Influences on Southern Italy Emigration
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Lecture Description: ID 500151

Millions of Italians left Italy by the 1920’s, what where the influences in Southern Italy that caused so many to seek a new life elsewhere? We will look at the political, social and economic factors that influenced this mass emigration and how they still cast a shadow over this part of Italy.

Outline:

What is Italy? A land of history and culture.

Background: Italian Unification (il Risorgimento)

To fully understand Italy today, you must understand her complicated history.

Before the 1860’s, what we now call Italy was a collection of various kingdoms and duchies in the north and a large kingdom in the south. The Italian Unification saw forces of northern Italy ‘conquer’ southern Italy to form the new Kingdom of Italy.

Italy is a united political entity but there are cultural differences between different regions that have roots going back far prior to the Italian Unification.

Italy Today: Italy is divided into 7,926 comuni (city/town) in 107 provinces separated into 20 regions.

The people, customs and traditions of the various provinces of Italy can be very diverse. This applies to dialects, foods, wine and traditions.

Important Dates:

- 1861 Italian Unification: Encouraged emigration
- 1888 Brazil Abolishes Slavery: Encouraged emigration
- 1914 – 1918 World War 1: Restricted emigration
- 1921 USA Immigration restrictions
The Numbers: Italian emigration between 1876 and 1926:

During this period the total emigration from Italy was:

- 8.9 million to the Americas
- 7.6 million to Europe
- 300,000 to Africa (Italian colonies: Libya and Horn of Africa)

National Bureau of Economic Research Volume Title: International Migrations, Volume II, 1931: Interpretations. Volume Publisher: NBER. Publication Date: 1931 Chapter Title: Italian Migration Movements, 1876 to 1926 Chapter Author: Anna Maria Ratti.

Earthquakes:

- 1857 Basilicata
- 1908 Messina, Sicily
- 1910 Campania and Basilicata border area

Historical earthquakes and damage patterns in Potenza Potenza (Basilicata, Southern Italy) Fabrizio Terenzio Gizzi and Nicola Masini. Istituto per i Beni Archeologici e Monumentali, CNR, Area della Ricerca di Potenza, Tito Scalo (PZ), Italy. ANNALS OF GEOPHYSICS, VOL. 50, N. 5, October 2007

Plagues and epidemics: Nationwide

- Cholera Epidemic: 1866 – 67 approx. 130,000 deaths
- Meningitis Epidemic: 1870’s uncounted, 80% mortality from infection
- Cholera Epidemic: 1884 – 85 approx. 50,000 deaths
- Smallpox Epidemics: 1900 – 02 1920 – 21
- Whooping Cough: 1901 - 1905


Agriculturally based economy:

- Absent landowners.
- Poor farmland.
- Crop failures.

Usi Civici. Prior to Unification the Catholic Church was a large landowner and provided communal lands which peasants had the right to use for grazing, growing, gathering, and collecting wood. The new Kingdom of Italy worked to remove the influence of the Church in the life of Italians and redistributed many of their landholdings.
The draw of new countries. Opportunity for jobs and to support their families. Prior emigrants from individual towns were a key factor in where new emigrants headed.

Birds of Passage: As many as 50% of all Italian emigrants returned to Italy, at least temporarily.

Land of Women: Basilicata, Emigration, and the Women Who Remained Behind, 1880-1914
Victoria Calabrese (2017) The Graduate Center, City University of New York

"Taking everything together it would seem that the Italians, in spite of poverty and illiteracy, are -if they will remain in the United States - a desirable element to fuse with our motley population. They bring to us the logical qualities of the Latin race, and they show in the long run the effect of an experience which no other people in Europe has had - of over two thousand years of civilization."

Italian Immigration into the United States Author(s): Eugene Schuyler Source: Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Sep., 1889), pp. 480-495 Published by: The Academy of Political Science

Website Recommendations:
Italy History: https://www.britannica.com/place/Italy/Land
Details on regions, provinces and towns: https://www.tuttitalia.it/italia/
URL links current as of December 2022

Book Recommendations: