

“On the Street Where you Live”: Italian American Doo-Wop in Postwar New York*

* The Chuckles (a.k.a. The Consorts), “On the Street Where You Live” (1963), <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JW9nocJNoRI>> , 4 November 2009.

Not to find one’s way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. Requires ignorance – nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling. Then, signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest, like the startling call of a bittern in the distance, like the sudden stillness of a clearing with a lily standing erect at its center.

(Walter Benjamin, “A Berlin Chronicle”)

The concept of space is itself transformed when it is seen in terms of the ex-centric communicative circuitry that has enabled dispersed populations to converse, interact, and more recently even to synchronise significant elements of their social and cultural lives.

(Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps*)

Music historian Ed Ward, drawing on his personal experience as a teenager and rock and roll fan in the late 1950s, eloquently begins his article “Italo-American Rock” by considering some similarities between Italian American and African American youths:

In my hometown, Eastchester, New York, there was only one ethnic group that knew anything about rock and roll. They liked loud, flashy colors, and they seemed to have a natural sense of rhythm and inborn musical ability. They excelled in the school band, and at dances they cut everybody. They all lived in one section of town, and while it was dangerous to go there after dark, there were a couple of candy stores where they’d sometimes gather to hang out and stand outside and harmonize. My Jewish friends might have had the money to buy the latest rock and roll records, but when it came to swinging it, dancing it, and living the rock and roll life, they had to cross the invisible line into the north end. That’s where the Italian kids lived. (You thought I was talking about blacks? Hey, the day the first black moves into that town is the day the last Italian is too weak to fight ‘em off).¹

¹ Ed Ward, “Italo-American Rock”, in John Miller, ed., *The Rolling Stone: Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Random House/Rolling Stone Press Book, 1980), 133.

This description racializes the image of African Americans and Italian Americans. Nonetheless, it helps us to understand how Italian American youths were involved in an urban culture which has moved away from the conventional image of Italian American culture. Inspired by Ward’s reflection, this essay explores Italian American doo-wop music in the 1950s within the context of urban space and culture in post-war New York.

Although the 1950s had been the decade when many so-called white ethnics left city centers with the consequent development of the suburbs, rock and roll was essentially an urban phenomenon. Most Italian American youths in New York belonged to working class communities and were directly involved in rock and roll as an urban creation. As historian George Lipsitz suggested: “The movement of young people into the street emerged in part as a reaction against the corporate culture of conformity that had shaped much of the suburban life since World War II”.² Doo-wop was introduced by African American R&B vocal harmony groups in the 1940s. Its roots are in gospel, black vocal groups of the 1930s and the barbershop tradition. Contrary to gospel, this music was not religious and reflected the new urban conditions of the North – the street corners of Harlem, Brooklyn and the Bronx. According to music historian Reebee Garofalo:

[D]oo-wop was the product of urban vocal harmony groups, mostly black and almost invariably male. The style owed as much of a debt to gospel, jazz, and pop as it did to the blues. Typical of the genre was a melodramatic, often gospel-inflected lead tenor who was bracketed by a distinctive bass and a soaring falsetto. Backgrounds vocals typically consisted of nonsense syllables, such as “Sha-na-na-na sha-na-na-na-na”, “Buzz-buzz-a-doodle-lee”, “Shoo-doo-shoo-bee-doo.”³

By the 1950s this music had been appropriated by working-class ‘white ethnics’, especially of Italian origins, and Puerto Rican youths in urban centers. Cultural critic Greil Marcus states that doo-wop “was the first form of rock & roll to take shape, to define itself as something people recognized as new, different, strange, theirs”.⁴ In the 1950s, doo-wop was known as R&B vocal harmony or simply as rock and roll. As DJ Dan Romanello explains: “I guess doo-wop, the name doo-wop is something that I don’t think anybody used ... It’s a kind of a name that came later. I think somewhere in the 1970s was when the term was probably coined”.⁵

In the late 1950s, the two major streams of Italian American rock and roll/R&B were the teen idols phenomenon, and doo-wop. While the teen idols phenomenon was a creation of the media industry launched through the television program *American Bandstand*, broadcast from Philadelphia, doo-wop came from the streets of New York and other cities like Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Pittsburgh.⁶ In New York each borough had its favorite doo-wop band. Dion and the Belmonts (Dion DiMucci, Carlo Mastrangelo, Fred Milano and Angelo D’Alea) came from the Bronx. Their first hit was “I Wonder Why” recorded in 1958.⁷ As the doo-wop expert Stephen M. Bennett argues, “this blend of pop-jazz and rock and roll was devastating on ‘I Wonder Why’, a record which introduced the catchy, bouncing bass which was to become the most

² George Lipsitz, “Who’ll Stop the Rain? Youth Culture, Rock and Roll, and Social Crises”, in David Faber, ed., *The Sixties: From Memory to History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 321.

³ Reebee Garofalo, *Rockin’ Out: Popular Music in the USA* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 101.

⁴ Greil Marcus, “Is This the Woman who Invented Rock & Roll?: The Deborah Chessler Story”, *Rolling Stone* (24 June 1993), 41.

⁵ Dan Romanello interviewed by Mark Smith, Part of the Fordham University Bronx African American History Project, 2002, The Bronx County Historical Society Archive; and Mark Naison, “The Bronx African American History Project”, *Organization of American Historians Newsletter* 33 (August 2005), 1 and 14.

⁶ See John A. Jackson, *American Bandstand: Dick Clark and the Making of Rock’n’Roll Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁷ See <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ZBSGaWrEn4>>, 3 November 2009.

⁸ Mark Bennett, "Introduction", in Edward R. Engel, *White and Still All Right* (New York: Crackerjack Press, 1977), 6. On Italian American doo-wop see also Joseph Sciorra, "Who Put the Wop in Doo-Wop? Some Thoughts on Italian Americans and Early Rock and Roll", *Voices in Italian Americana* 13.1 (2002), 13-19.

⁹ See <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QySQ3UQnK3c>>, 3 November 2009.

¹⁰ *Doo-wop Box* (Rhino Records, 1993). The *Doo-wop Box* is a complete collection (four CDs) of black and white doo-wop.

¹¹ See <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jl-o5LsYtKU>> (The Crests, "Sixteen Candles"), and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_OsX2K-mv8> (Johnny Maestro and the Crests, "My Juanita"), 3 November 2009.

¹² Engel, *White and Still All Right*, 66.

¹³ Alessandro Buffa, unpublished interview with Bob Gerardi, April 2003, hereafter cited as B.G. Bob Gerardi grew up in Queens Village, Queens. In the late 1950s he was a member of a rock and roll band called The Rockin' Chairs. Their first song, "A Kiss is a Kiss", sold over 200,000 copies and made the top 20 on the New York charts.

distinctive element of all the white group R&B harmony which was to follow".⁸ The Elegants (Frank Tardagno, Carmen Romano, Jimmy Moschella, Vito Picone and Artie Venosa) started to sing doo-wop on the street-corners of their neighborhood in Staten Island. They wrote one of the most popular doo-wop pieces of the 1950s: "Little Star" (1958).⁹ In this song black vocal harmony style interacted with pop and Italian melody to create a new sound. The Elegants will never repeat the success of "Little Star" which "hit # 1 with both white and black audiences".¹⁰ The Crests, who came from Brooklyn, were a racially mixed group, which included one Italian American (the lead singer Johnny Maestro), two African Americans (Tommy Gough and Jay Carter), and a Puerto Rican (Harold Torres). They had a few big hits in 1958 and in 1959 such as "My Juanita", "Sixteen Candles", "The Angels Listened In" and "Step by Step".¹¹ The Crests was not a group created by the music industry, but was rather the product of a spontaneous friendship among four teen-agers from different ethnic backgrounds in the streets of Brooklyn. Another important group from the Bronx was The Regents/Runarounds (Guy Villari, Sal Cuomo, and Ernie Maresca). Their name is associated with the classic song "Barbara Ann" (1959) which was made famous by the Beach Boys version a few years later in 1964. Not many people know that "Barbara Ann" was composed by The Regents and was first released by Lou Cicchetti, the owner of the "Cousins Music Shop" in Fordham Road (The Bronx) and proprietor of the "Cousins" record label. Doo-wop historian Ed Engel argues that "Barbara Ann" was an immediate hit in the New York area and thanks to this song, Lou Cicchetti's label became very important in the rock and roll music business. Lou Cicchetti's record shop in Fordham Road was an important meeting point for all Italian American doo-wop bands and fans alike. As Engel puts it: "Cicchetti and his shop came to serve as the focal point of the highly influential, so called Bronx sound".¹² Unfortunately today the shop has been replaced by a clothing outlet.

What was specific to the age of early doo-wop was that many youths just decided to form a group in a day. Almost all young people from working-class neighborhoods in one way or another became involved in music in those days. Most doo-wop bands did not earn money. As Bob Gerardi recalls: "When I put the band together around sixteen we started to play but with no money. The DJ never paid us. He gave us a ride. We couldn't drive, we were kids and we had fun".¹³ Similarly, Emilio Fornatora remembers: "Nobody told us how to sing. I was thirteen or fourteen but I was with older guys. I looked older for my age. I was more mature. After we made a couple of records, I remember we cut a record ... 'Lonely Heart'. The next day it was on the radio, went to number 7 in New York. I told my mother, mom, I'm going on TV this week-end. I made no money.

It was different from today, you got to have a good lawyer. I was so young that I had to make my parents sign”.¹⁴

Sounding out the City: from Home to Hybridity

In doo-wop, more than in other music, and perhaps similarly to hip-hop but without its social commentary, the urban landscape acquires particular importance: places like street corners, trains, roofs, parks, passages, and candy stores, were all parts of the doo-wop imaginary. As the doo-wop musician Dion DiMucci recalls:

Being in a studio never really made me nervous. My approach to cutting records was, and still is, simple: don't fake it. Standing in front of that microphone, I could shut my eyes and see the street corner where we'd first started singing. I could hear everyone joining in, the girls clapping hands, and someone banging on a cardboard box. Sometimes it would be winter, bitter cold, but we'd still be out there, stamping our feet by an oil barrel fire.¹⁵

Referring to the modern metropolis Iain Chambers observes: “Here the urban machine is no longer the privileged focus of alienation. Rather, it has become the principal means of language”.¹⁶ In doo-wop music places like trains, cars, and bridges, which generally are associated with the alienated and ‘intoxicated’ life in big cities, were “appropriated and domesticated” by youths.¹⁷ As DiMucci recalls: “A lot of our rehearsing was on the Sixth Avenue D train, heading downtown. We'd grab a couple of seats and start banging out time on the floor. Trains had the greatest bass sounds in the world. So did the back seats of Checker cabs, underneath the EL, or on the roof of a building, next to the pigeon coops”.¹⁸ The formation of the doo-wop band The Crests is connected with the fluidity and incessant movement of the city. As Ed Ward puts it: “The earliest of these groups to make a real impression was The Crests. Legend has them starting out in Brooklyn singing on the subway, the Lexington Avenue IRT, to be exact, and a mysterious lady walking up to them with a business card from a well known band leader”.¹⁹

Doo-wop music was strictly linked to the territory of the

¹⁴ Alessandro Buffa, unpublished interview with Emilio Fornatora, April 2003. Emilio Fornatora lives in Long Island but he grew up in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. Hereafter cited as E.F.

¹⁵ Dion DiMucci with Davin Seay, *The Wanderer: Dion's Story* (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1988), 76.

¹⁶ Iain Chambers, *Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience* (London: Routledge, 1987), 194.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ DiMucci, *The Wanderer*; 57.

¹⁹ Ward, “Italo-American Rock”, 132.



Fig 1: “The Third Avenue El (Elevated Train)”, 1956, photograph, The Bronx, in Lloyd Ultan and Gary Hermalyn, *The Bronx: It Was Only Yesterday, 1935-1965* (The Bronx, NY: The Bronx County Historical Society), courtesy of The Bronx County Historical Society.

neighborhoods. For example, the group Dion and the Belmonts took their name from their neighborhood, and they had been members of a gang called the Fordham Baldies. Doo-wop was the favorite music of gang members, and sometimes before musicians could cut a record they had to perform privately for youth gangs during parties.²⁰ Musicians were highly respected by gangs. Black doo-wop musician Arthur Crier, who had never been in any gang, could have special privileges among the youths on his block because he was an excellent singer. Crier, who grew up in the Bronx on Prospect Avenue, recalls that youth gangs were part of the culture of his neighborhood, and doo-wop was central to the daily life of gangs. As a musician he could go into any neighborhood of the Bronx and Upper Manhattan without having any problem.²¹

²⁰ See Richard Price, *The Wanderers* (New York: Penguin Books, [1974] 1999).

²¹ Mark Naison, unpublished interview with Arthur Crier, part of the Fordham University Bronx African American History Project, 2002–, The Bronx County Historical Society Archive.

²² Chambers, *Popular Culture*, 183.

²³ Eric Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Postwar New York* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 153.

As Chambers has observed: “The city exists as a series of doubles: it has official and hidden cultures, it is a real place and a site of imagination”.²² The candy store is central to the production of doo-wop and to the hidden histories of working-class youths in the 1950s. The candy store was a public place generally located on the street corners of working-class neighborhoods where youths used to hang out after school and in the evening. It was a ‘real place’ grounded in the local history of the neighborhood. “Candy stores”, as Eric Schneider observes, “dotted working class areas, offering an opportunity for petty entrepreneurship that kept the proprietor rooted in the local neighborhood. Typically small storefronts, with a counter, a soda dispenser, magazine racks, and perhaps a jukebox and some stools or a small table, candy stores provided a place where gang members could meet, gossip, and, if space permitted, dance with their debts”.²³ However, the candy store was also ‘a site of imagination’ which allowed inter-ethnic exchanges and where youths could desire and experience a new hybrid metropolitan culture which emerged in post-war years. Fornatora remembers the candy store almost like a place of fantasy. In his words: “In the candy store you had the juke box, penny candies, the soda fountain, egg creams. You had to see summer nights outside the candy store in 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962. It was a spectacle to see. The counter was in marble, it was marvelous. The owner was Jimmy, he had only one arm” (E.F.). Fornatora recalls that it was in the candy store where he started to sing doo-wop: “At the candy store there was the first group I started, it was a group called the Mystics. We all started to sing at the candy store, nobody told us how to sing” (E.F.).

Italian American doo-wop is a very interesting example of black and Italian interactions and of the continuity and change in neighborhoods culture in the 1950s and early 1960s. Although Italian American bands borrowed their style from black doo-wop, I would argue that the appropriation of black cultural expressions by Italian American teen-agers does not follow a straightforward pattern. Here we have different diasporic

stories which intertwined with each other within the context of postwar popular culture and urban space. Certainly Italian American singers such as Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Tony Bennett were a source of inspiration for Italian American vocal groups. However, Italian folk and regional music like stornelli and tarantella, for instance, perhaps influenced Italian American doo-wop in a more unconscious and subterranean way. Italian regional music was very popular in Italian American neighborhoods. It traveled with migrants and was kept alive within Italian American communities.

Bronx local historian Lloyd Ultan recalls that in the 1940s in the Bronx there were many “itinerant street singers roaming from neighborhood to neighborhood and into backyards of apartment houses”.²⁴ In the United States traditional regional music evolved and was adapted to the life of Italian immigrants. Some regional popular songs, for example, are based on rhymes, often improvised; they depict situations which can be funny, sad, acts of protest, or just comments about the weather, or a hard day of work. There were many places where Italian Americans performed these songs: at parties, at home, during working breaks, in barber shops, or in the streets of the neighborhood. In my view, although the roots of doo-wop are in black American music, it was also embraced by Italian Americans because of their diasporic life in the United States. Lipsitz refers to similar interactions as follows:

Another kind of history permeated Dion DiMucci’s hit record “The Wanderer” in 1961 “The Wanderer” was written by Ernie Maresca. It reached the number-two spot on the best-seller charts in the winter of 1961-62. Maresca claims that in writing the song he was inspired by “I’m a Man”, by blues musician Bo Diddley, and the lyrics certainly show an affinity between the two songs. The infectious beat of “The Wanderer”, however, comes from the tarantella, the traditional Italian dance frequently played at weddings and other festive social occasions.²⁵

As sociologist Phil Cohen suggests, “[S]ubculture is a compromise solution to two contradictory needs: the need to create and express *autonomy and difference* from parents and, by extension, their culture, and the need to maintain the security of existing ego defenses and the parental identifications which support them”.²⁶ In this sense, the neighborhood played a fundamental role in the formation of youth identity especially in terms of ethnicity, class and gender in the 1950s and early 1960s since it embodied both parent culture and ‘foreign’ cultural forms.

In his book *Blood of my Blood*, Italian American scholar Richard Gambino states that “Italian-American neighborhoods were indeed clusters of transplanted towns of the Mezzogiorno, compressed together in the congested cities of the New World”.²⁷ Yet, we must keep in mind that Italian American neighborhoods in New York were surrounded by Puerto Rican, African American and Irish neighborhoods, and that Italian American

²⁴ Lloyd Ultan and Gary Hermalyn, *The Bronx: It Was Only Yesterday, 1935-1965* (The Bronx, NY: The Bronx County Historical Society, 1992), 9.

²⁵ George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xxi. See also <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJBT71O_fLU> (Dion DiMucci, “The Wanderer”, live 1990), 3 November 2009.

²⁶ Phil Cohen, *Rethinking the Youth Question* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 59.

²⁷ Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of the Italian-Americans* (New York: Guernica, 1974), 110.



Fig.2: *Spanish American Restaurant*, about 1950, photograph, The Bronx, in Lloyd Ultan and Gary Hermalyn, *The Bronx: It Was Only Yesterday, 1935-1965* (The Bronx, NY: The Bronx County Historical Society), 115, courtesy of The Bronx County Historical Society.

children interacted with children from different ethnic backgrounds in schools, recreation centers and other public places. In addition, as Lipsitz observes, through mass communications technology like radio and record-players, “consumers ... can experience a common heritage with people they have never seen; they can acquire memories of a past to which they have no geographic or biological connections”.²⁸ In this view, Italian American neighborhoods, rather than simply being reproductions of Southern Italian towns, can be

²⁸ George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 5.

²⁹ Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 8.

considered as sites of struggle where a sense of Italianness was “continually contested and renewed” by local youths.²⁹ Fornatora, for instance, perceives the Italian characteristics of his neighborhood as highly influential for his life experience and identity formation. He is very proud to be an ‘Italian’ who grew up in Brooklyn in the 1950s. In his words: “Everybody in the butcher shop spoke Italian I knew a person from Italy who brought fresh tomatoes from Italy every year We had dinner all together in my family ... during holidays all my relatives were in the house ... having a big lunch together and once they had finished eating, all the *men* had black Italian coffee” (E.F.).

At the same time, it is interesting to note that he remembers many things which are not generally associated with the traditional image of the Italian American community. He recalls that on Tuesday nights people from the neighborhood organized concerts in the local church. What is striking is that these concerts were not of Italian music; rather, they were of Latin music with Puerto Rican musicians. Latin music in the late 1950s started to be very popular in New York. He also recalls that while his mother sang opera, he started to sing doo-wop at the candy store, and in his leisure time he listened to the radio, especially rock and roll and R&B. Before World War II Italian American families listened particularly to ethnic radio stations, which broadcast Neapolitan and other traditional Italian music. By the end of the 1940s, private radio stations started to broadcast music from the South of the United States like R&B and country. It was through the radio that Italian American youths first encountered black music. DiMucci recalls his first encounter with the music of Hank Williams

as something that changed his life:

I can still smell the aroma of my mother's spaghetti sauce, simmering on the stove for that Sunday supper ... I heard it coming over the radio, drifting down the hall like the scent of my mom's good sauce. I got up pulled along by that sound, strange and distant and cut through with static ... to tell you the truth if there'd been a five-alarm fire with engines racing down Crotona Avenue, I don't think I would have noticed. I was listening for the first time in my life to the music of Hank Williams.³⁰

³⁰ DiMucci, *The Wanderer*, 131.

The fact that Italian American youths embraced black music does not mean that the relationships between Italian Americans and African Americans were good. As Susan Douglas has observed in her important book *Listening In*: "On the radio (as elsewhere in popular culture), white ridicule of black culture and of African Americans mixed with envy, desire, and imitation: with what the University of Virginia scholar Eric Lott called Love and Theft".³¹ In the 1950s interactions between African Americans, Italian Americans, and Puerto Ricans were not peaceful. However, as Lipsitz points out, in "the very moment that residential suburbs increased class and racial segregation, young people found 'prestige from below' by celebrating the ethnic and class interactions of the urban street".³² In his autobiography, DiMucci deals with interactions between African American and Italian American musicians. He recalls that he had a series of concerts with his band on the East Coast, and that one show was at the Howard Theater in Washington, D.C., which was a traditional black venue. He was surprised by the success they had in Washington. In his words: "They [black audience] loved us. We had a two-week stand there, living in an all-black boarding-house, sleeping during the day, performing and partying with all our new friends during the night. We got the same response at the Apollo in Harlem where we were the first white performers ever to play the house".³³

³¹ Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Times Books, 1999), 18.

³² Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, 122.

³³ DiMucci, *The Wanderer*, 76.

Of course African Americans were certainly glad that white youths listened to their music; as James Brown states, referring to the role of white DJs in promoting black music to white audiences, "John R. meant so much to Afro-American people. He did as much to help blacks as any white I know, and more than most. Because he made us aware, and he made our music important".³⁴ Sometimes white bands from working class neighborhoods became a source of inspiration for African American bands. As Gerardi observes: "Black music came out from the gospel, doo-wop was a black form, and white groups imitated black groups. But black groups were inspired by white groups because we were surrounded by each other" (B.G.). The common experience of marginality and racism, and the blurring of ethnic and racial lines in working-class neighborhoods, has sometimes produced alliances and cooperation between Italian Americans and African Americans. As historian David Roediger puts it:

³⁴ Cit. in Douglas, *Listening In*, 240.

It may well be that, as the music historian Ronald Morris has argued, Sicilians playing jazz in New Orleans embraced black music because Sicilians were like black people in seeing music as a highly personalized affair ... born of collective experience. But in the playing, Sicilians not only retained this sensibility but contributed to creating a new American art form, though far from a white American one.³⁵

³⁵ David Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (London: Verso, 1994), 188-189.

According to Gerardi and Fornatora doo-wop music helped to establish a better relationship between the two communities. Bob and his band, for example, did back-ups of black bands such as Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, and The Cadillacs, and they were discovered by a black DJ. Gerardi told me that in doo-wop shows there were many black and white groups performing one after the other, most of them were black groups but there were also many Italian American bands. As he observes: "We were in the same show all the time, black groups and white groups. We were making music. We really liked them for their music" (B.G.). Fornatora recalls that he and his band used to play in Coney Island and in such ballrooms as Freedom Land, and the Brooklyn Paramount, and that Italian Americans wanted to play there because a lot of black bands performed there. In the interview, Fornatora emphasizes that there were no problems between Italian Americans and African Americans; he remembers that the bass singer in his band was African American. In his view "in music there is no boundary, there is not black and white and musicians are *different people*" (E.F.). Only once in the whole interview did he mention, but then immediately changed topic, that there were some kinds of people in the neighborhood who really did not like African Americans. I asked him to be more specific but he answered without hesitation: "You know, I cannot explain it now" (E.F.). In these gaps we can read that there were probably many problems between African Americans and Italian Americans at the end of the 1950s, and his "you know, I cannot explain it now" hinted at further stories about relations between blacks and Italians.