Room Four: The Approach of World War II

Facism

After Mussolini's capture of power in Rome, he made a concerted effort to win the loyalties of Italy's expatriate population, especially in the United States. He found a receptive audience in California. With memories of extreme poverty still in their heads, Italians in California found an expression of their pride in Italian heritage and culture in Italian organizations and Italian schools funded by the new Italian government. Mussolini hoped to capitalize on these newfound feelings of cultural pride by trying to recruit Italian-American men to the Italian military on visits to their parents' country, and by maintaining strong diplomatic ties to the United States. This included the 1937 visit of his youngest son Vittorio to California.

Most likely to join the organizations set up by Mussolini were those that had immigrated to California in the early waves. Their memories of extreme poverty and illiteracy led them to admire Mussolini's emphasis on a vibrant nationalism. The Red Scare of 1919 encouraged these immigrants to look favorably on distancing themselves from the Italian tradition of radicalism, and in affirming their national pride in Italy, they also saw an opportunity to affirm their similarity to other European Americans. More recent immigrants were split between those that admired the new feelings of national pride that Mussolini's government encouraged, and those that abhorred its persecution of anarchists, socialists, and communists. While socialists, communists, anarchists, and labor radicals were persecuted in other parts of the country, including the Pacific Northwest, the only Italian-Americans that were called in front of the State Legislature’s Committee on Un-American Activities were all accused of participating in Fascist activities. Prominent Italian-Americans, such as San Francisco mayor Rossi were called before the committee in 1943, but none were convicted.