Introduction

*In order to have news the American only has to tell what he sees around himself.*

—CARLO CATTANE, 1855¹

**A White Canvas**

Commenting on an allegorical drawing by Jan van der Straet depicting Amerigo Vespucci’s arrival in the New World (1587), the philosopher Michel de Certeau explained how Europeans treated America as “a white (savage) canvas on which to inscribe Western desire.”² Europeans wrote the New World and saw in it what they wanted to see in order to make sense of their own changing world.

For several centuries after the discovery of the Americas philosophers and artists continued to be inspired by the societal myths associated with the New World’s natural otherness.³ Many thinkers of the Enlightenment used the little they knew about America in ways similar to those suggested by de Certeau: the Marquis de Condorcet, Hector Saint Jean de Crèvecoeur, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, or the Baron La Hontan. Robert Darnton called this phenomenon “Americanized Rousseauism,” where America became the stage for societal experiments inspired by the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as a land far from corrupting civilization, where equal people in woollen dress invent brilliant laws.⁴

In addition to animating philosophical treatises and academic works on human geography, the societal myths associated with the New World were also discussed in periodicals and encyclopedias, which were more widely accessible. They often featured in poems, opera libretti, and choreographies (*libretti da ballo*), where they reached nonscholarly audiences. While many of these sources reflect sympathetic curiosity toward the New World, they also pay

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu
witness to a sharp distinction between civilization and the absence thereof. In the case of the Italian sources explored in this book, they demonstrate that the New World did not necessarily appeal to the self-conscious bearers of the Mediterranean’s millenary civilizations.5

In 1784 King Gustav III of Sweden visited Italy, an episode to which I will briefly return in chapter 4. On the occasion of this official state visit, the Venetian Republic honored the Swedish monarch with the organization of an international regatta. A boat representing “gli’americaní” featured “savages” with feathers and skirts, a mixture of Incas and Aztecs.6 The Venetians’ picturesque representation of the New World hardly differed from the far more famous one by another Venetian, the painter Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. Working with two of his sons and a small colony of Italian artisans, in the early 1750s Tiepolo had produced the world’s largest continuous ceiling fresco for the Residence of the Prince-Elector of Würzburg, one of the greatest examples of eighteenth-century art. Representing the world in four continents, the painting’s architectural frame is such that it can never be seen as a whole, in the same way as the globe can never be seen as a whole.7 Any visitor ascending the palace’s monumental staircase is first confronted with Tiepolo’s depiction of America, the only continent visible already from the foot of the stairs.

Portrayed within a picturesque tropical setting, the continent’s human species looks as exotic as the wild animals at their side.8 Tiepolo’s America is
characterized by the absence of the most basic markers of civilization. There are no buildings, only basic signs of industry or the art of writing. The severed human heads in the foreground of Tiepolo’s fresco pay witness to the continent’s alleged habit of living on human flesh, only rendered more gruesome by the scene to the right, which shows four men roasting a large piece of meat on a spit. This idea can be traced back to the early sixteenth-century prints illustrating editions of Amerigo Vespucci’s letters, which were unashamed in depicting naked savages chopping up human limbs and urinating in public.9

Tiepolo’s emphasis on the New World’s savage otherness was not the idea of an artist removed from the academic debates of his day. Writing in 1757, the Neapolitan economist and philosopher Antonio Genovesi was convinced that Native Americans were unable to “count to three,” despite the fact that by that time Native tribes had been trading with European settlers for several centuries.10 The widely read Relationi Universalì by the Piedmontese geographer Giovanni Botero, first published in Rome in the 1590s and still used as a source by Italian writers in the late eighteenth century, summed up the fundamental differences between the humans of both hemispheres: “Not verie well favoured, but of savage and brutish behaviours, excellent footmen and swimmers, cleanly in their bodies, naked, libidinous, and men eaters. Some worship the divell, some Idols, some the Sunne, and some the Stars.”11

These widely read comments notwithstanding, by choosing to accentuate the “man eaters,” Tiepolo’s America goes beyond what most authors during the mid-eighteenth century were writing about the New World: a painting can express thoughts most commentators at the time would hesitate to put into words.

Tiepolo composed the painting so that the American continent never receives much natural light—less than any of the other continents depicted; and a huge black cloud hangs over the scene. Art historians have compared Tiepolo’s fresco to a stage set, which plays on popular representations of the

---

New World in contemporary theater. Contrasting with de Certeau’s reference to America as almost completely invented by European men of letters, Tiepolo evokes empirical authenticity. A European dressed in a long coat and with Cracow shoes, fashionable in the fifteenth century, is creeping toward the cannibals, hiding behind his canvas to observe the scene, as if intending to capture what he sees in a painting. Empirical observation became an important new feature of eighteenth-century representations of the New World.

The images of America discussed in the preceding paragraphs demonstrate the extent to which Europeans, shortly before the American Revolution, still thought of the New World in terms of the absence of civilization. Deciding to stage these strong images in the palace of a prince-bishop, in Italy’s magnificent theaters, or in front of the panorama of the Grand Canal in Venice, the contrast between civilization and its absence could not be more striking.
The practice of representing Native Americans as savages (often equipped with considerable erotic appeal) and placed in a wild, empty environment, survived even into the early nineteenth century, when steamships and railways started to connect most states of the northern Republic. They still influenced a thinker like Carlo Cattaneo, protagonist of Milan’s 1848 revolution and one of Italy’s foremost contemporary experts on the US constitution. In an erotic poem of the early 1830s, he compares the body of a female Native American to the classical image of Venus rising from the sea:

**Americana**

Venia leggiera come piuma; il braccio  
Ritonda e il petto e il fianco, e dolcemente  
Sottile al mobil collo e alla cintura.  
Nera il crin, nera gli occhi. E come sorge  
Nella sale de’ re di fulvo bronzo  
Nuda Venere antica; o come appare  
Allo sposo che immoto alla finestra  
Miro’ la smorta luna e sazio alfine  
Si volse indietro, in la secreta stanza  
Al greve lume d’una fioca lampa  
La vaga sposa che dal casto letto  
Nuda il petto s’eleva e sulla culla  
Del sorridente bambolo s’incurva  
Tutta suffusa di rosso chiarore:  
Tale un color su quelle lisce forme  
Il cielo americano indotto avea.14

Cattaneo’s poem refers to a style of poetic allegories of America common in the late eighteenth century.15 Still playing with ideas evoking Tiepolo’s fresco, in the early 1840s Cattaneo described the “unexplored lands, which bear only the first indicators of civic life among scattered tribes, who live in perpetual cruelty, possibly still feeding themselves on human flesh. . . . What an immense void to fill, those lands!”16 America was largely empty, populated by cannibals, and poor. Similar images still appear in Italian debates about slavery and the American Civil War, discussed in the book’s final chapter. A history of political thought investigating the Risorgimento’s relationship to the United States has to take account of this wider cultural context of references and associations.

This initial discussion of Italian images of America sets the scene for a long introduction. Owing to the specific thematic structure of the following five chapters, the introduction will present the main source materials used throughout the book. These range from early Italian histories of the American Republic to philosophical and political writings, from parliamentary documents to memoirs and correspondence, including literature and
representations of America on stage. Roughly organized along chronological lines, the following chapters cover the period between the end of the Seven Years’ War in the early 1760s and the American Civil War a century later, which coincided with the Unification of Italy under the crown of Savoy.

Chapter 1, on early Italian histories of the American War of Independence, compares the context in which these works were created to the changing responses they generated during the later course of the Risorgimento. The works of Botta, Londonio, and Compagnoni offer examples of three different historiographical approaches to the early history of the United States. With a focus on concepts such as constitutional government, representation, and federalism, chapter 2 analyzes references to the United States in the Risorgimento’s political language. The works of Giuseppe Mazzini, as well as those of a wide range of other prominent political thinkers including Cesare Balbo, Vincenzo Gioberti, Gian Domenico Romagnosi, and Antonio Rosmini, used the United States as a matrix to discuss Italy’s present and future political institutions. Based on case studies of Lombardy, Tuscany, and Sicily, chapter 3 examines the ways in which protagonists of the Italian Revolutions of 1848 engaged with American political institutions. Because historical and constitutional experiences varied greatly across the peninsula in 1848, they discussed the United States with very different emphasis, illustrating how references to the United States could serve very different ideological purposes. Moreover, chapter 3 demonstrates how wrong it would be to assume that European revolutionaries necessarily had to look across the Atlantic to conduct their constitutional debates. The short-lived republic in Florence is point in case. Despite Tuscany’s long history of engagement with the United States, we find far fewer references to American political institutions than for instance in Sicily, where the revolutionaries adopted a monarchical constitution.

The book’s final two chapters move the focus of analysis into a different direction, looking at resonances of engagement with American political institutions in the cultural imagination of Italians around the time of their nation’s unification. This analysis will start from an examination of contemporary debates around two hugely influential stage works. Chapter 4 analyzes the creation of Giuseppe Verdi’s American opera *Un ballo in maschera*, first performed around the time of Italy’s Second War of Independence, in 1859. After a number of works dating back to the eighteenth century, Verdi’s new work was the first modern Italian opera set across the Atlantic. The history of the work’s creation and the subsequent debate around *Un ballo in maschera* demonstrate that the New World still served to negotiate perceptions of otherness. Closely related to chapter 4, the book’s fifth and final chapter examines the Italian reception of Giuseppe Rota’s ballet *Bianchi e Neri*, based on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s celebrated novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Among the most frequently performed ballets in nineteenth-century Italy—and often staged in connection with Verdi’s *Un ballo*—the work inspired comments that reveal
the passion with which Italians engaged with issues such as race and slavery across the Atlantic. The debate on the ballet had an important impact on Italian responses to the unfolding American Civil War, which coincided with Italy's own civil war in the South.

The book's main argument holds that Italian ideas of the United States during the period of the Risorgimento cannot be reduced to blind admiration for America's political experiments. Contrary to widely held views among American observers of the Risorgimento, which still inform a good deal of transatlantic historiography today, Italians largely abstained from treating recent American history as a blueprint for their own struggle for independence. Instead, Italians engaged with what they knew about the early Republic in relation to their own constitutional history, as well as to a whole range of different European experiences. During that process, different ideological factions of Italy's national movement, as well as its opponents, used references to the United States to achieve a variety of political objectives. Emphasizing the transnational flow of ideas, my book questions concepts of center and periphery in global history, while also connecting cultural and intellectual history in novel ways, thus demonstrating how abstract political ideas were reflected in Italians' wider cultural imagination.17

Where, When, and What Was America?

In 1814 two of Italy's most influential publicists, the Italianized Genevan historian Jean-Charles Léonard de Sismondi and the publisher Giovan Pietro Vieusseux, also of Genevan origin, lamented “un pays où l'on ne lit pas,” a country where people don't read.18 Likewise Ugo Foscolo, writing in 1824, complained that “compared to other European peoples, the Italians do not take the same pleasure from reading.”19 While complaints such as these might explain Italians' often rather unrealistic views of the United States, they cannot be taken as statements of facts. It is more likely that they express a deeply felt need for more public debate, debate to take account of the epochal changes associated with the American and French Revolutions. Although the Napoleonic regime and the Restoration period imposed limitations on the availability of certain books, geographical and philosophical works (as well as periodicals with reviews of such works) circulated widely among the educated elites and frequently crossed the peninsula's internal borders. That Italians knew relatively little about the North American Republic had more to do with the fact that—compared to Britain, France, and Spain—the transatlantic world mattered far less to Italians, whose economic and intellectual connections were tied to the Habsburg monarchy and the German states, the Adriatic, France, and to some extent England.

While Italian navigators and explorers played a crucial part in the discovery of the New World, they left the systematic colonization of the continent
to the powerful monarchies of Spain, France, and England. The governments of the Italian states frequently intervened to hinder their subjects from emigrating to America. Only a small number of Italians achieved significant roles in transatlantic trade or in missionary activity during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The formation of a Catholic Church in the British colonies remained mainly the work of Irish immigrants. “In the vast territories of that New World, discovered by an Italian, among all the nations of Europe only the Italians have no settlements, and at no point did a sizable number of Italians decide to move there,” the Italian translator of the History of the European Settlements in America complained in 1762, a book by Edmund and William Burke. Even basic geographical information continued to be rather sketchy. Were one to believe Niccolò Piccini’s immensely popular opera I napoletani in America (1768), the libretto’s action took place “between Florida and Virginia, where the immense deserts of Canada are located.” Judging from a comparison of geographical studies and maps circulating in Italy during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Piero del Negro comes to the conclusion that America was the continent about which Italians knew the least, and certainly less than about Asia and Africa. In many geographical surveys there is no mention at all of the English colonies, or they are listed as part of French Canada. According to Giorgio Spini, an important reason for the lack of knowledge about North America was the “Iron Curtain” that the Counterreformation had erected between Catholic Italy and the Protestant world, along with the decline of the peninsula’s role in global trade. As a consequence, Italians were more likely to read works about Latin America. In the case of the seafaring Italians from the Venetian Republic, their interest in Latin America was often motivated by polemical confrontation between their republican pride and the Spanish monarchy.

Patterns of migration also explain Italians’ limited knowledge about North America. Instead of debating migration from the perspective of American domestic politics, Donna Gabaccia has argued for an emphasis on “transnational linkages” between America and different parts of the world, created “from below” by immigrants. Within such a perspective, chronology is key to a better understanding of connections. Italians increasingly had “foreign relations” (to employ Gabaccia’s use of the term), but before the end of the nineteenth century relatively few of them resided in the United States. Even at the time of Unification, Italians were still more likely to emigrate to other European countries or to Latin America than to chose the United States. New Jersey was among the states of the Union Italians knew best, but according to the census of 1860 it counted only 106 residents born in Italy (among a rapidly growing population of over 672,000). Between 1820 and 1860 not more than 13,792 people had left the Italian peninsula for the United States, of whom many returned after relatively short spells in the New World. During the following decade (1861–70) 99,272 Italians migrated within Europe, compared to

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu
21,768 choosing a non-European country, still predominantly Latin America. The huge wave of Italian emigration to the United States started only during the first decade of the twentieth century, when numbers reached 232,945. Meanwhile, very few Americans traveled to Italy as part of a Grand Tour or decided to settle there on a permanent basis.

Despite this relative lack of direct contact, what fascinated Italians about the early American Republic was the idea of the country as a metaphor for the rapid transformation of the modern age. The motto by Cattaneo, quoted at the start of this introduction, pays witness to this idea: in America everything was new; and the new was the closest one could get to the future. Writing in Vieusseux’s influential Antologia, Michele Leoni claimed in 1822 that Americans operated with a different mode of time, where social relations “every day take a different outlook.” Carlo Giuseppe Londonio, discussed in more detail in chapter 1, argued that the speed with which the former colonies reached prosperity “is enough to turn their history into an interesting topic for the philosopher.” Meanwhile, he also mentions Americans’ widespread “timore delle future,” the fear of futures (in the plural), suggesting an undetermined openness of future time. According to Londonio, when Americans broke with their mother country, they decided to step out of their own present and left their history behind, but their future remained unknown, a frequent source of anxiety. While as a matter of fact relatively few immigrants left their histories behind completely, Londonio’s understanding of a semantic shift in time is reflective of Italians’ perceptions of transcontinental experiences.

Commenting on the perceived change in the semantic of historical time across the Atlantic helped Italians to negotiate their own experience of change after the French Revolution. In doing so, they took reassurance from the fact that they perceived their own future as less open. Most Italians saw their nation as the descendant of an ancient civilization—a term discussed in more detail in chapters 2 and 4. They were proud of their nation’s past, whatever had gone wrong with it as a result of adverse circumstances. As a consequence, they had little reason to blindly endorse the uncertain future of a foreign country across the ocean. Italians were fully aware of modernity’s accelerated pace of time, reflected in the political turmoil associated with the French Revolution and their own nation’s Risorgimento; but they negotiated their present and future in relation to a proud past as well as foreign experiences.

**European Exchanges**

An important step toward greater appreciation of the New World was the bestseller of 1770 Histoire philosophique et politique des deux Indes by the Abbé Guillaume Thomas de Raynal. Coauthored by Diderot and immediately placed on the register, the book circulated widely in various French and
Italian editions; extracts and reviews appeared in numerous periodicals. As the following chapters will show, it is one of the books most frequently quoted in Italian debates on America, though mostly in terms of general references, without attempts at a more detailed discussion of Raynal’s theses. Commenting on Raynal’s depiction of European atrocities and the “barbarism of the ‘civilized,’” Jonathan Israel described the work as “the Radical Enlightenment’s—indeed the whole Enlightenment’s—most devastating single blow to the existing order.”34 While making commendable exceptions for Pennsylvania, Raynal presented the North American colonies—puritanical, hierarchical, with an economy largely based on slavery—in a remarkably critical light.

A revised extract of Raynal’s book appeared in 1781 as The Revolution of America.35 Its political potential was world shattering: “Forget not that . . . the power of those who govern is in reality but the power of those who suffer
government,” Raynal claimed in the introduction.³⁶ Like its prequel, The Revolution of America immediately generated much sympathy for the rebels, while also urging them to establish a more equal and humane society: “fear the affluence of gold, which brings with luxury the corruption of manners, the contempt of laws. Fear a too unequal distribution of riches, which exhibits a small number of citizens in opulence, and a great multitude of citizens in extreme poverty; whence springs the insolence of the former, and the debasement of the latter. Secure yourselves against the spirit of conquest. The tranquillity of an Empire diminishes in proportion to its extension. Have arms for your defence; have none for offence.”³⁷ Raynal’s warnings about the Americans’ materialism and their expansionist ambition was to become a major theme for Italian commentators on the United States, most prominently among them Mazzini.

Many of the philosophes Italians read during the second half of the eighteenth century had met Americans in Paris, but few of them ever set foot in the New World. Written ten years after the Declaration of Independence, Condorcet’s De l’influence de la révolution d’Amérique sur l’Europe has often been read as praise for a model of society that embodied the Enlightenment principles of liberty and progress, allowing natural man to achieve material prosperity alongside political freedom and equality. These claims notwithstanding, De l’influence remains surprisingly abstract; and Robert Darnton has characterized it as a “fantasy,” bearing little relation to the new nation across the Atlantic.³⁸ While Condorcet had met several revolutionaries in person, including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine, he never traveled much beyond Paris nor did he visit America. He was made an honorary citizen of New Haven, Connecticut, but John Adams considered him “ignorant, totally ignorant of all Writings on the Science of Government, with very little knowledge of the Human Heart and still less of the World.”³⁹

In his better-known work on human progress Condorcet’s main objective was to explain the temporal dynamic of the American Revolution, how it occurred in response to Britain’s denial of Americans’ natural rights. As for the Revolution’s “influence” on Europe, Condorcet largely reduced it to its impact on French trade.⁴⁰ Thus a note of caution seems necessary before employing Condorcet’s De l’influence for arguments on the American Revolution’s wider repercussions. Moreover, important aspects of American democracy contradicted Condorcet’s own political principles. He was profoundly hostile to any form of organized religion, and, like Lafayette, he was an outspoken opponent of slavery, prohibited at the time only in New England and in Pennsylvania. Despite Condorcet’s immense role as architect of the constitution of 1793, his political thought hardly survived his death.⁴¹ He knew Beccaria; and with the help of his wife he had translated Filippo Mazzei’s important manuscript on the United States into French. But few Italians were aware of Condorcet’s philosophical works.
While some of the early French books on America mentioned above included credible ethnographies and reliable accounts of political events, Europeans had to wait for authors such as Filippo Mazzei, an advisor to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Pietro Leopoldo, to receive a less idealistic, more rational and also more useable account of life in the American Republic. In addition to purely descriptive ethnographies, knowledge of American agriculture and its relevance for Europe became more widely available shortly before the American Revolution; and more French and English books appeared in Italian translation. The French legal scholar Jacques-Vincent de la Croix (1743–1832) was more specific on American political institutions than Condorcet, adding two chapters on the American War of Independence and the United States’ early constitutional development to his work on comparative constitutional history. First published in 1791, his book included a Catéchisme patriotique à l’usage de tous le citoyens français, meant to be of particular pedagogical value for the French legislators of the revolutionary period. Although Italian authors rarely mentioned the work, it appeared in several editions and translations and was well known beyond academic readers.

The following chapters take account of French and British debates about the North American colonies, of authors like Diderot and Edmund Burke, where they directly shaped Italian political thought. For instance, Italian authors frequently referred to the Abbé Raynal; and Rousseau’s ideas were brought up in discussions about American freedom, although the citoyen de Genève was so famous that he did not need to be named, let alone be discussed in any great detail. Meanwhile, Louis-Sébastien Mercier was well known in England and the Netherlands, but rarely mentioned in Italy. Similarly, Mary Wollstonecraft’s ideas were deeply influenced by debates about American freedom and by her acquaintance with Thomas Paine; but very few Italians seemed to have been aware of her writings. The same is true for the two volumes on American society by Harriet Martineau, despite her contacts with Italian exiles. Many of the authors discussed in the following chapters knew William Robertson’s History of America, which informed their thinking on the relationship between barbarism and civilization, but because his narrative was then interrupted by the Anglo-American war, his main arguments were less relevant to their interest in North American political institutions. Some Italian political thinkers, including Mazzei and Botta, commented on American developments from the perspective of their involvement in French political events, as a consequence of the peninsula’s political turmoil in the wake of 1792.

While Guizot and Tocqueville generated ample interest among Italian commentators, Michel Chevalier, who published his Lettres sur l’Amérique du Nord in 1836, influenced the Sicilian economist Francesco Ferrara but was less well known among the other Italian commentators on the United States. One of the reasons for this selective approach to foreign books on America is
the fact that as the nineteenth century progressed educated Italians were able to rely on a much wider range of Italian authors and Italian-language texts, as well as on ideas derived from American literature and literature about the North American Republic.

Transatlantic Connections

_There exists no nation, as long as it has a fleet, that is so far from any other nation of this world that it is not at the same time also always close to this nation._

—_Antonio Genovesi, 1757_50

Italians’ awareness of the Western Hemisphere increased considerably during the Seven Years’ War, which took place between 1756 and 1763, involving most of the world’s great powers and affecting Europe, the Americas, and parts of Africa and Asia. The Italian states stayed out of this conflict and enjoyed an unusually long period of peace, which lasted from the Treaty of Aachen in 1748 to the French Revolution.51 Commercial and diplomatic relations benefitted from this “mezzo secolo di pace,” as Franco Venturi described the period.52 For instance, in his pioneering study of the eighteenth-century Neapolitan economy Patrick Chorley demonstrated how growing foreign demand provided the impulse for the economic revival of the southern kingdom’s coastal areas; in particular the demand for olives, mulberries (for silk), almonds, and vines.53 This renewed economic activity was also a response to Naples’s terrible famine of 1764, which led Antonio Genovesi to dedicate most of his subsequent writings to the revival of commerce.54 The result was a new outlook on the world, which now included the Americas.

The end of the American War of Independence led to diplomatic relations with the new Republic and facilitated trade, followed by a new wave of cultural exchanges. Franklin’s work on electricity constitutes a particularly prominent example of transnational exchange, picked up in Italy by Beccaria as well as by the world’s first female university professor, Laura Bassi, in Bologna, and by the Italian physicist Giuseppe Toaldo.55 As early as 1784 the United States sought to sign commercial treaties with the Kingdom of Naples. After early negotiations remained inconclusive, a first American consul was accredited in Naples in 1796, although it took until 1825 for Naples to send a consul to the United States. Since 1802 the US government had exchanged consuls with Sicily, then under British protection, and by 1805 it had consuls in several of the island’s cities.56 The Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia opened its first representation in the United States in 1817, in Savannah, Georgia, followed two years later by a consulate in Philadelphia. After the acquisition of the former Republic of Genoa, with its important international trading ports, the state’s diplomatic relations were strongly driven by economic motives. A
rare and detailed report of 1822 by the kingdom’s consul in Philadelphia offers ample insights into this commercial relationship, from the American interest in wine and silk to Piedmont’s need for cotton and tobacco, also signaling potential for future mercantile expansion.\textsuperscript{57} Although American periodicals sympathized with the beginnings of the Italian national movement, official relations between the governments of Piedmont-Sardinia and the United States remained friendly throughout the period of the Risorgimento. The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 meant that the United States would not interfere in Italy’s internal affairs.\textsuperscript{58} Yet, there were exceptions. After the execution of the patriotic priest Ugo Bassi in August 1849, the pontiff’s legate to the United States was expelled.\textsuperscript{59} American diplomats increasingly encouraged the Department of State to adopt an “Italian policy,” recognizing the role the Sabaudian monarchy would play in the process of Unification.\textsuperscript{60} For Americans, an important source of information on political developments in Italy up to 1849 was Margaret Fuller, the Boston journalist reporting from Italy for the New York Tribune. Meanwhile, Fuller impressed Italians with her image of the new nation’s professional women.

American interest in the Risorgimento not only served altruistic purposes: Young America, modeled on Mazzini’s Young Italy, was founded in 1845 to propagate an aggressive expansionist nationalism, reflecting the United States’ “manifest destiny.” Mazzini’s concept of a nation’s “mission” was applied here to justify the United States’ aspiring hegemony on a global scale, “democratizing” and “civilizing” other people according to the United States’ own ideals.\textsuperscript{61} The movement was later absorbed into the Democratic Party and sometimes described as the party’s “radical fringe.”\textsuperscript{62} Americans’ interest in the peninsula’s political developments not only provoked sour reactions in Vienna; in turn it led many protagonists in the Risorgimento to take a more pronounced interest in American history, its politics, and its constitutional development. Early on the Italian national movement recognized in the United States a potential ally, but also a profoundly different country. As further discussed in chapter 5, the United States was among the first states to recognize the Kingdom of Italy. By 1864, American history had become sufficiently important for the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to introduce it into the program for the exams of future diplomats.\textsuperscript{63}

An important example of exchange across the Atlantic were contacts between American and Italian Protestants. A miniscule grouping forced into a largely sectarian existence, the Valdesi (Waldensians) were mostly found in parts of Piedmont. Although brutally persecuted by the dukes of Savoy and the kings of France during most of the early modern period, at specific junctures they served their governments as a political and military ally, granting them a position to exercise a certain degree of influence on Italian diplomacy.\textsuperscript{64} Italian Protestants maintained close connections with Protestant communities and established churches abroad. A small community of them had settled

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu
in Delaware during the seventeenth century, where American Puritans saw them as martyrs, comparing their destiny to that of the people of Israel. Among the first Italian books translated in the United States was a Protestant hagiography, Niccolò Balbani’s *Istoria della vita di Galeazzo Caracciolo* (1751), published under the title *The Italian Convert*. The first American book about Italy was Joseph Sansom’s *Letters from Europe during a Tour through Switzerland and Italy* (Philadelphia, 1805), which gave an important impetus to American *filovaldismo*.65

In turn, for many Italian Protestants, Calvinist tradition and Enlightenment became almost synonymous, explaining the prominent role of Geneva in the development of Italian liberal thought, exemplified by the circle around Madame de Staël, by Sismondi, Pestalozzi, and Vieusseux.66 Vieusseux’s *Antologia* became an important forum of discussion about the American Republic, while continuing to represent a moderate voice in Risorgimento debates, which kept a clear distance from radical republican ideas.67 The publisher’s *Gabinetto di lettura* in Florence was a meeting place for intellectuals from both sides of the Atlantic. These transnational contacts played a significant role in challenging the idealized legacies of eighteenth-century images of America. For instance, since 1813 the Franco-American Quaker Etienne de Grellet had used a Waldensian hostel in Geneva to propagate his pacifist-abolitionist ideas, pointing his listeners—among them many Italian Protestants—to the persisting contradictions within the American constitution.68

In contrast to Vieusseux’s cautious approach, the Risorgimento’s engagement with American Protestantism also gave birth to more radical forms of political thought. Through the American section of Young Italy Mazzini established connections with American Protestants who shared his hostility toward the papacy.69 Quirico Filopanti, secretary general of Mazzini’s Roman Republic in 1849 and a prominent member of the Italian exile community in London, developed a theory of theocratic dominion, where the protestant nations progressed, while the Papal States in Italy and Latin America fell behind, owing to the negative impact of Catholicism on education and science in those regions.70 Observers in the United States often described Giuseppe Garibaldi as a man of Protestant virtue, with some going so far as to convince themselves that Italy was turning into a Protestant nation.71 Theodore Dwight, of the American Philo-Italian Society, had met Garibaldi during his exile in New York. Seeing him as “both a theologian and statesman,” he was convinced that divine providence had chosen Italians to play a leading part in the prophesies of the Bible.72 Like the American and Foreign Bible Society and the Foreign Evangelical Society, Dwight’s organization actively pursued the evangelization of Italy. After 1849 the American Embassy in Rome continued to hold Episcopalian services. When the papal government prohibited these in 1851, Protestant organizations in the United States requested a break in diplomatic relations with the Papal States.73
While drawing on their financial and moral support, Mazzini was aware that open contact with American Protestant organizations risked compromising his movement in the eyes of many Italians, making his insurgencies appear to be driven by foreign interests. Maintaining a strong aversion to Protestantism throughout his life, Mazzini realized that organizations such as the Christian Alliance were politically too conservative to meet his own political agenda. Moreover, by that time nativist American Protestants resented the influx and influence of Catholic Europeans, seen as poisoning transatlantic relationships.

America’s Place on the Risorgimento’s Map

Italians related debates about their country’s future not only to the American present, but also to a much wider context of political, historical, and cultural comparisons. Nineteenth-century periodicals devoted a great deal of space to travel and the discussion of foreign countries. Any analysis of Italian ideas about America has to take account of the fact that interest in the United States always went with a much broader trend of curiosity about foreign cultures. For instance, the American Revolution was often discussed in connection with the French. Cattaneo’s federal thought made frequent references to Switzerland and to the constitutions of the Holy Roman and Austrian Empires. Giuseppe Compagnoni, one of Italy’s major historians of America, who is discussed in chapter 1, also wrote multivolume scholarly works on Russia, on the Ottoman Empire, and on the Tatars. Furthermore, there are many places where the historian would expect discussion of American political institutions but is struck by the absence of the United States.

John H. Elliot has warned that “any examination of European history in the light of an external influence upon it, carries with it the temptation to see traces of this influence everywhere. But the absence of influence is often at least as revealing as its presence.” Consequently, the main reason for writing this book is not that Italians, during the Risorgimento period, constantly referred to the United States. Where they reflected on American experiences, their assessment of what these experiences meant tends to vary according to specific political circumstances. Usually, these references are used as discursive instruments within a wide range of political debates. Disregard for the United States was also the consequence of the Atlantic World’s still rather peripheral role in intellectual debate compared to the rich cultural heritage on which Italians could draw at home. This peripheral role is also underlined by Christopher Bayly’s The Birth of the Modern World, in which the American Revolution plays an almost insignificant role. Bayly’s view puts the Atlantic history project into global perspective; but it also suggests that the more Eurocentric approach informing Hobsbawm’s idea of a “dual revolution,” one “industrial” the other “French,” retains a place in explaining the modern world.
It makes little sense to separate Italian debates about the American Revolution from those about the French Revolution. For instance, Paine and Brissot emphasized the two revolutions’ common roots and purpose, prompting a historiographical tradition, perhaps most famously represented by R. R. Palmer’s *Age of Democratic Revolution*, which speaks of one big revolutionary tide reaching both sides of the Atlantic.⁷⁹ Challenging historiographical conventions associated with this tradition, Richard Whatmore has argued that an important strand of political thought welcomed the North American colonies’ struggle for independence, while condemning the French Revolution’s radical republicanism, which had resulted in a war on monarchy and religion. Most famously among these thinkers was Edmund Burke, who distinguished “between the events in America he had supported, and those in France he had condemned.”⁸⁰ In most of these comparisons, the American Revolution’s defining principle was in effect not its republicanism. Identifying differences between both revolutions—as they emerge for instance from a comparison between Botta’s *History of the American War of Independence* (1809) and his *History of Italy, 1789–1814* (1824)—frequently resulted in a condemnation of democratic republicanism, which in the case of North America was reduced to the natural consequence of the country’s independence from Britain, with no ideological roots in the Old World’s political development.

To make things more complicated, condemnation of the French Revolution did not automatically mean endorsement of the American. While demonstrating a great deal of interest in the American experiment, many Italians were conscious of the fact that the conditions under which democratic republicanism had emerged in the United States would never apply to their situation at home. As a consequence, the Milanese patriot Giorgio Pallavicini, who had been involved in the Revolutions of 1820 and subsequently spent many years in Austrian prisons, recommended to Italians the constitutional monarchies of Belgium and Greece as alternatives to French republicanism.⁸¹ Owing to widespread Italian disillusionment with the results of the French Revolution, few accepted Thomas Paine’s analysis that presented American and French republicanism as almost identical. Moreover, originally positive assessments of the American Revolution, still prevailing during the earlier years of the Risorgimento, were increasingly tainted by the idea that certain aspects of American democracy, such as its federalism, would not provide a solution to Italy’s own constitutional problems. Perceived cultural differences reinforced doubts about the American Republic. For instance, the thought of the Savoyard philosopher Joseph de Maistre displays strong prejudice against America. Although his attitude to the United States was certainly not representative of North Italian intellectuals as a whole, he held that “America is often cited by us: I know nothing so provoking as the praise showered on this babe-in-arms: let it grow. . . . Weakness and decay could not be better combined.”⁸²
Emiliana P. Noether, who in an edited collection of essays celebrates the impact of the American constitution on Italy, concedes that only a small intellectual elite of Italians seriously considered the United States when discussing the future of Italy. They read about the federal constitution, but knew very little about the constitutions of individual states. While the United States offered important points of reference in political debates, Italians did not look for blueprints abroad and were far from considering the implementation of foreign models when discussing their liberal and constitutional demands.

The idea of a division of the world in two parts—dividing progressive, modern countries from retrograde, oppressive regimes—was far from political realities. Any such model, where one part of the world has to implement the lessons learned from the other, seems to aim at reconciling antithetically defined norms of development, explaining the past in terms of a predefined philosophy of history. Instead, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political thought draws on a broad range of cultural legacies and civic traditions, which are revealed according to specific historic conditions and set in complex sets of relationships with each other, where “foreign” experiences are constantly translated and assimilated into local vocabularies.

Questioning the one-dimensional flow of ideas across the Atlantic raises the more general issue of to what extent political models can be imported or exported from one specific historical-political context to another. To what extent do such schemes merely reflect the wishful thinking of the “export nation,” hoping to assert its international role, while in turn confirming a hegemonic relationship that relegates the “import nation” to the status of an underdeveloped client in need of foreign aid? Paola Gemme, in Domesticating Foreign Struggles, argues that the idea of America as a model for the Italian Risorgimento was at least partly an American projection, where “the discourse on Italy contributed to the articulation of America’s own national identity.” Gemme’s analysis shows how the United States’ patronizing attitude toward Risorgimento Italy went hand in hand with the idea that Italians were not ready for freedom, mirroring Americans’ attitude to their black population at home, who they deemed unfit for democracy. Though mainly investigating an American phenomenon—the nationalistic and self-congratulatory intent informing American narratives about the Italian Risorgimento—Gemme’s analysis is crucially important to the objective of this book, which examines the complexity of Italian engagement with American democracy.

Daniele Fiorentino has demonstrated how during the Revolutions of 1848 President James Polk and a good part of the United States’ political establishment considered Europe in need of guidance toward a democratic and republican future, despite the United States’ official policy of nonintervention in European affairs. Very similar was the attitude of James A. Hamilton, acting secretary of state to President Andrew Jackson, who was convinced that the political changes taking place in Italy around 1848 were “due to our example,”
where the spirit of 1776 became “the pillar of light by day and of fire by night to all mankind.” A lot of Italo-American history has traditionally been written in this perspective. For instance, Howard Marraro opened his book of 1932 with the self-consciously heroic statement that “during the middle decades of the nineteenth century America heard her battle cry of 1776 . . . raised by subject peoples throughout the length and breadth of Europe.”

David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have mocked such simplifications, noting that “the democratic revolution was thus a gift from the North Atlantic world to other peoples who had apparently contributed nothing to its original emancipatory potential.” Claudia dell’Osso, in *Voglia d’America*, also remarks that Europe’s *americanismo* was often “prefabricated” by the American elites themselves. Few voices expressed a different view. In 1911 the Oxford historian Herbert A. L. Fisher argued in *The Republican Tradition in Europe* that European admiration for the American Republic, its political institutions, and its constitution did not necessarily mean that the same Europeans considered it a viable model for the old continent. Although Europeans certainly demonstrated a great deal of interest in the social, political, and cultural development of the United States, it was to a large extent the Americans who liked to think of themselves as a model for the rest of the world.

David Armitage recently reaffirmed the global symbolic power of the American Declaration of Independence, providing “the model for similar documents around the world.” While his assessment is undoubtedly true, establishing the exact nature of the relationship between the model and its followers is a complicated task. The Declaration’s uncertain legal status—neither statute nor constitution—is reflected in the ways Italians engaged with it, or not. While in mid-September 1776 its text appeared in a Florentine newspaper, two months after the original pronunciation, later references to the Declaration, to the Bill of Rights, or other constitutional documents were often used interchangeably. More specific comments remained rare. Moreover, the context of dependence (resulting in independence) often differs dramatically from one country to another. Usually a wide range of other constitutional histories was discussed in connection with the American Declaration of Independence: regional or even local traditions, as the example of Sicily, discussed in chapter 3, suggests.

Like Armitage, George Athan Billias stressed the global influence of American constitutionalism over the past two centuries: its principles and practices, defined in terms of constitutional documents, procedures, and institutions that came into being. Billias concludes that “the world was never the same, constitutionally speaking, after 1776.” However, the fact that European patriots were in correspondence with men like Franklin and Jefferson, or that at certain junctures assemblies circulated translations of American legal texts, does not give license to the assumption that political developments in Europe were sparked off by the events of 1776. Instead, it is in the nature of legal
practice that constitutionalists make themselves familiar with legal and political theory on an international scale. It was in this spirit that the fathers of the American constitution traveled to Göttingen to study the constitution of the Holy Roman Empire, or read Beccaria and Filangieri.

Moreover, if European constitutional documents adopted a structure or language similar to that of the American documents, the political intentions of those referring to the American model could be dramatically different from the political ideas of the American founding fathers. As the example of the Italian states shows, constitutional monarchists as well as Democrats and Republicans were able to draw on the United States. Billias himself points to the example of the Belgian constitution of 1831, which featured radical elements of the American federal constitution, but resulted in the establishment of a constitutional monarchy with extremely restrictive suffrage.95 The Frankfurt Assembly of 1848–49 borrowed (rather freely) from the American constitution, but the document was never implemented.96 The impact of the American model on French and Swiss debates around 1848 is well documented. In the French case there remained important differences, while Switzerland was able to draw on its own constitutional history.

The argument for the United States’ case as a model for Italy is often made on the basis of their supposedly parallel histories. In his book on Franklin and Italy, Antonio Pace explained how “the American Revolution itself became a complete paradigm of the Risorgimento.” As he argues, “the parallels were obvious. Both the United States and Italy began as agglomerations of separate states dominated by foreign powers and weakened by internal dissent. The condition of victory seemed the same in both instances: indomitable patriotic zeal, brilliant, though necessarily limited, military action against the oppressor, and an astute international diplomacy to neutralize the opposition and enlist the support of friendly powers.”97 Within Pace’s logic, Garibaldi and Camillo Cavour came to reenact the roles of George Washington and Franklin, as if world history had been waiting for the two to appear on the political stage, ideally after having read and rehearsed the American script. Pace goes so far as to speak of America’s “palingenetic role” in explaining the Italian Risorgimento.

While there are obvious parallels between the historical development of the two countries, historians should avoid explaining the past by falling into the trap of two frequently made mistakes. First, history does not lend itself to analogical conclusions: similar conditions can lead to different outcomes; and despite some striking similarities, there remain vast differences between the two countries. Second, teleological reasoning takes the formation of a unified nation-state for granted and reads the history of Italian Unification back into a period of the peninsula’s past, when the formation of a unified Italian nation-state was simply not on the political agenda, at least not for the majority of political thinkers and not in the form that emerged in the aftermath of
1848. The similarity of conditions at the outset cannot be constructed on the basis of hypothetical references to later developments.

Americans’ overestimation of their role in teaching the rest of the world was not a new phenomenon at the time when Italians started thinking about their own political future. Janet Polasky begins her recent book *Revolutions without Borders* with an episode about the young Bostonian Elkanah Watson, who set off for Europe to witness in 1780 the beginnings of the Dutch Patriot Revolution, only to learn that his European brothers in arms, like Americans before them, considered themselves God’s chosen people for the achievements in their recent political struggle. In this case their pride was nourished by a tradition of fighting for freedom that reached back to the Dutch Revolt of the sixteenth century, long before America’s struggle for independence. Transnational experience put American national pride into perspective. American travelers to Italy often came to the conclusion that “the United States could teach more than it could learn.” While this might be a common view among Americans even today, Italians had reasons to reject these perceptions confidently.

The moderate political thinker Pellegrino Rossi serves as an example to illustrate this point. During the first half of the nineteenth century he was one of Italy’s most influential voices on an international scale. A naturalized citizen of Geneva and a professor at the Collège de France, Rossi’s political and legal thought draws on a wide range of non-Italian experiences without translating into a sense of inferiority toward supposedly more advanced countries, a position almost unthinkable for a graduate of the University of Bologna, where the study of Roman law dates back to the eleventh century. Throughout the modern period Italy had produced a number of legal theorists whose works were discussed all over Europe and across the Atlantic. Meanwhile, the very notion of national schools and hierarchies of thought must have seemed strange to the protagonists of the Risorgimento, who were typically polyglot and often extremely well traveled. Owing to his long periods of exile, Rossi mostly wrote in French; and along with references to the classics, he develops his political and legal thought in response to a great number of thinkers from Condillac, Kant, and Hume to Bentham and Lamennais, making a distinction between national schools almost impossible. His ideas on legal reform reflected revolutionary events in Latin America and experiences within the British Empire.

Meanwhile, these examples do not serve him as models for the reform of a supposedly less advanced society back home, but as spaces of experience from which to draw general empirical evidence for the analysis of social and political change. For instance, Rossi rejects English criminal law as “a chaos where every useful word is drowned in a mass of useless words.” Likewise, North America was only one of many places from where he drew ideas, despite the large volume of writings on the subject that had appeared in the aftermath of the American Revolution. The first version of his *Droit pénal* was published
in 1829, two years before Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville embarked on their famous trip to investigate the United States’ penitentiary system. Although Rossi’s book is full of detailed references to examples from England, France, and the German states, among others, the United States played practically no role in his extremely well-informed multivolume investigation. Despite ignoring the United States, it became one of the internationally most influential works in the field of criminal law. Rossi serves as a powerful example to relativize the role of the United States in Risorgimento political thought. In the event that he ever had the intention of integrating American experiences into his legal thought, he was denied the chance to do so: in November 1848 Radical Republicans assassinated him in front of the recently inaugurated Rome town hall, symbol of the pope’s new constitutional government.

Rossi’s work, similar to that of many other Italian political and legal thinkers at the time, is exemplary of the wide philosophical, chronological, and geographical horizon beneath which their ideas evolved. What some historians have described as “American” ideas owed profoundly to European traditions of political thought, a fact the Old World was acutely aware of. John Pocock offers a useful key to this way of thinking, which was never one directional. In the Machiavellian Moment he describes “the product of the ideas and conceptual vocabularies” that were widely available to political thinkers of the early modern and modern periods, constituting an Atlantic tradition of thought that traveled to and fro between the Old and the New Worlds. A postwar classic on American relations with Italy by H. Stuart Hughes introduced its subject with a chapter called “Terra Incognita,” explaining how little Americans knew about Italy. While this certainly applies to ordinary Americans, an exception has to be made for the intellectual elites, where classical studies and an admiration for the Italian Renaissance often generated an interest in Italy’s current affairs and the Risorgimento in particular. By the late eighteenth century Americans were able to look back on a long tradition of American knowledge on Italy, testified by the many Italian books in the libraries of the Pilgrim Fathers. John Adams’s Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America contained long passages on Italy’s medieval republics, although they presented Italians in a rather dark light. The writings of Beccaria and Filangieri had a profound impact on American constitutional history. As one recent historian, Karl Bessler, has written, “Italians were obsessed with liberty and America’s independence as much as Americans were enthralled by the Italian Enlightenment itself.”

According to Pocock, since the fifteenth century the Aristotelian polis had reemerged in Europe’s civic humanist thought and became a political reality that existed in many different forms and historical guises. For educated Italians this civic tradition resonated in a vast canon of literature from the classical tradition to Dante, Machiavelli, and Francesco Guicciardini. Here,
republican thought was not an abstract modus operandi of long-forgotten states, but a way of thinking that, over centuries, informed Italians’ search for meaning in the secular world. As Pocock has shown, the thinking of the “Revolutionary generation in America” was “anchored” in this Aristotelian and Machiavellian tradition, mediated through the experience of an Anglicized republic. These connections would make it absurd to think about transatlantic intellectual exchange as being one directional. Once the American Republic had been established, ideas continued to flow in both directions. In the same way as Europeans continued to study antiquity as a way of thinking about modern political institutions, they also looked at developments across the Atlantic. Vincenzo Gioberti, among the most prominent thinkers discussed in this book, has argued that “America emerged from Europe, in the same way as Europe today leans toward America.” Tocqueville’s concern with the despotism of opinion in a society where everybody ought to be alike refers back to problems Aristotle had discussed in his Politics. As Lucien Jaume has argued, when Tocqueville wrote about America, he indirectly addressed the problems of French society. Italian readers of Tocqueville were fully aware of these references.

What we study, then, is the traveling back and forth across the Atlantic of ideas that had informed political thought for centuries. In each new historical and geographical context these ideas had to be domiciled anew. Modern political concepts cannot be divorced from this tradition. Palmer defined the Age of Democratic Revolution as “a new feeling for a kind of equality, or at least a discomfort with older forms of social stratification and formal rank.” Meanwhile, Palmer admits that democracy also represented an aspect of the new age that many European observers found repulsive, especially when relying on secondhand accounts, without knowing much about it. A methodologically thorough analysis of Italian debates about the United States will be able to identify a rather cautious assessment of the American model, which takes into consideration the role of different political traditions and geopolitical conditions. Moreover, historiographical arguments on the apparent appeal of the United States to Italians are often based on the historians’ rather limited chronological scope of research. A vast literature on early Italian responses to the American War of Independence and the American constitution during the first decades of the Risorgimento should not lead to the assumption that these ideas about the United States remained unchallenged throughout the Risorgimento. The frenzied fascination with the modernity of American lifestyle starts only toward the end of the nineteenth century, when larger numbers of Italians arrived in the United States not just as emigrants, but also as travelers, with the specific aim of experiencing the New World’s modernity.

Reassessing the transatlantic flow of ideas, then, inserts itself into new ways of thinking about the history of the Italian Risorgimento. For most of the postwar period, in the aftermath of the publication of Gramsci’s historical
writings, historians of Italy understood the Italian Risorgimento as a passive revolution, which lacked the support of the popular classes and was largely the product of the socioeconomic interests of the Italian elites. This perspective was called into question with the publication of Alberto Banti’s La nazione del Risorgimento in 2001, which pointed to the role of ideology, language, and literature in transforming Italian nationalism into a mass movement. Defining the nation through a language of kinship, honor, and sanctity, Italian nationalism developed an appeal, Banti argued, that reached well beyond the narrow circles of intellectual elites. With its emphasis on language and literature, Banti’s approach sought to establish a dialogue between the history of political ideas and cultural history.

The transnational context from which these political ideas emerged is of pivotal importance to our understanding of Italian patriotism and liberalism, concepts of independence and nationality, or constitutional expectations. Although the Risorgimento was a national movement, it had its roots in Italy’s secolo dei lumi, which according to Pietro Verri’s Milanese periodical Il caffè had turned Romans, Florentines, and Lombards into Europeans. Despite the Italian Enlightenment’s awareness of forming part of a larger European movement, over the past two decades a number of innovative studies on Italian nationalism, some of them inspired by postcolonial approaches, have demonstrated the extent to which Italians internalized the northern European discourse about Italy as a beautiful but in all other respects backward nation, the product of long-declined civilizations.

Other historians have demonstrated how Italian patriots were capable of questioning these stereotypes. Rather than passively accepting ideas coming from abroad, transnational historiography has emphasized the extent to which this exchange of ideas worked in both directions. An important work exemplifying this approach has been Maurizio Isabella’s Risorgimento in Exile, which demonstrates how transnational experiences shaped Italian national identity. Returning to their homeland in 1848, the exiles celebrated the experience of their transnational encounters, as reflected for instance in Italian broadsheets praising the Princess Belgiojoso, whose salon’s hospitality many of the Italian exiles had enjoyed during their time in Paris. What the new cultural and intellectual history of the Risorgimento has shown is that ideas are not passively received but translated into a new context, where the final product often bears little similarity to the original. Likewise, recent work on travel writing has demonstrated that “orientalizing” discourse worked both ways, leading travelers from the so-called periphery to confirm self-confidently their native values and their own understanding of modern change. In the Italian case, Vincenzo Gioberti offers a persuasive example. Arguably the Risorgimento’s most prominent political theorist before 1848, and briefly prime minister of Piedmont during the revolutionary turmoil, he explained in his hugely influential Del rinnovamento civile d’Italia of 1851 that
England was an oceanic island in the periphery of Europe. America (its republican version) was even further away. According to Gioberti, England was to Europe what Sicily was to Italy. Reversing the stereotypes with which European travelers described the Mediterranean, Gioberti was not unsympathetic to the United States, comparing the Americans’ pride to the “fierrezza dei popoli antichi”; but his federalism did not need an American model.

The often peripheral place of the American Revolution in Italian political thought was further affected by the ways in which Italian commentators tended to lump England and the United States together as two versions of the same Anglo-Saxon tribe, with similar constitutions, one monarchical and the other republican. Giuseppe Pecchio is among the few Italian commentators who emphasized persisting differences and tensions between Britain and the United States. For Mazzini Americans belonged “to the English race,” as was the case for Bettino Ricasoli, an early prime minister of unified Italy, who spoke of the “glory of the razza Anglo-Sassone in the two hemispheres.” As Leonardo Buonomo has pointed out, American “citizens were commonly called inglesi [English], a frequent cause of irritation for US travelers and an actual disadvantage: among all foreign visitors of Italy, the least popular were precisely those from England.” American newspapers were also often summed up as “giornali inglesi.” Cattaneo referred to the britanni d’America, asserting that “it does not matter if this tribe organises itself under one or more governments; it does not matter that one part calls itself the United Kingdom and the other the United States. The particular mix and temperament of this tribe remain the same, as is the case for their language, the same religious traditions, their urge for expansion.” If many Italians did not distinguish between Americans and the English, the distinction between the United States and South America was also far from obvious. Frequently one notices confusion about which territories of the New World formed part of the northern Republic.

**Literary Tropes**

Among the most effective means to overcome the lack of familiarity with the American continent was literature. The works of James Fenimore Cooper became an especially important source of information for Italians. The first translation of *The Last of the Mohicans* had appeared in 1828, the year Cooper spent with his family in Italy, only two years after it was first published in the United States. The Italian subtitle—*Romanzo storico relativo ai tempi delle guerre americane*—illustrates that the novel was presented as a source for America’s role in the Seven Years’ War. (The English-language editions used the subtitle “A Narrative of 1757.”) Cooper’s earlier novel of 1821, *The Spy*, set during the American Revolution and glorifying George Washington as an almost godlike character, not dissimilar from the general’s portrait in the early
Italian histories of the War of Independence, was also particularly popular. Like the Italian edition of *The Last of the Mohicans*, the Italian version of *The Spy* also used the subtitle *Romanzo storico relativo ai tempi della guerra americana*, reinforcing the novel’s documentary character.130

An important aspect of *The Last of the Mohicans* is the encounter between British, French, and Native American populations. The relationship between Colonel Munro’s daughters Alice and Cora and the Mohican members of the caravan, Chingachgook and his son Uncas, animated the readers’ imagination regarding the New World’s racial composition, representing an important aspect of Italian dramatizations of the New World, discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

Many more editions followed the first translation of *The Last of the Mohicans*, and abbreviated versions were included in the author’s collected works. Educated Italians frequently read Cooper’s French translations. In France scenes from the novel became a popular topic for paintings exhibited at the Paris Salon, and stage adaptations made it to several theaters as well as to the Opéra. The frenzy for Cooper’s novels went hand in hand with the French fashion of “exhibiting” Native American tribes, long before the famous Buffalo Bill Shows came to the Continent.131 In 1835 the catalogue of Vieuvesux’s lending library in Florence listed twenty works by the American author.132 In 1852 the *North American Review* proudly claimed that “no American writer has been so extensively read as James Fenimore Cooper”; and that “in Naples and Milan, the bookstalls bear witness that *L’Ultimo dei Mohicani* is still a popular work.”133

Following Cattaneo’s reviews of American literature for various periodicals during the mid-nineteenth century, Enrico Nencioni became Italy’s most influential commentator on American fiction and poetry. A close friend of the celebrated poet Giosuè Carducci, he started reviewing American literature during the 1860s, mostly for *Nuova antologia*. His love of American poetry influenced an entire generation of Italian authors, including Giovanni Pascoli, Gabriele D’Annunzio, and Giovanni Papini.134 For Nencioni “true American poetry” corresponded to the myth of America’s natural world, characterized by an absence of civilization that he had similarly found in Cooper’s novels: “the true echoes of Mississippi and Missouri, of Virginia and Maryland have something rude and primitive about them, a natural and mesmerizing music like that of the vast lakes and the winds among the lianas, impulsive and violent, similar to the sounds of those deafening floodgates.”135

These impressions are easily reconciled with images in Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855), though Nencioni also admired American authors such as Edgar Allan Poe and Ralph Waldo Emerson. A first Italian essay on Emerson had appeared in 1855. Poe was initially translated in 1858; and Italians were deeply taken by what they knew of his life. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, among the first American translators of Dante Alighieri and author of a poem
“To Italy,” long remained America’s best-known poet in Italy, though Nencioni criticized him for imitating English or German models: “too many ballads, too many idylls, too many elegies, too many album verses.”\(^{136}\) Mentioning Bret Harte among the better-known American poets in Italy, Nencioni did most to popularize Whitman, celebrated as the poet of “cosmopolitan democracy” and of humanity’s future.\(^{137}\) Mark Twain had visited Italy in the 1860s, around the time of his first literary success, but in order to read his works in translation Italians had to wait until the turn of the century. Herman Melville visited Italy in 1857, and his work shows frequent references to the country’s culture and its history, but also in this case Italians became aware of the author only later in the century. Chapter 4 will briefly return to Cooper and Melville.\(^{138}\)

Despite Italy’s increasing familiarity with books from the New World, Mazzini found American literature “sickening.”\(^{139}\) His idea seems to reflect the impression that Cooper himself gained when traveling in Italy in the late 1820s. While forming himself a most favorable opinion of Habsburg rule in Tuscany, Cooper observed that the only thing Europeans could praise about America was their fine ships: Europeans considered America to be a nation of traders and not much else.\(^{140}\)

Mazzini’s judgement might have been informed by what returning exiles had to say about the United States. They often made a living of publishing their accounts, but what they wrote about rarely made their life enviable.\(^{141}\) They admired the United States’ republican constitution but found it difficult to make a living across the Atlantic.\(^{142}\) As for the American pull factor, Mazzini was convinced that the times were gone when immigrants could easily make a fortune across the Atlantic.\(^{143}\) One of the first Italian novels on emigration, published by the Mazzinian Antonio Caccia just after 1848, presented the unpleasant image of an American nativist who resented “the daily arrival of hungry Europeans.”\(^{144}\)

Garibaldi’s arrival in the United States had been greeted with a great deal of anticipation, but widely read accounts of his life did not present a rosy picture of his experiences in the United States.\(^{145}\) Because the general can hardly be described as a political thinker, he deserves less of a place in this book than for instance Mazzini. Moreover, despite his short (mostly negative) experience in New York, he hardly ever mentioned the United States and contributed little to what Italians knew about the country. His experiences in Latin America were certainly more formative for his political career than the disappointing months spent on Staten Island.\(^{146}\)

On his accession to the Austrian throne in 1835, Ferdinand I had issued an imperial rescript granting Italian prisoners a commutation of sentence on condition that they agreed to be deported to America. While some accepted the condition, others preferred to serve out their sentences in prison in order to avoid crossing the Atlantic.\(^{147}\) European revolutionaries knew that public opinion in the United States was not unanimous in its support for their
uprisings, and that many Americans resented their alleged radical socialism and its potential impact on business relations with the old continent. While American Protestants feared a new wave of Catholic immigration as a consequence of the European turmoil, Catholic Americans condemned Italian patriots for their treatment of the pope. During the Second War of Independence, in 1859, the US State Department’s major worry was that the war might affect free trade between neutral countries.

The 1860s were the years when novels about emigration as well as travel accounts became increasingly popular and more foreign works were translated into Italian. They often transmitted the idea of a primitive lifestyle and corrupt manners, as demonstrated in the works of Friedrich Gerstäcker. The son of opera singers, he emigrated to America in 1837, where personal experience formed the basis of his colorful descriptions of life among the settlers, a life deeply marked by moral corruption and religious fanaticism, an impression only superficially smoothed by a good deal of schmaltz in the description of personal relationships and praise for virtuous Natives. The very first sentence of his popular novel Die Regulatoren des Arkansans (1846) remarked on the absence of culture in the wide woods of the American South. Many of his stories appeared in the international periodical press, including L’Universo Illustrato. His descriptions of American landscape and characters became an important model for Karl May’s popular novels.

Italians did not have to resort to fiction to engage with this world: travel writing also offered a good deal of picturesque entertainment. Although certainly not prejudiced against Americans, Giovanni Capellini, a geologist and future rector of the University of Bologna, included in his travel account numerous episodes illustrating the unfamiliar manners of the New World. Hotels especially did not offer what Capellini expected. He was tortured by the feeling that he had to keep a colt under his pillow; and during the nights mice danced on his blanket and happily passed over his face. A man who had traveled through many of the most remote regions of Italy remained deeply impressed by the United States’ combination of ambition and backwardness.

A realistic and most brutal account of daily life in the United States appeared in 1852 and was immediately translated into Italian. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin, discussed in detail in chapter 5, became one of the most widely read novels of nineteenth-century Italy, reaching many more people of different classes through various stage adaptations, most prominently in the form of a ballet. In Italy the story of Uncle Tom was soon read in conjunction with the unfolding of the American Civil War, contemporary to the beginnings of Italy’s own civil war in the South. Henceforth Italian periodicals also started writing in much more detail about events and political developments across the Atlantic, presenting their readers with the shocking image of life in a war-torn society.
An important element of Stowe’s international success was her claim that the novel’s fictional account was based on historical facts, which she had researched and then documented in a separate volume, which also appeared in Italian translation. The early Italian histories of America, discussed in chapter 1, took credibility for granted. Contrary to Stowe, many of the aforementioned autobiographical accounts shifted freely between fiction and fact. These narratives demonstrate how events are manipulated by later acts of remembering; and how they are read in constantly shifting historical contexts. Lorenzo da Ponte’s memories of New York present a particularly pertinent example of the creative mixture of fiction and fact, while also demonstrating how the meanings of a text changed during different stages of its life. Mozart’s famous librettist published his memoirs in multiple editions and volumes between 1823 and 1830, dedicating two chapters to his experiences of life in the New World and living on the commercial success of his book for the remaining years of his life.

Many years earlier, in 1776, the year of the American Revolution, da Ponte had written a Latin poem entitled “Americano in Europa,” which he recited in a public meeting at the seminary in Treviso:

Nempe illic nemo est, qui sceptrum potentiae dextra,
Gemmea qui claro sertà gerat capiti.
Nemo est qui certo componet foedere leges,
Qui teneat propria sub dictione solum.

Non domus aggestas messes, non terminus agros,
Nec sortita gravis dividit arva lapis.

There certainly is nobody who, the sceptre of power in his right hand,
Is crowned with twinkling gems.
Nobody writes fixed laws
Nobody holds all land in his power.

No home divides the harvest; there are no boundaries to the fields,
No stone divides the ploughed land.

The poem’s egalitarian message cost Da Ponte his position as a teacher at the seminary. From his time in Venice and Vienna, Da Ponte was familiar with several operatic works that treated life in the New World as a fictional utopia, a genre that flourished in Italy and the Habsburg monarchy during the second half of the eighteenth century. One such work was Joseph Haydn’s Il mondo della luna (1777), based on a popular play by Goldoni, where men on the moon became a metaphor for life in the New World. Another example of this genre was Alessandro Guglielmi’s La quakera spiritosa, discussed briefly in chapter 4, which Da Ponte staged for Joseph II’s court theater in Vienna. Idealized images of American life—still rooted in Enlightenment discourse—were increasingly
replaced by accounts of real-life experiences in a country that brought material wealth to some, but lacked the culture that distinguished the lives of educated Europeans. Many of these operas linked democratic experiments to economic prosperity, a theme echoed in Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro*. Rather than the common (and absurd) suggestion that these works “anticipated” the French Revolution, according to Pierpaolo Polzonetti, *Figaro* was a critique of the ancien régime’s social hierarchies as much as a commentary on the changing social realities exemplified by the North American Republic. Reading da Ponte’s libretti in this light also makes sense if one considers that Beaumarchais, the play’s original author, had been an active supporter of the American insurrection. The political significance behind these plays is perhaps less radical than might appear at first sight: Europe’s enlightened rulers often shared their critique of the aristocracy; and often they followed American events not unsympathetically. Joseph II, who had abolished many feudal privileges, intervened against the performance of Beaumarchais’s all too explicit plays, but on moral rather than on political grounds. He personally approved the project for Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* and took a keen interest in its original staging.

Da Ponte left for the United States in 1805 to escape his creditors after filing for bankruptcy. His memoirs offer a firsthand account of daily life in the North American Republic, very different from the philosophical speculations that circulated among educated Italian readers during the earlier parts of the eighteenth century. Published in three volumes and taking the popular memoirs of his friend Giacomo Casanova as a model, they were soon reviewed in the Florentine *Antologia*, an influential forum for debate on the early American Republic. Suppressed in several Italian states, they remained freely available under the Habsburgs in Tuscany. In 1858, shortly before Italian Unification, Lamartine rediscovered da Ponte’s work, leading to first French and then German translations. Widely discussed in literary circles, the Mozart renaissance of the nineteenth century further increased interest in the book. As a consequence, da Ponté’s colorful account of life in the United States influenced several generations of Italians.

The main message behind da Ponte’s account of American life is easily summarized. In the New World “Italian language and literature were . . . about as well known as Turkish or Chinese.” For da Ponte this was less of a comment on his own difficulties when arriving in New York than a statement that Americans were deprived of Europe’s classical tradition and its cultural heritage. For years da Ponte spent his time in America fighting against swindlers, corrupt lawyers, and mean creditors, telling his readers that Americans were never to be trusted. Materialism caused their lack of appreciation for culture, with which he had hoped to contribute to the New World’s prosperity. Instead of showing an interest in his collection of Italian books, they preferred shopping next door for cheap Italian sweets and fat sausages from Bologna. As he summarized in one of his many poems,
All sciences are cultivated,
The numerical especially,
For it America is well known.
But it is not as distinguished
In the study of languages.\textsuperscript{159}

Da Ponte played an important role in laying the foundations of opera in America, but financially most of his projects turned out to be disastrous. While his image of America was largely a reflection of his own life, the popularity of his account did little to change Italians’ prejudice against a country that offered freedom but no culture.

\textit{Explaining America}

While chapters 4 and 5 of this book examine the United States in the Italian cultural imagination, where literature and the stage played pivotal roles, the bulk of this book concerns the role of the United States in Risorgimento political thought. Which were the books that helped Italians to articulate their ideas about American political institutions?

The first Italian translation of an English book about America appeared in 1763, \textit{An Account of the European Settlements in America}, published in Venice and attributed to the coauthorship of Edmund Burke and his distant cousin William.\textsuperscript{160} While it seems unusual to relate the Risorgimento back to the 1760s, global political events such as the Seven Years’ War, combined with the profound transformation taking place in Italy as a consequence of Enlightenment reforms, started off debates about the peninsula’s political future, which would leave a profound legacy for the Risorgimento. These debates were marked by a pertinent awareness that Europe was entering a new epoch, and they became the breeding ground for Italy’s brief period of republican government at the time of the Napoleonic conquest, the \textit{triennio repubblicano} (1796–99).\textsuperscript{161} First published anonymously in 1757, the Italian translation of \textit{The Account of the European Settlements in America} also omits the authors of the work. Richard Bourke explains this omission mainly through the Burkes’ positive assessment of French colonization in the New World, an inappropriate argument during times of a major British war against France.\textsuperscript{162} Along with their praise for French Colbertisme in international trade, the Burkes’ critique of the British slave economy directly attacked the interests of Britain’s colonial establishment, explaining why the Burkes decided to conceal their authorship.\textsuperscript{163}

For Italian readers the book represented a watershed in factual knowledge about the Americas, now readily available in Italian translation. The book outlines the original discovery of the continent, its natural history, and the customs of its Native population, to then account for its colonization and
its economic relevance in global trade. For readers with an interest in North America, the most relevant sections were to be found in the second part, dealing with the Native populations, as well as in the almost three hundred pages on the English colonies, exposing the settlers’ free and republican spirit.\textsuperscript{164} The same ideas would play a significant role in Edmund Burke’s analysis of the colonies’ conflict with the motherland two decades later. At the time of writing, Burke so admired the new continent that he even considered emigration.\textsuperscript{165} Analysis of the continent’s commercial potential is one of the book’s main objectives, making it a distinct contribution to the emerging science of comparative political economy.\textsuperscript{166} The work’s anonymous publication contrasts with its remarkable popularity, resulting in six English editions before 1777 as well as French and German translations.

With the Seven Years’ War’s unfolding, the American colonies became an independent agent on the international stage, helping Europeans to appreciate the significance of the New World for their own future. Coinciding with the end of the war in 1763, the same year as the Italian translation of the Burkes’ book, a three-volume geographical encyclopedia on the New World appeared in the Tuscan port city of Livorno. In numerous monographic articles \textit{Il Gaazzettiere Americano} gives a detailed overview of the continent’s geography and its flora and fauna, as well as its cities and their economic development, all lavishly illustrated with maps and plates by prominent graphic artists from Tuscany.\textsuperscript{167} Also included are vignettes showcasing the customs of local populations, or innovative technologies applied to the continent’s commercial activities. Based on an English publication of the previous year, the Italian edition is considerably more elegant than the original. According to the publisher’s own preface, the scarcity of books on America written in Italian is the main motive for producing this altogether rather extravagant work.\textsuperscript{168}

The \textit{Gazzettiere}’s entries on North American cities gave Italian readers insight into institutions of self-rule and the emerging democratic culture of the British colonies. Its article on Boston emphasizes that there were many well-furnished bookshops and five publishing houses.\textsuperscript{169} The description of New York points out that “in 1754, a set of gentlemen undertook to carry about a subscription towards raising a public library, and in a few days collected near 600 Lire Sterling, which were laid out in purchasing about 700 volumes of new, well chosen books. Every subscriber, upon payment of 5 Lire principal and the annual sum of 10 shillings is entitled to the use of these books. . . . This is the beginning of a library, which in process of time will probably become vastly rich and voluminous.” Meanwhile, the article argued, the city’s schools “are in the lowest orders; the instructors want instruction, and through a long shameful neglect of all the arts and sciences, the common speech is extremely corrupt; and the evidences of bad taste, both as to thought and language, are visible in their proceedings, publick and private.”\textsuperscript{170} These entries show that
the survey was not limited to praising the wonders of the New World. In much
detail the same article reports the local population’s concern over the mother
country’s habit of exporting its prisoners to the colonies: “can agriculture be
promoted, when the ‘wild boar of the forest’ breaks down our hedges, and pulls
up our vines?”

Although the edition’s print run is unknown (the British Library alone
holds six original copies of the Italian translation), Marco Coltellini’s deci-
sion to undergo the commercial risk of this expensive publication bears wit-
ness to growing Italian interest in Americana. Coltellini was a visionary pub-
lisher, who would print Cesare Beccaria’s Dei delitti e delle pene the following
year, taking advantage of the relaxed attitude of Tuscany’s Habsburg rulers to
censorship.

Another example of Tuscany’s early interest in North America is the Storia
del governo d’Inghilterra e delle sue colonie by the literary scholar Vincenzo
Martinelli. After having spent several decades in London, Martinelli returned
to Tuscany in 1776 and published his book at exactly the time when conflict
broke out. Well timed to catch his readers’ interest, it was mostly based on
his understanding of English politics and appeared too early to foresee the
outcome of the American Revolution.

Compared to the intensity of debates in Tuscany, the Lombard Enlight-
enment remained largely indifferent to political developments in the New
World. The above-mentioned periodical Il Caffè, published between 1764
and 1766, first in Brescia and then Milan, rarely mentioned America; and Pi-
etro Verri’s first article for the periodical, “Storia naturale del caffè,” concludes
with the less than reassuring remark that “worse than any other coffee is the
American.” (It is unclear if by that time he has had a chance to taste English
coffee.) In his later writings he followed current events in the colonies, but
his admiration for England led him to believe that the fanaticism of the revo-
lutionaries would not prevail. Giuseppe Pecchio, another lombardo who
frequently quoted Verri, displayed similar views. The eye-opening travels of
Verri’s brother Alessandro to London and Paris, where he met Franklin and
other American revolutionaries, happened after his experience at the Milanese
periodical.

Regarding the Lombards’ relative lack of interest in the New World, excep-
tion needs to be made for the Milanese scientist Count Luigi Castiglioni, who
traveled the thirteen states during the 1780s, witnessing the very beginnings
of the Republic. One of the first Italians to publish a major book about
the United States, the main objective of his travels was to collect specimens
of plants and seeds that could be of economic interest to Europe. Castiglioni
also stayed in Monticello, studying in Jefferson’s library. Back in Italy he regu-
larly opened his house to American visitors. His book is of interest not only
for its commentaries on the early Republic’s political institutions, but also for
its independent ethnographic observations, which no longer simply relied on
French or British accounts from the earlier eighteenth century. A reflection Castiglioni found worth commenting on was the fact that in America people from many different national backgrounds formed a population in its own right, a phenomenon many Italians observed. While he admired William Penn and the democratic constitution of Pennsylvania, Castiglioni was aware of continuing social inequality among the new Republic’s inhabitants; and he strongly condemned the treatment of Native Americans and the brutality and exploitation that underpinned the institution of slavery in the southern plantations. In doing so, he related Italian debates on America to the big themes of Voltaire’s historiography and of the Enlightenment.

Contrary to the comparative indifference in Lombardy toward America, intellectual elites in the Kingdom of Naples voiced their interest in the American colonies and the United States early. These contacts led to a number of immediate legacies. When, in 1783, the Calabrian city of Castelmonardo was destroyed by an earthquake, the local authorities copied William Penn’s plan for the Pennsylvanian capital to rebuild their city as Filadelfia. The project for the new city was the idea of Filangieri’s friend Giovanni Andrea Serrao, bishop of Potenza and himself a native of Castelmonardo. Filangieri corresponded with Franklin, an admirer of his Scienza della Legislazione, which had been published in Naples between 1780 and 1785. It was Franklin who sent Filangieri an early copy of the American constitution. In 1782, Filangieri begged Franklin for help with his project of moving permanently to America as a solution to his financial difficulties in Naples and to overcoming obstacles to his marriage to a Hungarian noblewoman, Charlotte Frendel, whom he described as “a Lady whose virtues would lend her distinction even in Pennsylvania.” Advocating social reform through legislation, Filangieri was, in the words of John Robertson, a Neapolitan heir to Montesquieu. Education and a free press were key to his aims. This is what he hoped to find in the United States.

While Filangieri’s work made for a great comment on classical thought, frequently expanding on examples of British legal practice, references to American political institutions remained rare. Where Filangieri mentions the American Revolution, these references remained abstract, presented alongside those to Athens and Sparta. Filangieri’s interest in the American experiment reflects an often rather patronizing attitude of a knowing teacher, for instance when commenting on excesses during the War of Independence: “free citizens of America, you are too virtuous and too enlightened to ignore that having acquired the right to self-government you have in front of the Universe the rare obligation to be more moderate, wiser and luckier than any other people. In front of the tribunal of humankind you have to account for any sophistry that your errors could infringe upon liberty. Do not embarrass its defenders, do not make common cause with its enemies.”

Filangieri’s example of offering Americans advice illustrates an argument made at the start of this introduction: that intellectual flows were never one
directional and that in many cases they formed complex networks of debate. Several years after completing his *Scienza della Legislazione*, and still stuck in Naples, Filangieri befriended Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, an encounter documented in the German’s *Italienische Reise* and leading to a short reference in his novel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. It was Filangieri who introduced Goethe to Giambattista Vico’s philosophy. Almost two decades later, when Madame de Staël first visited Weimar, Goethe hosted Benjamin Constant. Introduced by Goethe to what he knew of the Neapolitan Enlightenment, Constant became Filangieri’s most influential commentator. He published his two volumes of annotations on Filangieri’s legal theory in 1822 and 1824. It was this commentary that integrated postrevolutionary (including American) experiences into Filangieri’s debate on legal and economic concepts. The impact of Filangieri’s work on Risorgimento political thought rests firmly on the Italian reception of Constant’s commentary. Instrumental to its initial reception was a substantial review of Constant in Vieusseux’s *Antologia*, followed shortly after by several Italian translations, signaling a continued interest in the work as late as the 1850s. Introducing the creative force of civil society into Filangieri’s state-centered concepts of reform, one of Constant’s main contributions was to translate the language of the Neapolitan Enlightenment into liberal concepts of postrevolutionary Europe.

One very specific aspect of American society Filangieri discussed regards its demographic development, used as a matrix to point to societal issues at home. Reflecting on the noxious consequences of legally imposed celibacy in much of Europe, Filangieri praised the American right of any citizen to marry as an instrument in support for the nation’s economic development, while at the same time reducing the vices associated with crime and prostitution. An important condition of this demographic development, Filangieri explains, was the equal distribution of land among settlers. Consequently, there seemed to be an economic and a political foundation to the culture that emerged in the new society across the Atlantic.

Castiglioni, who, unlike Filangieri, knew the United States through personal experience, gave a rather different account of the United States’ demographic foundations. Describing Connecticut’s laws on adultery, Castiglioni almost despaired at the Presbyterians’ interference in private lives, describing the different forms of corporal punishment, where the culprit “and his accomplice are brutally whipped on the bare body, then branded on the front head with a hot iron marking the letter A. Both then have to wear a rope around their neck and above their cloths, to be always visible.” Severe punishments notwithstanding, Castiglioni heard of surprising levels of *libertinaggio* in Connecticut, “which can only surprise the ears of a European,” noting in particular the ease with which “one gets familiar with young ladies, but also spend the night with them. . . . I was in doubt whether these tales were not exaggerated until I had the opportunity to see incontestable proofs.” Introducing his
Italian readers to the English term “bundling,” he explains that these opportunities offered him only limited pleasures. “Love in the United States, and in particular in the Northern states, is less lively, less refined than in most parts of Europe. Repulsive vices diminish in ladies the potency of amorous passion. The young pay on a daily basis for the satisfaction of their appetites. As a consequence, behind the search for more delicate proofs of love there is either complete indifference or brutish avidity. Women become quasi insensible, presenting themselves like statues in front of cupid’s tribunal. They compromise any modesty and make it a virtue to receive with indifference the most passionate declarations of love.”\(^{193}\) Olwen Hufton has suggested that characters as they appear in Castiglioni’s narrative “are part of male fantasy, all of them bigger and stronger than the men who enjoy them”; but they also serve as a striking contrast to another male fantasy: that of the chaste woman representing the virtuous nation as it had emerged in European literature from the mid-eighteenth century, from Rousseau’s Julie to Vittorio Alfieri’s Virginia.\(^{194}\) Incapable of explaining the customs he observed, or his attitude toward the women he met, Castiglioni moves on quickly to discuss Connecticut’s commerce in horses and sweet corn.

Despite these hands-on debates, idealist visions and abstract philosophical references remained the more important aspect of Italian Americana before 1800. Alfieri’s five odes *L’America libera* (1781)—celebrating the Marquis de Lafayette, Franklin, and Washington, and bemoaning the tyranny still reigning Italy—became the most famous expression of pro-American sentiments in Italy. Meanwhile, Alfieri’s expression of sympathy was still far from suggesting the application of American constitutional principles to Italy’s own political future. His support for the American Revolution went hand in hand with his increasing hostility toward the outcomes of the French Revolution at home.

While the aforementioned examples of Italian works on America demonstrate how Italian attitudes toward the New World had changed during the years of the American Revolution, for a surprisingly large number of Italians the United States remained insignificant, also after the War of Independence. For instance, despite its author’s academic and political background as an economic advisor to the Habsburgs, Count Gian Rinaldo Carli’s widely read ethnographic account, *Delle lettere americane*, published between 1780 and 1785, was still concerned with debates over the state of nature and the question whether the New and the Old Worlds had been connected via the sunken island of Atlantis.\(^{195}\) Carli, who had published his famous essay “Della patria degli Italiani” in Verri’s *Il Caffè*, offers a wide-ranging panorama of the Native populations’ physiology, of the continent’s climate and nature, and of social and political structures, as well as of religion, mores, and cultural practices, but in doing so his main source of information remains the continent’s very first descriptions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Carli’s
myth-loaded book seems to have had a more profound impact on Italy’s literary and philosophical debates than, for instance, the Burkes’ study of the colonies’ political economy. Rejecting Cornelius de Pauw’s thesis of the inability of America’s Native population to reach a state of civilization, Carli saw the Mexican and Peruvian civilizations as closely related to those of Egypt and China, a view for which he was praised by Franklin.

Emphasizing these connections, as well as the comparability of ancient civilizations, had been an important theme since the publication of *Religious Ceremonies of the World* by Bernard Picart and Jean Frédéric Bernard (1723), which included rich material on Native Americans. Meanwhile, an important purpose of Carli’s argument was philosophical, a justification of absolute power, directed against the fashionable political theories associated with Rousseau’s *Social Contract*. Twelve years after his *Lettere americane*, in 1792, Carli published a *Ragionamento sulla disuguaglianza*, also directed against the doctrines associated with Rousseau and the French Revolution. Despite the fact that their main focus was on South American civilizations, the *Lettere americane* are indirectly relevant to the purposes of this book, exactly because it sparked wider debates on political principles.

Similarly to Carli, Giacomo Leopardi’s perspective on the New World also remained largely Iberocentric. While little of his thought on the topic reached the outside world, Leopardi shows the extent to which even highly educated Italians, writing in the early decades of the nineteenth century, perpetuated the anthropological concerns of eighteenth-century philosophers. He was convinced that only thanks to Incas and Mexicans the rest of America’s Native population abolished its alleged cannibalistic practices. Leopardi knew about the *californii* that they had no proper language and that they lived in a “pure savage state,” representing “the last traces of primordial humanity.” Many of his ideas were based on William Robertson’s *History of America*, of which several Italian translations had been in circulation since the 1780s. The savage from California could not think; indeed he “does not know of thinking.” Rather than being a negative reflection on the savages, for the depressingly pessimistic Leopardi this was a celebration of a state of development that ignored the burdens of civilization. His view of the Natives’ character as determined by geographical conditions closely mirrored his ideas about Italian national character.

**Pamphlets, Not Muskets**

Books played an important, but not exclusive role in expressing Italian political thought on the United States during the Risorgimento. The brochures and pamphlets used throughout the different chapters of this book can be found in libraries and specialized collections throughout Italy and abroad. Huge numbers ended up in the British Library, often donated by Italian exiles and
collected in hefty folders or as individual items. Some were published anonymously, with incomplete or no bibliographic information. In many of these pamphlets the United States appeared only briefly, in the form of a passing reference used as a discursive instrument in a specific political context.

America also became a motive in political satire. For instance, in February 1848 the Genovese printer Luigi Banzoli published an *aerostatic correspondence* entitled “Nero’s travel to the Moon.” Printed on a single leaflet, this short play described the Roman emperor’s travels from America to the moon, represented as an allegorical satire on Ferdinando II of Naples. Nero knows that Americans see themselves as the proud defenders of liberalism and that they have formed an alliance with the constitutional movement in Italy. As a consequence, he fears not being welcome on their shores, which are richly populated by the Italian exiles of 1821. Forced to move on, Nero briefly descends on Venus, where the aged seducer becomes the object of much hilarity among the local women. Reprimanded for his tyrannical rule over Naples, his only option is to settle on the moon. Without engaging in any complex debate about American political institutions, the play pays witness to a widely held belief that the American Republic was a natural ally of Italy’s constitutional movement.

In a city like Genoa, a principal center of transatlantic trade and home of Christopher Columbus, local populations easily understood the sense behind references to America. Sicily, with its international trade connections and a constitutional tradition bound to British experiences, had similar reasons to evoke the example of the United States. In other parts of the peninsula, for instance the Papal Legations, the situation could be different. Chapter 3, which deals with the Revolutions of 1848 in Lombardy, Tuscany, and Sicily, examines pamphlets and documents of the parliamentary assemblies in conjunction with published accounts of the Revolution’s protagonists. A particular feature of satirical pamphlets and broadsheets published in Genoa was the playing with foreign accents, again typical for a port city. A short scene featuring a fictional dialogue between Radetzky and Metternich after the field marshal’s defeat in Lombardy transcribes the Bohemian’s Germanic sounding Italian, turning all the soft sounding into hard consonants:

RADESCHI: Fieni Metternich, fieni!

METTERNICH: Attio Radeschi, mi afer saputo che ti star qui assediato, afer sapute tue tiscrazie e afer a to portato soccorso.

RADESCHI: Si afer tante discrazie, non afer mangiar, ti portato mangiar?

Throughout the Risorgimento, censorship permitting, Italy’s learned journals engaged with international debates on a wide range of intellectual and political issues. Reviews of Italian and foreign books about America were a major source of information on the North American Republic. In particular, Vieusseux’s Florentine *Antologia* discussed social and economic developments in the
United States, helped by direct exchange agreements with the *North American Review*. An important role in communicating global political events on a wider scale was played by Giuseppe Compagnoni, whose *History of America* will be discussed in chapter 1. Assuming the editorship of the Venetian periodical *Notizie del Mondo*, the future inventor of the Italian *tricolore* set a new standard in Italian political journalism. 206 With his publication Compagnoni helped Italians to realize that social and political change at home was linked to world affairs, drawing on connections between the American and French Revolutions as well as on the experience of Napoleon’s rule in Italy.

Occasionally newspapers produced by the small community of Italian exiles in the United States, among them the Mazzinians Giuseppe Avezzana and Eleuterio Felice Foresti, offered insights into Italian views on American political institutions, but their influence on Italian debates remained extremely limited, with many of these papers never crossing the Atlantic. 207 In this respect they differed, for example, from Marx’s and Engels’s American journalism; also, they mostly wrote about the political situation in Europe, with information on the United States remaining scarce. Articles on America in the Italian press were frequently based on extracts from official documents and speeches, often translations from newspapers such as the *New York Tribune* and the *New York Herald*, and dispatches from Reuters or the *National Intelligencer*. As a consequence, the reading public in Italy was increasingly well informed about American affairs. Because much of this information
appeared without further commentary, some of it is of limited interest for an assessment of Italian ideas about the American Republic. The beginnings of the American Civil War, coinciding with the Unification of Italy, marked the moment when newspapers started reporting in much more detail, and often on a daily basis, on American events. As chapter 5 will show, Italians experienced the American Civil War as a truly unsettling event.

Relying on a vast network of contributors with connections around the globe, Italy’s Catholic press played a particularly prominent role in shaping Italian ideas about the New World. In this context it is interesting to note that Italy’s most important (and most detailed) commentator on Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* was the Roman Catholic priest Antonio Rosmini, whose critique of American political institutions will be discussed in chapter 2. The Jesuit *Civiltà cattolica* was among Italy’s best-informed periodicals, regularly reporting on social and political developments in the United States. While fighting an ideological battle against the liberal nation-state at home, it hoped that the young Republic across the ocean would one day be cured by conversion to Catholicism.208 Despite its status as an antigovernmental publication, *Civiltà cattolica* was among the peninsula’s most influential periodicals, claiming that even in Piedmont it had more subscribers than all the liberal papers taken together.209

**Singing and Dancing America**

Within the context of this book, representations of the New World in literature, opera, or dance serve to relate the role of the United States in Italian political thought to Italians’ wider cultural imagination, attempting to bridge the gap between abstract political ideas and more widely held views about the New World. The uses of these forms of fictional narratives (and their reception in changing historical contexts) offer different keys to views on the American Republic. The new quality of debate on the United States in the Italian press of the 1850s and 1860s is reflected in the programming of Italian theaters during the period of Unification. Writers of libretti picked up on the fashion for American themes in literature, but also on political news now readily available.

During the course of the nineteenth century the emergence of a transcontinental opera industry—as a means of exchange between the Old and the New World—was an important factor in this process.210 Singers and musicians increasingly worked on both sides of the Atlantic. As a consequence, not only traveling opera companies, but also publishers and impresari, sought to appeal to audiences in both worlds. Italian musicians were behind the New York–based Mazzinian periodical *Il Proscritto*, fiercely opposed to the politics assumed by the Piedmontese government after 1848.211 While they formed part of a still small group of people at home in both hemispheres, chapters 4 and 5 will show that their experience contributed significantly to giving authenticity to plots about America.
How socially relevant were images of the New World on stage? In Italy, theater was at the center of municipal structures of sociability; and more than anywhere else in Europe, theater helped Italians to identify themselves as a Kulturnation, an idea that was crucial to the project of Unification. The repercussions of this art form reached well beyond the social elites, who owned or rented private boxes in the peninsula’s famous opera houses, the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, the Teatro Comunale in Bologna, the principal Roman theaters or the Teatro San Carlo in Naples. The loggione in the upper floors of these theaters was usually populated by an audience that was more mixed socially, to include members of the lower middle classes and students. Barrel-organ players and municipal bands carried the most important tunes from the current program into the piazza, where they were also appreciated by those sections of society who would not be able to afford to go to the theater. For many Italians these potpourris of popular tunes were the only music they ever heard performed.212

Italian society in the nineteenth century was fractured not only along social divisions, but also regionally, where inhabitants of the Papal States had little in common with people from Tuscany or Piedmont, and where the majority of Sicilians or Calabresi knew little about people from Lombardy or Venetia. Thanks to the activities of impresari and the geographical mobility of their industry, productions of opera and ballet toured the entire peninsula, spreading from some of the world’s finest theaters to countless venues in smaller cities and performances at markets and trade fairs.213 Responses may have differed regionally, but the same art was shared across the peninsula. In this sense theater fulfilled a role comparable to that of periodicals, which circulated between gabinetti di lettura across Italy.

Owing to the limited availability of sources, analyzing the reception of an opera or ballet across different sections of Italian society raises methodological challenges.214 Meanwhile, the fact that the same works were usually performed all over Italy, from North to South and including the islands, makes theater a particularly interesting source for research into nineteenth-century Italian culture. The musical press, with its network of correspondents covering some of the most remote theaters in Italy (and abroad), spread news about performances and their reception all over the peninsula.215 Newspapers and learned journals too reported on the current season, with the effect that even those readers who did not go to the theater knew what was happening on stage. Historians usually leave those articles in the periodicals to the few opera scholars interested in reception studies. What they miss are the heated debates over life in the United States—debates on slavery, the Civil War, and even the American constitution, all triggered by the experience of Verdi’s Un ballo in maschera or Rota’s ballet Uncle Tom. Including these sources in my analysis stands for an approach to intellectual history that attempts to bridge the gap between political thought and culture.