

**Editing Mussolini: *Il Duce*'s American Biographies on Paper and on Screen, 1922-1936**

by

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For my family  
For Jamie, Grace, and Luca

In loving memory of Luigi Erbaggio, my father

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## Abstract

“Editing Mussolini: *Il Duce*’s American Biographies on Paper and on Screen, 1922-1936” uses an unexplored corpus of non-fiction texts (including Benito Mussolini’s own English-language editorials and American newsreels), along with published biographies, to argue that, between 1922 and 1936, American media established Mussolini as a political celebrity. In this interdisciplinary study, I position the American response to the Fascist dictator in relationship with prevailing cultural trends regarding biographical narration, personality studies, and oratorical performance. I explain Mussolini’s acclaim by considering it in the context of exemplary biographical experiences and personality traits of representative men of the American financial and political spheres. *Il Duce*’s biographical tales broadcast the attractive image of an efficient leader and a political model, a modernizer and an essential actor in world politics. Through the analysis of connections between the media and their financial backers, I further suggest that institutions such as J.P. Morgan favored Mussolini’s positive portrayal to profit from their involvement in Italian economy.

## Introduction

“Editing Mussolini: *Il Duce*’s American Biographies on Paper and on Screen, 1922-1936” is a study of the American media representation of the Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini from the time of the March on Rome, the conventional date for the beginning of the Fascist rule of Italy, and the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-36. Of course today, on both sides of the Atlantic, mainstream historical and popular accounts of Benito Mussolini and his Fascist regime agree on the dictator’s deleterious role in history. His bombastic style, frantic gesticulation, and repetitive rhetoric made him an easy target for caricatures and parodies in the Allied Forces’ media during World War II. The examples abound: for instance, in the 1942 Warner Bros. *The Ducktators*, Mussolini is represented as a goose delivering a speech to a solitary listener who is forced to applaud.<sup>1</sup> Mussolini was often caricatured as a servile sidekick to Adolf Hitler.

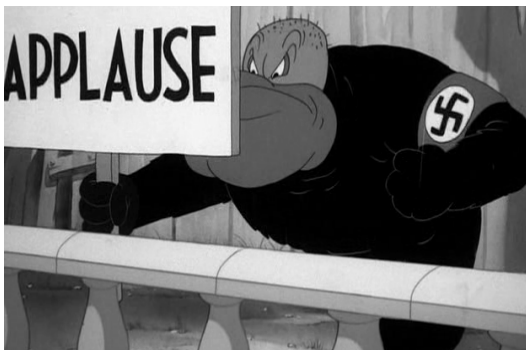


Image 1



Image 2

Mussolini as a goose in *The Ducktators* (1942) (image 1) and Mussolini portrayed as a servile dog to a Nazi in a Rube Goldberg’s caricature appeared in *The New York Sun* (June 1940).

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<sup>1</sup> *The Ducktators* (Los Angeles: Warner Bros., 1942). The short animation is available online on YouTube and shows, in addition to Mussolini, Adolf Hitler and Japanese Emperor Hirohito as ducks.

Yet, in the period spanning from the inception of Italian Fascism (1922) to the Italo-Ethiopian war (1935-36), Mussolini received quite favorable press in the United States and was often regarded as a political model. In “Editing Mussolini,” I interrogate the causes and forms of this forgotten American reception of Mussolini to show how such overwhelming media interest established the Fascist dictator as a precursor of today’s political celebrities. My dissertation provides an interdisciplinary study of the biographical representation of the Italian Fascist dictator in the United States media. I explain how different texts, biographies, Mussolini’s own English-language editorials, and American-made newsreels contributed to the dictator’s media celebrity, constructed a positive narrative of Fascist politics, and renegotiated the image of Italy for Americans. In studying these different works on or by Mussolini, in fact, I examine the American responses to the Fascist dictator and the relationship these texts have with prevailing cultural trends regarding biographical narration, personality studies, and the rising celebrity culture. I make sense of his acclaim by considering it in the context of exemplary biographical experiences and personality traits of a group of representative men of the financial and political spheres.

At the conclusion of this study, I analyze the connections between the media and their financial backers, and specifically suggest that institutions such as J.P. Morgan and Bank of America favored this positive portrayal of Mussolini as a means to justify and sustain their involvement in the economy of Fascist Italy. While mainly focused on archival documents and rarely examined texts, both strictly related to Mussolini’s presence in the American media, in “Editing Mussolini,” I also propose a structural analysis of the links between Fascist Italy and United States financial giants of the time such as John D. Rockefeller and Amadeo Giannini. Although further research is necessary to deepen the understanding of the American involvement

in the economy of Mussolini's regime, the contemporary role that those same financial player had in popular media production, strongly points in the direction of a planned effort to offer to American media consumers a cohesive and sympathetic image of *Il Duce*. Ultimately, I consider "Editing Mussolini" a case study of how economic and financial agents, through media and cultural productions, shape popular opinion and the socio-political landscape.

The American reaction to Italian Fascism, and to the rise of Mussolini in particular, has been the object of limited scholarship. In a seminal 1972 work, *Mussolini and Fascism. The View from America*, John P. Diggins examines the reception of Mussolini in the United States, and discusses the perception of Italy on the eve of the 1922 March on Rome as determined by a "romantic" or a "nativist" approach.<sup>2</sup> Although with "caution," Diggins uses these two categories "as a basis for explaining America's response to Fascism" divided, especially until 1935, into a large number of sympathizers and supporters and a smaller number of anti-Fascists.<sup>3</sup> While I consider Diggins' twofold categorization of American attitudes toward Italy a useful starting point for exploring the American response to Mussolini's rise, I believe that it is insufficient to fully explain the positive representation of the Italian dictator proposed through American cinema and popular press. The need to delve further into the relationship between Mussolini and the United States becomes even clearer if one considers the chronological length of such support and interest in the American media. From 1922 to 1935, many films and articles worked to create a myth of Mussolini that anticipated and even substantiated the Italian consensus for the dictator.<sup>4</sup>

In Diggins' *Mussolini and Fascism* readers can find a deep analysis of the reaction to

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<sup>2</sup> John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism. The View from America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), see in particular 5-21.

<sup>3</sup> Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 19.

<sup>4</sup> The example of the 1933 film *Mussolini Speaks!* is very telling. This Columbia production was described as a success in the Italian press, thus contributing to the myth of the dictator in Italy as in the United States.



Mussolini amongst different social demographics: Italian-American communities, the American financial world, union members, religious authorities, political figures from both the Democratic and Republican parties, and so forth. Such a reaction was positive at least until 1935 when, as Diggins' research highlights, America's changing attitudes toward Fascism were the result of "the public's response to Italy's expansion in North Africa prior to the outbreak of war."<sup>5</sup> In his exploration, the author, however, does not strive to find connections between the various social groups that had given support to Mussolini. Diggins is able to show the presence in American newspapers of many positive articles that boosted the Italian dictatorship, and to crucially highlight that financial players also supported Mussolini by investing their money into Fascist Italy. In my work, expanding on Diggins' analysis, I explain how a cohesive narration of Mussolini took place through a variety of media products and how the biographical representation of the Fascist dictator closely followed existing cultural trends in the depiction of representative, charismatic, and exemplary characters of the United States' various financial and political contexts.

Before examining the representations of Mussolini in American media, I explore, in fact, the cultural texts and conditions that preceded, and indeed prepared, Mussolini's stardom in the United States. My goal is to show how Mussolini's narrative in the United States was made to fit him within an existing popular culture centered on the biographical experiences and the personality traits of a group of representative men of the financial and political spheres, whose lives and personal qualities had been described as exemplary.

The idea that the lives of leaders and successful individuals could serve as models for possible self-improvement persisted for many decades around the turn of the twentieth century, and is arguably still very present, in American culture. During the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 287.

century, and leading to the biographical representation of Mussolini, these sorts of educational biographies, more often than not, focused on the exemplary lives of American financial giants and political leaders. The biographies of men such as Carnegie or Rockefeller provided numerous answers to the set of questions that readers of the time were seemingly asking. Through a close reading of some of these texts, I indicate the elements composing a narrative canon and a sort of existential pattern toward success characterizing the “representative man” of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Among the examples I examine, I consider Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Representative Men* (1850) as a key text for understanding how life stories were narrated, not only to showcase extraordinary experiences, but also to offer models for the self-improvement of the readers’ character.<sup>6</sup> The book was the collection of Emerson’s lectures on the topic of human greatness and was later republished several times, notably during the 1920s. In writing the biographies of six exemplary men, as I will show, Emerson had a crucial didactic goal: educating future citizens to seek and achieve greatness. For Emerson there is a potential inner hero within all individuals. Exceptional subjects are important because they serve as models and inspire those around them and future generations to develop such possibilities. With his work, Emerson also indicates the crucial role of the biographers who, in writing the lives of great men and pointing out their achievements, set the paths for readers to follow. Finally, Emerson’s words indicate the American fascination with exceptional, leading persons. Studying *Representative Men*, I explain how the American attraction to Mussolini and the fact that such interest lasted for more than ten years might be, at least in part, the result of the cultural tradition Emerson’s work started.

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<sup>6</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men* (1850; reprint Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1930).

The focus on biographies strongly connects my work to Luisa Passerini's 1991 *Mussolini immaginario*.<sup>7</sup> The Italian historian analyzes countless biographies, articles, essays, travel journals, and children's books related to Mussolini and produced in Italy during the years 1915 through 1939. Her goal is that of describing the ways in which the Italian imaginary was shaped by the narration of Mussolini's life. History, she asserts, "comprehends also fantasy, dreams, expectations, in one word that whole of thoughts and daily feelings that go under the name of imaginary and that are interlinked with but not connected to the experiential elements."<sup>8</sup> In examining examples of narrations of Mussolini in the United States, my objective is to explore the formation of a sort of American "imaginary" Mussolini constructed through language and visual images. Adding to Passerini's research, I highlight how Mussolini's cohesive positive representation was welcomed as it corresponded to an existing framework of celebrities' narration in the American cultural context.

My interest for the visual representations of Mussolini on American screens through newsreels marks an additional difference, in terms of textual examples, between my research and both Diggins' and Passerini's works. This focus moves my work in the direction of other scholars, such as Philip V. Cannistraro and Matteo Pretelli, who have worked on Fascist cultural production, particularly with, respectively, the book *La fabbrica del consenso* (1975) and the article "Culture or Propaganda? Fascism and Italian Culture in the United States."<sup>9</sup> With their research, these scholars have looked at how Fascism used culture and media (with cinema being

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<sup>7</sup> Luisa, Passerini, *Mussolini immaginario: Storia di una biografia, 1915–1939* (Bari: Laterza, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Passerini, *Mussolini immaginario*, 3. Translation is mine.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, in *La fabbrica del consenso* (1975), Philip V. Cannistraro explores the topic of Fascist propaganda in Italy starting from the study of institutional organizations such as the "Ufficio Stampa" and the "Ministero della Cultura Popolare" that controlled cultural programming. In "Culture or Propaganda? Fascism and Italian Culture in the United States," Matteo Pretelli studies the Fascist dictatorship efforts to control Italian culture in the United States. See in particular, Cannistraro, Philip V. Cannistraro, *La Fabbrica del Consenso: Fascismo e mass media* (Rome: Laterza, 1975); Matteo Pretelli, "Culture or Propaganda? Fascism and Italian Culture in the United States," *Studi Emigrazione* 43:161 (2006), 171-192.

one major element) as tools for the creation of consensus, and at the links between Fascist culture and Italians in America. Both authors' works look predominantly at the reaction of Italian-American communities to Mussolini's rise and they make significant contributions to understanding the history of Italian immigration in the United States. They note, for instance, that the popularity of Mussolini in America resulted in a boost for Italian-Americans' self-esteem. With Mussolini considered a respectable and admirable head of state, Italian immigrants, who had endured years of humiliation and scorn, were able to feel proud of their national heritage.<sup>10</sup>

My research reaches beyond the existing studies of Italian-American communities and official propaganda channels to offer a new perspective on Mussolini's reception in the United States, because it explicitly addresses the American cultural, social, and economic contexts.

Whereas scholars have worked predominantly on Italian official and institutional cultural

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<sup>10</sup> Cannistraro and Pretelli also examine in particular the ways in which Fascism attempted to penetrate American society. In *Blackshirts in Little Italy* (1999), Cannistraro describes a number of pro-fascist associations that include the "Fascist League of North America," the "Sons of Italy," and other groups. These organizations, he notes, were active between 1921 and 1929 and were directly linked to the Italian government through the Italian Embassy and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. In a similar way, Pretelli researched the methods used by the fascist government to reach the Italian immigrants in the United States. In *Il Fascismo e gli italiani all'estero* (2010), he pays particular attention to the fascist propaganda through not only cultural organizations such as the "Dante Alighieri Society," but also through cultural initiatives aimed at young Italian-Americans, exchanges of scholars between the two countries, and control of the so called ethnic press, that is, the newspapers in Italian published in the United States. In her 2004 *Parleremo al mondo intero*, Benedetta Garzarelli, discusses the ways in which Italian propaganda, particularly through the cinematic production of the "Istituto Luce," was directed abroad, namely toward France and Germany. In "Duce/Divo," Giorgio Bertellini, then, explores the role Mussolini had in changing the stereotypical reaction to the massive immigration of Italians to the United States at the turn of the century. See, in particular, Philip V. Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy: Italian Americans and Fascism, 1921-1929* (West Lafayette, IN: Bordighera, 1999); Matteo Pretelli, *Il Fascismo e gli italiani all'estero* (Bologna: CLUEB, 2010); Benedetta Garzarelli, *Parleremo al mondo intero: La propaganda del Fascismo all'estero* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2004); Giorgio Bertellini, "Duce/Divo: Masculinity, Racial Identity, and Politics among Italian Americans in 1920s New York City," *Journal of Urban History*, 31: 685 (2005), 685-726. See also, on similar topics, Francesca Cavarocchi, *Avanguardia dello spirito: Il Fascismo e la propaganda culturale all'estero*. (Rome: Carocci, 2010); Stefano Luconi and Matteo Pretelli, *L'immigrazione negli Stati Uniti* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008); Stefano Luconi and Guido Tintori, *L'ombra lunga del Fascio: Canali di propaganda fascista per gli italiani d'America* (Milan: M&B Publishing, 2004); Stefano Luconi, *La "Diplomazia parallela": Il regime fascista e la mobilitazione politica degli Italo-Americani* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2000); and Stefano Luconi, *Little Italies e New Deal: La coalizione Rooseveltiana e il voto Italo-Americano a Filadelfia e Pittsburgh* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002).

propaganda in the United States, my dissertation aims to uncover, describe, and explain the forms of cultural productions that the United States media industry created. I study in particular Mussolini's editorials in the American press and the biographical and autobiographical publications in English. Furthermore, I examine American produced newsreels that focused on the Fascist dictator. Mussolini was, in fact, the protagonist of numerous American newsreels, which, in the early 1920s, already represented an international medium. I highlight a cohesive representation of Mussolini that resulted from the convergence of various American media and that determined a cult of the dictator that approached him to other celebrities of the time, including cinema stars and athletes, but also politicians, key financial players, and artists.

My exploration of the American media reaction to Mussolini develops through four chapters. The first, "Self-Made Man via Self-Improvement: The Representative Character in American Biographical Narration," explains the various components of my theoretical framework, which includes the evolution of the biographical genre, the American fascination with life narratives of powerful men, the personality manuals craze of the early twentieth century, and the rise of the cult of celebrities. Engaging with an American cultural context and proposing a transnational literary analysis, I start from Emerson's *Representative Men* (1850) to explore the American market for the life narratives of political, historical, and financial giants. In examining the biographies of such men as Andrew Carnegie and Henry Ford, I highlight the common narrative tropes that would later become prominent in the representation of Mussolini: the overcoming of obstacles, the solitary path toward success, innovation.

The second chapter, "The Spectacular Life of Benito Mussolini," proposes a new perspective in Italian studies of Fascism adding an innovative reframing and contextualization of the representation of Mussolini in the United States. It closely analyzes biographical texts that

described Mussolini in terms typical of the narratives of American self-made men and glamorized his life. This chapter studies the biography of Mussolini by Margherita Sarfatti, adviser and mistress of the dictator, originally published in English as *The Life of Benito Mussolini* (1925), then republished in Italian as *Dux* (1926). I also consider two series of ten biographical articles: first, "Mussolini's Own Story of His Busy Life," syndicated by the news agency United Press in 1927; second, an autobiographical series published in the weekly magazine *Saturday Evening Post* and later republished as *My Autobiography* (1928). These texts exalted Mussolini's heroic youth, highlighting his participation in World War I and his solitary years as an immigrant worker in Switzerland; they downplayed Mussolini's use of violence and emphasized, instead, his managerial aptitudes as a political leader. On the whole, the articles I group together here instructed Americans on Mussolini's political efficacy and projects to innovate Italy, portraying the dictator as a heroic man of destiny.

Chapter three, "Mussolini's Editorials: A Real-Time (Auto)Biography of a Fascist Nation," analyzes select passages from the dictator's 82 editorials syndicated in Hearst newspapers between 1928 and 1935. I clarify how Mussolini's rhetorical and stylistic strategies revealed to American readers his strong character, his modernizing ambitions for Italy, and his aspirations to historical relevance. He uses disdainful terms for lengthy speeches and diplomatic meetings, engages constantly with aspects of modernity, employs medical terminology and metaphors, and expresses himself in erudite language. Through this rhetoric, Mussolini presented himself as a practical, effective leader, a competent Prime Minister transforming the country, a perfect heir of the Roman Empire, and a superlative modern man of politics.

In the fourth chapter, "Mussolini in American Newsreels. *Il Duce* as Modern Celebrity," I offer a systematic and much needed study of American newsreels displaying Mussolini. In

dialogue with recent publications on Adolf Hitler, such as Thomas Doherty's *Hollywood and Hitler: 1933-1939* (2013) and Ben Urwand's *The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler* (2013), my research proposes to film and media scholars a further assessment of the American film industry's role in the portrayal of European dictatorships.<sup>11</sup> I demonstrate that American newsreels companies such as Fox Movietone and Hearst Metrotone, which had offices in Rome, reinforced *Il Duce's* biographical narration by adding images and sounds to the representations circulating in the press. Through American newsreels, Mussolini became a political celebrity whose private and public life merited attention. For instance, in 1927, Mussolini was the first foreign politician to appear in a sound newsreel featuring groundbreaking sound technology. This pioneering newsreel reinforced the idea of Mussolini as a modern political leader by positioning him in a metonymic relationship with modernizing Fox technology. Through the study of numerous newsreels, outtakes, and paper documents, I follow the Fox and Hearst troupes documenting the dictator in Italy. These companies captured private aspects of his life and established, I argue, a cult of the dictator's personality that preceded the organization of Italian agencies for propaganda.

In my dissertation's closing pages, I explore the financial structure behind the American media system. I reveal the crucial links between media groups and financial powers such as J.P. Morgan, New York National City Bank, and Bank of America. While lending money to the Italian government and issuing Italian bonds on the American financial market, these financiers benefitted from the creation, through the media they controlled, of a consensus of popular opinion regarding Mussolini. As these financial institutions were involved simultaneously in the American media industry and the Italian economy, I suggest that they had interest in sustaining

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler: 1933-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) and Ben Urwand, *The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013).

the uncritical, favorable narration of Mussolini and Fascist Italy illustrated in the previous chapters. This cohesive and positive image of Mussolini was constructed to appeal to Americans who were drawn to exemplary representative characters. Presenting Mussolini in a sort of political vacuum, emphasizing his fame more than his political status, strikingly, in the American media, the message was often secondary to the mere narration of the dictator's performance and actions. Even when the stories, the images, and the sounds recorded in Italy could have been easily decrypted as proofs of the alarming rise of a totalitarian regime, American were left uninformed. The fact that financial interests might be a factor behind such misleading representation urges us to, even today, always critically assess media productions related to political figures and economic processes.



## Chapter 1

### Self-Made Man via Self-Improvement:

#### The Representative Character in American Biographical Narration

*Such a man was wanted, and such a man was born.*<sup>1</sup>  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

In March 1926, Ettore Villani, the Fox Newsreels Rome-based camera operator, filmed the 7<sup>th</sup> -anniversary celebration of the Fascist Party's foundation. Accompanying the newsreel he sent back to New York was a short memo transcribing part of Benito Mussolini's speech. Villani used the back of the paper to offer his American employers what he considered a crucial cultural observation. His note reads: "DUCE: leading captain."<sup>2</sup> By offering this translation to his editors and, by extension, to the Fox Newsreels audience, Villani demonstrated that he was well aware of the American obsession for leaders, for the men who, apparently alone, hold power. The operator intended to signal, with his short note, that it was worthwhile to edit his filmed material and to include it in the next newsreel issue because it showed a commanding chief and an oratorical champion. Villani's glossing of the word "Duce" also shows that the American interest in Italian Fascism resided primarily in Mussolini as a biographical character. Rather than focusing on Mussolini's political activities, let alone the contradictions of his ruling, the dictator

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men* (1850; reprint Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1930), 230

<sup>2</sup> University of South Carolina, Moving Image Research Collections, Fox Movietone News Collection, Dope Sheets, News Story B1904.

became the core of an exemplary representation of power and success.

Fox Newsreels was not the only American media corporation interested in Mussolini. The dictator was the center of countless press articles, as well as subject of biographies published in book format or in newspaper and magazine installments.<sup>3</sup> The radio often broadcasted Mussolini's voice, and another modern media outlet, cinema, showed the dictator's face through newsreels produced by Fox and all the major film companies: Hearst, Paramount, Pathé, and Universal.<sup>4</sup> Between the March on Rome in 1922 and the Ethiopian War of 1935-1936, this ubiquitous presence of Mussolini in American culture had a rather positive tenor. By mixing factual information and news reports with aspects of Mussolini's personality, enriched by fictional details about his life, this narration amounted to a series of biographical tales of a young, heroic leader. On the one hand, this is no surprise: American financial institutions, such as J.P. Morgan, which were involved simultaneously in the American media industry and the Italian economy, had a vested interest in sustaining an uncritical, favorable narration of Fascist Italy. On the other, however, the question remains: why was the wider American audience so interested in Mussolini? How did Mussolini become a star for the American public? And what narrative strategies did the media adopt to maintain his stardom status for a decade and half, that is, until the Ethiopian war in 1935-36 revealed to the international community the danger of the Fascist regime's unilateral plans of imperial expansion?

To explore these questions, it is useful to consider Mussolini as a "representative

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<sup>3</sup> Mussolini appeared in the American press as early as 1921. See, for example, "Who the Italian Fascisti Are," *The Literary Digest*, 69, April 16, 1921, 18. Chapter two will be particularly devoted to the biographies of the dictator.

<sup>4</sup> Mussolini addressed the American people on the radio in 1930 for the first time. From Villa Torlonia in Rome, the dictator entered in contact with the Vice Consul of Italy in Los Angeles Ubaldo Alberto Mellini Ponce de León who was flying over the city with a group of scientists testing a radio transmission system that the media magnate William R. Hearst had commissioned. In a short message, Mussolini thanked and greeted the American public. The dictator addressed the American public with a second radio message on January 1, 1931. In this second message, he declared his admiration for, among other American authors, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Cf. Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel, 44 vols. (Florence: La Fenice, 1951-1980), 249-250 and 329-330. Chapter four will address the American produced newsreels on Mussolini.

character,” a man with personal characteristics and a life story that befittingly coincided with the American narrative tropes of individual heroism of the time. The scholar Sarah Paige Baty defined and fruitfully employed the “representative character” category in her work on mass-mediated remembrances of Marilyn Monroe *American Monroe: The Making of a Body Politic* (1995). A representative character, a formula specifically reminiscent of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Representative Men* (1850), a book which I will later discuss, is a symbol, a person who “embodies achievement, success, failure, genius, struggle, triumph, and other human possibilities: one representative character’s story may be written as a cautionary tale, while another’s may be erected as a monument to human achievement.”<sup>5</sup> Through her analysis of the biographies of Marilyn Monroe, Baty explains how the media constructed such composite figures, which would perfectly adapt to a plethora of cultural discourses, particularly those regarding gender and politics. For her definition of the formula “representative character,” Baty also refers to *Habits of the Heart* by Robert N. Bellah et al. In this 1985 sociological work, a representative character is understood as “more than a collection of individual traits and personalities. It is rather a public image that helps define, for a given group of people, just what kinds of personality traits it is good and legitimate to develop.”<sup>6</sup>

In order to understand the media success of Mussolini in the United States, my contention is that during the mid-1920s and until the mid-1930s, American media made the Italian dictator into a representative character. His pervasive presence in American popular culture and his biographical representations were constructed to mirror what Americans admired and aspired to in terms of charismatic personality and political change. Mussolini became a symbol of

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<sup>5</sup> Sarah Paige Baty, *American Monroe: The Making of a Body Politic* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 39.

exceptional achievement through the exercise of exceptional personal qualities. He came to mediate values and specific personality characteristics through the media's biographical accounts and the celebrations of his persona. American media repeatedly commodified Mussolini's life story and words, as the presentation of these resulted in immediate profit, through sales, and long term benefits for their financial backers.

While Baty's use of Marilyn Monroe as a representative character allows her to analyze "the political cultural condition of our time," that is, the 1990s postmodern obsession with an iconic celebrity, my focus on Mussolini's media representations gives me the opportunity to reconstruct the popular culture atmosphere of the American 1920s.<sup>7</sup> In this chapter, after a brief overview of the biographical genre, I will explore the cultural texts and conditions that preceded, and indeed prepared, Mussolini's stardom in the United States, looking at questions of biographical narration, personality characterization, and oratorical performance. The cultural texts I analyze include not only the biographical tales of exceptional individuals, but also the popular self-help manuals that during the first three decades of the twenty-century guided Americans toward developing what they believed to be a successful personality. While the biographies provided numerous examples of accomplished people to imitate, almost as if they were modern-day saints' hagiographies, the literature on personal self-improvement offered advice about how to transform oneself into an exceptional individual. The parallel analysis of these two complementary cultural trends, in conjunction with an examination of the rise of celebrity culture, all emerging during the first thirty years of the twentieth century, provides an ideal setting for exploring, in the following chapters, the American media representations of Mussolini both in writing and on the screen. My ultimate objective is to show how Mussolini's narrative in the United States was made to fit him within an existing popular culture centered on

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<sup>7</sup> Sarah Paige Baty, *American Monroe*, 8.

the biographical experiences and the personality traits of a group of representative men of the financial, political, and public spheres, whose lives and personal qualities had been described as exemplary. Such positive framing was done in spite of the fact that he was a dictator who despised democratic processes and rose to power through murderous violence.

### **The Trajectory of the Biographical Genre**

The U.S. narration of the Duce was created in ways that often differed from his propagandistic efforts within Italian political and cultural life. Rather than focusing on and endorsing specific policies or political initiatives, American media centered on Mussolini as an heroic and strong individual. The analysis of the media interest for Mussolini thus requires that the protean form of the biography lie at the center of my investigation. Throughout my dissertation, by “biography” I refer broadly to a narrative mode that traveled across media and was functional to the depiction of Mussolini as a representative character, through the inspirational tale of his success as a self-made-man and his rise to power. The literary and filmic genre of the “biography” turned out to be productively ambivalent for its blending of factual and fictional elements and for its position between the fields of history and literature. Media outlets deemed it the most appropriate mode of representation for the characterization of the Italian dictator as both a “Great Man” and an individual who, because of his exceptional personality, his drive, and his ability to self-invent, achieved a prominent position. By adopting a biographical perspective, journalism and non-fiction filmmaking, including newsreels, contributed to the making of the dictator’s media celebrity.

The representation of Mussolini, whether explicitly as in Sarfatti’s biography *The Life of Benito Mussolini* and in Columbia’s 1933 biopic *Mussolini Speaks!*, or implicitly as in the Duce’s editorials and in newsreels, contained numerous elements of the biographical form:

selection of facts, fictionalization of factual elements, and heroic or prophetic hagiography to name a few.<sup>8</sup> To better understand the ways in which American media used the biography genre to narrate Mussolini, it is necessary to briefly sketch the trajectory of this genre. This overview covers three centuries of western literary tradition, with a specific focus on the Anglophone context, during which biographies became a complex literary genre. During this period, in the context of a growing market for the genre, publications were devoted to individuals who were not primarily saints, kings, mythological figures, and artists, but rather simply people renowned for their political and financial prowess. Starting from the mid-nineteenth century, I examine in more detail the American approach to the biographical genre, concentrating on those elements that prepared the United States' obsession for Mussolini as a "Great Man".

Life narratives present such a number of variations and emphases that scholars have difficulty in defining the characteristics of biography as a genre. The first American use of the biography appears to be in the preface to John Dryden's 1683 English translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (beginning of second century AD) which, with its interest for the private, domestic lives of historical figures, provided the first and most enduring model of biographical writing in the West. In Dryden's times, the subject of biographical writings included artists, writers, and other public figures and not only rulers or saints. In the eighteenth century, with the works of Samuel Johnson, biographies entered into their modern form and moved definitively away from the panegyric and hagiographic models, that is, the representations of exemplary lives and saints' stories, which had become typical during the Middle Ages and encouraged listeners and

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<sup>8</sup> Sarfatti's biography is specifically examined in the second chapter of this dissertation. Cf. Margherita Sarfatti, *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, trans. Frederic Whyte (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1925). Chapter three will deal with Mussolini's editorials in the American press, while, as mentioned, chapter four will be devoted to the study of the American newsreels depicting the dictator.

readers to replicate the subject's acts described.<sup>9</sup>

Also in the eighteenth century, the moral objective of biographies changed from that of offering an example to imitate to that of illustrating and explaining aspects of lives beyond the readers' personal experiences. The notion of truth was at the center of Samuel Johnson's biographical investigations and even failures and vices were included in his *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779-1781). During the nineteenth century, especially in the British Victorian context, biographers offered fewer private details in their accounts of the lives of exceptional individuals. Also, notable in this period was the connection between biographies and fictional writing. Individual lives were at the center of novels, such as Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) and Émile Zola's attempt to tell an entire family's story in his cycle of novels *Les Rougon-Macquart* (1871-1893). Along with the blurring of the lines separating fictional and non-fictional writing, another element of interest in the history of the biographical genre of this period enters into play. With the rise of the European bourgeoisie, during the mid-1800s, the focus of biographers and fiction writers alike moved from the existences of aristocrats or distinguished historical characters to the lives of "ordinary" individuals. *David Copperfield* and the protagonists of Zola's novels are not the sort of people whose lives have usually been the object of biographies: kings, saints, or recognized artists. Rather, they are individuals who gained their position at the center of a life narrative by their qualities and their personal experiences. They are examples of self-made men, characters who were able to distinguish themselves from the crowd, to shine amongst their peers in new social classes, the working class and the

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<sup>9</sup> Between Late Antiquity and the end of Middle Ages, hagiography was among the dominant literary genres in Europe, first in Latin and Greek, then in vernacular languages. From Bede's 721 *Life of St. Cuthbert* to John Capgrave's *Life of St. Catherine* (c. 1445), from Eusebius of Caesarea's account of the martyrs of Palestine (4th century AD) to the *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine in the 13th century, hagiographies focused on individual or groups of saints describing their martyrdoms and their miracles. These life narratives were fundamental in establishing and promoting the cult of saints in the Christian world. For an overview of this literary genre, see Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography. Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

bourgeoisie resulting from the industrialization, which seemed to be growing and pervasive. In the American biographical representation of Mussolini, as I will describe, the image of the dictator as master of the masses, but also belonging to the masses, is central. In the media tales of Mussolini, not only does he emerge from the multitude after World War I, mass war *par excellence*, but he is also able to control the crowds with his mesmerizing speeches.

Going back to the history of the biographical genre, if before Dickens and Zola, historical biographies and fictionalized ones were two different enterprises, it is in the 1920s that the two genres undoubtedly intersected in the Western literary tradition under the auspices of the “New Biography” genre. The novelist Virginia Woolf is credited with theorizing the concept of the “New Biography.” In a short article in *The New York Herald Tribune* entitled “The New Biography” (1927), which can be considered a synthesis of her reflections on the genre, Woolf formalizes the concerns about the relationship between fiction and biographies that she shared with other modernist writers of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Lytton Strachey.<sup>10</sup> In opposition to the conventional Victorian biographical style, with its impersonality and its focus on public acts of the subjects, Woolf and modernist biographers introduce the importance of issues related to gender, identity, and consciousness. In “The New Biography,” Woolf refocuses the biographical genre from life events to individuals’ personalities, suggesting that biographers should illustrate the character, the nature, and the behavior of biographical subjects. The biographers’ role is that of combining the truth, which is “of granite-like solidity,” and the personality, a characteristic “of rainbow-like intangibility.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Virginia Woolf wrote biographies and about the genre throughout her life. Some of her biographical experiments include *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) with a main character who changes sex and lives for over three centuries, and *Flush: A Biography* (1933), which centers on a dog and his owner. Lytton Strachey is the author of the, at the time, irreverent and unconventional *Eminent Victorians* (1918).

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Woolf’s short essay on “The New Biography” was republished in *Granite and Rainbow: Essays by Virginia Woolf* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1958). 149-155; 149.



This combination of truth and fiction, facts, and art advocated by Virginia Woolf, deprived of its intellectual and theoretical depth, certainly framed a large part of the myth-making, biographical narration of Mussolini, both in Italy and abroad.<sup>12</sup> In particular, Woolf's focus on the importance of understanding the personality of the biographical subjects resonates within the American context.

In the U.S., the writing of popular biographies of notable individuals was often done with the goal of bettering the readers' personalities. In particular after the publication of Emerson's *Representative Men* (1850), biographers started narrating the lives of notable men, not only to showcase extraordinary experiences, but also to offer models for the readers' personal self-improvement. The book was a collection of Emerson's lectures on the topic of human greatness and was later republished several times, notably during the 1920s.<sup>13</sup> In *Representative Men*, Emerson indicates six individuals whose lives were exemplary and worthy of closer examination: Plato, Emanuel Swedenborg, Michel de Montaigne, William Shakespeare, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The presence of Napoleon among Emerson's *Representative Men* is a clear signal of the American fascination for strong, powerful men regardless of their moral ambiguity. Such a cultural tradition, along with Mussolini's perceived anti-communism and, as I will explain, a narration which highlighted, for example, his

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<sup>12</sup> The biographical genre changed even further after the 1920s with the popularization of psychoanalysis and later the emergence of feminist theories. After Freud, biographers felt compelled to deal with their subjects' inner lives, sexuality, dreams, and childhood. In the late 1960s, feminism promoted a renewed focus on women's life stories. Not female saints, but instead women artists or political activists became the object of biographical works. This opened the way to the writing of biographies on women who did not attain public renown and on other individuals considered before of marginal interest. For a succinct summary of the biographical genre, see Hermione Lee, *Biography. A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). For the connections between this genre and the field of history, see Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). For additional details on the literary development of biographies and on the links between biographies and autobiographies, see Michael Benton, *Literary Biography: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) and Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses. Theory, Criticism, Practice* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Editions of the text or of the complete works of Emerson were published in 1921, 1923, 1925, 1926, 1929, and 1930.

efficiency and heroism, might partly explain the American attraction to the Italian dictator and the fact that such interest lasted for more than ten years. In writing the biographies of these six men, Emerson had a crucial didactic goal: educating future citizens to seek and achieve greatness. In the introductory chapter, tellingly titled “Uses of Great Men,” Emerson writes:

We love to associate with heroic persons, since our receptivity is unlimited; and, with the great, our thoughts and manners easily become great. We are all wise in capacity, though so few in energy. There needs but one wise man in a company, and all are wise, so rapid is the contagion. . . . Thus we feed on genius, and refresh ourselves from too much conversation with our mates, and exult in the depth of nature in that direction in which he leads us. What indemnification is one great man for populations of pigmies! (sic)<sup>14</sup>

One of the elements that emerges from these words is Emerson’s interest for the potential inner hero within all individuals. Exceptional subjects are important because they serve as models and inspire those around them and future generations to develop such possibilities. With his work, Emerson also indicates the crucial role of the biographers who, in writing the lives of great men and pointing out their achievements, set the paths for readers to follow. Finally, Emerson’s words indicate the American fascination with exceptional persons, and in particular, strong leaders. While he seems to despise the masses of “mates,” reduced to “pigmies,” he is exalted by the potential presence of the future “great man,” who, inspired by past triumphs, can arise from the crowd through his intelligence and heroism.

With his *Representative Men*, Emerson renewed a traditional form of biographical writing that put him in direct connection with Plutarch and the saints’ hagiographers of the Middle Ages. The idea that the lives of leaders and successful individuals could serve as models

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<sup>14</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men*, 25-26.

for possible self-improvement persisted for many decades, and is still very present, in American culture.<sup>15</sup> During the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and leading to the biographical representation of Mussolini, these sorts of educational biographies became less frequently devoted to philosophers or writers. Much more often, they focused on the exemplary lives of American financial giants and political leaders. A closer look at some of these texts will permit me to indicate the elements composing a narrative canon of the “representative man” of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As I will show in the next chapters, American media readily used this set of narrative strategies for their casting of Benito Mussolini as a representative character.

### **The Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Great Men Narratives**

The American literary field is rich with the success stories of businessmen. The tale of the self-made man, the familiar trope of gratifying results for hard working individuals, and the myth of achievement as a direct result of desire and ambition populate the biographies of numerous celebrated heroes of American history, from Andrew Carnegie to John D. Rockefeller, from J.P. Morgan to Henry Ford. All these individuals received the attention of biographers during their lifetime and afterwards.<sup>16</sup> During the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many publications, which mimic the narrative structure of Emerson’s *Representative Men*, tell the life stories of these powerful men and display slightly different configurations of the American financial pantheon. Examples of these publications are Elbert Hubbard’s *Little Journeys to the Homes of Great Business Men* (1909), George F. Redmond’s *Financial Giants of America*

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<sup>15</sup> The editorial success of Walter Isaacson’s biography of Steve Jobs is just one example of the continuing popularity of the genre. Cf. Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Some of the biographies of the financial giants of the time include the sympathetic John T. Flynn, *God’s Gold. The Story of Rockefeller and His Time* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1932); Jesse Burton Hendrick, *The Life of Andrew Carnegie* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1932) based on primary material supplied by Carnegie’s family; Charles Merz, *And Then Came Ford* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1929); the popular John K. Winkler, *Morgan the Magnificent. The Life of J. Pierpoint Morgan* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1930).

(1922), and Bertie C. Forbes' *Men Who Are Making America* (1917) and *Men Who Are Making the West* (1923).

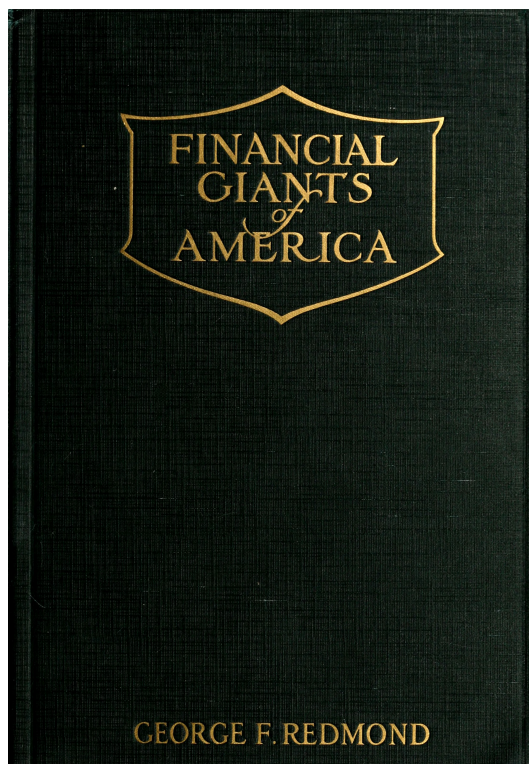


Image 3

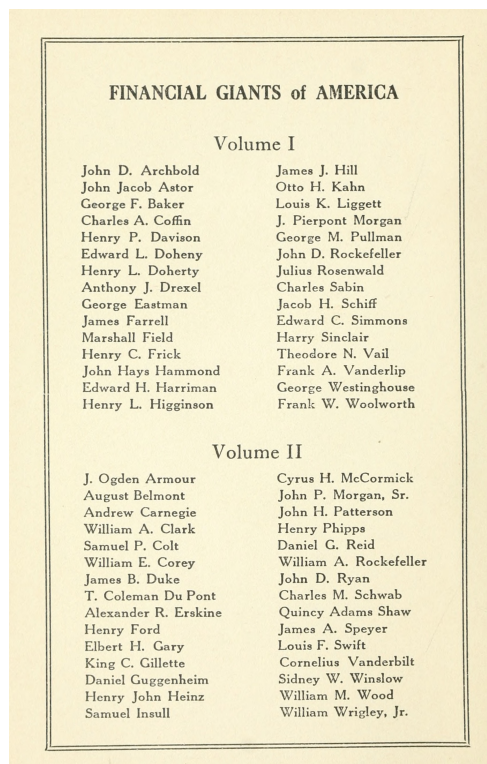


Image 4

The cover of George F. Redmond, *Financial Giants of America* (Boston: The Stratford Company, 1922) (Image 3) and the list of its *Financial Giants* (Image 4).

Notable in these texts is their explicit educational goal and the exemplary nature of the biographies they contain. For instance, in the introduction to *Men Who Are Making America*, Forbes tells readers that his biographical “sketches” offer exhaustive answers to the questions “How can one achieve big things? What are the necessary qualifications? What course must be followed?”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, at the end of the preface to Redmond’s *Financial Giants of America*, readers could learn that the biographical stories in the volume “are combined to make a record of magnificent achievement – a story which, rightly read and wisely interpreted, should serve as an

<sup>17</sup> Bertie C. Forbes, *Men Who Are Making America* (New York: B. C. Forbes Publishing Company, 1917), VIII.

inspiration to the young life of the world.”<sup>18</sup>

One of the first narrative tropes emerging from the success stories told in these books is that the protagonists had to overcome many difficulties. First and foremost, the obstacle for many of these individuals was the condition of being poor. Forbes informs us, with a chart that also details ages, places of birth, and business fields, that of the fifty men described in his *Men Who Are Making America*, twenty-four were born poor and seventeen were born in “moderate circumstances.”<sup>19</sup> In Hubbard’s biography of James Oliver (1823-1908), later the founder of the Oliver Farm Equipment Company, readers learn that his family was so poor that “they huddled close for warmth in their little cottage.”<sup>20</sup> When poverty was not an issue for these great men’s early steps toward success, other obstacles had to be overcome. In describing the commitment of Daniel Guggenheim and his brothers to expanding the mining and smelting empire established by their father Meyer, Forbes stresses that:

No mountaineer, no prospector knew more hardship than [what] the Guggenheim brothers voluntarily went through to reach a desired goal. Mountain fastnesses, untamed valleys, arid wastes, possessed no terrors that the daring young Guggenheims shrunk from facing. ... Distance had no meaning for him or for them; wherever there was a chance to achieve something, he went, no matter what the cost in physical discomfort. He slept in tents or wagons amid wild surroundings as often as under a roof. The food he not infrequently ate would have been scorned by a Negro slave. His business demanded that he proceed to

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<sup>18</sup> George F. Redmond, *Financial Giants of America* (Boston: The Stratford Company, 1922), vol. 1, n.p.

<sup>19</sup> Forbes, *Men Who Are Making America*, V-VII.

<sup>20</sup> Elbert Hubbard, *Little Journeys to the Homes of Great Business Men* (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1909), vol. 24, 39.

the firing line of advancing civilization, and he did not flinch from the ordeal.<sup>21</sup>

	WHERE BORN	CIRCUM- STANCES OF PARENTS	AGE 1921	BEGAN :	CHIEF SUCCESS WON IN :
‡Archbold, John D.	Leesburg, O.	Poor	69	Grocery Boy	Oil
Armour, J. Ogden	Milwaukee, Wis.	Rich	58	Packing Business	Meat Packing
Baker, George F.	Troy, N. Y.	Poor	81	Grocery Boy	Banking
Bedford, A. C.	Brooklyn, N. Y.	Moderate	57	Store Clerk	Oil
Bell, Alexander Gr'h'm	Edinburgh, Scot.	Poor	74	School Teacher	Telephone
*Carnegie, Andrew	Dunfermline, Scot.	Poor	85	Bobbin Boy	Steel
†Davison, H. P.	Troy, Pa.	Poor	54	Errand Boy	Banking
Dollar, Robert	Falkirk, Scot.	Poor	78	Cook's Boy	Lumber and Shipping
Douglas, W. L.	Plymouth, Mass.	Poor	76	Pegging Shoes	Shoes
Duke, James B.	Durham, N. C.	Poor	60	Peddling Tobacco	Tobacco
Du Pont, T. Coleman	Louisville, Ky.	Moderate	58	Coal Miner	Traction Cos. & Powder
Eastman, George	Waterville, N. Y.	Poor	67	Insurance Clerk	Cameras
Edison, Thomas A.	Milan, O.	Poor	74	Newsboy	Inventor
Farrell, James A.	New Haven, Conn.	Moderate	58	Laborer	Steel
Ford, Henry	Greenfield, Mich.	Poor	58	Machinist	Automobiles
Forgan, James B.	St. Andrews, Scot.	Moderate	69	Bank Clerk	Banking
§Frick, Henry C.	West Overton, Pa.	Poor	70	Store Clerk	Coke and Steel
Gary, Elbert H.	Near Wheaton, Ill.	Moderate	73	Law Clerk	Steel
Gaston, William A.	Boston, Mass.	Moderate	62	Law Office	Banking
Goethals, Geo. W.	Brooklyn, N. Y.	Poor	63	Errand Boy	Engineer
Guggenheim, Daniel	Philadelphia, Pa.	Rich	65	Lace Business	Mining
Hammond, John Hays	San Francisco, Cal.	Moderate	66	Engineer	Mining
Heckscher, August	Hamburg, Ger.	Moderate	73	Coal Mining	Zinc and Real Estate
†Hepburn, A. Barton	Colton, N. Y.	Moderate	75	Store Clerk	Banking
Insull, Samuel	London, Eng.	Poor	62	Clerk	Electricity
Kahn, Otto H.	Mannheim, Ger.	Rich	54	Bank Clerk	Banking

Image 5: One of the two-page chart in Bertie C. Forbes, *Men Who Are Making America* (New York: B. C. Forbes Publishing Company, 1917).

In similar admiring terms, Forbes describes John D. Rockefeller's unstoppable drive toward achievement:

Fires might sweep away valuable plants; important oil fields might dry up over night, rendering worthless costly apparatus; banks might refuse to risk money in so hazardous a business; prices might fall to disastrous levels; markets might become glutted; foreign oil fields might threaten to dwarf the whole American output, yet never once did John D. Rockefeller waver.

Thirty years before Morgan grasped and acted on the combination method of doing business *à la* Steel Corporation, Rockefeller, with foresight, courage, and resourcefulness, introduced the combination idea in the sphere.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Forbes, *Men Who Are Making America*, 176.

What appears evident in these quotes and in other similar passages in these texts is the importance of fearlessness and ambition in the exemplary tales of financially successful individuals. In these biographies and, as I will show, in Mussolini's biographical narration, the authors overstress the hardship endured on the path to fame, often to emphasize the solitary nature of the journey and the protagonists' unfaltering endurance. The narrative of the self-made-man, who reaches unimaginable achievements and overcomes incredible difficulties, is quite common in the texts describing these American financial giants.

An additional shared component in this familiar narrative, which is already apparent in the last part of the quote regarding Rockefeller, is the depiction of a defining moment or gesture that determines the ultimate success and brings to light the individuals' exceptionality. This important moment that changes the lives of the biography's subjects, when looking historically at the genre, as a similar narrative function of the conversion stories in the Middle Age saint's hagiographies. In the biographies of saints, the narration of the conversion to religion highlights the moment in which an individual becomes ready for perfection and sanctity, in the modern biographies of these wealthy and powerful men, the examples of their key ideas and actions show how individuals can access the pantheon of power. In both cases, hagiographies and biographies of great men, the narration of the defining moment illustrates to the readers the possibility of changing one's life for the better with just one act. While in the case of Rockefeller, in Forbes' biography, the crucial event was the consolidation of Standard Oil in 1870, in Hubbard's biography of Carnegie, the "pivotal point" in the life of the Scottish-born steel industrialist is a rather simple event: the meeting with a man called Thomas A. Scott, the

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<sup>22</sup> Forbes, *Men Who Are Making America*, 307.

Pittsburgh Superintendent of the Pennsylvania Railroad.<sup>23</sup> It is while working as a secretary for this man that Carnegie learned about railroad investments and, eventually, made his fortune in the steel industry. On the contrary, numerous inventions gained Henry Ford the fame of a “really wonderful man” whose “record seems magical.”<sup>24</sup> In Redmond’s biography, Ford’s life success stems from his hard working attitude as much as his inventiveness and intuitions: “visions, dreams, ideas” in the author’s words.<sup>25</sup> The central element of Ford’s career, however, the one revolutionary transformation that made his Detroit car factory the “greatest industrial wonder of modern times,” is the introduction of the eight-hour workday for his workers.<sup>26</sup>

Another of the common elements in the life narratives of these representative men of the American financial world, and an important component of the biographical tale of Mussolini, is strictly connected to this aspect of outlining the defining moments of a great man’s career. Certainly, the account of the inventions and the individuals’ decisions leading to success has an important part in those biographies, both in terms of the narrations’ climax and for their exemplary power. Most significantly, however, it is worthwhile to describe these turning points as they enabled the biographies’ subjects to rise from the crowd, to make themselves and their names recognizable to the world, and, using Emerson’s words, distinguish themselves from the “populations of pigmies.”<sup>27</sup> It is the idea of the “Great Men” changing and shaping the world around them. Such demiurgic supremacy is part, for instance, of the biographical narrations of Ford, whose name became a worldwide “household word” thanks to his “Universal Car,” and of T. Coleman Du Pont, the man who, in Forbes’ words, possesses “the stuff that makes heroes”

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<sup>23</sup> Elbert Hubbard, *Little Journeys to the Homes of Great Business Men* (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1909), vol. 25, 39.

<sup>24</sup> George F. Redmond, *Financial Giants of America* (Boston: The Stratford Company, 1922), vol. 2, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Redmond, *Financial Giants of America*, vol. 2, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Redmond, *Financial Giants of America*, vol. 2, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Emerson, *Representative Men*, 26.



and who will be remembered in history for the construction of the largest building in the world.<sup>28</sup> Forbes uses a similar narrative strategy in his account of the Italian-American banker Amadeo P. Giannini, who, out of his dislike for the existing banking system, “decided to establish a bank of his own.”<sup>29</sup>

Along with the characterization of Mussolini as a self-made-man and the narration of his will power and path to glory, the topic of the fascist dictator renewing the nation, by reshaping both the landscapes and the Italians, proves just as central in the American narrative dedicated to his life as in the biographies of these “Great Men.” With the construction of new cities, the reclamation project of the Pontine Marshes, and the plan to regenerate the image of Italians in the world, Mussolini was the protagonist of biographical accounts circulating in American culture which exalted him as the representative leader of his time.

### **Personality and Individual Qualities: The Successful Character**

As part of the analysis of their life stories, these biographical representations of groundbreaking and wealthy Americans and of the Italian dictator also focus continually on the personality traits of the biographers’ subjects. As mentioned, fearlessness, perseverance, courage, and ambition seem to be common characteristics leading to success. The inclusion of explanatory passages illustrating the benefit of possessing such qualities, in parallel with a flourishing literature of behavioral manuals, mirrors the development of readers’ widespread interest in personality traits and individual characteristics, particularly those which made men noteworthy and exceptional. This curiosity is at the center of Warren Susman’s critical essay, “‘Personality’ and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture,” in which the author notes how the attention for the development of personality exploded in American culture between the turn of

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<sup>28</sup> See Redmond, *Financial Giants of America*, vol. 2, 20 for Ford’s quotes and Forbes, *Men Who Are Making America*, 78 for Du Pont’s.

<sup>29</sup> Bertie C. Forbes, *Men Who Are Making the West* (New York: B. C. Forbes Publishing Company, 1923), 204.

the century and the 1930s.<sup>30</sup> Susman explains that the American focus on personalities, intended both as personal characteristics and famous public figures, was a consequence of the rise of mass society. Susman aptly observes that Americans understood the problem as follows:

We live now constantly in a crowd; how can we distinguish ourselves from others in that crowd? While the term is never used, the question is clearly one of life in a mass society (*crowd* is the most commonly used word). Since we live in such a world it is important to develop one's self – that is, those traits, “moral, intellectual, physical, and practical,” that will enable us to think of ourselves and have others think of us as “somebodies.”<sup>31</sup>

The continuous changes of modernity first, and the World War I and Depression-era instability later, brought fear and insecurity, which Americans hoped to confront with the help of inspirational manuals, as they were called. On the ideal bookshelves of the middle-class American homes during the first three decades of the twenty-century, these self-help volumes occupied a space next to the biographies of representative men of the financial world. While the former provided instructions on how to behave and how to become successful, the latter, as previously exposed, offered plenty of examples of those who had been able to become *somebody*, to step out of anonymity and stand out from the crowd. Thus, for my study of the cultural conditions preparing the popular and positive representation of Mussolini in American media, the analysis of this fascination with personality is complementary to my examination of the narrative strategies deployed in the biographical tales of successful individuals. That is

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<sup>30</sup> Warren Susman's essay was first published in John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, eds. *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 212-226. It later appeared in Warren Susman, *Culture as History. The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 271-285.

<sup>31</sup> Warren Susman, *Culture as History*, 277. Emphasis in original text. In this passage, Susman quotes from Henri Laurent, *Personality, How to Build It* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1915), 11.

because the American interest for the Italian dictator can be explained as a result of two cultural trends. First, the longstanding attractiveness of strong, great men, often viewed as models of successful behavior. Second, the early twentieth century interest for the development of personality traits. Also, as I will show in the following chapters, along with numerous narrative strategies from biographical texts of powerful individuals, various keywords and concepts that populated the manuals of personality development appear in Mussolini's biographical tale.<sup>32</sup>

The self-help literature proposes a wide range of desirable traits seen to facilitate individuals in their quest to emerge and distinguish themselves in crowd. The first qualities that every successful individual should possess are those of being efficient, effective, and energetic. Efficiency, a central characteristic of Mussolini's American representation, is, for instance, the sole topic of one of Forbes' texts, tellingly titled *Personal Efficiency* (1920). Ten titles, including not only Henri Laurent's *Personality: How to Build It*, but also *Poise: How to Attain It* and *Timidity: How To Overcome It*, were part of a 1915 series on "Mental Efficiency." John Herman Randall talks specifically of efficiency in his *The Culture of Personality* (1912), where he affirms that one must pursue "higher mental and moral efficiency."<sup>33</sup> In order to do so, readers are invited to continuously exercise their mind through "the daily committing to memory of portions of great poetry or prose" or through more practical activities, such as reorganizing one's own schedule or keeping a journal of daily events.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> As part of my corpus of texts on the development of personality, there are the collection of lectures by John Herman Randall, *The Culture of Personality* (New York: Dodge Publishing Company, 1912); the short study with practical application advises Henri Laurent, *Personality: How to Build It* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1915); the pseudo-scientific Harry Collins Spillman, *Personality. Studies in Personal Development* (New York: The Gregg Publishing Company, 1919) with citations and self-assessment questionnaires; Burt Clifford Bean, *Power of Personality* (Meriden, Conn.: Pelton Publishing Company, 1920); the extensive Swett Orison Marden, *Masterful Personality* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1921); and Bertie C. Forbes, *Keys to Success. Personal Efficiency* (New York: B. C. Forbes Publishing Company, 1926), which is strictly focused on efficiency as a key trait for personal success.

<sup>33</sup> John Herman Randall, *The Culture of Personality*, 177.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 158-172; quote on page 163.

Examining the self-help manuals of the period, however, one can easily realize that other than efficiency, to emerge with an attractive personality from an anonymous crowd and shine among groups of coworkers and acquaintances, one must possess and cultivate qualities such as poise, personal charm, originality, creativity, will-power. Individuals must appear self-assured and kind, be honest and ambitious, and convey conviction and force. The ultimate goal of all these manuals is that of teaching one how to “leave a lasting impression” and make an “indelible mark” in others’ memories, “radiate force and communicate ... strength to others.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, while the authors of these texts point out an individual’s risk of becoming lost within the swarming crowds of the new mass society, they also indicate that to be recognized corresponds to attracting those same crowds. As standing out and fascinating with one’s magnetic personality is the kernel of this self-help literature, Mussolini perfectly fit within this cultural perspective. The American representation of the Italian dictator captured Mussolini as the exemplary fulfillment of this vision, by proposing an exemplary tale of an accomplished individual, capable of rising from anonymity and charming the masses with his personality.

In addition to highlighting the most important personal characteristics one should acquire, part of the preoccupations of these manuals is, of course, that of explaining how to effectively transform “the man we are” into “the man we might become – the possible man, the supreme personality.”<sup>36</sup> The starting point for all the authors is that of knowing one’s own qualities and limits. The chapters in Harry Collins Spillman’s *Personality* (1919) invite readers to a “Self-Survey” and to exercise “Control,” measure one’s own “Assets,” and discover what is one’s personal “Standard Bearer,” that is, “a nontransferable idea, a knack which can never pass

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<sup>35</sup> Swett Orison Marden, *Masterful Personality*, 10.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

current unless indorsed with the trade-mark of [one's] own handiwork."<sup>37</sup> A similar path to self-discovery is highlighted in Swett Orison Marden's *Masterful Personality* (1921), in which the author points out that "You Can Compel Others to Like You" once you "study yourself, examine yourself carefully" in order to find those "qualities which repel, which antagonize, which rub people the wrong way."<sup>38</sup> The secret is again to find one's own "Keynote," which in Marden's words is "something which distinguishes [one] from all others," and is embedded in the first impression that one makes upon others.<sup>39</sup>

The importance of first impressions underlines another major common topic in the self-help manuals of the period, that is, the importance of presenting oneself to the world. In quite explicit terms, Marden explains in his volume that:

So much of our success in life depends upon what others think of us, upon their estimate of us, so much depends upon our reputation, upon people who have never seen us, but who have only heard of us, who have only gotten their estimate of us from others' estimate, that we cannot afford to make a bad impression, we cannot afford to be a poor advertisement of ourselves, that is, of what we are trying to make of ourselves.<sup>40</sup>

The author here, fittingly adopting a marketing register, stresses the importance of being in control of what others think and say of us. To do so, the personality development literature suggests that individuals need to be master of their appearances, starting from their wardrobes. On the topic, both Spillman and Marden insist that "every man must be a well-dressed advertisement of his wares" and that "God's children were not intended to go around in rags ...

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<sup>37</sup> Harry Collins Spillman, *Personality*, 59.

<sup>38</sup> Swett Orison Marden, *Masterful Personality*, 62.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.

but they should always be neatly and becomingly attired, so that human beings would be attractive to one another.”<sup>41</sup>

As part of the suggestions for self-presentation, the manuals also address the topic of physical appearance and use of one’s voice. For instance, Randall’s text invites readers to learn how to hide the expression of their feelings from their physical appearance, particularly “destructive emotions” such as “irascible, malevolent and depressing emotions.”<sup>42</sup> After all, the author stresses, “every form of emotion has its corresponding physical expression,” thus everybody must learn to “smooth the brow, brighten the eye, contract the dorsal rather than the ventral aspect of the frame, [and] speak in a major key” in order to grow a positive personality.<sup>43</sup> The emphasis, in Randall’s and other personality manuals, is particularly on the face, with its power of expressing the inner self, and on the voice, instrument for conveying our strengths and for gaining others’ admiration.

### **Personality, Face, and Voice: How to Become a Celebrity**

New technological advances and forms of communications gave a renewed impulse to the early twentieth century’s rising interest for the representations of human faces and to the importance given to individuals’ voice, crucial characteristics for understanding other people’s personalities. Printing technologies had already facilitated the multiplication of images of faces, allowing the portrait to become a more easily accessible and reproducible form of expression of selves. Around the turn of the century, a new visual perception of society, thanks to the introduction of photography and cinema, interrelated with a renewed aural culture following the invention of the radio and later the introduction of sound cinema, provoked the emergence of a

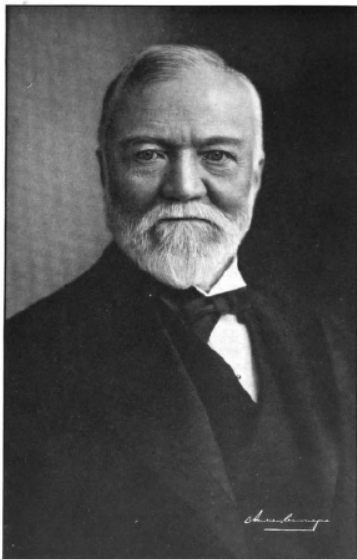
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<sup>41</sup> Harry Collins Spillman, *Personality*, 86; Swett Orison Marden, *Masterful Personality*, 134.

<sup>42</sup> John Herman Randall, *The Culture of Personality*, 119. For a complete listing of “destructive” and “constructive” emotions see pages 117-118.

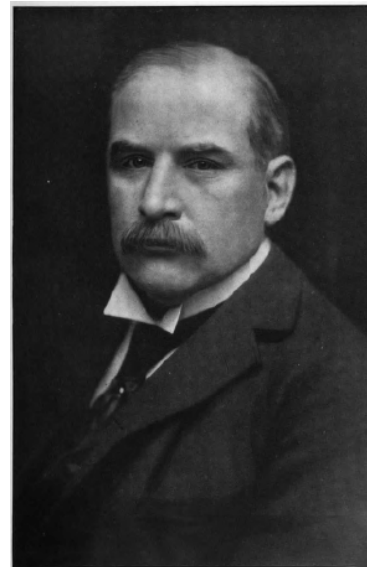
<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-131.

cult of celebrities that invested cinema stars and athletes, but also politicians, key financial players, and artists. Douglas Fairbanks' and Rudolph Valentino's faces filled entire pages of film magazines as well as the screens of the movie theaters; descriptions of George Herman "Babe" Ruth's performances, on and off the baseball field, populated the newspapers; the voice of president Calvin Coolidge became familiar to the entire country thanks to his six radio addresses; Henry Ford, interviewed and photographed, appeared in countless articles and biographical accounts throughout his career; Bernard Shaw and Conan Doyle were often shown, in the late twenties, in the newly introduced sound newsreels. Mussolini himself, as I will reveal, participated in this American culture of celebrities. American media often placed his face and his oratorical power squarely at the center of his biographical representation, alongside his exemplary, successful personality.



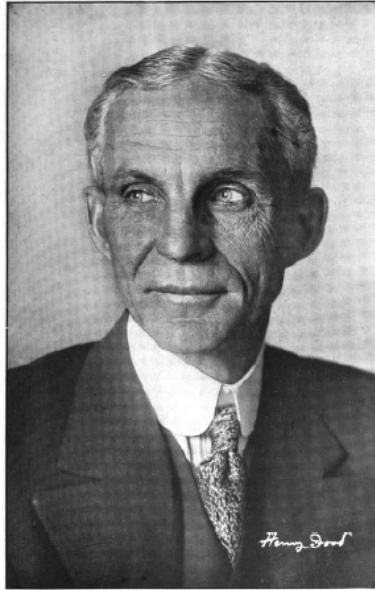
ANDREW CARNEGIE

Image 6



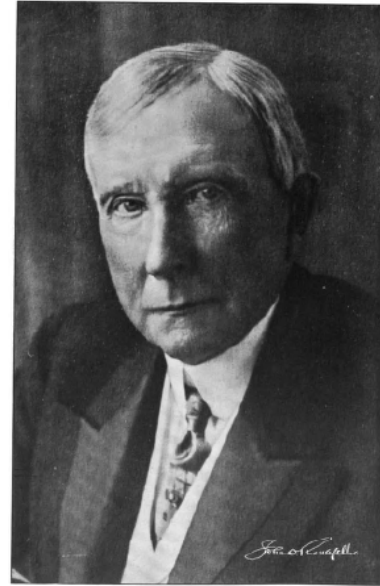
J. P. MORGAN

Image 7



HENRY FORD

Image 8



JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER

Image 9

Portraits of financial personalities in Bertie C. Forbes, *Men Who Are Making America* (New York: B. C. Forbes Publishing Company, 1917): Andrew Carnegie (Image 6), J. P. Morgan (Image 7), Henry Ford (Image 8), and John D. Rockefeller (Image 9).

Photographic portraits often characterized the biographies of financial and industrial giants. Forbes' aforementioned volume on the *Men Who Are Making America* opens with a series of portraits of the fifty individuals whose lives are described. The same goes for Redmond's and Hubbard's volumes, in which the individuals' portraits, in sketches or photographs, open each chapter. Similarly, the faces of the American presidents occupy the pages of their biographies, which were among the most read texts of the genre. For instance, Lord Charnwood's 1923 biography of Theodore Roosevelt opens with an official photographic portrait of the American president.<sup>44</sup> Carl Sandburg's 1926 bestselling two-volume biography of Abraham Lincoln, on the other hand, includes "34 illustrations from photographs, and many cartoons, sketches, maps, and letters."<sup>45</sup> These illustrations include, of course, several depictions of Lincoln's face at different stages of his political career.

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<sup>44</sup> Lord Charnwood, *Theodore Roosevelt* (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1923).

<sup>45</sup> Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1926), III.





Image 10: Roosevelt portrait opening Charnwood's 1923 biography.

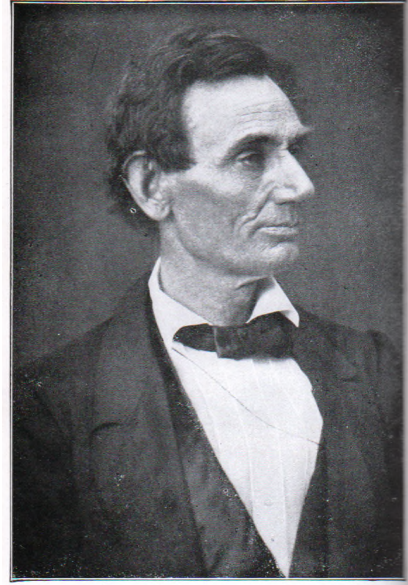


Image 11: One of Lincoln's portraits in Sandburg's 1926 biography.

Another biography of Lincoln, in 1930, can be considered an exemplary tribute to the importance of visual representations and iconicity of the human face of the period. It is Albert Shaw's two-volume "Cartoon History" of the Illinois president.<sup>46</sup> This biography contains hundreds of images, including numerous photographic portraits of Lincoln and of other contemporary public men, and cartoons reproduced from a variety of sources: political pamphlets, newspapers, and posters. During the 1920s and 1930s, the planning and construction of the Mount Rushmore monumental portraits of the four most appreciated American presidents, that is, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt, is one more sign of the period's fascination with the individual faces of powerful, representative characters.

Around the same time, film celebrities enjoyed widespread fame and capitalized on their appearance. With its potent camera technique of the close-up shot, cinema even further increased the significance of the face as the locus revealing personality and the essence of one's life. One

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<sup>46</sup> Albert Shaw, *Abraham Lincoln: His Path to the Presidency* (New York: The Review of Reviews Corporation, 1930) and *Abraham Lincoln: The Year of His Election* (New York: The Review of Reviews Corporation, 1930).

of the main Hollywood stars of the 1910s and 1920s, Douglas Fairbanks, even contributed to the market of self-help publications with works such as *Live and Laugh* (1917), which explained how one could reach happiness through self-confidence and optimism. Regarding the face in particular, Fairbanks states, “No man of refined personality would walk the streets with a soiled face or uncombed hair. Such things do not give poise. They are the evidences of a laggard spirit.”<sup>47</sup>

Roland Barthes, talking in *Mythologies* (1957) about another Hollywood star of the 1920s and 1930s, Greta Garbo, underlined how she belonged to a:

moment in cinema when capturing the human face still plunged audiences into the deepest ecstasy, when one literally lost oneself in a human image as one would in a philter, when the face represented a kind of absolute state of the flesh, which could be neither reached nor renounced.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to the artistic and photographic strategies of portraiture, to the framing of personalities’ faces and busts that symbolized their success in life, cinematic images of human faces introduce an increased sense of desire for and attraction to the person represented.

During the first quarter of the twentieth-century, newsreels became the instrument through which even public personalities could rise to the status of celebrities capable of charming spectators. The mobile faces of American politicians, no longer in a still image, but rather often represented in the act of public speaking, were offered to the audience’s scrutiny. Mussolini was the protagonist of numerous American newsreels, which often depicted him alone and focused on his face through close-ups. The cinematic and biographical narration of the Italian dictator also included a 1933 biopic, *Mussolini Speaks!*, that magnified the personal

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<sup>47</sup> Douglas Fairbanks, *Laugh and Live* (New York: Britton Publishing Company, 1917), 54.

<sup>48</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972), 56.

qualities permitting his accomplishments.

Even before cinema changed the American cultural landscape, the radio had impacted not only the media and communication fields, but also the entire American lifestyle introducing new forms of indoor entertainment. While Calvin Coolidge was the first American president to use the new media with his nationally broadcasted radio addresses, it was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, starting in 1933, to most effectively use this new technology as a tool of political rhetoric and to increase his popularity. With his “Fireside Chats” radio addresses, F. D. Roosevelt made all Americans feel included in his recovery plans. He captured the essence of the sound and visual age with an oratorical style that was less wordy and more conversational, direct, and, at times, humorous and familiar.

Voice and speakers’ abilities were in fact central, as mentioned, in the self-help literature on personality development as part of the presentation of the selves. In Spillman’s text, an entire chapter, “Winning with Words,” is devoted to developing one’s speaking abilities. It includes a chart and practical suggestions on how to “build” one’s voice and vocabulary: “Breath[e] deeply; Articulate clearly ... Use ‘picture’ words.”<sup>49</sup> These exercises, which seem best suited to professional actors and politicians, are offered to all readers. They are thus invited to become public performers in order to gain, if not the status of a celebrity, at least renown among their peers.<sup>50</sup> In Mussolini’s representations in American newsreels, and through his vocal presence in his transcontinental radio addresses, the dictator’s oratorical ability was a trademark of his celebrity and of his recognized fascinating personality. Even before the advent of the sound newsreels, in 1927, Mussolini’s magnified face on the screen provided details of his mastery of

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<sup>49</sup> Harry Collins Spillman, *Personality*, 124.

<sup>50</sup> The foundation of the Toastmaster International in 1924, an organization fully devoted to the improvement of members’ communication and public speaking skills, is a further proof of the American obsession with leadership and oratorical performances of the time.

the art of speaking and mesmerizing crowds.

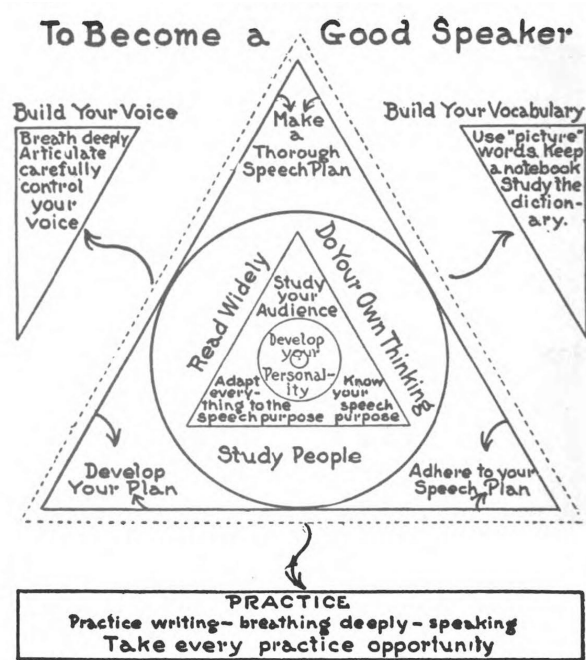


Image 12: The chart with instructions on how to become a good speaker in Harry Collins Spillman, *Personality. Studies in Personal Development* (New York: The Gregg Publishing Company, 1919).

## Conclusion

A book that epitomizes the culture of personality and celebrity of the 1920s and 1930s in the United States is Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.<sup>51</sup> In this popular manual, to date the most sold self-help book worldwide, Carnegie suggests that economic wealth alone is not a measure of one's success. To be successful means to have friends, to be appreciated and recognized as a leader. To do so, one has to perform a likable personality with others: deal with people in a kind way, make a good first impression, smile, and avoid arguing. In the introduction to his "action book," Carnegie states that before writing he analyzed hundreds of biographies, "over one hundred biographies of Theodore Roosevelt alone."<sup>52</sup> In an attempt to discover the secrets of developing a winning personality, he also conducted interviews with

<sup>51</sup> Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends & Influence People* (1936; repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981).

<sup>52</sup> Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends*, XXI, XVIII.

world-famous successful people: inventors, political and business leaders, movie stars, and explorers. As I have shown, the interest for men of renown and for their life narratives, the need to understand others' and develop one's own personality, and the desire to rise from the anonymous crowd characterized those years. Carnegie's book summarized these popular culture and public demands of the previous three decades in one, convenient volume. A few years before Carnegie's book was published, between the mid-1920s and until the 1935-36 Ethiopian War, the Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini came to fit perfectly within this American cultural atmosphere.

The 1926 note written by the Fox Newsreels operator Villani with which this chapter opens, is an emblematic illustration of the reading of Mussolini and of his representation in the United States. The fascist dictator, regardless of his moral qualities and political motives, was a "leading captain" before everything else. His magnetic, charming personality, interpreted as the reason behind his success, needed to be celebrated and used as an exemplary tale. Framing Mussolini's depictions in print and on screen as those of a representative character permits us to better understand the American interest in the biographical account of a powerful man, the attraction for the development of personality, and the growing appeal of the celebrity culture. It highlights the media tendency to distil complex personalities down to manageable, and potentially less important, characteristics. In the case of Mussolini, this oversimplification was done in spite of his violent political practices and murderous dictatorial regime. Finally, the analysis of Mussolini's biographical texts also allows for a reconsideration of the political and financial relationships that tied the United States to Italy, and demonstrates why and how a more complex cultural interpretation of Mussolini – as a representative character at the intersection of traditional biographies, inspirational literature, and cult of personality – served these interests.

## Chapter 2

### The Spectacular Life of Benito Mussolini

“‘Mussolini Dux’ would not have quite the desired effect in English – it would have a slightly comical effect.”<sup>1</sup> Frederic Whyte, the English translator of Margherita Sarfatti’s biography of Benito Mussolini replied in a letter to the author’s imperative to change the text’s title with these reservations. Sarfatti had in fact indicated in a previous missive that the title of the biography should be “Mussolini Dux. By a Witness.”<sup>2</sup> Sarfatti’s letter was a response to the English-language copy of the manuscript that Whyte asked her to proofread. Sarfatti must have found the title *The Life of Benito Mussolini* so objectionable that, before listing a series of typos and misspellings of proper names, she urged Whyte to revert to her original title. “The proofs you sent me” one reads in her letter, “bear the title ‘The Life of Mussolini.’ I hope this is not going to be its title, as I prefer the one by far which I put on the first leaf of my m.s. [manuscript].”<sup>3</sup>

Thus Sarfatti must have been dismayed when the English version of her biography of Mussolini was published under the title of *The Life of Benito Mussolini* both in the United

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<sup>1</sup> Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, University Library, Special Collections, “Whyte (Frederic) Papers,” Whyte to Sarfatti. July 17, 1925.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Sarfatti to Whyte. July 4, 1925. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Kingdom and in the United States in September 1925.<sup>4</sup> Whyte's comment about the comical nature of "Mussolini Dux" points out that the publishers of Sarfatti's text preferred to introduce the Italian dictator with a more straightforward title, which would avoid confusion and immediately direct the readers to the recognizable biographical genre. Marketing reasons, of course, also drove the selection of the English title. The name of the Italian dictator, spelled out in the English title of Sarfatti's biography, was already a familiar one thanks to the international press interest about the Italian political situation. Thus, using the unfamiliar Latin denomination "Dux," a name that would soon become a recognizable designation of the fascist dictator but was not yet widely used, might have alienated potential buyers of the book.<sup>5</sup>

The title was not the only change to Sarfatti's biography. In a note opening the English edition, Whyte says that he "found necessary to condense somewhat freely Signora Sarfatti's text."<sup>6</sup> A comparison of the English and Italian texts reveals that in *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, the translator merged some chapters and rearranged some of the content. Additionally, Whyte eliminated passages related to Italian political issues and to ideological details that would have been "unclear to the English reader unless they were very elaborately annotated."<sup>7</sup> While the majority of the content is unchanged, the condensed English version of Sarfatti's biography reads more as the story of a powerful man than a narrative of a political leader and his movement. *The*

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<sup>4</sup> Margherita Sarfatti, *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, trans. Frederic Whyte (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1925). The volume was published in the United States by The Frederick A. Stokes Co. in 1925. All quotes and notes will refer to the American edition. See the reviews "Mussolini. From Socialist to Fascist," *The Times*, Oct. 2, 1925, 7; John Carter, "Mussolini, Master of Italy," *The New York Times*, Feb. 7, 1926, 4.

<sup>5</sup> In Italy, where the epithet Dux was already in use in 1925, Sarfatti was able to publish her biography in June 1926 with her preferred title. Margherita Sarfatti, *Dux* (Milan: Mondadori, 1926).

<sup>6</sup> Sarfatti, *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Sarfatti, *ibid.* The Italian version *Dux* consists of 48 chapters while *The Life of Benito Mussolini* is divided into 42 chapters. In Whyte's translation, for instance, all references to Mazzini and an entire chapter devoted to Fascism's symbols and terminology ('Giovinezza' in *Dux*, 243-252) disappear.

*Life of Benito Mussolini* is very much a publication about the man Mussolini that, rather than proceeding through main events in a conventional chronological order, highlights the role played by the dictator in building his own fate. The author acknowledges and defends her “zigzag method” that disregards “all unities whether of time or place or action.”<sup>8</sup> In describing Mussolini as a predestined leader, as an exceptional individual who achieved greatness by virtue of his own will-power, Sarfatti declares: “I shall not sacrifice to a pedantic chronological unity that more genuine unity which is inherent in the character of my hero. . . . I shall proceed, therefore, as life has done with him and he with life – by leaps and bounds, by rapid advances and sudden retreats.”<sup>9</sup> Sarfatti’s intent was that of depicting Mussolini’s essence, conveying his character and his personality rather than offering an objective narrative rendering of his life story. The method of Sarfatti’s biography seems to closely anticipate the “New Biography” style that Virginia Wolff would outline in 1927 by stressing the importance of combining both historical truth and details of inner personality in biographies. *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, with its focus on the dictator’s mind, even anticipated the sort of psychological biographies that would become a thriving genre starting in the late 1920s following the popularization of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical theories.

Sarfatti’s biography of Mussolini, which depicts the dictator’s personal qualities and describes him as a man of power and incredible charisma, certainly found a welcoming audience in the United States, where, for years, readers had been accustomed to adopting the life narratives of exceptional individuals as models for self-improvement. When *The Life of Benito Mussolini* was published in the United States in 1925, the interest in Mussolini had already determined the flourishing of a large number of journalistic texts that recounted the dictator’s

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<sup>8</sup> Sarfatti, *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, 56.

<sup>9</sup> Sarfatti, *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, 56-57.



biographical tale, focusing particularly on his personality traits and highlighting his leadership qualities.<sup>10</sup> Sarfatti's biography, however, crystalized the biographical representation of Mussolini as a public hero, a personality to be admired, a true celebrity for the American audience. Thanks to Sarfatti's biography and to a vast American journalistic focus on the dictator, during the mid-1920s and until the start of the Italian war in Ethiopia in 1935, in the United States Mussolini became one of the public figures most closely associated with the idea of individual success, will power, and modernity in terms of both innovation and progress. Although Italian, Mussolini attracted the attention of ambitious Americans as he embodied a representative character for their ideals of charismatic leadership and attractive personality. As the *New York Times*' reviewer noted, Sarfatti's biography allowed Americans to learn about "the most interesting political *personality* of the age" and "presented a picture of a man upon whose *character* may depend the history of the next twenty years."<sup>11</sup> In my analysis of *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, I highlight the narrative elements that contributed to its success and to the construction of an American-style hero worship, in the style of financial giants such as John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie or political figures such as Frank Delano Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln.

In addition to Sarfatti's text, I examine two other serialized autobiographies of Mussolini, which, among the biographies published in the press during the mid-1920s, are the most significant, in terms of their mass circulation and richness of original details, for exploring the ways in which Mussolini was framed in terms of his winning personality and as a representative

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Lloyd R. Morris, "Mussolini. A Benevolent Tyrant?," *Forum*, 70 (1923), 2067-74; "Rome's New Caesar," *Literary Digest* 78 (1923), 15-16; and "Mussolini the Man," *Living Age*, 326 (1925), 407-13.

<sup>11</sup> Carter, "Mussolini, Master of Italy," 24. Emphasis mine.

character.<sup>12</sup> These two “official” autobiographies of Mussolini, bearing his name as the sole author, were both published in ten installments in the American press. Scholars have revealed that Mussolini did not write these texts himself, but instead received substantial help from a number of ghostwriters and, in particular, from his brother, Arnaldo, and Margherita Sarfatti.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, the two autobiographical series that I analyze in this chapter are of fundamental importance for understanding the American narration of the Italian dictator and the way the United States audience came to perceive him. The first of these series is *Mussolini’s Own Story of His Busy Life*, syndicated by the United Press in American newspapers in 1927 between January 5 and January 15. The second autobiographical series on Mussolini was published in the weekly magazine *Saturday Evening Post* from May 5, 1928 to October 27, 1928.<sup>14</sup> These ten installments of the *Saturday Evening Post* were later republished under the title of *My*

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<sup>12</sup> Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund define serialization as a “pervasive” publishing practice during the Victorian era for a number of different kinds of texts, from fiction to poetry and biographies. Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *The Victorian Serial* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991). *The Saturday Evening Post* thrived on the printing of serialized fictional works of authors such as Jack London and Harry Sinclair Lewis.

<sup>13</sup> John Diggins attributes to Richard Washburn Child, American Ambassador in Rome in the early 1920s, and to Mussolini’s brother Arnaldo the writing of the autobiographical texts for the *Saturday Evening Post* titled *My Autobiography*. See specifically John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism. The View from America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 28. In *Il Duce’s Other Woman*, Philip Cannistraro and Brian Sullivan explain that “the articles were written in English by Child and Luigi Barzini, Jr., based on notes supplied by Arnaldo Mussolini and Margherita [Sarfatti].” Philip Cannistraro and Brian Sullivan, *Il Duce’s Other Woman* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993), 358. Cannistraro and Sullivan also suggest that the United Press’ Rome manager Thomas B. Morgan and Margherita Sarfatti were the real writers of the United Press series *Mussolini’s Own Story of His Busy Life* (355).

<sup>14</sup> At the time of Mussolini’s autobiographical series, the United Press served over 1,000 newspapers across the United States and other 35 countries. In 1928, the *Saturday Evening Post*, on the other hand, had almost 3 million subscribers. For further details on the United Press, see Joe Alex Morris, *Deadline Every Minute: The Story of the United Press* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957). For information on the *Saturday Evening Post* circulation, see *A Short History of the Saturday Evening Post* (Philadelphia: The Curtis Publishing Company, 1937) and Douglas B. Ward, “The Geography of an American Icon: An Analysis of the Circulation of the *Saturday Evening Post*, 1911-1944,” *American Journalism* 27: 3 (2010), 59-89. With his study, Ward is able to determine that although the readership of the *Saturday Evening Post* was mostly made of “well-to-do white urbanites,” the magazine circulated unevenly, reaching the Southern states less than the Western and Eastern ones (80).

*Autobiography*.<sup>15</sup> Richard Washburn Child, the American ambassador to Italy between May 1921 and February 1924, wrote a preface to the volume. Child, who John P. Diggins calls “Mussolini’s mouthpiece in America,” also shared with the editors a personal photograph of Mussolini bearing *Il Duce*’s signature.<sup>16</sup> No substantial content differences exist between the press and the book versions of this 1928 autobiography of Mussolini. The ten installments in the *Saturday Evening Post* are spread across thirteen book chapters since the longer text of the first and last installments are used for the first three and last two chapters, respectively.

In analyzing these three biographical texts, I look particularly at how the American narration of Mussolini came to fit the existing trends of representations of exceptional individuals. I demonstrate that, as the giants of the American financial and industrial world had been before him, Mussolini is characterized as a self-made man and as an exceptional character possessing incomparable qualities. Mussolini’s biographies also frame him as an individual who is not only able to rise from the anonymity of a crowd, but singlehandedly capable of changing and modernizing the existing world. Additionally, I focus on the biographies’ insistence on describing the personality traits that distinguish the dictator from others and permit him to be successful. As was common in American biographies of the first quarter of the century, life narratives’ subjects were regarded as examples to follow. Furthermore, as the literature on self-improvement of the time prescribed, readers could learn how to perfect their own personalities by carefully examining the exemplary lives of successful individuals. Framing Mussolini not only as a likable individual, but also as a model to imitate, meant including extensive descriptions of the dictator’s rules for efficiency and highlighting his personal magnetism and

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<sup>15</sup> Benito Mussolini, *My Autobiography* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928). All subsequent quotes will be from this edition.

<sup>16</sup> Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 28.

strength, coupled with his will-power and originality. The numerous pictures included in these texts, finally, also drew the readers' attention to other significant aspects of Mussolini's personality that were considered worthy of emulation, such as the dictator's care for his physical appearance and for his self-presentation.

### Setting the Stage: The Opening Image



Images 13 and 14: Mussolini in the opening pictures of Sarfatti's *The Life of Benito Mussolini* (left) and *My Autobiography* (right).

As was customary for biographical texts of the time, Sarfatti's *The Life of Benito Mussolini* and *My Autobiography* open with photographic portraits of the dictator. These images convey Mussolini's leadership qualities and his character traits to the readers. In Sarfatti's text, the autographed opening photograph portrays Mussolini from the waist up. He is standing, with his body in profile, but with his face looking rightward toward the camera. Also visible in this image, we find his arms, folded across his chest, and his hands, which hold what seems to be a newspaper or a folder. Mussolini appears smartly dressed, with a dark suit and tie that contrast

boldly with his white shirt and the clear tone of his skin. The dictator looks right into the camera and smiles benevolently. The chiaroscuro, which adds to the image's elegance and artistry, puts the left side of Mussolini's face slightly in shadow and makes the dictator's reassuring expression stand out even more. Elegance, composure, and confidence are the main characteristics emerging from this picture. Mussolini appears in this picture with a business-like attitude, with his body ready to advance and the expression of somebody firmly convinced of his own success.

A similar assertiveness even more clearly dominates the picture opening *My Autobiography*. An elegantly dressed Mussolini is shown sitting at his desk, which the caption places at Palazzo Chigi, the location of the Prime Minister's office in Rome. Mussolini's face is at the center of the image and he is, again, looking at the camera directly. His gaze is severe, but the light, shining from his left side and illuminating part of his face, gives to the dictator's portrait an inspired, almost messianic tone. His hands are on the desk, barely visible behind papers and a set of rubber stamps. Mussolini, portrayed with the tools of his trade, appears here busy at work, confidently making his vision of Italy a reality. The caption, which details "when listening intently this is his attitude and expression," further emphasizes the dictator's intensity and personal commitment.

These pictures foreshadow the narratives of Mussolini's personality, along with the myth of his omnipotence and omnipresence, and introduce the readers to the tale of a powerful man's story. They help set the stage for the account of an exceptional individual and give further authority to the texts as representative examples of success. Mussolini's personal note opening Sarfatti's text and Child's introduction to *My Autobiography* have the same authoritative function. In his preface to *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, the dictator states, "In this book my life

is to be found recorded (...). My life is presented in it in the form of a succession of events, in the form of a development of ideas.”<sup>17</sup> He then concludes, “This book pleases me because it presents me with a sense of the proportions as regards time and space and events, and without extravagance.”<sup>18</sup> Here Mussolini, in addition to endorsing Sarfatti’s biography, offers a sample of his directness, a personal trait that the former Ambassador Child, likely among many other Americans, admired. In his Foreword to *My Autobiography*, Child describes the volume in these terms: “Much of the extraordinary personality disclosed here was an open book to me long ago because I knew well the man who now, at last, has written characteristically, directly and simply of that self for which I have a deep affection.”<sup>19</sup>

With a similar introduction, full of deferential words, the short note opening the United Press series attempts to authenticate and reinforce the importance of the subject profiled. The title of this short editorial text is *United Press Scores Beat with Series by Mussolini* and it reads:

One of the outstanding newspaper exploits of recent years is revealed in the release today by the United Press of a series of articles by Premier Benito Mussolini, in which Mussolini tells the intimate, personal story of his daily life. The articles were secured exclusively for newspapers receiving United Press service through the enterprise of Thomas B. Morgan, Rome manager of the United Press. They were in large part dictated to Mr. Morgan by Mussolini. For an hour or more each day over a period of four weeks Mr. Morgan worked side-by-side with the premier, assisting in the formulation, revision and correction of

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<sup>17</sup> Sarfatti, *Life*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Mussolini, *Autobiography*, IX.

the articles. Securing the consent of the Italian premier to authorship of such a strongly personal series of newspaper articles was a task requiring a high degree of personal ability and tact.<sup>20</sup>

With the stage set, and once the editorial voices or Mussolini himself have asserted the legitimacy and the authority of the biographical texts, the exemplary narration of the son of a blacksmith who transformed himself into the admired leader of Italy can begin, describing the humble origins and the process of overcoming insurmountable obstacles.

### **Mussolini as a Self-made Man**

The biographical narrations of Mussolini dedicate some space to his family and to his poor, yet moral upbringing in Predappio, a small village in the Emilia Romagna region. His father, Alessandro Mussolini, was a blacksmith and an innkeeper, and his mother, Rosa, was a schoolmistress. Sarfatti's biography informs the readers that "although a manual worker and of plebeian status," Alessandro Mussolini "was not an uneducated man" and had "nothing vulgar or uncouth about him."<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the author describes Benito Mussolini's mother "almost as a saint from Heaven, so gentle and refined," and notes that "to know Benito Mussolini aright, one needs to conjure up a picture of his mother as she sat there teaching in her school, an incarnation of goodness and unconscious nobility, reserved, retiring, sensitive in the extreme."<sup>22</sup> While Rosa Mussolini transmitted to her son such noble personal characteristics, Benito Mussolini inherited his father's political passion and love for everything mechanical. The dictator's autobiography details how, while working together with his father and "steam threshing machines," he

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<sup>20</sup> "United Press Scores Beat with Series by Mussolini," *Chester Times*, Jan. 5, 1927, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Sarfatti, *Life*, 21.

<sup>22</sup> Sarfatti, *Life*, 27-28.

discovered that “machinery has its fascinations.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, again thanks to his father, Mussolini was exposed early on to socialist principles and political thoughts which revealed to him “new political ideals destined to flower” and demonstrated the fact that a deep and secret grudge was darkening the hearts of the common people.”<sup>24</sup> By highlighting the parental influence on the young Benito Mussolini and his growing passions for technological advances and political thought, these biographical narrations develop an exemplary tale of success that transcends original location and economic situation. The socialistic ideals inherited from his father, along with the dictator’s own socialist past, are downplayed to the level of folklore and connected to the passionate spirit of the Emilia Romagna working class people. Instead, will power, moral values, and intelligence are emphasized as Mussolini’s crucial personal characteristics for overcoming material difficulties. Mussolini’s education and personality, along with his parents’ oversight, allowed him to become a future leader and to fulfill the promises that, as he writes in *My Autobiography*, his mother saw in him.<sup>25</sup>

The description of Mussolini’s family in these terms had the additional purpose of framing the fascist leader as engaged on a path toward success from an early age, when the marks of his extraordinary personality were already visible. Explicitly, a chapter of Sarfatti’s volume is entitled “The Boy, Father to the Man” and reports a childhood episode that shows the qualities of “the true leader he already was.”<sup>26</sup> Sarfatti recounts how Mussolini, during his boyhood, planned with some friends to steal some apples from a tree on somebody’s farm. When the farmer, owner of the fruits, shot and injured one of the boys, Mussolini was the only one of the group who “went to the rescue of the wounded lad who was all but unconscious, his leg

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<sup>23</sup> Mussolini, *Autobiography*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Mussolini, *Autobiography*, 10.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Sarfatti, *Life*, 38.



bleeding profusely,” and while the farmer was still angry, with “his gun still handy, Benito, anxious and earnest, lifted the boy on to his shoulders and carried him home.”<sup>27</sup> This episode, reported in one of the first chapters of Sarfatti’s biography, creates the image of a heroic young man who has all the qualities of a future leader, and who was able to build his own success.<sup>28</sup>

### **Overcoming Difficulties: The Swiss Exile and World War I**

Having described the humble family origins of the dictator and offered a telling example of his positive personal characteristics (bravery and determination, to name two), the biographical narrations focus on the difficulties and obstacles that Mussolini had to overcome before becoming the leader of Italy. Sarfatti’s biography details, for instance, Mussolini’s wandering years in Switzerland in a chapter entitled “A Hodman in Switzerland.” The chapter consists in part of a letter written by Mussolini himself to a friend. To further validate the authenticity of this text in attesting the desperate conditions endured by the young Mussolini, a note by the translator, Frederic Whyte, reads “In the rendering of Italian into English some freedom is, as a rule, necessary, but in the case of Mussolini’s own writing I have adhered to the original as closely and literally as possible.”<sup>29</sup> The letter describes to an unnamed friend his arrival in Switzerland in July 1902 and the first difficult weeks spent in poverty and in search for work as a “manual labourer.”<sup>30</sup> A particularly self-pitying passage of the letter describes this

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> For American readers, this story also likely resonated with the legendary tale of George Washington cutting down his father’s cherry tree during his childhood and, subsequently, admit to it refusing to tell a lie. This story, which illustrated Washington’s honesty as Sarfatti’s episode exemplified Mussolini’s courage, first appeared in Mason Locke Weems, *The Life of Washington the Great*, (Augusta, GA: George P. Randolph, 1806), 8-9. While Weems’ biography was not translated into Italian, the stories exemplifying Washington’s virtues have likely traveled outside of the United States due to the enormous popularity of the volume.

<sup>29</sup> Sarfatti, *Life*, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 84

difficult period and, in retrospect, serves to further cast Mussolini in terms of heroism and drive.

It reads:

I found work and on Monday, the 14<sup>th</sup>, I began: eleven hours' work in the day at thirty-two centesimi the hour. I made one hundred and twenty-two journeys with a hand-barrow full of stones up to the second floor of a building in process of construction. In the evening the muscles of my arms were swollen. I ate some potatoes roasted upon cinders and threw myself in all my clothes on to my bed: a pile of straw. At five on the Tuesday I woke and returned to work.<sup>31</sup>

Mussolini describes his period in Switzerland in *My Autobiography* in similar terms. The pages focusing on the “wander-life,” however, are much more explicit in explaining what Sarfatti hinted at with her romanticized narration of Mussolini’s exile experience: overcoming obstacles was crucial in making Mussolini the strong and dynamic leader he later became.<sup>32</sup> Thinking back to his short stay in Switzerland, “full of difficulties, toil, hardship and restlessness,” Mussolini notes how “it was the milestone which marked [his] maturity.”<sup>33</sup> He adds that the “stay in Switzerland was a welter of difficulties,” yet he explains how fundamental this experience was for his future success: “To this day I thank difficulties. They were more numerous than the nice, happy incidents. But the latter gave me nothing. The difficulties of life have hardened my spirit. They have taught me how to live.”<sup>34</sup>

While the biographical texts of Mussolini describe the experience of hunger, poverty, and even prison as reinforcing an already strong personality, in both Sarfatti’s text and in *My*

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

*Autobiography*, World War I is the event that marks the fascist dictator's life the most and that represents a true turning point in his rise to power. Sarfatti starts her biography exactly from the Great War, with a chapter entitled "The Tragedy Without a Hero." Mussolini is not even mentioned in these few initial pages, yet without explicitly affirming it, Sarfatti suggests with her biography that the dictator is the latest hero of recent world history, the heir of Alexander the Great, Washington, and Napoleon, precisely for his participation in World War I.<sup>35</sup> In *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, Sarfatti lets the fascist leader describe his war experience in his words, drawing upon his diary, "one of the most memorable of war books" she observes.<sup>36</sup> The objective is again that of further validating the authenticity of the biographical narration. Here, however, a non-secondary goal might be that of proving how, in the midst of terrible events and sufferings, Mussolini was able to keep his moral strength, compassion, and foresight. She notes how in Mussolini's writings about his war participation "there is never a word of anything approaching a complaint. Not merely are there no grumblings or protests against the hardships of fate – there was none even against the culpable inertia and incompetence and baseness of men."<sup>37</sup> The dictator arrived on the war front as the director of the interventionist newspaper he had started, *Il popolo d'Italia*. Mussolini notes in *My Autobiography*, how his "political position brought [him] plenty of offers of privileges and sheltered places," which he preferred to turn down.<sup>38</sup> Having been in favor of the Italian intervention, Mussolini believed that the trenches, where he "learned the torture of pain," were the place he needed to be.<sup>39</sup> The aim of the chapters focusing on the war is that of creating the image of an individual who not only has been through unimaginably

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<sup>35</sup> These three figures are all cited in the first page of Sarfatti's biography as examples of heroes who have been the product of war events. Sarfatti, *Life*, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Sarfatti, *Life*, 217.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, 42.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

difficult circumstances but also has the quality of a leader, coherent with his choices and decisively following his ideals. Mussolini explains it explicitly in a passage of his autobiography:

I wanted to create the impression of a complete and rigid consistence with an ideal. This was not a scheming on my part for personal gain; it was a deep need in my nature of what I believed and still hold on to as my life's dedication – namely, that once a man sets up to be the expounder of an idea or of a new school of thought, he must consistently and intensively live the daily life and fight battles for the doctrines that he teaches at any cost until victory – to the end!<sup>40</sup>

In this passage, Mussolini rhetorically constructs himself as a trustworthy leader, who follows up his ideals with concrete and coherent actions. While negating “personal gain” as the motive behind his behavior, Mussolini adduces natural causes for his drive. Through the representation of his role in World War I, the biographical narrations present Mussolini, then, as a natural leader who can rationally associate vision to personal and active engagement, no matter how hard that is.

In the context of the narration of Mussolini and the war, the injury he suffered becomes the central event for the representation of his heroism and personal qualities and for the characterization of his rebirth as the true hero and leader of the nation. After recounting that, during the war, Mussolini's specialty “was to collect live bombs, fallen behind the Bersaglieri,” Sarfatti, with her characteristic romanticizing style, describes the events leading to Mussolini's injury in a chapter entitled “Memorable Pilgrimage.”<sup>41</sup> Setting her memory of the episode in the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>41</sup> Sarfatti, *Life*, 229.

context of a trip she took in 1922 with Mussolini and other fascist members to the area where most of the fights between Italians and Austrians took place, Sarfatti writes:

Here, in these trenches, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, 1917, [Mussolini] took part in a terrific bombardment, overwhelming the enemy with a rain of bombs. The trench-mortars became almost red-hot.

While unsurpassed for bravery, he also knew how to be prudent. He called the attention of the lieutenant to the trench-mortar. “Signor Tenente, we must stop, the metal has cracked, there will be an accident.” “Just once more, Sergeant!” That “once more” burst the mortar. Those around were killed or maimed (...). Mussolini, terribly lacerated, was hurled some distance away and stunned. When he came to himself, he was taken (...) to the hospital. (...) Fever set in. He showed himself very reserved, quiet, silent, almost shy. When he was taken to the operating theatre and felt the knife enter his flesh, he met the spasm of pain by closing his lips with a smothered curse, but immediately relaxed and smiled gently at those around.<sup>42</sup>

In her description of the episode, Sarfatti starts by exalting Mussolini’s courage. Yet, she notes how his bravery, which gets magnified into an “overwhelming” attack against the Austrian army, is never mere recklessness. Mussolini is instead “prudent” and wise; in the middle of an assault, he is able to show a better understanding of the situation than his superior. The bursting of the mortar is the demonstration of his competence and intelligence. The dramatic scene ensuing the explosion gives us the portrait of a man that is always in control of himself and his emotions, through fear and pain. To the gruesome image of the knife entering Mussolini’s lacerated flesh,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 229-230.

*My Autobiography* adds even more vivid details to the narration of the accident:

My wounds were serious. The patience and ability of the physicians succeeded in taking out of my body forty-four pieces of the grenade. Flesh was torn, bones broken. I faced atrocious pain; my suffering was indescribable. I underwent practically all my operations without the aid of an anesthetic. I had twenty-seven operations in one month; all except two were without anesthetic.<sup>43</sup>

Here, desirable leadership qualities of universal value such as courage, physical strength, and self-control are strategically mixed in the description of the suffering leader. The image of the wounded Mussolini and his painful near-death experience become the centerpiece for the narrative of a hero with superhuman characteristics, capable of bearing pain without medications and ready to overcome every obstacle on his path toward the control of the nation. As in the account of a rebirth, Sarfatti describes Mussolini, once “he is pronounced well and is sent to Milan,” as feeble and helpless, almost as an infant: “He was so exhausted he could scarcely speak. He smiled out at us from his pale face, his eyes sunken in great hollows. His lips scarcely moved, one could see how horribly he had suffered.”<sup>44</sup> From the details about the injury to the focus on the medical treatments and the slow, painful recovery, the biographical narrations construct the image of a man who comes out of World War I as a true hero and a leader to be followed, a man who will rule Italy with strength and without palliatives, just as he underwent surgical operations without anesthetics.

### **The Personal Characteristics of a Leader**

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<sup>43</sup> Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, 48.

<sup>44</sup> Sarfatti, *Life*, 232.

Mussolini's participation in World War I and his injury are the turning points of his life, the events that in the biographical narrations set him apart and launch him toward the country's leadership. Mussolini's ability and political competence had already characterized the events leading to the Italian engagement in the world conflict. With his refusal to abide by the Socialist official anti-war line and his decision to break free from the party and to found a new newspaper to promote his interventionist agenda, Mussolini is presented in the biography as a man who already possesses all the qualities of a perfect leader. In the biographical texts, will power and strength are the two personal characteristics that helped him the most in becoming the leader of the interventionist faction, to actively participate in World War I, and to come out of the fights as a hero. The biographies of Mussolini highlight other personality traits that were crucial for leading him to become the beloved head of the country: efficiency and directness, rhetorical ability and magnetism, a poised and neat appearance.

The topic of efficiency is particularly predominant in Mussolini's biographical texts and is one that specifically appealed to Americans aspiring to learn the secrets of a successful personality from an exemplary public character. Present in the Italian discourse surrounding the Duce, the concept of the dictator's efficiency can be seen in the narrative of the process of renewal of Italy and Italians. In this rhetorical context, all of Mussolini's political choices and social reforms aimed at effectively improving the country and its people. In the American tale of Mussolini, on the other hand, while this idea of rebirth and renewal is certainly present, the topic of Mussolini's efficiency becomes even more fundamental as it allows the American audience to connect with the biographical texts and to recognize in Mussolini the positive and celebrated characteristics of the American way of life: a business-like attitude and the predisposition to work hard in view of great achievements. In his autobiography, Mussolini already associated the

topic of efficiency with the United States. When talking about his reform of the Italian public services, he notes: “It is not a thing of small moment that all public utilities are conducted with an efficiency which I might call American, and that the Italian bureaucracy, proverbially slow, has become eager and agile.”<sup>45</sup> Anxious to please his American readers, Mussolini presents himself as a leader whose goal is to make Italy resemble the United States more and more. At the same time, because of his personal American-like attitudes, he becomes a character to emulate for the readers, a person whose personality traits should be considered as exemplary. In the United Press’s series of ten articles *Mussolini’s Own Story of His Busy Life*, published in January of 1927, the theme of efficiency and physical energy become the most persistent linguistic and narrative components.<sup>46</sup> The first article of the series is fully dedicated to Mussolini’s efficiency and the editor presents the dictator as follows: “He works intensively fourteen to sixteen hours a day. He personally holds seven portfolios in his own government. Every minute of each day is scheduled in advance for some definite thing the premier must do. Personal efficiency is his fetish; hard work his gospel.”<sup>47</sup> The dictator himself, the editor continues, “consented to publication of the series of articles largely in the belief that his own example of efficiency might do some good in the world.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, the first article of this autobiographical profile opens with the following words:

It has been my rule of life to employ the body and mind to render the

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<sup>45</sup> Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, 294-295.

<sup>46</sup> The series was syndicated in numerous United Press local newspapers across the United States in 1927, between January 5 and January 15. For instance, two New York’s newspapers, *The New York Sun* and *The New York Herald* published the autobiographical articles at the same time, and the series appeared in such widely located newspapers as *The Ames Daily Tribune* in Iowa, in the *Chester Times* in Pennsylvania, in the *Taylor Daily Press* in Texas, in *The Anniston Star* in Alabama, in the *Decatur Evening Herald* in Illinois, and the *Oakland Tribune* in California. All quotes in this chapter come from the *Chester Times*, which was readily available online on [www.newspaperarchive.com](http://www.newspaperarchive.com).

<sup>47</sup> “United Press Scores Beat with Series by Mussolini,” *Chester Times*, Jan. 5, 1927, 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*



maximum output. We have not yet fully exploited the potentialities of physical and mental man to the point of calling him efficient. Just now we can but meditate on those possibilities and try to attain as best we can the limit of our capabilities.<sup>49</sup>

Mussolini affirms that reaching a maximum level of efficiency, an efficiency that goes to the very limit of what humans can realize, is his personal goal. To do so, as he explains, he follows a series of strict rules and personal habits. A box preceding the first-page article summarizes all of these strategies to achieve such a productive life. Among “Mussolini’s Efficiency Precepts” American readers could find: “Master your body and mind. Concentrate on the one thing before you. Get seven hours’ sound sleep. Never stay in bed after the instant of awakening. Read the newspapers while dressing. Shave. ‘I am anti-whiskers’. Drink a glass of milk for breakfast.”<sup>50</sup> As this list shows, daily routines, physical characteristics, and eating habits, paired with self-control and will power, contribute to Mussolini’s incredible efficiency. Just as in the *Autobiography* he highlighted his ability to undergo painful medical treatments without anesthetics, the dictator here claims to be in full control of his own body in the name of increased efficiency and, consequently, as a means to improve his country. This notion of corporeal mastery, cited here in the context of a banal list of daily routines, signals the fascist leader’s interest for the development of a biopolitical program, broadly intended as a series of practices regulating the individual body and the entire “political body.”<sup>51</sup> Such an agenda, cursorily

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<sup>49</sup> Benito Mussolini, “My Twenty-Four Hours,” *Chester Times*, Jan. 5, 1927, 1.

<sup>50</sup> “Mussolini’s Efficiency Precepts,” *Chester Times*, Jan. 5, 1927, 1.

<sup>51</sup> According to the French philosopher Michel Foucault, biopolitical processes involving, among other things, the rate of reproduction and the fertility of a given population, started developing in the second half of the eighteenth century. In Foucault’s words, biopolitics aims at “taking control of life and the biological processes of man-as-species and of ensuring that they are not disciplined, but regularized.” Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended’: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*, trans. David

represented in Mussolini's biographical texts, invested a large number of private biological functions of Italians, from the reproductive to the nutritional domains, from the sphere of sexual orientation to the importance of fitness for keeping a healthy body.<sup>52</sup> Finally, while explaining with his list how he applies those daily rules for the ultimate objective of changing his country, Mussolini appears in this opening article as ready to share with the American readers this *know-how* of the perfect productive administrator and man.

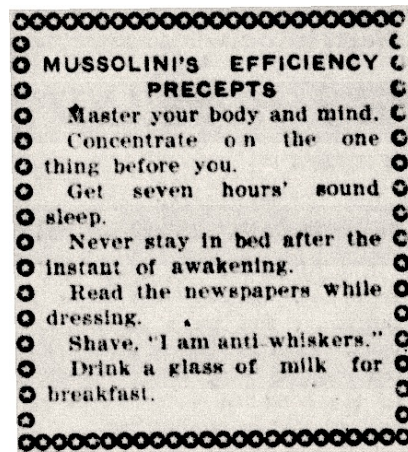


Image 15: Mussolini's efficiency principles.

The connection between Italy and United States under the sign of efficiency continues in the fourth article of the series, in which the dictator affirms that:

The United States presents to the world numerous examples of gigantic

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Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 246-247.

<sup>52</sup> Scholars interested in the intersection between Italian Fascism and biopolitics have focused particularly on the topic of population policies. See, for instance, David G. Horn, *Social Bodies: Science, Reproduction, and Italian Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). On the same topic, although not explicitly connected to Foucault's biopolitical approach, see also Carl Ipsen, *Dictating Demography: The Problem of Population in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For an overview of fascist food policies, see Carol Helstosky, *Garlic and Oil: Food and Politics in Modern Italy* (New York: Berg, 2006), particularly pages 63-126. Lorenzo Benadusi, *The Enemy of the New Man: Homosexuality in Fascist Italy* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012) provides an important historical analysis of the regulation of sexual orientation during Mussolini's dictatorship, while Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) demonstrates how the concept of virility, in opposition to femininity and homosexuality, is at the center of the Fascist regime.

successful business organizations, which to arrive at their great achievements must have been governed by these principles. (...) They created smooth-running organizations of human units finally reaching a degree of efficiency which has been the marvel of the world. (...) It is just such business efficiency on a larger scale, we have tried to work into the government machine of Italy. We are succeeding. We have practically rebuilt the old machine, substituting a part here and there and renewing it. It has been completely overhauled and speeded up and has already shown its productive power.<sup>53</sup>

Here, the concept of efficiency is clearly connected to American business culture, which Mussolini seems to take as an example for his own renewal of the country. The words “efficient” and “efficiency” are used, in this passage and in the rest of the series, along with other words of the same semantic family: productivity, work, activity, schedule, organization, quick, decision. Mussolini, with his effectiveness and work ethics, becomes the model for Americans wishing to become more efficient in their lives and better equipped for emerging with their personality in the modern world. In contrast with the stereotypical characteristics usually attributed to Italians, namely disorganization, sentimentalism, and lack of practicality, Mussolini offers the image of a renewed Italian individual who is pragmatic and rational. In the passages in which Mussolini exalts these American values, it is also possible to read an attempt to substitute the stigmatized view on Italian and Italian-Americans as being “backward” people and racially inferior to the United States’ white citizens with a more modern version of productive “American-Italians.”<sup>54</sup> Under Mussolini’s leadership, Italians were bound to become efficient

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<sup>53</sup> Benito Mussolini, “Mussolini Tells Details of Life,” *Altoona Mirror*, Jan. 8, 1927, 7.

<sup>54</sup> For the American view of Italy and Italians before the appearance of Mussolini on the world scene, see chapter one in Diggins’ *Mussolini and Fascism* (5-21). For the role Mussolini had in changing such

just like Americans and ready to enter forcefully into the modern world. In the meantime, the dictator portrayed himself as a superhuman, effective leader. Furthermore, while it is ironic that Mussolini, who will soon proclaim the superiority of the Italian race, is announcing the development of a more Americanized Italian, the fact that Italy was becoming a more efficient country must have been welcome news in the American financial world. Considering the large number of private investments from the United States, in fact, the image of a new Italy, ready to engage in the global markets, was certainly an appealing one.<sup>55</sup>

The United Press “inspirational” autobiographical account “revealing the secrets behind ‘Il Duce’s’ success” includes also a number of practical tips and dietary instructions.<sup>56</sup> For instance, Mussolini advises against the presence of women in a workplace. “I have given imperative orders that (...) where I work (...) no woman shall be admitted,” he notes, as women “interfere with the efficient procedure of the work. They cause delay and do not appreciate the business-like character of work, introducing by their presence an obligatory deference not necessary in the company of men.”<sup>57</sup> This reference to women, while addressing the issue of productivity and workplace etiquette, denotes the exclusion of certain subjects from the fascist

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stereotypical reaction to the massive immigration of Italians to the United States at the turn of the century, see, for instance, Giorgio Bertellini, “Duce/Divo: Masculinity, Racial Identity, and Politics among Italian Americans in 1920s New York City,” *Journal of Urban History*, 31: 685 (2005), 685-726. For a contemporary sample of the racialized perspective on Italians, see Edward Alsworth Ross, *The Old World in the New* (New York: The Century Co., 1914). In a chapter devoted to the Italian immigrants in the United States (95-119), the American sociologist notes how “Although less advanced, the Italians from the valley of the Po are racially akin to the Swiss and the South Germans” while the South Italians are “instable, volatile, (...) and unreliable.” (101 and 117). He then concludes his analysis with the following statement: “So far as the American people consents to incorporate with itself great numbers of wavering, excitable, impulsive persons who cannot organize themselves, it must in the end resign itself to lower *efficiency*, to less democracy, or to both.” (119, emphasis mine).

<sup>55</sup> In my Conclusion, I will highlight some of the major capital investments between the United States and Italy and discuss the links between such financial operations and the American media sector.

<sup>56</sup> Benito Mussolini, “My Twenty-Four Hours,” *Chester Times*, Jan. 10, 1927, 5. The quoted text is part of the *Chester Times*’ short editorial introduction to the sixth installment placed at the end of the fifth installment.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

project, or at least from its power and political centers. It shows how, under Mussolini's rule, women were considered as subaltern to men and their only task was that of being faithful wives and, in line with the regime's biopolitical views, fertile mothers.<sup>58</sup>

Food is also something that could hinder productivity in Mussolini's opinion. He suggests, "Frugality of diet is absolutely necessary for the maintenance of an alert and responsive spirit".<sup>59</sup> He tells Americans that his main meal, at two, consists of one dish of fish or meat with some boiled vegetables, that he does not drink alcohol or coffee, which "is no concrete good either for the system or in aiding in productivity," and that he drinks instead four glasses of milk everyday. That is because these foods give him "the greatest net results in health and productivity" and because "big meals (...) are only conducive to inaction and dullness."<sup>60</sup> Similarly, with regards to wine, Mussolini affirms that, even though "Italy through the long ages has been a great wine country" and Italian "vintages have become famous as the standard of the world," he abstains "rigidly from all kinds of alcoholic beverages, even from the lightest wines."<sup>61</sup> That is because wine "is a deterrent to perfect efficiency" especially for "brainworkers".<sup>62</sup>

Such abstinence from alcohol, which Mussolini is able to maintain even when the "most tempting nectar" is put before him, signal again the dictator's ability to self-control and his

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<sup>58</sup> On fascist misogyny, see especially Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). For forms of female opposition to the male-centered fascist ideology, see for instance, Luisa Passerini, *Torino operaia e fascismo* (Bari: Laterza, 1984) and Lucia Re, "Fascist Theories of 'Woman' and the Construction of Gender," in *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*, ed. Robin Pickering-Iazzi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 76-99.

<sup>59</sup> Benito Mussolini, "My Twenty-Four Hours," *Chester Times*, Jan. 12, 1927, 5.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Benito Mussolini, "My Twenty-Four Hours," *Chester Times*, Jan. 15, 1927, 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

incredible will power.<sup>63</sup> His decision to quit smoking after the war and his habit to fast two or three times per month highlight these same personal characteristics. Mussolini talks about his fasting ritual as an act carrying “inestimable spiritual good as well as physical.”<sup>64</sup> Referring to the human body as a machine that, in order to efficiently function, is in need of continuous maintenance, he explains the benefits of fasting as follows:

The absence of nourishment allows the system to free itself of misused and decayed food. The rest of the organs is of potent assistance in restoring [the ordinary processes] to efficient functioning and in bringing about a general adjustment of the system. When one has completed the fast, he cannot but be impressed by the sense of cleanliness which rules the body and the mind, as well as by the genuinely healthy feeling which comes with it.<sup>65</sup>

Additionally, fasting also allows individuals to keep fit and to free their bodies “from useless and redundant tissues which might burden the physical and mental operations.”<sup>66</sup> Mussolini’s advice is to “eat meagerly and live an active life” to prevent the body from “bulg[ing] and swell[ing]” and from adding “rolls of burdensome and unnecessary flesh”.<sup>67</sup> That is for both reasons of productivity and for keeping an aesthetically acceptable appearance, especially for women who should absolutely avoid transforming their “great beauty” into a “monstrosity”.<sup>68</sup> In stressing the importance of fit bodies in the eyes of the fascist regime, what emerges from these passages is the exclusionary rhetoric of the dictator who once again indicates physical and aesthetic

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Benito Mussolini, “My Twenty-Four Hours,” *Chester Times*, Jan. 14, 1927, 4.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

principles according to which one could consider oneself an important part of the future of the Italian nation. If women were to be excluded from power centers, overweight women were to be despised and further marginalized.

The dictator also has some more specific standards for men when it comes to their physical appearance. For instance, he advocates for clean-shaven faces in his first article of the series. After stressing the fact that he is an effective and fast user of razors (“I have become rather skillful in the use of an American safety razor and (...) I have attained such dexterity”), and that he shaves his entire “thick and stiff” beard off every day, he declares:

I am anti-whiskers. Fascism is anti-whisker. Whiskers are a sign of decadence. Glance at the busts of the great Roman emperors and you will find them all clean-shaven - Caesar, Augustus. When the decline of Roman glory began, whiskers came into style. It is true of all periods. The renaissance was a beardless period. Whiskers were the rule in the old decadent regime, which fascism replaces with youth of clean-shaven faces.<sup>69</sup>

Sarfatti, in her biography, had already talked about the dictator’s distaste for overweight people and for beards and emphasized, using Mussolini’s own words, his ideals of physical appearance:

The type of individual who most infuriated him was (...) – ‘The man with a beard!’ – ‘The heavy-weight imbecile!’. These were favourite phrases. (...) Mussolini would sometimes say: ‘(...) God preserve me from the heavy-weight imbeciles!’ As for beards, Mussolini has always abominated them. He has

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<sup>69</sup> Benito Mussolini, “My Twenty-Four Hours,” *Chester Times*, Jan. 5, 1927, 7.

consistently kept his own Roman profile free from one. He thinks of beards as masks for solemn humbugs and second-rate *arrivistes*.

For the old-fashioned, long, full beard he cherishes a special detestation, seeing in it a symbol of all that is unsporting and unprogressive and unpractical.<sup>70</sup>

*The Life of Benito Mussolini* had also already characterized the dictator as an efficient and pragmatic individual, able to “sleep at will” and “to pass from sleeping to waking at one step, without wasting a moment”.<sup>71</sup> In Sarfatti’s text, Mussolini is also described as someone always active, to the point of refusing to even have an armchair in his office: “In what was to be the Editor’s room, (...) there were five chairs, one of them a *poltrona* (...). ‘A *poltrona!* A *poltrona!*’ shouted Mussolini (...) ‘Away with the thing! Easy chairs and slippers are the ruin of men!’”<sup>72</sup> Such personal preferences and character’s traits constituted, according to Sarfatti, “an aureole, as it were, round the head of the true leader of men”.<sup>73</sup>

### **Conclusion: A True Leader Shaping His People**

A fundamental aspect of Mussolini’s leadership, in Sarfatti’s opinion, is the dictator’s magnetism. This term, which she often uses throughout her text, is reminiscent of the numerous manuals of self-help of the period guiding readers into transforming themselves into leaders. Mussolini, with his personal characteristics, becomes the perfect example of a winning personality:

Mussolini is one of those rare men who are born to compel admiration and devotion from all around them. He is even an exception to the rule that no one is a

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<sup>70</sup> Sarfatti, *Life*, 53. Emphasis in original text.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 54. Emphasis in original text.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.



hero to his valet. Even the humblest member of his staff, though they may not be able to gauge his actions and achievements, come under the sway of his magnetism and the force of his personality.<sup>74</sup>

Mussolini's strength and self-assurance, however, did not allow him to become a leader willing to bask in the warmth of his followers' acclaim. Sarfatti declares that "he despised and avoided the plaudits of the crowd" and that "he fled from applause".<sup>75</sup> In Sarfatti's words, something stronger was at play in Mussolini's relationship with his people, and that was a "magnetic current" which made possible the dictator's "communion with the crowd".<sup>76</sup>

Sarfatti indicates Mussolini's eloquence as a central component of this magnetism. In *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, she evokes a telling example showing how, already in the early 1910s, he was able to use his public speaking ability to benefit his political and personal appeal. During a public meeting in Forlì about the rising cost of milk, "he was not content to preach direct action – he put it into practice. (...) 'The price of milk,' he declared, '(...) must be within the means of all. It *must* be! (...) Come with me!'"<sup>77</sup> After this speech, he went to the mayor's office and intimated an immediate decrease of the price of milk by menacing to throw the public official out of the window into the piazza. Throughout this fiery act of "direct action," he was "followed by the crowd, who were hypnotized rather than convinced."<sup>78</sup> This mesmerizing power is the result of Mussolini's rhetorical skills, which, in Sarfatti's opinion, is a true key to understand his success. "Crowds flocked to hear him," she recalls, and that is because:

Mussolini's eloquence, closely adhering to realities, was simple and direct. He

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 169. Emphasis in original text.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

neither used much gesture, nor rounded his periods, two curious characteristics in a Latin country.

His speeches were apparently prosaic pronouncements, concise almost to brusqueness. But by flashes and bursts he rose from the recital of bare facts to the heights of thought and imagination. (...)

His eloquence, resembling the bulletins of Napoleon, is not that of a man of letters, accustomed to seek at his writing-table the nuances of expression. He is a true man of action, living through in his own experience the experiences of history and touching the heart of a people through its imagination.<sup>79</sup>

Mussolini's rhetoric, with its directness and connection to facts and experiences, along with the dictator's business-like attitude and his proven ability to rise from anonymity and build his own fate, formed a positive mix of personal characteristics for American readers, attracted by the examples of winning individuals. Furthermore, in the United States, the tale of the man who was able to mold Italy in his own image strongly resonated with people longing to witness the successes of a contemporary representative man, able to change the course of history through his actions.

Mussolini's autobiographical texts are rich with examples displaying this ongoing process of identification between the dictator and the Italian nation. In the United Press series, in addition to the already mentioned creation of an entire new country made of "clean-shaven faces," Mussolini remarks how, through modeling abstinence from alcohol and strict work ethics, he is building a "sober nation" in which "productivity may not be impeded" and

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 301-302.

“efficiency may be increased.”<sup>80</sup> Similarly, when describing his eating habits, Mussolini, who eats bread “sparingly,” exposes his plans for a new kind of bread “of a standard quality” for all Italians.<sup>81</sup> That means that the same kind of bread, made of “coarser flour,” is produced for everybody, while “fancy bread has been abolished.”<sup>82</sup> In Mussolini’s opinion, this modern whole wheat bread “is very nutritious” and better serves the needs of Italian people.

In *My Autobiography*, the process of identification of the dictator with his country is even more explicitly stated. Opening the chapter describing the first five years of his government, Mussolini states that with his new political power, “an existence wholly new began.”<sup>83</sup> He then continues

To speak about it makes it necessary for me to abandon the usual form of autobiographical style; I must consider the organic whole of my governmental activity. From now on my life identifies itself almost exclusively with thousand of acts of government. Individuality disappears. Instead, my person expresses, I sometimes feel, only measures and acts of concrete character; these do not concern a single person; they concern the multitudes, they concern and permeate an entire people. So one’s entire life is lost in the whole.<sup>84</sup>

The narration of Mussolini’s identification first with his government and then with his country and people aimed at showing to Americans that Italy was now going in a new direction, embracing modern efficiency and leaving behind political uncertainty. In the mind of Americans, Mussolini was reshaping Italy and changing the course of history and, through the biographical

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<sup>80</sup> Benito Mussolini, “My Twenty-Four Hours,” *Chester Times*, Jan. 15, 1927, 2.

<sup>81</sup> Benito Mussolini, “My Twenty-Four Hours,” *Chester Times*, Jan. 12, 1927, 5.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, 200.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

and autobiographical narrations of his achievements, everybody could fulfill the desire of being somehow part of this process and, possibly, learn how to attain such leadership skills. Between 1927 and 1935, Americans had even more opportunities to read first-hand accounts of the supposedly extraordinary work that Mussolini was doing in Italy. As I will explain in the next chapter, the dictator's editorials published in the newspapers of William Randolph Hearst chronicled Mussolini's reshaping of Italy to American readers.

### Chapter 3

#### Mussolini's Editorials: A Real-Time (Auto)Biography of a Fascist Nation

In Vittorio Mussolini's 1957 autobiography *Vita con mio padre*, the dictator's son recalls hearing his mother talking to his father about their vacation home in Emilia Romagna. "Benito, you must write an article for America, straight away, 'cause in a week our mortgage payment with the Rural Bank of Forlì is due," she would say, referring to the profitable journalistic engagement Mussolini had with the American media tycoon William Randolph Hearst.<sup>1</sup> While Mussolini's journalistic career in Italy has been at the center of scholarly studies, very little attention has been given to the editorials Mussolini published between 1927 and 1935 in American newspapers.<sup>2</sup> By May 5, 1935, when the *New York American* published the last of Mussolini's editorials, "Pact of Rome Ends Long Controversy Between Italy and France, Says Duce," the dictator had signed a total of 82 articles on various subjects, including international politics, the financial world, Italian policies, and history. Mussolini, who dealt with his American editors through the mediation of Margherita Sarfatti, was paid between \$1,200 and \$1,500 for each editorial, at the time roughly between 18,000 and 28,500 liras in Italy.<sup>3</sup> The payments received for these articles represented a small fortune if one considers that Mussolini's annual

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<sup>1</sup> Vittorio Mussolini, *Vita con mio padre* (Milan: Mondadori, 1957), 83. All translations from Italian are mine.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Renzo De Felice's last work, Renzo De Felice, ed. *Mussolini giornalista* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1995); and Bruno Gatta, *Si firmava Mussolini. Storia di un giornalista* (Rome: Settimo Sigillo, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> For the articles of 1934, Margherita Sarfatti signed a deal with the Hearst Corporation that guaranteed a payment in Italian liras. Considering the drastic devaluation of the American dollar at the beginning of 1934, the decision of receiving a compensation of 16,000 liras per article was a clever one.

salary as prime minister was 32,000 liras and most Italians dreamed, as the refrain of a famous song of the late 1930s goes, of earning 1,000 liras per month in order to fulfill all their desires.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond offering immediate financial gain, these articles allowed the Italian dictator to directly communicate with American readers and explain his political creed. The United Press first, and later Hearst's Universal Service, commissioned the articles from the Italian dictator and distributed them throughout the United States by way of their network of local newspapers. In assessing the results of the United Press for the year 1925, Karl Bickel, president of the international news agency between 1923 and 1935, explained the amplitude of this network and also offered a clue to the potential audience reached by Mussolini's editorials. He stated: "The United Press closed 1925 with the best record in every department of its business that it has ever made. The United Press, United News, United Financial and various subsidiary services closed the year with 1032 client newspapers. The United Press serves its report directly to newspapers in 36 countries."<sup>5</sup> Adding to this already ample readership, when, in 1930, Hearst's Universal Services took over the exclusive distribution of Mussolini's editorials, the Italian dictator had a direct outlet to readers in some of the major United States cities through the *New York American*, the *Los Angeles Herald*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, the *Baltimore American*, the *Detroit Times*, the *Syracuse Journal*, and the *Pittsburgh Sun Telegraph*. The geographical distribution of these newspapers alone shows us that the recipients of Mussolini's words were spread across the entire country. At a time when there were no American newspapers with a national distribution, it is clear that the advantages of being published through these two large syndicates were enormous for Mussolini. The dictator was in fact able to reach a large

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<sup>4</sup> The song "Mille lire al mese" was written in 1938 by Carlo Innocenzi and Alessandro Sopranci. In 1939, it was used as the music score for a film with the same title.

<sup>5</sup> This statement is reported in Joe Alex Morris, *Deadline Every Minute: The Story of the United Press* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957), 145.

community of Italian Americans fascinated by a renewed image of their native country. At the same time, thousands of American citizens found printed, in the Sunday edition of their local newspaper, Mussolini's editorials on the progress of Italy and on international politics and thus had a regular opportunity to peruse Mussolini's rhetoric.<sup>6</sup>

Following the publication in 1927 of "My Twenty-four Hours," already examined in the previous chapter, the United Press approached Mussolini for the publication of a continuous series of editorials. Thomas Morgan, the United Press representative in Rome, was again at the center of the deal with the Italian dictator and Sarfatti, his official biographer and ghostwriter. A first editorial signed by Benito Mussolini under the copyright of the United Press appeared on October 24, 1927 and celebrated the fifth anniversary of the March on Rome.<sup>7</sup> In this piece, Mussolini retold the notorious story of his party freeing Italy from the threat of Bolshevism and of his five years guiding "a really great revolution."<sup>8</sup> It was, however, starting from November 1928 that the editorials began appearing once a month. When Hearst acquired the exclusive rights to Mussolini's editorials, in 1930, the regular stream of publications continued and reached an even wider audience.

The negotiations between the Hearst Press and Mussolini, which took place between January and April 1930, were complex. They involved a number of players: in addition to Sarfatti, these included Valerio Pignatelli and Karl von Wiegand, respectively the Italian correspondent and the head of the European correspondents for the Hearst organization.

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<sup>6</sup> In *Il Duce's Other Woman*, Cannistraro and Sullivan estimate that as many as one third of adult Americans may have read Mussolini's articles during the 1930s. Philip V. Cannistraro and Brian R. Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1993), 362.

<sup>7</sup> Benito Mussolini, "Fascism Wrote a Bloody and Magnificent Page in History, Says Duce," *New York American*, October 24, 1927, 1. As mentioned, Mussolini's editorials were syndicated in numerous newspapers and appeared sometimes on different dates and with slightly different titles. All articles quoted in this chapter will be indicated with their titles and dates of publication from the newspaper in which they were found. Research was conducted on both microfilms and the online database [www.newspaperarchive.com](http://www.newspaperarchive.com). See Appendix A for a list of all the editorials.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Moreover, the signing of a contract between the Italian dictator and the American media magnate corresponded to the visit of Millicent Hearst to Rome. Her intervention proved to be crucial for Mussolini's decision to leave the United Press for the Hearst Press. Mrs. Hearst was able to convince Mussolini to write for her husband's newspaper, but she did so by fixing the price for the 1931 articles at \$1,500 each, higher than the agreed upon amount. The correspondence between Italy and Than Vanneman Ranck, who from 1928 to 1937 was the editorial manager and editor of the "March of Times" Sunday section, in which Mussolini's editorials were often published, details this difficult negotiation and the role that Millicent Hearst played. In a letter to his editorial manager, von Wiegand explained how, in the midst of his negotiation with Margherita Sarfatti, "Mrs. Chief had told [Mussolini] we would pay \$1,500," that is, \$300 more than the price von Wiegand had been able to fix.<sup>9</sup> "Mrs. Chief had the best of intention (sic) (...) and she meant to be helpful," von Wiegand added before describing the setting in which the exchange between Mussolini and Millicent Hearst occurred: "Mussolini had taken her out for a two hours (sic) drive, he himself acting as a chauffer."<sup>10</sup> Despite the increase in the cost of Mussolini's articles caused by the well-intentioned intervention of Millicent Hearst, by February 1931, Ranck wrote to W. R. Hearst that the syndication of the "March of Events" articles, including those signed by Mussolini, was "progressing so satisfactorily that by first of April syndication receipts might be enough to pay entire costs."<sup>11</sup>

The agreement between Mussolini and the two major American press syndicates, in addition to being very profitable for all parties involved, allowed Mussolini to have a strong presence in the United States public opinion. Through his editorials, he was able to chronicle his

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<sup>9</sup> Yale University, New Haven, CT, Sterling Memorial Library, Manuscript and Archives, "Than Vanneman Ranck Papers," Box 3, Folder 51, von Wiegand to Ranck, April 30, 1930.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Yale University, New Haven, CT, Sterling Memorial Library, Manuscript and Archives, "Than Vanneman Ranck Papers," Box 4, Folder 65, Ranck to Hearst, February 20, 1931.



political choices well beyond the borders of his country and offer a sort of chronicle of Italian fascist society. In this chapter, by analyzing some of these numerous editorials, I will explain how this chronicle of Italy developed. To do so, I will focus particularly on some of the rhetorical strategies the dictator employed in order to highlight his political competence, his efficacy in revolutionizing the Italian public sphere, and the novelty of his political approach in international affairs.

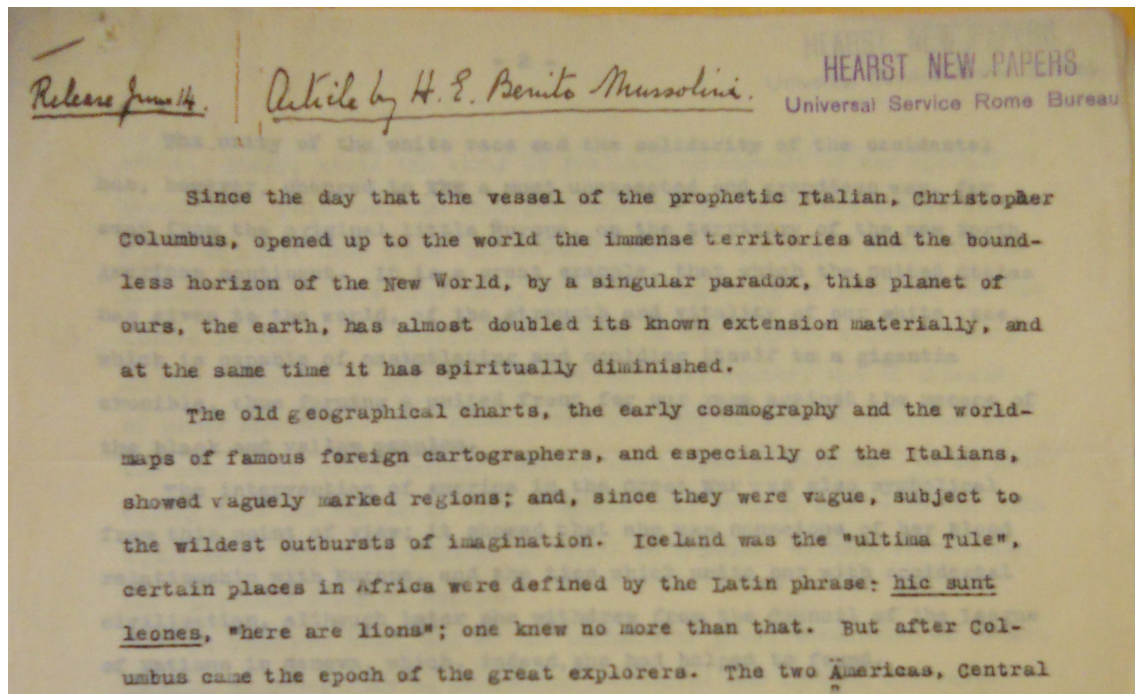


Image 16: One of Mussolini's 1931 editorials as it is preserved at the Yale University's Sterling Memorial Library in the "Than Vanneman Ranck Papers."

Despite the language difference, in fact, a noteworthy element of Mussolini's editorials in the American press is their rhetorical consistency with his speeches and writings in Italian. Thus, this body of articles offers an unprecedented opportunity for further advancing the study of fascist rhetoric and, more specifically, Mussolini's linguistic style. This analytical endeavor will continue the work of a small group of linguists and historians who, beginning in the 1970s, have proposed to study the language of Italian Fascism. The edited volume *La lingua italiana e il*

*fascismo* (1977) and the proceedings of the conference entitled “Parlare fascista” in *Movimento operaio e socialista* (1984) are the two key publications on the topic of the language used by Mussolini and on Fascist language policies.<sup>12</sup> In the United States, even fewer scholars have touched on Fascist language. Whether analyzing one speech (as Chiara Ferrari and Barbara Spackman have done) or exploring the possible antecedents of Mussolini’s oratorical strategies (as Walter L. Adamson has done in a number of articles), American scholars have concentrated specifically on Mussolini’s language.<sup>13</sup> They have analyzed his Italian speeches as they are transcribed in the monumental *Opera Omnia* of the dictator edited by Edoardo and Duilio Susmel.<sup>14</sup>

As is the case in the studies by Ferrari, Spackman, and Adamson, the study of Fascist language has corresponded often solely to the analysis of Mussolini’s language.<sup>15</sup> The abundance of examples of Mussolini’s rhetoric is certainly the main explanation for this focused attention. Other reasons, however, further explain the equation Mussolini-Fascist language. The dictator was seen as a linguistic model by other public figures of the Fascist party. Italian journalists, who could offer other examples of language use, received precise instructions from the government

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<sup>12</sup> Erasmo Leso, Michele A. Cortellazzo, Ivano Paccagnella and Fabio Foresti, *La lingua italiana e il fascismo* (Bologna: Consorzio Provinciale per la Pubblica Lettura, 1977); “Parlare fascista. Lingua del fascismo, politica linguistica del fascismo,” special issue, *Movimento operaio e socialista* 7, no. 1 (1984).

<sup>13</sup> Chiara Ferrari, “Discursive Ritual and Sacrificial Presentation: The Rhetoric of Crisis and Resolution in Fascist Italy,” *The Italianist* 23 (2003), 123-149; Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities. Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), particularly 114-155; Walter L. Adamson, “Modernism and Fascism: The Politics of Culture in Italy, 1903-1922,” *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 2 (Apr. 1990), 359-390; Walter L. Adamson, “The Language of Opposition in Early Twentieth-Century Italy: Rhetorical Continuities between Prewar Florentine Avant-gardism and Mussolini’s Fascism,” *The Journal of Modern History* 64, no. 1 (Mar. 1992), 22-51.

<sup>14</sup> Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel, 44 vols. (Florence: La Fenice, 1951-1980).

<sup>15</sup> A different field of linguistic studies related to the Fascist period regards the implementation of policies, especially those regarding the use of dialects and foreign words. See for instance, Sergio Raffaelli, *Le parole proibite. Purismo di stato e regolamentazione della pubblicità in Italia (1812-1945)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1983); Lorenzo Coveri, “Mussolini e il dialetto. Notizie sulla campagna antidialettale del fascismo (1932),” in “Parlare fascista. Lingua del fascismo, politica linguistica del fascismo,” special issue, *Movimento operaio e socialista* 7, no. 1 (1984), 117-132; and Gabriella Klein, *La politica linguistica del fascismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986).

on the style to adopt, the topics to select, and even the words and the typographic fonts to use in their articles.<sup>16</sup> Contemporary linguists, such as the German Hermann Ellwanger, regarded Mussolini's language as the linguistic model for all Italians since he "[is] the man who combines in himself, if one can say so, all the main characteristics of Italian people, and is the spontaneous and immediate expression of his people."<sup>17</sup> As Italian linguist Erasmo Leso highlights, additionally, in contemporary dictionaries and grammar manuals, Mussolini's sentences were often quoted to exemplify the use of particular words.<sup>18</sup>

Considering this contemporary tendency to look at Mussolini's language as the epitome of Italian language during the Fascist years, scholars have turned to the dictators' speeches and articles in search of his stylistic, lexical, and rhetorical strategies. Leso was among the first in the mid-70s to look at Mussolini's language not only to explain what characterizes it, but also to explain the ways in which the dictator used language to increase his consensus. For instance, Leso stresses the absence of precise data, technical terms, and facts in Mussolini's speeches as a central component of his "magic" language.<sup>19</sup> His is a language, Leso argues, that does not attempt to clarify complex political or economical issues, but that instead aims at eliciting an emotional response in the audience. Giorgio Fedel reaches a similar conclusion and defines Mussolini's language as "autonomous" from facts and "totalizing" since in his speeches the dictator gave the impression of describing all possible options and respond to all objections.<sup>20</sup> Michele Cortellazzo, another Italian linguist, attempted to look at Mussolini's language diachronically to show the continuity between his Socialist period and the Fascist period. One

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<sup>16</sup> On this topic, see Philip V. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso. Fascismo e mass media* (Bari: Laterza, 1975), particularly the original documents transcribed in the appendix: 419-424, 442-445, and 446-455.

<sup>17</sup> Hermann Ellwanger, *Sulla lingua di Mussolini* (Milan: Mondadori, 1941), 31.

<sup>18</sup> See Erasmo Leso, "Osservazioni sulla lingua di Mussolini," in *Credere, obbedire, combattere. Il regime linguistico nel Ventennio*, ed. Fabio Foresti (Bologna: Edizioni Pendragon, 2003), particularly 86-92.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>20</sup> Giorgio Fedel, "Per uno studio del linguaggio di Mussolini," *Il Politico* 43 (1978), 467-495, see particularly 492-494.

remarkable example, considering the anti-clerical bent of the Fascist party, is the use of religious metaphors and symbols in Mussolini's language throughout the years.<sup>21</sup> The American historian Adamson went even further in his search of the antecedents of Mussolini's language and located the roots of the Fascist dictator's rhetoric in prewar cultural and political movements. In addition to the socialist and syndicalist language already highlighted by Cortellazzo, Adamson notes the importance of the language use of futurist artists such as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and of the intellectuals belonging to the avant-garde Florentine journal *La Voce* such as Giuseppe Prezzolini and Giovanni Papini.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Adamson demonstrates the influence of the nationalist political movement and of poet Gabriele D'Annunzio on the development of Mussolini's language.<sup>23</sup> Adamson points out, for instance, to the rhetorical "need for an aggressive Italian imperialism to restore national grandeur and to raise Italy's status in the international arena" that Mussolini had in common with the nationalists.<sup>24</sup>

Drawing on some of the characteristics identified by Italian and American linguists and historians, I analyze Mussolini's English language texts in order to widen the field of examples and demonstrate, despite a high degree of continuity between the two language uses, the adoption of specific rhetorical strategies for the American readers. The rhythm and sonority of the language that Mussolini used in these articles, albeit present through repetitions, alliterations, and ternary structures, will receive only marginal attention. These linguistic elements, whose use

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<sup>21</sup> See in particular Michele A. Cortellazzo, "Mussolini socialista e gli antecedenti della retorica fascista," in *Credere, obbedire, combattere. Il regime linguistico nel Ventennio*, ed. Fabio Foresti (Bologna: Edizioni Pendragon, 2003), 67-82.

<sup>22</sup> Ernest Ialongo explores the connections between Marinetti and Mussolini and the role the futurist poet had in shaping Mussolini's modernity image in "Marinetti and the Cult of the Duce," in *New Directions in Italian and Italian-American History: Selected Essays from the Conference in Honor of Philip V. Cannistraro*, ed. Ernest Ialongo and William Adams (New York: John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, 2013), 27-39.

<sup>23</sup> See particularly the already mentioned Walter L. Adamson, "The Language of Opposition in Early Twentieth-Century Italy: Rhetorical Continuities between Prewar Florentine Avant-gardism and Mussolini's Fascism," *The Journal of Modern History* 64, no. 1 (Mar. 1992), 22-51

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

is well explained by Leso and other scholars, served the dictator in transforming the language into something that would attract and soothe audiences with its musicality rather than convince Italians with concepts, ideas, and plans. Obviously, in written texts that Americans read in newspapers, such characteristics are less relevant. Further, in the next sections, I will highlight some specific linguistic phenomena: the use of medical terminology and metaphors, the habit to explain political and economic policy through, for instance, antithesis and anaphoric constructions, the exercise of erudite language and notions, and the repetitions of Mussolini's own antirhetorical stances. I highlight the examples of such rhetorical strategies in articles that discuss the policies and progress of Italy, the glorious history and culture of the country, the subject of world politics, and, more specifically, the long and seemingly fruitless international meetings in which the dictator was involved. In analyzing Mussolini's rhetoric, I also show how Mussolini offered American readers a chronicle of Italy and of his work with a positive and convincing narrative that further increased his personal fame in the United States.

### **Benito Mussolini: The Cure for a Terminal Country**

In his narrative of Italian progress, Mussolini often used medical terminology and metaphors. If Italy and the world were frequently described as ill, Mussolini represented the cure, or rather, the doctor with the knowledge and tools needed to solve every problem. The use of medical terminology is certainly not unique to Mussolini's language. Even today, politicians adopt medical metaphors to highlight their role in curing their countries. The positive reputation of the medical profession, in concert with the western world's conventional organic analogies between the human body and, for example, the political body, explain the frequent use of medical terms in political language. However, one of the specific aspects of Mussolini's recurrent use of medical terminology and metaphors is its strict connection to a set of political

measures that literally invested Italian human bodies, from nutrition and physical activity to reproduction. In a 1931 article for the United States newspapers, for instance, Mussolini describes how well Italy fared during the first 9 years of the regime.<sup>25</sup> The dictator explains that Italy, while not yet out of the global depression, is going to be in a favorable position as soon as the world economy recovers because the Fascist “government has unshakably withstood the test and strain of crisis and depression and overcome them.”<sup>26</sup> Among the measures that Mussolini describes, there is the creation of the corporative system, whose main goal is to administer “the country organs (sic) of production” and whose greatest success has been the resolution of all disputes between labor and capital forces.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to these conventional metaphorical uses of medical terms, namely, depression, crisis, and organs, in the same article Mussolini discusses also real bodies, and specifically the Fascist approach to public health, in particular for children. “In the realm of child hygiene,” he writes, “the government agencies sent 250,000 children from the cities either to the sea or to the mountains to improve their health and physical strength.”<sup>28</sup> What the dictator is referring to are the activities that the Fascist leisure-time organization, the *Opera Nazionale del Dopolavoro*, organized through a myriad of programs, which involved, in addition to popular tourism, sport events and modern forms of entertainment such as radio broadcasts and newsreels screenings.<sup>29</sup> This control of Italians’ lives signified the complete fusion of popular culture and social life with Fascism itself. The ultimate goal of the *Dopolavoro* organizations throughout the country and of the numerous clubs and associations for every stage of Italians’ lives, from childhood to

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<sup>25</sup> “Mussolini Points to 9 Years of Fascist Rule With Pride,” *The San Antonio Light*, November 15, 1931, 2, 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> On the role of the *Dopolavoro* in shaping the Italian acceptance and support of Fascism, see Victoria de Grazia, *The Culture of Consent. Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

adulthood, was that of governing and controlling all public and private aspects of the citizens' individual existences. In Fascist Italy, as Mussolini's editorial exemplifies, political programs for financial recovery and health measures for working class children are all part of one totalizing plan in which the lines between political bodies, personal choices and a pre-organized Fascist life become indistinguishable. Mussolini's quote shows how even leisure time activities and vacations become part of a larger Fascist scheme, in which, especially because of the physical strength of the Fascist youth, Italy is destined to continue its resurgence and excel in the world. In closing his editorial, after assessing the general health of his patient, Mussolini significantly concludes, using a vivid metaphor from the agricultural world, "We have sown the seed and will be able to reap the harvest in our own generation, and even more in the generations to follow, when our present wards, the disciplined *Avanguardisti* and *Balilla*, become the ruling generation."<sup>30</sup>

This idea of regeneration is very present in Mussolini's language and, as Roger Griffin has pointed out, the myth of rebirth is a prevalent ideological aspect of Fascism.<sup>31</sup> In a 1930 article in which the dictator discusses the application of Fascist principles in other countries, he uses medical terms related to birth and maternity to describe how Fascism is an Italian creation.<sup>32</sup> He affirms that while other countries, such as England, France, United States, and of course, Germany, are attempting to replicate some of the Fascist policies already successfully developed in Italy, "the birth of [Italian] Fascism was unattended by any infiltration of foreign or political dogmas or of parental postnatal influences."<sup>33</sup> In keeping consistent with the semantic field

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>31</sup> Griffin explores the palingenetic elements of Fascist ideology in *The Nature of Fascism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> "Mussolini Sees Fascism Spreading Throughout World in Various Forms Unlike His Creation," *The San Antonio Light*, Oct. 5, 1930, 1, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 1.

related to birth, the closing metaphor permits Mussolini to colorfully state his paternity of Fascist politics.

In this editorial, Mussolini further explains how Fascism coincides with him and how Italy fully identifies with the Fascist program. The three are inextricably interconnected, so that Mussolini's personal success and the party's accomplishments mean the resurgence and rebirth of the country: "When we refer to the Fascist revolution, we mean just exactly revolution, for what has transpired has been as truly a revolution as any in history... Fascism in no uncertain way has meant a new Italy."<sup>34</sup> The familiar theme of Fascist efficiency, repeatedly exploited in Mussolini biographical texts, concludes the editorial. Keeping up with a fast-evolving world is, for Mussolini, the only cure for world decay: "The ills of vacillating democracy are today striking some of the nations rather serious blows" and that is because "the present age is a new age in which speed and efficiency are counting. Government ... must be brought to full efficiency."<sup>35</sup>

With a similar rhetoric and always stressing his efficacy in managing the country, Mussolini describes the July 20 reorganization of the government in a 1932 editorial.<sup>36</sup> "This world" he writes, "proceeds today with a faster rhythm than ever. Old methods are constantly becoming obsolete and the political administration of a country must be so managed it will be able to respond to these needs of the times."<sup>37</sup> Offering an ideal response to the "little speculation on the presumably diminished prestige of [the old] ministers," Mussolini explains that he and the Fascist party "reorganize to strengthen."<sup>38</sup> The dictator calls this reorganization a "changing of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> "Fascist House-Cleaning Is Explained by Il Duce," *The San Antonio Light*, Aug. 7, 1932, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



the guard” rather than a “crisis,” and, with a medical metaphor, he describes the process that reinvigorates his government and his country:

New blood strengthens the system while the old blood returns within the system to be restored and purified.

The new blood is ready to attack its problems with fresher enthusiasm, while the old retires with knowledge of what the government problems are.<sup>39</sup>

Here, the metaphor of the blood is mixed with the imagery of an engineering mechanism. Being behind the government reshaping, Mussolini, more than a doctor, appears as the capable scientist who is recreating a new body. The metaphor of the old and new blood flowing used to describe these new governmental changes sounds, though, also as a strong reminder of the political opponents’ blood, shed during the rise of the Fascist movement during the early 1920s and throughout the Fascist dictatorship.

The antithesis “old blood” and “new blood,” and the opposition between the previous Italian governments and the current Fascist one, allow him to offer a seemingly complete picture of Italian politics and history. Through his rhetoric, Mussolini is able to propose an all-encompassing simplification of all political discussions, resolved in an efficient manner and without unnecessary delays. This 1932 reorganization of the government invested a few key offices: Foreign Affairs, Corporations, Education, Finances, and Justice. Mussolini stresses the differences between other democratic countries and previous Italian governments, in which changes are the result of lengthy government crises and are “dependent on intrigues and chicanery of politicians,” and the Fascist government changes, dictated by the “Fascist will” and by “the force and sincerity of our aims.”<sup>40</sup> However, the reference to the “new blood” bringing

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

fresher and renewed energies to the Fascist government is a bit of an overstatement considering that the dictator took on the roles of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of Corporations himself. He kept these roles, in addition to his position of Head of the Government and his other ministries, until 1936. Thus, while highlighting the coherence and effectiveness of his government, what he omits to say in this editorial for the American audience is the fact that he was alone responsible of a number of main offices and of all governmental changes, disregarding all democratic principles. In view of this omission behind the rhetoric of the “new blood” there is the fact that even this phase of country’s renewal passes through the “old blood” and body of Mussolini, recycling himself in numerous executive positions.

### **The Faceless Mass and the Exceptional Leader**

In several editorials published throughout the years, Mussolini did not shy away from disparaging the democratic process and, more generally, all subjects of politics. In a 1933 article, for instance, he affirms “No one has ever assured us that democracy knows how to put the right man in the right place for successful government of the commonwealth. On the contrary, this is one of its most fundamental and characteristic weaknesses.”<sup>41</sup> The topic of this editorial is women’s right to vote, and the dictator offers his position on the subject after “giving an outline of what has hitherto happened.”<sup>42</sup> Mussolini often used the rhetorical strategy of presenting himself as an expert on any given subject, adopting a historical perspective and using erudite, technical language. The goal of using such a rhetorical approach is that of presenting himself as a competent leader, who has clear, logical, and understandable positions on all matters, both nationally and internationally. In the case of women’s right to vote and active participation in political affairs, the dictator started his editorial discussing the situation in Great Britain and

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<sup>41</sup> “Mussolini Firm Against Giving Vote to Women,” *The San Antonio Light*, March 19, 1933, 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

United States, two countries where women could vote and even occupy political positions. Mussolini continues by stating, however, that as a result of women's involvement in public life "We have not noticed any difference in the policy of the governments of Great Britain and the United States since women got their electoral rights. ... We have seen, on the contrary, that [women's] influence has been inferior to what had been prophesied, in fact in some cases absolutely negative."<sup>43</sup> In this passage, even without explicitly stating his personal position on the subject yet, Mussolini has grounded his opinion in what might seem to be unchallengeable facts. The anaphoric and impersonal "we" that starts both paragraphs, hints at a shared position, as if it were the result of a wider debate or a study on the subject. Additionally, this passage exemplifies another recurrent rhetorical strategy, that of readjusting an initial statement by accumulation of details. Here, in fact, Mussolini first states that there are no noticeable changes in the countries that have allowed women's participation in political life, and then he adds that instead, in Great Britain and in the United States, women's right to vote has been detrimental to the public sphere. While apparently offering additional information, clarifying with details what had been said, Mussolini is rhetorically hiding the fact that there is no specific data substantiating his statements. Even if talking about international political policies, Mussolini is not expressing anything politically relevant, yet he justifies his misogynous and antidemocratic position behind what he presents as facts. In the dictator's opinion, in fact, women lack the:

capacity to scale the giddy heights which are reached by a few individuals whose sublime genius honors not only themselves but humanity at large.

From the beginning of time to the present day there has never been a great woman symphonic composer, nor a great woman architect. There has never been a really

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

great woman painter, or sculptress, ... Philosophic speculation is denied to women. Philosophers always have been and will always continue to be men.<sup>44</sup>

Mussolini offers this rhetorical accumulation of examples in an attempt to disguise his personal contempt for women's capabilities and present his position against women's franchise as a logical consequence of historical fact.

If women are not to be part of the political world and of Fascist Italy, except in their role as mothers, as highlighted in the previous chapter, the same can be said for those who Mussolini calls disparagingly the "men in the street." In an editorial entitled "Statesmen Must Rule, Not Masses, Says Mussolini," the dictator explains how the democratic consultation of all people in society is a dangerous myth that should be undone.<sup>45</sup> All individuals can have a place and their say in their own domains. Again employing the rhetorical strategy of accumulation, Mussolini explains how, for example, the "workman... receives a hearing at his workshop or in his home," the "peasant will say things most wise" if "considered in the quality of a peasant," and "the scholar at his desk, the schoolmaster in his school, the doctor at the patient's bed, or the scientist and the artist, each in his own sphere, is more or less king and monarch in his own field" and "can express his opinion with full and justified authority."<sup>46</sup> Every one of these individuals, however, Mussolini continues, when taken as an example of the "man in the street," is "nothing but an anonymous atom lost in the crowd, without physiognomy of his own and without importance." Hiding behind the rhetorical choice of scientific and rarefied words is, as in the case of the aforementioned misogynous editorial, an antidemocratic position with regards to public affairs. In this editorial, Mussolini clarifies that not all individuals should be allowed to have a say in social and political matters because "the 'man in the street' is... nothing but a new

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>45</sup> "Statesmen Must Rule, Not Masses, Says Mussolini," *The San Antonio Light*, May 7, 1933, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

travesty of the old myth of the citizen, the man... without any characteristic of his own and without any competence.”<sup>47</sup> In Fascist Italy, only a few individuals were allowed to have political opinions and influence the way the country was ruled. Mussolini was obviously one of the few, and the reference to the faceless man in the crowd is a relevant one considering the multiplication of the images of the dictator’s face in the media of the time. As we have seen in the biographical representations of the dictator and as we will see in the newsreels depicting him, Mussolini’s face was the center of a new visual culture in which political authority fused with celebrity status. Furthermore, Mussolini’s reference to the faceless individual lost in the crowd is also reminiscent of that fear of anonymity characterizing the turn of the century rise of mass society.<sup>48</sup>

In order to further illustrate his vision of the common man, the dictator refers to Shakespeare, who “in his ‘Julius Caesar’ and ‘Coriolanus’ ... has given us a description of the man composing this inconsistent mass which is a triumph of irony and of truth.”<sup>49</sup> With this vague reference, Mussolini attempts to fashion his opinion drawing on a recognized historical and cultural figure and, at the same time, to offer an example of his literary expertise to his American readers. Contrasting himself with the masses of undifferentiated individuals, Mussolini, as Shakespeare before him, emerges as an exceptional individual capable, as we have seen, of reshaping an entire country. As women in the previous editorial, anonymous individuals have no political subjectivity in Mussolini’s world. He gets away with such problematic antidemocratic political positions by strategically using scientific, erudite words and abstract literary references, without having to concretely explain them.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> See chapter one for a larger overview on the topic of the emergence of mass society and culture and the fear of anonymity.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

The same can be said for his rhetorical questions, a linguistic device he often used in his vast public speaking activity, which allow the dictator to establish an ambiguous dialogue with the readers. In this editorial, for example, after the list of examples of “men in the street” seen in their domains, Mussolini wonders, “why then make [the man in the street] arbiter of situations of general importance, a kind of nebulous divinity, an imponderable being with power to weigh down in the balance the destiny of peoples? Why should statesmen take so much notice of him?”<sup>50</sup> Here, the responses almost ironically elicited from an undistinguishable mass, rather than clarifying a political point, are a way for the dictator to establish a connection with the readers almost on an emotional level and reinforce their uncritical agreement with his words.

In a 1932 editorial on a less controversial topic, the repression of criminal activities, Mussolini used similar rhetorical strategies, namely, accumulation of examples and historical references. In “Highest-Placed Criminals Must Be Mercilessly Suppressed, Says Mussolini,” the dictator starts by offering numerous examples of “scientific progress and cultural advance” that have benefitted both criminals and “any other branch of human activity.”<sup>51</sup> For instance, he starts, “the high-powered automobile, with its gift to man of rapid flight, could not be left to serve the legitimate ends of mankind, but must be made to serve its illegitimate ends. The telephone, telegraph, airplane, chemistry and physics have been adopted by criminals.”<sup>52</sup> Mussolini then continues his analysis of the problem choosing a number of words and expressions highlighting his decision-making and leadership skills. He uses a strong language that transmits what Mussolini considered the most adequate response to crime of a powerful leader. Thus fighting crime must be done “methodically and mercilessly,” offenders must be

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> “Highest-Placed Criminals Must Be Mercilessly Suppresses, Says Mussolini,” *New York American*, Oct. 23, 1932, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

“removed,” and any “attempt to question the authority of the State... must be nipped in the bud.”<sup>53</sup> While not offering specific details on how Fascism has fought against crime and mafia groups, the dictator summarizes the pre-Fascism attitude against crime with one of his oversimplifying antitheses: “Before the advent of Fascism the police were constantly torn between two policies, namely, being prudent without energy, or being energetic without prudence. They succeeded in neither.”<sup>54</sup> Fascism, on the other hand, has dealt with “the ‘Mafia’... within a very short time” and was able “to control it and later to suppress it altogether.”<sup>55</sup> To do so, Mussolini writes, “We engaged the task of accepting responsibility and working with direction and firmness. We were energetic in our method and we succeeded in suppressing all organizations which had set up themselves as a State within a State.”<sup>56</sup> In place of further explanations on Fascist policies and political strategies against organized crime, Mussolini concludes his editorial with the evocation of three historical examples of uncompromising fight against crime. The first is George Washington, who “on several notable occasions of his life gave us magnificent example of sternness in opposing the lower, menacing instincts of the masses.”<sup>57</sup> The second example is that of Giuseppe Mazzini, who in 1849, in response to “common crimes masked under political motives” gave “drastic orders that any crime was to brought to an immediate end.”<sup>58</sup> The last “typical” example is that of “Pope Sixtus V who sentenced a parricide who had been apprehended after forty years he had perpetrated the crime.”<sup>59</sup> Once again, Mussolini strategically prefers to display his historical knowledge in place of discussing specific Fascist politics. Rather than addressing, for instance, the violent means

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

adopted by Cesare Mori, the prefect who worked in Sicily to fight against mafia between 1924 and 1929, or the arrest of Fascist political figures, such as Francesco Cuccia, for connection with organized crime, Mussolini remains rhetorically on a general level.<sup>60</sup> He omits relevant political details and instead presents himself as a strong, effective leader while offering some common sense statements against criminality. Moreover, while disparaging criminal individuals, who “may be mentally deficient, may have a criminal tendency which for him and for society is an unfortunate quirk in his make-up,” Mussolini is raising himself to the rank of George Washington.<sup>61</sup>

While demeaning women, criminals, and crowds of anonymous individuals, Mussolini often celebrated his own contributions to the resurgence of Italy and his role in the world. Such tendency is most clearly evident in articles discussing the topic of agricultural improvements and technological progress, two themes that were frequently combined. In a 1933 editorial, Mussolini explains how technology, under his guidance, is changing his country.<sup>62</sup> “I believe that the machine, as much as anything else of modern days, helps for progress of this age,” he starts. Then, he adds, “It can be said today that in Italy, and in agriculture alone, we have introduced the machine more than ever into the history of the country.”<sup>63</sup> Through the introduction of new technology in the agricultural sector, Italy has “enjoyed the greatest production of grain” in its history. Mussolini does not hesitate in self-acknowledging his crucial role in such an achievement: “several months ago near Littoria, the town which I founded, I signaled the start of

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<sup>60</sup> Christopher Duggan’s *Fascism and the Mafia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) is one of the few studies in English focusing considerably on Mori’s work in the 1920s. Scholarly works in Italian include the recent Salvo Porto, *Mafia e fascismo: Il prefetto Mori in Sicilia* (Messina: Armando Siciliano, 2001) and Pierluigi Basile, “Mafia e fascismo nella Sicilia degli anni Venti,” *Diacronie* 2, no. 3 (2010), URL: [http://www.studistorici.com/2010/07/30/basile\\_mafia\\_dossier\\_3/](http://www.studistorici.com/2010/07/30/basile_mafia_dossier_3/)

<sup>61</sup> “Higher-Placed Criminals Must Be Mercilessly Suppresses, Says Mussolini,” *New York American*, Oct. 23, 1932, 32.

<sup>62</sup> “Technocracy Will Not Work Benito Mussolini Declares,” *The San Antonio Light*, Feb. 12, 1933, 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*



a hundred mechanical plows on the Pontine marshes which were reclaimed from squalor to fruitfulness.”<sup>64</sup> This vivid description of Mussolini on a tractor, ready to work in the field, mixed with the imagery of the founder of new towns and of the developer of reclaimed lands, must have been a familiar one for American readers. Mussolini appeared in fact in these roles in both photographic and, as we will see, newsreels depictions. The myth of a superhuman Mussolini, leader and modernizer, efficient farmer and first in all domains saturated all of the dictator’s media representations and his editorials as well.

The Italian technological advances were not limited to the agricultural sector. With a list, Mussolini explains how, thanks to his government, “Italy presents to the world a spectacle of marked technological progress.”<sup>65</sup> He states:

Our trains run faster. Our steamers are bigger than and as fast as anything afloat. Our seaplanes are considered by many as the best in the world, while our electric equipment all over the country is the very latest developed. Our roads are built with machinery. Land reclamation projects have meant the added use of all kinds of intricate dredgers, excavators, and special canal makers.<sup>66</sup>

The accumulation of facts, expressed through parataxis and short sentences, is a way for Mussolini to rhetorically make the point that he and his dictatorship have brought progress to Italy while disregarding details or, for example, the fact that the technological improvements described were far from uniformly spread throughout the country.

Despite his personal interest in everything mechanical and new, Mussolini does not believe that “technocrats” should guide future governments of the world.<sup>67</sup> In order to discredit such an option, he uses historical examples, drawing on easily recognizable names:

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Plato, in his republic, maintained that the best form of government was that presided over by philosophers. We tried it, and all through the Middle Ages theologians aspired and endeavored to direct the affairs of mankind, ... It failed as the great universal spirit of Dante prophesied. ... We encountered an aristocracy which also fell when it monopolized the selfish aims of aristocrats. We have had autocrats, soldiers, plutocrats, and theocrats, and they all fail.<sup>68</sup>

Plato and Dante, just like Mazzini, Shakespeare, and Washington before, are names that allow Mussolini to signal, before anything else, the fact that he has a wide-ranging culture, that extends from humanities subjects to political culture and technical expertise. In his words, there are no deep explanations or details substantiating his position, which is often summarized in a slogan-sounding antithesis. In the case of this article, his catchphrase is that technology “must be made the servant of man rather than his master.”<sup>69</sup>

### **From Italy to the World: Mussolini’s International Leadership**

What this 1933 editorial also exemplifies is Mussolini’s common tendency to move from his focus on Italy to generalized opinions on world affairs. Sometimes the supposed progress of Italy and the dictator’s leadership are put in opposition with the rest of the world and other government’s leaders. In other cases, Mussolini concentrates solely on world politics and proposes solutions using some of the rhetorical strategies mentioned above. In a 1932 editorial, for instance, the dictator uses medical metaphors to describe the desperate condition of the global economy and makes historical and philosophical references to show his competence despite the lack of substantial explanations.<sup>70</sup> The article “World Must Cure Its Own Economic Ills This

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. The sentence was also used as the title of the *New York American* editorial, published on February 5, 1933.

<sup>70</sup> “World Must Cure Its Own Economic Ills This Time,” *The San Antonio Light*, January 3, 1932, 4.

Time,” which uses medical terms already in the title, opens with this statement: “We seem to pass one shock and another and we deliberate upon how long this tale of continued depression and disasters is going to endure.”<sup>71</sup> Continuing in the semantic field of medical terminology, after a description of the economies of the United States and of the major European countries, the dictator writes: “The pulse of world economy will beat weaker and weaker, just as when the movement of the heart is about to fail.”<sup>72</sup> The use of terms such as “depression” and “shock,” along with the metaphor of the dying hearth, helps Mussolini in outlining an emergency situation, in which a solution must be found quickly. The direction that he indicates is to cut down the “tariff walls” impeding international trades. Without further explaining this general proposal, Mussolini prefers to describe the alternative, which is a return of the world:

to the fortified cities of the Middle Ages: we are returning to a Middle Ages greatly magnified, it is true, but still a Middle Ages in all aspects from the economic viewpoint.

Some will observe that we are facing one of those recurring cycle that the great Neapolitan philosopher, Giambattista Vico saw in the history of the world.<sup>73</sup>

Mussolini once again makes vague references to moments in world history and to cultural figures, attempting to impress his readers with his cultural expertise rather than with well-detailed political plans. This time, rather than a recognizable literary or historical name, he cites Vico and qualifies him as a “great Neapolitan philosopher.” This recurrence of a Middle Ages-like epoch is, then, put in contrast with modern times. Mussolini insists that the permanence of taxes on importing foreign goods throughout the world is slowing the economy and “is all contrary to the conquests of modern science which with aviation and the radio has practically

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

eliminated distance.”<sup>74</sup>

All the rhetorical strategies in this editorial seem to highlight Mussolini’s leadership as a competent politician who has an easy fix for the current crisis and is in touch with modernity. The medical metaphors help him explain the world’s condition and urge readers to understand the need for blunt measures. The historical reference to the Middle Ages, reinforced by an allusion to an Italian philosopher, allow him to describe the dangers of going backwards by keeping the current system of taxation on international trading. At the same time, Mussolini is able to indirectly discredit world politicians who would disagree with him by connecting them to an obscurantist historical period, or at least to one widely considered as such. Finally, with his antithetical opposition of medieval times to modern ones, the dictator is designating himself as a champion of modernity, and his nebulous proposition to facilitate international trading as the right and progressive choice.



Image 17: Mussolini’s editorial “Mussolini Sees Prosperity in Disarmament” on the first page of the March of Events section of the *Detroit Times*, February 22, 1931.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

When it comes to world politics, one of the main themes of Mussolini's articles is the discussion of international meetings related to disarmament and peace treaties. As a leader of one of the members of the League of Nations, the Fascist dictator often boasted Italian anti-war and pro-disarmament stances. For example, in his piece published on February 22, 1931 and titled "Mussolini Sees Prosperity in Disarmament," he talks about the Geneva disarmament meeting to be held the following year.<sup>75</sup> Mussolini explains how disarmament will bring beneficial effects to world economy by allowing nations to lower budgets and reduce taxes. The only obstacle, in his opinion, is the excess of conversations among world leaders on the topic. The meeting, he says with an empty, self-explanatory statement, should have been scheduled for "an earlier date" because "in these matters each day which passes is one more day lost."<sup>76</sup> Mussolini expresses an even stronger call for immediate actions, opposing them to further discussions and considerations, towards the end of his editorial. Before declaring Italy to be unconcerned about adopting the measures necessary to achieve disarmament, the dictator warns against the "long-drawn-out discussions" that will continue the extensive "preliminary discussion as to the method which must be used in approaching the scheme of disarmament."<sup>77</sup> The consequences of such behavior will replicate, in Mussolini's opinion, the difficulty of finding a solution encountered at the 1930 London Naval Conference, when world leaders engaged in "a great search to find the 'yardstick' to measure battleships, cruisers, and destroyers."<sup>78</sup> It is particularly in this passage that Mussolini declares his disdain for political meetings based on exchanges among politicians rather than action, and his loathing of discussions and speeches. By using the word *yardstick* and placing it in quotation marks, the dictator promotes an image of world leaders as bureaucrats

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<sup>75</sup> "Mussolini Sees Prosperity in Disarmament," *Detroit Times*, February 22, 1931, 1, 2.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

engaged in the tedious operation of measuring the exact length of ships and weapons. Ironically, the leader who was mostly famous abroad for his oratory and whose collection of writings and public speeches is contained in over forty volumes, offers here an anti-rhetorical stance that better coincide with the image of the effective leader he fashioned for himself.<sup>79</sup>

Mussolini adopted such rhetorical strategy in nearly all of his editorials focused on international meetings. In describing a League of Nations' meeting in Geneva, for example, the dictator states: "Speeches continue year after year in a never ending flow of oratory with beautiful platitude recurring again and again," and describes the Geneva event as a "diplomatic and oratorical marathon."<sup>80</sup> A few years later, in describing a future world economic conference, the dictator advocates for action, because "the time of 'recommendations' or 'suggestions' is over. It is necessary to decide and assume responsibility for decisions."<sup>81</sup> To better distinguish himself from other world leaders involved in international meeting, he then explains that "the great need of today is firm men and decisive men who know what their course should be, how to set it, keep to it."<sup>82</sup> In a 1933 editorial on the London Economic Conference, which was supposed to help restore international trade, stabilize currency exchange rates, and indicate measures bringing the world out of a global depression, Mussolini denounces that, almost a week before the scheduled closing, the meeting, "on which so much hope had been concentrated, can be considered virtually ended."<sup>83</sup> One of the reasons for the failure of the conference, according to Mussolini, is certainly the fact that there were no "men who make decisions," but rather "men who talk and argue and report."<sup>84</sup> Additionally, one of the problems of this and other

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<sup>79</sup> See note 14 for bibliographic references to Mussolini's *Opera Omnia*.

<sup>80</sup> "Benito Mussolini Discusses Marathon of Talk at Geneva," *The San Antonio Light*, Sep. 22, 1929, 6.

<sup>81</sup> "Time for Action Arrives in World Affairs, Says Duce," *The San Antonio Light*, Mar. 12, 1933, 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> "Put Embargo on Parleys or Prestige Of Nations Will Fail, Says Mussolini," *New York American*, Jul. 23, 1933, 12. The London Economic Conference, started on June 12, was scheduled to end on July 27.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

conferences, the dictator says, is the high number of participants: when “2,000 delegates from more than 60 countries... are participating in a conference, it inevitably assumes the aspect of a parliament with all the inconveniences generally known and deplored.”<sup>85</sup> Such inconvenient parliament’s characteristics are later clarified as the “external pretense or conventional falsity” of “democratic equality, that neither exists in nature nor has ever existed in history.”<sup>86</sup> To further clarify his point, the dictator states that these continuous conferences are “the degeneration of misunderstood democracy, according to which, not the pilots should steer the ship, but the ignorant, who do not even know how to read a compass.”<sup>87</sup> Here, adopting a traditional maritime metaphor equating the government of a country to that of a ship, Mussolini reiterates some of his positions already made in previous articles about his opinions with regards to democracy and international politics. As he talked of faceless common men and women, inept at deciding about the fate of their countries, he now refers to “ignorant” members of foreign countries “whose circumstances have no great influence in determining the course of life.”<sup>88</sup> Whether it is for the administration of his own country or for the government of world affairs, Mussolini does not shy away from excluding democratic participation and procedures, expressing his preference for direct action and limited diplomatic meetings, in which “the great states, which have major responsibilities and a greater number of inhabitants, first come to agreement.”<sup>89</sup>

If the population of a country is the measure of its status in the world, it is clear why Mussolini often stressed the importance of public measures that would increase demographic reproduction. At home, Fascism attempted to implement, through numerous pronatalist policies, a politic of support to prolificacy, with consequent devaluation of Italians, especially women, to

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

the roles of mere reproductive tools.<sup>90</sup> The increase of Italian population, in addition to making Italy a more important player in the world, in the dictator's plans, was also a way to put a stop to the expansion of "the yellow and the black races" and allow the survival, resurgence, and dominance of whites.<sup>91</sup> In a 1934 editorial, Mussolini offers an overview of the western world demographic decrease and warns against what he calls the "dying of nations."<sup>92</sup> Showing off his expertise through numbers and statistics, Mussolini explains, for example, "France will lose 150,000 to 200,000 inhabitants every year."<sup>93</sup> Displaying his competence in history and humanities, then, the dictator adds,

History demonstrates to what point demographic decadence leads nations. Polybius even speaks to us of sterile Greek cities, empty and an easy prey to Roman conquerors. Rome also began to decline when, with a decreased birth rate, she had to resort to mercenary troops. There was a time when, in order to secure men sufficiently tall for the Imperial Guard, she had to recruit the Batavi from Holland, who had been conquered by Julius Caesar.<sup>94</sup>

If the decadence of Greece and of the Roman Empire exemplifies the current decline of Western civilization for lack of children, the reference to the shortage of Roman tall guards foreshadows a current genetic issue of Fascist Italy, that is, the need of a new generation of intellectuals. "That which is still more depressing," Mussolini writes, "is the fact that the so-called intellectual elements ... are not prolific. They are satisfied with one or two children, unless they prefer,

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<sup>90</sup> For an exhaustive overview of Fascism's sexual politics, see Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), particularly chapter 3, "Motherhood," 41-76.

<sup>91</sup> "Mussolini Warns Falling Birthrate Is Leading White Race to Disaster," *New York American*, August 26, 1934, 12.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*



indeed, to have none at all.”<sup>95</sup> The scarcity of children from the most well educated class of the country is a crucial issue for the dictator because it will genetically determine the intellectual impoverishment of Italy:

If we look at the statistics of the graduates of our universities and scientific institutions, we perceive that, in proportion to their number, these intellectuals assume the responsibility of giving new elements which can raise the intellectual level of the nation only in a small way.<sup>96</sup>

Mussolini’s eugenic rant concludes with a racist alarm that puts in an antithesis “the increase in number and the expansion of the yellow and black races” and the fatally perishing “civilization of the white man.”<sup>97</sup> Masking his racist and eugenics views behind erudition, with statistics and historical references, Mussolini promotes in this 1934 editorial his demographic policies and pushes readers to believe that similar measures should be adopted in the entire Western world.

### **Conclusion: Building Prestige, Reinforcing Celebrity**

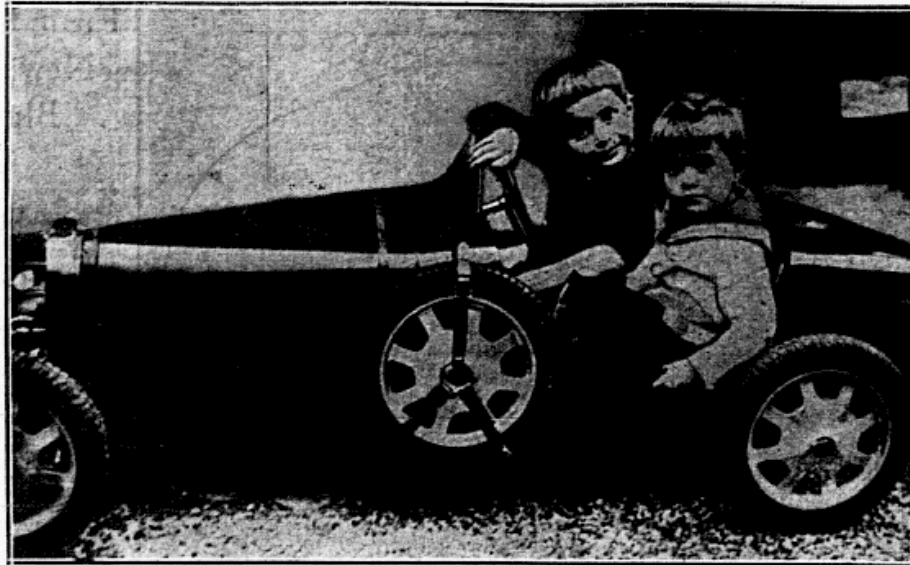
Through his rhetorical strategies, Mussolini was able to build his political and international prestige. He appealed to American readers with his effectiveness, efficiency, and expertise, even though his claims were unverifiable and his positions were often blatantly antidemocratic, misogynist, and racist. As explained for the biographical texts, these editorials for the American press contributed to create a myth of a good political leader who was also a champion of modernity and a character representative of his time. These editorials, along with the other media appearances of the dictator, accrued Mussolini’s fame among Americans.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.



**"WHAT HE PREACHES"**—So Italy's Premier Benito Mussolini practices in his private life. Two of his five children are shown herewith in a charming photograph of them at play with their model speedster along the pathways of Villa Torlonia. They are Romano and Maria. Close study of Romano (left) reveals an identical likeness of expression as is frequently seen in *Il Duce's* facial changes.

Image 18: Mussolini's children portrayed in Villa Torlonia. The picture accompanied the dictator's 1934 editorial on the world demographic decline.

In the next chapter, the analysis of the newsreels produced in the United States will further clarify the topic of Mussolini's American celebrity, but the picture and its caption reproduced here can already serve as an exemplary summary of this point.<sup>98</sup> The picture shows the two youngest of Mussolini's children, Romano and Anna Maria, as they play in a toy car in Villa Torlonia. The title given to this image is "What he preaches," and the caption specifies, "So Italy's Premier Benito Mussolini practices in his private life. Two of his five children are shown herewith in a charming photograph of them at play with their model speedster along the pathways of Villa Torlonia."<sup>99</sup> In a few lines, and with an all-caps title, Mussolini's leadership and trustworthiness is further emphasized. He is identified as the leader who follows all of his words with concrete actions. He is not just stating that Italians should have children, he is in fact

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<sup>98</sup> The image was published with the *New York American* version of the editorial. The New York's Hearst newspaper was the publication in which most often pictures of Mussolini were included with the editorials. The presence of a larger Italian-American community, most susceptible to *Il Duce's* iconicity, must be the reason behind this editorial decision.

<sup>99</sup> "Mussolini Warns Falling Birthrate Is Leading White Race to Disaster," *New York American*, August 26, 1934, 12.

having more children than average and is creating a large family. The toy car, called a “model speedster,” with which the children are playing, is used as a subtle reference to Mussolini’s own love for velocity and mechanical progress, passions often reiterated in articles focusing on the dictator and fundamental elements of his fame. The similarities between Mussolini and his children, then, do not stop to their shared love for cars. The caption, in fact, details: “Close study of Romano (left) reveals an identical likeness of expression as is frequently seen in *Il Duce*’s facial changes.”<sup>100</sup> The interest for Mussolini’s face, along with a curiosity for his family, already evident in this caption, was often the central focus of the American newsreels depicting the dictator. His celebrity status in the United States, as we will continue to see, grew through the repeated reproduction of similar themes and images on movie screens.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 4

### Mussolini in American Newsreels. *Il Duce* as Modern Celebrity

In considering the links between newsreels and Benito Mussolini, one cannot avoid connecting the Fascist dictator with the Italian *Istituto Luce*, the Italian newsreels agency, founded in 1924. Especially in present-day Italian historical documentaries, many filmed images of the dictator appear flanked by the familiar eagle symbol that opened the *Cinegiornali*, and today television audiences still recognize the voices of *Luce*'s news commentators. The fact that *Luce* was one of the most pervasive propaganda tools of the regime is something that has become a commonplace among scholars of Fascism.<sup>1</sup> To a certain degree, the persistent availability and online accessibility of *Luce*'s newsreels and footage today might be the reason for such a strong connection between the Italian film company and fascist propaganda: if all the images of a successful and adored Mussolini always come from one source, that source must be an

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<sup>1</sup> Relevant studies of *Luce* include Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cinema italiano fra le due guerre. Fascismo e politica cinematografica* (Milan: Mursia, 1975); Philip V. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso. Fascismo e mass media* (Rome: Laterza, 1975); Mino Argentieri, *L'occhio del regime: Informazione e propaganda nel cinema del fascismo* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1979); Massimo Cardillo, *Il Duce in moviola: Politica e divismo nei cinegiornali e documentari del Luce* (Bari: Dedalo, 1983); Giampaolo Bernagozzi, *Il cinema allo specchio. Appunti per una storia del documentario* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1985); James Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy. The Passing of the Rex* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Mino Argentieri, ed., *Schermi di guerra: Cinema italiano, 1939-1945* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1995); Ernesto G. Laura, *Le stagioni dell'aquila. Storia dell'Istituto Luce* (Rome: Ente dello spettacolo, 2000); Gabriele D'Autilia, "Istituto Luce," in *Dizionario del fascismo*, ed. Victoria De Grazia and Sergio Luzzato (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), vol. 1: 684-688; Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Stefano Luconi and Guido Tintori, *L'ombra lunga del fascio. Canali di propaganda fascista per gli italiani d'America* (Milan: M&B Publishing, 2004); Marco Bertozzi, *Storia del documentario italiano* (Venice: Marsilio, 2008); Pierluigi Erbaggio, "Istituto Nazionale Luce: A National Company with an International Reach," in *Italian Silent Cinema*, ed. Giorgio Bertellini (New Barnet, Herts, U.K.: John Libbey Publishing, 2013), 221-231.

instrument of the regime.<sup>2</sup> This conventional reading of the history of *Luce* is, however, only partially satisfactory because it does not take into consideration the range of *Luce*'s nonfiction productions and the key role it played in modernizing Italian cinema by introducing newsreels in a serialized form and efficiently distributing them throughout the country. More significantly to understanding the representation of *Il Duce* on screen, this approach does not account for the existence of other Italian film companies interested in the dictator that produced documentaries on the regime's accomplishments.<sup>3</sup> Also, it fails to consider the network of exchanges between European and American newsreel companies of the time. More importantly, it disregards the nearly constant presence of numerous foreign film crews, which directly filmed Mussolini. These foreign productions, while not apparently propaganda, allowed the production of newsreels stories that often represented the dictator and his fascist regime in a positive light.

In this chapter, I study in particular how two American newsreels companies, Fox Movietone and Hearst Metrotone (hereafter Fox and Hearst), which had offices and personnel in Rome, reinforced the biographical narration of *Il Duce* by adding images and sounds to the representations already circulating in the press. They emphasized, for instance, his charismatic role in international politics and his engagement with modernity, raised him to the status of a public celebrity, and highlighted his power in physically reshaping the bodies of Italians. These two American companies not only imported Italian reels from *Luce*, but also had their own extensive production of newsreels on Fascist Italy and Mussolini.<sup>4</sup> By analyzing the Fox and

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<sup>2</sup> Hundreds of videos and still images are available on the Luce website ([www.archivioluce.com](http://www.archivioluce.com)) and even on a dedicated Youtube channel (<http://www.youtube.com/cinecittaluce>).

<sup>3</sup> Considering *Luce*'s effectiveness (or lack thereof) in building consensus for Mussolini's regime, the fact that in 1933 the dictator invited the film company Cines to produce *Mussolinia di Sardegna* [Mussolinia in Sardinia, 1933] for the inauguration of one of the regime's new towns may be puzzling.

<sup>4</sup> Research on the *Luce* newsreels imported by American newsreels companies, while confirmed by archival documents, is difficult for lack of surviving filmed material. See, for instance, chapter two in Luconi and Tintori, *L'ombra lunga del fascio*, in which the authors attempt to trace the arrival and distribution in the United States of Italian newsreels. See also, Erbaggio, "Istituto Nazionale Luce: A National Company with an International Reach,"

Hearst newsreels depicting the dictator, I explain the ways Americans focused on—and indeed framed—Mussolini. Rather than a comparative study of Mussolini in Italian and American newsreels, my approach is a contextual one. I study the American newsreels representation of Mussolini, both in a quantitative and qualitative sense: how often did Fox and Hearst propose Mussolini stories in their newsreels issues? And how did they represent the dictator in these newsreels? Putting these visual representations in relationship with the printed narratives about Mussolini, I highlight the cohesive framing of the Italian dictator across the American media: a man with a strong personality and leadership skills, a celebrity to be admired, a competent politician able to reshape his country. At the same time, through a close reading of several exemplary newsreels, I focus on the representation of the dictator and that of the Fascist body. Newsreels in particular, allowed Americans to physically see Mussolini at work, creating, for example, strong connections between the Fascist leader and objects of modernity while leaving out of the frame all related social and political implications.

Through American newsreels, Mussolini became a modern political icon whose private and public life merited constant attention. Additionally, the American newsreels representations of Mussolini emphasized the fascist dictator's close relationship with symbols of modernity and technological progress, and his embrace of newer forms of political communication. For instance, in 1927, Fox chose Mussolini as the first "Movietoned" international political leader, that is, the first non-American politician to appear in a Fox Movietone sound newsreel. Also, Fox and Hearst often filmed Mussolini delivering speeches in foreign languages (English and French), demonstrating his competence in world diplomacy and broadcasting the idea of his central role in international political gatherings that was so prevalent in the press and in the

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for details about the *Luce's* exporting efforts.

dictator's editorials.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Fox and Hearst newsreels made Mussolini a public celebrity. While focusing on the dictator, on his persona, strength, and appearance, these American newsreels often diluted or completely eliminated all political content. Mussolini was the sole protagonist in front of the cameras, which often captured his face in close-ups, equating the political leader to a film star. The interest for the dictator extended, as with modern celebrities, to other members of his family, particularly to his two children Bruno and Vittorio who, as I will detail, were portrayed in a few newsreels between 1925 and 1935.

This chapter argues that Fox and Hearst productions, when seen in the context of the larger biographical representation of the Italian dictator in the United States media, contributed significantly to the establishment of a cult of Mussolini's personality. While not the result of official propaganda efforts, these American newsreels reached the same objectives of highlighting *Il Duce's* leadership skills and increasing consensus for the Fascist regime, goals that were later pursued by the Italian agencies for propaganda.<sup>6</sup> Before the analysis of a selection of Fox and Hearst newsreels centered on the Italian dictator, an overview of the American newsreels field will highlight the crucial role this media played in informing, influencing, and entertaining large audiences.

### **The Field of American Newsreels**

In the early 1920s, when the Fascist Party emerged and took power in Italy, newsreels already represented an international medium. Particularly during World War I, newsreels became a powerful and pervasive source of news for American people. If one considers, as Frank Kessler does in the *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, the *actualités* as the "early form of news event films

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<sup>5</sup> On Mussolini's competence, see for instance, Yoi Maraini, "Mussolini, Man of Many Interests" *The Living Age* (May 24, 1924): 986-989; "Mussolini Back 'On the Job'" *Literary Digest* 85 (June 27, 1925): 20. For more details on Mussolini's editorials on International political meetings, see chapter three, 93-100.

<sup>6</sup> In the third volume of his voluminous biography of Benito Mussolini, Renzo De Felice characteristically indicates the years between 1929 and 1936 as *Gli Anni del Consenso*.

and newsreels”<sup>7</sup>, the birthdate of this medium almost corresponds to that of cinema itself. The first *actualités*, defined as films presenting factual stories and current events, were part of the 1890s Lumière brothers’ productions in France. These short films depicted political personalities, state visits, royal parades, and other public affairs. Exhibitors often connected several *actualités* with other *views*, a common name for the short single-shot films of 15-17 meters depicting notorious places, sporting events, and ceremonies, and formed a program of various films for audiences to experience. What characterizes these early examples of non-fiction films is their strong connection to current events and the fact that they are unstaged, that is, as Tom Gunning puts it, “the subject filmed either pre-existed the act of filming (a landscape, a social custom, a method of work) or would have taken place even if the camera had not been there (a sporting event, a funeral, a coronation).”<sup>8</sup> With the emergence of movie audiences and movie-going practices, during the first decade of the nineteenth century, the necessity of proposing interesting, thrilling and sensational news stories often pushed film companies beyond the mere recording of events in order to attract audiences. Famously, Georges Méliès staged news re-enactments of the Dreyfuss affair (1899) and of King Edward VII’s coronation (1902). Staged and unstaged newsreels often coexisted in film companies’ catalogues. Although, as Kessler remarks, “it would be anachronistic to consider [staged news] as ‘fakes,’” the question of understanding just how spectators read and experienced both kind of newsreels remains

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Kessler, “Actualités,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Richard Abel (New York: Routledge, 2005), 5. In addition to the primary sources cited below, for my description of the American newsreels field, the following secondary sources are particularly pertinent: Peter Baechlin and Maurice Muller-Strauss, *Newsreels across the World* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952); Adelaide F. Hawley Cumming, “A History of American Newsreels, 1927 to 1950” (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1967); Raymond Fielding, *The American Newsreel, 1911-1967* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972); Marcel Huret, *Ciné actualités: Histoire de la presse filmée* (Paris: H. Veyrier: 1984); Roger Smither and Wolfgang Klaue, eds., *Newsreels in Film Archives: A Survey Based on the FIAF Newsreel Symposium* (Trowbridge, U.K.: Flicks Books, 1996); Clyde Jeavons, Jane Mercer, and Daniela Kirchner, eds., *The Story of the Century! An International Newsfilm Conference* (London: British University Film & Video Council, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Tom Gunning, “Before Documentary: Early Nonfiction Films and the ‘View’ Aesthetic,” in *Uncharted Territory. Essays on Early Nonfiction Film*, ed. Daan Hertogs and Nico de Klerk (Amsterdam: Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1997), 14.



unanswered for early non-fiction scholars.<sup>9</sup> The emergence of numerous film companies that specialized in newsreels during the early 1900s suggests that movie-goers enjoyed the content of these productions regardless of their staged or unstaged nature.

The French company Pathé-Frères was one of the first to recognize the demands for a regular release of newsreels that would satisfy the recreational needs of growing audiences. During the second half of the 1900s, Pathé began releasing the first weekly newsreels issue, *Pathé Faits-Divers*, initially only in Paris. Shortly thereafter, this programming was released throughout France as *Pathé Journal*.<sup>10</sup> From the end of the nineteenth century, in the United States companies such as Edison, Biograph, and Vitagraph had produced numerous news films, particularly boxing events and re-enactments of episodes of the 1898 Spanish-American War. Nonetheless, in 1911 Pathé was the first company producing a regularly released newsreels series in the United States, *Pathé's Weekly*. The same year, American Vitagraph issued *The Vitagraph Monthly of Current Events*, and, the following year, another French company, Gaumont, challenged the competition in the United States with the *Gaumont Animated Weekly*. While the Vitagraph newsreels series was short-lived (within a year it ceased production), other American film companies started developing their own newsreels series. Among the most important, there were the *Hearst-Selig News Pictorial* (1914-1915), which was the first encounter of William Randolph Hearst's organization with the newsreels business, and the silent newsreels series *Kinograms* (1919-1931). During World War I, as a consequence of the European market closure, American film companies, which released long feature films and newsreels, strengthened their national and international position. As a result, from 1918 onward,

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<sup>9</sup> Kessler, 6. See also Kessler, "Visible Evidence – But of What? Reassessing Early non-fiction Cinema," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 22, no. 3 (2002): 221-223.

<sup>10</sup> There is disagreement regarding the dates of issue of these Pathé series. Raymond Fielding remarks in *The American Newsreels* that scholars dating ranges between 1906 and 1910 (326, n.11).

three American companies came to dominate the world newsreels market along with Pathé: Fox, Hearst, and Universal. In 1927, they were joined by Paramount, which released *Paramount News* until 1957.

While *Universal News* kept its name throughout its long existence (1912-1967), a number of name changes characterizes the Fox and Hearst newsreels series in the years leading to the introduction of sound and then to World War II. Such modifications reflect alterations in the production and distribution structures of the companies and significant variations and modernizations of the medium. For instance, the introduction of sound led to the transformation of *Fox News* (1919) into *Fox Movietone News* in 1927, a name that Fox kept until 1963 when it ceased its newsreels production. Hearst's *The International Newsreel* (1914), which was initially released through Universal, became *The MGM International Newsreel* after the 1929 contract between Hearst and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. With MGM, Hearst that same year started releasing a sound newsreels series called *Hearst Metrotone News*. This latter series would wrap up in 1967 as *News of the Day*, a name adopted in 1936.<sup>11</sup>

Initially silent, newsreels transitioned to sound in the late 1920s. By the early 1920s, newsreels production companies competed for the approximately 16,500 American theatres that exhibited newsreels with their biweekly newsreels issues.<sup>12</sup> Fox, in particular, expanded significantly during the 1920s, establishing an important international presence and playing a crucial role in the modernization of the medium. When Fox introduced its sound newsreels in 1927, it had already created a network of camera operators in foreign countries. By the 1930s,

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<sup>11</sup> The extensive list of Hearst's newsreels series includes: *International News* (1919-1928), *International Newsreel* (1928-1929), *MGM News* (1927-1929), *MGM International Newsreel* (1929-1930), *Hearst Metrotone News* (1929-1936), *News of the Day* (1936-1967). UCLA Film and Television Archive, Los Angeles, "Hearst Metrotone News, Inc.," *Corporate History*, Vol. 1, n.p.

<sup>12</sup> This figure and other newsreels exhibition details are reported in Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler: 1933-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 79.

Fox employed cameramen in fifty countries and had production centers in nine different locations, including Paris and London.<sup>13</sup>

From the time of the 1922 March on Rome, Mussolini was already the subject of a remarkable number of silent newsreels and press interest in the United States. Newsreels emphasized a representation of Fascist Italy solely centered on Mussolini, depicted as a competent leader, at the center of International meetings, or as a commander in chief, engaged in reviewing troops and overseeing substantial projects modernizing the country. In parallel with the published biographies and the dictator's editorials, newsreels showed Mussolini as an efficient and modern politician, and as a strong and charismatic individual with a winning personality. Mussolini was often at the center of the frame, in close-ups, and, in many cases, the only significant subject of the newsreel stories. The Fox transition to sound newsreels further celebrated Mussolini, making him the first political leader to appear in a newsreel featuring the new sound technology and allowing him to become part of the history of the genre.

### **Enter *Il Duce*: Mussolini's Presence in Fox and Hearst Newsreels**

The dictator's presence as a protagonist of newsreels was the result of what the film industry identified as his innate cinematic appeal. Mussolini fascinated American media both physiologically and in terms of his personality. In *Newsreel Man*, a rare and precious first-hand testimonial of the 1930s newsreels business, Charles Peden, a former Fox Movietone cameraman, affirms that "among foreign public men the best performer is Mussolini. He can always be depended on to deliver a vigorous speech extemporaneously, and pictorially he is ideal."<sup>14</sup> This remark echoed a December 1931 *Variety* first page article about "Big Newsreel Star" in which it was noted "Hoover, Mussolini, MacDonald and Walker are the world's greatest

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<sup>13</sup> Roel Vande Winkel, "Newsreel Series: World Overview," in *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*, ed. Ian Aitken (New York: Routledge, 2006), 987. See also Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler*, 78-85.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Peden, *Newsreel Man* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1932), 13.

newsreel stars.”<sup>15</sup> Notably, the *Variety* journalist added “there [was not] a program released which [did not] contain *Il Duce* or some reference to him.”<sup>16</sup> An analysis of the archival documentation of both Fox and Hearst newsreels productions corroborates the impression of this overwhelming interest in the dictator—not just on the part of the public, but on the part of the film and media industry.<sup>17</sup> In particular, the list of newsreels issued to the theaters by the two companies (also known as their “synopsis sheets”) show that between April 1925 and August 1936, about 175 newsreels, or in other words roughly more than one per month for over a decade, displayed or referred to Mussolini. More specifically, Mussolini is present in eighty-four Fox records between April 8, 1925 and October 22, 1935. Hearst archival documents, on the other hand, reveal the presence of the dictator in ninety-one newsreels issued between September 28, 1929 and August 31, 1936. It should be noted that in both the Fox and Hearst archives, the existing paper documentation does not always match the preserved video footage. This means that a small number of newsreels stories related to Mussolini precede the starting dates of the synopsis sheets and that no paper documentation exists for some existing footage in the period that goes from 1923 to 1936.

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<sup>15</sup> Tom Waller, “21 Big Newsreel Star,” *Variety* 104, no. 3 (8 December 1931): 1.

<sup>16</sup> Waller, *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>17</sup> The University of North Carolina holds the Fox Movietone News Collection among its Moving Image Research Collections. Hearst newsreels are preserved at the Film and Television Archive of the University of California at Los Angeles.

Image 19

Image 20

Image 19 A 1927 Fox Dope Sheet; Image 20: A 1931 Metrotone Synopsis Sheet [Courtesy of the University of South Carolina's Moving Image Research Collections, "Fox Movietone News Collection" and of the UCLA's Film & Television Archive, "Hearst Metrotone News, Inc."].

In the case of Fox newsreels, the first preserved newsreel story, titled *Black Shirts*, dates back to February 28, 1923 and shows groups of youth and adult Fascist followers marching through the streets of Rome and convening at the monument to the Unknown Soldier on the steps of the *Altare della Patria*.<sup>18</sup> Seven other Fox newsreels precede the April 8, 1925 date, while eight are the Hearst newsreels before September 28, 1929. The discrepancies and holes in the archival holdings of the two companies should not come as a surprise because, as William T. Murphy noted, the "preservation of theatrical newsreels in the United States is in rather desperate situation."<sup>19</sup>

Today, the Fox and Hearst archival holdings are the only ones offering substantial filmed newsreels material from the 1920s: silent and sound newsreels stories, outtakes, complete issues, and synopsis and dope sheets, or cameramen's written records of their work on the field.<sup>20</sup> In

<sup>18</sup> *Black Shirts* (New York: Fox, February 28, 1923). Preserved at the University of South Carolina, Moving Image Research Collections, Fox Movietone News Collection.

<sup>19</sup> William T. Murphy, "The Preservation of Newsreels in the United States," in *Newsreels in Film Archives: A Survey Based on the FIAF Newsreel Symposium*, ed. Roger Smither and Wolfgang Klau (Trowbridge, UK: Flicks Books, 1996), 8.

<sup>20</sup> In addition to Fox and Hearst newsreels, *Universal News* footage covering the period 1929-1967 is well preserved at the National Archives and Records Administration as part of the "MCA/Universal Pictures Collection, 1929 –

examining the existing Fox and Hearst news stories directly focusing on Mussolini, one cannot help but notice that these American newsreels often depicted the Italian dictator as a modern leader, ready to engage with the newest examples of progress and latest technology. A 1927 Fox Movietone sound newsreel is exemplary in this respect.

### **Mussolini, Spokesperson for Modernity**



Image 21: Variety, September 21, 1927, p.1

On September 21, 1927, *Variety*'s front-page headline was "Mussolini's Hope in Screen." The dictator's statement summarized below the title reads: "This can bring the world together and end war."<sup>21</sup> Reportedly, Mussolini placed his hopes in the new Fox Movietone technology that allowed moving images and sound recordings to be impressed together on film. This *Variety* article was published a few days before the Italian dictator's speaking debut on American screens. Mussolini was, in fact, the first foreign politician to be shown in an American sound newsreel. The pioneering newsreel *The Man of the Hour* premiered at the Times Square Theatre in New York on September 28, 1927.<sup>22</sup> Mussolini's innovative newsreel shared the program with *Sunrise* (1927), the latest film by Friedrich W. Murnau (1888-1931), which

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1967". For other information about the newsreels preservation efforts, see Murphy, "The Preservation of Newsreels", 8-12.

<sup>21</sup> "Mussolini's Hope in Screen," *Variety* 88, no. 10 (21 Sep. 1927): 1, 23.

<sup>22</sup> *The Man of the Hour* (New York: Fox, Sep. 28, 1927).

featured music and sound effects, along with modern cinematographic techniques.<sup>23</sup> The theatre program boasts: “Benito Mussolini, Premier of Italy, lives before your eyes through Movietone. He speaks to you, expressing, with his characteristic gestures, his sentiments toward the United States and the Italian-Americans in this country.”<sup>24</sup> Although the title uses the word “Premier,” *The Man of the Hour* stars Mussolini in a sort of political vacuum. It refers to the dictator as a generic “foreign personage,” thus emphasizing his fame more than his political status (see below, image 22). The “historic film” was shot with two cameras in the gardens of Villa Torlonia, Mussolini’s private residence in Rome, and not in a formal institutional location. The dictator appears alone in this Fox sound newsreel, and after the short medium shot with him walking out of the house and toward the camera, the audience sees Mussolini in a long close-up as he pronounces his English speech. His arms crossed, maybe to add solemnity or to avoid gesticulation, coincide precisely with the bottom of the frame and make him resemble a bust of an important historical figure. The frontal camera angle allows for a direct connection with the audience. Although his English is far from perfect, he does not appear to be reading. Solemn, direct, and competent in a foreign language, Mussolini explicitly refers to American friendship and collaboration. But his message is secondary to his performance in front of the camera.

The Fox Movietone newsreel, according to the reviews of the time, ran about 20 minutes and included, in addition to Mussolini’s addresses in Italian and in English, images and sounds of the Italian army marching and singing, and of Italian navy members working on a ship.<sup>25</sup> The American Ambassador in Rome, Henry P. Fletcher, introduced Mussolini on camera, and the

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<sup>23</sup> For a thorough analysis of Murnau’s film distribution, see Janet Bergstrom, “Murnau, Movietone and Mussolini,” *Film History* 17 (2005): 187-204. Bergstrom indicates the Murnau-Mussolini double billing as a possible reason behind the financial failure of *Sunrise*, particularly in its New York showings.

<sup>24</sup> Rome Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario, *Spd Co 1922-1943*, container 221, file “P. S. E. Varia 148,” New York’s Times Square Theatre Program.

<sup>25</sup> Sime, “Mussolini,” *Variety* 88, no. 10 (21 Sep. 1927): 20; Kann, “Sunrise and Movietone,” *Film Daily* 41, no. 72 (25 Sep. 1927): 1-4; Mordaunt Hall, “The Screen. A Film Masterpiece,” *The New York Times* (24 Sep. 1927): 15.

dictator spoke first in Italian, reading from a script, and then in English, with no script in his hands.<sup>26</sup> Mussolini, here coupled with this technological progress, becomes a sort of testimonial to modernity. American audiences had already had the opportunity to see him in silent newsreels and read about his engagement with other symbols of modernity, namely airplanes, transoceanic ships, cars, and speed.<sup>27</sup> With *The Man of the Hour*, Fox puts the Italian dictator in a metonymic relationship with its modernizing technology and allows the dictator to speak for himself. Through this innovative newsreel, the dictator is indicated once more as a leader in touch with modernity and with the newest forms of political communication. His persona, while he is speaking in English and bridging the linguistic gaps between Italy and the United States, is again associated with positive, desirable characteristics: competence, curiosity, and adaptability to the changes of the media landscape.

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<sup>26</sup> The images of the brief speech in English are today available online on the British Movietone Archive website and on YouTube. Numerous paper documents are available at the Rome Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario, *Spd Co 1922-1943*, container 221, file “P. S. E. Varia 148.”

<sup>27</sup> In 1926, at least three Fox newsreels were related to Mussolini and Umberto Nobile’s expedition to the North Pole with the “Norge” airship. See Appendix B for details.





Image 22

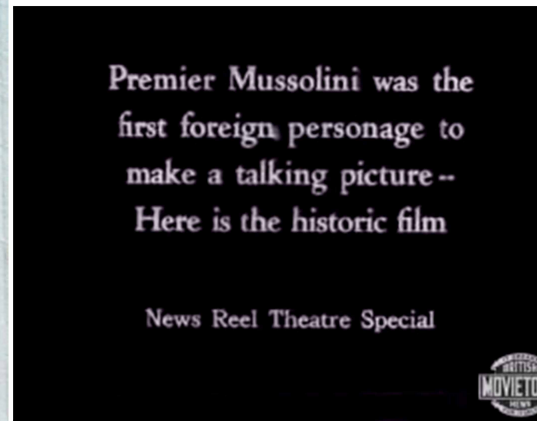


Image 23 (top) and 24 (bottom)

Image 22: New York's Times Square Theatre program [Courtesy of Archivio Centrale dello Stato, (Rome): Segreteria Particolare del Duce]. Image 23: reproduction of Fox Movietone opening caption; Image 24: Benito Mussolini delivering his speech for the Fox Movietone newsreel [Courtesy of the British Movietone Archive website].

The fact that Mussolini was the first foreign political figure to be shown in the newly created genre of sound newsreels, as the caption preceding the short film reminds us, has an even greater value if one considers the importance of this major technological and artistic innovation. In fact, in addition to emphasizing the presence of Mussolini, Fox celebrates and explains the new recording method that permits the audience to hear Mussolini's words while seeing his gestures. A specific note about the newest technological advance occupies most of the program page (image 22). The Movietone sound technology was achieved thanks to the efforts of Earl Sponable and Theodore Case who had been collaborating since the early 1920s on a sound-on-film system.

At the time, the competition over this sort of technological advance was fierce among film companies. In 1926, Warner Brothers perfected a system commercially known as Vitaphone that involved the use of a recorded disk played on a turntable in sync with the camera movement. This system, although cumbersome and difficult to maneuver, permitted Warner Brothers to produce *Don Juan*, screened on August 6, 1926, and *The Jazz Singer*, screened on October 6, 1927. These two films are traditionally indicated as the first feature films with sound. Sponable and Case's technology, however, proved to be the most efficient and successful for commercial purposes. It consisted of the impression of a sound track on the same film that carried the recorded images. This system, in the words of the newsreels historian Raymond Fielding, "was commercially practical, it involved a minimum of equipment, it provided for absolute synchronism, and – following the subsequent sophistication of technique – it allowed for intricate and artistic editing of picture and sound."<sup>28</sup>

The first commercially released sound films with this new synchronized technology were newsreels, which were less expensive and faster to produce than long feature films. Consistent with the media interest in the lives of great men, the subjects selected for the first sound newsreels were public figures who already enjoyed a high degree of notoriety, and whom the audience would find inspiring. On May 25, 1927, a sound newsreel showed, in fact, Charles Lindbergh's takeoff, an event that had happened five days earlier. Fox then produced a second sound newsreel to record the welcome ceremony and President Coolidge's introductory speech for Lindbergh's arrival in Washington on June 12, 1927. My research at the Italian Central Archives indicates that the Fox crew recorded Mussolini's newsreel with his speech in Italian on

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<sup>28</sup> Fielding, *The American Newsreels*, 160-161. On the transition to sound, see also Rick Altman, ed., *Sound Theory. Sound Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Douglas Gomery, *The Coming of Sound* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Elizabeth Weis and John Belton, eds., *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

May 6, 1927, that is, two weeks before their May 20 filming of Lindbergh's first sound newsreel.<sup>29</sup> This adjustment makes Mussolini the very first subject that Fox filmed for testing its groundbreaking sound technology. Although the screening of Mussolini's sound newsreel was on September 28, it was produced in a number of different moments and after lengthy negotiation for the making of the 85-second-long English address. The Fox Movietone cameramen and sound technicians worked with Mussolini and his office from May to August 1927.<sup>30</sup> These chronological details are crucial not only for reasons of cinema historiography, but also to understand Mussolini's presence in American media and, more broadly, the dictator's connection to discourses of modernity. They confirm that American media, in addition to broadcasting the figure of the Italian dictator as an icon of modernity by highlighting his personal interest for everything mechanical and new, considered Mussolini to be the voice of innovation itself.

The link between Mussolini and advances in newsreels and sound technology can be traced even further taking into account that, as mentioned, the September screening of this newsreel issue included a short speech by the dictator in Italian. Archival documents show that the English text of the speech in front of the Movietone cameras was a close translation of the Italian one recorded on May 6.<sup>31</sup> This makes this entire Fox Movietone film one of the first attempts at grappling with multilingual productions in cinema history. With the introduction of sound, in fact, film companies had to face the problem of language for exporting films in non-

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<sup>29</sup> Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario (*Spd Co 1922-1943*), container 221, file "P. S. E. Varia 148," letter from Alessandro Chiavolini to Edgar Kaw, May 5, 1927. Chiavolini was at the time Mussolini's secretary and Edgar Kaw was one of the Fox crew's members.

<sup>30</sup> Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario (*Spd Co 1922-1943*), container 221, file "P. S. E. Varia 148," letter from Alessandro Chiavolini to Edgar Kaw, May 5, 1927; memo "Discorso di S.E. per il 'Movietone' della Fox Film", August 16, 1927; and telegram from Chiavolini to J.P. Spanier, August 16, 1927.

<sup>31</sup> Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario (*Spd Co 1922-1943*), container 221, file "P. S. E. Varia 148," memo "Discorso di S.E. per il 'Movietone' della Fox Film", August 16, 1927

English speaking countries. At first, American majors dealt with this issue with subtitles and dubbing. However, because of the inadequacy of these techniques during the early years of sound cinema, mainly between 1929 and 1933, American film companies produced versions of their films in foreign languages. The production of these multilingual versions involved the reshooting of the entire film with actors who could speak fluently in the language of the target market.<sup>32</sup> The production of “The Man of the Hour” with Mussolini’s address both in Italian and English, probably for attracting Italian-American and American audiences alike, represents another important first and a further coupling of technological progress with the image and communicative skills of the Italian dictator.



Image 25: An image captured at Villa Torlonia, during the Fox Movietone production of the newsreel *The Man of the Hour*. [Courtesy of Archivio Centrale dello Stato, (Rome) Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario (*Spd Co 1922-1943*), container 221, file “P. S. E. Varia 148”].

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<sup>32</sup> Nataša Đurovičová considers the multilinguals as “fascinating traces of the complexity and turbulence brought about by the transition to sound” in Đurovičová, “Translating America: The Hollywood Multilinguals 1929-1933,” in *Sound Theory. Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 138-153. Quote on page 139. On multilingual productions, albeit only focusing on feature films, see also Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema’s Transition to Sound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), particularly 418-441. Gomery, “Economic Struggle and Hollywood Imperialism: Europe Converts to Sound”, in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elizabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 25-36; Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-1934* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), particularly 158-168.

Fox experimented with this multilingual practice for the production of Mussolini's newsreels even after 1927. For instance, in 1931, two Fox newsreels recorded Mussolini speaking in both English and French. In these two newsreels, titled *Mussolini Promises Peace*, the dictator addresses the audience to explain the Italian position regarding "the chief problem which interests the whole humankind, namely, peace or war."<sup>33</sup> In affirming Italy's willingness to pursue peace, the fascist dictator adopts a rhetorical strategy familiar to those who were used to reading his American press editorials. He declares that, as a former World War I soldier, he knows what a war would entail and the disaster that it would provoke in an entire generation of young people. In other words, in his address to the English- and French-speaking audiences, Mussolini reframed a public debate about his nation's future within a personal realm, starting from a familiar biographical episode.

Also significant for the discussion of Mussolini's connection to modernity, however, is the fact that he dedicates the first words of his statement to the technology allowing him to speak to the world: cinema, which he considers "the most magnificent discovery of modern times." Fox's synopsis sheet adds further details about this production.<sup>34</sup> *Mussolini Promises Peace* was issued in American theaters in January 10, 1931. The document also highlights that this Mussolini story was placed as the opening one, that is the most prominent one in Fox's newsreels tradition, in the January 10, 1931 six-stories release. The synopsis reads:

Fox Movietone News presents an exclusive interview with the world's most dramatic political figure. *Il Duce* later repeated this important statement in a world-wide radio broadcast. The dictator speaks in unfamiliar English, which he

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<sup>33</sup> *Mussolini Promises Peace* (New York: Fox, Jan. 10, 1931). Preserved at the University of South Carolina, Moving Image Research Collections, Fox Movietone News Collection.

<sup>34</sup> University of South Carolina, Moving Image Research Collections, Fox Movietone News Collection, Synopsis Sheets, Vol. 4, Release #32.

only recently attempted to perfect. The scene is Mussolini's sanctum in the Palazzo Venezia, Rome.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of this Fox newsreel, because of its exclusivity and for the high profile of the leader depicted, this description reiterates Mussolini's preference for cinema, considered in its technological primacy. By stressing that the dictator recorded a radio broadcast only after the recording of the video, Fox puts Mussolini in a close relationship with the most modern available technology, sound cinema, to the detriment of the radio, considered already a more obsolete means of communications.



Image 26: Benito Mussolini delivering his peace address for the Fox newsreel *Mussolini Promises Peace* (10 Jan. 1931). [Courtesy of the University of South Carolina's Moving Image Research Collections, Fox Movietone News Collection].

With this newsreel, Fox gave Mussolini the opportunity to present himself as a modern statesman. Although speaking in “unfamiliar” English, Mussolini demonstrates that he possesses

all the qualities of a credible world leader. Standing behind his desk in his studio in Rome, he performs competence, experience, engagement with modernity, and charisma with his calm demeanor and lack of hand gestures. This image, very different from that of the frenzied orator speaking in front of massive crowds, is much closer to the picture emerging from the lines of Mussolini's press editorials and leaves the audience with the impression of the Duce as a diplomat and a fundamental player in world politics.

### **Mussolini as a Celebrity in American Newsreels**

In the 1927 Fox sound newsreel *The Man of the Hour* described above, Mussolini's upper body takes up most of the screen and he appears larger than life (images 4.7). By capturing Mussolini's image alone and, in particular, images of his face, which by the mid-20s was an essential body part for the establishment of stardom status, American newsreels companies such as Fox and Hearst elevated the Fascist leader to the rank of a celebrity for American audiences.<sup>35</sup> The dictator's stardom was based on the enchanting narration of his physical strength, directness, and effective mastery over modernity creating a new kind of public icon in both printed and visual media. Those characteristics were often alternated with more intimate details about his persona, as the 1926 Hearst newsreel *Mussolini Smiles!*, with the dictator's smile for Hearst's camera, exemplifies. Newsreel stories and media interest in Mussolini's family, including his young children and his older daughter Edda, further accrued celebrity status for *Il Duce*.

The very brief Hearst newsreel entitled *Mussolini Smiles!* demonstrates how news media showed an early interest in *Il Duce* as a show business personality rather than as a dictator or even a political figure. In this newsreel, which ran about 50 seconds and was released on red-tinted film in addition to the more usual black and white version, images of Mussolini are

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<sup>35</sup> I have discussed the importance of the "face" in establishing celebrity status in the first chapter. See in particular pages 23-27.

interspersed with that of the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele III as they both attend an unspecified official ceremony.

This silent newsreel shows how Mussolini’s representation catalyzed his celebrity status in the United States. One of the first striking elements of *Mussolini Smiles!*, when examining the caption introducing it and its title, is that, once again, the political element is subdued, if not absent. The Fascist dictator is identified by his last name or referred to as “Italy’s strong man.”



Image 27: Captions and images of Benito Mussolini in the 1926 Hearst silent newsreel *Mussolini Smiles!* [Courtesy of UCLA’s Film & Television Archive, “Hearst Metrotone News, Inc.”].

King Vittorio Emanuele III, indicated only as King Victor Emmanuel in the intertitle, is present as well, but we see him only as one person in a crowd in the long shots; his role, as the intertitle informs us, is that of a jokester. The audience is unaware of the institutional or political circumstances leading to the gathering; the kernel of the news story, along with his strength in “crushing” assassination plots, is Mussolini’s smile.<sup>36</sup> This juxtaposition of the “smile” with his

<sup>36</sup> Mussolini escaped three assassination attempts in 1926. On April 7, an Irish woman, Violet Gibson shot at the dictator, hitting his nose. On September 11, then, the Italian anarchist Gino Lcetti threw a bomb at Mussolini’s car in Rome. Finally, on October 31, the 15-year-old Anteo Zamboni attempted to shoot Mussolini in Bologna. It is unclear to which of these assassination attempts the Hearst newsreel is referring.



overcoming of an assassination plan doubly emphasizes the dictator's strength. Mussolini is shown as he smiles in the face of adversity, thus, the newsreel represents him as larger than life.

Mussolini's presence dominates the screen. He is the focus of the two close-up shots and is at the center of the two medium shots as well. The way these two sets of shots are intercut in this newsreel and the intertitle's attention-grabbing text contribute to the creation of a story that manipulates the facts and the chronological linearity of the ceremony that the two political figures are attending, in order to bring the shot of a smiling Mussolini to the fore, connecting it to the powerful "crushing" of the rivals plotting to eliminate him. This sequence makes him the only newsworthy element.

Such personal interest in the Fascist leader was recurrent throughout the years and even invested the rest of the Mussolini family. The 1930 Hearst newsreel *Mussolini Sees His Daughter Wed* is exemplary when considering the attention for the dictator's family.<sup>37</sup> The wedding between Galeazzo Ciano and Edda Mussolini, the oldest of the five children of Mussolini and Rachele Guidi, was celebrated in Rome on April 24, 1930. Fox and Hearst newsreels companies reported the event presumably along with numerous others. Ciano was a fervent Fascist and had participated in the 1922 March on Rome along with his father, Count Costanzo Ciano, Admiral of the Italian Royal Navy and World War I veteran hero. He later became the Minister of Popular Culture in 1935, but eventually was processed and executed as a traitor of Mussolini and the Fascist party in 1944.

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<sup>37</sup> *Mussolini Sees His Daughter Wed* (New York: Hearst, May 7, 1930). Preserved at the UCLA's Film & Television Archive, "Hearst Metrotone News, Inc." The images of this newsreels and of the outtakes are available also at the University of South Carolina, Moving Image Research Collections, Fox Movietone News Collection.



Image 28 Newsreels cameramen waiting for the bride and groom. Outtake of *Mussolini Sees His Daughter Wed* (May 7, 1930). [Courtesy of the University of South Carolina's Moving Image Research Collections, Fox Movietone News Collection].

In showing the event, the dictator appears for the first time sidelined, but only to emphasize the presence of his daughter and his family. The cameras attempt to capture Mussolini in an intimate family setting and to show heartwarming details. For instance, the dictator listens to a group of Rome school children singing, while standing with his daughter and son-in-law on one of Villa Torlonia's balconies. The camera captures him lovingly reaching for his daughter's hand and shows a subsequent complicit smile between the two.



Image 29: Benito Mussolini holding his daughter Edda's hand. *Mussolini Sees His Daughter Wed* (May 7, 1930). [Courtesy of the University of South Carolina's Moving Image Research Collections, Fox Movietone News Collection].

Bordering the style of a gossip column, images and captions of this newsreel highlight the presence of other members of Mussolini's family. In particular, the dictator's wife, Rachele Guidi, her husband, and children Vittorio and Bruno, are portrayed while listening to the final part of the Roman students' concert. The intertitle stresses how Mrs. Mussolini's appearance was

noteworthy since she had never been captured in a newsreel before. American newsreels made Mussolini's private life public, revealed his emotions, and recorded his expressions while, as we will see, left out of the picture more complex political and social interpretations.



Image 30



Image 31

Images from *Mussolini Sees His Daughter Wed* (May 7, 1930): Hearst intertitle emphasizing the presence of Rachele Mussolini (image 30) [Courtesy of UCLA's Film & Television Archive, "Hearst Metrotone News, Inc."]; Rachele Mussolini (on the left), Bruno Mussolini, and *Il Duce* (image 31) [Courtesy of the University of South Carolina's Moving Image Research Collections, Fox Movietone News Collection].

### ***Il Duce* Reviews the Italian Bodies**

In addition to showcasing Mussolini's addresses and meetings with international political figures, and highlighting the major events in his personal life, American newsreels broadcasted the Fascist interest for the bodies and health of Italians. Consistent with the dictator's journalistic and biographical writings, a dozen of Fox and Hearst newsreels between 1928 and 1934 depict Mussolini as he was involved in observing Italians, in general young citizens, as they were publicly exercising and getting fit, following the Fascist plan to make the body of the entire nation a more powerful one. For instance, a 1930 Hearst sound newsreel showed Mussolini as he reviewed young girls in Milan performing "mass athletic exercises," as the opening caption specifies. The newsreel *Il Duce Looks Over Italian Children* edits together medium shots of Mussolini, first arriving at the Arena in Milan, then watching the girls' exercises, and finally applauding, with long shots of the young girls rhythmically executing simple, yet carefully

choreographed, gymnastic movements.<sup>38</sup> Mussolini did not speak at this event, but the title and the images suggest his role as a benevolent, paternal guide to the Italian youth. Two young children are part of the frame with *Il Duce* as he watches the spectacular exercises, suggesting that the atmosphere of the event was friendly. Mussolini's gaze downward toward the large crowd of exercising girls emphasizes his leadership role.



Image 32



Image 33



Image 34

Images from *Il Duce Looks Over Italian Children* (May 23, 1930) [Courtesy of the University of South Carolina's Moving Image Research Collections, Fox Movietone News Collection]: Opening title (image 32), young girls performing exercises (image 33), and Benito Mussolini watching and applauding (image 34).

A similar patronizing gaze is present in a 1929 Hearst silent newsreel on a related topic, *Fascist Health Builders Reviewed by Mussolini*, in which the dictator watches the physical exercises of a group of gymnastics teachers.<sup>39</sup> In this newsreel, the expression of the dictator, whose face is captured in two close-up shots, appears more serious. He is intent on examining the moves of the physical instructor, who will then teach young Italians how to keep fit and become strong and resilient individuals.

<sup>38</sup> *Il Duce Looks Over Italian Children* (New York: Hearst, May 23, 1930). Preserved at the University of South Carolina, Moving Image Research Collections, Fox Movietone News Collection. It appears that Hearst used filmed material acquired from Fox for this newsreel story.

<sup>39</sup> *Fascist Health Builders Reviewed by Mussolini* (New York: Hearst, July 19, 1929). Preserved at the UCLA's Film & Television Archive, "Hearst Metrophone News, Inc."



Image 35



Image 36

Images from *Fascist Health Builders Reviewed by Mussolini* (July 19, 1929) [Courtesy of the UCLA's Film & Television Archive, "Hearst Metrotone News, Inc."]: Mussolini's close-up (image 35), gymnastic teachers performing push-up exercises (image 36).

In his American self-narration, Mussolini always described himself as being in full control of his own body and corporeal needs. In these two newsreels, he is depicted while overseeing the reshaping of the country. The American media of the time did not seem interested in raising concerns for a future generation of physically mighty Italians, disregarding the Fascist political objective of creating a strong army for its future imperial and belligerent plans. On the contrary, an entertainment quality characterizes the second newsreel in particular, with captions that emphasize, with comic-like language, the gymnastic teachers' exploits. While the Italians were working to form a cooperative national body that would soon move against the interest of the Western world, the attention of United States audiences was diverted to a deceptively entertaining story about the man who, alone, was able to successfully remake Italy.



Image 37

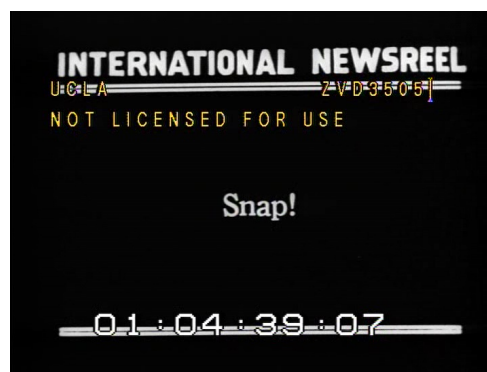


Image 38

Images from *Fascist Health Builders Reviewed by Mussolini* (July 19, 1929) [Courtesy of the UCLA's Film & Television Archive, "Hearst Metrotone News, Inc."]: Gymnastic teachers fencing (image 37), a Hearst newsreel's colorful caption (image 38). A few seconds later, another caption reads "Verve!".

With a similar attention to the entertaining quality of the events portrayed and a similar disregard for the menacing attitude of large groups of young Italians, another 1931 Hearst sound newsreel shows the Fascist *Avanguardisti*, young men between 14 and 18 years of age, engaged in war simulations during the third annual “Dux Camp,” which took place on September 6, 1931. The newsreel *Youth of Italy Thrills Mussolini*, a title that already frames the dictator as the referent of the actions depicted and the Italians as performers for his gaze, opens with the sound of a rifle firing over the long shots of a crowd of young people watching the spectacular “war game,” as the opening title describes it.<sup>40</sup> The next shot is centered on the dictator, who, evidently pleased, witnesses the simulation along with other dignitaries. After three long shots showing the *Avanguardisti* engaged in their battle simulations, the dictator, centered in the middle of a long shot, gives a short speech: “(...) come dei vecchi soldati vittoriosi. Oggi avete offerto a Roma un grandioso spettacolo di coesione, di forza e di disciplina. Siate sempre orgogliosissimi di portare la gloriosa camicia nera. Lo sarete voi?” [(...) as old victorious soldiers. Today, you have offered to Rome a great spectacle of cohesion, strength, and discipline. You must always be extremely proud to wear the glorious black shirt. Will you be?].<sup>41</sup> To Mussolini’s question, as was customary, the crowd responded with a convinced “Yes!” The Hearst commentator, speaking for the first time in this newsreel, intervenes immediately following the young Italians’ affirmative answer. He does not attempt to translate Mussolini’s speech, nor does he mention the young age of the teenagers involved in the war exercises portrayed. Without neither translations nor explicative captions, American audiences are left in a willful ignorance with regards to the militant speech, which is thus reduced to incomprehensible

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<sup>40</sup>*Youth of Italy Thrills Mussolini* (New York: Hearst, September 19, 1931). Preserved at the UCLA’s Film & Television Archive, “Hearst Metrotone News, Inc.”

<sup>41</sup> The speech in its entirety is reported in Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel, 44 vols. (Florence: La Fenice, 1951-1980), XXV:32. Translation into English is mine.

noise. Instead, the Hearst commentator states enthusiastically: “That means Signor Mussolini liked it!” and then continues “And now the athletic division is going to close the show. They’ve got a snappy director who knows how to make them jump, especially when *Il Duce* is looking on! Get an ear full of this, it’s good!” After another long shot of Mussolini applauding, which is synchronized with the commentator’s uttering of the words “*Il Duce*,” the newsreel concludes with a panning shot of the *Avanguardisti* choreographically executing their “snappy” instructor’s military commands.<sup>42</sup>



Image 39

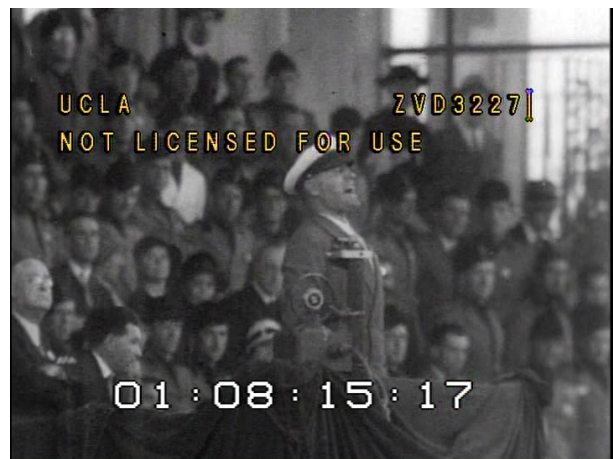


Image 40

Images from *Youth of Italy Thrills Mussolini* (September 19, 1931) [Courtesy of the UCLA’s Film & Television Archive, “Hearst Metrotone News, Inc.”]: Italian teenagers practicing their shooting skills (image 39) and Mussolini pronouncing a speech (image 40).

Thus the American media not only failed to alert viewers of the potential danger that the Fascist rule represented, but also to simply inform the American audience of what Italy had become in the hands of Mussolini. As these scenes show, “news” cameras were interested in the images of the violent Italian dictator engaged in reshaping a stronger nation merely for their entertainment value. In the process of editing them for American audiences, they emptied them of their overt political content. In a narrative context in which Mussolini was presented as an effective leader and individual, able to offer tips for achieving perfect efficiency through

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<sup>42</sup> The instructor is heard saying: “Cambio! In guardia! Con fronte al comando, sull’attenti!”

corporeal discipline, the newsreels favored a distorted, yet positive, attitude toward Fascist dictatorship. In particular, the interest of the newsreels companies and, more generally, American media centered solely on Mussolini as a main character, disregarding socio-political circumstances, and effectively silencing voices of dissent, or leaving them out of the frame.

## Conclusion



Image 41 Benito Mussolini and his children Vittorio (with his back to the camera) and Bruno (facing the camera between the two) in an outtake of *Mussolini Sees His Daughter Wed* (May 7, 1930) [Courtesy of the University of South Carolina's Moving Image Research Collections, Fox Movietone News Collection].

A Fox outtake from the newsreel focused on Edda Mussolini's wedding shows her father and two of her brothers talking to the cameramen waiting outside of Villa Torlonia (image 4.23). The dictator and his children appear at ease with the camera operators, who even invite Bruno and Vittorio to say a few words. By 1930, Mussolini was certainly well aware of the power of filmed media propaganda and took personal care in negotiating the ways in which he was portrayed. While the American newsreels companies were eager to have Mussolini-focused news stories in their programs for their own commercial goals, the dictator was more than happy to offer new images of himself and welcomed the possibility to manipulate public opinion in the United States to his advantage. The American audience of the time was likely unaware of the



role that the media played in building the character of the self-made leader. Behind the façade of the powerful man who had risen from a humble family to the rank of Prime Minister and major player in international politics, there was a coordinated effort to create a media celebrity, with a complete disregard for his political agenda.

The documented lengthy negotiation preceding the production of the 1927 Fox newsreel *The Man of the Hour* offers further proof of the willingness of both Mussolini and the media companies to collaborate in the construction of a personage. With the help of intermediaries such as the former American ambassador Child and ghostwriters like Margherita Sarfatti, the media narration of the dictator as a self-made man was a well-constructed news story. In my conclusion, I will hypothesize some reasons for the American media interest in the Fascist dictator that go beyond the immediate values of the commercialization of his character.

## **Conclusion**

### **A Looming Financial World**

In order to understand the media success of Benito Mussolini in the United States, I contend that during the mid-1920s and until the mid-1930s, American media made the Italian dictator into a representative character. His pervasive presence in American popular culture was strategically constructed to mirror what Americans admired and aspired to in terms of charismatic personality. Mussolini became a symbol of exceptional achievement through the representation of exceptional personal qualities. He came to mediate values and specific personality characteristics through the media biographical accounts and the celebrations of his persona. While commercial considerations can explain in part the protraction of such univocal, cohesive representation, the question remains as to why American media decided to ignore a dark side of Fascism that, in these very years, should have been evident to many in the United States. Americans had the instruments and information to recognize the impossibility of democratic ideals in Italy, where there was no opposition to the ruling party and where power lay in the hands of a dictator who, in 1925, had claimed full responsibility for the killing of his political opponent Giacomo Matteotti. In Italy, the continuous hampering of rights such as freedom of speech and of the press was becoming the norm, but ironically, in the United States, where these freedoms were held dear, an image of Mussolini persisted that closely resembled the

propagandistic celebrations the dictator favored. As seen in the previous chapters, some of the American media representations of Mussolini had already offered ample details of his authoritarian and antidemocratic views. Yet, it was only in 1935 that Mussolini published his last editorial in the Hearst press and that American newsreels started showing *Il Duce* in a different light as they followed closely the Fascist military operations in Eastern Africa. The war in Ethiopia of 1935-36, which clearly revealed the aggressive side of Mussolini's dictatorship and went against the existing peace treaties, determined a rupture in the positive representation of Mussolini. It also crucially interrupted a series of financial operations that had been ongoing since the inception of the Fascist government. My research suggests that in order to understand the full scope of Mussolini's presence in American media, one must examine this net of private investments in Fascist Italy and also explore the international nexus of media and financial interests that existed at the time.

The media corporation of William R. Hearst, a magnate deeply involved in the American financial world, and the one that published Mussolini's editorials and produced sympathetic newsreels, had close ties to the House of Morgan and to the Italian-American banker Amadeo P. Giannini. The Fox Movietone company, which also produced numerous newsreels exalting Mussolini's leadership, had, on the other hand, the financial backing of John D. Rockefeller's banking and industrial concerns. The involvement of such financial giants in the media groups that, as I have highlighted in the previous chapters, portrayed Mussolini in a favorable light and allowed him to become a celebrity to be admired, is a troubling aspect worthy of further examination. That is especially true because these same financial players had an important role in the rise of Mussolini in Italy and in the success of the Fascist party.

As Gian Giacomo Migone has already documented in his groundbreaking *Gli Stati Uniti e il Fascismo* (1980), the House of Morgan, particularly through its banker Thomas W. Lamont and along with other American banking giants, played a crucial role in financing Mussolini and the Fascist Party.<sup>1</sup> In July 1925, Italy agreed to repay to the United States its World War I war debts, totaling over \$2 billion, in 62 annual installments. This settlement was very advantageous to the Fascist regime since it represented the payment of only 20% of the actual debt. A month later, the House of Morgan, who had counseled the Italian government throughout the difficult negotiations on the war debt, offered to lend the Italian government \$100 million, which would be used to stabilize the Italian currency. For this initial loan, J. P. Morgan acted as the main referent of a group of important American banks. Among those, there was also the National City Bank, in which Amadeo P. Giannini was involved. The loan was issued in the form of bonds to be bought by the American people in November 1925. This \$100 million loan and subsequent bonds on the American market represent only the first of a long series of financial investments that J. P. Morgan directed to the Fascist government and to private Italian companies. Among those companies, for instance, FIAT received a loan for \$10 million from the House of Morgan and, again, National City Bank. Furthermore, proving the financial interests that the J. P. Morgan's group had in the Turin-based car company, Giovanni Fummi, the Italian representative for the House of Morgan, became a member of the Board of Directors of FIAT in 1926. The House of Morgan also had, until the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia in the mid-1930s, open credit lines for short-term borrowing in favor of major Italian banks, such as the Credito Italiano.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a more extensive description of the American involvement in the economy of Fascist Italy, see Gian Giacomo Migone, *Gli Stati Uniti e il Fascismo. Alle origini dell'egemonia americana in Italia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1980), 99-199. This volume was recently translated in English by Molly Tambor: *The United States and Fascist Italy: The Rise of American Finance in Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> For details on the House of Morgan's investments in Italy and in Europe, see Martin Horn, "J. P. Morgan & Co., the House of Morgan and Europe: 1933-1939," *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 4 (Nov. 2005), 519-538.

While the role of J. P. Morgan in the rise of the Fascist dictatorship has received some scholarly attention, little is known about Giannini, a fervent supporter of Mussolini and founder of the Californian Bank of Italy.<sup>3</sup> A son of Italian immigrants from Genova, Giannini became wealthy in San Francisco as a produce broker. In 1904 he founded the Bank of Italy with the intention of extending financial services to the mid and lower classes, thus, creating a revolutionary path in the banking system. By 1905, through the offer of saving accounts and loans, in particular to hardworking Italian immigrants, the Bank of Italy's deposits grew over \$700,000. By 1926, the Bank of Italy had branches in ninety-eight American cities and four Italian ones. Now, the clients of the Italian American banker were not only the Italian immigrants who wished to send money to their families in Italy, but also members of other immigrant communities and American citizens. In 1928, Giannini approached the head of the Los Angeles-based Bank of America and the two banks merged, keeping the name of the latter.

Giannini was intensely involved in financing William Randolph Hearst and his media empire. The Bank of Italy first, and the Bank of America later, in fact, were part of the Hearst holding company. The Bank of America was the financial backer of the Hearst Corporation and Metro-Goldwin-Mayer and, for instance, in 1939, Giannini saved the Hearst magazines from bankruptcy by offering an \$8 million loan.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, at the head of the financial pyramid of the Hearst Corporation, there was the New York National City Bank, whose largest stakeholder with

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<sup>3</sup> John P. Diggins notes that Giannini's Bank of America placed ads in the pro-Fascist Italian-American newspaper *L'Italia* in San Francisco. See John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism. The View from America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 83.

<sup>4</sup> The information and figures are contained in both Ferdinand Lundberg's and Louis Pizzitola's biographies of Hearst: Ferdinand Lundberg, *Imperial Hearst: A Social Biography* (New York: Equinox Cooperative Press, 1936); Louis Pizzitola, *Hearst over Hollywood: Power, Passion, and Propaganda in the Movies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

10% was Giannini himself.<sup>5</sup> Ferdinand Lundberg highlights in his *Imperial Hearst* that by the early 1930s:

The financial condition of the publishing properties has become so impaired that large bank loans have been necessary. Although nominally controlled by Hearst, the Hearst publishing properties are actually controlled through the instrumentality of these bank loans by a Wall Street syndicate headed by the National City Bank of New York.<sup>6</sup>

National City Bank and Bank of America both had a significant amount of financial control over the Hearst Press. As I have described in chapter three, it is through the Hearst newspapers in particular that Mussolini was able to spread his messages in the United States through editorials that must have been welcomed by the pro-fascist Amadeo P. Giannini.

The Californian banker's brother Attilio H. Giannini was also involved in finances as he managed the East River National Bank in New York. The younger Attilio was also in charge of the contacts with the movie industry. In 1931, for instance, the Giannini brothers loaned \$1 million to Sam Goldwin of M. G. M. for *The Kid from Spain* (1932) and \$500,000 to Harry Cohn of Columbia for *American Madness* (1932) directed by Frank Capra. In 1934, Attilio Giannini became a member of the board of trustees of Columbia Pictures, which had just successfully produced and distributed the biopic *Mussolini Speaks!* (1933).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The links between Hearst and the National City Bank preceded Giannini's involvement. The National City Bank, in fact, was behind the \$7,500,000 transaction between George Hearst (father of William) and the Rothschild family for the sale of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company stocks at the beginning of the 1900. At that point, the National City Bank became the main lender of the Hearst family. While in the 1930s Giannini was the major stakeholder of the National City Bank, it is important to note that the House of Morgan was the second stakeholder of this financial institution.

<sup>6</sup> Lundberg, *Imperial Hearst*, 310.

<sup>7</sup> *Mussolini Speaks!* (1933) is preserved at the UCLA's Film & Television Archive. Columbia produced it by reediting Istituto Luce's newsreels and adding transitions and the enthusiastic commentary of Lowell Thomas, already a familiar voice to the American audience as he was a radio speaker for NBC and a narrator for the Fox Movietone's newsreels. While some more research is necessary on this rare film, especially considering its Italian

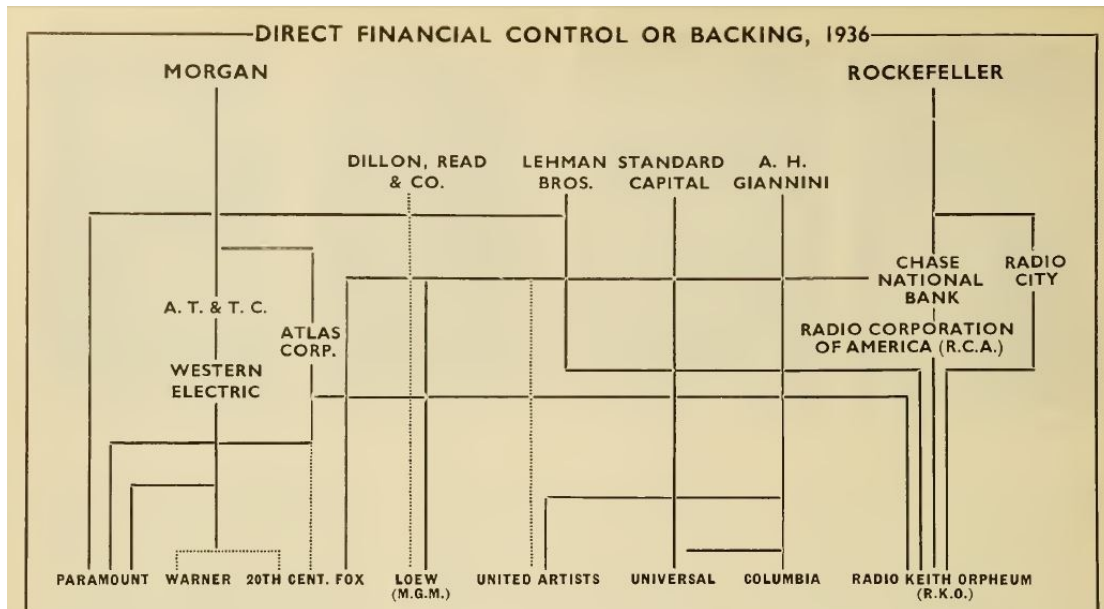


Figure 42: First chart reproduced from *World Film News and Television Progress* (Nov. 1936): 26.

The picture of this financial and media interest in Mussolini would not be complete without a few details about the ownership and the role that Wall Street groups played in the American film industry. In 1936, the British journal *World Film News and Television Progress* conducted a study of the financial forces governing American media.<sup>8</sup> The researchers of the *World Film News* “Film Council” unit looked at the processes behind the production, distribution, and exhibition networks of the eight major American film companies, specifically, Columbia, Fox, Loew-M.G.M., Paramount, R.K.O., United Artists, Universal, and Warner.<sup>9</sup> The investigation highlighted a double dependency of the film industry on the financial world. First, starting from the early 1920s, Wall Street banking firms started backing the film industry directly and through the control of a large portion of film companies’ stocks and securities. Second, particularly after the transition to sound, the major Wall Street financial institutions had a

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filiation and the role the Gianninis played in its production, some information can be found in Steven Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922-1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 133-140.

<sup>8</sup> “Whose Money Makes Movies?,” *World Film News and Television Progress* I, no. 8 (November 1936), 24-27.

<sup>9</sup> The “Film Council” was described in the September 1936 issue as “a research group which proposes to study various aspects of the film industry and, from time to time, publish its findings.” The documentary filmmaker Stuart Legg was listed as the secretary of the group. “The Film Council,” *World Film News and Television Progress* I, no. 6 (September 1936), 4.

monopoly on the equipment necessary for film production. Relevant to my study of the American newsreels field is the fact that the major film companies and distributors controlled all five newsreels groups.

Morgan occupied a major position in this connection between the financial world and the film companies. In the mid 1930s, through the investment trust Atlas Corporation (formed in 1924), Morgan owned and handled significant interests in four film companies: Fox, Paramount, R.K.O, and Warner Brothers. Morgan's group also had direct investments in these companies, excluding R.K.O., through the communication conglomerate A.T.&T., which it organized in 1906 and, in the mid 1930s, continued to manage through control of fourteen of its nineteen directors.

With the transition to sound, then, the control that Morgan exerted indirectly over the film industry became even more remarkable. Two competing manufacturing groups led to the emergence of sound technology between 1927 and 1928: the Electrical Research Products Inc. (ERPI) and the Radio Corporation of America (RCA). These two companies were subsidiaries respectively of Western Electric and of General Electric Co., that is, two of the largest electrical manufacturers in the world. Both Western Electric and General Electric Co. were under direct control of Morgan. By the 1930s, ERPI and RCA provided sound equipment to all eight film majors and had license agreements all over the world, allowing Morgan to hold a dominant position in the finances of the film industry.



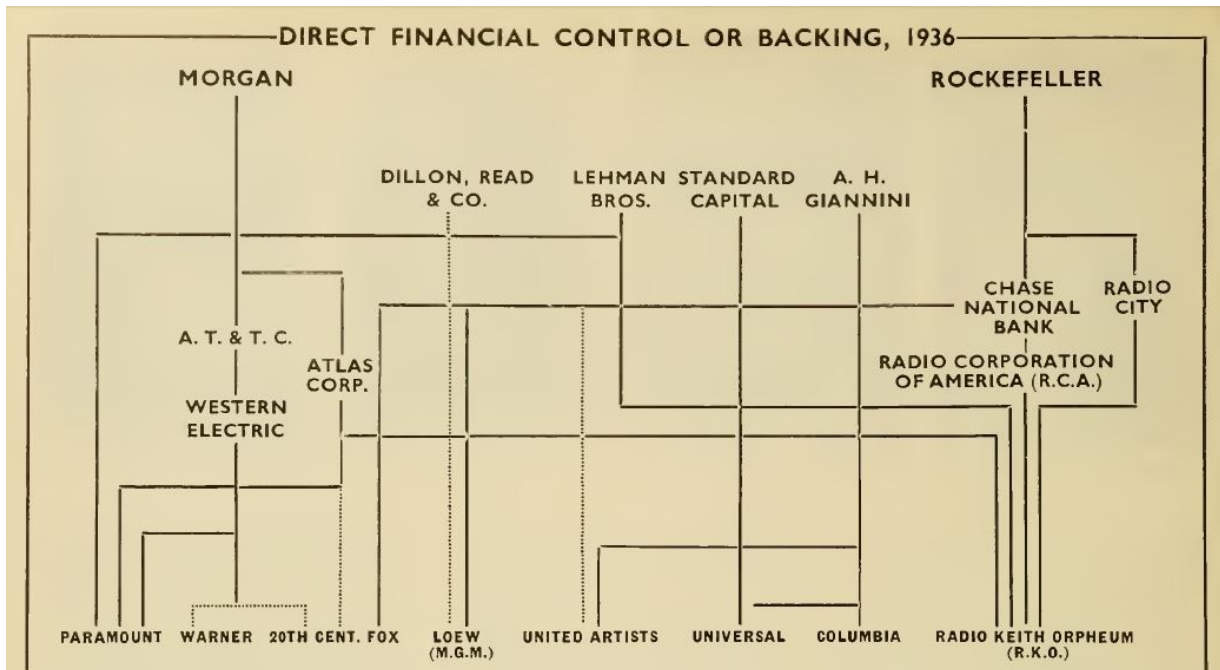


Image 43: Second chart reproduced from *World Film News and Television Progress* (Nov. 1936): 26.

The *World Film News* study highlights not only Morgan’s stronghold on film companies, but also the prominent position that John D. Rockefeller and his financial groups occupied. Rockefeller, as Morgan, had interest in Fascist Italy between the 1920s and 1930s. The investments in Italy of the American oil companies, the field in which Rockefeller’s Standard Oil was leader, amounted to \$25.9 million in 1929. This figure situates Italy as the second most important European country after Germany for oil-related investments.<sup>10</sup> Most of those interests were connected to the Società Italo-Americana del Petrolio, a company that Standard Oil created in Italy in 1891 and that in the mid-1920s controlled eighty percent of the Italian oil market.<sup>11</sup> Rockefeller’s direct control over the film industry was exercised through the Chase National Bank, which, for instance, held the majority of Fox’s and R.K.O.’s stock holdings. Rockefeller

<sup>10</sup> For more details about the oil companies’ investments in Europe, see Cleona Lewis, *America’s Stake in International Investments* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1938), 186-190.

<sup>11</sup> For information regarding the Società Italo-Americana del Petrolio, but particularly on the oil-related Sinclair scandal leading to the assassination of Giacomo Matteotti in 1924, see Mauro Canali, “The Matteotti Murder and the Origins of Mussolini’s Totalitarian Fascist Regime in Italy,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 14, no. 2 (2009): 143-167.

also had a prominent position in the RCA, which had Columbia, Fox, R.K.O., and Warner as its licensees.

It is against this complex backdrop of media and financial correlations, and given Wall Street interests in Fascist Italy, that the representation of Mussolini in American media becomes troubling. While lending money to the Italian government and issuing Italian bonds on the American financial market, financial powers such as the House of Morgan held a stronghold over the media industry. It is possible to suggest that they also had an interest in creating popular consensus of opinion in America regarding the Italian dictator through the media they controlled.

The portrayal of Mussolini as a positive leader, similar to the representation of these same financial giants themselves, corresponded to what Americans had come to like and to be drawn to. In a way, while boosting the dictator's ego and financing his rise, the American financial world was also taking advantage of Mussolini, at the expenses of Italians, by commercializing him as corporations could do with a good product. Would history have been different if the American media had alerted the United States audience of the perils of the Fascist dictatorship? It is a question that will never be answered. It is doubtless, however, that the positive image of Mussolini in the United States did not help prevent or foresee the disastrous consequences of the Fascist dictatorship in Italy.

## Appendix A

### List of Benito Mussolini's editorials in the American press

"Fascist Revolution Real, Mussolini Writes; Perils Overcome in Five Years." *The Washington Post*, October 23, 1927, 1.

"'United States Economic Moral Leader of World' – Mussolini." *Detroit Times*, November 11, 1928, 1, 5.

"Coolidge is Right, Says Duce." *Detroit Times*, December 2, 1928, 1, 4.

"Benito Mussolini Outlines World Outlook for 1929." *The San Antonio Light*, January 6, 1929, 2.

"Tradition Bests Progress in Amanullah's Banishment." *The Galveston Daily News*, February 3, 1929, 11.

"Mussolini Says Vatican Treaty is World Blessing." *The Galveston Daily News*, March 3, 1929, 15.

"Fascism Given Voters Okeh." *The San Antonio Light*, April 14, 1929, 6.

"Mussolini Speaks of Peace." *The San Antonio Light*, May 5, 1929, 4.

"Mussolini Abandons Construction of Dirigibles in Italy." *The San Antonio Light*, June 2, 1929, 5.

"Mussolini Surveys American Tariff, Trade Situation." *The Galveston Daily News*, July 21, 1929, 7.

"Benito Mussolini Discusses Marathon of Talk at Geneva." *The San Antonio Light*, September 22, 1929, 6.

"Mussolini in Stresemann Tribute." *The San Antonio Light*, October 8, 1929, 8.

"Dictatorship Defended by Benito Mussolini." *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 1929, 7.

"Mussolini Explains Italy's Sea Power Needs." *The San Antonio Light*, December 15, 1929, 5.

“Mussolini Visions Terrors of New Wars.” *New York American*, February 2, 1930, 1, 2.

“Italy’s Seven Years of Fascism.” *The Washington Post*, March 2, 1930, 4.

“Mussolini Has No Fear of Far East Menace.” *The San Antonio Light*, May 4, 1930, 8.

“Mussolini: ‘Why I Am for Temperance Rather Than Prohibition’.” *New York American*, May 25, 1930, 1, 2.

“Mussolini Analyzes International Dissatisfactions.” *The Galveston Daily News*, June 22, 1930, 16.

“Mussolini: ‘Antarctic Claims by U.S. Raise New Sovereignty Issue’.” *New York American*, July 20, 1930, 1, 4.

“Mussolini Sees Fascism Spreading Throughout World in Various Forms Unlike His Creation.” *The San Antonio Light*, October 5, 1930, 1, 8.

“Says Mussolini, Woe to Any Nation That Tries to Embroil Italy in Conflict, Warns Duce.” *New York American*, November 9, 1930, 1, 4.

“Duce Views 1931 As Year of Recovery.” *The San Antonio Light*, January 11, 1931, 1, 15.

“Says Mussolini, Historic Feat Gives New Significance to Italy’s Air Progress.” *New York American*, January 25, 1931, 1, 4.

“Mussolini Sees Prosperity in Disarmament.” *Detroit Times*, February 22, 1931, 1, 2.

“Mussolini Voices Happiness Over Accord.” *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 1931, 2.

“Benito Mussolini Says: ‘Italian-French Naval Agreement Assures Peace in Europe and World Until 1936’.” *New York American*, March 22, 1931, 1, 2.

“Mussolini Sees Italy As Key to Customs Union.” *New York American*, April 19, 1931, 1, 4.

“Italy Solves One Problem.” *The San Antonio Light*, May 31, 1931, 4.

“Balance Of Power in Italy Insures Justice to Austro-German Union.” *The San Antonio Light*, June 28, 1931, 1, 4.

“Mussolini Hails Hoover Plan as Hope of Europe.” *The San Antonio Light*, July 12, 1931, 1, 10.

“World Must Disarm or Face Economic Ruin, Says Mussolini.” *The San Antonio Light*, August 23, 1931, 3.

“Duce Says British to Pass Crisis.” *The San Antonio Light*, October 4, 1931, 1, 10.

“Mussolini Points to 9 Years of Fascist Rule With Pride.” *The San Antonio Light*, November 15,

1931, 1, 4.

“Mussolini Sees U.S. as Leading Factor in Peace.” *The San Antonio Light*, November 22, 1931, 1, 10.

“World Is in Economic ‘State of War’, Says Mussolini; Asks Tariff Disarmament.” *New York American*, December 27, 1931, 4, 5.

“Stop Asking U.S. for Help Mussolini Advises Europe.” *The San Antonio Light*, January 31, 1932, 2, 6.

“World Trade Balance Must Be Restored to Aid Prosperity Revival, Says Mussolini.” *New York American*, February 14, 1932, 2, 4.

“Mussolini Sees Government Speeded Up by ‘Lame Duck’ Amendment to Constitution.” *New York American*, March 6, 1932, 2, 4.

“Disarmament Will Suffer from Far East Conflict.” *The San Antonio Light*, March 27, 1932, 2.

“Europe Must Unite to Avert Collapse of Danube Nations.” *The San Antonio Light*, April 24, 1932, 2.

“Mussolini Tells How Italy Is Helping Its Veterans.” *The San Antonio Light*, May 22, 1932, 3.

“Disarmament One Avenue to Restore World Balance.” *The San Antonio Light*, June 5, 1932, 2, 5, 6.

“Capitalism Blamed for Our Present Economic Collapse.” *The San Antonio Light*, June 26, 1932, 3, 6.

Mussolini Warns Of Danger If Geneva Action Is Lacking.” *The San Antonio Light*, July 17, 1932, 2.

“Fascist House-Cleaning Is Explained by Il Duce.” *The San Antonio Light*, August 7, 1932, 3, 6.

“Mussolini Sees Sick World on Way to Economic Recovery.” *New York American*, August 21, 1932, 1, 10.

“Germany Must Have Equality in Arms, Says Mussolini.” *The San Antonio Light*, September 18, 1932, 3.

“Mussolini Explains Fascist Theories of Government.” *The San Antonio Light*, October 2, 1932, 3.

Social Doctrine of Fascism Explained.” *The San Antonio Light*, October 16, 1932, 2, 6.

“Highest-Placed Criminals Must Be Mercilessly Suppressed, Says Mussolini.” *New York American*, October 23, 1932, 3.

“Ten Years of Fascism Has Welded Italy.” *The San Antonio Light*, November 20, 1932, 2.

“Mussolini Rips Debt Dodging Plea; Admits Depression Worst Here.” *Detroit Times*, December 4, 1932, 1, 13.

“Mussolini Urges Legalizing of Wine to Solve Temperance Problem in U.S.” *Detroit Times*, December 25, 1932, 2.

“Mussolini Sees Signs of Recovery With 1933 as the Decisive Year.” *New York American*, January 1, 1933, 3.

“Mussolini Sees Monument Destruction by Jugo-Slavia an Insult to Italy.” *New York American*, January 15, 1933, 3.

“Technocracy Will Not Work Benito Mussolini Declares.” *The San Antonio Light*, February 12, 1933, 2.

“Time for Action Arrives in World Affairs, Says Duce.” *The San Antonio Light*, March 12, 1933, 2.

“Mussolini Firm Against Giving Vote to Women.” *The San Antonio Light*, March 19, 1933, 1, 4.

“Mussolini Insists Treaty Must Be Changed.” *New York American*, April 9, 1933, 1, 10.

“Statemen Must Rule, Not Masses, Says Mussolini.” *The San Antonio Light*, May 7, 1933, 3.

“Fascism, Revolution of Youth.” *The San Antonio Light*, May 28, 1933, 4.

“Mussolini Outlines His Plan for Back to Soil Movement.” June 18, 1933, 6.

“Roosevelt System Moves in Atmosphere Similar to That of Fascism – Mussolini.” *New York American*, July 2, 1933, 13.

“Put Embargo on Parleys or Prestige of Nations Will Fail, Says Mussolini.” *New York American*, July 23, 1933, 12.

“Sunset of Old Civilization Now at Hand, Says Mussolini.” *The San Antonio Light*, August 20, 1933, 4.

“Mussolini Sees New Italo-Soviet Pact Hastening End of Russia’s Isolation.” *New York American*, September 24, 1933, 15.

“Duce Plans Economic Rule of Italy Through 40 Guilds.” *New York American*, November 5, 1933, 1, 6.

“Prohibition Repeal Shows How Slowly Democracy Moves, Declares Mussolini.” *New York American*, November 26, 1933, 2.

“European Leaders Clash on Program to Reform League. Must Be Reorganized or Perish, Asserts Mussolini.” *San Antonio Light*, December 24, 1933, 1, 4.

“Mussolini Builds Wheat Crop to Break All Time Record.” *San Antonio Light*, December 24, 1933, 2.

“Mussolini Sees U.S. Involved As Russia and Japan Face Hostilities in the Far East.” *New York American*, January 14, 1934, 1, 10.

“Mussolini Sees Roosevelt Inspired by Spirit of the American Pioneer.” *New York American*, February 11, 1934, 2.

“U.S. Abandons Individual Enterprise, Adopts State Control, Says Mussolini.” *New York American*, March 11, 1934, 3.

“Mussolini Warns the World of Arm Race and New War; Says Europe’s Fate Is at Stake.” *New York American*, May 13, 1934, 1, 14.

“Italy Curbed Crime When It Throttled ‘Local Politicians,’ Declares Mussolini.” *New York American*, June 3, 1934, 3.

“Mussolini Sees 40-Hour Week Solving World-Wide Unemployment Problem.” *New York American*, July 15, 1934, 2.

“Revision of Peace Treaties Is Vital to Prevent War in Europe – Mussolini.” *New York American*, July 29, 1934, 3.

“Mussolini Warns Falling Birthrate Is Leading White Race to Disaster.” *New York American*, August 26, 1934, 12.

“Italy Glories in Militarism, Says Mussolini; ‘Pacifists the Worst Enemies Of Peace’.” *New York American*, September 30, 1934, 3.

“Mussolini Envisions World on Threshold of an Advanced and Better Civilization.” *New York American*, October 28, 1934, 3.

“Pact of Rome Ends Long Controversy Between Italy and France, Says Duce.” *New York American*, May 5, 1935, 2.

## Appendix B

### List of Fox and Hearst newsreels on Benito Mussolini (1923-1936)

*Congress of the International Chamber of Congress.* New York: Fox, 1923.

*Black Shirts.* New York: Fox, 1923.

*Congress of War Volunteers Association.* New York: Fox, 1924.

*Inauguration of New Italian Cable Lines.* New York: Fox, 1925.

*Fascists Celebrate Mussolini's Recovery.* New York: Fox, 1925.

*Mussolini Inspects Italian Navy.* New York: Fox, 1925.

*Inauguration of New Italian Cable Lines.* New York: Fox, 1925.

*Aviation: "Norge."* New York: Fox, 1925.

*Italian Fighting Ships Line Up for Mussolini.* New York: Hearst, 1925.

*"Beware" Says Mussolini Parading his Power.* New York: Hearst, 1925.

*Aviation: "Norge."* New York: Fox, 1926.

*General Umberto Nobile Arrives.* New York: Fox, 1926.

*Mussolini Meets British Foreign Secretary.* New York: Fox, 1926.

*Benito Mussolini at Flag Day.* New York: Fox, 1926.

*Mussolini Congratulates De Berna[r]di.* New York: Fox, 1926.

*7<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Fascisti Party.* New York: Fox, 1926.

*Mussolini Visits Libya.* New York: Fox, 1926.

*Assassination Attempt Against Mussolini.* New York: Fox, 1926.



*Mussolini Smiles!* New York: Hearst, 1926.

*All Italy Rejoices as Mussolini Again Escapes.* New York: Hearst, 1926.

*Mussolini Reviews Merchant Fleet of New Italy.* New York: Hearst, 1926.

*Mussolini Displays Power on Fascism's 7<sup>th</sup> Birthday.* New York: Hearst, 1926.

*Magnificent Spectacle as Mussolini Measures Italy's Might on Sea.* New York: Hearst, 1927.

*Couple Wed 25 Years has 25 Kids.* New York: Fox, 1928.

*Rome Celebrates 2.681st Birthday.* New York: Fox, 1928.

*Mussolini Speaks to Workers.* New York: Fox, 1928.

*Mussolini Issues His Orders for New Year at Coliseum Rally.* New York: Hearst, 1928.

*100.000 War Veterans Acclaim Mussolini at Victory Celebration.* New York: Hearst, 1928.

*Mussolini Addresses Crowd of 100.000.* New York: Fox, 1929.

*Mussolini Monument.* New York: Fox, 1929.

*Youthful Fascisti Open Training Headquarters.* New York: Fox, 1929.

*Benito Mussolini.* New York: Fox, 1929.

*"March on Rome" 8<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.* New York: Fox, 1929.

*Mussolini Speaks.* New York: Fox, 1929.

*Mussolini.* New York: Fox, 1929.

*Italian Students Hail Mussolini.* New York: Fox, 1929.

*Mussolini Addresses Crowd at the Coliseum.* New York: Fox, 1929.

*Mussolini Reviews Police.* New York: Fox, 1929.

*Fascist Youths from Many Lands Hail Duce on Pilgrimage to Rome.* New York: Hearst, 1929.

*Italian War Veterans Pack Ancient Coliseum to Pay Homage to Mussolini.* New York: Hearst, 1929.

*Youth of Italy Thrills Mussolini.* New York: Hearst, 1931.

*Italian Veterans Parade in Rome.* New York: Hearst, 1929.

*Il Duce Reviews Rome's "Finest."* New York: Hearst, 1929.

*Fascist Italy Is Seven Years Old.* New York: Hearst, 1929.

*Fascist Health Builders Reviewed by Mussolini.* New York: Hearst, 1929.

*Mussolini Honors Air Heroes.* New York: Fox, 1930.

*Roman Kids Sing For Mussolini.* New York: Fox, 1930.

*"Il Duce" Watches Callisthenics by Children.* New York: Fox, 1930.

*Italian Military Maneuvers.* New York: Fox, 1930.

*Premier Benito Mussolini.* New York: Fox, 1930.

*Ciano-Mussolini Wedding.* New York: Fox, 1930.

*Mussolini Rouses Fascist Hosts to Fighting Frenzy.* New York: Hearst, 1930.

*Mussolini Stirs All Europe With Warning to "Foe."* New York: Hearst, 1930.

*Start'Em Young. Says Mussolini.* New York: Hearst, 1930.

*Mussolini Sees His Daughter Wed.* New York: Hearst, 1930.

*Horse Show Attracts Notables.* New York: Fox, 1931.

*Brookhart Comments on Butler's Insults of Mussolini.* New York: Fox, 1931.

*General Leonard Talks on Butler Affair.* New York: Fox, 1931.

*Mussolini Promises Peace.* New York: Fox, 1931.

*Aviation: Mussolini Honors Air Heroes.* New York: Fox, 1931.

*Mussolini Peace Talk.* New York: Fox, 1931.

*Rome's Finest Give Italians a Treat.* New York: Hearst, 1931.

*Mussolini Promises Peace.* New York: Fox, 1931.

*17<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Italy's Entrance into WWI.* New York: Fox, 1932.

*All Italy Hails the Giuseppe Garibaldi.* New York: Fox, 1932.

*15,000 Kids Perform Callisthenics Before Il Duce.* New York: Fox, 1932.

*Italian King and Il Duce Review Troops.* New York: Fox, 1932.

*Italy's Greatest Air Show Thrills King and Mussolini.* New York: Hearst, 1932.

*King and Mussolini Review Mountain Army of 50.000.* New York: Hearst, 1932.

*Italian Air Fleet Heads For Chicago on Epochal Flight.* New York: Hearst, 1933.

*Rome Hails Balbo!* New York: Hearst, 1933.

*Kids Serenade Mussolini.* New York: Hearst, 1933.

*Mussolini Joins British Premier in Peace Move.* New York: Hearst, 1933.

*Opening of Italian Parliament.* New York: Fox, 1934.

*Benito Mussolini Reviews Young Fascists.* New York: Fox, 1934.

*All Rome Hails City's Rebirth.* New York: Hearst, 1934.

*King Shares Triumph With Il Duce.* New York: Hearst, 1934.

*Mussolini Takes Leadership of Europe.* New York: Hearst, 1934.

*Italian King Opens Parliament.* New York: Hearst, 1934.

*Emperor's Plea Stirs Ethiopia.* New York: Hearst, 1935.

*Women of Italy Back Mussolini.* New York: Hearst, 1935.

*War Crisis Near as League Warns Italy.* New York: Hearst, 1935.

*War! Summary of the Italo-Ethiopian War.* New York: Hearst, 1935.

*Italy Rushes More Troops to Africa.* New York: Hearst, 1935.

*All Rome Hails a New Emperor.* New York: Hearst, 1936.

*Conquest of Ethiopia.* New York: Hearst, 1936.

*Mussolini Turns From War to Start New City.* New York: Hearst, 1936.

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