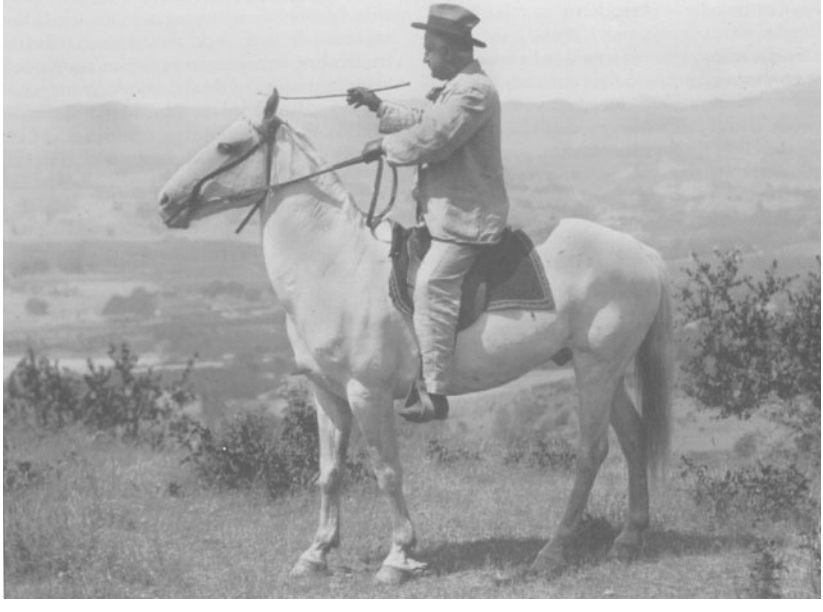
CHAPTER ONE

The Success *of* Italian Winemakers *in* California *and the* "Pavesian Myth"

THE ITALIAN SWISS COLONY, THE ITALIAN VINEYARD COMPANY, AND THE E. & J. GALLO WINERY

March 12, 1881, provides a convenient and definitive start date for the history of the Piedmontese immigrant presence in the California wine industry. On that day, the Italian Swiss Colony was incorporated in San Francisco, with its premises to be established on the gently sloping hills of the Russian River Valley, eighty-five miles north of the city. The idea for the enterprise had been hatched among the Italian immigrant merchant elite of San Francisco as an ethnic utopia; a community-bred company that could both provi3de jobs to Italian immigrant workers with experience in viticulture and reward its ethnic financial backers with a decent return on their investment. The original promoter of the enterprise was Andrea Sbarboro, a merchant and banker who had immigrated to San Francisco from a village in western Liguria as a boy. Using a modest amount of capital

provided by the circle of northern Italian businessmen with whom he mingled in the city, Sbarboro acquired fifteen thousand acres of land in Sonoma County, just south of Cloverdale. He then brought in a handful of northern Italian immigrant laborers and renamed the site Asti in honor of the Piedmontese town famous for its wines. The substantial and steady growth of grape prices on the San Francisco market during the 1870s had inspired Sbarboro to focus his enterprise on grape growing. However, not only did grape prices proceed to plummet during the following decade, but the company's first crops were a considerable disappointment. The only reason the Italian Swiss Colony even survived these early years was thanks to additional injections of money from the Italian financiers in San Francisco.



Andrea Sbarboro inspects Italian Swiss Colony's vineyards at Asti, ca. 1890. Courtesy Alfreda Cullinan/San Francisco Museum and Historical Society.

Pietro Carlo Rossi, ca. 1900. Courtesy Center for Migration Studies, Staten Island, New York.

The turning point for the Italian Swiss Colony's success was when Pietro Carlo Rossi, a native of Dogliani (in the Langhe) and a pharmacological graduate from the University of Turin, took over the reins in 1888. Rossi wisely decided to transform the company into a winery as a way to cope with the fluctuations of the grape market. Shortly thereafter, he began to experiment with innovative winemaking techniques and made the fateful decision to produce bulk wine and ship it to the vast urban immigrant markets in the Eastern United States. By the end of the century, the Italian Swiss Colony had become the largest winery in California in terms of vineyard acreage, production capacity, distribution network, and market reach. Asti had grown from a plot of land to the size of a small town, complete with Italian school and church. Rossi's colonial house and Sbarboro's neoclassical villa, which hosted parties for visiting politicians, diplomats, and royalty, symbolized the settlement's prosperity.[1]

Rossi's sons Robert and Edmund took over the company after their father's sudden death in 1911 and continued to employ prevalently

Piedmont-born immigrants as both laborers and winemakers. Some of these employees, like Edoardo Seghesio, went on to found their own independent wineries; others, like Joe Vercelli, pursued careers as highly skilled winemakers.[2] Prohibition was naturally a major shock when it came to the company's prospects for growth, inaugurating a more complicated period in its history. In 1920, a few months after total Prohibition came into effect, a four-way partnership was formed by the two Rossi brothers, the then-superintendent Enrico Prati, and Edoardo Seghesio, under the name Asti Grape Products (the Dogliani-born Seghesio, who was a relative of the Rossis and Prati's father-in-law, dropped out of the partnership just one year later). The company survived this period remarkably well by selling grapes, grape juice, and grape concentrate to its already-consolidated market for domestic wine production and use (permitted as an exception to the Eighteenth Amendment in the amount of two hundred gallons per family per year), and it resumed its old name of Italian Swiss Colony at the repeal of Prohibition in 1933. After relaunching the company as a leading U.S. winery following the repeal of Prohibition, Robert and Edmund Rossi ceded control to the National Distillers Corporation in 1942.[3] The company went back into family hands in 1953 when it was sold to another conglomerate, the United Vintners Company, and Pietro Carlo Rossi's grandson, Edmund A. Rossi Jr., took over as vice president and director of quality control.[4]

The Italian Vineyard Company would get its start nearly twenty years later and some six hundred miles further south on flat, sandy, barren land in the San Bernardino Valley, a hundred miles northeast of Los Angeles. Despite such different environmental and climatic conditions, the winery would come to have much in common with its Asti-based rival. In 1881, the same fateful year the Italian Swiss Colony was founded, future Italian Vineyard Company founder Secondo Guasti emigrated from his birthplace of Mombaruzzo d'Asti, leaving

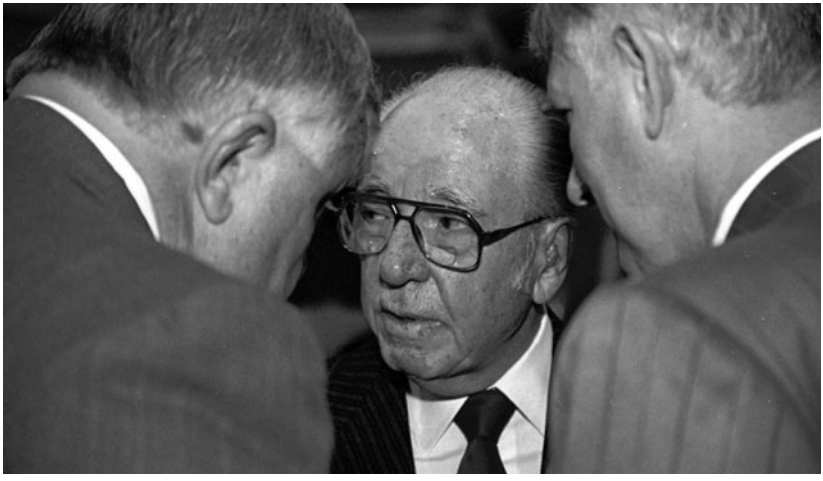
Italy on a ship headed for Panama. In 1883, after brief and discouraging stays in San Francisco, Mexico, and Arizona, Guasti arrived in Los Angeles, where he found work as a cook in an Italian-owned hotel–restaurant. After marrying the owner's fifteen-year-old daughter, Louisa Amillo (1872–1937), he began working as a wine merchant.[5] In 1900, Guasti, like Sbarboro before him, used capital provided by predominantly Piedmontese immigrant investors to buy a vast plot of land split off from a former Mexican rancho in South Cucamonga, where tracks for the Southern Pacific Railroad were just being laid.[6] By the end of the decade, Guasti's grapevines had expanded so far as to garner the distinction of forming the "largest vineyard in the world." Like Asti in Sonoma County, Guasti's property had expanded to the size of a small town. Indeed, Guasti was so proud of his accomplishments that he renamed the township after himself.[7] It, too, became a company town assembled around the winery, a church, a

Secondo Guasti, ca. 1910. Collection of the author.

school, and the house of the founding father, where receptions were held for local dignitaries and visiting Europeans. Some of Guasti's Piedmontese employees likewise went on to open their own wineries. Giacomo and Giovanni Vai, natives of San Mauro Torinese, acquired the North Cucamonga Winery, where they made tonics, sacramental wine, and other products that managed to pass through the legal net of Prohibition. Giovanni De Matteis of Viale d'Asti, one of the Italian Vineyard Company's first shareholders, also ran the Italian American Vineyard of San Gabriel during the 1920s and 1930s.[8] Finally, most of the Italian Vineyard Company's early laborers were also Piedmontese immigrants whom Guasti had specifically called to Los Angeles. Unlike what happened at the Italian Swiss Colony, however, where Sbarboro made the strategic and ideological choice to employ a strictly "white" workforce, much of the seasonal field labor at the Italian Vineyard Company was performed by Japanese, and later Mexican, migrants.

Secondo Guasti Sr. died without witnessing the repeal of Prohibition that he had long hoped for, and management of the company passed to his son, Secondo Guasti Jr. Upon the latter's premature death in 1933, the Italian Vineyard Company entered a phase in which it repeatedly changed hands. In 1957 it came under the control of the Brookside Winery owned by Franco American Philo Biane and Piedmont native Joe Aime. The company was eventually absorbed by a series of large financial corporations in the wine and food sector, while the area of Cucamonga gradually declined as a region for extensive grape cultivation. Today, only a few relics remain of Guasti's winery and the once largest vineyards in the world.[9]

The E. & J. Gallo Winery, founded by the brothers Ernest and Julio Gallo, started right where Rossi's and Guasti's efforts had been forced to leave off—the hiatus of Prohibition. Reaping the fruits of these pioneering attempts to build a national wine market in the United States,



Ernest Gallo with collaborators, ca. 2005. Courtesy Associated Press.

the Gallo Winery went on to achieve extraordinary results. Today, the company is a winemaking colossus that employs more than five thousand people worldwide, owns more than fifteen thousand acres of vineyards across the state of California, and sells seventy-five million cases of wine per year in the United States and ninety other countries, for a total yearly revenue of $1.5 billion. The winery's roots can be traced back to 1900, when Giuseppe Gallo (1882–1933), one of seven children born into a family of butchers, horse traders, and tavern keepers, left the his native rural town of Fossano, Piedmont, for the United States. Giuseppe (who by then went by the name of Joe) eventually arrived in California after spending time in Venezuela and Philadelphia. He spent his early years in the United States working various pick-and-shovel jobs before entering the petty commerce of wine with his younger brother Michele (Mike) (1885–196?) and becoming a saloon keeper in various boomtowns on the California mining frontier. In 1908, Joe married Assunta (Susie) Bianco (1889–1933), the daughter of an immigrant farmer from Agliano d'Asti. With

the substantial help of his young wife, Joe ran a number of different saloons and boardinghouses (informal hotels for single migrants) up and down Northern and Central California before Prohibition forced him out of the trade. Joe had just started his own grape-growing business when Ernest and Julio were born a year apart in the town of Jackson, at the foot of the Sierra Nevada, and he began training them as vineyard workers at a very young age.

Ernest and Julio's life was to be indelibly marked by their parents' dramatic death, which was ruled as a murder–suicide. In June 1933, Joe Gallo apparently fatally shot his wife before turning the gun on himself. Just weeks later, the two brothers founded their winery in Modesto. While the Eighteenth Amendment had just been repealed, as promised by newly elected President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the market for wine had shrunk significantly since the pre-Prohibition era. The Gallos made it their mission to expand and dominate that market through the vertical organization of their company's departments, large-scale production, and mass marketing. The first of their products to become vastly popular were sweet, sparkling, and fortified wines whose main consumers were poor minorities in decaying inner cities. But substantial acquisitions of vineyards in California's Central Valley and the renowned wine regions of Sonoma and Napa; innovative quality research originally overseen by Julio; and aggressive marketing strategies masterminded by Ernest gradually transformed the Modesto-based winery into a brand that met the tastes of more discriminating consumers while still holding mass-market appeal. Over the years, the E. & J. Gallo Winery has become renowned for remaining in family hands despite its massive growth. Indeed, by the time Ernest Gallo died in 2007, the company's brands and divisions were being run by as many as sixteen different family members spanning three generations.[10]

Julio Gallo inspects a vineyard of the E. & J. Gallo Winery, 1992. Courtesy Corbis.

WHERE THEY CAME FROM: PIEDMONT, ITALY

The successes of Piedmontese winemakers and their placement within California's racial and socioeconomic hierarchies must be understood within the historical context of Piedmontese migration to the United States and elsewhere. Despite hailing from the comparatively richer Northern section of the Italian peninsula, Rossi, Guasti, and the Gallos came from a place where *la miseria*—extreme poverty—was almost as prevalent as in the parts of Southern Italy that have been most often the subject of the histories of Italian immigration to the United States. In the rural surroundings from which they departed, migration was a common experience that touched the daily and emotional lives of those who left as well as those who stayed.

Piedmont, the northwestern part of Italy, derives its name from its location at the foot (*pied*) of the Alps, the chain of mountains that separates it from nearby France. The geography of the region is varied, with the mountains in the west sloping down toward the plain of the Po Valley in the east, and the rolling hills of Langhe and Monferrato in the south bordering on the coastal region of Liguria. Most of the recorded history of Piedmont coincides with the House of Savoy, which ruled over the land from 1046 until 1861, when King Victor Emmanuel II became the first King of Italy, thus unifying the country as an independent state. Since 1720, when the Treaty of The Hague handed Sardinia to the Kingdom of Savoy, the state became the Kingdom of Sardinia with the city of Turin as its capital. The political history of the Kingdom of Sardinia, and Piedmont therein, was especially influenced by its proximity to France. Even the dialects spoken in the region derive from French and are more similar to it than to Italian. In 1798, the Napoleonic invasion extended legal reform to Piedmont that provided for the end of the remnants of feudalism and the seizure of lands from the Church. In 1848, King Charles Albert introduced a Constitution (Statuto), inspired by the bourgeois revolutions occurring on the other side of the Alps, which would become the supreme law of the Kingdom of Italy after 1861. On the eve of Italian unification under the Savoy crown (a process in which the military role of the French was also crucial), Piedmont was one of the country's more developed areas. It boasted industrial districts in Biella and Turin (the Italian capital between 1861 and 1865, home to a population of 175,000), an advanced irrigation system that supported the capitalist agriculture of the Eastern plains, more than one-third of Italy's railroads, and rates of literacy that widely surpassed the rest of Italy.[11]

But the economic and social development of the region was far from continuous or homogeneous, and this was particularly true for the struggling Southern part of Piedmont where Rossi, Guasti, and

the Gallos were born—Langhe and Monferrato. Today this section of Piedmont is one of the richest in all of Italy and is renowned for its food and wine. Langhe and Monferrato have become the destinations of choice for upscale international tourists interested in exciting local cuisine and sought-after wines—Barolo, Barbaresco, Nebbiolo, Grignolino, Barbera, Dolcetto, Freisa, Arneis, and Moscato. Until globalization, deindustrialization, and economic restructuring changed its social and human landscape, however, Southern Piedmont was long one of the poorest areas in Northern Italy. The mostly hilly provinces of Langhe and Monferrato lie halfway between Turin and Genoa and for centuries endured the dearth and excessive fragmentation of arable plots. Bypassed by industrialization, which did not reach them until after World War II, Langhe and Monferrato suffered from their marginal position in relation to nearby centers of economic activity.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Langhe and Monferrato provided large numbers of seasonal migrants to other parts of Piedmont and especially across the Alps in France. For some time each year, local peasants—both men and women—became construction workers, chimney sweeps, silk spinners, wet nurses, street performers, beggars, or rural laborers abroad. They used their income from migrant work to bolster their extremely fragile family economies.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the consolidation of an Italian market for wine, the early industrialization of winemaking, and the damaging effects of the phylloxera blight on competing French vineyards encouraged the intensive development of grape cultivation, consequently converting the local rural subsistence economy into market-oriented crop agriculture. For a while, the introduction of large-scale viticulture seemed to provide hope for the region. By the 1880s, however, many critical factors converged to transform traditional short-range seasonal migrations into a mass exodus to destinations both near and far. In the

last quarter of the nineteenth century, the population of the area grew at an unprecedented rate. The high taxes levied by the new Italian state—to check its national debt and the tariff war it waged against France—worsened the effects of the agrarian crisis caused by the arrival on European markets of cheap grains from Russia and the United States. In Southern Piedmont, the crisis was made even more acute by the spread of the phylloxera epidemic on Italy's side of the Alps. Against the backdrop of these ongoing problems, the wide availability of jobs elsewhere and the transport revolution, which made even transoceanic travel cheaper and shorter, opened up unprecedented opportunities for mobile, rural Piedmont natives. Migration went from being a short-term economic resource that was needed to survive and stay on the land, to offering the chance to imagine a different way of life.[12] As a result, until 1900 Piedmont was ahead of nearly all other regions in Italy in terms of emigration rates. In the period 1876–1900, Piedmont ranked second only to the Veneto for its number of emigrants, with 709,076 of its men and women leaving for destinations abroad (13.5 percent of the total Italian emigrant population). Even after the turn of the century, when the sources of Italian emigration shifted to the Southern regions, Piedmontese mobility remained strong: 831,088 emigrants were registered in the period of 1901–1915, which accounted for 9.5 percent of all Italian emigrants.[13]

Migrants from Langhe and Monferrato followed the routes paved by earlier immigrants. The vast majority chose France, traditionally the most favored destination, or Argentina, where a contingent of Piedmontese contractors and businessmen had immigrated in the wake of the War of Independence (1810–1818). While in France many Piedmontese entered construction work, in Argentina they concentrated themselves in the rural areas around Santa Fe and Mendoza, seeking opportunities in independent farming.[14] Only one in ten turn-of-the-twentieth-century Piedmontese migrants chose the United States as their destination. Of those who did, some settled

in New York, where many found work in the restaurant business. A sizable Piedmontese community survived on Manhattan's West Side around 23rd Street through the 1920s.[15] Others moved on to the mining frontier between the Midwest and the West and found work in soft coal, iron, copper, and gold mines in Southern Illinois, Nevada, Colorado, Montana, Idaho, and California.[16]

Overall, an estimated ten thousand Piedmontese immigrants traveled to the Pacific Coast, with an unknown number eventually returning to Italy. The regional diaspora reached its peak before the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, when California remained a costly destination for European newcomers and only certain kinds of jobs and migration projects offered benefits. In fact, many Piedmontese immigrants were penniless peasants who left Langhe and Monferrato with the intention to work, save money, return home, and buy property. Many of them ended up working in the wineries run by their fellow Piedmont natives. Others, mostly men but also women, possessed some skills and money and did not necessarily regard migration as temporary. The martyr and icon of labor internationalism Bartolomeo Vanzetti (1888–1927) was part of this massive human movement, having left his native Villafalletto in 1908 as a modest pastry maker seeking fortune in the United States. Similarly, Rossi, Guasti, and Gallo Sr. departed their small hometowns as a trained pharmacist, a baker–merchant, and a butcher–tavern keeper, respectively, with a small amount of capital in their pockets and the determination to "make America."

THE PAVESIAN MYTH: ITALIAN WINEMAKING IN CALIFORNIA AND THE HISTORIANS

The deprivation that plagued late nineteenth-century Southern Piedmont and the concurrent belief that human mobility offered

the best opportunity for escape helps to explain why such an optimistic narrative of the immigrant experience in California developed in both popular memory and historiography. Back in the rural towns where the entrepreneurial and labor "wine diaspora" originated, the outstanding achievements of Rossi, Guasti, the Gallos, and other "sons of Piedmont" fostered a popular mythology of California as a Piedmontese promised land, a view that easily overlooked class differences and all-too-common failures. Moreover, this celebratory migration narrative developed and thrived largely due to the fact that these immigrants succeeded in an area of human activity so deeply entrenched in Piedmontese native culture—that of winemaking and wine drinking.

This myth of a "Piedmont on the Pacific"—a triumphant public memory of Piedmontese immigration to California that incorporates all the verbal and nonverbal "texts" that have accumulated about that experience since the late nineteenth century, in California and transnationally—has gained further currency since the 1950s through its inclusion in the writing of Cesare Pavese (1908–1950). Pavese is arguably the most accomplished Piedmontese novelist and one of the most important Italian writers of the twentieth century. A pioneering translator and critic of modern American literature (despite never having actually visited the United States), Pavese did more to create a hegemonic literary image of Piedmont than did any other writer. The cafés, streets, and courtyards of Turin and the hilly landscape of his native rural Langhe during the war-torn 1940s are the vivid canvases on which Pavese deployed his personal, poetic dramas of love, despair, existential angst, and loneliness. For the protagonist of his last novel, *The Moon and the Bonfires*, published posthumously after his suicide in 1950, Pavese chose a migrant who has returned to the Langhe after World War II and undergoes the painful process of acknowledging the merciless work of time. His experience of

migration and the hybridizing effect it has had on his identity have alienated him from his childhood friends. The estranged returnee, known only by his nickname "Eel," now measures his once familiar surroundings against another place that is bound in memory—his personal America: "From station to station [I] had reached California, and, seeing those long hills under the sun, had said: 'I'm at home.' Even America ended in the sea, and this time there was no sense in shipping out again, so I stayed there among the pine trees and the vineyards. 'Me, with a hoe in my hands,' I thought, 'How they'd laugh at home.' But you don't hoe in California. It's more like being a gardener with us."[17]

This passage ably condenses the image of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Piedmontese immigration to California as it is preserved in memory, narrated in letters and photographs, and written about in history books. According to this popular discourse, now over a century in the making, turn-of-the-twentieth-century California was just like the hills of Southern Piedmont, except that its bountiful soil hardly even required effort to extract the fruits of human labor. This legendary California provided a familiar landscape and climate, not to mention abundant career opportunities. Though not the worker's paradise described by the shipping-line agents who traversed the Italian countryside at the turn of the twentieth century ("How they'd laugh at home to see me with a hoe in my hands," remarks Eel), this Piedmontese California is the dreamed-of "Merica" that delivers what it has promised to those courageous enough to make the journey. "Everyone here seems to think that I've come back to buy myself a house," Eel continues. "They call me 'the American,' and show me their daughters. For a man who left without so much as a surname I ought to be pleased, and in fact I am."[18] As Pavese's character conveys, Piedmontese immigration to California is a success story, a narrative of continuity and transplantation to a familiar physical and cultural–economic environment whose central

theme is found in the symbols of the hoe and the vineyards. This discourse, originated in popular memory and consolidated in its literary transposition, can be called the "Pavesian myth" of Piedmontese winemaking success in California.

The extent to which the Pavesian myth has influenced the historical interpretation and narration of the role of Piedmontese immigrants in California winemaking has been significant to say the least. Perhaps unsurprisingly, among the considerably diverse works published on both sides of the Atlantic documenting that history, Italian/Piedmontese local historians have written the most enthusiastic accounts. Maurizio Rosso's *Piemontesi nel Far West: Studi e testimonianze sull'emigrazione piemontese in California* (Piedmontese in the Far West: Studies and Testimonies on Piedmontese Immigration to California) is the most comprehensive and well-crafted of these quasi-scholarly contributions, which tend to be analytically naive, occasionally digressing into impressionism and the biographical celebration of a group of "illustrious men" and their impressive accomplishments.[19] The celebratory tone of such regional heritage–oriented histories is largely due to an uncritical reading of the primary sources available. In fact, many of these sources consist of documents that were either produced by the same wineries being studied—printed publicity material, pamphlets, autobiographies, and interviews—or published by circles of Italian American potentates to which the Piedmontese wine entrepreneurs belonged—biographical collections, almanacs on the Italian "colonies" of California, and official narratives by Italian consuls in San Francisco and Los Angeles. It should come as no surprise, then, when such sources concentrate on the "marvelous achievements and destinies" of the major winemakers and their companies, limiting themselves to a few, brief passages that disclose the power relations—in terms of class, gender, and race—implicit in their work.

The scholarship published in the United States, on the other hand, belongs to two major fields: the history of wine in the United States—mostly written by non–Italian American agricultural and wine historians—and the history of Italian immigration to California—mainly written by Italian American historians. While both groups of scholars have shown far less interest in the regional background of Piedmontese immigrant winemakers, often addressing them generically as "Italians," they have also taken the Pavesian myth for granted when dealing with the Italian Swiss Colony, the Italian Vineyard Company, and the E. & J. Gallo Winery, thus reinforcing the myth with an academic patina. The rich historiography of California wine has understandably focused on the technical and commercial aspects of winemaking, and wine historians have underscored the extensive practical knowledge and cultivation methods introduced by Italian immigrant winemakers, most of whom happened to be Piedmontese. Their insistence has been on the wide-ranging reverberation of an "Italian" legacy on California wine.[20] Immigration historians, for their part, have widely discussed winemaking as one of the industries that best characterized Italian immigration to California between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The overall experience of Italian immigrants in California was in fact substantially different from that of their far more populous counterparts in the urban enclaves of the East and the Midwest, whose history has been studied more extensively. California's peculiar history, with its early specialization in agriculture, its delayed industrialization, and its unique ethnic and racial composition (especially the large numbers of Asian and Mexican/Chicano minorities) influenced the conditions of its Italian immigrants to a significant extent. Contrary to what occurred in New York, Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia, where Italians concentrated themselves in low-skilled construction and industrial jobs, many Italian Californians pursued the path of agriculture. In 1900, 32.1 percent of them had rural occupations, as opposed to 5.3 percent in

New York State, 5.5 percent in New Jersey, 2.4 percent in Pennsylvania, and 1.9 percent in Massachusetts.[21] They also arrived in California with more starting capital and a better education, they came from more economically developed regions of Italy, and they were more predisposed to permanent immigration. Not only did these immigrants therefore occupy a higher social position upon their arrival, but their interest in agriculture also allowed them to assimilate and climb the social ladder more quickly than their counterparts in the rest of the United States.[22]

A decisively optimistic vision of this collective experience was central to its historiography from the start, inaugurated as it was in the pioneering work on Italian immigration to California, Andrew Rolle's *The Immigrant Upraised: Italian Adventurers and Colonists in an Expanding America*, published in 1968. Though later revisited and rendered more complex, Rolle's sanguine perspective has never been radically contested by later generations of Italian American historians.[23] As for the specific case of Italian immigrant winemakers in California, the historian Sebastian Fichera has noted how such entrepreneurs enjoyed privileged access to credit thanks to the cooperative instincts and financial aggregation skills of the Northern Italian business community in San Francisco, which was already in place before the full-blown mass immigration of Italians to California in the early twentieth century. According to Fichera, the main reason the Italian community in San Francisco and its rural surroundings was so much more successful than its sister communities in Eastern U.S. cities was because its members were uniquely prepared to create social capital and develop autonomous financial institutions.[24] The immigration and food historian Donna Gabaccia has also emphasized the importance of a vast national ethnic market of fellow Italian Americans poised to consume the products of these new California winemakers.[25]

Despite making rare mention of the predominantly Piedmontese origins of these immigrant winemakers, and dealing with Rossi,

Guasti, and the Gallos under a national rather than regional rubric, two paradigms come up repeatedly in wine and immigration histories that perpetuate the Pavesian myth. According to the first, California's ecology, environment, and climate all greatly resembled those of the land that Italian immigrants had left behind. The supposedly striking resemblance between the hills around Oakland and those of his native Langhe is precisely what caused the protagonist of Cesare Pavese's *The Moon and the Bonfires* to exclaim, "I'm at home!" Therefore, a less traumatic transition can hardly be imagined for these immigrants than what they experienced moving from Piedmont to California. The second paradigm insists that the mostly Northern Italian immigrants arrived in California well-equipped with the skills required to cultivate grapevines and obtain wine of marketable quality, since they came from what was, and still is, a widely known Italian wine region. It was thus *natural* for them to find an occupational niche in grapes and wine in California, which in turn guaranteed them social and financial success.

The optimistic determinism of the Pavesian myth is a powerful discourse that has worked effectively, since its late nineteenth-century inception, as an *agent of history*. A century ago, it helped immigrant winemakers and padrones recruit laborers from their distant diasporic homes by luring them with the prospect of work and security in a familiar, if more fertile, land overseas. Up to this day, the myth has suggested a direct lineage, bound by blood as well as craft, between the wines of California and Europe; a narrative framed within the larger discourse about California as an American Mediterranean, which has been part of the national mystique of the American West and advertised as such to generations of U.S. consumers.[26] As a historical explanation, however, the determinist Pavesian narrative is extremely shallow, if not utterly misleading. First, it underestimates the importance of the dense networks of social relations both inside

and outside the Piedmontese community that were crucial in helping immigrants develop their careers and life goals as wine entrepreneurs and laborers. It also precludes asking important questions about the complex connection between Piedmontese migration to California and the unique economic development of the state of California, as mentioned above. For example, what specific jobs were actually open to immigrant workers and middle-class immigrants from Piedmont? What roles did they perform in the local labor market? And what kinds of independent occupations were available to them as gateways to upward mobility?

Second, the determinist explanation of the Piedmontese success in California winemaking neglects to sufficiently consider the multiracial and multiethnic nature of Californian society at the turn of the twentieth century (see table 1). When Piedmontese immigrants began to arrive in large numbers during the late nineteenth century, California seemed like an open frontier between Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Piedmontese immigrants' own village-based diasporas intersected with many other migration flows from elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere and across the Pacific.[27] As the focus of numerous internal and international migrations, California was also the stage for much of the contemporary debate over how to build the American nation, who belonged and who did not, who was desirable and who was not, and what role each race should play in the division of labor required to develop the country.[28] The related perception of Northern and Southern Italians as irreconcilably different racial groups was especially potent in that environment. More than just the kind of fragmentation that can arise from Italian *campanilismo*, or civic pride, this unequivocal notion of racial difference was stoked by the widespread racism of early twentieth-century America.

In texts dealing with the experience of Piedmontese winemakers in California, there is an overall tendency to ignore the fact that

Table 1

NATIONAL ORIGIN OF IMMIGRANTS (FOREIGN BORN) IN CALIFORNIA, 1850–1920

	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920
Chinese	660	34,935	48,790	74,548	71,066	40,262	36,248	28,812
English	3,050	12,227	19,202	24,657	35,457	35,746	48,667	58,572
French	1,546	8,462	8,063	9,550	11,855	12,256	17,390	20,387
Germans	2,926	21,646	29,699	42,532	61,472	72,449	76,305	67,180
Irish	2,452	33,147	54,421	62,962	63,138	44,476	52,475	45,308
Italians	228	2,805	4,660	7,537	15,495	22,777	63,601	88,502
Japanese	32	133	1,224	10,264	41,356	71,952		
Mexicans	6,454	9,150	8,978	8,648	7,164	8,068	33,444	86,610
Portuguese	109	1,459	2,495	4,705	9,859	12,068	22,427	24,517

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, *7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th Census of Population*, vol. 3, tab. 1b (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1921), 85.

these immigrants and their children were forced to confront a delicate, controversial alchemy of race in Californian society, becoming themselves profoundly transformed when it came to thinking about their own identity and that of the many others with whom they came into contact. As will be seen, the strong concentration of Piedmont-born immigrants in the wine economy had much more to do with how notions of race were articulated in American politics and society than with the discursive images and ideas of continuity and cultural transplantation perpetuated by the Pavesian myth. The most convenient place from which to start rethinking the Piedmontese experience in California viticulture and winemaking, then, is the foundational tenet of that myth—the relationship between the immigrants and the land; between these Old World newcomers and both the imagined and the real geography of California.