A similar case can be identified in observation of Pizza Hut and how the company has advertised their product, pizza, over the last 57 years. In 1965, Pizza Hut released their first commercial. The commercial begins with a tall, lanky, white, American man who is on the phone with Pizza Hut, presumably. There is no dialogue in the commercial, which runs for about one minute and four seconds. After hanging up the phone, the man scurries outside of his suburban home into his Mustang JR, where he is being closely chased by his friends and neighbors through the suburban streets of Wichita. The man picks up two pizzas in what appear to be to-go bags, however, he is chased into his own home where his friends and neighbors steal every last slice of the pie that he throws onto his kitchen table. Shortly after this scene, the commercial replays and ends when the man first steps into his car, focusing in on his bumper which has a Pizza Hut bumper sticker. As the commercial comes to an end, the background music becomes a chant, "Putt Putt, to the Pizza Hut."

The most striking aspects of the commercial are the obvious efforts to create an all-American setting. The man is driving a miniature Ford Mustang, created by the Ford Motor Company, an all-American motor company of the Midwest. There is no sign of ethnicity, or Italian-American influence and the pizza is barely given any attention. For Pizza Hut, this commercial seems to focus more on providing an American experience where pizza is consumed by all: friends, family, and neighbors alike.



In the 1980 Pizza Hut Pan Pizza commercial, there is still a clear effort by the company, to create a brand attractive to an all-American crowd. The commercial emphasizes homemade taste, pure ingredients, and a hometown environment. More importantly, there is a continuing theme among main characters of these commercials. Racially, they are all white, ethnically, they are all American, and regionally, they are from Midwestern small towns, which often lacked ethnic variation. The 1983 Pizza Hut “Pizza to-go” commercial takes Pizza Huts strictly American interests a step further by introducing an interest in Christian tradition. In America, Kansas is a part of what many refer to as the “Bible Belt”, a general location where Christian churches hold a higher attendance average than other parts of the country. One of the most practiced Christian traditions in American is Christmas, which is why Pizza Hut allows Christmas to be the theme of their 1983 commercial.

Pizza Hut continued their efforts of maintaining an American throughout the decades of the 1980’s and 1990’s. Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, Pizza Hut successfully maintained this image, until American society began to make a mass media transformation. In 2007, Pizza Hut released their “P’zone” commercial, it was the first commercial to have racial diversity. Finally, in 2014, Pizza Hut released a commercial referencing Italian culture in relation to pizza for the first time. There is surely something to be said about Pizza Hut’s determination to create a pizzeria franchise that avoided any Italian association. The motives behind such efforts appear to be ambiguous, as it may have been to either appeal to a greater American audience, or to avoid association with ethnic opposition. In either case, the process of change among Pizza Hut commercials over the second half of the nineteenth century, sheds light on the progression of how American society viewed ethnicity, especially Italians.

As both Italians and Americans searched for ways of integrating pizza into American food tradition, there was a common theme among these efforts: integration of exotic with the familiar. Underlying pizza's rise to fame, were advertising "wizards," understanding that Americans needed a hand to hold before jumping into open waters. Although Lombardi's Pizza thrived for forty years prior to the 1950's spike, New York City was surely a region of intense anti-Italian sentiment and practice. Creating a comfort zone for Americans in this region was a bit more complicated than that of the Midwest. The Chicago deep-dish introduced their pizza in 1943, it was completely unattached to Italian-American culture, as Sewell and Riccardo were undeniable American. Pizza Hut faced little to no complications on the issue of ethnicity, which is why they steered clear of the topic for almost fifty years. For those in Wichita, Kansas, pizza was only American—from the ingredients to the consumer—the dish was introduced in this region as a strictly American dish, overpowering the exotic with the familiar.

## VII. Pizza as a Truly American Dish

Finally, after painting a vivid picture of Italian immigration, ethnicity and exoticism in America, and discussing how the pizza has transformed into an American favorite, it is surely time to focus on pizza and how Americans have made it their own. From the dirty, impoverished Italian ghettos within cities across America, the pizza has been completely adopted into American “cookery” and food culture. Although, the origins of the Neapolitan pizza will never be forgotten, the pizza that Americans fell in love with was no longer a dish strict to its ethnic roots. It was an ethnic dish transformed into hundreds of different variations, all of which are American.

In Carol Helstosky’s book, *Pizza*, she discusses this very concept in a chapter titled, “Pizza Americana”.<sup>48</sup> According to Helstosky, “Americans consume more pizza than any other population in the world...a widely cited estimate is more than a billion tons per year.” In efforts to explain why Americans are so willingly to adopt, and reshape ethnic dishes to fit their personal fancies, Helstosky states:

Perhaps Americans have reshaped immigrant food habits to create a distinctive American cuisine in the absence of an acceptable folk cuisine (Native American food didn’t seem to be all that attractive to arriving immigrants)...Already a highly malleable meal in nineteenth-century Italy, pizza went through several more transformations in the United States throughout the twentieth century: from ethnic specialty to an exciting snack to a wholesome family dinner to a gourmet meal. Americans not only embraced pizza, they squeezed and reshaped it and made it fit the rhythms and circumstances of their lives.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Carol Helstosky, *Pizza: A Global History*. China: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Helstosky, *Pizza*.

Essentially, from the time pizza was first being sold on American city streets at the end of the nineteenth century, it was already in the process of Americanization and assimilation. There is no definable American pizza variation, although some are more widely accepted than others. Each region has reworked the pizza, taking out some ingredients, adding others, but the end result is still American. Once pizza was put into the hands of the American public, any trace of the original Neapolitan pizza was buried beneath layers of processed cheese in some areas, and barbecue sauce in others.<sup>50</sup> Due to the versatility of the pizza, however, the dish has managed to hold on tightly to its identity as an ethnic Italian dish. In Helstosky's words, "It would seem that the globalization of pizza has led to a greater localization of the food as consumers make pizza their own concoction, yet somehow pizza still retains its Italian identity..."<sup>51</sup>

It has now been determined that pizza, although rooted in Naples, Italy, has undergone massive transformations in the United States, allowing many variations of the dish to now be rooted in specific regions of the United States. The dish, following the decade of the 1950s, became an American favorite, as highlighted in the March 1961 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens*, which shows no surprise that, "pizza is already as American as apple pie!"<sup>52</sup> And even earlier in 1956, when the *New York Times* writer Herbert Mitgang emphasized the overwhelming popularity of the pizza. By 1956, Mitgang writes that "A Neapolitan *pizzaiuolo* might be startled by pizza in the United States." It seems that Mitgang is making a distinction as well, between American pizza tradition and Italian-American pizza tradition.

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<sup>50</sup> Helstosky, *Pizza*, 49. In discussion of different regional variations, the author mentions barbecued chicken pizza as

California phenomena.

<sup>51</sup> Helstosky, *Pizza*, 15-16.

<sup>52</sup> Johnston, "Italian food Americans love!"

Still in the process of achieving the popularity it now has today, Americans were quickly jumping aboard the pizza making train. Pizza's versatility allowed for this opportunity, as pizza kings could throw some pretty obscure things together and call it pizza—"At a "pizza bar" in a large Manhattan department store—where thousands are absorbed weekly by hungry shoppers—three kinds are for sale: plain pizza (a pie); pizzaret (a muffin). And a best-seller called the pizza-bagel, created, after some protest, by a turncoat *pizzaiuolo* in Florida."<sup>53</sup> Mitgang is establishing that there are in fact Italian-Americans making real Neapolitan pizza, however one need not be Italian to be a *pizzaiuolo*, you might need to be Italian to understand what it means, though. Americans quickly began branching out, and exploring their options with the basic pizza build, and some spiraling out of control. "In the realm of pizza, nobody is less than a king. There are some pretenders. One king on Long Island makes a pizza that includes malt. Another pizza kind makes his with butter and sour cream—and claims that Americans of Italian origin love it. A pizzeria in the Midwest begins sanely by placing a layer of mozzarella cheese on the dough but then tops it with powdered sugar, cinnamon and sliced bananas."<sup>54</sup> Clearly, some of the pizza kings are stretching their boundaries a bit, and even try to defend their pie by declaring loyalty from the pallets of Italian-American.

Whether or not Americans of Italian origin are interested in any of these American variations is not important, the significance of this relationship is that within a fifteen year span, from about 1945 to 1960, pizzerias began popping up across America, some maintaining a Neapolitan personality, others diverting completely into something new, something American. It is evident that America is home to an untraceable number of variations of pizza as a dish, all of which are both Italian in some way, and American. The idea of pizza in America, however, will

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<sup>53</sup> Mitgang, "Pizza a la Mode."

<sup>54</sup> Mitgang, "Pizza a la Mode."

always be identified with the deeply rooted Italian identity which accompanied Italian immigrants throughout the twentieth century.

## VIII. Conclusion

As the paper began with a question, it shall also end with one: How should pizza be discussed in relation to American food history? The most substantial point being determined in this paper, is that American food culture is not to be viewed as homogeneous. It is a conglomeration of ethnic dishes that became so enticing and familiar to the American that they were able to completely assimilate and become *American*. Pizza, is being used to explain an extremely complex issue that extends far beyond pizza in 1950s America. With evidence that pizza was introduced by immigrants as an ethnic dish, it may now be said that American food culture contains many ethnic dishes, with variation of course, that were able to become American with time—just as the ethnic peoples who have created these dishes. Pizza should be considered a tool for Italian immigrants. As their ethnic dish became more familiar to Americans, so did the exotic culture which became celebrated and cherished in relation to the dish. From cookbooks, to newspaper articles, a tsunami of crust, sauce, cheese and garlic took the country by storm, forcing Americans to familiarize themselves with Italian-American culture. That being said, this paper has successfully proven that although the dish is ethnically bound to Italian-American culture, it has transformed in the hands of Americans, and pizza now, in its many forms, is truly an *American dish*.

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