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DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

SAIL - Sicilians dreAming Louisiana: Agents of Migration and Labour Recruiters on the Palermo-New Orleans Route (1865-1901)

SAIL analyses early migration from Sicily to Louisiana between 1865 and 1901. It sheds light on agents of migration who enrolled peasants in Sicily and on their transnational connections with labour recruiters based in Louisiana, who were looking for a labour force after the abolition of slavery at the end of the US Civil War in 1865. On the other side of the Atlantic, the Italian government considered emigration as an issue to be managed or opposed: the 1901 law restricted the activity of agents of migration, who were regarded as people smugglers and used as a scapegoat to justify migration, rather than being studied as one of the interrelated factors triggering it. This simplistic view permeated the public debate in Italy, has not been challenged by scholarship on Sicilian migration, and resonates with current populist and xenophobic narratives. SAIL offers the first comprehensive study of early Sicilian migration to Louisiana by adopting an interdisciplinary approach combining social, economic, and cultural history with literature. Thanks to a thorough investigation and cross-referencing of untapped Italian and US archival sources and literary works, SAIL maps the presence of agents of migration in Sicily, analysing their identity, background, methods, organisation, and the transnational connections with labour recruiters in Louisiana, gauging their effectiveness in disseminating a dreaming image of the USA among Sicilian peasants and examining the extent to which their activity impacted the migration flow alongside other factors (economic depression, political turmoil, chain migration, remittances). SAIL will fill a scholarly gap, develop tools for researching migrations, and reflect on Sicily's past and its present as one of the main gateways into Europe. Through activities involving academic and non-academic audiences, SAIL will stimulate a debate and raise awareness around one of Europe's most pressing concerns: safeguarding the right to safe migration.

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