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VITO MARCANTONIO: A SUCCESSFUL NEW YORK CITY RADICAL
POLITICIAN

City University of New York

PH.D. 1984

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VITO MARCANTONIO: A SUCCESSFUL NEW YORK CITY
RADICAL POLITICIAN

by

GERALD MEYER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in History in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy, the City University of New
York.

1983

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Vito Marcantonio served in the United States House of Representatives from East Harlem from 1934 to 1936 and then from 1938 to 1950, a tenure unremarkable in its length and legislative production. He deserves attention because his radical positions and affiliations closely paralleled those of the Communist Party. He was the most electorally successful radical politician of this period. His electoral successes consisted not merely in winning seven elections, but in winning them either by large margins (for example, in 1942 and 1944 he won the Democratic, Republican, and American Labor Party primaries)¹ or against strong opposition. In 1944, his congressional district was expanded to include areas strongly unfavorable to a radical politician. A 1947 electoral law, the Wilson-Pakula Act, which was specifically aimed at Marcantonio (see pp. 422-24), prevented him from entering the major party primaries, and necessitated his running solely on the American Labor Party (ALP) line. Especially in the postwar period, a press campaign identifying him with crime and communism reached extreme proportions (see p. 244). Despite these obstacles,

¹This was an unusual, but not unique, accomplishment; in 1944, Adam Clayton Powell running in Central Harlem, won all three primaries. Robert F. Carter, "Pressure from the Left: The American Labor Party, 1936-1954" (Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse University, 1965), p. 208.

he continued to be returned to office, and, while maintaining the support of his East Harlem bailiwick, he was defeated in 1950 by James Donovan, a coalition candidate of the Democratic, Republican, and Liberal Parties. Although during this period other individuals closely allied with the Communist Party--some even running under the Party's banner--were elected to one or two terms, the fact remains that no other person with similar political positions and affiliations held public office as long as Marcantonio did. As one of his biographers has pointed out, "None of the Congressmen whose positions most clearly paralleled his--John Bernard of Minnesota, Jerry O'Connell of Montana, Hugh De Lacy of Washington, or Leo Issacson of New York--lasted more than one term."² This work will explore the major reasons for Marcantonio's deviation from this pattern.

The six major circumstances surrounding his political success which are highlighted include: (1) the socioeconomic character of his political support--the Italian-American and Puerto Rican communities of East Harlem; (2) East Harlem's electoral history; (3) his political organization; (4) the assistance provided him by the Communist Party; (5) his largely non-antagonistic relations with the major parties, especially on the local level; and (6) Marcantonio's personal qualities.

Marcantonio's political strength rested primarily in East Harlem's Italo-American community. The literature examining the political behavior of Italo-Americans during this period documents an absence of involvement in radical or leftist politics and generally

²Richard Sasuly, "Vito Marcantonio: The People's Politician." In American Radicals: Some Problems and Personalities, ed., Harvey Goldberg (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1957), p. 149.

indicates fairly conservative voting patterns. (See pp. 219-24; Tables 8-11) Hence a major focus of this study is to determine why so large a proportion of this community supported a pro-Communist Congressman. Using Herbert Gans's urban village model, the thesis examines the degree to which Italian Harlem existed as a world unto itself, with a social structure, norms, and values different from, and some times hostile to, the wider American society.³

Unlike Italian Harlem, El Barrio (the Puerto Rican section of East Harlem) contained a left-wing contingent--influenced by socialist and Puerto Rican nationalist ideas--which had a visible presence and fomented considerable political activity. For example, of the thirty precincts in the entire United States that gave Henry Wallace a plurality in 1948, eight were in El Barrio.⁴ Also, it was the largest community in New York City consisting largely of first-generation immigrants. Political currents in Puerto Rico in the thirties, and the hostile reception these immigrants met when they arrived, go far to explain the alienation of El Barrio from the mainstream of American life as manifested by its enthusiastic support for Marcantonio's radicalism.

Marcantonio's political career was shaped by the unusual political history of East Harlem. From shortly after the turn of the century to the early twenties, the district gave the Socialist Party the largest percentage of votes of any Congressional district in New York City other than the Lower East Side. For example, Morris Hillquit of

³Herbert Gans, The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans (New York: Free Press, 1965), *passim*.

⁴Samuel Lubell, The Future of American Politics (New York: Harper, 1952), pp. 206-7.

the Socialist Party received more than 40 percent of East Harlem's vote, being defeated only by a coalition candidate representing both the Republican and Democratic Parties. (See pp. 20-21, 336-37) Unlike the Lower East Side and other bastions of Socialist Party support, however, East Harlem continued to be radical politically throughout the twenties. From 1922 to 1930 it was represented in Congress by Fiorello LaGuardia. Marcantonio's later candidacy for the district's Congressional seat, therefore, presaged no dramatic break with the radical tradition.

Since his painstaking construction of a classical political machine was undoubtedly critical to his victories, the dissertation dissects this machine, giving particular and detailed attention to (1) the kinds and quantity of services it provided; (2) its financing; (3) the political techniques it used; and (4) the personnel who staffed it.

Marcantonio's open relationship with the Communist Party also deserves careful study. A major thrust of the present work is to gauge the Party's contribution in abetting his spectacular career. Another is the examination of the Party's varying strengths in Italian Harlem and El Barrio, and the extent to which it mobilized its own resources and those of organizations over which it exerted influence on behalf of Marcantonio.

The participation of the American Labor Party in promoting Marcantonio was, of course, closely connected both to his political organization and to the contribution of the Communist Party. In this study, the effect of the ALP on his career is treated separately, since it was also related to the larger question of Marcantonio's relations with the Republican and Democratic Parties. The degree to which his influence in the ALP permitted him to bargain with the two major parties--tendering the endorsement of the American Labor Party for major

party candidates elsewhere, in return for leaving him without serious opposition in his own district--is evaluated. Furthermore, the ALP line provided an effective means of garnering a significant number of votes.

A biographical chapter traces the origins of Marcantonio's political philosophy, beginning with his student experiences at De Witt Clinton High School, which were decisive to his political orientation. The character and style of his particular brand of radicalism and deep commitment to the community are largely explained by his relationship with the Italian-American educator and leader, Dr. Leonard Covello. Marcantonio's political style, a synthesis of padronismo and old-time political bossism, is explored through his relationship with Fiorello LaGuardia. His lifestyle, especially its close conformity with Southern Italian-American mores, is detailed, emphasizing the aspects that best illustrate his political effectiveness.

This study does not systematically review Marcantonio's legislative career. A political biography of the man has already been published (see below). Marcantonio's far-left station on the political spectrum denied him the possibility of having a major impact on the legislative process. No Congressional bill bears his name. On the other hand, his political isolation frequently brought him national attention, particularly when his was the sole vote against a major measure. (See pp. 63, 69, 72, 307). There were valuable political consequences to having legislative debate and national publicity on such major questions as United States entry into the Korean War which otherwise would have been adopted by acclamation.

The goal of this study is to explain Marcantonio's elections. His radical political positions were an obstacle to this electoral success. Had Marcantonio retained a major-party affiliation and been in

6

the political mainstream, his re-election to public office would, at this date, be of no concern. His radical politics, however, were not the politics of any major number of his constituents, and they gave rise to significant opposition from many quarters. Our task then is to explain his ability to mobilize his non-radical constituency behind his candidacy and to overcome an increasingly wide ranging and determined opposition.

Particular aspects of Marcantonio's Congressional career are relevant to this study. First are those political positions that most clearly identified his close adherence to the general positions of the Communist Party. Second, are the legislative activities that related specifically to the two bases of his electoral successes, East Harlem's Italian-American and Puerto Rican communities. Except for the period of World War II, when the Italian-American community was placed in a somewhat precarious position, his legislative work relevant to Italian Harlem was limited. Because Puerto Rico lacked Congressional representation, however, his legislative work in behalf of the island was most significant. Indeed, during most of his tenure in Congress, he acted as de facto Congressman for Puerto Rico. The comparatively recent origin of East Harlem's Puerto Rican community created the basis for a strong positive political response to these efforts.

Only a modest amount of published and unpublished work has appeared on Marcantonino. The published scholarly work on Marcantonio includes three books. Alan Schaffer's political biography, Vito Marcantonio: Radical in Congress,⁵ although skillfully written, glosses over major causes for Marcantonio's electoral successes--his

⁵Alan Schaffer, Vito Marcantonio, Radical in Congress (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966).

relationship to the life and fabric of East Harlem, as well as the major problem that arises out of a study of Marcantonio--his ability to win seven elections in a district not populated by significant numbers of radicals. Schaffer also underplays Marcantonio's intimate relationship with the Communist Party and their almost identical political viewpoints. Some weaknesses in Schaffer's book stem from this mistaken focus, while others result from his overselective use of the Marcantonio Papers.⁶ Schaffer cites this source sixty-three times, yet half these citations are from material in one carton. In all, he cites from only six of the sixty cartons in this collection, missing a great deal of vital material while ignoring a wealth of existing information on Marcantonio's organization.

Salvatore John LaGumina's Vito Marcantonio: The People's Politician⁷ attempts to capture part of the "Marcantonio phenomenon" (that is, a successful pro-Communist Congressman representing a non-radical constituency), but lacks any clear or sustained focus, remaining a series of brief, inconclusive essays. A more thorough study of Marcantonio would demonstrate that ethnicity, the theme of LaGumina's book, only partially explains his string of election victories.

⁶The Vito Marcantonio Papers are deposited in the New York Public Library. The collection consists of sixty cartons which contain everything from a letter signed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt to bills from printers. Twenty cartons are filled with correspondence from constituents and other ordinary citizens. There is also extensive correspondence with various organizations and trade unions, campaign materials, and texts of speeches. Voluminous materials relate to Marcantonio's organization, including lists of election captains and six boxes of weekly reports from staff members. This description of the extensive and rich Marcantonio Collection is not exhaustive, and no study to date has grappled with more than a small portion of its contents.

⁷Salvatore John LaGumina, Vito Marcantonio: The People's Politician (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1969).

Neither Schaffer nor LaGumina conducted many interviews. Neither examined Marcantonio's constituencies or the communities in which his electorate lived. Neither analyzed electoral results as a function of ethnicity, social class, or related variables.

Felix Ojeda Reyes' Vito Marcantonio y Puerto Rico: por los trabajadores y por la nación (1978) is a fifty-five-page monograph plus appendices on a much neglected aspect of Marcantonio's career, his relationship to the Puerto Rican independence movement.⁸ This work is weakened by Ojeda Reyes's failure to examine more carefully the Marcantonio Papers and to consult such other sources as the New York Times. He also failed to explore other involvements of Marcantonio with Puerto Rico and its people, such as his legislative work on behalf of the island and his political work in El Barrio.

Two scholarly articles by LaGumina about Marcantonio have been published.⁹ There exist a handful of additional articles on Marcantonio which provide overviews of his career, but are not based on extensive research.¹⁰

Unpublished scholarship on Marcantonio consists of a single doctoral dissertation and three undergraduate papers. Norman Jay Kaner's "Towards a Minority of One: Vito Marcantonio and American Foreign

⁸Felix Ojeda Reyes, Vito Marcantonio y Puerto Rico: por los trabajadores y por la nación (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracan, 1978).

⁹Salvatore J. LaGumina, "Vito Marcantonio: A Study in the Functional and Ideological Dynamics of a Labor Politician," Labor History, 13 (Summer 1972), 374-399; "Case Studies in Ethnicity and Italo-American Politicians," published in The Italian Experience in the United States (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1973), pp. 143-61.

¹⁰Sasuly; and, Richard H. Rovere, "Vito Marcantonio: Machine Politician New Style." Harper's Magazine (April 1944), pp. 391-98.

Policy"¹¹ presents the Congressman's advocacy of leftist positions on foreign policy "in a more favorable light," that is, in the light of revisionist historiography on the Cold War. It relies almost exclusively on the Congressional Record and digresses at great length into reviews of revisionist writings on the Cold War. A chapter on Marcantonio and Puerto Rico, however, suggests that his relations with that country deserves further study, signaling a major focus of the present thesis.

Arthur Walker Bingham's "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio"¹² provides a remarkably detailed account of every Congressional campaign. Bingham's father, Jonathan (currently a Congressman from the Bronx) was a prospective candidate for the coalition opposing Marcantonio in 1950. This familial connection allowed the younger Bingham to interview a host of political figures. These interviews are doubly valuable for this study because they were conducted mostly with persons hostile to Marcantonio, who as a group are now very reluctant to grant interviews. Bingham's paper is the only extensive source on Marcantonio written from a negative perspective, and it counterbalances material favorable to the Congressman. Equally valuable is Bingham's impressive set of maps of the Twentieth Congressional District. One is based on ethnic distribution, a second

¹¹Norman Jay Kaner, "Towards a Minority of One: Vito Marcantonio and American Foreign Policy" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1968). See also: Gerald Meyer, "Vito Marcantonio y el partido nacionalista puertorriqueño," Signos (January-March 1980), pp. 2-9; "Vito Marcantonio, Congressman for Puerto Rico: 1934-1936, 1938-1950," Revista del Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico, 43 (February 1982), pp. 67-98.

¹²Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio" (Honors paper, Harvard University, 1950).

on income levels. These maps are accompanied by acetate overlays of election results from 1940 to 1950.

The first third of Donna Liberman's "Vito Marcantonio: The People's Congressman: The New Deal Period"¹³ is largely based on interviews with people now dead or otherwise unavailable. Her main informant was Leonard Covello, a key influence on the young Marcantonio. In the interviews, Liberman focuses on the roots of Marcantonio's radicalism and his involvement with the Italo-American community.

Jacob Blum and Peter Wilhelm's "Vito Marcantonio and the Political Organization of East Harlem"¹⁴ contains very detailed material on the day-to-day operations of Marcantonio's political machine, including election returns unavailable elsewhere.

No published study of Italian Harlem exists. Ironically, there are studies of smaller Italo-American communities in Buffalo, Newark, New Haven, Cleveland, San Francisco, Chicago and Boston.¹⁵ To some

¹³Donna Liberman, "Vito Marcantonio: People's Congressman: The New Deal Period" (Honors paper, Radcliffe College, 1970).

¹⁴Jacob Blum and Peter Wilhelm, "Vito Marcantonio and the Political Organization of East Harlem" (Honors paper, Yale University, 1967).

¹⁵Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971); Charles W. Churchill, The Italians of Newark (New York: Arno Press, 1975); Irvin Child, Italian or American: The Second Generation in Conflict (New York: Russell and Russell, 1970); Josef J. Barton, Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Paul Radin, The Italians of San Francisco: Their Adjustment and Acculturation (San Francisco: R & E Research Associates, 1970); Humberto S. Nelli, Italians in Chicago 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Gans, Urban Villagers.

extent these publications, as well as more general studies of the history and sociology of Italian-Americans, have been drawn upon for the present study. Leonard Covello's highly regarded The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child: A Study of the Southern Italian Family Mores and Their Effects on the School Situation in Italy and America¹⁶ is in large part derived from studies of Italo-American high school boys in East Harlem done about 1940. Although much of this material is too directly aimed at educational concerns to be of substantive value in this political inquiry, it does provide considerable support for the concept of Italian Harlem as an urban village.

The establishment of a Boys' Club center in Italian Harlem in 1929 gave rise to an extensive sociological study on settlement house clients directed by Frederick Thrasher, Chairman of the Sociology Department of New York University. Enormously detailed, the final report of this study lay neglected in the New York University Library. Less-detailed aspects were published by Thrasher in two articles.¹⁷ Also generated from this study were five New York University doctoral dissertations on Italian Harlem's social life, which are of limited value.¹⁸

¹⁶Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1969.

¹⁷Frederick Thrasher, "Final Report on: The Jefferson Branch of the Boys' Club of New York." Typewritten. Submitted to the Bureau of Social Hygiene, 1935; "The Boys' Club Study," Journal of Educational Sociology (December 1932); "The Boys' Club and Juvenile Delinquency," The American Journal of Sociology, 42 (July 1936), 404-17.

¹⁸Nels Anderson, "The Social Antecedents of a Slum: A Developmental Study of East Harlem Area of Manhattan Island, New York City" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1930); Marie J. Conicistre, "A Study of a Decade in the Life and Education of the Adult Immigrant Community in East Harlem" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1943); May Case Marsh, "The Life and Work of the Churches in

Edwin Friedman's Master's thesis, "East Harlem Community Study, 1940-1950"¹⁹ is the best existing source of material relating to housing conditions, providing significant data about occupational and income levels of East Harlem residents.

During the entire period of Marcantonio's political ascendancy, El Barrio was the most important Puerto Rican community in the continental United States. Almost every book on the Puerto Rican experience in this country contains material on El Barrio. Lawrence Chenault's Puerto Rican Migration, a fine study, is based solely on El Barrio. C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior, and Rose Goldsen Kohn's New York's Newest Migrants is another excellent work, based on two Puerto Rican communities, one of which is El Barrio. A recently published book--Memorias de Bernardo Vega--furnishes much data on political activity in El Barrio from 1904 to 1948.²⁰ It also contains important commentary on Marcantonio's interaction with and significance to this community.

Annette Rubinstein, a close associate of Marcantonio, edited I Vote My Conscience: Debates, Speeches, and Writings of Vito

an Interstitial Area" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1932); Irving V. Sollins, "A Socio-Statistical Analysis of Boys' Club Membership" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1936); Margaret Campbell Tilley, "The Boy Scout Movement in East Harlem" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1935).

¹⁹Edwin Friedman, "East Harlem Community Study: 1940-1950" (Master's thesis, New York University, 1954).

²⁰Lawrence Chenault, Puerto Rican Migration (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938); C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior, and Rose Kohn, The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants (New York; Harper, 1950); Bernardo Vega, Memorias de Bernardo Vega: Contribución a la historia de la comunidad puertorriqueña en Nueva York, ed., Cesar Andreu Iglesias, (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Huracán, 1977).

Marcantonio, 1935-1950,²¹ which consists primarily of long excerpts from Marcantonio's Congressional speeches and debates. It also contains radio speeches and legal briefs presented on behalf of various victims of the McCarthy period which are unobtainable elsewhere.

The existing scholarly work on Marcantonio either ignores or exaggerates various components that account for his electoral success. Especially missing from these works is a study of his electoral bases, Italian Harlem and El Barrio. A reconstruction of Italian Harlem would be a mammoth task were it not for the Covello Collection.²² This, however, only became available to scholars in 1977. Also of some value in understanding Marcantonio, particularly his relationship with the Communist Party, are the files collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation on him, which are now available under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.²³

²¹Annette Rubinstein, ed., I Vote My Conscience: Debates, Speeches, and Writings of Vito Marcantonio, 1935-1950 (New York: Vito Marcantonio Memorial, 1956).

²²The Covello Papers are deposited in the Balch Institute, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They include six boxes of material on the social, political, and cultural life of East Harlem, and especially on that part of it which comprised Italian Harlem. Covello did more than collect data; he also generated material on East Harlem, particularly through papers he assigned in graduate courses on Italo-Americans and on education at New York University. As principal of East Harlem's only high school--Benjamin Franklin--from its founding in 1934 until his retirement in the early 1960s, he had its students collect information on housing conditions and businesses in the community. The collection also contains some pertinent information on Marcantonio.

²³Under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 946 pages of Federal Bureau of Investigation files on Marcantonio were released. While most of this material is composed of abstracts of newspaper articles and (often inaccurate) reports of informants, it does include information on Marcantonio's involvement with members of the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico which is obtainable nowhere else.

Marcantonio's active participation in Congressional deliberations and his much-reported activities in the press have led those who have written on him to rely excessively on the Congressional Record and the New York Times. This accounts to a large extent for their concentration on Marcantonio's legislative and political activities, and for their concomitant failure to explore seriously major variables requisite for this radical politician's ability to have achieved unprecedented electoral successes. Through the study of all the Marcantonio Papers and the now available Covello Collection, as well as the FBI files and interviews, this work attempts more fully to explain the Marcantonio phenomenon.

CHAPTER II

MARCANTONIO, THE EARLY YEARS, 1902-1934

There was nothing about Vito Marcantonio's origins that presaged his later notoriety as a radical Congressman. His father, Sanario, began his working life as a skilled carpenter in the employ of his father's contracting firm in Cornwall-on-Hudson, New York. In 1901, father and son journeyed to Picerno, in the elder Marcantonio's native province of Basilicata. (The area, southeast of Naples, was one of the major sources of Italian immigration to the United States.) It was there that a marriage between Sanario and Angelina de Dobitis was quickly arranged, and the young couple relocated to New York City. On December 12, 1902, she gave birth to Vito Anthony Marcantonio.¹

His birthplace, East 112th Street between Second and Third Avenues, was two blocks south of what was designated in the Federal Writers' Project study, The Italians of New York, as the center of Italian Harlem,² bounded by the East River, Third Avenue on the west, 96th Street on the south, and 125th Street on the north. From the

¹Leonard Covello and Mark Vericchio, interviews, as quoted in Donna Liberman, "Vito Marcantonio: People's Congressman: The New Deal Period" (Honors paper, Radcliffe College, 1970), pp. 1-3.

²Federal Writers' Project, The Italians of New York: A Survey Prepared by Workers of the Federal Writers' Project (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 21.

first settlement in 1878, the Italian population grew to sixty-nine thousand in 1910, and reached eighty thousand in 1930, making it the largest Italian community in America.³

A boyhood friend recalled that young Marcantonio lived on a "one hundred percent Italian block."⁴ Twenty-three of its twenty-five brick-front tenements had been constructed before the passage of the New Tenement Laws of 1901. Old Law tenements generally lacked such amenities as private bathroom, hot water, at least one window in each room, and central heating.⁵ The ill-effects of population density on Marcantonio's home block were somewhat mitigated by its proximity to East Harlem's only park, Thomas Jefferson, one-half block from Marcantonio's home. He and other neighborhood youths played there and

³ Italian Harlem has been cited as the largest Italo-American community in 1930 by the following sources: Leonard Covello, The Heart is the Teacher (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958), p. 171; A Decade of District Health Pioneering: Ten Year Report of the East Harlem Health Center, prepared under the direction of Kenneth D. Widdemer. (New York 1932.) Deposited in Aguilar Branch of the New York Public Library (hereafter cited as "Aguilar"); Francesco Cordasco and Eugene Bucchioni, eds., The Italians: Social Background of an American Group (Clifton, N.J.: Augustus M. Kelly, 1974), p. 128; Federal Writers' Project, The WPA Guide to New York City: A Comprehensive Guide to the Five Boroughs of the Metropolis--Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Richmond (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), p. 269.

⁴ Interview with Frank Maurelli, New York City, August 23, 1976. The 1930 census reported that in the Health Area where Marcantonio was born (#22), Italo-Americans (that is, persons either born in Italy or with at least one parent born there) comprised 78.6 percent of the population. Health Area 22 also had an unusually high population density. In 1910 the average population per block in this Health Area, which included a number of blocks given over to industry, was 1,780. A Health Area was an administrative-statistical unit consisting of about 25,000 persons. (See Map 3) Statistical tables collected by Covello from various sources. Covello Collection, Balch Institute, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (hereafter cited as "CC").

⁵ Marie J. Concistre, "Italian East Harlem," an excerpt from the doctoral dissertation, "A Study of a Decade in the Life and Education of the Adult Immigrant Community in East Harlem, New York City" (New York University, 1943), published in The Italians: Social Backgrounds of an American Group, p. 232.

swam in the nearby East River. The park also contained the community's public bathhouse. The parish church, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, was three blocks north of Marcantonio's home; the public school was two blocks farther. His boyhood world, then, consisted of a few square blocks inhabited almost exclusively by recently-arrived Southern Italian immigrants, who were either unskilled or semi-skilled laborers.⁶ (See Map 1)

Vito Marcantonio enjoyed a somewhat more privileged childhood than most of his peers in Italian Harlem, owning, for example, one of the few tricycles on his block. In contrast to most of the neighbors, his father had been born in America and had a skilled trade.⁷ Indeed, Sanario (or Samuel, as he by now identified himself) Marcantonio was among the upper ten percent of Italian Harlemites in occupational rank and probably of income. Samuel, like his father before him, derived

⁶Typically in East Harlem, the avenues running north-south were lined with stores, while the streets running east-west were largely devoid of them. Perhaps because of its proximity to the much-used park, Marcantonio's block was lined with stores and other businesses. In 1931, it contained the following commercial and social establishments: four candy stores, two barber shops, three saloons, one pool room, one funeral home, one junk yard, one lumber yard, and one real estate office. The block also accomodated a Seventh Day Adventist church which conducted services in Italian, and a labor union hall. "Base Map of East Harlem," CC.

As late as 1934, in the immediate ten-block area where Marcantonio was born, 50 percent of the housing units had four rooms, about 30 percent had three rooms, and 12.5 percent had five rooms. Only 42 percent had a private toilet. Abraham Kavadlo, "Housing in Lower East Harlem." Typewritten. May 15, 1939. Marcantonio Papers, New York Public Library, Carton 13, Folder 1 of 2 "Housing in Lower East Harlem." (Hereafter cited as MP followed by carton number and folder title in parentheses.)

⁷Interview, Maurelli.

from the artigiani, the artisan class of Italians.⁸ Most other members of the community had come from the Italian landless contadini, the landless or land-poor peasantry. Only a slightly better off materially than the contadini, the artigiani nonetheless possessed an independent spirit that had been handed down through the centuries. When the artisans emigrated, they were motivated largely by the desire to give their children an education. The majority of Italo-Americans who achieved professional status in this period were the children of artigiani immigrants.⁹

Another of young Marcantonio's advantages was that his father was a native speaker of English. In general, Italian immigrants learned the new language very slowly, so much so that in the United States Census for 1930 and 1940 Italians headed the list of newcomers unable to speak English. Moreover, Vito's paternal grandparents, who lived in his tenement, spoke English. His mother rarely spoke it, and then only haltingly. Unlike most other Italo-American children, Vito had only one other sibling with whom to share the limited resources and nurturing of his family, his younger brother, Frank.¹⁰ Hence Vito, unlike his

⁸In 1916, nearly half the Italian fathers of children born in New York were laborers. Of the remaining half, 15 percent identified themselves as tailors, barbers, or shoemakers. Only 0.2 percent of the Southern Italian immigrants had professions. John D'Alesandre, Occupational Trends of Italians in New York City, a Casa Italiana Educational Bureau bulletin published in 1935, which was reprinted in The Italians: Social Background of an American Group, p. 424.

On the Marcantonios' class background, see Patrick Gallo, Old Bread New Wine: A Portrait of the Italian-Americans (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), p. 202.

⁹On the artigiano class, see Leonard Covello, The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child: A Study of the Southern Italian Family Mores and Their Effect on the School Situation in Italy and America (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1967), pp. 99, 320.

¹⁰Covello, Social Background, p. 279; Interview with Ida Hefner, New York City, August 3, 1975, and Maurelli.

playmates, was not forced to contribute economically to the welfare of his family.¹¹ (See pp. 240-41)

In elementary school, he displayed marked intellectual and leadership qualities. His grades were excellent, and he became chief of the school patrol. He had many friends and did not get involved in fist fights. He showed little interest in organized sports. His best subjects were history and public speaking, and he became a favorite of his teachers and the principal.¹² In a letter of recommendation, the latter described him as having

distinguished himself by his unswerving fidelity, his fine zeal in the performance of his duties, his tenacity of purpose, his initiative, his courage, and his innate leadership. . . . Although he was considerably undersized, he was given the position of chief of the school patrol. As such he displayed all the fine qualities that I have enumerated above. . . . I can bear testimony to the fact that he is an excellent thinker and likewise a very able talker. I

¹¹In 1900, Italian women in Buffalo had an average of 4.5 surviving children. Women of forty-five and over had given birth, on the average, to eleven children. Again in Buffalo, in 1905 three-quarters of all Italo-American boys fifteen to nineteen years of age worked, 5 percent stayed at home, and only 20 percent attended school. Beyond the economic hardships generally suffered by large families, most Italo-American youth were forced to work because their fathers' earning power, in the typically seasonal and low-paid occupations in which they were concentrated, was severely limited. The near taboo on women's working outside the home also operated to compel male children to seek gainful employment. Virginia Yans-McLoughlin, Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 104, 170-71, 173, 192, 195, 197, 203, 213. A recent study indicates that because the garment industry provided relatively desirable work for women, this norm was considerably eased among Italian women in New York City. Miriam Cohen, "Italian-American Women in New York City, 1900-1950: Work and School," in Class, Sex and the Woman Worker, eds., Milton Cantor and Bruce Laurie, *passim*. On Italian-American women working outside the home, also see Marlene P. Terwilliger, "Jews and Italians and the Socialist Party, New York City, 1901-1907: A Study of Class, Ethnicity, and Class Consciousness" (Ph.D. dissertation, Union Graduate School, 1977), p. 24. On the perception of the child as an economic asset among Southern Italians, see Leonard Covello, Social Background, pp. 160, 223-24, 229-32, 265.

¹²Interview, Maurelli.

am sure that in business he will be a huge success.¹³

In February 1917, Marcantonio and one other neighborhood boy enrolled in De Witt Clinton High School. (East Harlem did not have its own high school until 1934.) The two chums generally walked the four miles to 59th Street and Tenth Avenue to save the nickel trolley fare. Initially Marcantonio had some disciplinary difficulties at school, as did the other boy, who dropped out before the end of his freshman year. Marcantonio's teacher requested a meeting with his father, but the youngster turned instead to a stranger on the street, gave him money for a shave and haircut, and instructed him to answer yes to everything the teacher asked. The ruse worked. But when Vito was asked to bring his father to school a second time, he was unable to find the original father-substitute. He brought in another impostor and his deception was discovered.¹⁴

From 1914 to 1922, the Socialist Party dominated the Jewish section of East Harlem, a few blocks west of Marcantonio's home, but it exerted only a mild influence on Italian Harlem.¹⁵ Jewish Harlem sent Socialist aldermen to the New York City Board of Aldermen and Socialist assemblymen to the state legislature. Its candidate in the 1916

¹³William Hanig, June 17, 1919. MP 7 (Prominent People).

¹⁴Interview with Louise Berman, New York City, July 27, 1976.

¹⁵At least until 1916, there was no Italian Socialist Party organizer or section in the Twentieth Congressional District, which was coterminous with East Harlem. Terwilliger, pp. 63-64.

Congressional race, Morris Hillquit, lost by 350 votes.¹⁶ (See pp. 336-37) But Jewish and Italian Harlem were politically and culturally different worlds.¹⁷ There is no evidence that Marcantonio's political development was charted by the Socialist Party's activities in Jewish Harlem. At times, Marcantonio, later in his life, boasted that his grandfather had marched with Garibaldi, but there is little reason to believe that his radicalism was derived from his family. He could not, however, escape the effects of the radicalized ambiance of De Witt Clinton.¹⁸

In 1917, Marcantonio's freshman year at Clinton, the school day was lengthened as a wartime measure to encourage mothers to enter the work force. The students protested this action, in part because it infringed on their after-school employment, and in part because of their antiwar sentiment. Their protest was reported in the New York Times, which assailed the "young Leninists" who "rebelled, struck, paraded, committed acts of violence, had their hours of Bolshevism." A school official warned he would close the school if the teachers did not counteract the protest with a resolution stating their disapproval, and the associate superintendent of schools launched an inquiry "to ascertain whether certain teachers were loyally supporting the

¹⁶The assemblyman, August Claessens, along with five other Socialists, was denied his seat in 1920 on the grounds that he had been elected on a platform inimical to the best interests of New York State and the United States. For an account of the famous trial subsequent to this action, see Norma Fain Pratt, Morris Hillquit: A Political History of an American Jewish Socialist (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 182.

¹⁷Jeffrey S. Gurock, When Harlem was Jewish: 1870-1930 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 80-81. For further discussion on the Socialist Party in Jewish Harlem herein, see pp. 40-41, 435-36.

¹⁸Interview with Ida Hefner.

Government in the conduct of the war." He defined the purpose of this inquiry as follows: "The Board of Education will not tolerate teachers who are not prepared to exercise a positive influence in support of their Government. It is their business to see how we can make the pupils more willing to serve in the army when their turn comes. . . . Some pacifists and extreme individualists are not exerting such an influence on the students. . . . We want our teachers to be positive in their Americanism." He went a step further, adding that "seditious" students sixteen years and older should be dismissed. "Our state should not be taxed to educate useless or worthless children."¹⁹

The teachers were then summoned individually to the principal's office and interrogated at length about their views on socialism, Bolshevism, Hillquit's mayoral campaign, and internationalism. One teacher was asked if he thought "Jewish students, especially the Russians, need to be disciplined out of their individualistic tendencies." Eventually, eight teachers were transferred and three dismissed for "views which are subversive of discipline in the schools and which undermine good citizenship." One discharged teacher was accused of being neutral in a classroom discussion about anarchism; another was charged with proposing that persons in military uniform should not be allowed to address the school assembly; and the third was arraigned for not considering it his duty to develop in the students an instinctive respect for the President and other government officials. The third teacher was also charged with permitting a student to read in class an anti-war statement criticizing the President for his readiness to "slaughter us all in order that we may enjoy in death what we are now

¹⁹As quoted in Liberman, pp. 11-12.

lacking in life." The Times characterized this antiwar statement as a "particularly vicious product of English as it taught at De Witt Clinton High School." Assailing the school as a "nursery of anti-patriotism," the newspaper demanded that the Board of Education "root out all the disloyal and doubtful teachers . . . and if they continue to profess sedition, they should be locked up."²⁰

The three received support from the newly founded teachers' union, which condemned the inquiry as a "star chamber proceeding" and charged the authorities with attempting, "under cover of the flag . . . and patriotism," to thwart the union and Prussianize the school. It raised a defense fund to aid the dismissed Clinton trio and formed union committees to enlist the aid of the community. Abraham Lefkowitz, one of the union's founders, chaired this speakers' committee.²¹

Lefkowitz, an ardent Socialist who ran for Congress in 1922 and later became a full-time official of the teachers' union, taught Marcantonio history at De Witt Clinton, introducing the youngster to socialist viewpoints on history and encouraging his interest in the subject. Lefkowitz remembered Marcantonio as an eager and excellent student, "always discussing world affairs, politics, and labor conditions." Lefkowitz probably significantly influenced Marcantonio's view of American history as a succession of struggles of the haves against the have-nots to extend the boundaries of democracy. His

²⁰As cited in Liberman, pp. 13-14.

²¹Ibid.

interest in the writings of Jefferson and Lincoln date to this period.²²

There is no evidence that Marcantonio joined the Socialist Party at this time. He nevertheless considered himself a socialist, as did some of his classmates. A boyhood friend recalled Marcantonio as a fighter for the "underdog . . . always trying to improve situations; he was socialistic."²³ Covello remembered Marcantonio berating a group of students in school: "You don't even know you're alive," Marcantonio challenged them. "I'll bet you this very minute there's somebody, some guy outside there figuring how he's gonna make money off your hides when you go look for a job. You don't even know that."²⁴

Nor were his socialist views confined to the classroom. He joined the campaign for Ireland's independence from Great Britain and spoke at a mass rally at Columbus Circle in Manhattan, protesting the hunger-strike death of Terrence MacSwiney, an Irish nationalist.²⁵

Despite his political activity, the future Congressman did not entirely neglect his studies. He barely scraped through elementary algebra and suffered with chemistry for one year, but showed better

²²Ibid. Marcantonio was not the only famous person influenced by the socialist milieu at De Witt Clinton. Max Schactman, the renowned Trotskyist, recalled that his attachment to socialism resulted from its rather wide following at the school. Schactman was particularly impressed by a history teacher whose socialist sympathies generally found their way into his American history classes. (We do not know whether the history teacher at De Witt Clinton who probably influenced Marcantonio--that is, Abraham Lefkowitz--was the same teacher who influenced Schactman.) Salvatore John LaGumina, Vito Marcantonio: The People's Politician (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1969), p. 3.

²³Interview with Charles Cimilucca, in Liberman, p. 13.

²⁴Covello, The Heart, p. 152.

²⁵Interview with Cimilucca, in Liberman, p. 14.

academic achievement in the social sciences. When Marcantonio graduated from De Witt Clinton with an 84 average in a class of 250 in 1921, he was the only one of eleven Italo-Americans to receive honors. He also achieved distinction in history.²⁶

The combination of innate abilities and relative family prosperity helped Marcantonio transcend the social and economic barriers that confined most Italo-Americans to low levels of educational and occupational achievement. As late as 1930, only 11 percent of the Italo-American residents in the Health Area containing Marcantonio's birthplace graduated from high school.²⁷ His achievement was quite unusual. He was an Italian Horatio Alger hero escaping the ghetto and entering middle-class America. But Marcantonio did not follow the story outline. The chance meeting at De Witt Clinton with Leonard Covello and Fiorello H. LaGuardia determined his commitment to remain in Italian Harlem.

Leonard Covello was born in Southern Italy in 1887 and came to America at the age of nine. Against great odds, he earned a Pulitzer scholarship to Columbia University in 1907 and graduated in 1911, having been elected to the Phi Beta Kappa Society. He dedicated all his extraordinary energies and talents to designing a pedagogy to raise the educational achievement of Italo-Americans. He believed that these students' low scholastic achievement was rooted in the mores of the contadini, the socio-economic class from which the majority of Italian

²⁶Alan Schaffer, Vito Marcantonio, Radical in Congress (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), p. 11; "Program of Commencement Exercises." CC.

²⁷Statistics compiled from United States Census Bureau for 1940 by Covello, CC; Covello, Social Background, p. 285.

immigrants--derived. They generally opposed school attendance beyond childhood years, fearing that prolonged formal education would disrupt the family unit. This pattern created a conflict with the ethos of the American educational institutions.²⁸

Covello devoted his professional life to refining an educational model that would alleviate, if not eliminate, this conflict. Two years before Marcantonio came to De Witt Clinton, Covello began to implement strategies for improving Italo-American high school achievement. Initially, his efforts took three forms: promoting the study of the Italian language; establishing "Circulos Italianos," Italian student clubs; and founding Casa del Popolo, a settlement house in Italian Harlem. Marcantonio's participation in all three of these undertakings gave form and direction to his life.

With Marcantonio among his first students, Covello started teaching Italian at De Witt Clinton in 1920.²⁹ Marcantonio acquired

²⁸Even when the economic status of the Southern Italian immigrants improved, Covello demonstrated that their mores--at least in a homogeneous community such as Italian Harlem--persisted. (See f.n. 9, p. 174) This was reflected in the group's low educational achievement. For example, the average family income in East Harlem in 1950 was twice as high in the core areas of Italian Harlem than in El Barrio. Yet the differences in the average number of years of schooling per adult was slight: 6.6 to 6.9 in El Barrio, and 8.0 to 8.4 in Italian Harlem. (See Map 6) Covello noted that the frequent complaint of the Southern Italian immigrant was that "the school takes our children away from us." Covello, Social Background pp. 287, 312, 319, 360-81, 407-48; see also Herbert Gans, The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian Americans (New York: Free Press, 1965), p. 134; Yans-McLoughlin, pp. 172, 176, 195; and, Phyllis H. Williams, South Italian Folkways in Europe and America: A Handbook for Social Workers, Visiting Nurses, School Teachers, and Physicians (New York: Russell and Russell, 1969), pp. 130-34.

²⁹Largely because of Covello's efforts, the Italian language achieved parity with French, German, Latin, and Spanish in the New York City School system. It was recognized in 1922 as an accepted language requirement for an academic diploma. Aside from the conventional academic reasons for the study of a language, Covello stressed the

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fluency in the language in Covello's classes, helping him immeasurably in political life. In fact, his knowledge of the mother tongue earned him enormous respect from his Italo-American constituents. His rapport with them was strengthened by his frequent references to political opponents in Italian slang. As late as his 1949 mayoral campaign (see pp. 430-31), he made a number of radio speeches entirely in Italian.³⁰

Covello's efforts to rid students of the idea that "Italian" meant something inferior sparked Marcantonio's enthusiasm. Covello recalled that Marcantonio became a "volcano of energy, becoming involved in everything that had to do with the Circolo and the Italian department." When Il Circolo presented Carlo Goldoni's The Fan (Il Ventaglio) in English at De Witt Clinton in January 1921, Marcantonio (listed as "Victor" Marcantonio) played the role of Evarito. These social activities cultivated his political acumen. Covello recalled that when Marcantonio was denied the presidency of the club because of

importance of studying Italian by second- and third-generation Italo-Americans as a means of "creating a sympathetic bond between parents and their children, now often separated by the inability to speak the same language." He also envisioned command of the language as a requisite for meaningful social and political work in the Italian community. As late as 1940, of the Italian-American group, 3,600,000 had been born in the United States, 600,000 had been here since childhood, and 2,400,000 had immigrated to the country in adulthood. Of the first-generation cohort, 665,000 had not been naturalized. Particularly in a homogeneous community like Italian Harlem, therefore, there were large numbers of Italian-dominant or exclusively Italian-speaking people. Robert Whitney Peebles, "Leonard Covello: A Study of an Immigrant's Contribution to New York City" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1967), pp. 114, 161-62; Leonard Covello, The Heart, pp. 137-39; Leonard Covello, "Language as a Factor in Integration and Assimilation: The Role of the Language Teacher in a School-Community Program," Modern Language Journal XVIII (February 1939), p. 330; Edward Corsi, "Italian Immigrants and their Children," published in Cordasco and Bucchioni, eds., p. 217; Schaffer, p. 187.

³⁰"Marcantonio Assails Morris and O'Dwyer," New York Times (October 8, 1949), p. 30.

his "off-handed actions and Socialistic tendencies," he managed to have the organizational structure revised and got himself elected chairman of the executive committee, with powers exceeding those of the president.³¹

Covello's primary motivation for organizing Il Circolo at De Witt Clinton (similar groups were later founded at other high schools) was to increase the educational success ratio of Italo-American students. At that time, De Witt Clinton's student body was composed of predominantly college-bound Jewish students, most of whom came from the Lower East Side, but there were also many well-to-do youngsters from the Upper West Side. As one of Marcantonio's fellow members of Il Circolo recalled, "We were a minority group and we were looked down upon. Some teachers even had the impression we couldn't learn."³²

The usually strong Italo-American peer-group hostility toward education and social mobility did not entirely elude Marcantonio, who was subjected to a good deal of pressure from his friends to quit school. As he passed through the neighborhood with books under his arm,

³¹That neither his politics nor his style met with universal acclaim from fellow members of Il Circolo is reflected in this item on the gossip page of the December 1923 issue of Il Foro: "You never appreciate a good man until he is dead. That is why Marc is keeping quiet. But bear in mind: 'little drops make big rivers.' Now for his diploma at the N.Y.U. Law School." Covello, Social Background, pp. 422-25; Covello, The Heart, pp. 15, 152; Untitled, undated report on the progress of Italo-American students at De Witt Clinton and Il Foro, 1922, CC. Program for Il Ventaglio reproduced in Peebles, p. 319.

³²Interview with Lionel Trilling in Liberman, p. 6. Trilling further recalled that the intellectual atmosphere at the school was serious and exciting, with many gifted, well-educated teachers and a considerable regard for scholastic achievement. Stress was on the humanities, and academic standards were high.

they would taunt him with the nickname "The Professor."³³ Consequently, he hid his books in a candy store some distance from home.³⁴ The basic reason for this peer derision of formal education (reinforced by adults) was the conviction that the economic needs of the family should take precedence over the aspirations of the individual family member for better employment, higher income, and social advancement. The educationally ambitious Italo-American youth, thus, was faced with the alternative of succumbing to these pressures and curtailing his ambitions or becoming alienated from his family.³⁵ Covello envisioned Il Circolo as a means of overcoming this obstacle. The club provided a familiar, protective educational enclave within an environment that many--if not most--Italo-Americans perceived as antagonistic. Covello theorized that the pressures from the original peer group could be countered by creating a second or substitute peer group, which was intrinsically pro-education--that is, Il Circolo Italiano. To him, the club's emphasis on learning of the group's own culture and language might help overcome the Italian immigrant parents' typical suspicion of prolonged "book learning." And the Circolos did help to supply the communities with effective leadership; otherwise, the pressures of forced acculturation would have continued to alienate the most gifted,

³³Interview with Cimilucca, in Liberman, p. 7; Interview, Maurelli.

³⁴Annette Rubinstein, interview, cited in Jacob Blum and Peter Wilhelm, "Vito Marcantonio and the Political Organization of East Harlem" (Honors paper, Yale University, 1967), p. 10.

³⁵Gans, pp. 31, 134, 219, 221; Covello, Social Background, pp. 289, 311, 327; Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1963), pp. 198-99.

ambitious Italo-Americans from their communities.³⁶

Covello's family came to the United States in 1896, when he was nine years old. Their first residence was East 112th Street between First and Pleasant Avenues, one block from Marcantonio's birthplace. Many immigrants from Avigliano in Southern Italy lived in this part of Italian Harlem. When the entire neighborhood was razed to create Thomas Jefferson Park, the Avilianese reacted with a "curious fatalistic attitude. . . . Generations of hardship were behind them. Life was such: 'La Volontà di Dio!'"³⁷

Covello felt that the responsibility for the deplorable conditions in Italian Harlem rested not with "unguided youths or misfit adults living in stultifying surroundings," but with the educated, who, "possessing the qualities, the power, and the opportunity for leadership have failed to act in behalf of our Italo-American communities and their people."³⁸ Il Circolo, then, would function to encourage the Italo-American student to remain and serve his community by providing the necessary leadership to dispel the fatalism of the contadini mentality. Marcantonio would be his greatest success.

In the early twenties Covello directed a settlement house called Casa del Popolo, which connected and committed the members of the Circolos to the Italo-American community. Casa del Popolo's directors

³⁶Covello appeared to have one further goal in the creation of such circolos, that is, to provide a counterweight to the pressures of forced acculturation that led to the alienation of the most gifted and ambitious Italo-American youth from their communities, leaving them without effective leadership.

³⁷Covello, The Heart, p. 21.

³⁸Leonard Covello, "Leadership and Responsibility in the Italo-American Community," Mimeographed (ca. 1940), p. 4. CC.

and staff were Italo-Americans and taught both Italian and English, while maintaining facilities for the exercise of both American and Italian cultures. Marcantonio was in charge of La Casa's citizenship classes, personally conducting small groups through the bureaucratic labyrinth of the naturalization process. Covello recalled that his protégé's style was "intense and not without humor" as he patiently explained the history of the Italo-Americans' new land.³⁹ (See pp. 199-201) When Marcantonio entered New York University in 1921, he and other former members of the Circolos Italianos founded, under Covello's tutelage, the college-level Inter-Scholastic Circolo Italiano. One of its main functions was to provide tutoring for Italian Harlem's high school students.⁴⁰

Covello and Marcantonio collaborated throughout their lives. The project that brought them closest was the effort to obtain a permanent home for Benjamin Franklin High School. East Harlem's first and only high school, founded in 1934 with Covello as its first principal, was initially housed in two abandoned junior high schools. Covello and Marcantonio pressured LaGuardia to provide the funds for the construction of a new edifice. In 1940 Marcantonio wrote Covello: "I flew down to Washington, D.C., with the Mayor this morning and had a very satisfactory talk with him in regard to the school. . . . I am

³⁹Brochure, Preparatory School for Italian Young Men at Casa del Popolo (ca. 1920). CC.; Covello, The Heart, p. 156. For a more detailed account of Casa del Popolo, see Social Background, pp. 425-26.

⁴⁰Interview with Covello conducted by Liberman, p. 18.

confident that everything is going to be alright [sic]."⁴¹ One year later, a red brick and limestone building with a copper cupola, on Pleasant Avenue facing East 115th Street, surrounded by Thomas Jefferson Park on three sides and overlooking the East River was dedicated as Benjamin Franklin's new home.⁴² (See pp. 130-1, 135)

Covello also played a very active role in organizing the Harlem Legislative Conference, founded in 1937. Marcantonio joined him to become chairman of this group. The history of this coalition of community groups and Marcantonio and Covello's collaboration in its activities is recounted in detail in Chapter IV.

At East Harlem rallies, the two men frequently shared the same platform with the featured speakers. In 1939, at a bilingual mass meeting against the Dies Committee sponsored by the Progressive Lodge of the International Workers Order, they headed the list of speakers. They also appeared together on numerous other occasions, in 1941 at an "East and Lower Harlem Conference on Jobs and Training" sponsored by the Harlem Legislative Conference, in 1946 at a "Give a Can of Milk Rally" sponsored by the American Labor Party's campaign for the children of Italy.⁴³

The collaboration between Marcantonio and Covello took many

⁴¹July 16, 1940. MP 5 (Covello). Marcantonio's continued involvement with the fate of Benjamin Franklin High School is captured in the following sentence from a somewhat cryptic letter from Covello to Marcantonio dated May 4, 1944: "From all indications, you will have saved this school of ours for this community for the third, if not the fourth time." CC.

⁴²Guy Trebay, "Elevation and Scale," Village Voice (January 18, 1983), p. 55.

⁴³Leaflets deposited in the Covello Collection.

different forms. During the politically conflicted period of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, Covello wrote a letter to Marcantonio saying, "I would appreciate it very much if you would send me any material you have on peace and the reasons why America should keep out of the war, as I am going to speak Friday and shall need this material in order to prepare my speech." In another incident, a political lieutenant asked Marcantonio to intervene so that a Puerto Rican youngster could take an entrance examination to the Music and Art High School. Marcantonio replied: "Bring the father to the Harlem Legislative Conference Friday night. Covello and some of the other members of the Board of Education will be present and I will take the matter of his son up with them right there and then."⁴⁴

The Covello-Marcantonio lifelong collaboration was sustained by a mutual commitment to East Harlem. Neither ever wanted to leave the community. From the early thirties they lived in adjacent brownstones on East 116th Street, renowned as the "Fifth Avenue of Harlem's Little Italy."⁴⁵ Their commitment embraced all the community's residents. They never flinched from insisting that Blacks and Puerto Ricans were to be given equal access by right to the same schools and public housing. True, their world views did not exactly coincide, but there were sufficient points of agreement to enable this remarkable relationship to

⁴⁴Covello to Marcantonio, April 1, 1940. MP 5 (Covello); Aide Report, Lopez, 1940-41. MP 44; Covello to Marcantonio, June 13, 1954. CC.

⁴⁵Frederick Thrasher, "Final Report on: The Jefferson Branch of the Boys' Club of New York," Typewritten. Submitted to the Bureau of Social Hygiene, 1935. Deposited in the New York University Library.

endure.⁴⁶

To fulfill his educational mission, Covello knew he would have to fully understand the community and its people in order to help both. He collected every conceivable fact he could find on East Harlem's demographics, housing, economics, and organizations. When facts were not readily available, he found ways to gather and combine them into meaningful research information. Along the way, he created seemingly endless lists of religious, fraternal, and social organizations, and trade unions. To better understand his students, he spent ten years researching a doctoral thesis, The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child. All his unrivaled insight into Italian Harlem was put at Marcantonio's disposal throughout their years together.

Because he was Marcantonio's only confidant and the most important figure in his life, Covello was a major influence on his

⁴⁶Covello had been influenced by socialism in his youth. The experience of tutoring a millionaire's daughter while attending Columbia College jolted him: "I kept seeing before my eyes the [millionaire's family], with their home in the country and their mansion in town, and the people of East Harlem who worked all day long and were barely able to fill their stomachs and clothe their children." The Heart, p. 85. Yet politics was not Covello's primary concern. He was an educator with an educational theory that necessitated social activism in the community. The underlying political content of his educational concept is best revealed in the following excerpt from an untitled draft of an essay (p. 18, CC) on Italo-American students and the Italian community, which he wrote about 1930:

"I am completely convinced that education--which is not the accumulation of knowledge and the sharpening of people's wits to prey upon their fellow man--can be a potent force in directing young people's lives to serve and not exploit a fellow human being. This is a very difficult job indeed because our society is based, in the main, on the exploitation of human beings; but there is no doubt that we can and should try with all our resources to lessen the impact of this type of thinking and this way of life in our present-day society. For, as teachers, we cannot remain neutral in this struggle and our job is to be on the side of the exploited."

friend's sustaining leadership in the Italian community. To the childless Covello, Marcantonio was "one of my boys," a term that prompted the future Congressman, while at De Witt Clinton, to begin calling him "Pops," a nickname that persisted for life. The final irony for the mentor, Covello, was that he served as a pallbearer at his protégé's funeral.⁴⁷ (See pp. 453-57)

While Marcantonio was still in high school, his father was crushed to death by a Third Avenue streetcar. For the lack of twenty-five dollars, the family could not have a funeral mass. Without Samuel's income, Vito's mother and grandmother had to take in washing and sew lace at home to support the family. With financial assistance from relatives and, possibly, a financial settlement with the streetcar company, they were able to keep the boy in school.⁴⁸

In September 1921 Marcantonio entered New York University Law School, registering himself as "Victor." There he continued his interest in Italian culture by organizing and becoming president of the university's first Italian club, Circolo Mazzini. He also helped to form an Inter-Scholastic Italian Club, which planned and coordinated regularly scheduled activities. The group extended these activities to

⁴⁷Covello's introduction of Marcantonio at the Grand Opening Ceremony of Benjamin Franklin High School, June 1939. Text deposited in the Covello Collection; Covello, The Heart, p. 152; "Funeral Services for Vito Marcantonio," press release. CC.

⁴⁸Schaffer, p. 12; Interview, Ida Hefner; LaGumina, Vito Marcantonio: People's Politician, p. 3.

other Italian neighborhoods in the city.⁴⁹

During this postwar period of rampant rent-gouging, Marcantonio led the Tenants' Association based in Haarlem House in several well-organized mass rent strikes. He also worked as naturalization director at the settlement house, helping immigrants obtain citizenship papers and conducting classes for them. In 1924, he became director of educational work and then director of men's activity, a position he retained until 1934. In these administrative posts, he helped to ensure the future of Haarlem House as a neighborhood forum for liberal ideas and as a center for organizing community action on problems of sanitation, housing, and recreation.⁵⁰ (See p. 197-99)

Active in the Italian culture club, working at Haarlem House, clerking in a law office, absorbed in reading radical literature, and keeping busy in LaGuardia's campaigns, it is a wonder that Marcantonio graduated from law school. He failed several courses, barely passed

⁴⁹Interview with Covello, Liberman, p. 18. Marcantonio's involvement in Italian cultural activities often led him to take roles in plays. On one occasion, Luigi Pirandello happened to be in New York City when the New York University Circolo presented his play The License, and the noted playwright was the guest of honor at one of the performances. Marcantonio had not mastered his part, but luckily the law student played the role of the judge, and could hold the script on the bench. Half a century later, Covello recalled having teased Marcantonio for looking like a girl in another play. The youth's indignant reply was, "No, I'm not a girl, I'm an 18th-century gentleman!" In a production of The Fan, an actor became so preoccupied backstage that he missed his cue to bring Marcantonio the fan, and no amount of ad-libbing on stage could attract his attention. Finally, after pacing interminably back and forth on stage, the harried Marcantonio rushed into the wings shouting, "Where the hell is the fan?" Interview with Covello, Liberman, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁰Federal Writers' Project, pp. 106, 109; Haarlem House, 311 East 116th Street--Annual Report, 1929-1930, passim. Aguilar. Marcantonio's involvement with Haarlem House is discussed in Liberman, p. 18. See also "Why You Must Elect Vito Marcantonio to Congress," handbook issued by Marcantonio for the Congress Campaign Committee, 1934. MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns). Covello, The Heart, p. 154.

many others, and had to take reexaminations in a few in order to qualify. In 1926, on his second try, he succeeded in passing the bar.⁵¹

While a student Marcantonio clerked for Haile, Nelles, and Schoor, a prestigious firm specializing in civil liberties and labor cases and representing a host of prominent radicals and leftist organizations. Isaac Schoor represented Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman and the "Buford deportees," alien radicals who, during the hysteria following the First World War, had been rounded up and deported by the government.⁵²

During Marcantonio's internship, Joseph Brodsky joined the firm. A labor lawyer, Brodsky later became counsel to the Communist Party and appeared in court frequently on behalf of its leaders, including Earl Browder and William Z. Foster. He also achieved renown as an attorney in the Scottsboro case. Marcantonio's association with the firm, in particular with Brodsky, significantly contributed to his left orientation. He began reading Marx and Engels and sought every opportunity to discuss political and philosophical matters with members of the firm and their clients. In 1937 he assumed the presidency of the organization with which Brodsky was most closely identified --the International Labor Defense, a legal defense organization intimately tied to the Communist Party. (See p. 73) Brodsky took the neophyte under his wing and let him research many of his own varied cases.

⁵¹Schaffer, p. 13; Interview with Faye Pasternak, in Liberman, p 22.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 23-24.

Marcantonio developed great admiration for Brodsky's integrity, balanced judgment, and legal acumen. Moreover, he regarded him as a trusted friend and adviser, and it is quite probable that Marcantonio's close relationship with the Communist Party originated with his association with Brodsky. When Brodsky died a quarter of a century later, Marcantonio joined with Paul Robeson and William Z. Foster to pay him public tribute. Marcantonio was quoted as saying: "Joseph Brodsky was my friend--a real friend . . . and his name is a synonym to many of devotion to the common people. We will carry on the fight he left us to finish."⁵³

Other than his law firm and community activities, little is known about what issues influenced Marcantonio's early political development--except for the case of Sacco and Vanzetti. Their trial was the only issue that politically united the radicals and the Italian communities. In 1937 he wrote a pamphlet entitled Labor's Martyrs, Haymarket, 1887, Sacco and Vanzetti, 1927, in which he stated, "On August 22, 1927, Sacco and Vanzetti were legally murdered by the State of Massachusetts. The tragedy of their untimely and cruel death is still an open wound in the hearts of many of us who remember them as shining spirits, as truly great men such as only the lowly of the earth can produce."⁵⁴

Although Marcantonio's public life was gaining more and more

⁵³Ibid.; Interview with Ida Hefner; "2,000 Pay Tribute to Joseph Brodsky" New York Times (August 1, 1947), p. 17; "Thousands Attend Brodsky Rites," Daily Worker (August 1, 1947), p. 5.

⁵⁴Vito Marcantonio, Labor's Martyrs, Haymarket, 1887, Sacco and Vanzetti, 1927, introduction by William Z. Foster (New York, 1938), p. 20; Interview with Edward Wallenstein, New York City, August 5, 1976.

visibility, he shielded his private life from public view. We do know that on May 20, 1925, in a civil ceremony at New York City's Municipal Building, he married Miriam Sanders, a woman eleven years older and four inches taller than himself. Born in Boston and reared in Ossippe, New Hampshire, Sanders traced her lineage to colonial times through an ancestor who had been governor of New Hampshire. She was a graduate of the state university and later, a student at Hull House in Chicago. In 1923, she became an assistant to the director at Haarlem House. Along with Marcantonio, she was involved in educational projects there, and the concern they shared for the welfare of the ghetto people brought them together. The differences in their backgrounds could hardly have been more extreme: she was neither Catholic nor Italian. At first shocked by his marriage to a non-Italian, Marcantonio's family gradually accepted it. Although husband and wife were generally understanding and considerate of each other, their basic cultural differences detracted somewhat from their happiness. They had no children, and Miriam stayed in the background of her husband's life, pursuing her own interests, and continuing to use her own name.⁵⁵

At the beginning of their relationship, Marcantonio must have seemed a settlement house worker's dream: a young man from the ghetto who not only rose above his environment, but was also effectively working to bring about change. She once recalled that in the fall of 1924 she had become "electrified by his incisive and compelling oratory," upon hearing him speak at the "Lucky Corner"--East 116th

⁵⁵"From Mrs. Marcantonio," undated, unsigned three-page interview with Miriam Sanders. No indication of interviewer. MP 10; Interview with Annette Rubinstein, New York City, August 21, 1975; interviews with Berman, Ida Hefner.

Street and Lexington Avenue. (It was there that LaGuardia and later Marcantonio made their final election campaign speeches.) He was the apotheosis of what she hoped could emerge, with assistance from Haarlem House and herself, from the immigrant community. To Marcantonio, Sanders represented an unknown America, almost another country, but a country he truly loved and wanted to be a part of. Their marriage was in most ways incongruous but, as one of their intimates noted, "She could speak English, Marc said 'dese' and 'dose.'" It was very important for him that someone could speak English. He learned a lot from her." More than anyone else, it must have been his wife who introduced Marcantonio to the manners and ways of the world outside East Harlem, without which knowledge he might never have achieved national prominence.⁵⁶ (See pp. 253-54)

There was a certain distance and formality in their marriage, but after his defeat in the Congressional campaign of 1950, the couple drew closer. She had inherited a modest home in Danbury, Connecticut, and Marcantonio enjoyed going there to entertain old friends, to read American history, and to fish (with infrequent success).⁵⁷

Marcantonio's first meeting with Fiorello LaGuardia was shortly before he graduated from high school in January 1921. Covello invited LaGuardia to address a school assembly. Before LaGuardia spoke, Marcantonio did, saying, "This morning, I am going to talk about old-age pensions and security. . . . If it is true that government is of the people and for the people, then it is the duty of government to provide

⁵⁶"From Mrs. Marcantonio," MP 10; Interviews: Ida Hefner, Berman, Rubinstein.

⁵⁷Interview with Robert Rusch, New York City, August 5, 1976.

for those who, through no fault of their own, have been unable to provide for themselves. It is the social responsibility of every citizen to see that these laws for our older people are enacted."⁵⁸ LaGuardia shook Marcantonio's hand, slapped him on the back, and worked the thread of the youngster's speech into his own. From this chance encounter grew a rewarding, if sometimes turbulent, lifelong relationship. (See pp. 120, 394-95)

Backed by William Randolph Hearst and the expanding League of Italian-American Republican Clubs, LaGuardia was one of the most radical politicians of the postwar era east of the Mississippi. His political positions were an embarrassment to New York City's Republican Party. But because of his proven vote-getting abilities, he could not be easily dismissed. When he made it known that he wanted to run for governor in 1922, the Republican machine had to get him out of the way. After a long talk with LaGuardia, it did so by nominating him for Congress from East Harlem.⁵⁹

The Socialist Party had retained considerable strength in the district, with its 1922 candidate, William Karlin, garnering the endorsement of the Central Trades Labor Council of Harlem. To further his chances, a special Italo-American labor committee representing locals in the building trades, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union, and the Ladies' Garment Workers' Union set up a Socialist Party campaign headquarters in the heart of Italian Harlem. Since the Party had helped Morris Hillquit capture 43 percent of the vote in an election two years

⁵⁸Covello, The Heart, p. 153.

⁵⁹Arthur Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, 1882-1933 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 149.

earlier, LaGuardia directed an appeal to the Socialist constituency by running on a platform calling for immigration reform, freedom of speech and action for leftists, old-age pensions, workmen's compensation, municipally-owned housing, state-owned utilities, anti-injunction laws in labor disputes, rent control, tax exemption for incomes under \$5,000, a minimum wage, and an eight-hour workday for women. On purely ethnic grounds his candidacy attracted the enthusiasm of East Harlem's Italo-Americans. At this time not a single Democratic or Republican assembly district leader was of Italian descent and the only Italo-American elected official, State Assemblyman Salvatore Cotillo, had been succeeded by a non-Italian.⁶⁰ Not surprisingly, LaGuardia won the backing of the Bollettino della Sera, which stated: "For the Italians . . . LaGuardia's name is the entire program." And he won, receiving 8,492 votes to Democrat Henry Frank's 8,324 and Karlin's 5,260.⁶¹

Even during his freshman term in office, LaGuardia established himself as what one of his biographers described as "the most vociferous, most colorful and most radical member of a small group of Progressives and Socialists who tried to jab at the conscience of their age." His next race, in 1924, was an infinitely complex one. LaGuardia, a nominal Republican, endorsed Robert La Follette, the Progressive Party candidate, for President. In fact, the Progressive Party set up its Northeast headquarters in New York City under the

⁶⁰Thomas M. Henderson, "Immigrant Politician: Salvatore Cotillo, Progressive Ethnic," International Migration Review (Spring 1979), pp. 82, 98.

⁶¹Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, pp. 147, 152, 153, 158.

leadership of LaGuardia and Gilbert Roe, a friend of La Follette's. As a result of his support for La Follette, LaGuardia was denied the Republican designation. In this remarkable campaign, LaGuardia had the backing of the American Labor Party, a New York organization comprising Socialists, single-taxers, farmer-laborites, and trade unionists. But this party had no place on the ballot. So, in a move unprecedented in the history of the Socialist Party in New York City, the name of a nonmember--LaGuardia's--was entered on the Party's line.⁶²

The loss of the Republican Party's support compelled LaGuardia to found his own political organization. Still an outsider in the district, he chose a native Italian Harlemiter, Marcantonio, to do the organizing. Thus at age twenty-two Marcantonio became LaGuardia's chief aide-de-camp.⁶³ With characteristic zeal, Marcantonio started fitting together the pieces of the new Fiorello LaGuardia Political Association, using Haarlem House as his base. It soon became one of the most effective machines in the entire country, and perhaps the most effective in the city, boasting a membership of well over one thousand. One source claimed that by 1930 it had five thousand members who formed a "political center for progressive Italian activity." Its members, a cross-section of the Italo-American community, were popularly called "Gibboni." Thanks to Marcantonio's fervent organizing, the Gibboni became a political force of some importance. (See pp. 118-120).⁶⁴

⁶²Howard Zinn, LaGuardia in Congress (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958), p. 81; Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, p. 173.

⁶³Zinn, pp. 80, 83, 104; Schaffer, p. 80.

⁶⁴Zinn, p. 83, Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, pp. 241-42; Federal Writers' Project, p. 98. There are a number of etymologies for the term "gibboni." Judge Eugene Canudo, who

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On the eve of the election, LaGuardia ended his campaign on the "Lucky Corner," with a parade featuring fireworks, torches, and music. The next day, the thousand Gibboni led by Marcantonio produced an astounding victory: LaGuardia, 10,756; Henry Frank (the Democratic candidate), 7,141; and Isaac Siegel (the Republican), 7,099. The outcome showed a remarkable increase in LaGuardia's standing since his win by a margin of a mere 168 votes in 1922. He carried five of the six Assembly Districts.⁶⁵

While the national and state movements of the Progressive Party faltered, local groups in a few areas of the country maintained their vitality. One of these was East Harlem's Twentieth Congressional District, where Party meetings were held in February and March of 1925. Even though the regular machine tried to regain control of the district by having the county committee appoint its own precinct captains over the heads of the rank-and-file Republicans, LaGuardia's Political Association (which continued to hold meetings at Socialist Party headquarters) maintained its hegemony.⁶⁶

Soon after the 1924 election, LaGuardia reaffiliated with the Republican Party. Nonetheless, his control over the local political machine allowed him to maintain his highly independent relationship from the party. Marcantonio was to follow the same pattern in his accession

participated in LaGuardia's campaign, wrote, "After winning a baseball game the [Fiorello LaGuardia Political] Club earned the reputation of being 'campioni' (champions) but one of the Club's kibitzers remarked on one occasion that they looked more like 'gibboni' (referring to the ape) than campioni." Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, p. 242.

⁶⁵Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, p. 180; Simon Gerson, Pete: The Story of Peter V. Cacchione, New York's First Communist Councilman (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p. 91.

⁶⁶Zinn, p. 160.

to power, namely, a nominal affiliation with the Republican Party while maintaining his independence by continuing to control an independent political organization.

LaGuardia continued to support the Socialist Party, endorsing, for example, its candidate, Norman Thomas, for mayor in 1925. His radicalism went deeper than delivering fiery speeches on the floor of the House: on one occasion he led tenement dwellers from East Harlem to State Housing Commission hearings at City Hall, and he endorsed a meat strike that began in East Harlem and soon spread throughout the city in 1923. Despite his unrepentant radicalism, LaGuardia brought the votes of the low-income minorities to the Republicans. The Republican Party repaid him by nominating him for re-election in 1926, which he won with 9,121 votes to the Democrat's 9,058 and the Socialist's 1,049. The following year, LaGuardia, ever the maverick, endorsed Socialist-supported Jacob Panken in his race for Municipal Court judge. The 1928 race saw LaGuardia increase his margin of victory over his Democratic opponent and the demise of the Socialist Party as a factor in what had been known as "Hillquit's district": LaGuardia, 12,078; Democrat, 10,878 and Socialist, 377.⁶⁷

These campaigns cemented the friendship and affection LaGuardia and Marcantonio shared. The Congressman, who lost his daughter in May of 1921 and his wife that November, came to regard his youthful aide as

⁶⁷Zinn, pp. 72-73, 163, 165-66, 170.

a protégé and practically as a son.⁶⁸ The fatherless Marcantonio spent a full decade in the shadow of his mentor. Soon after LaGuardia's 1926 election, Marcantonio became a law clerk in the Congressman's firm. LaGuardia told his partner, "I want to take this boy in eventually as I want to make him my professional heir."⁶⁹ That year, Marcantonio actually lived for a short while in LaGuardia's Bronx apartment, his only residence outside of East Harlem.⁷⁰ The nature of their relationship is epitomized in a letter LaGuardia sent the young law student, whom he addressed as "Dear Sonny," shortly after Marcantonio joined his firm:

You are going to have a lot to learn and a long way to go before you will be a lawyer in the real sense of the word. I am fond of you and want to help you. . . .

You have an opportunity presented to you as such as few boys have, other than those who can step into their father's office and know that one day it will be theirs. That is what I am offering you. You must make up your mind to be fair with me. You are either going to be a politician, a social worker or a lawyer. If you are satisfied, as I told you, to make your living from the Magistrate and Municipal Courts, with General Sessions as the possible limit, you can keep up your social and political activities. If you love your profession, want to be proficient at it, then you have got to cut out your evening appointments, your dances, your midnight philosophers for the next five years and devote yourself to serious hard study of the law. . . .

Be careful of your personal appearance. Get a Gillette razor and keep yourself well groomed at all times . . . and for goodness sake keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth closed for at least the next twenty years. . . . My dear boy take this letter in the

⁶⁸August Heckscher with Phyllis Robinson, When La Guardia Was Mayor: New York's Legendary Years (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 117.

⁶⁹As quoted in Liberman, p. 22.

⁷⁰Interview with Miriam Sanders, quoted in Zinn, p. 248.

fatherly spirit that I am writing it.⁷¹

Though Marcantonio did not wait twenty years to open his mouth, he seemed to have followed LaGuardia's advice about his appearance: whenever he appeared in public, he dressed in a vested suit. Apparently satisfied that the young man heeded his suggestions, LaGuardia often remained at the office late into the night to talk to Marcantonio. He also insisted that the firm increase his salary and allow him to sit in on case reviews.⁷²

While LaGuardia was in Washington, voicing the aspirations of the ghetto people to a largely indifferent Congress, Marcantonio kept his finger on the pulse of the community. He handled complaints, processed visa applications for relatives of constituents, assisted others in obtaining naturalization papers, fought exorbitant rents and evictions, and answered civil service, veterans' benefit, and other legal aid inquiries. He always carried out his mentor's orders to the letter, from organizing the staff to assembling a street-corner crowd.⁷³ Not once did he overstep the bounds of his role as a Congressional aide. Later, when he took over the machine he had helped to build, he demanded

⁷¹Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, p. 175. A similar letter from LaGuardia to Marcantonio written about the same time (published in La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, p. 240) stated:

"You are young, you have a lot to learn and a long way to go before you will be a lawyer in the real sense of the word. I am fond of you and want to help you. Were I not interested in you, I would not have planned as I did looking far into the future. You simply must learn that you do not know it all and that others in the world have some brains. Both Mr. Cutler and Mr. Foster are splendid gentleman, able lawyers, and I shall expect a courteous, respectful, obedient attitude to them at all times."

⁷²Ibid., p. 176.

⁷³Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, pp. 175-76.

the same degree of loyalty from his staff. (See pp. 87-88, 98)

Marcantonio's service to LaGuardia involved skills distinct from those of a social worker or an attorney. Surviving East Harlem's rough-and-tumble politics was no game for shrinking violets. Strong-arm squads were often required to cope with the illegal registrations and voting. Sometimes they had to guard against attempts to disrupt outdoor meetings by opponents' supporters who would start a scuffle, drop bricks and baby carriages from nearby tenement roofs, turn in false alarms, or deploy brass bands to drown out the speakers. At one outdoor meeting Marcantonio, who was far from being a street fighter, suddenly flew from the speakers' stand "right out into the air and landed on top of a milling group . . . flailing away at a great rate." Observing Marcantonio's management of LaGuardia's campaign, Ernest Cuneo, another young aide of LaGuardia, called him "one of the smartest cookies I ever encountered, one who could trade political punches blow by blow with any comer."⁷⁴

In August 1930, LaGuardia secured his protégé's appointment as Assistant United States Attorney for New York's Southern District at a salary of \$3,000 a year. He kept the position until 1932, although politics, not law, was still his career preference, and he regarded the job as transitional. He specialized in immigration cases, which he found routine and confining, and was relieved when he resigned to establish his own labor law firm of Pinto and Marcantonio in 1932.⁷⁵

In 1930, LaGuardia defeated the Democrat Vincent Auletta by a

⁷⁴Ernest Cuneo, Life With Fiorello: A Memoir (New York: Avon Books, 1955), pp. 127-28.

⁷⁵Bisson to Marcantonio, August 8, 1930. MP.

clear majority, 9,934 to 8,217, a particularly impressive victory in view of the national and statewide Democratic landslide. In New York State, for example, Franklin D. Roosevelt regained the governorship by a plurality of 700,000. Back on Capitol Hill, LaGuardia took command of a leftist group known as the Allied Progressives. He was the only Easterner among them, but his seniority, mastery of parliamentary maneuver, and knowledge of social and economic issues ensured his leadership of this pre-New Deal Congressional group.⁷⁶

Actually, the political upheaval caused by the Crash of 1929 propelled LaGuardia into the political forefront. The center having moved to the left, he was no longer a maverick shouting jeremiads at a complacent House. In the Seventy-First and Seventy-Second Congresses, LaGuardia outspoke every other representative, addressing his colleagues no fewer than four thousand times.⁷⁷ Taking his stand on the left, LaGuardia, for example, assailed the McNary-Haugen bill, which proposed to raise foreign commodity prices by establishing quotas and subsidizing exports: "You have protected the dollar and disregarded the producers. You have protected property and forgotten the human being, with the result that we have legalized a cruel system of exploitation. Now we are approaching the time when real change is necessary."⁷⁸

Although there was hardly an issue that LaGuardia did not become embroiled in, the greatest success of LaGuardia's Congressional career was the passage of the Norris-LaGuardia Act in 1932, the culmination of

⁷⁶Zinn, p. 184; Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, p. 299

⁷⁷Ibid., 289.

⁷⁸Zinn, p. 138.

an eight-year struggle against labor injunctions. The Act forbade courts to consider "yellow dog" contracts (agreements in which an employee promised his employer not join a union while in his employ) as binding.⁷⁹ He returned to East Harlem as the most highly publicized Congressman in the country. That September, when he gave his annual report at the Star Casino, five thousand people packed the hall and another one thousand listened in the streets. In October, Marcantonio collected 6,800 signatures to place LaGuardia's name on the ballot under the Liberty Bell emblem of the Liberal Party as well as on the Republican line.⁸⁰

Despite his national prominence and the apparent enthusiasm of his constituents, LaGuardia lost the 1932 election to James Lanzetta, 15,227 to 16,447. The major reason for this unexpected defeat was the very special character of the 1932 electorate: 12,866 more people voted in the Twentieth Congressional District that year than in 1930. Attracted to Roosevelt, many of these new voters voted the straight Democratic ticket. The Puerto Rican El Barrio had been growing, and Lanzetta won there by three thousand voters--more than twice his overall margin of victory.⁸¹ In 1933, however, the mayoral election catapulted LaGuardia into City Hall as head of a reform coalition that governed for twelve years. Marcantonio was one of the main architects of this victory. LaGuardia's triumph, of course, left his East Harlem Congressional seat vacant, a fact not overlooked by "Sonny." In a

⁷⁹Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, p. 311.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 313.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 318-19.

sense, then, Marcantonio's campaign work for LaGuardia was simultaneously the beginning of his own first campaign for Congress.

While the nomination for mayor still hung in the balance, Marcantonio initiated a campaign that extended far beyond East Harlem to the remote reaches of Staten Island and the Bronx to encourage grass-root support for LaGuardia and to allay the Establishment's concern about his radicalism. Petitions were circulated in Italo-American neighborhoods and delivered by the wheelbarrow to Judge Samuel Seabury, who held the key to the nomination. "There seems to be a recurrent demand for LaGuardia," Seabury remarked. As a member of the Republican Mayoralty Committee, Marcantonio was also instrumental in delaying the endorsement of General John F. O'Ryan, the conservatives' candidate, until the Fusionists had made LaGuardia's nomination a fait accompli. And he played a major role in helping to swing the Italian colony, particularly in East Harlem, where the Gibboni-led voters contributed heavily to LaGuardia's overall victory.⁸²

It is from this campaign that we have the first example of Marcantonio's oratory: a five-page transcript preserved by Covello. It was unlike Marcantonio's later speeches in that it was almost totally non-ideological and, apart from a call for tax cuts, it avoided political issues. But it was emotional and somewhat demagogic. Evidently addressing an Italo-American audience, he concentrated on stirring their resentment and suspicion of politicians. He accused LaGuardia's opponent, John Patrick O'Brien, of conducting a "whispering campaign in the ears of the non-Italian citizens in that LaGuardia is an

⁸²Mann, La Guardia Comes to Power (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) p. 78.

Italian, that he is not an American and that the people of this city don't want a wop mayor." Pursuing this theme, he noted that an O'Brien spokesman had accused LaGuardia of being the "type who waits until one's back is turned and then stabs him in the back with a stiletto."

Marcantonio declared that the metaphor stiletto was used to "bring to light again the dead and forgotten unfair picture of the Italian immigrant in America. It was a deliberate attempt to arouse those passions and racial hatred against a great people. . . ." He then seized upon O'Brien's infelicitous statement that "I often walk in the cemetery because I like to mingle with the dead." Relying for effect on his excellent sense of humor and his knowledge of Italian, Marcantonio continued:

Although personally honest, he has been il piu morto sindaco della citta di New York ["the deadest mayor of the city of New York."] If by some chance he should be elected mayor of New York some bright morning while he is walking and mingling with the dead upon his return from one of his frequent sojourns in the cemetery, he will find that his city hall has been carted away by some of his very much alive associates of Tammany Hall.⁸³

It fell to Marcantonio, Edward Corsi, and Covello to swing the Italo-American vote to LaGuardia. Wherever Italians constituted the dominant ethnic group, LaGuardia won more than half the votes. In Italian Harlem, he polled his highest score in the city: 54 percent. Now that City Hall was LaGuardia's, the major political question was who would inherit East Harlem in the next Congressional race.⁸⁴

⁸³Untitled, undated text of speech, CC.

⁸⁴Mann, La Guardia Comes to Power, pp. 99, 131. Corsi was United States Commissioner of Immigration for twelve years under Roosevelt. From 1943 to 1955 he was Industrial Commissioner for New York and then became Assistant United States Secretary of State. Michael A. Musmanno, The Story of Italians in America (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), p. 253.

LaGuardia had been an exceptionally active Congressman and for ten years the political organizational work--both in serving constituents and in managing electoral campaigns--remained in Marcantonio's hands. At the age of thirty-one, therefore, Marcantonio inherited what was in fact his own creation, the Fiorello LaGuardia Political Association. The thousands of people it had helped already knew Marcantonio as a person who kept his promises. In most instances, the services benefited individuals and their families. On occasion, his efforts assisted the community at large. In 1927, for example, a small Harlem bank, the City Trust Company, failed, jeopardizing the savings of many East Harlem depositors. (Some of the bank's officials, incidentally, were active members of the Democratic Party.) Marcantonio organized the depositors, represented them without fee, and succeeded in persuading other New York banks to take over City Trust's obligations. Eventually, the depositors were paid in full.⁸⁵ Marcantonio's longstanding relationship with LaGuardia gave him other political advantages. His endorsement by the immensely popular mayor was of great importance, especially in the mayor's former district and among his own paesani. Along with the endorsement came the designation of the Republican Party and that of LaGuardia's own political vehicle, the City Fusion Party. Few young people seeking high public office for the first time entered the fray with as many resources as Marcantonio did.

By this time, Marcantonio's personality and life style were established. The contributions of personal characteristics to his electoral successes must be considered here, though the topic is

⁸⁵Lieberman, p. 25; Cuneo, p. 121.

explored in greater detail in Chapter VII (see pp. 239-254). Nothing in his private life detracted from his political goals. He had no children, no hobbies, no vices, and no desire for wealth. All of his considerable energy was devoted to politics. His abiding concerns were belonging to and assisting his community. Oriented toward community service by Covello and to political service by LaGuardia, Marcantonio devoted his life to the general needs of East Harlem and to the individual needs of tens of thousands of community members. East Harlem was a small area--thirty blocks long and seven blocks wide. His main political base, Italian Harlem, was twenty-five blocks long and four blocks wide, and was primarily populated by long-term residents. Many of his constituents knew him personally. His lifelong residence in the neighborhood and close adherence to its mores effectively endorsed his constituents' way of life, further ingratiating him to them.

CHAPTER III

MARCANTONIO AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY

Marcantonio's accession to Congressional office in 1934 signaled his initiation as an autonomous figure. Removed from LaGuardia's supervision, Marcantonio's political career rapidly veered in a direction that set him apart from his mentor and indeed all other holders of high elected office who remained in power for more than one or two terms. Marcantonio at once identified himself as a radical. (See pp. 58-61) But it was his close alliance with the Communist Party that most clearly defined his radicalism. Throughout his political career, there were very few conflicts on political issues between the radical Congressman and the Communist Party. In his first term their only divergence was Marcantonio's support of the Wagner-Connery bill, which proposed establishment of the National Labor Relations Board. Although the bill "will not settle the capital-and-labor problem," he said, "it is a great step toward a Magna Carta for American labor." The Communist Party vigorously opposed the bill as a "weapon to destroy the power which the workers have gained through their economic organizations."¹ Four years passed before another significant

¹Donna Liberman, "Vito Marcantonio: People's Congressman: The New Deal Period" (Honors Paper, Radcliffe College, 1970), p. 62.

difference emerged. The Party praised the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact; Marcantonio neither defended nor condemned it. After the Nazi invasion of Poland in November 1939, he voted for the Fourth Neutrality Act, which allowed for the sale of arms to belligerents on a cash-and-carry basis and which was generally considered advantageous to the British and French. He subsequently voted against every amendment designed to restrict or weaken that legislation. The Daily Worker characterized the new legislation as "balking the will of the people for peace" and as "one more long step in the direction of war." Since Marcantonio did not participate in the debate on this bill, we have no explanation for his vote.² Moreover, in August 1941, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Marcantonio voted against conscription. Earl Browder recalled that when Marcantonio visited him in Atlanta Federal Penitentiary that year, Marcantonio defended his vote solely in terms of political expediency: that is, his need to maintain his connections with the anticonscription bloc in the House and to respect the feelings of his own constituency, who would not have understood his sudden change of position.³

After the war, Marcantonio twice disagreed with the Party on major political positions. In July 1946, he voted in favor of a resolution to provide a \$3 billion loan to Great Britain, taking pains, however, to disassociate himself from the incipient Cold War

²Alan Schaffer, Vito Marcantonio, Radical in Congress (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), pp. 91-93.

³Earl Browder to Donald J. Murphy, March 2, 1959. Browder Papers, Series 1, Box 5, Folder M, Syracuse University Library.

connotations of the loan.⁴ After his defeat in 1950, he supported Jawaharlal Nehru's call for a cease-fire in the Korean War, at a time when the Communist Party vehemently opposed it. The Party later reversed its position.⁵

Unlike the Communist Party and its spokesmen, Marcantonio rarely referred specifically to the Soviet Union. On the few occasions that he did, however, his comments were positive. His first mention of the Soviet Union in the House came during a heated debate on a measure to outlaw strikes for the duration of the war. Marcantonio attacked the law, submitting that Congressmen who supported it were "motivated by the same political philosophy and class interest [as] the Fascists of Italy and Benito Mussolini." A supporter lashed back: "I am after information. Is the labor of Russia free?" Marcantonio replied: "We are learning a great deal about Russia. We were told for years that the Russians could not fight, and we are finding that they can, and as we receive more and more truthful information about Russia we will learn that labor rules in Russia. I also say that the Russian people would not be fighting like tigers if they did not feel that they were fighting for something that belonged to them, and that is an irrefutable conclusion."⁶

⁴Annette Rubinstein, ed., I Vote My Conscience: Debates, Speeches, and Writings of Vito Marcantonio, 1935-1950 (New York: Vito Marcantonio Memorial, 1956), p. 221.

⁵George Charney, A Long Journey (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), pp. 110-1.

⁶Congressional Record, December 2, 1941, p. 9360.

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In 1946, Newsweek quoted Marcantonio as declaring at an American Labor Party rally in Madison Square Garden: "There is only one issue in this campaign--collaboration with the Soviet Union for peace, and for the defeat of domestic fascism."⁷ That statement is unique for the period. Of the innumerable times he attacked United States postwar foreign policy, only once did he refer to the Soviet Union: "We are in no danger of attack. Yes, in no danger of aggression from the Soviet Union, despite the tons of newsprint and billions of radio words to the contrary."⁸ (See p. 68)

These few differences between Marcantonio and the Communist Party were outweighed by the entire balance of his Congressional career. His legislative career therefore is highly predictable and has been presented in Schaffer's Vito Marcantonio, Radical in Congress. The present work briefly outlines his overall political approach inasmuch as this will help establish the limits of his radicalism. In this way, we will also be able to gauge the political context within which Marcantonio's electoral campaigns were waged. In the House of Representatives, Marcantonio always sat on its far left. At times his was the only radical voice heard.

During his first term, he advocated nationalization of the bituminous coal industry and the merchant marine, as well as municipalization of utilities.⁹ He pinpointed the cause of unemployment as an "economic system which permits want in a land of plenty." He added, "Such an economic system must be overhauled by the American

⁷"Red Darling," Newsweek (November 26, 1946), p. 31.

⁸Congressional Record, August 4, 1948, p. A4850.

people themselves through their Representatives in Congress."¹⁰ His public statements, however, indicated that he did not expect these Representatives to overhaul anything.

During his second year in office he stated: "In the face of this appalling situation, the unemployed can expect nothing from those in power. They must depend on themselves, on militant labor organizations, and on all liberty-loving Americans." In addition to unrelenting demands for immediate relief for the unemployed, he proposed "reopening and operating . . . shut down factories by and for the benefit of the unemployed, . . . producing for use instead of profit."¹¹ Along with three other Congressmen (George J. Schneider and Thomas Amlie of Wisconsin and Ernest Lundeen of Minnesota), he signed a manifesto to convene a Constitutional Convention to "rewrite the basic law in order to realize the new age of economic liberty and democracy." It continued: "The great problem of the twentieth century is how to organize our economy so that the abundance which our country is capable of producing can be enjoyed by all its citizens."¹² In January 1936, Marcantonio had proposed a resolution for creating Congressional powers to "establish and take over natural resources, properties, and enterprises in manufacturing, mining, commerce, transportation, banking, public utilities, and other businesses to be owned and operated by the government of the United States or agencies thereof for the benefit of

⁹Congressional Record, June 16, 1936, p. 9625; June 29, 1935, p. 10435.

¹⁰Congressional Record, August 5, 1936, p. 6938.

¹¹Congressional Record, April 30, 1936, pp. 6485-86.

¹²Rubinstein, pp. 50-51.

workers, farmers and the consumers."¹³ During this term, he also defended the rights of Communists, upheld the interests of family farmers and farm laborers, and advocated a social security system financed by general revenues.

On May 6, 1936, he initiated his lifelong public association with Puerto Rico and its people by introducing a bill for that nation's independence. Charging that the United States was maintaining Puerto Rico as a "colony, . . . thus giving ample room for American interests to penetrate as deep economically as they wished," Marcantonio's bill also provided for indemnification "to be paid to the long-suffering people of Puerto Rico."¹⁴ (Marcantonio's efforts on behalf of Puerto Rico's independence are discussed fully in Chapter IX.)

The Harlem Congressman's foreign policy positions were typically presented within a framework which attacked economic as well as political intervention into the affairs of other countries. He viewed military expenditures as motivated by a need to expand the market for American goods.¹⁵ A 1935 speech expressed this belief: "We have now made it our business not only to protect the United States . . . against communism, but we have seen to it that it is our naval policy to protect China against communism. . . . I am not interested in making China safe from communism, I am not interested in protecting sellers of religion or sellers of products. I am not interested in those who go to China for

¹³"FDR Asks Aid of All for 'Progress and Ideals'; New Farm Policy Drafted," New York Times (January 9, 1936), p. 10.

¹⁴Rubinstein, pp. 375-78.

¹⁵Congressional Record, April 30, 1935, pp. 6486, 6540; Rubinstein, pp. 375-78.

huge profits. They take the profits; let them take the risks."¹⁶

During his first House term, Marcantonio put forward a decidedly anti-capitalistic, pro-socialistic (although never avowedly so) domestic program and an anti-imperialist approach to foreign policy. And as if to clarify his determined political stance, if such were necessary, he openly declared that year: "I am a radical."¹⁷ For reasons other than his politics, however, Marcantonio lost the 1936 election.

In November 1937, before a meeting of the annual New York State convention of the International Labor Defense, he enunciated the new left position--that is, the much-moderated line of the Popular Front. His emphasis was on unity: "The reactionaries are banding together. We must too. This is not time for hedging and lack of cooperation. There is only one way to meet that offensive--a strong, militant counteroffensive on the part of the progressive forces of the United States of America."¹⁸ In a similar vein, before a 1937 meeting of the Communist-led District Council 9 of the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America, he urged that labor stop "fratricidal warfare." He contended that it was "absolutely imperative" for labor to forget its differences and unite in a "militant, aggressive and progressive combination" against fascism and reactionary forces.¹⁹

¹⁶Congressional Record, April 25, 1935, pp. 6330-31.

¹⁷Congressional Record, June 29, 1936, p. 10435.

¹⁸"Marcantonio Asks New Labor Fight," New York Times (November 21, 1937), p. 3.

¹⁹"Labor Unity Is Urged: Marcantonio and Other Leaders Ask End of 'Warfare,'" New York Times (July 31, 1937), p. 5.

Eight months after Marcantonio's return to the House, the Popular Front was brought to an abrupt halt by the signing of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact on August 23, 1939. This event signaled a dramatic reversal of Marcantonio's politics. From support of Roosevelt and the New Deal, he now took up a position epitomized by the following declaration, "Another four horsemen of the Apocalypse are abroad today. . . . [They are] Hitler, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Mussolini. . . . The Wall Street-Downing Axis must be defeated."²⁰ In Congress and before public gatherings, he repeatedly described the war as inspired by "imperialism":

We are not preparing for a war in defense of the men and women in the shops . . . factories . . . farms . . . mines and mills. . . . [It is a war] to protect the stake of the American dollar and the British pound for the possible extension of our imperialism in South and Central America.

You are not going to forever solve the problem of unemployment in America by giving the American unemployed the job of stopping bullets and shrapnel at the front. The American workers want overalls; they do not want soldiers' uniforms.

This imperialist holocaust . . . is the President's war, it is the war of the Morgans and the DuPonts, of the economic royalists. . . .²¹

²⁰From a speech presented at a rally sponsored by the New York Council of American Peace Mobilization. Text deposited in MP. See also, "La Guardia's Name Is Hissed at Rally," New York Times (March 23, 1941), p. 30.

²¹The first excerpt is from a speech Marcantonio delivered over the National Broadcasting Company network on behalf of the American Youth Congress, which he had inserted into the Appendix to the Congressional Record, August 29, 1940, p. 5330; the second excerpt is from a speech he made in the House supporting the Work Projects Administration (WPA) appropriation. (Congressional Record, May 17, 1940, p. 6328); the third excerpt is from "Speech Recorded for Student Peace Meetings," text of phonograph recording produced for student peace meetings held throughout the United States on April 23, 1941. MP 22, 1 of 2 (Speeches and Press Releases, 1 of 8).

A particularly stark example of Marcantonio's foreign policy

Despite these fulminations against intervention, Marcantonio's failure to defend the German-Soviet Pact and his support for the Fourth Neutrality Act indicate some ambivalence toward the Communist position during this period.

Marcantonio's opposition to United States intervention in World War II thrust him into sustained national prominence for the first time. As the outstanding leftist opponent of American participation, and therefore of war preparedness, he spoke frequently at rallies and on nationwide radio. What brought him the widest publicity was that he was the only Congressman to vote against major war-preparedness measures: for example, on May 8, 1940, the Ship Construction Bill was passed 400 votes to 1, and the Aviation Expansion Bill by 402 to 1; on August 1, 1940, the nearly \$5-billion supplemental National Defense Appropriation Bill passed by a voice vote with only Marcantonio heard in opposition.²²

stance in this period is contained in his response to a questionnaire from the Brighton-Midwood (Brooklyn) Peace Council. He stated: "Great Britain is not fighting a battle for democracy. It is fighting an imperialist war. Therefore, it makes no difference to the people of the world and the United States as to which brand of imperialism wins. . . . It will be a tragic repetition of 1917, not a war for Democracy but a war for profits, tin, oil, colonies, etc." Jessie Cooper to Marcantonio, January 4, 1941; Marcantonio to Cooper, January 9, 1941. MP 25 (ALP Campaigns, 1939-53, 3 of 3). Further material on Marcantonio's opposition to preparedness and United States intervention is contained in these New York Times articles: "Draft Assailed at Rally" (August 5, 1940), p. 2; "Lend-Lease Bill Fought" (February 1, 1941), p. 6; "House Votes Lend-Lease Bill, 260-165" (February 9, 1941), p. 1; "Leaders of Youth Protest Aid Bill" (February 9, 1941), p. 1; "Aid Bill Backed by Labor" (February 25, 1941), p. 10; "C.I.O. 'Peace' Rally Attended by 5,000: Marcantonio, Connolly, Curran Cheered as They Denounce Aid Bill and Backers" (March 7, 1941), p. 42.

²²"House Speeds Aim of 2-Ocean Fleet," New York Times (May 29, 1940), p. 14; "House Votes \$4,963,151,957 Bill For Nation's Rearmament Drive: Only Marcantonio Is Heard in Opposition as Measure for 200 More Warships and Army Expansion Passes in Record Time," New York Times (August 1, 1940), p. 1; see also "Gap Is Wide," New York Times (May 31, 1940), p. 18.

The Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 ended Marcantonio's opposition to United States participation in the war. Unlike the Communist Party, he did not immediately call for intervention; in fact, it was not until September 29th that he made his first pro-war speech. The only plausible reason for his opposing anti-Axis measures following the Non-Aggression Pact, and then supporting intervention after the invasion, would be his conviction that the survival of the Soviet Union took precedence over every other consideration. Although not quite articulating this position, his first pro-war speech went far in that direction: "An unconquered Soviet Union constituted a most important consideration in the defense of the United States against physical and ideological conquest on the part of the Nazis." He made clear, however, that by now supporting the Allies he was not supporting "imperialism"--that the "fight against Hitler can best be won by assuring and giving to the people of India their freedom, in assuring the emancipation from all sorts of imperialism, not only of the conquered countries but of those countries that find themselves under the imperialism of Wall Street or Downing Street. I refer specifically to Puerto Rico."²³ In little more than two weeks after this speech, Marcantonio was advocating a second front.²⁴

²³"Marcantonio for War," New York Times (October 16, 1941), p. 5. Marcantonio's address explaining his switch to a pro-war position was presented on September 29, 1941, before the Kings County Committee to Rebuild the American Labor Party. He had its complete text inserted into the Appendix to the Congressional Record, October 10, 1941, pp. A4599-601. See also Schaffer, pp. 105-6.

²⁴"House in Clashes over Ship Arms," New York Times (October 17, 1941), p. 9. On October 11, 1941, Marcantonio made a radio address in favor of lend-lease which he had inserted into the Appendix to the Congressional Record, October 16, 1941, pp. A4686-87. See also Rubinstein, p. 143.

For the duration of the war, Marcantonio veered significantly to the right. For example, in a nationwide speech in 1942 he stated, "The overwhelming majority of American businessmen . . . do not seek to exploit labor."²⁵ The same year, he accused Congressmen who opposed the automatic granting of citizenship to conscripted aliens of pitting "class against class."²⁶ Even while declaring "I am for capitalism," Marcantonio's legislative efforts during this period focused on preventing erosion of gains made by labor in the previous decade. He vigorously resisted efforts to impose wage controls. A bill calling for the elimination of overtime pay brought out the old Marcantonio, who characterized its supporters as "gentlemen who prefer to fight labor rather than fight Hitler [and who imperil] the safety of our Nation in the lust for profit."²⁷

Marcantonio's support of the war effort ended his isolation in the House and enabled him to become, for the first and only time in his political career, a truly effective legislator. It was during this period that he became the most important and influential advocate of civil rights in the House, a role he expanded in the postwar era. For instance, he served as sponsor and floor leader of the two most important pieces of civil rights legislation between 1942 and 1950, when he was defeated, the anti-poll tax and Fair Employment Practices (FEPC) bills.

The anti-poll tax bill passed the House a number of times, but

²⁵Text deposited in MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

²⁶Congressional Record, February 2, 1942, p. 1796.

²⁷Congressional Record, April 21, 1942, p. A1478; see also, February 27, 1942, p. 1743.

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Southerners repeatedly filibustered to prevent its enactment in the Senate. To break through this legislative impasse, an amendment to exempt soldiers from the tax was attached to a bill designed to facilitate balloting by members of the armed forces. Clearly the poll tax was repugnant to the vast majority of Americans, and its extension to soldiers during a war was even more repugnant. Attaching a minor issue to a larger one, or an unpopular issue to a popular one, was typical of Marcantonio's parliamentary tactics. In this instance, by attaching abolition of the tax to soldier balloting, he could, with some degree of plausibility, charge supporters of the tax with "demanding tribute from these fighters [and] sowing disunity in our country, attacking the morale of our armed forces, and undermining our war effort. . . ."28

Marcantonio's use of the poll tax issue illustrates the basic tenets of his political philosophy. He found the origins of the tax in a conspiracy of the "landowners and carpetbaggers from the North" to frustrate the growing unity of Southern "working people, white and black" in the 1890s. "Placing cheap labor above democracy, [the rich] forged the chains of the poll tax system to hold the Southern workers in political bondage." Moreover, opposition to programs of greatest interest to working people comes "to a considerable extent from those who have been elected in poll tax districts."29 In short, the poll tax was as much a class issue as a civil rights issue for Marcantonio.

A skillful parliamentarian, Marcantonio often maneuvered House opponents of civil rights legislation into approving, however

²⁸Rubinstein, pp. 167-68.

²⁹Congressional Record, March 4, 1943, p. A948.

reluctantly, bills they disliked. The headline of the lead article of the New York Times of July 4, 1945 read, "Battle over FEPC in House Imperils 11 Other Agencies: A Single Member Can Block Funds for These Units and Marcantonio Plans to Do So." Because the FEPC was included among eighteen other war agencies in a supply appropriations bill, it was covered by the so-called consent agreement. Hence, Marcantonio's objection to the FEPC exclusion was sufficient to prevent the appropriation of funds for the most important wartime agencies, including the War Production Board, Office of Economic Stabilization, and War Shipping Administration. The specter of this was enough to insure continuation of FEPC funding. "For once," The Nation exulted, "the agile Southern parliamentarians were beaten at their own game."³⁰

The end of World War II and the onset of the Cold War cast Marcantonio in a new but not unaccustomed role. In 1947, after President Truman delivered the State of the Union message outlining an aggressively anti-Communist foreign policy, the Times reported: "The members of the House arose as a body and applauded heartily. There was one notable exception, Representative Vito Marcantonio, who stood up and reached for his cigarette case. Extracting a smoke, he stamped it upon his palm, creating no more acclamation than would a mouse creeping across a rug."³¹ Until his defeat in 1950, he provided the most consistent opposition to the new bipartisan foreign policy in the House. Often his was the only dissenting voice.

What was most characteristic, and unique, about Marcantonio's

³⁰Schaffer, p. 138.

³¹"Truman Acts to Save Nation from Red Rule," New York Times (March 13, 1947), p. 4.

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opposition to United States Cold War foreign policy was his frontal attack on its foundations, viz., anti-Communism and fears of Soviet expansionism. The responsibility for the civil war in Greece, for example, Marcantonio ascribed not, as official policy had it, to the Greek Communist Party's operating as a front for Soviet expansionism; rather he argued it rested with the incumbent regime by refusing

to adopt elementary democratic reforms, this regime backed by British imperialists has caused the civil strife in Greece. The question in Greece is not one of communism. The question involved in Greece is bread, land, equitable taxation, liberty, a square deal for the peasants. . . . This regime is a Fascist regime. . . . We will be giving money to a Fascist regime to shoot down men and women, yes, call them guerrillas--yes, some of them Communists, many of them non-Communists--who fought on our side during the war. . . . We are . . . aiding Fascist interests all over the world by the action we are taking. We do it by raising the anti-Communist cry. It is a fascist technique. It will not succeed.³²

Repeatedly, Marcantonio insisted that there was "no danger of aggression from the Soviet Union." Instead, he believed, "All this suffering and deprivation is for the benefit of the Wall Street trusts who seek to control the world for profit and more profit and at our expense."³³ In lieu of a foreign policy based on "containment," he advocated collaboration with the Soviet Union. In a Congressional speech, delivered April 9, 1948 opposing the Marshall Plan, he presented his most extreme foreign policy statement of the postwar period, placing responsibility for the division of Europe on the United States. He warned that the policy of containment would lead to war with the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China. Repeatedly he insisted that the

³²Congressional Record, May 7, 1947, p. 4973.

³³Radio speech sponsored by the American Labor Party, August 2, 1948. Text deposited in MP 22, 1 of 2 (Miscellaneous 4 of 8). Printed also in the Appendix to the Congressional Record, August 4, 1948, pp. A4850-1.

Marshall Plan (in the words he used in Congress):

is not aid. It is not food. It is not rehabilitation. It is war. It is being sold to the country under the guise of stopping communism. . . . [The Marshall Plan] is being used by Wall Street corporations to extend their monopoly control all over Europe. [It] is building markets for monopolies which want to dump goods abroad while maintaining high prices at home. . . . The ladies and gentlemen of high finance and monopoly capitalism are the real masters of the Government in America.

On many occasions, Marcantonio had denounced "Wall Street imperialism," but had never before presented United States foreign policy so totally within a Marxist-Leninist framework. With similar force, and for the first time, he characterised both major parties as "planning to embroil the world into another war" and being equally dominated by the "big trusts of Wall Street."³⁴

As the Truman foreign policy of containment and anti-communism achieved bipartisan support, Marcantonio found himself increasingly isolated in the House. On August 18, 1949, for example, 122 Representatives voted against the foreign military aid bill; one year later, he cast the sole dissenting vote.³⁵ Most striking, however, was his opposition to the Korean War. Less than five months before Election Day, when he would have to face a coalition candidate of the Democratic, Republican, and Liberal Parties, he rose to "state my opinion on this

³⁴Congressional Record, June 12, 1948, p. 8654. Also on his opposition to the Marshall Plan see Congressional Record, December 11, 1947, pp. 1130, 1134-35. In the House, Marcantonio presented the only opposition to the Marshall Plan from the left. In the Senate, Glenn Taylor (Democrat, Iowa) presented the only opposition from the left. See Mary Sperling McAuliffe, Crisis on the Left: Cold War Politics and American Liberals, 1947-1954 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), p. 30.

³⁵"House Cuts Europe Arms Aid by Half," New York Times (April 19, 1949), p. 1; "Arms Aid Is Voted; Marcantonio Casts Only 'Nay' in House," New York Times (July 20, 1950), p. 1; "18 Billion in Arms Is Voted by House," New York Times (December 16, 1950), p. 5.

matter. After all, Mr. Chairman, you only live once; and it is better to live one's life with one's conscience rather than to temporize or accept in silence those things which one believes to be against the interests of one's own people and nation." He objected first to Truman's failure to ask Congress for a declaration of war. Noting the victory of the Communists in China, Marcantonio insisted that the "tyrannical rulers of South Korea were thwarting national unity." Before casting the sole negative vote, he branded United States intervention as abetting tyranny and perpetuating aggression.³⁶

During his final two terms, Marcantonio rose time and again to argue in opposition to contempt of Congress citations against persons who refused to cooperate with the House Committee on Un-American Activities. The earliest occasion, in April 1946, involved seventeen members of the executive board of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee who had been cited for refusing to turn its records over to the committee. Marcantonio pointed out that the House was sitting as both judge and jury and that, if it upheld a contempt citation, these persons would almost certainly be imprisoned. He pleaded that the House not "be motivated by hatred, by bias, by passion, by red baiting. . . ."; he further questioned what he called the "basic political question, [that is] whether aid to the victims of Franco constitutes subversive and un-American activities." The vote for contempt was 292 yeas, 56 nays.³⁷

Also in 1946, he unsuccessfully fought against the contempt citation of Corliss Lamont, the leftist millionaire who was a leading

³⁶Rubinstein, pp. 352-55.

³⁷Congressional Record, April 16, 1946, pp. 2747-48, 2770-72.

figure in the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, and George Marshall, chairman of the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties.³⁸ In the latter case, Marcantonio was able to delay the inevitable majority vote for contempt by insisting that a quorum be present and a roll call vote be taken. The citing of Marshall delayed adjournment of Congress, since every time John Rankin rose to bring his committee's resolution for contempt to the floor, Marcantonio or an ally would suggest the lack of a quorum. When a majority of the members were rounded up by the ringing of the House bell, Rankin moved to "dispense with the proceedings" so that he might go ahead with the contempt citation. Then one of the Marcantonio group would ask for a roll call, which would show that a quorum was no longer present, various Congressmen having left the chamber. This procedure was repeated eight times. When Rankin protested that it constituted a "dilatory tactic," there was laughter in the House, since it was he who had used the same parliamentary trick whenever Marcantonio brought forward civil rights legislation.³⁹

In 1947 Gerhart Eisler, a German refugee, was cited for contempt for refusing to be sworn in before the House Un-American Activities Committee before reading a three-minute statement. Richard Nixon, who presented the Committee's contempt case to the House, described Eisler as a man who had come to the United States to "direct and mastermind the

³⁸Schaffer, p. 56.

³⁹Walter Goodman, The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 179.

espionage activities of the Communist Party" in this country.⁴⁰ Pointing out that no concrete evidence had been presented to support such a charge, Marcantonio insisted: "This is the beginning of a red scare, it is aimed at Eisler, the Communist, but it is aimed at all advocates of democracy. . . . History has taught us that behind a red scare. . . hysteria, there marches, slowly but surely, and often speedily, domestic fascism. . . ." ⁴¹ The vote to cite Eisler for contempt was 370 to one.⁴² Again in 1947 he was the only member of the House to vote against the contempt citation directed at Eugene Dennis, the general secretary of the Communist Party.⁴³ On two days in August 1950, the House was presented with the contempt citations of fifty-six persons. Only Marcantonio argued that the Fifth Amendment had been appropriately taken. Before casting the sole negative vote, he asked his colleagues: "What are you really afraid of?"⁴⁴

Walter Goodman, the major historian of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, stated that after Marcantonio's defeat, the only chiding that Committee had to endure was from its well-wishers, who sometimes argued it was not being harsh enough.⁴⁵ Perhaps more significantly, the only serious criticism of United States foreign

⁴⁰"Eisler Contempt Is Voted by House," New York Times (February 19, 1947), p. 10.

⁴¹Congressional Record, February 18, 1947, p. 1131.

⁴²"Eisler Held Victim of a 'Fascist' Plot," New York Times (March 21, 1947), p. 3.

⁴³"Josephson and Dennis Are Cited by House on Contempt Charges," New York Times (April 23, 1947), p. 1.

⁴⁴Rubinstein, p. 361.

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policy heard in the House was to be made more than a decade after his defeat. These silences on major aspects of American political life perhaps best underline Marcantonio's importance as a legislator, that is, as a dissenting voice whose presence in that body caused substantive debate and deliberation.

While upholding the general positions of the Communist Party in the House, Marcantonio's extra-Congressional pursuits consisted almost exclusively of involvement with organizations either closely or directly connected to the Communist Party. Of the twelve organizations branded as Communist by the Attorney General's report of 1942, he was found to be a member of seven and vice chairman of three.⁴⁶ On assuming the presidency of the International Labor Defense in 1937, he had used his Congressional experience to broaden the organization's legislative activity, establishing an office in Washington, D.C. for the purpose of "initiation of legislation. . . , development of a nationwide lobby, . . . and a legislative information service."⁴⁷ (See pp. 37, 61)

He also assisted the Workers Alliance, an organization of the unemployed and WPA employees that was allied with the Communist Party. He spoke at its conventions, defended it against Congressional attack, and, most interesting, introduced a bill in 1940 drafted by the organization.⁴⁸ Entitled "The American Standards Work and Assistance

⁴⁵Goodman, p. 297.

⁴⁶Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio" (Honors Paper, Harvard University, 1950), p. 138.

⁴⁷"The President's Message," Equal Justice (January 1938), p. 1.

⁴⁸"La Guardia Favors 3 Million on WPA," New York Times (March 23, 1940), p. 2; Congressional Record, January 12, 1939, p. 267; March 27, 1939, p. 4531; July 20, 1939, pp. 9631-32.

Act," the bill called for the immediate employment of three million persons by the WPA at "wages equal to those prevailing for similar work in the locality or to the union scale. . . ." Further, it guaranteed the right of these persons to organize unions and bargain collectively. Finally, a clause barred discrimination for reasons of "sex, race, color, religion, citizenship, length of residence within the state or locality, political opinions, or membership in any economic, political, or religious organizations."⁴⁹ (See pp. 128-29)

Other groups with which Marcantonio remained on friendly terms included the International Workers Order (a fraternal organization and ally of the Communist Party), of which he was a vice president; the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born (of which he was also a vice president); the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade; the American Youth Congress; and the American Peace Mobilization. He also endorsed fund appeals of the Daily Worker and the New Masses,⁵⁰ and headed the board of directors of L'Unita del Popolo, an Italian language weekly with alleged Communist Party ties.⁵¹ He also spoke at meetings sponsored by the Communist Party. In 1942, before 25,000 people at Union Square, he shared the platform with the party leadership, joining them in the demand that "right now is the right time to open a second front."⁵² On May 3, 1943, he was a featured speaker at a Communist-

⁴⁹Congressional Record, May 22, 1940, pp. 6640-42.

⁵⁰Joseph North, editor of the Sunday Worker, to Marcantonio, December 18, 1935; Marcantonio to North, December 31, 1935. MP 26; Paul Kaye, business manager of the New Masses, to Marcantonio, March 27, 1947; Marcantonio to Kaye, March 29, 1947. MP 22, 1 of 2 (Miscellaneous 3 of 8); see also "Charge by Marcantonio," New York Times (March 2, 1936), p. 7.

⁵¹"Plans New Italian Daily," New York Times (June 5, 1938), p. 2.

Party-sponsored May Day Rally held in Yankee Stadium, where he reiterated his support for a second front.⁵³ In a letter to the Fur and Leather Workers Union's 1946 convention, Marcantonio described this most openly Communist-led union in the city as his "favorite" union.⁵⁴ He helped it to lobby for legislation to remove the 20 percent excise tax on furs,⁵⁵ spoke at strike meetings,⁵⁶ and provided its members with various services.⁵⁷ (See pp. 76-77, 79)

Especially in the postwar period of political repression of the left, Marcantonio increasingly served as counsel to individuals and organizations which came into legal jeopardy because of their alleged or avowed Communist Party connections.

One of the most widely publicized legal cases that Marcantonio undertook was the defense of W. E. B. DuBois, who as a result of his promotion of the Stockholm Peace Appeal was indicted on February 7, 1951, for failing to register as a foreign agent. The government's case rested largely on an attempt to prove a parallel between the positions of the domestic circulators of the peace appeal and those in other countries. To this he responded in court: "Two people may have parallel views, one at the north pole and one at the south pole. That does not establish agency." Working without fee as co-counsel and

⁵³Agent's Report of March 2, 1945. FBI File.

⁵⁴Marcantonio to Ben Gold, May 20, 1946. MP 17, 1 of 2 (Furriers Union).

⁵⁵Leon Strauss to Marcantonio, July 25, 1949. MP 17, 1 of 2 (Furriers Union).

⁵⁶"City Asked to Curb Fur Strike 'Terror,'" New York Times (May 10, 1938), p. 1.

⁵⁷Henry Foner to Manuel Medina, September 29, 1949. MP 49.

does not establish agency." Working without fee as co-counsel and frequently referring to DuBois as the "greatest living American," Marcantonio won acquittal for DuBois.⁵⁸

Marcantonio's defense of another subject of political attack, the Executive Secretary of the Civil Rights Congress, William L. Patterson, was so vigorous that the presiding judge often called him to order. Patterson was indicted on November 27, 1950, for contempt of Congress for not producing the records of his organization when they were subpoenaed by the House Select Committee on Lobbying Activities. In his closing statement, Marcantonio informed the court that during the Congressional hearings, the presiding chairman of the committee, Rep. Henderson Lanham of Georgia, referred to Patterson as a "black son-of-a-bitch." The jury of seven blacks and five whites informed the court that they were unable to agree upon a verdict. The judge discharged them and suggested that the government drop the case. Patterson was not reindicted.⁵⁹

Marcantonio was not successful in all the legal cases he accepted. In 1954, he was defense counsel for Ben Gold, the President of the Fur and Leather Workers Union, when the latter was indicted for falsely attesting under provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act that he was not a member of the Communist Party, not affiliated with it, and not a supporter of an organization that taught the overthrow of the United States by force. Attacking government witnesses as "trained seals,"

⁵⁸Rubinstein, pp. 441-45; "Rally Backs DuBois," New York Times (February 22, 1951), p. 37; W. E. B. DuBois, In the Battle for Peace: The Story of My 83rd Birthday (New York: Masses and Mainstream, 1952), p. 150.

⁵⁹Rubinstein, pp. 446-52.

Marcantonio advised that "events will pass judgment on a political party. But today or tomorrow when you retire you are to pass judgment on this defendant, not the Communist Party. . . ." On April 2, 1954, the jury returned a guilty verdict and Gold was sentenced to one to three years in prison.⁶⁰

The most important legal battle that Marcantonio joined in this period concerned the legal existence of the Communist Party. When the Subversive Activities Control Board opened hearings in 1951 to determine whether the Communist Party should register under the Internal Security Act, Marcantonio served as co-counsel for the party. The hearings, which lasted for more than a year, found that the party should comply with the Act by registering with the Justice Department, listing all its officers and members, filing annual financial reports, and identifying all material sent through the mail. Then, only a few months before his death, Marcantonio issued his final words in opposition to the legal attacks on the left in an unsuccessful attempt to have the Internal Security Act overturned, referring to it in a statement before the Court of Appeals as the "statutory codification of McCarthyism."⁶¹

⁶⁰Rubinstein, p. 475; "Ben Gold Jailed for 1 to 3 Years," New York Times (May 1, 1954), p. 10; see also, "Ben Gold Is Guilty in Denial He's Red," New York Times (April 3, 1954), p. 7.

⁶¹Rubinstein, p. 481; see also pp. 477-82. In regard to Marcantonio's defense of the Communist Party before the Subversive Activities Control Board, see these New York Times articles: "Communists Hire Marcantonio, Abt" (January 5, 1951), p. 9; "Red Control Board Is Termed Illegal" (January 23, 1951), p. 20; "Suit by Communists Assails Security Act" (February 1, 1951), p. 11; "Soviet Set Up Here in '21, Gitlow Says" (April 25, 1952), p. 14; "Ex-Red Says Party Threatened Death" (January 23, 1952), p. 8; "Reds Again Lose Suit to Halt U.S.

the increasingly unpopular cause of defending the legal existence of the Communist Party--both as a lawyer and in public statements--that the most serious dispute between Marcantonio and the Party arose.⁶² Their disagreement evolved out of their differing evaluations as to the nature of the postwar political repression of the left. Marcantonio viewed it as an episode similar to other politically repressive periods in American history, such as the periods of the Alien-Sedition Act and the Palmer raids. For example, in 1950, while arguing that the loyalty oaths, Un-American Activities Committee, and Smith Act trials were bringing about a quasi-fascist state, he concluded: "To those who feel overwhelmed by the seemingly overwhelming powerful character of the war-makers and their profit-makers and their tools, the Democrats and the Republicans and their flunkies, the false liberals . . . I say that midnight is ending. Just as the calendar brings us around the turn of the new half-century, so had the clock of events brought us past midnight."⁶³ In contrast to Marcantonio's evaluation of this period, the Communist Party saw the United States as being "five minutes to midnight," that is on the verge of becoming a full-fledged fascist

Hearings" (February 6, 1952), p. 14; "Marcantonio Stirs Red Inquiry Clash" (June 10, 1952), p. 12; "Reds Wind Up Plea on Party Registry" (January 8, 1953), p. 16.

⁶²For example, in July 1952, he stated: "The first line of defense of American democracy is the defense of the Constitutional rights of the Communists and of the Communist Party." Text of speech delivered on July 5, 1952 before the Progressive Party convention, deposited in MP, 1 of 2 (Miscellaneous 7 of 8).

⁶³National Guardian, January 11, 1950.

state.⁶⁴ These vastly differing perspectives led to the only serious breach between Marcantonio and the Communist Party, one which widened until Marcantonio's death. The Party took the position that left political formations could not be sustained during a pre-fascist situation. It began, therefore, to withdraw its forces from the American Labor Party and entered into the Democratic Party in order to influence its liberal wing. Marcantonio led a group that insisted that every effort should be made to preserve the ALP.

The great bitterness engendered by this factional fight is perhaps best revealed by the response Marcantonio sent to the executive secretary of the Furriers Joint Board, a union with especially close ties to the Communist Party and to Marcantonio, on receipt of a \$500 contribution to the ALP: "I acknowledge receipt of your letter and check in the amount of \$500. I herewith return your check. Your letter is in keeping with all of the double-talk and broken promises that your check represents."⁶⁵ (See pp. 76-77)

The denouement of the Marcantonio and Communist factional dispute occurred over the question of the 1953 New York City mayoral election. The Communist Party took the position that the main task was the defeat of the incumbent Democrat, Vincent Impellitteri, which indirectly amounted to an endorsement of Liberal Party candidate Rudolph Halley. (Halley repudiated this support: "I don't want any part of Marcantonio

⁶⁴Joseph R. Starobin, American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 220. On Marcantonio's deteriorating relationship with the Party, see Starobin, p. 12.

⁶⁵Marcantonio to Leon Strauss, October 29, 1951. MP 47 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

or the Daily Worker or the Communists or of any Communist-supported party.")⁶⁶ The miserable showing of the Progressive Party's 1952 Presidential candidate, Vincent Hallinan, who received 140,000 votes nationwide,⁶⁷ and the general decline of the ALP convinced the Communist Party that the major means of influencing United States politics was to work within existing organizations where liberals were to be found. A corollary of this proposition was the abandonment of leftist political formations, including the American Labor Party.⁶⁸ Marcantonio, stressing what he perceived as identical positions undertaken by the two major parties, declared: "They may use different fiddles but they are playing the same tune." To him, therefore, the best hope for furthering the positions of the ALP--particularly an "early and honorable peace in Korea, preventing our being catapulted into the Indo-China war"--was strengthening the ALP itself.⁶⁹

The outcome of the 1953 mayoral election was a disaster for the ALP. Its candidate, Clifford McAvoy, garnered only 54,000 votes. The day after the election, Marcantonio resigned as state chairman and as a member of the party. His resignation statement centered on his long-running dispute with the Communist Party:

⁶⁶"Marchisio Retires from Liberal Race," New York Times (April 19, 1953), p. 19; see also, "Rival Democrats Fret Over Apathy," New York Times (September 8, 1951), p. 1.

⁶⁷Lawrence Lader, Power on the Left: American Radical Movements Since 1946 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), p. 88.

⁶⁸George Charney [George Blake] and Harry A. Levin, "An Analysis of the New York Elections," Political Affairs (January 1954), pp. 33-50.

⁶⁹Text of report, "The American Labor Party and the 1953 Municipal Elections," delivered at the American Labor Party State Conference, April 29, 1953. MP 22, 1 of 2 (Miscellaneous 1 of 8).

Despite the fact the [the Marcantonio faction] speak[s] for the majority, to continue this contest would be futile and exhausting. It is apparent that the majority decisions are in vain and the result is and would continue to be an ALP unable to muster the required 50,000 votes in 1954 to remain on the ballot.

The ALP would become more and more a pressure group with the issue unresolved. It would become more and more a mimeograph machine rather than a political party. The role is inescapable . . . in the present "house divided" condition of our Party.

I reject the course of a purge of the minority. It is repugnant to the democratic principles to which I have subscribed throughout my political career. . . .

I believe in independent political action and I sincerely believe that efforts for independent political action are impossible and hopeless today through the ALP.⁷⁰

Perhaps alone among national public figures, his public statements consistently upheld the Communist Party as a legitimate American institution. For example, in 1943, in speaking against the appropriation for the House Un-American Activities Committee, he had questioned "the war against the Communists who, as an integral part of 130 million Americans, are fighting and working like all other Americans for victory against the enemy" ⁷¹ By 1952, at a time of unprecedented hostility toward "Communism," Marcantonio stated that the Communist Party was an "American political party operating in what it considered to be the best interests of the American working class and people." ⁷² As a result of his open and intense relationship with the Party, many considered him to be a member of the Communist Party. He

⁷⁰Press release, November 4, 1953. MP 22, 1 of 2 (Resignation of Vito Marcantonio from the American Labor Party); see also, "Demise of ALP," New York Times (November 5, 1953), p. 30; "Marcantonio Out as ALP Chairman," New York Times (November 5, 1953), p. 35; and "Marcantonio Resigns," New York Times (December 11, 1953), p. 35. For the Communist Party's position on the 1953 New York City mayoral election, see Charney and Levin, pp. 33-50.

⁷¹Congressional Record, February 8, 1943, p 726.

⁷²"U.S. Reds Branded 'Puppets' of Soviet," New York Times (October 21, 1952), p. 12.

was not. His problems with the Communist Party in the last three years of his life exposed at least part of the nature of their relationship.

Three months after Marcantonio's defeat in 1950, an article by George Charney, the Communist Party District Organizer for East Harlem, was published in Political Affairs. It revealed misgivings the party had about its alliance with Marcantonio. Charney noted that the Party's "organization has tended to reduce itself to an auxiliary apparatus in the coalition [to elect Marcantonio]." The Party, he continued, had "primarily contributed the manpower," but it had not developed either itself or a "lasting, united-front movement and organization." Ultimately, then, by deploying its resources along these lines, the Party had been "swallowed up in the routine of the campaign. . . ." He further noted that "tendencies have developed to merge the Party and the mass movement." In other words, now that the mass movement to elect Marcantonio had been defeated, the Communist Party was left with very meager organizational gains. (See p. 155)

Charney also questioned the almost total concentration of Party forces in Marcantonio's district. He stated that the failure to conduct a campaign throughout Harlem had lessened the Black vote in East Harlem for Marcantonio because the "Negro people in all parts of the city and, for that matter the country, are influenced by the main political currents and movements in Harlem." (Actually, the Black vote for Marcantonio in 1950 was greater than in 1948; see Map 9.) Despite these misgivings, Charney concluded: "The progressive movement . . . made this campaign in the 18th C.D. the focal point in the struggle against reaction. In our opinion it was a correct policy, even though it demanded an unprecedented city-wide rallying of the progressive

movement. . . .⁷³

And to the same degree, despite Marcantonio's misgivings about the Communist Party's direction in this period, he never broke his relationship with the Party. At the time of his death he was still co-attorney for the Party in its most important legal battle, its fight before the Security Activities Control Board to stop its registration as a subversive organization.

Marcantonio's presence in Congress as an articulate national spokesman for the general position of the Communist Party was of inestimable importance to the Party. At the same time the ability of a radical politician to survive the vicissitudes of the American political system to a large extent depended on the infusion of resources into his district which only the Communist Party of that period was willing and able to provide. Whatever the misgivings of the Communist Party and Marcantonio about their alliance, they were indispensable to each other. This relationship was not at its heart one of political opportunism: underlying it was broad ideological affinity. During these three years of growing conflict, the Party and Marcantonio did not break relations. Beneath the struggle over the future of the ALP remained general political agreement.

Marcantonio's actions in regard to the Party in this period reveal his own motivations. There was probably nothing he wanted more than to return to Congress.⁷⁴ After his defeat, his headquarters remained open. He had continued extending services to his former

⁷³George Charney [George Blake], "The Marcantonio Election Campaign," Political Affairs (January 1951), pp. 80-90.

⁷⁴Interview with John Abt, New York City, August 25, 1975.

constituents. On the day of his death he had just visited a printer who was preparing his nominating petitions.⁷⁵ Yet, there was probably nothing he might have done that more undermined the possibility of a political comeback than accepting the job of legal representative for the Communist Party. The supremely practical politician was at heart an ideologically committed radical.

A recently published American government textbook states: "Of the dozens of thousands of men and women elected to Congress, only one--Vito Marcantonio--ever publicly acknowledged sympathy for the Communist Party USA."⁷⁶ The remainder of the present work attempts to explain how he was able to accomplish this feat seven times.

⁷⁵Schaffer, pp. 208-10.

⁷⁶Robert Sherrill, Why They Call It Politics: A Guide to America's Government, third edition (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1979), p. 75.

CHAPTER IV

MARCANTONIO'S POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Marcantonio's electoral successes greatly depended on his creating and controlling what very well may have been the most elaborate, efficient, and massive political machine in New York City.¹ While he sat in the House, East Harlem was, according to Warren Moscow, "the last stronghold in New York of an old-time political machine."² And curiously, the rise of his machine coincided with the decline of Tammany Hall and political machines elsewhere in the United States.³ There is considerable irony in this, inasmuch as the American political experience seems to indicate that machine politics is the antithesis of reform politics.

The origins of his classical political machine are found in the

¹Arthur Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, 1882-1933 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 152.

²Warren Moscow, Politics in the Empire State (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 122.

³Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio" (Honors paper, Harvard University, 1950), p. 45. Caroline F. Ware noted that: "The jobs-and-favors political system was more strongly entrenched in 1930 than it had been in 1920 and it had become interwoven with all aspects of the community's life. While other institutions of the locality--with the exception of the health agencies--had to struggle to hold their own, the political clubs grew and their power was extended in several directions." Greenwich Village 1920-1930: A Comment on American Civilization in the Post-War Years (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 276.

campaigns that elected LaGuardia to represent East Harlem in Congress from 1922 to 1930. Although this is discussed elsewhere in this work (see pp. 43-44), a few points about the early history of this machine should be made here. LaGuardia, having previously represented an aldermanic district in lower Manhattan, was an outsider to East Harlem. Marcantonio's in-depth knowledge of and activism in Italian Harlem were the tools with which LaGuardia's youthful campaign manager built the formidable machine that elected and re-elected both of them to Congress. While LaGuardia was in the nation's capital, Marcantonio attended to the day-to-day business of servicing constituents' requests for assistance.⁴ In a letter to his law partners in 1925, an appreciative LaGuardia wrote that he wanted Marcantonio to be his "professional heir."⁵ Marcantonio rejected this opportunity, however, becoming instead his mentor's political heir and inheriting the F. H. LaGuardia Political Association, the political machine the protege built for his mentor.

Around 1940 this machine changed its name to the Vito Marcantonio Political Association, but from its inception the apparatus reflected almost totally the personality of its architect. The membership fluctuated between one and three thousand;⁶ as late as 1951, dues

⁴Howard Zinn, LaGuardia in Congress (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958), pp. 156, 161.

⁵Alan Schaffer, Vito Marcantonio, Radical in Congress (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), p. 16; interview with Ida Hefner, New York City, August 13, 1975; interview with Annette Rubinstein, New York City, August 21, 1975.

⁶"Memo to Allen Goodman." MP 22, 1 of 2 (Miscellaneous 6 of 8).

remained only \$1.00 a year.⁷ Monthly meetings were held in either a public school or a hall in the district.⁸ The major clubhouse at 247 East 116th Street was housed in a basement six houses away from Marcantonio's residence. In 1944, after his district had been enlarged, a second clubhouse was established in Yorkville at 1484 First Avenue. During election campaigns other headquarters were opened throughout the district. American Labor Party clubhouses, of which there were six in 1938, also served to promote his candidacy.⁹ The passage of the Wilson-Pakula Act in 1947 which prevented Marcantonio from contesting the Democratic and Republican primaries (see pp. 422-25), led to the elimination of any distinction between Marcantonio's personal clubhouses and those of the American Labor Party.

In Marcantonio's absence, his executive secretary, Lillian Landau, directed the staff and supervised the lieutenants: assembly district captains, election district captains, and in some instances block or even house captains. In all the chronicles of the Vito Marcantonio Political Association, there is not a single record of a vote being taken. Nor is there evidence of any factional dispute. Marcantonio, operating with the counsel he sought, totally directed this machine.

One of his memoranda, dated September 20, 1946 and entitled "To All Section Commanders," makes perfectly clear the nature of the maverick Congressman's machine:

Because of some apparent confusion or misunderstanding, I want

⁷"Call to Meeting," December 1951. ALP Labor Party Papers, Rutgers University Library, New Brunswick, New Jersey. Series 1 (1951 LM). Hereafter cited as ALP followed by box number and name of folder in parentheses.

⁸"Memo to Allen Goodman."

⁹American Labor Party, Brochure, American Labor Party Papers. Tamiment Library, New York University, New York City. Hereafter cited as Tamiment.

to repeat a few of the instructions given to you in order to clarify our procedures.

1. Section commanders are expected to report personally to headquarters each night. Do not send an assistant or messenger.
2. Do not call the headquarters at 10:30 PM and ask to be excused from reporting that night. . . .
3. Turn in each night the names of those captains and assistants who are not reporting. Since we are extremely short in forces, we cannot afford to be lenient in following up on those who do not fulfill their commitments.
4. Double check pledge sheets to be sure that all the names and addresses are clear and legible. . . .
5. Your headquarters must be kept open seven days a week. . . .
6. Don't pirate campaign workers. From now on, any campaign workers you get should first be interviewed here at the campaign headquarters. This is important for the proper organization of our campaign and distribution of what forces we get. . . .¹⁰

Here are embodied many of the characteristics of Marcantonio's machine: instructions were to be followed explicitly; volunteer workers were expected to perform a tremendous amount of work; and great attention was paid to details. Another memorandum from 1948 states that all captains were expected to canvass "all day Sunday and report to me personally 9:00 tonight Sunday."¹¹ Those who did not comply with instructions received notes such as the following:

You were not present at the meeting tonight. I am not going to tolerate any absence on your part or anyone else either.

Any captain who does not attend the meeting is automatically dropped and he will not be reinstated under any circumstances.

From now on this rule applies to you as well as everybody else. If you do not attend the next meeting, I shall assume that you are no longer interested and you can consider yourself dropped from the Organization.¹²

I have been informed that you have not brought in a single signature. I want to see you at the Club. . . .¹³

¹⁰MP 50 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

¹¹"Marcantonio to Election Captains," October 1948. MP 50 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

¹²Marcantonio to Testa, March 19, 1952. MP 25 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

¹³Marcantonio to Salerno, October 25, 1946. MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

The central component of Marcantonio's political machine was the dispensing of services on a scale which may have been unmatched anywhere else by any other political organization. As early as 1936, the Congressman boasted that the organization was handling 17,500 cases a year.¹⁴ The American Labor Party organization for his district kept a file of personal requests that had been fulfilled: 35,000 between 1946 and 1948, and 33,000 from 1948 to 1950. Such requests were spread fairly evenly over the year, except for an increase of about 30 percent in the weeks before elections.¹⁵ This increase seems to have resulted from greater canvassing of constituents, which encouraged even more of them to request assistance. Richard Rovere's 1946 Harper's article on Marcantonio's political machine observed that in one day the Congressman had "heard, advised, helped 327 constituents."¹⁶ Since he saw constituents in his clubhouses two or three days a week almost every week of the year, we can safely assume that he interviewed five hundred persons a week--or about 25,000 a year. Those unable to see him--in many instances because of the great crowds in his clubhouses--sent letters; letters also arrived from many non-constituents. Thousands of these letters, preserved in the Marcantonio Papers, document the remarkable scope and efficiency of the machine.

A sampling of these letters from 1935 to 1938 indicates that even in that early period more than one-third of requests for assistance came

¹⁴Donna Liberman, "Vito Marcantonio: People's Congressman: The New Deal Period" (Honors paper, Radcliffe College, 1970), p. 106.

¹⁵Bingham, p. 46.

¹⁶Richard H. Rovere, "Vito Marcantonio: Machine Politician New Style," Harper's Magazine (April 1944), p. 391.

from outside the district. By 1950 (after the 1944 redistricting had doubled its population to 250,000 adults), more than half the letters were from non-district residents. Considering the greater likelihood of persons from outside to write because of the distances involved in reaching one of the clubhouses, and also because they were often directed to write when they did arrive at the crowded offices, we can safely assume that most of those requesting services in person lived in the district. Based on these data we can estimate that in 1950 one out of every fifteen adults in his district received help, making the number of people with a direct personal stake in seeing that Marcantonio remain in office unparalleled in any other Congressional district in the city, and perhaps in the country.

The table below, based on a sampling of letters to Marcantonio, indicates the types of services requested in the period 1935-38 and in 1950:

TABLE 1

TYPES OF SERVICES REQUESTED FROM VITO MARCANTONIO
POLITICAL ASSOCIATION

	<u>Percent in 1935-38</u>	<u>1950</u>
Housing complaints	4	5
Welfare	12	34
Medical	4	5
Immigration	3	2
Intervention with government bureaucracy	24	9
Seeking housing	4	3
Employment (especially WPA)	33	12
Legal	2	4
Information	10	2
Public Housing	--	28
Veterans	--	2
Miscellaneous	4	2

Source: MP 26 (G-Z) and MP 9 (C-G). The percentages total more than 100 percent because in some cases more than one request was made.

The rest of the letters were of a strictly political nature, most in favor of positions he had taken. In 1935-36, 15 percent of his mail fell into the political category, in 1950, 12 percent.

The availability of government-sponsored employment in the thirties accounted for the large percentage (about one-third) of requests. Two of the most striking of thousands of requests for employment assistance included one from a doctor, employed by the WPA, who had had his salary reduced from \$27.00 to \$23.86 for a thirty-hour week and asked: "Do you think that amount is adequate for a doctor who graduated from medical school six years ago?"¹⁷ A former classmate of Marcantonio's who had a law degree wrote that: "I find it impossible to earn enough at my law practice to warrant my continuing further and my present financial status is such as to make it imperative that I obtain some sort of remunerative employment immediately. I have made every effort to do so without success."¹⁸

The postwar housing shortage and the great increase in public housing construction, particularly in East Harlem, accounted for the introduction of a new category of requests, which grew to about 28 percent of the total by 1950. Before these projects were built, there was little that a public official could do to obtain more adequate housing for a constituent. From the early thirties, however, his organization maintained a list of available apartments. The severe national housing shortage following the war, which was especially

¹⁷Sissa to Marcantonio, January 27, 1935. MP 26 (G-Z).

¹⁸MP 26 (H-J).

aggravated in Marcantonio's district by the massive influx of Puerto Ricans, is graphically expressed in the letters he received. Excerpts from a few from 1950 follow:

I am writing you with hopes that you will be able to help me as I have heard you have helped so many others. . . . We are a family of three living in one room, a very small room.

I am a woman with five children who is sick children and myself have to go to the Board of Health for my lungs. I vote ALP and all my family vote ALP. I'm dearly in need of an apartment in the projects. . . . I have one room.

I heard that you help those in dire need. I am desperate as my landlord put my furniture in the cellar. My husband is out of work and I am 54 years of age. I can't go to work. . . . Please in God's name help me. I cannot sleep in the cellar as I am in poor health.

I request that you be so kind as to investigate into the deplorable conditions, that has forced me and my wife and child to split, and will soon end in a divorce court, due to what I firmly believe to be discrimination and race prejudice.

After having served in the Army for four years, including two of which were spent in overseas duty, I returned home December 1945, and have ever since, that is, 1950 been seeking a home for my wife and three years old daughter.

Due to the above mentioned conditions my wife is seeking a divorce from me. I tried to be a good husband and failed, and it is all due to the fact that we can't find a place to live. I love my wife and want very much to keep her and my family intact. . . .¹⁹

One Marcantonio aide, Leonard Fink, handled more than three hundred legal cases in 1950 alone. These cases ranged from homicides to complaints about defective television sets.²⁰ Apart from Marcantonio, who handled the more spectacular cases, there was always at least one, and at times as many as four, lawyers present at the clubhouse.²¹ Stays of eviction and immigration proceedings ranked among the most common

¹⁹MP 9 (C), (L-P), (B).

²⁰Various "Aide Reports." MP 14.

²¹Interview with David Freedman, New York City, August 25, 1975.

problems these lawyers attempted to solve.

The most controversial of Marcantonio's services related to public assistance. As clearly as January 1935, he was charged by his opponent in the previous election, James Lanzetta, of using relief funds to buy votes.²² These charges multiplied over the years. There is no question that Marcantonio and his organization vigorously and effectively fought for the rights of individuals to obtain public assistance. "In the case of Luigi Visconti," he wrote to one of his lieutenants, "the relief bureau has no right to force anybody out of school even though the boy happens to be nineteen and his family on relief. Tell the relief bureau that I will carry this case to the public. I will not tolerate depriving the youth of my district the privilege of an education simply because the family is on relief."²³ In an interview with the New York Times in 1949, two Marcantonio staff members related the procedures his organization followed when seeking public assistance:

When someone comes in here [that is, the clubhouse] who's entitled to relief we send them into the proper welfare station for an application. He brings it back and we help him fill it out. If he can't speak English, we send an interpreter back to the station with him. If there is an undue delay in getting on relief [an aide] goes to the welfare station to jog the administrator. In addition to such visits [Marcantonio's aides] hold weekly discussions with the Department of Welfare community interviewer, who is assigned to each office to take up community problems.²⁴

A sample of the representation of clients before the New York

²²"Lanzetta Fights for House Seat," New York Times (January 3, 1935), p. 16.

²³"Aide's Report, Pizzo '42." MP 47.

²⁴"City's Puerto Ricans: Complex Problem," New York Times (October 3, 1949), p. 11.

City Department of Welfare by various organizations for the two weeks ending September 23, 1939, indicated that the F. H. LaGuardia Club represented 246 persons. In addition, two organizations that worked very closely with Marcantonio in East Harlem, the Teachers Union and the Workers Alliance, represented many other East Harlem residents.²⁵ The success of this prodding of administrators is captured in this item from an aide's report to Marcantonio dated August 1935:

I called on [the welfare center administrator] on four cases that [the department] had refused to give me any consideration and after reading the riot act to her, saying that you were going to take up this matter with the Mayor, she finally consented to act on the four cases, two were opened immediately, an investigator was sent on another, and on the last one a letter was sent out in my presence requesting the clients to call at the precinct for an interview tomorrow in order to clear up one or two mis-statements.²⁶

The thousands of letters Marcantonio received requesting that he intervene with the welfare department provide a remarkable documentation of the stark poverty and extreme deprivation that prevailed for so many in East Harlem. The following are excerpts from 1950 letters:

Half the time my baby hasn't anything to eat. Sometimes my husband and I don't even eat. I haven't any money neither has my husband. Sometimes my baby drinks sour milk. Sometimes I have to go from door to door to ask people for milk. We haven't eaten in one week I'm losing weight. And my husband is too. My baby is very weak. . . . I don't see why the baby has to suffer. Please help us right away. My mother belongs to your club and my aunt.

I am so happy to have you again [one month after Marcantonio won his sixth term in Congress]. I hope you all is happy as you are a good man. I done all I was able to do, for you my good Marc. I never can do enough for good now as you know that I am a widow and seven children. You must look out for us, Christmas is near. I have no help. The relief never gives us Christmas money, so I hope you to do your part for the seven children. I

²⁵Bingham, p. 51.

²⁶"Aide's Report, Mucciolo '35." MP 46.

need your help now for a little turkey for the children it's only for them to be happy for myself I don't care but you know where children are concerned, they need plenty of things in life to be happy. Marc only a little turkey about six pounds for the children, please do that for me. I will depend on you as you do on me, you see how a mother has to beg for her poor children without a father. The baby will be three years old and it is so sad for him--no papa to give him a cake and love for his birthday. I hope in God to help me out so I hope I can depend on you for the turkey as a gift. I assure you I won't ever forget you.

This week I haven't seen not a container of milk. After all I have my children and it is a pity to see them go hungry like this. I am going out of my mind. When they come home from school I have nothing to give them to eat. We are going to bed without food. I have been going to you and you always help me. You'll never know how grateful I am to you.²⁷

Marcantonio frequently assisted people in obtaining medical treatment. While arranging an interview with a Puerto Rican who had been active in his organization in El Barrio, his son told how "Marcantonio saved my life when I was five." This person was quite sick during the war and his father had driven to five hospitals, but no one would admit him. About midnight, the father called Marcantonio at his home, and he arranged for his admission to a hospital where the boy was diagnosed as having pneumonia, which in that era was often fatal.²⁸

Marcantonio worked to have neighborhood streets designated play streets, and his lieutenants assisted thousands to fill out their tax forms (one of them helped 830 persons in 1950).²⁹ Other constituents simply sought advice:

I have always been a strong supporter of yours. So now I need

²⁷MP 4 (Christmas); MP 9 (G); MP 11 (R-S).

²⁸Anonymous interview, New York City, July 14, 1977.

²⁹MP 27 (Playgrounds); "Aide Reports Medina '50."

your help. I reared my nephew. He is twenty-one years old, and has been a good boy and always worked and helped me but for the past six months I think he has formed the dope habit and he won't work and has pawned all of his clothes and even pawned my radio. . . . so please advise me what to do. I am a widow fifty-eight years old and I want something done to help him.³⁰

He was also besieged for small amounts of money, at Thanksgiving for baskets of food, and at Christmas for children's toys:

I am a poor woman. I have three little children. I have no money to buy toys or clothing for Christmas. They cry because they see other children get what they want. I have no money to make them happy.

Won't you please try to send me a Christmas basket, because I can't afford anything for my children and it breaks my heart to hear them cry, they want so many things which I can't afford. . . . You can't imagine how happy we were when we heard you came out on your election. . . .³¹

Many of these requests were satisfied from Marcantonio's own pocket.

(See pp. 449-51).

The changes in the ethnic and racial distribution of those who sought services over time closely corresponded to the population changes in Marcantonio's district. The percentage of Puerto Ricans seeking assistance increased from 11 percent in 1938 to 31 percent in 1950, while Italo-American requests decreased from 47 to 26 percent, respectively. The greatest proportional rise, however, took place among Blacks: from one to 15 percent, while the percentage of persons from ethnic and racial backgrounds other than Puerto Ricans, Italo-American, and Black fell from 41 to 28 percent.³² Based on the nature of the

³⁰"X" to Marcantonio, January 19, 1951, and "X" to Marcantonio, ca. 1951. MP 11 (E-F, 1951).

³¹MP 5 (Christmas, '40), and MP 4 (Christmas '42).

³²Compiled from a sampling of letters to Marcantonio requesting assistance.

assistance these people sought, we can safely say that almost all were poor.

The impact on the recipients of these services was intensified by the manner in which they were delivered. Visitors to his clubhouse were given a number on a first come, first served basis. Everyone saw Marcantonio, who without rising would give a limp handshake and greet his guest with the single query, "What can I do for you?"³³ After listening to the request, he would refer him to a member of his staff. Every tenth case or so he handled himself. But by acting as his own receptionist, everyone saw "the Congressman," and therefore had the sense that "Marc Fixed It." Even his letters made a significant impact. One of his canvassers remembered constituents who saved letters concerning Marcantonio's attempts to render a service; many letters were ten or more years old.³⁴

Marcantonio, who called opponent Lanzetta "Jimmy Next-Week" because of tardy responses to constituents' requests,³⁵ went to the opposite extreme. He relentlessly drove himself and his staff to ensure that every request was rapidly and thoroughly answered. When one of his secretaries resigned, she wrote her successor a sixteen-page letter outlining office procedures, which included the following: "Everything in the pending file should be followed up every ten days. . . . When you write to individuals for information or to ask them whether their problem is solved and you get no answer after ten days write to Charlie

³³Bingham, pp. 46-47.

³⁴Interview with Miriam Dworkin, New York City, September 19, 1975.

³⁵Interview, Ida Hefner.

and ask him to have Frank call to see these people to get the information from them."³⁶

Remarkably painstaking efforts were made to satisfy a request. For example, over a span of one and one-half years, twenty-four pieces of correspondence and two interviews were generated to effect the transfer of one WPA worker to a job closer to his home.³⁷ During a fourteen-month period, twenty pieces of correspondence were written to obtain a small supplementary allowance for someone receiving Old Age Assistance. When a constituent made an appointment and did not keep it or did not respond to a letter, a staff member was sent to his home. When Marcantonio felt that a member of his staff was not sufficiently diligent, he lambasted him: "Your fancy alibis on this case don't go with me. . . . Am I to believe that you are purposely refraining from reporting on cases in the hope that I will forget about them--don't try to conceal anything from me as in the long run, I will surely catch up with you. Stop figuring on ways and means of passing the buck. . . ."³⁸

Despite its persistence, it is very difficult to assess Marcantonio's organization's success in supplying assistance. The evidence suggests that he was largely unsuccessful in assisting people to obtain preference in obtaining apartments in public housing projects. In the standard procedure a staff member would compose a letter to the Public Housing Authority, presenting facts about an

³⁶Ida Hefner to (illegible). MP 7 (Il Popolo).

³⁷MP 5 (Constituent Problems, '42-44).

³⁸"Aide Report, Mucciolo '40." MP 46.

individual family's situation that might qualify the family to obtain priority. However, the lists were so long and priority assigned so rarely that few benefited from Marcantonio's intercession. Requests for public assistance or special grants from the Department of Welfare apparently did meet with better success, because of the elaborate criteria for eligibility that a trained member of Marcantonio's staff could manipulate. The power of the Communist-led United Public Workers Union, which had significant membership in the Department of Welfare, unquestionably facilitated Marcantonio's ability to get results in this area. His prestige as a Congressman also helped, as did his connections with people of power at City Hall.³⁹ Marcantonio's staff was also able to get results in the area of housing-code enforcement, which was of major importance in this overwhelmingly tenement district. An aide of his recalled: "The landlords did more painting [of tenants' apartments] in Marcantonio's district than in all the rest of the City combined."⁴⁰

The Marcantonio Papers contain many letters of thanks for services rendered, or requests from people who mention that either they or someone they knew had received assistance from him; almost no letters express disappointment or complain about the lack of results. Even those who got no results shared the general feeling that Marcantonio's machine had made every effort possible. Typical was the sentiment expressed by a woman in 1939 who was seeking Marcantonio's assistance in obtaining a Civil Service position: "Whether or not you are successful in having me placed is not as important as the fact that you took a

³⁹Bingham, p. 53.

⁴⁰Edward Wallenstein, interview, quoted in: Jacob Blum and Peter Wilhelm, "Vito Marcantonio and the Political Organization of East Harlem" (Honors paper, Yale University, 1967), p. 183.

moment of your very busy day to help me in my struggle for security."⁴¹ For many, perhaps, no one else had ever taken their problems to heart and tried very hard to solve them.

Curiously, no direct connection was ever made between the performance of a service and a political payoff. The person requesting assistance was never asked if he were a registered voter or given political literature. This practice was carried to rather extreme lengths: no evidence exists that a petitioner from outside the district received any less attention than a constituent. Inasmuch as many of those outside people were former residents of East Harlem, they must still have had relatives or friends there. In this way, providing services to non-constituents could have been politically beneficial to Marcantonio.

Constituents requesting help were placed on the organization's mailing list, but once again there is no evidence that they received more or different kinds of letters from those sent to registered or potential voters in the district.⁴² A 1943 letter to one of Marcantonio's most trusted aides, Manuel Medina, reveals the Congressman's motivation in securing requested services:

It is just such situations that cause me to be embarrassed. I believe that you might have better assisted the lady with her relief matter since it was possible for her to secure the desired allowance through another source. . . .

I am very much concerned when people give up trying to secure the help they need through our office. You must therefore make every effort to follow up all cases and express to the clients that they should continue to call at the Club until they receive the assistance they seek.⁴³

⁴¹MP (T).

⁴²Interview with Robert Rusch, New York City, August 5, 1976; interviews, Ida Hefner, Rubinstein.

⁴³Marcantonio to Medina, April 8, 1943. MP 49 (Aide's Report, Medina, '42).

For the most part, the thousands of volunteers attracted to Marcantonio's cause served primarily as canvassers. Every potential voter in the district was canvassed at least once a year, two or three times in election years. Marcantonio believed that elections were never lost by overcanvassing. Particularly in the postwar period, when the press campaign against him was gaining momentum, canvassers were prepared to respond to any and all charges. A confidential memorandum for canvassers in the 1950 campaign presented a list of recommended responses to the kinds of questions people might ask. They were instructed to explain that Marcantonio had appeared at the Smith Act trial of the twelve top Communist leaders so that he could further the "fight for a democratic jury system and expose the fact that workingmen and women were deprived of the right to serve on Federal juries." Canvassers were also urged to take the offensive and attack Marcantonio's opponents on such issues as their opposition to wage and price controls.⁴⁴ Teams of two were then sent to canvass a particular block. Marcantonio insisted that a man always accompany a woman canvasser, but particularly in Yorkville, where there were many more women active in the organization, this edict was quietly ignored.⁴⁵ Armed with literature, they were instructed to maintain a record of everyone they canvassed. While discussions of issues did take place, especially regarding Marcantonio's alleged connection with Communists, the thrust of the canvassing was to identify problems and encourage their victims to seek Marcantonio's assistance.⁴⁶ Canvassing, then,

⁴⁴"Memo to Canvassers," October 21, 1950.

⁴⁵Interview, Rubinstein.

⁴⁶Interviews, Ida Hefner, Dworkin.

served as a means of recruiting clients for the service-dispensing arm of his organization. A typical canvasser's report follows: "Mrs. X bothered by juke box; Mr. Y wants to get into project; Mrs. Z has leak in roof and in need of painting; Mr. and Mrs. W's apartment desperately in need of repairs, strong supporters; Mrs. V. wants information re widow's pension."⁴⁷ All these people would promptly receive a letter signed by Marcantonio requesting that they see him and discuss the problem the canvasser had discovered.

Canvassers were also able to alert Marcantonio to problems in apartment houses and neighborhood blocks in which he could intervene. One canvasser reported that "the people in this community are troubled by traffic hazards. A child was injured on this block very recently. Mrs. Foley advises me that delegation was sent to both Republican and Democratic candidates. Suggests letter go to Mrs. F. advising her that Marc would be glad to meet with delegation from neighborhood." When a canvasser learned that a landlord was threatening to evict tenants who had previously "acted together when there was no coal," Marcantonio wrote to each tenant: "I want to assure you that I am most anxious to be of service to you with regard to [the possible evictions], and that my legal representatives stand ready to assist you without charge." Canvassers also acted as Marcantonio's eyes in the community. One reported that on a Sunday morning while services were being held in a Greek Orthodox church, a pro-Marcantonio rally was being held outside. Even though a member of the congregation had requested that the rally move, it continued for some time. The canvasser noted that the

⁴⁷"Canvassers' Reports." MP 49 (Canvassers' Reports).

"congregation became incensed at this desecration of their service." Once apprised of his incident, Marcantonio apologized to a representative of the church.⁴⁸

Canvassing was also helpful in identifying unregistered potential voters. A typical canvasser's report would include an item such as: "Never voted, old lady will need help to register and vote." The woman would then receive a letter from the Congressman: "Please let me know when you wish to go to the polls to register and I shall be pleased to send someone to assist you."⁴⁹ The effectiveness of canvassing in this regard accounts in part for the high voter registration totals in East Harlem. Indeed, while the number of voters city-wide declined, voter registration in the Eighteenth Congressional District increased:

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN EIGHTEENTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

ASSEMBLY DISTRICT	1944	1948
16th (Italian Harlem)	28,607	37,730
14th (El Barrio)	24,446	24,322
10th	40,374	46,027
8th	45,818	47,560

Source: "Fight for Marcantonio Seat a Lively Old-Time Political Scrap," New York Times (October 11, 1948), p. 48.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Marcantonio to Nelmayer, October 7, 1946. MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

Marcantonio shared the Eighth Assembly District with another Congressional district, which accounted for the slight increase there. The small decrease of registered voters in the Fourteenth was due to the tremendous influx of Puerto Ricans, many of them ineligible to vote because of insufficient length of residency, inability to pass the English literacy test, and insufficient age (many of the migrants were under twenty-one years old). Considering these factors, it was a remarkable feat of Marcantonio's organization that voter registration in El Barrio remained constant.

The radical Congressman's machine's success in registering and getting out the voters in 1948 triggered an investigation by the New York City Police Department into alleged fraud in his district. In particular, it was the appearance in one East Harlem election district of two hundred persons seeking to register on the last possible night in 1948 that caused the investigation. The Daily Mirror mused, "What organizational 'magic' was involved by the ALP boss to bring him record turnouts in his East Harlem stronghold, while so-called 'machines' were under par everywhere in the city?"⁵⁰ Although it went unreported in that newspaper, no instance of voter fraud was ever discovered by the investigation, nor for that matter at any other time.

Canvassers made every attempt to get potential voters to sign pledge cards. In the 1949 mayoral campaign, the card read:

We are tired of living in a city where everybody has a mayor except us--the people. Real estate kings, landlords, the bankers, business corporations, public utility companies, insurance combines, Tammany politicians and their racketeer friends--they all have a mayor who plays ball with them. When

⁵⁰"Probe Big Marc Registration," New York Daily Mirror (October 4, 1948), p. 1.

they want something, we get it in the neck. They don't pay their fair share of the city taxes, so we pay twice as much fare every time we ride the subway. They want rent increases, higher gas and electric and telephone rates, they want Jim Crow housing; they want to cut down Home Relief; they don't want too much money spent on schools and hospitals. . . .

We know a man who has worked all his public life for the little people . . . for us. He was a good friend of Fiorello H. LaGuardia and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He is a very good friend of Henry Wallace. In Congress he has battled for thirteen years to get the things the people need--slum clearance and low-rent housing, adequate health and welfare benefits for working men and women, increased minimum wage laws, outlawing of racial and religious discrimination. . . .

You know him, he is Vito Marcantonio. He is the man we are asking to make mayor of all the people. Join with us!⁵¹

This innovative electioneering technique served to commit individuals who expressed verbal support for Marcantonio. These pledges also provided a "pull list," that is, a list of favorable voters whom the organization concentrated on getting to the polls. On Election Day a veritable army of volunteers was assembled to ensure that every signer of a pledge card actually voted. On Election Day 1948, the election captain for the assembly district encompassing Yorkville processed more than five hundred poll-watchers by 7 A.M. These people were served breakfast, briefed, and then given their assignments.⁵² Inasmuch as Marcantonio's district included another two and one-half assembly districts, one can assume that 1,750 poll-watchers were engaged by his organization on Election Day. As the polling proceeded, the poll-watchers would check off the names of pro-Marcantonio voters who had

⁵¹"Pledge Card." MP 2 (Miscellaneous Campaign, Mayoralty).

⁵²Interview with Edward Wallenstein, New York City, August 5, 1976. On the day after the 1944 primary the New York Times reported: "There is no doubt that the Marcantonio forces had more campaign workers than the regular Republican and Democratic organizations combined. . . . Many East Side districts had the appearance of a general election instead of a primary election." "Fish, Marcantonio Win in Primaries" (August 2, 1944), p. 1.

appeared. By late afternoon, "pullers" were sent to remind those pledge card signers who had not yet voted to do so. Where needed, baby-sitting or transportation were provided promptly. One hundred attorneys were also present on Election Day to take challenged Marcantonio voters before a judge. These poll-watchers challenged any voter not on the pledge card list who may not have been qualified to vote, and represented any Marcantonio voter challenged by his opponents' poll-watchers.⁵³

Besides canvassing, Marcantonio's machine engaged in every conceivable technique of electoral politics. Store-owners who displayed a campaign poster received a signed letter of acknowledgement from the Congressman, which in closing said, "Please remember that if at any time I may be of service to you, do not hesitate to let me know."⁵⁴ A United States Agriculture Department cookbook was so widely distributed by his organization and so well received by housewives in his district that it became known as "Marcantonio's cookbook."⁵⁵ A polling machine was always present in his clubhouses so that new voters, particularly the foreign-born, could practice on this unfamiliar device. Significantly, people would frequently come into his headquarters and ask, "Show me again how to vote for Marcantonio."⁵⁶ When people wrote expressing support, they would often receive a reply from Marcantonio suggesting

⁵³Interview, Ida Hefner.

⁵⁴Marcantonio to Bellone, November 1, 1948. MP 50.

⁵⁵Interview, Dworkin.

⁵⁶Interview, Ida Hefner.

that they could help him by "going among your friends and neighbors to get out to vote for me. . . ."57

Perhaps the most original of his machine's techniques was circulating petitions asking Marcantonio to support legislation and causes he already favored. One such petition called on him to vote for "effective price and rent controls, large-scale programs of housing construction. . . ."; another to "continue your fight for peace, for prosperity, and for freedom for all regardless of race, creed, or political conviction." These petitions were directed at residents of Yorkville, which was incorporated into Marcantonio's district in 1944. (See pp. 406-7) They provided a means of establishing contact with liberals and informing all the people of the availability of assistance from his organization. Every signer of the petition received a reply from Marcantonio expressing his support for the political positions stated in the petition. The reply closed: "Please remember, any time that I can be of service to you do not hesitate to let me know."58

Marcantonio also used film in later campaigns, a promotional technique far in advance of its time. In 1948 a rather sophisticated documentary was shown during street meetings from the back of a truck. Narrated by Paul Robeson, it consisted of about ten minutes of voice-over outlining Marcantonio's political stands while the picture showed

⁵⁷Marcantonio to Pizzolani, August 19, 1946. MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

⁵⁸"Petition." MP 7 (Petitions).

him talking to the residents of the building where he was born, in his clubhouse, attending to the needs of his constituents, or simply walking about his district. During the final five minutes Marcantonio spoke on behalf of his re-election.⁵⁹

Innovation was also apparent in his campaign literature, with his organization producing The People's News, a four-page tabloid replicating the format of the rabidly anti-Marcantonio Daily News. The first issue, dated October 21, 1950, ran this banner headline: "Marc Battles Bosses Gang-up: Exposes 'Bilbo-Donovan!'" The story met head-on James Donovan's charge that Puerto Ricans were being imported into the district to vote for Marcantonio. It pointed out that Puerto Ricans were American citizens and added: "Puerto Ricans come here because their country had been impoverished, exploited by the Wall Street backers of Bilbo-Donovan. While Bilbo-Donovan lies about the Puerto Ricans, the corporations for whom he stooges rob them." (See pp. 373-75) Other articles bore these headlines: "30,000 People Aided by Marc in Past Two Years"; "Marc Aids Evictees, Fights for 4 Million Housing Units in 1951"; "Rail Union Backs Marc." The People's News also ran an editorial, an "Inquiring Photographer" column, "Voice of the People," and a cartoon. The question asked by the inquiring photographer was, "What's your personal reason for supporting Vito Marcantonio and voting for him in the coming election?" One woman mentioned his assistance in getting a ceiling plastered "after it just missed my baby by a few inches"; an old Italian man stated that the "Italian people are proud of

⁵⁹Vito Marcantonio, directed by Carl Marzani. Deposited in the Museum of Modern Art Film Library.

the way Marc has fought for the people in Congress"; a Puerto Rican woman said that "before I came to the U.S. two years ago my father told me about the wonderful American Vito Marcantonio who had helped the Puerto Rican people so much." The Voice of the People section consisted of a "few of the thousands of letters Marc gets from the people he represents." The editorial, "The Big Lie vs. the Big Fact"--written by Marcantonio--declared, "Just for the record, I am not a Communist--and have never been a member of the Communist Party."⁶⁰

But it was speaking from the platform of sound trucks that gave Marcantonio his greatest and most effective campaign exposure. Between October 14 and November 4, 1948, about seventy such street-corner orations (or more than three a day, but never on Sundays) were held.⁶¹ Before the meetings, leaflets would be distributed in the area. At a time when television was still in its infancy, audiences ranging from fifty to five hundred would gather to hear this most controversial and eloquent Congressman. Outside East Harlem, heckling was frequent, most of it targeting Marcantonio's connection with the Communist Party. Adept at handling detractors, his usual retort was, "I may be red, but I'm sure not yellow."⁶² The presence of a bodyguard insured that heckling and other forms of disruption would not prevent a meeting from being held. Recruited from the Italian community, these young men would surround a persistent heckler and, when their presence failed to quiet him, literally picked him off the ground.⁶³

⁶⁰Deposited in the Covello Collection.

⁶¹"Schedule of Sound Trucks." MP 49, 1 of 2 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

⁶²Interview with Jane Benedict, New York City, September 2, 1976.

⁶³Interview, Ida Hefner.

Particularly in East Harlem, these rallies reached vast proportions. A campaign worker recalled one in El Barrio that still impressed him years later. "Hundreds of people stood in the driving rain to hear speeches in Spanish. When Marcantonio got on to the platform to speak, a deafening roar went up from the crowd. Cries of 'Viva Puerto Rico Libre' filled the air. The latter part of his speech was a recitation of what food would be served at the celebrations after the election. A type of joyous enthusiasm filled the air."⁶⁴

These meetings frequently involved a form of street theater. For example, while Marcantonio was speaking, a car would drive up and a man would step out dressed in a tuxedo and top hat and carrying a satchel. Marcantonio would invite him up to the platform. "Where are you from?" he would ask. "I'm from Wall Street," the man would reply. "What do you have in your satchel?" "I have [John] Ellis (Marcantonio's 1948 Republican opponent)," the interloper would reply, taking out a marionette resembling Ellis for Marcantonio to interview. "Where do you live?" he would ask. "On Sutton Place," the marionette would respond. "And how many rooms do you have--four?" When the marionette answered "No," Marcantonio would ask if he had five rooms and so on until he reached fourteen--the actual size of Ellis's fashionable apartment,⁶⁵ a number that both astounded and appalled the East Harlem audiences. When Marcantonio's earliest opponent, James Lanzetta, refused to debate him, Marcantonio debated a representation of Lanzetta in the form of a puppet. "Here is Jimmy Next-Week, the puppet of Tammany Hall," the

⁶⁴Interview, anonymous.

⁶⁵Interview, Wallenstein.

master of ceremonies would announce with devastating effect.⁶⁶ (See p. 393)

These meetings gave Marcantonio the opportunity to exercise his exceptionally skillful oratory, which he punctuated by stamping his foot in cadence with his words. As he continued, he would speak more and more loudly and rapidly, creating sufficient noise with his foot to mesmerize his listeners. By the end of his speech, his arms were flailing the air and, in the words of an associate, his legs were moving as fast as a flamenco dancer's.⁶⁷ At least among his followers in East Harlem, his speeches were capable of an "hysteria-producing reaction."⁶⁸ A Puerto Rican associate recalled, "His voice was a hurricane of electricity going through the people. He could take over a whole audience by his dynamism, his magnetism."⁶⁹

Marcantonio's fluency in Italian and ability to use to good effect his limited Spanish and still more limited Yiddish enabled him to reach the largest ethnic groups in his bailiwick.⁷⁰ A campaign worker who later became a New York State assemblyman, remembered that during the 1949 mayoral campaign he heard Marcantonio speak to students at City College, to a mother's organization in East Harlem, and to a group of longshoremen on the docks. Each time, he spoke with the vocabulary and

⁶⁶Interview, Ida Hefner.

⁶⁷Interview, Benedict.

⁶⁸Interview, Ida Hefner.

⁶⁹Interview with Clemente Soto Velez, New York City, September 26, 1975.

⁷⁰Interview, Soto Velez.

accent of his audience.⁷¹ A number of his associates remarked on his ability to "make complex issues simple without condescension."⁷² An Italian Harlem campaign worker reflected:

He never touched on a complicated subject of foreign or domestic policy without explaining it in terms his hearers understood and felt deeply about--their economic problems, living conditions, fascism and what it meant to Italians living under it, and independence of the Puerto Ricans. . . . He was one of them and he educated them without ever patronizing them. . . . There was a lot of discussion in groups after he had gone, a lot of "he's right," a lot of "I hope he's right," etc. And in the main, they didn't desert him that year [1950] either.⁷³

After the returns were in, his supporters staged torch-light parades. Here is how a New York Times article entitled "East Harlem Jubilant" described the colorful festival following Marcantonio's victory over Frederick Van Pelt Bryan in 1944:

The Calypso singers of East Harlem last night invented ballads for an old leader. They got the word from the Representative himself, when at 9 P.M. Vito Marcantonio stood on a desk and announced his victory.

Firemen were busier than a politician getting out the vote elsewhere in the Eighteenth Congressional District. Fire engines raced rapidly up and down First and Second Avenues. In several instances firemen were halted in their efforts to extinguish the small victory blazes. And not all of the small bonfires remained small.

It was East Harlem's way of showing its pride in Vito Marcantonio. America's melting pot was bubbling with unrestrained glee. Its representatives gloated with uninhibited joy at Marcantonio's headquarters. . . . In a small second-story room, whose soiled wall plaster was scattered with political posters, 350 people had waited for hours for "Marc."

⁷¹Interview with Seymour Posner, New York City, December 3, 1977.

⁷²Interview, Benedict.

⁷³Mary Bowes, Personal Letter, November 16, 1976.

When he arrived . . . men and women spoke excitedly in Spanish, Italian and English; many pressed forward eagerly to embrace the man who would represent them for a sixth term in the nation's Capital.

Five minutes away at Bryan headquarters, a small store on Second Avenue near Seventy-second Street, fashionably dressed men and women were still watching the tabulations.⁷⁴

As a result of this multifaceted and intensive campaigning, the vast majority of registered voters in the Eighteenth Congressional District actually cast their ballots. In 1946, for example, of a total of 87,793 registrants, 84,831 voted.⁷⁵

Clearly, Marcantonio's political apparatus was expensive to operate, particularly because it was a year-round endeavor. Any attempt to determine the costs, however, begins to flounder as soon as one tries to define exactly what the apparatus comprised. The staffing costs of these headquarters must have been considerable. Nowhere in the Marcantonio Papers is there any data on payroll, nor is there any indication of which staff members were salaried and which were volunteers. My estimate is that there were at any given time between five and eight paid staff members. As a Congressman, he was allotted a small sum for staff. Interviews with close associates suggest that the main source of money for staff salaries was Marcantonio himself--his Congressional salary and the income from his law practice.⁷⁶

⁷⁴New York Times (November 6, 1946), p. 12.

⁷⁵Marcantonio to J. Percy Priest, chairman of the Campaign Expenditures Committee of 1946, no date, p. 9, 19. MP 49 (Campaign Expenditures).

⁷⁶Interviews with Ida Hefner and Rubinstein.

Financing these headquarters and staff was frequently accomplished with great difficulty. In 1935 Marcantonio received this memorandum from a staff worker: "After receiving such a big check I really didn't know how to spend the money. The truth of the matter is, I only have about \$15 left for the rest of the month. How can I get along on \$15 for 24 days? I haven't enough money for car fare, telephone, etc., to take care of Contracts."⁷⁷ Efforts to establish and maintain a headquarters in El Barrio further underscored the precarious financial state of the organization. One of Marcantonio's chief aides there, Leopold Lopez, wrote to the leader in May of 1940: "The rent of the Marcantonio Club . . . was due on 5/1/40. I try my best to save you money but it has reached a point where I had to put my wristwatch in the pawn shop to pay the bill of electricity. Out of my salary I have put several times ten or fifteen to have the club going."⁷⁸ Apparently this club's existence was short. Lopez's next effort to open another one in El Barrio was in 1944. In a subsequent letter to Marcantonio, Lopez indicated that the organization's finances had not greatly improved in the interim:

In regard to the club, I wish to state that I do not have the money to put the electricity. If . . . we have the electricity this week I believe we can start something. I have to buy about twelve bulbs, a lock, I have been promised fifty chairs by the Club Obrero and the Club Rivera but Marc I have to pay for the transportation and that requires money. . . .

I take this opportunity also to tell you that my two children

⁷⁷Mucciola to Marcantonio, February 5, 1935. MP (Aide Report, Mucciola, 1935). According to The Pocket Dictionary of American Slang, among other things "contract" means, "A political or business favor." Compiled and edited by Harold Wentworth and Stuart Berg Flexner (New York: Pocket Books, 1967), p. 77.

⁷⁸Lopez to Marcantonio, May 20, 1940. MP 44 (Aide's Report, Lopez, 1940).

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will graduate on 5/26 and I have been unable to send her money to buy the graduation dresses and suit.⁷⁹

The organization scraped by using whatever supplies Marcantonio could obtain from his Congressional office. In 1940 one of his aides wrote to a new staff member: "Mr. Marcantonio does not want you to spend money on stamps to send in your contracts to this office. Charlie has envelopes addressed to the Congressman, and whatever you send in contracts get your envelopes from Charlie as they are franked and do not require postage so long as the business pertains to Congressional work."⁸⁰ In 1943 the same staff member sent a report from New York to Washington that ended: "P.S. Send me a ream of yellow paper." Similar requests were submitted for index cards, typewriter ribbons, plain

⁷⁹Lopez to Marcantonio, May 2, 1944. MP 44 (Aide's Report, Lopez, 1944-45). An earlier letter from Lopez to Marcantonio of May 20, 1940, further illustrates the general impoverishment of this community:

"As you know, 99 percent of the people of that club are on relief, you stated that you do not want us to get members from relief rolls, we have to lend the club to the groups that work for you. The Narragansett Boys [the Puerto Rican Democratic Party club] had the club last month, this month . . . the Sociedad Cultural Infantil also wants our club but none will help in paying the bills and if I don't let them run their dances I am branded as a N.G. [The members] know how all the bums get money from you and they know those guys do not deserve it. . . . Relief clients come to me and I have to give my money away sometimes. I cannot do it any more, many times my children need the fives and tens that I put in that club. I expect to pay two or three months rent with the dance we are going to have on 6/8.

The real estate man called me this morning and wants the money this week--I am going crazy--today I have a dime in my pocket and cannot afford to put a nickel this month. . . . It is the only club (political) on Madison Avenue and [it] is your club--If I stayed till 11 and 12 during the evenings breaking my head it is only because of YOU. I am a nervous wreck with all these headaches."

MP 44 (Aide's Report, Lopez, 1940).

⁸⁰Johnson to Pizzo, January 12, 1940. MP 46 (Aide's Report, Pizzo, 1939-40).

envelopes, and other supplies.⁸¹ Marcantonio also used his franking privileges quite generously to further his political goals. Before the State Committee of the American Labor Party in 1948, he reported: "I am going to put Wallace's speech in the Congress [that is, the Congressional Record]. Then we are going to order a million copies. All you need do is simply put the name and address of the person whom you want to receive that speech on the envelope. No postage will be required."⁸²

In the postwar period, Marcantonio's political machine was amply supplied with money. In 1950 while running against Donovan, for example, there is every indication that Marcantonio spent more than the combined resources of the Democratic, Republican, and Liberal Parties for which Donovan was coalition candidate. Donovan used three soundtrucks; Marcantonio used four, plus two other trucks for showing a specially prepared movie short on a screen mounted in the back, plus an aluminum trailer with a balcony at the rear that was dubbed "Marcantonio's travelling office." Soundtrucks cost about \$400 a week each; Marcantonio's fleet started rolling a week before Donovan's. Marcantonio posters, as well as a series of American Labor Party posters against war, were plastered on walls and fences. Donovan had only six or eight large posters. In their mailings to voters, the candidates matched each other in quantity. Marcantonio also produced ninety thousand copies of his People's News.⁸³

There is no way to place a dollar value on the labor contributed

⁸¹Pizzo to Marcantonio, January 29, 1943. MP 47 (Aide's Report, Pizzo, 1943).

⁸²"Proceedings: State Executive Committee of the American Labor Party," January 7, 1948. MP 25 (ALP Campaigns, 1939-53).

⁸³Bingham, p. 58.

by the thousands of volunteers who flooded Marcantonio's district at campaign time. His opponents were never able to attract significant numbers of volunteers from either outside or inside the district. Similarly, there is no way to calculate the value of the campaign assistance he received from organizations in his district and beyond. The financial statement of campaign expenses required under the provisions of the Federal Corrupt Practices Act showed only direct contributions. The 1946 receipts amounted to \$16,562, and expenditures \$19,626; his opponent's statement cited figures of \$13,478 and \$12,813, respectively.⁸⁴ There is no question that these were merely a fraction of the actual figures. Two East Harlem politicians with close ties to Marcantonio (Hamlet O. Catenaccio and Joseph Boccia) recalled in the late sixties that Marcantonio's congressional campaigns were the most expensive of their time in New York City. They estimated that his 1950 campaign cost \$100,000.⁸⁵

Marcantonio was the beneficiary of funds from several wealthy persons, including Elinor Gimbel, who sent the following invitation to her friends in 1948: "Will you join Mike Nesselson and myself at a small informal reception for Congressman Vito Marcantonio at my home at 163 East 78th Street?"⁸⁶ There was one millionairess, Louise Berman, in Marcantonio's entourage whose husband, Lionel, was one of his closest friends. She consistently donated large sums to the candidate

⁸⁴"Financial Report Submitted by Candidates to Special House Committee to Investigate 1946 Election." MP 49.

⁸⁵Interviews, quoted in Blum and Wilhelm, p. 194.

⁸⁶Gimbel to Alfred and Martha, September 30, 1948. MP 49 (Campaign Expenditures).

and organized small fund-raising affairs attended by other wealthy supporters.⁸⁷ One associate was assigned the task of privately soliciting substantial contributions--that is, between \$5,000 and \$9,000. He noted in 1950, however, that because of the rise of McCarthy many of his wealthy patrons were no longer willing to give. One consistent contributor, when asked for support that year, replied: "I haven't the slightest idea why you would call me about Marcantonio."⁸⁸

On the basis of the Marcantonio Papers, it appears that his organization's overall financial condition did improve over time. As a congressman who frequently attracted national attention, and as the leader of the American Labor Party, he increasingly sought and obtained financial resources from organizations and individuals who agreed with his positions, including the Communist Party. Extant sources do not, however, give a clearer picture of Marcantonio's financial backing. Nearly thirty years after his death, his surviving associates are reluctant to discuss this aspect of the Marcantonio phenomenon.

Marcantonio's machine, manned originally by the "Gibboni," (pp. 43-44) unquestionably included many members primarily concerned about money and the prospect of a job. While over time this traditional basis for staffing his machine waned, as late as 1942 Marcantonio received the following letter:

I expected to receive from you more than \$10.00 for the week's pay. You know my condition. I cannot get relief and have lost two week's work by handling two districts for you. Last night you gave a Puerto Rican worker \$20.00 while you gave me \$10.00, you know these people are getting relief; but I don't get any. . . . It looks like I'll have a hard time with the workers,

⁸⁷Interview with Louise Berman, New York City, July 27, 1976.

⁸⁸Interview, Benedict.

because they are not satisfied with the amount of \$4.00 they received. They expected \$10.00 each for six nights and a full day's work.⁸⁹

Patronage was another incentive for the Gibboni, but as a maverick and member of a minority party, Marcantonio had relatively little to dispense. His greatest source of patronage was obtained through the Manhattan Borough President's office. The title was "sewer inspector," whose job it was to ensure that manholes were covered. The annual salary was \$1,800 and Marcantonio had six to eight of these sinecures to pass out. As a Congressman, he could also offer Census Bureau jobs every tenth year. Although the pay for these positions was low and the duties unexalted, they were genuine prizes amid the great poverty of East Harlem. In 1939 Marcantonio received a letter from an officer of the United Puerto Rican Republican Club:

Last week my baby was sick and I couldn't come over to the club to see you, I'm sorry. Marc, I hope that you do something for me after May 31st because I really do not wish to go back to WPA at \$63.00 a month. My family is consisted of six, so you can judge. If it is true that there are going to be openings for position of clerks at the Bureau of the Census in Washington I hope that you wouldn't forget me and see if you can place me there. . . .⁹⁰

In response Marcantonio wrote that "I have written directly to Mr. Gerson [a Communist Party official working as an assistant to Manhattan Borough President Stanley Isaacs] in your behalf, and trust that this will be of help to you." In October of the same year the man wrote back requesting that he be placed on the WPA payroll again because "I just

⁸⁹"X" to Marcantonio, September 1942. MP 49 (Headquarters Correspondence).

⁹⁰Leopold Lopez to Marcantonio, February 13, 1940. MP 44 (Aide's Report, Lopez, 1940-1).

cannot live on \$12.35 every fifteen days which the relief give me."⁹¹

Marcantonio's political and personal connections with LaGuardia, also a source of patronage, prompted him in January of 1942 to write to the mayor:

This will serve as a reminder.

The time you requested that the ALP nominate Nathan, I pointed out to you that there were three of my boys employed as corporation inspectors in the Borough President's office. . . .

You told me that you would personally guarantee that they would be continued in their jobs.

I have been informed that changes are contemplated in the Borough President's office. I am very anxious to keep these boys at work.

Therefore pursuant to your promise, I am sending this letter again as a reminder.⁹²

LaGuardia publicly acknowledged this relationship. As late as 1942, when newsmen asked about the attacks of some Republican leaders on Marcantonio, the mayor replied with a smile, "Yes, I know. I may have to trim the payrolls a little."⁹³

The effect of patronage on the operation of Marcantonio's machine was noted by George Charney, organizer for the Communist Party in East Harlem:

I found it difficult . . . to reconcile ideology and patronage. It was instructive, though disconcerting, to hobnob with the clubhouse "boys" in Marc's own machine. They didn't give a hoot about ideology or issues. They were loyal to Marc and took comfort from the patronage, little as it was; and if Marc told them to teach the voters how to pull the lever for Israel Amter, Communist candidate for councilman-at-large in 1937, they didn't bat an eye.⁹⁴

⁹¹Gregory Domenech to Marcantonio, May 9, 1940; Marcantonio to Domenech, June 29, 1939; Domenech to Marcantonio, October 8, 1939. MP 44 (Aide's Report, Domenech, 1939-40).

⁹²Marcantonio to LaGuardia, January 5, 1942. MP 44 (Aide's Report, Lopez, 1940-44).

⁹³Rovere, p. 381.

⁹⁴George Charney, A Long Journey (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), p. 109.

But the changed political climate of the postwar years brought all sources of the Congressman's patronage to a sudden halt. On August 27, 1948, Mayor O'Dwyer announced his decision to oust from public employment all non-civil service American Labor Party members under his jurisdiction and that of Hugo Rogers, Borough President of Manhattan.⁹⁵

Compensating for these losses was ever-increasing assistance from the Communist Party. Particularly in the Cold War period, the Party made Marcantonio's re-election a major political priority. This is illustrated by these excerpts from articles published in Political Affairs, the theoretical journal of the Party, from the years 1946 to 1950:

The aims of the Party in [the 1946] election campaign are:
 . . . 2. To elect progressives for Congress and for State offices and especially to help elect Marcantonio and Powell.

The battle in which the labor-progressive forces had their greatest stake [in 1948] took place in the 18th Congressional District in New York City.

The reelection of Marcantonio to Congress. . . has been universally singled out as the outstanding progressive victory in the 1948 elections.

The defeat of Vito Marcantonio in the 18th Congressional District . . . has robbed the country of its greatest voice in Congress. . . .⁹⁶

Here we shall review further the scope and magnitude of the Communist Party's contribution to Marcantonio's political survival.

Perhaps the most significant contribution to Marcantonio's

⁹⁵"Beat Marcantonio, Mayor Bids Party," New York Times (August 26, 1948), p. 1.

⁹⁶William Weinstone, "The Tactics of the Party in the New York Elections" (October 1946), p. 904; George Charney [George Blake] and Al Testerman, "The People Win with Marcantonio" (January 1949), p. 85; George Charney [George Blake], "The Marcantonio Election Campaign" (January 1951), p. 80.

successful staffing operation was made by the Communist Party. His organization was increasingly staffed by Communist Party members and sympathizers, who overwhelmingly lived outside the district. Charney, for example, recalled: "I cursed the day I was assigned [by the Party] to this district. . . . How often did [Marcantonio] call me in the dead of night to launch a tirade because we had not fulfilled our commitment of people for the campaign? If we promised 400 people and only 350 appeared, he went berserk, even when he was a candidate on all three party lines. . . ." ⁹⁷ During an interview conducted in the late sixties, Charney estimated that as many as eight hundred Party members canvassed during an election campaign. ⁹⁸ It was, however, mass organizations under the Party's leadership--fraternal organizations, trade unions, and the American Labor Party--that provided most of the manpower and money to fuel Marcantonio's machine. ⁹⁹

It is evident that over the years the percentage of volunteers residing in the district decreased. A list of campaign workers for 1948 and 1950, for example, contains the names of 140 East Harlem residents and 1,375 outsiders, a few of the latter even residing beyond the New York City limits. ¹⁰⁰ A memorandum from Lillian Landau to club leaders

⁹⁷Charney, A Long Journey, p. 113.

⁹⁸Quoted in Blum and Wilhelm, p. 220.

⁹⁹In 1936, Israel Amter, the New York State Party Chairman, told Party members and sympathizers, "The building of the American Labor Party is a central task." Through its control of neighborhood clubs and via the affiliation of Communist-led unions, the Party rapidly became a major force within the American Labor Party. Kenneth Waltzer, "The Party and the Polling Place: American Communism and an American Labor Party in the 1930s" Radical History Review, 23 (Spring 1980), pp. 118, 116.

¹⁰⁰Lists deposited in MP 49. The Party's ability to supply large amounts of manpower directly from its membership was possible because in

dated 1948 emphasizes this fact: "Up to now, very few canvassers and election district workers have actually come from the club membership itself. I think a special effort should be made by the club Execs to go over carefully name by name and to get as many people and, if necessary, release some from other jobs so they can function as election district captains and canvassers."¹⁰¹

Supportive of the ALP was a wide range of unions that were led or influenced by the Communist Party. The extent to which their members manned and financed Marcantonio's campaigns is perhaps best illustrated by the following memorandum circulated during his 1949 mayoral race:

"Action Before Friday--For a Winning Campaign"

1. Request the assignment of 100 union organizers on union payrolls to campaign headquarters for flying squads, October 10th through November 8th.
2. Request use of 200 union office personnel to organize massive phone call campaign from union or private phones for duration of campaign.
3. Request that each union or organization get its own printer to turn out one specific piece of campaign literature, to go on their own bill. They ought to undertake distribution as well.
4. Each union to pay for one full-page ad in one paper.
5. Each union to pay for one 15-minute radio broadcast, over and above other commitment.¹⁰²

When the president of the Political Action Committee of the United Office and Professional Workers Association wrote Marcantonio in 1946, inquiring how his union could be of assistance, the Congressman replied: "Other than providing me with clerical and canvassing assistance, a letter might go out to membership asking that members and

this period over half the national Party membership was located in New York City. Waltzer, p. 123.

¹⁰¹MP 25 (Campaign, 1948).

¹⁰²Dated October 6, 1949. MP 25 (ALP Campaign 1949).

their friends living in my district, register to vote for me in the coming election."¹⁰³

In 1943 the legislative chairman of the Newspaper Guild wrote Marcantonio: "We have informed over four thousand members in your district of your recent [negative] vote on the inflationary measure which eliminated FDR's \$67,000 salary [maximum].¹⁰⁴ It was apparently quite a common practice for left wing unions to mail such letters to their members. Before the 1946 primary, for instance, every member of Local 1199 of the Retail Drug Store Employees Union living in Marcantonio's district received a letter from its president, Leon Davis, which stated that "Congressman Vito Marcantonio has championed the cause of the American people."¹⁰⁵ In the 1948 campaign all members of the American Communications Association in his district received this letter from its president:

In your Congressional District, you have an outstanding opportunity to vote for the best Congressional representative the people have had in the last twelve years. I refer of course to Rep. Vito Marcantonio. . . . He has given freely of his assistance on every problem which we ever brought to him, and has rendered valuable service to our membership. When the Western Union-Postal Telegraph merger legislation was before Congress, he singlehandedly held up enactment of the bill, delaying its passage for over a year. . . . Unable to delay it any longer, Congressman Marcantonio put up a heroic fight to amend the onerous provisions of the bill, and with his invaluable assistance, we were able to secure provisions for protection to the employees in the industry against the loss of jobs, wage cuts, loss of seniority, etc. . . .¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³Marcantonio to Joseph Cadden, August 24, 1946. MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

¹⁰⁴Richard Seller to Marcantonio, March 22, 1943. MP 4 (Bankhead-Pace Bills).

¹⁰⁵Misfiled in MP 49 (Campaign 1948).

¹⁰⁶Joseph Selly to members, September 28, 1948. MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns, '48, 1 of 2).

Although Marcantonio was regularly attacked in the major newspapers, he enjoyed extensive positive coverage in the publications of these unions. In 1943, for example, the president of the United Furniture Workers Union stated: "You will find your communication reported in full in our next issue of the Furniture Worker Press. . . . Thank you for your splendid fight for democracy."¹⁰⁷ Similarly, the editor of The Pilot, the publication of the National Maritime Union, requested: "Would you be so kind as to send to this publication the material you presented to the meeting of the American Labor Party captains last night, which the NMU members attended? Since we will be devoting considerable space to your campaign, we'll be needing all the facts we can get."¹⁰⁸

Also of great value to Marcantonio were the endorsements he received, until 1950, of the Greater New York CIO Council. In 1942 its president, Joseph Curran, and its Political Action Committee chairman, Michael Quill, wrote: "Your record is outstanding among all New York City Congressmen. . . . We wish to assure you that we will work untiringly for your nomination by all political parties and for your election."¹⁰⁹ Marcantonio also obtained direct access to union memberships via speeches at innumerable union conventions and shop steward and mass-membership meetings. Unions furnished thousands of campaign workers for him, as indicated by this 1945 letter from the secretary-treasurer of the Women's Auxiliary of the National Maritime

¹⁰⁷Morris Mister to Marcantonio, July 14, 1943. MP 17, 1 of 2 (Furniture Workers).

¹⁰⁸No signature, June 16, 1942. MP 17, 1 of 2 (NMU).

¹⁰⁹Dated May 17, 1942. MP 49 (Campaign Endorsements, 42-44).

Workers: "Last week I was up in New York at the NMU Auxiliary Conference. I am sure you know how hard many of those women worked in your campaign. It would have done your heart good to see how very proud they were of you because of your fight for the Fair Employment Practices Commission."¹¹⁰ The previous year, the president of the State, County, and Municipal Workers of America wrote: "Our union has already begun to mobilize its people to help in this campaign. . . . By the end of the week, we will be able to start sending forces into the District and the Congressman can count on our practical support."¹¹¹

Members of the Teachers' Union made a unique contribution to Marcantonio's victories. Their special assignment was to prepare Puerto Ricans for the literacy test administered by the New York Board of Regents required of potential voters who lacked proof of schooling through the eighth grade or of honorable military service.¹¹² Teachers developed sophisticated materials to assist prospective voters, and made particular efforts to ensure that they understood all test procedures. For example, in a brochure entitled First Voters the section, "How to Answer the Questions," directed:

- a. Read the first question. Be sure you understand what the

¹¹⁰Eleanor Fowler to Marcantonio, July 19, 1945. MP 17, 1 of 2 (NMU).

¹¹¹Jim King to Marcantonio, June 7, 1944. MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns, Sponsors '44).

¹¹²Wallace S. Sayre and Herbert Kaufman, Governing New York City: Politics in the Metropolis (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1960), p. 204. The literacy requirement was ruled out by the Civil Rights Act of 1965 and Puerto Ricans illiterate in English can now register simply by showing evidence of having completed six years of schooling in Puerto Rico. Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), pp. 57-58.

- question asks for. Sometimes it asks for the name of a person or place. Sometimes it asks for a date or a number.
- b. Start to read the story. The answer to the first question is usually in the first sentence, sometimes it is in the second sentence. If you do not find the answer, read the first sentence again.
 - c. Put a line under the words that answer the questions. Remember, you must take your answer from the story. That is one of the rules of the test. . . .¹¹³

Samples of earlier tests were appended to these materials. Potential voters were tutored both in test-taking techniques and in English. To a large extent the surprisingly high voter registration in El Barrio must be attributed to these efforts. (See Table 12; pp. 357-58)

Because a large percentage of its membership were Puerto Ricans living in Marcantonio's district, the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union's help was especially valuable. It carried out voter-registration drives among its members, made substantial financial contributions, and provided hundreds of shop stewards and rank-and-file activists to work in the district, as did the Union of Office and Professional Workers.¹¹⁴

El Barrio had a wide array of left-wing organizations, which acted in concert with Marcantonio's political machine. (See pp. 338-42) Aside from the Vito Marcantonio Political Association, however, Italian Harlem was almost devoid of political life. (See pp. 222-24) The Democratic and Republican parties maintained clubs, but these devoted themselves almost exclusively to furthering the fortunes of state-wide and city judgeship candidates. (See pp. 400-1)

The only other expressions of political organization in Italian Harlem were fostered by the Communist Party. An Italian Lodge of the

¹¹³MP 49 (Campaign, Literacy Tests).

¹¹⁴Interview with Charles Collins, South Norwalk, Conn., August 25, 1976; interview with Benedict.

International Workers Order existed in Italian Harlem during this entire period. Its influence was quite limited. (See p. 223) Until the war, the Workers Alliance, an organization of the unemployed and WPA workers, had significant strength throughout East Harlem. One of Marcantonio's associates recalled that in Italian Harlem the Workers Alliance branch, the Italian Unemployed Association, was of great help in re-electing Marcantonio. The considerable prestige of this organization redounded to Marcantonio, who served as its attorney without fee and who provided it with a headquarters--the Vito Marcantonio Political Association.¹¹⁵ The annual report of the executive board of the Workers Alliance stated: "We will throw everything we got into the election of men like Vito Marcantonio, who during his tenure in office, was in the forefront of the fight for the unemployed and WPA workers."¹¹⁶ After his election, Marcantonio acknowledged his appreciation for the Workers Alliance's support. Before its state convention, he called upon the "redbaiters and reactionaries to take notice that I am mighty proud of the fact that the Workers Alliance was one of the most powerful contributing factors in my election to Congress as an American Labor Party candidate."¹¹⁷ A New York Post article describing Marcantonio's 1940 campaign stated that the Workers Alliance had a considerable

¹¹⁵Blum and Wilhelm, p. 184; Salvatore John LaGumina, Vito Marcantonio: The People's Politician (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1969), p. 42.

¹¹⁶"Workers Alliance in Political Drive," New York Times (August 21, 1938), p. 1.

¹¹⁷"Fusion of Jobless and Aged Planned," New York Times (February 12, 1949), p. 1.

following in East Harlem. The article reported that Marcantonio "brought down the house" when before the Italian Unemployed Association of the Workers Alliance of America he stated: "If they call what I stand for Communism, then let me be called a communist. I am a leader of the forces of peace in America. . . ."118 The war boom's virtual elimination of unemployment and the demise of WPA caused the Workers Alliance to disband.

In 1937, on the initiative of George Charney, the Communist Party established and staffed the Harlem Legislative Conference (HLC), an umbrella organization with which trade union, religious, fraternal, youth, and political groups, as well as settlement houses from both Central and East Harlem would affiliate. Its primary purpose was to encourage political activity--and unity--among the area's three major communities. From its inception to its demise in 1943, Marcantonio served as its chairman.119 The Harlem Legislative Conference supplemented the work of the Vito Marcantonio Political Association to expand Marcantonio's political hegemony in East Harlem.

The HLC fought to improve Harlem's housing, medical, and educational facilities, and to fight discrimination against Blacks, Hispanics, and the foreign-born. Furthermore, it pledged its support of the Bill of Rights, trade unionism, and "Keeping America out of war." Its claim of 275,000 members was exaggerated, but its ability to attract

¹¹⁸New York Post (November 1, 1940), p. 2.

¹¹⁹On the founding of the Harlem Legislative Conference, see Charney, A Long Journey, p. 114. On the Communist Party's work in Central Harlem, ca. 1935, to politicize fraternal groups, see Mark Naison, "Harlem Blacks and Communism," Science and Society (Winter 1979), pp. 338-39.

organizations--it claimed 165 of them--was indeed impressive.¹²⁰

A Job and Unemployment Conference held in 1940, for instance, brought together delegations from Amparo Latino, People's Baptist Young People's Choir, United Puerto Rican Republicans, Chilean Workers Club, Communist Party 17th Assembly District, Madison Flashes, Benjamin Franklin High School, Royal Athletic Club, and thirty-six other groups.¹²¹

Although half of these organizations were left-wing, it is remarkable that they (including local branches of the Communist Party) coalesced with Parent-Teacher Associations and the Royal Athletic Club. All HLC functions followed a similar pattern. For example, a leaflet announcing the HLC-organized "Housing Parade" (that is, a demonstration favoring low-rental public housing for East Harlem) listed as its sponsors five construction-worker locals with headquarters in East Harlem; the Teachers' Union and local chapters of the State, County, and Municipal Employees Association; the United Italian Association and the Italian Social Workers Association, the LaGuardia Political Club (not yet renamed the Vito Marcantonio Political Association); the Workers Alliance and the International Workers Order; and three settlement houses.¹²²

The Harlem Legislative Conference's greatest success was its contribution to bringing low-cost public housing to East Harlem. As part of his conception of community-centered education at Benjamin

¹²⁰"Call for Conference for the Strengthening of the Relationship between Afro-American, West Indian, and Hispanic Peoples, June 8, 1939." CC.

¹²¹Leaflet deposited in Covello Collection.

¹²²Ibid.

Franklin High School, Leonard Covello established some twenty committees composed of teachers, students, and community leaders. In 1935, the Housing Committee began its work by organizing class discussions and sponsoring housing exhibits in the school library. Class compositions on housing, and films stressing the need for better housing, also formed a part of this campaign in the first few months of the committee's existence. The "Friends and Neighbors Club," a community outreach organization connected with Benjamin Franklin, became activated on this issue. In December 1937 a Housing Conference, chaired by Marcantonio, at which various political, community, and religious leaders (including Covello) spoke, announced that the Friends and Neighbors Club and the HLC had formed the East Harlem Housing Committee for the purpose of launching a campaign to bring low-cost public housing to East Harlem. A resolution was passed calling on the mayor to build low-rent housing in East Harlem along the East River on land that was being considered for luxury housing development.¹²³ Three months later, another mass meeting was held, followed three days later by the "Housing Parade." A leaflet urging East Harlem residents to attend this demonstration read:

Horror and Death Strike Twice in a Week!: Four Children, Four Victims, Four Deaths
Yes--the people of East Harlem were again witnesses to a tragedy, a tragedy which this time took as its victims five innocent children--peacefully at sleep, but suddenly awakened by the noise of roaring flames, which led to their destruction and death. This tragedy happened on East 112th Street--who knows when or where the next one will occur? The East Harlem Housing Committee of the Harlem Legislative Conference is fighting for a low-rent housing project. You can win this fight by--coming to the Monster Housing Parade. Mobilize at Benjamin Franklin High School.¹²⁴

¹²³Lieberman, p. 70; Leonard Covello, "A Community-Centered School and the Problem of Housing," Educational Forum, XLI (January 1943), pp. 93-133.

¹²⁴Leaflet deposited in Covello Collection.

Echoing this leaflet, Marcantonio said in a radio broadcast sponsored by the HLC: "Our children are raised in disease-breeding firetraps. . . . The siren of the fire truck will continue to strike terror in the hearts of our people as long as the slums stand."¹²⁵

The next year, widely circulated petitions read: "We the undersigned tenants of East Harlem, living in one of the worst slum areas in the City, urge Mayor LaGuardia to allocate funds for a low-cost housing project. . . ."¹²⁶ The minutes of a January 1939 meeting of the East Harlem Housing Committee give a good picture of how this campaign was organized. A committee member reported an enthusiastic response to his address at a local American Labor Party club, noting that the forty members present eagerly accepted the petitions. Two other committee members stated that their ALP club would hold a meeting in Italian on the subject of the low-cost housing project the following month. An order for the purchase of one thousand buttons bearing a housing slogan

¹²⁵LaGumina, Vito Marcantonio: The People's Politician, p. 55; text of speech deposited in MP 23, 1 of 2 (Housing). In this same speech Marcantonio said further:

"As president of the Harlem Legislative Conference, I urge you all to join with us in militantly demanding a low-cost housing project . . . in our district. We urge that the East River front be used for this purpose. We are opposed to the exploitation of this site by realty interests. We are opposed to the erection of another Tudor City along the East River. We do not want in our community penthouses and silk hats alongside tenements and people on relief budgets. We do not want Dead Ends. The East River is our river. We were born on its banks. We learned to swim in that river. We have lived and suffered alongside its banks. We have had to smell it in the hot summer days. Now that the river has been cleaned, and now that the land alongside it is available, we want that river to ourselves. Let those of us who have been part of the very existence of that river enjoy it now by living in clean and cheerful homes on its banks. It is our river, and we do not intend to have anybody take it away from us."

¹²⁶"Call for Petition Drive." CC.

was agreed to. It was said that a letter from a committee member, a physician, to a hundred East Harlem physicians calling on them to participate in the housing campaign had engendered a weak response. Finally, it was reported that five thousand signatures had been collected.¹²⁷

Having friends at City Hall was also helpful, and Marcantonio had one in LaGuardia. In the midst of this campaign, he wrote: "I had a long discussion with the Mayor about a week ago with regard to the housing problem in Harlem. Confidentially, he is with us. He asked me to submit to him right away land values along the East River. Will you please get these for me at once?"¹²⁸

In October 1938 the building of the housing project commenced. It would cost \$7,638,000 and provide units for 1,326 families. Leaflets in English, Spanish, and Italian (almost all leaflets prepared by the HLC were published in all three languages) were distributed announcing a "Victory March and Celebration." The leaflet further stated that "the people of East Harlem, through the leadership of their fighting Congressman, Vito Marcantonio, at last have secured low-rent housing."¹²⁹

The project, named East River Houses, which Marcantonio described as consisting of "fifteen six storey buildings . . . each apartment supplied with a Frigidaire, gas range and all modern equipment," was not

¹²⁷Deposited in Covello Collection.

¹²⁸Marcantonio to Covello, February 13, 1938. MP (Covello, Dr. Leonard).

¹²⁹Leaflets deposited in Covello Collection.

an unqualified success.¹³⁰ As early as January 1940, he was expressing his concern that some project apartments would not be assigned to East Harlem residents. In a letter to an aide assigned to help these people apply for acceptance, he wrote:

The only manner in which we can be assured that apartments in the housing project in the district be given to people in the district is to flood the housing authority with applications from the people in the community. In other words, it is necessary that the New York City Housing Authority be forced to choose 1,200 families from the applications that come from our district. This can be assured only if there are thousands of applications from the 20th Congressional District. Hence, I believe that the application forms you have should be circulated widely among the organization. In fact, we should have quite a number with us at the Harlem Legislative Conference on Friday.¹³¹

This letter was dated March 4. On March 8 a letter was sent to all members of the HLC calling for an emergency meeting to "discuss and act upon the present situation regarding the selection of tenants to occupy the new East Harlem Housing Project. . . ." ¹³²

Marcantonio was also particularly concerned that East Harlem's Puerto Ricans be admitted into East River Houses, which were built in Italian Harlem. To the aide responsible for project applications he wrote: "Will you please make sure that all agencies distributing housing applications mark them with an E.H. particularly in the Puerto Rican section." On the same day, he wrote to his aide in El Barrio: "I am most anxious to have the Puerto Rican people in that housing

¹³⁰Marcantonio to Louis Lopez, October 2, 1919. MP 13, 1 of 2 (East Harlem '39-'42).

¹³¹Marcantonio to Edmundo Contento, March 4, 1939. MP 13, 1 of 2 (HLC).

¹³²Emmett May (executive secretary of the HLC) to members, March 8, 1939. CC.

project."¹³³ (It is significant that this aide, assigned to distributing and processing applications, was himself Puerto Rican.)

In 1941 the twelve-hundred-unit East River Houses opened. Over a drawing of this project a caption was printed on a 1940 Marcantonio campaign brochure that started: "I Brought a Housing Project for 1,200 Families to the District."¹³⁴ Ironically, the success of Marcantonio and the HLC in obtaining East River Houses and ultimately many other housing projects was to create great problems for East Harlem and its crusading Congressman. (See p. 441)

The Harlem Legislative Conference proved to be helpful to Benjamin Franklin High School as well. In reply to a 1941 New York Journal-American story asserting that the school's "teachers praise Soviet Russia in the classrooms, while students sell the Communist paper, the Daily Worker, in the halls," the organization called for a meeting to combat "this attack upon our children, Mr. Covello, the teachers, and the people of East Harlem." A poster in the form of a letter from Marcantonio called on HLC supporters to attend this meeting to "put a stop to this kind of slander about East Harlem's High School. . . . This is an attack upon our children, Mr. Covello, the teachers, and the people of East Harlem." A trilingual leaflet accusing the Journal-American of "slandering Benjamin Franklin High School . . . our children's school . . ." was widely distributed.¹³⁵

¹³³Marcantonio to Edmundo Contento, January 16, 1940. MP 13, 1 of 2 (East Harlem 1939-40).

¹³⁴Campaign brochure deposited in Covello Collection.

¹³⁵"Call to Conference," June 21, 1941 and poster. CC. Covello's unwillingness to accede to this type of political pressure is illustrated by the holding of a meeting at Benjamin Franklin on May 29,

Covello's involvement with the HLC went beyond the fight for public housing. When the executive secretary requested that Marcantonio pay some of its outstanding bills, he replied: "So far as dough is concerned, it is definitely out. I am up to my neck trying to pay campaign debts, and am being hard pressed. . . . This business of personally financing the Conference is all wrong. I think a meeting with men like Covello . . . to find ways and means, such as running a little luncheon, for the purpose of raising funds might work."¹³⁶

In its original call to meeting, the Harlem Legislative Conference stated that its "sole purpose is to devise ways and means of securing the passage of remedial legislation which will benefit and raise the living standards of the people of Harlem." In fact, New York State legislators who were HLC members submitted bills embodying the content of resolutions passed by the organization. Inasmuch as all East Harlem's and most of Central Harlem's legislators belonged to it, the initial concern of "developing and securing sufficient public opinion for the passage of bills" tended to wane.¹³⁷ By December 1940, in a letter signed by HLC executive secretary Emmett M. May and Marcantonio, the organization's "program" was redefined as responding to the "need for action by the people of the Harlem community around the problems of better housing, jobs, reliefs, evictions, against racial

1943 sponsored by the Youth Committee of the New York Council of American-Soviet Friendship. The purpose of this meeting was for "American students to welcome your Soviet friends." Appearing at the meeting was Professor Robert S. Lynd and Paul Robeson, Jr. Leaflet deposited in the Covello Collection.

¹³⁶Marcantonio to Emmett May, January 8, 1939. MP, 1 of 2 (HLC).

¹³⁷"Call to Meeting, February 21, 1938." CC.

discrimination. . . ."138

Effective as they were in the public housing area, HLC efforts to upgrade education, health care, recreation, welfare, and WPA funding were disappointing, consisting primarily of periodic conferences and public meetings. The concrete results of these campaigns were scant; no publicly supported hospital was built in East Harlem, nor was there any discernible improvement in education and recreation.

Marcantonio was the main speaker at a meeting sponsored by the HLC in January 1940 to discuss peace and civil rights. Conferences, on January 25, 1941, and February 22, 1941, were held to "Keep America at Peace." Ironically, the other topics at these conferences included "Give Us Jobs in the National Defense Program" and discrimination against Italians, Negroes, and Puerto Ricans in defense industries.¹³⁹ The HLC also sponsored a "Harlem People's Rally for Peace," with Marcantonio as the featured speaker, which was preceeded by a march through East Harlem. The HLC's sponsorship of this march and the Housing Parade of the previous year marked two of the few times in that period that the HLC, or for that matter any other organization, sponsored a street demonstration in Italian Harlem except in direct relationship to one of Marcantonio's electoral campaigns.¹⁴⁰

In March 1939, a Youth Committee of the HLC was formed to "unite all the youth organizations in Harlem regardless of race, color, creed or belief, towards a drive for youth legislation."¹⁴¹ The committee's

¹³⁸Marcantonio and May to Covello, December 26, 1940. CC.
¹³⁹Leaflets in English, Spanish, and Italian. CC.
¹⁴⁰Leaflet deposited in Covello Collection.
¹⁴¹Idelen Vasquez to Covello, March 28, 1939. CC.

major activity was an extensive campaign to fight cutbacks in the number of jobs available under the National Youth Administration, and specifically against the dismissal of young workers from East Harlem who had been assigned to positions in the area's settlement houses.

Conferences, leaflets, and petitions pointed out that "eight out of every ten young people in East and Lower Harlem are unemployed."¹⁴²

A Youth Committee conference in June 1941 on "Jobs and Training and the Welfare of Conscriptees" featured Marcantonio as keynote speaker.¹⁴³ While specifically attacking reductions in the National Youth Administration appropriation, his speech also placed this event within a wider context. Declaring that the United States possessed more wealth than any other country as well as a Bill of Rights, he stated:

When there was need of the development of our country, the Homestead Act was enacted. Under this law it was possible for a young man to acquire for himself a piece of land from the Government and work on that land, and build on it, and raise a family on that land; even then, even in the days when this country had plenty for its young people, in the days when individualism was possible, it was a recognized fact that the Government had to do something for the young people.

Today, when everything is monopolized, when the economic life of this country lies within the grasp of the economic barons, we find that with the exception of a pitiful amount--the Government has no program, nothing whatsoever to offer as a solution for the young people of this country.

[On the problem of youth unemployment] there are two schools of thought--one school feels that the problem of jobs will be solved in only one manner--that of putting American youth on the job of stopping bullets on the front. . . .

On the other hand, we have the school of thought that feels that the Government should provide proper jobs at a decent wage and proper training and education. . . .

I ask of you that you organize into a council of young people ready to demand these things in behalf of yourselves.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴²Leaflets deposited in Covello Collection. CC.

¹⁴³Call for this conference deposited in Covello Collection.

¹⁴⁴Text of Marcantonio's speech deposited in Covello Collection.

While the content of this speech is in no way remarkable, it is of special interest because, of the thousands of speeches Marcantonio made in East Harlem, it is among the mere handful whose texts exist. It allows us, therefore, to note that although the style was modified, he was presenting the same positions in the same way both in Congress and in East Harlem. As was his wont in Congress, this speech takes a position on a political issue within the context of class struggle, so that the "economic barons" are the ones who are denying East Harlem youths their stipends and job training. In the areas of social and labor legislation, at least, his consistent presentation of issues in the context of rich versus poor differentiated him from the typical New Deal liberal. This speech, and to a lesser extent his campaign material (see pp. 225-26), substantiate the recollections of his associates that Marcantonio faithfully and strenuously detailed his political positions to his constituents.

The Harlem Legislative Conference embraced East and Central Harlem: the borders of a district of the Communist Party that had been created as an outgrowth of its strategy to combat racism and expand political solidarity across ethnic and racial lines. Charney recalled that this arrangement was unwieldy in view of the strikingly different characteristics of the three major communities--Black, Hispanic, and Italian--contained in this area.¹⁴⁵ To some extent this problem was remedied in 1940 by establishing subdivisions within the HLC

¹⁴⁵Charney, A Long Journey, pp. 95-96.

corresponding to these three separate communities. The subdivision for East Harlem was known as the "East and Lower Harlem Conference."¹⁴⁶ The formidable linguistic difficulties of carrying out political work simultaneously in an English-, Spanish-, and still significantly Italian-speaking sector were resolved in part by having the HLC's constituent divisions represent Italian- and Spanish-language organizations which conducted meetings under their own auspices. In this manner, in 1939, a "Mass Meeting Against the Dies Committee and for the New Deal" was held by the Progressive Lodge of the International Workers Order and endorsed by the United Italian Associations of Harlem. Also in the same year, another Italian-language meeting to protest cuts in WPA appropriations and "in favor of the politics of peace in the United States" was sponsored by the Italian-language clubs of the American Labor Party, the Independent Sons of Italy, two construction-worker locals, and the Modern Times Club. In 1940, when a Spanish section of the HLC was formed, a Spanish-language meeting in opposition to the Hobbs Bill was sponsored by the Spanish-language section of the IWO, Club Obrero Español, Club Obrero Chileno, Comité Pro Democracia, two Spanish-language locals of the Workers Alliance, and the United Cigar Workers. Featured speakers at all these meetings were Marcantonio and Covello.¹⁴⁷

The HLC never ignored the issues of discrimination and racism. The legislative recommendations in 1941 of its Subcommittee on Education

¹⁴⁶Memorandum from Marcantonio and May to "presidents, officers, and members of the Organizations of Lower Harlem," February 15, 1940. MP 13, 1 of 2 (HLC).

¹⁴⁷Leaflets deposited in Covello Collection.

included repeal of a section of the New York State Education Law that "now makes it possible to establish separate schools for Negroes." A letter from Marcantonio to HLC members dated January 4, 1941, stated: "The huge need for us, you and me, is to fight discrimination against Negroes, Puerto Ricans, and other Latin-Americans, and Italians in National Defense jobs and in the service of the armed forces of the United States."¹⁴⁸ In 1940 an alleged act of police brutality against a Puerto Rican couple caused the Spanish Section of the HLC, the American Labor Party, and the Workers Alliance to call for a mass protest meeting.¹⁴⁹ (See pp. 368-69)

The fact that the Tenth Assembly District was equally divided between El Barrio and the eastern half of Central Harlem was a source of great rivalry among Puerto Ricans and West Indian Blacks and Afro-Americans. In response to this increasingly tense situation, a two-day "Latin American, West Indian, American Negro Unity Conference" was called in 1939. The speakers at the plenary session included diplomats from Mexico, Chile, and Cuba, as well as Marcantonio. On the second day, various workshops on the mutual problems of these groups were held.¹⁵⁰ (See pp. 355-56)

Within East Harlem itself, the Harlem Legislative Conference became an effective force for fostering amicable relations between Italo-Americans and Puerto Ricans. In the fall of 1938, in the midst of

¹⁴⁸Deposited in Covello Collection.

¹⁴⁹"Letter of invitation to attend meeting sponsored by the Committee for the Defense of the Victor Garcia Family." CC.

¹⁵⁰Conference brochure and call for conference signed by May. CC.

the Congressional campaign, a series of violent confrontations between youths of these two groups broke out. The communities immediately became armed camps, and the explosive situation threatened to destroy the unity that the HLC had worked to achieve. Marcantonio and Covello at once activated the organization to quell these disturbances, focusing its efforts on a "Mass Meeting of Brotherhood." Marcantonio sent letters of invitation to every clergyman in East Harlem. An "Urgent Call by the Harlem Legislative Conference," signed by Marcantonio, was sent to the presidents and officers of East Harlem's Italo-American and Puerto Rican organizations. Chaired by Marcantonio, the meeting attracted more than two thousand residents. Speeches in Italian, Spanish, and English, stressing the cultural heritage these peoples shared and the common problems they faced, were sufficient to bring a halt to the disturbances.¹⁵¹

This mass meeting was followed by a conference of Italo-American and Puerto Rican religious and community leaders. Led by Marcantonio, a delegation of three Catholic and two Protestant clergymen met with Mayor LaGuardia, who pledged that the police and other city agents would cooperate toward ending the inter-community feud.¹⁵² A memorandum from Marcantonio to Covello on this problem demonstrates the extent of their personal involvement in defusing it:

In looking over the report on the Italo-Puerto Rican clashes (Juvenile Aid Bureau records) I find that four of the boys

¹⁵¹Charney, A Long Journey, p. 115; Marcantonio to East Harlem clergy, October 25, 1938, and "Urgent Call" MP 13, 1 of 2 (HLC); clipping, "Gran Mitin de Confraternidad entre Italianos y Hispánicos," La Voz (October 28, 1938), p. 3. CC.

¹⁵²"Harlem Peace Sought," New York Times (November 5, 1938), p. 14.

arrested were from 108th Street. If these boys have been released, I think that it would be a good idea to get the names and addresses of these four boys and have them in for special conferences. It might be possible to make them see your viewpoint on the situation, at least as far as 108th Street itself is concerned. It might spread out further to the whole group, if these four boys should happen to have any leadership qualities and could be made to do things RIGHT. Send out publicity for Wednesday evening's meeting: identify your name with leadership in this.¹⁵³

An Italo-American woman who did political work for the Communist Party in Italian Harlem for more than fifteen years recalled that when the 1938 youth disturbances erupted, "Marcantonio got out of his sick bed and spoke everywhere. He was most forceful in condemning violence on the part of Italians, reminding them constantly that they too had once been the butt of violence, segregation, and discrimination, and it was particularly shameful of them to indulge in such tactics against others."¹⁵⁴ Charney also emphasized that the "resolution of this conflict was a remarkable tribute to Marc's leadership, for he alone had the confidence of the people and the determination to intervene."¹⁵⁵ This recognition by both Italian Harlem and El Barrio, of Marcantonio, along with Covello, as leaders willing to provide leadership was undoubtedly essential to achieving an end to the open conflict. (See p. 439)

The incident also sheds light on Marcantonio the politician as well as Marcantonio the man. During the crisis, he received for his approval a list of community leaders to be invited to the "Mass Meeting of Brotherhood." Among those on the list was James Lanzetta, the man

¹⁵³Dated October 24, 1938. CC.

¹⁵⁴Mary Bowes, Personal Letter, November 16, 1976.

¹⁵⁵Charney, A Long Journey, p. 115.

who had defeated LaGuardia in 1932 and Marcantonio in 1936, and against whom the latter was again running in 1938. Marcantonio crossed Lanzetta's name off the list. He would get out of his sick bed to go among the Italians to preach against racial intolerance. That was a matter of principle. But he would not provide his opponent with a platform. That was bad politics. Lanzetta, for his part, had enough political sense to make an entrance during the meeting anyway. When Marcantonio saw him, he shrewdly announced Lanzetta's presence, stating: "In order that no one is going to think that this is a political meeting, let me present and call to the platform Congressman James Lanzetta." A newspaper article reported that "to great applause, Lanzetta went to the platform and spoke."¹⁵⁶

After peace had been restored, a Committee on Racial Cooperation was formed within the HLC to stabilize both communities, and it combined efforts with a "Racial Committee" that had been formed by faculty members of Benjamin Franklin High School. A report of this latter committee for the period September 1938 to February 1939 stated: "The committee realizes that the community problems are to a great extent the problems of the school." Along other things, the report noted that in order to further community goals, interracial and multicultural assemblies had been organized. At one such assembly, the language department presented an international program of folk dancing and folk music. At another, the English Department invited clergymen from the Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic religions.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶List of community leaders deposited in MP 6 (HLC); clipping from La Voz deposited in CC.

¹⁵⁷Report deposited in Covello Collection.

The outbreak of World War II caused the HLC to veer in a very different direction. A letter of December 10, 1941, to the membership of the HLC, signed by its secretary Hope Stevens, signaled this changed perspective:

Japan's unprovoked and dastardly attack on our country has committed us irrevocably to victory over all the Axis enemies of the United States. It is therefore more urgent than ever before that the people of Harlem become thoroughly identified with the national defense effort. The program of the Harlem Legislative Conference must be put into effect now. In this great national crisis everyone must do his or her part in the armed forces, in defense industries and in civilian defense services. Once and for all we must end the discrimination and segregation that hamper the complete unity of the American people. We need to inform the whole people of the need for the most complete integration of resources of Harlem, human and spiritual, in furthering the defense of the nation. . . . A united effort to integrate our community wholeheartedly and completely in the national program to defeat Hitler, Japan, and all our Axis enemies now must be our first concern.¹⁵⁸

It is not without significance that Marcantonio was not a signatory of this manifesto: he was still in the process of edging himself from being one of the most strident anti-war spokesmen in the United States toward becoming an advocate of all-out support for the war effort. (See pp. 55-56)

From this point on, the HLC concentrated on winning the war, although steps to combat discrimination and promote interracial and inter-ethnic harmony continued. At its January 17, 1942 meeting, Marcantonio stated that the organization should call a conference in order to

organize the Harlem community for the most effective prosecution of the war, particularly from the standpoint of civilians. This is not only a war of defense, but a just war, an anti-fascist war, a people's war. . . . This war can remain a just and democratic war only so long as the people are permitted to and do

¹⁵⁸Deposited in MP 6 (HLC).

fully participate in it, not only in its military, but also in its civilian aspects.

A number of resolutions were framed at this meeting, acknowledging that

there were special problems in Harlem which require that the civilian defense of Harlem be given special consideration by the Office of Civil Defense; that not least among these problems is that of housing and the need for recognizing the dangerous situation presented by the construction of Harlem tenements; the wooden beams of which make them particularly vulnerable in case of bombing or widespread fire; that air raid shelters are badly needed and steps must be taken to provide them; that a delegation wait upon the Director of the Red Cross in New York City presenting the viewpoint of the people of Harlem on the refusal to accept donations of blood from Negroes and to make fullest possible representation in protesting this policy. . . . ; that social and economic gains made by the people of Harlem and the people of the United States should not be surrendered in the current crisis and that the basis for further gains should be laid while we go forward in defense of America and in preparation for winning of the peace; that a larger conference, representing the broad masses of the people of Harlem be immediately projected and that all organizations represented in this conference be listed as sponsors thereof, and are hereby organized in a Harlem Defense Council as of today. . . .¹⁵⁹

Later in 1942, the work of the Harlem Legislative Conference was subsumed into the Harlem Victory Council, which sponsored a "Salute to Negro Troops" in Central Harlem attended by fifteen thousand people. A committee of the Council focused on discrimination in national defense work, demanding the elimination of job-application forms of any question regarding race or religion. Emmett May informed Marcantonio that this committee intended to "develop action around concrete cases of Italians, Puerto Ricans, and Negroes who had been denied jobs in national defense work."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹Text of Marcantonio's speech and resolution deposited in MP 6 (HLC).

¹⁶⁰Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting of Harlem Victory Council of April 11, 1942, and undated letter from May to Marcantonio (ca. 1943) deposited in MP 6 (HLC).

In East Harlem itself the vacuum created by the demise of the HLC was not filled by the activities of its successor, the Harlem Victory Council. A letter to Covello from its secretary, dated May 4, 1942, noted that "we are very much disturbed because we are not at all involving people from East Harlem in our work."¹⁶¹ It would appear that the issues projected by the Council did not arouse the same response among the social, fraternal, religious, and trade union locals of East Harlem as had those projected by the HLC. This is perhaps best illustrated by the sponsorship of a "Mass Victory Meeting" in 1943, which was held in the usual HLC meeting place, the Park Palace, at 110th Street and Fifth Avenue. As always, Marcantonio served as featured speaker; unlike the prewar HLC meetings, however, this rally to "Smash Hitlerism at Home" was not co-sponsored by a multitude of voluntary organizations, but only by groups closely associated with the Communist Party.¹⁶² No attempt was made to revive the HLC after the war.

The extensive work of the Harlem Legislative Conference had been supported by a \$4,000 per annum budget financed by the \$2.50 monthly dues from its affiliated organizations.¹⁶³ After 1941, the decline of the HLC aggravated its financial problems, and in 1942 its treasurer resigned, citing as the reason his "inability to continue paying expenses out of my own pocket."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹Stella Garvis to Covello. CC.

¹⁶²Leaflet deposited in MP 6 (HLC).

¹⁶³"Harlem Legislative Conference Report and Activities: 1941."
CC.

¹⁶⁴Bocchio to Marcantonio, January 27, 1942. MP 6 (HLC).

The HLC was of inestimable value to Marcantonio. At its countless meetings, at which he was invariably the main speaker, and the endless mailings, all of which went out over his signature, Marcantonio was projected as the preeminent and undisputed leader of the community. Moreover, his work in Congress became more widely known, often succeeding in countering the hostile press accounts of his legislative role. Without an exceptional orator and charismatic leader, the Harlem Legislative Conference might never have taken root; but without the HLC, Marcantonio might not have found the means of sinking his own roots quite so deeply in East Harlem.¹⁶⁵ The politicization of social, fraternal, and local trade union organizations accomplished by the Harlem Legislative Conference provided a crucial supplement to Marcantonio's political machine. The connections between these related groups and the radical Congressman survived after its demise.

The HLC was important to the progress of East Harlem for several other reasons. Its efforts to eliminate intergroup conflict significantly contributed to the relatively harmonious relations between Italian Harlem and El Barrio. This achievement was, of course, important to Marcantonio as well, since open conflict between these two communities could only have devastated his political base. To the people of East Harlem, the successes of the HLC--for example, in securing public housing--demonstrated in Covello's words, "what could be

¹⁶⁵Marcantonio not only provided political leadership for the HLC, but also instructed its organizers in practical politics. In 1939, for example, he wrote to May: "I think it was a serious mistake to cancel the meeting of the Harlem Legislative Conference, particularly in view of the fact that I publicly announced that there would be a meeting. Incidentally, I received a leaflet in Spanish announcing a 50-cent admission for each delegate. This also explains why we did not have any attendance." Deposited in MP 13, 1 of 2 (HLC).

done through concerted action."¹⁶⁶ In this way, the familialism of the Italo-American community could be replaced in some part by wider social involvement. And lastly, although its concrete achievements may have been few, according to Marcantonio they "brought a measure of happiness to the people of East Harlem."¹⁶⁷

Without financial and manpower assistance from the Communist Party and its affiliates, the Harlem Legislative Conference and the Vito Marcantonio Political Association could not have functioned. Perhaps no other political machine had ever received so much outside assistance. Nonetheless, the infusion of these resources cannot in itself account for Marcantonio's success. Marcantonio's political organization was able to flourish because it was congruent with East Harlem's social realities. Its poorer residents needed the services the club provided. Moreover, this organization was compatible with the mores of East Harlem's two largest communities, Italian Harlem and El Barrio. It is certainly instructive that after six years, Marcantonio--despite all the efforts of his machine--made no comparable progress in Yorkville, that is, the area added to his District in 1944. (See pp. 406-7)

The major reason that the organization could sink such deep roots in Italian Harlem was that political machines corresponded to the social structure transplanted from Southern Italy. There the abyss between the poor and the government was so vast that intermediaries were essential. Upon the arrival of the Southern Italian contadini in the United States, this function was often fulfilled by the padroni,

¹⁶⁶Covello to Recreation and Education Committee. CC.

¹⁶⁷Marcantonio to Louis Lopez, October 2, 1939. MP 6 (HLC).

individuals who, for a fee, acted as employment agent, housing agent, and liaison with immigration authorities.¹⁶⁸ The decline of this system and the general failure of the small Italo-American upper class to become involved in the problems of the great mass of Italian immigrants left the local politicians to play out this role.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, El Barrio's Puerto Ricans, accustomed to depending on friends and relatives for help, were reluctant to directly approach bureaucratic structures for help, preferring to leave such contact to a padrino.¹⁷⁰ (See pp. 377-78)

Comparing the Vito Marcantonio Political Association with the archetypal machine as outlined in Plunkitt of Tammany Hall,¹⁷¹ it appears that although the purpose of both was to win elections, the differences between the two were enormous. The typical political clubhouses operated as convivial and protective meeting grounds where the immigrants could acquaint themselves with the realities of American life, political and non-political. Although in the early thirties Marcantonio's association served some of these functions (for example, sponsoring a softball team), his clubhouses were not places where men congregated to play cards or drink; nor did they sponsor dances or other

¹⁶⁸Michael Parenti, Ethnic and Political Attitudes: A Depth Study of Italian Americans (New York: Arno Press, 1975), pp. 30. See also p. 21.

¹⁶⁹Joseph Lopreato, Italian Americans (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 93-96; George Enrico Pozzetta, "The Italians of New York City, 1890-1914" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1971), pp. 232-33.

¹⁷⁰C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior, and Rose Kohn Goldsen, The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants (New York: Harper, 1950), pp. 114, 109.

¹⁷¹Arthur Mann, Introduction to Plunkitt of Tammany Hall, recorded by William L. Riordon (New York: Dutton Paperback, 1963), pp. xi, xv-xvii, xx.

social events. They were offices, competently staffed and efficiently run, for the single purpose of furnishing services and electing Marcantonio.¹⁷²

Structurally, Marcantonio's political machine matched the archetype: at its base were the all-important election district captains, and above these the assembly district leaders. Like almost all machine leaders, Marcantonio was a second-generation American-- someone who understood the problems of the immigrant poor and their progeny, who in turn identified with him and looked upon his organization as a social agency. And like other political machines, it dispensed patronage. Always present as attractions to some of its participants, however, were elements of ethnic pride and ideological affinity. These became the predominant motivations for those involved in the Marcantonio Political Association as its leader became increasingly isolated politically. Especially in the postwar period, working for his re-election could not promise an easy route out of the ghetto. For those who came from outside the district to work in this organization, the motive was clearly to assist in an effort in keeping the only nationally recognized spokesman for their point of view in Congress. For the East Harlemites, pride in their native son and probably resentment against what they viewed as unfair attacks on Marcantonio prompted them to lend a hand at election time. (See pp. 261-62, 267)

Marcantonio's political organization's efforts to solve the

¹⁷²Bingham, p. 100.

everyday problems of his constituents gave the poor residents concrete reasons to register and vote. Many East Harlem residents may or may not have cared that from Monday through Thursday Marcantonio was the sole voice in Congress fighting for Puerto Rico's independence, or against contempt citations of alleged or avowed Communists. But they deeply cared that on Saturday and Sunday he was always in his headquarters, doing everything possible to get their toilets fixed, to have the landlords provide adequate heat, or to prevent the deportation of relatives who had run afoul of the law. After his electoral defeats in 1949 and 1950, letters from his constituents expressed genuine disquietude at the loss of this resource:

You was and still you are the bread of the poor people. . . . I love you like you were my son. When you had that bad trouble last 1948 I got so sick, so worry about you. . . . We pray that God bless you for the good you have done and to give you strength, power, and wisdom to spread more good. I feel that you have a firm and colossal character. . . . I consider you as a valiant soldier and express my sincere wishes that you go forward in your fight. God bless you. Good luck and God bless you. I know you are not a communist and need our support against your (and our) enemies. Christ too was persecuted for the same reasons. I only wish you were mayor. . . . I love you and the things you've done and tried to do. . . . I would appreciate a picture of you, if possible. They claim you are a communist. Who knows? I know many a little fellow in your district who thinks you are a prince. I know you are the only man who fights for the rights of the Puerto Rican people. . . . you never have said no to the Puerto Rican people and you can be sure that I pray to God and talk to the Puerto Rican people to keep you always as our leader. . . . You are the man who saves thousands and thousands of good American citizens lives. I am inclined to allow myself the pleasure of saying, may God in his mercy give you more strength and courage to fight the good fight for the common people which you are doing. . . . if we did not have an upright and honest man like you what would become of us. . . . you are good to the people. God bless you for the good you do to us poor people. I will always remember. Terribly sorry to hear the way they are slandering you--thanks for your untiring laboring for us. . . . We hope and pray for your continuing success. Have visited seven churches in past few weeks. The people are all praying for your victory.¹⁷³

¹⁷³MP 11 (C-D, 1952); MP 9 (B, 1949); MP 11 (M, 1951); MP 9 (B,

His organization's ability to deliver services gave East Harlem's most needy residents a genuine stake in his re-election. It is primarily for this reason that voter registration and turnout in East Harlem were-- particularly for a community of the poor--so exceptional. (See Table 2)

Although it is impossible to gauge, there is no question that the widespread dispensing of assistance by Marcantonio's organization caused many to overlook his political beliefs and affiliations. In this way, the delivery of services helped to compensate for the unpopularity of certain aspects of Marcantonio's politics. In 1949, a Yorkville constituent wrote: "I was in [your clubhouse] on Saturday to talk over my problem with you. . . . I was very impressed by the way you meet people, your sincere interest, and the general way you did things. Although I come from a long line of Republicans, I, and many of my friends and neighbors will be at the polls on election day casting our vote for you, a man who is really for the People."¹⁷⁴

In some cases, individuals were brought closer to his political positions because of the service-dispensing aspects of his machine. One resident of El Barrio repeatedly heard that Marcantonio was a Communist. She was so impressed with the help he provided for people that she joined the Communist Party, reasoning that if what Marcantonio was defined as a Communist, that is what she wanted to be.¹⁷⁵

The machine's greatest flaw was that when its namesake died, almost everything died with him. Such, perhaps, did not have to

1950); MP 9 (G, 1950); MP 9 (F, 1950); MP 4 (Christmas); MP 4 (Christmas, 1949); MP 50 (Campaigns, Miscellaneous).

¹⁷⁴MP 9 (F-G).

¹⁷⁵Interview, Anonymous.

occur. After all, the lineal ancestor of the Vito Marcantonio Political Association was the Fiorello LaGuardia Association. But LaGuardia had a protégé--Marcantonio; the latter had none. In large part this was a function of Marcantonio's personality. One close associate speculated that Marcantonio did not have a protégé because "he found too much fault with people." She further noted his self-centeredness: "He was interested in anyone who was interested in him."¹⁷⁶ The absence of an heir apparent also reflected the difference in style between LaGuardia and Marcantonio. The former left the day-to-day operation of his machine to Marcantonio while he attended to the business of Congress. Marcantonio did both, believing that a major cause of LaGuardia's defeat by Lanzetta in 1932 was his aloofness from his constituents. Furthermore there is no evidence that within East Harlem Marcantonio's political organization contributed to the development of self-help organizations such as tenant organizations. In 1936, when the director of a welfare center attempted to bar Marcantonio's aides from helping people who were applying for assistance, he wired them: "[We] will have to refer this matter to unemployed councils and take appropriate action."¹⁷⁷ With the decline of the Workers Alliance in the late thirties, however, no other direct-action political organization emerged in East Harlem. The most serious attempt to politicize East Harlem was vested in the Harlem Legislative Conference. But this provided no opportunity to develop local leadership: Marcantonio was its president, and its staff was composed of Communist Party functionaries. Especially

¹⁷⁶Interview, Berman.

¹⁷⁷Marcantonio to Mucciolo, April 30, 1936. MP 46 (Aide's Reports, Mucciolo, '36).

after the demise of the Workers Alliance and the Harlem Legislative Conference, the entire thrust of Marcantonio's political organization was to encourage people to seek its assistance, not to seek resolution of their problems in any other manner. Its other efforts were devoted to mobilizing East Harlem's residents to register and to cast their ballots. Increasingly these tasks were carried out by outsiders. In view of this, it is not surprising that so little of East Harlem's radical tradition survived Marcantonio. In 1952, for example, when Marcantonio sat out the election while waiting for the Democratic/Republican/Liberal party coalition behind James Donovan to fall apart, the ALP's candidate, Vito Magli, received only 6,663 votes. Two years before, Marcantonio had garnered 36,095.¹⁷⁸ Nonetheless, inasmuch as his defeat in 1950 and death in 1954 occurred in the midst of an intense nationwide repression of the political left, it is most difficult to determine the degree to which the collapse of the left movement in East Harlem was due to the personalismo of its political organization, or to the political climate of the time. (See p. 82)

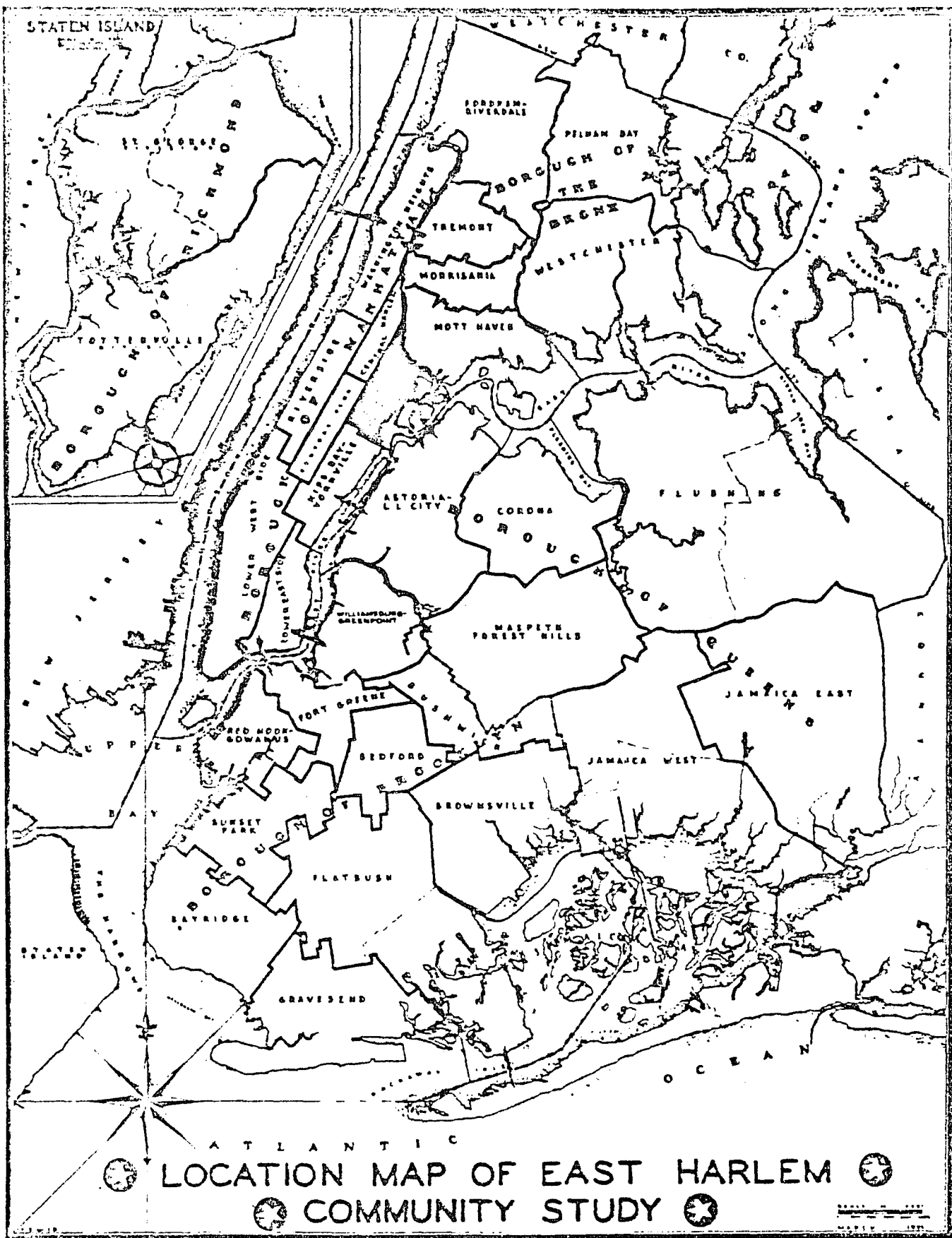
¹⁷⁸"City Republicans Gain 3 House Seats," New York Times (November 5, 1952), p . 21.

CHAPTER V

EAST HARLEM: AN OVERVIEW

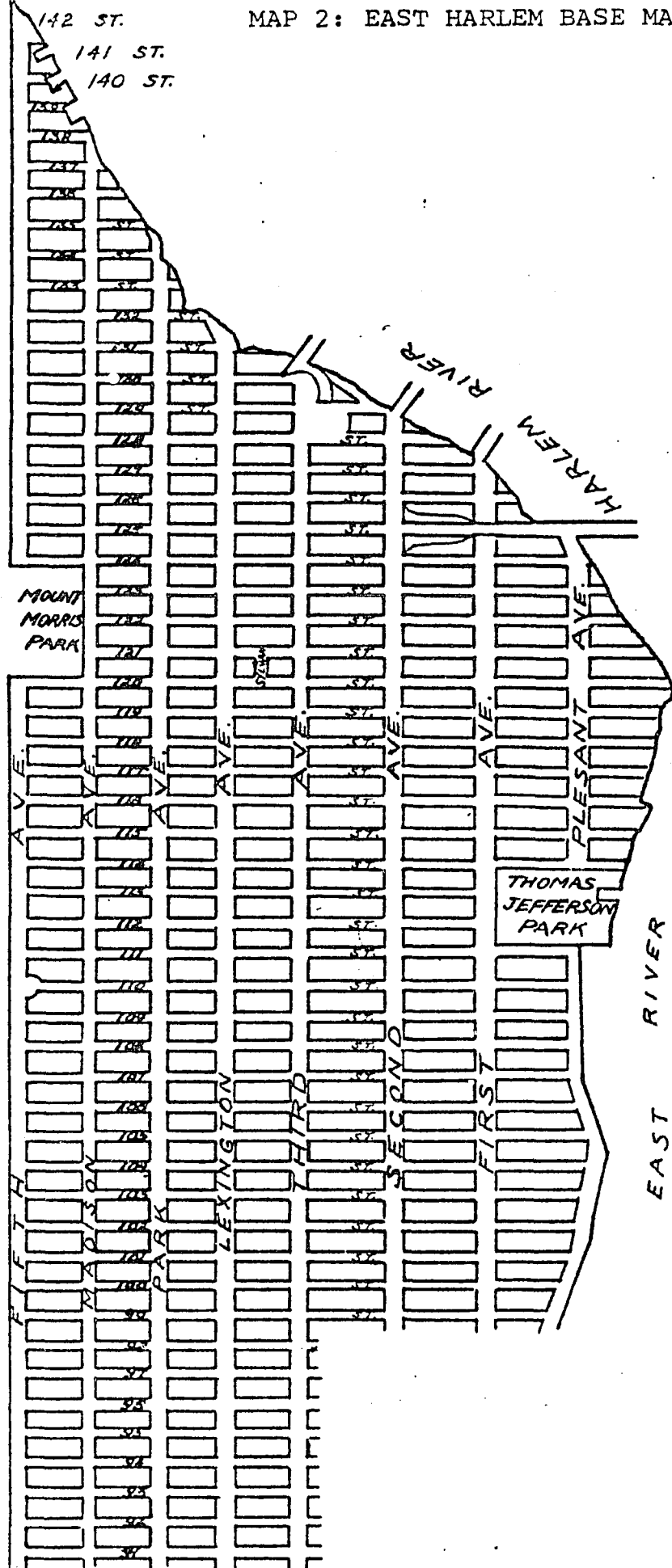
Marcantonio entered his electoral campaigns ostensibly well-equipped for victory. He was an attractive figure, an effective speaker, hard working, and single-mindedly devoted to the goal of being a consummate politician. At his disposal was the American Labor Party, a party that held the balance of power in his own district and was a major force in New York City politics. Aside from providing substantial numbers of votes for him, the ALP bargained with the Democratic and Republican parties in such a way that opposition to Marcantonio was eliminated or deflected. Moreover, he had in his control a professionally staffed and lavishly financed political organization able to provide a wide array of services on a mass scale. Accompanying the service-dispensing arm of this machine was a corps of volunteers, numbering in the thousands, which ensured that the maximum number of his potential voters registered to vote and cast their ballots. As a notorious radical, however, his appeal was sharply curtailed. Most of his constituents did not agree with his overall politics and would not have been willing to vote for him. This reality was demonstrated by the voters' behavior in Yorkville. Here his vote hovered below the 30 percent mark from 1944 until his final election in 1950. With all the resources Marcantonio brought to these elections, his

MAP 1: LOCATION MAP OF EAST HARLEM



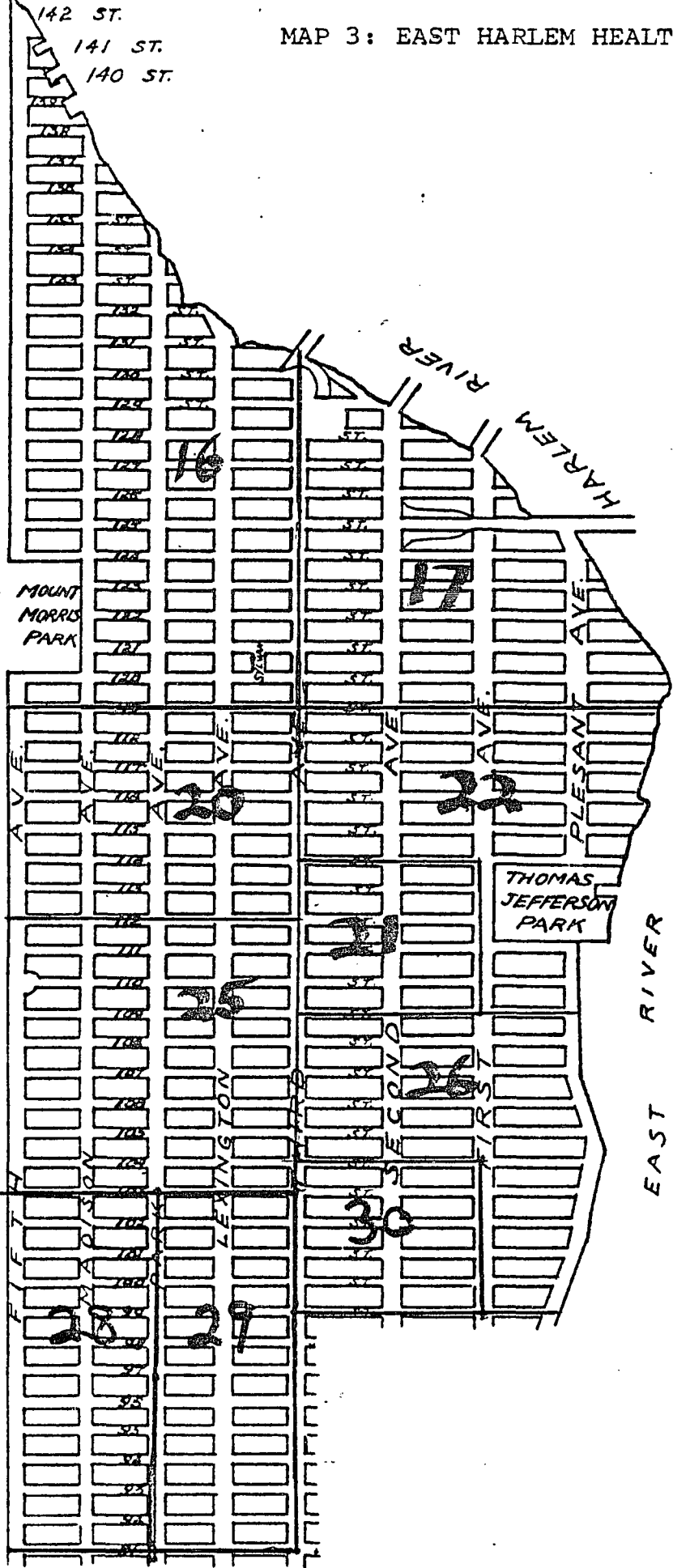
Source: Edwin Friedman's "East Harlem Community Study: 1940-1950." Master's Thesis, New York University, 1954.

MAP 2: EAST HARLEM BASE MAP



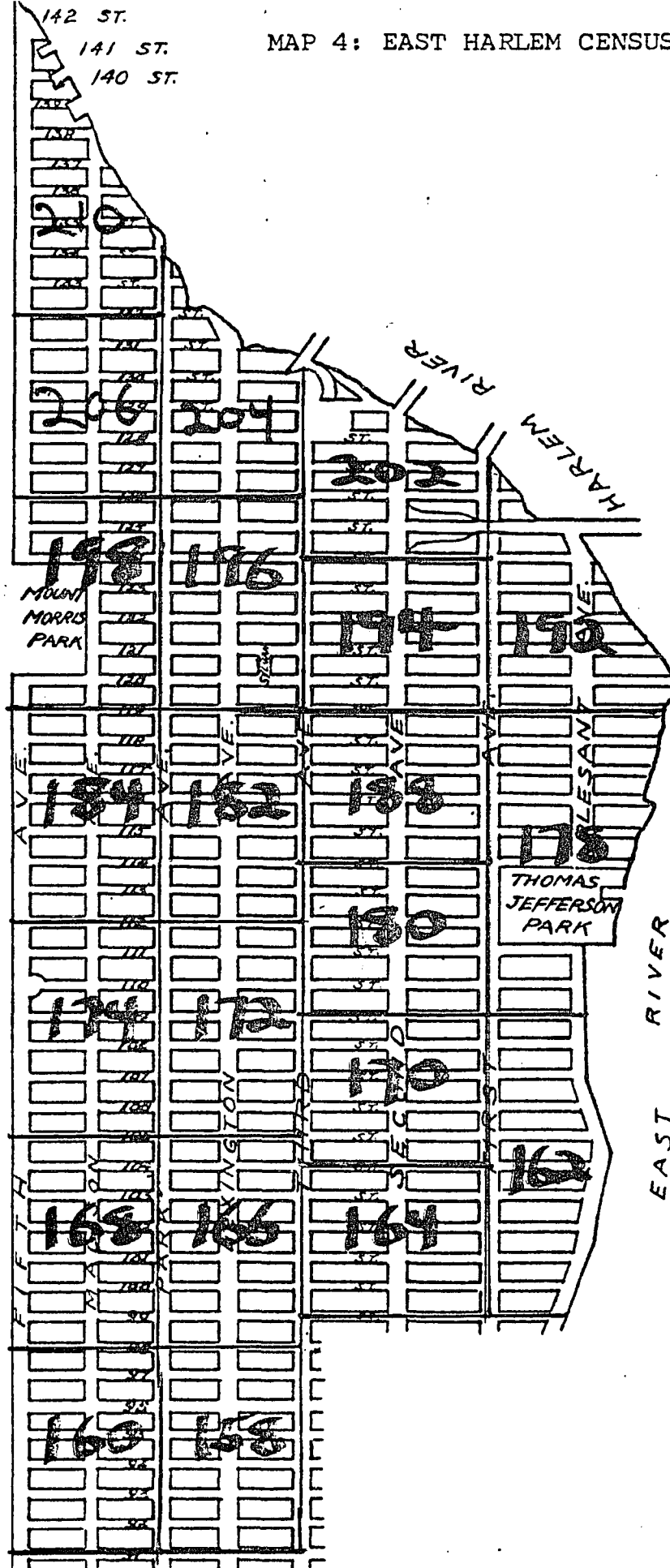
Source: Covello Collection

MAP 3: EAST HARLEM HEALTH AREAS 1930-1950



Source: Covello Collection

MAP 4: EAST HARLEM CENSUS TRACTS 1950



Source: Covello Collection

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victories were dependent upon a receptive electorate. This electorate existed in East Harlem, which in eight elections (seven Congressional and one Mayoral) cast a majority of its ballots for the radical Congressman. Even in 1950, when he ran solely under the ALP's banner against a coalition candidate of the Democratic, Republican, and Liberal Parties, nearly 60 percent of this area's electorate voted for the beleaguered politician. Had Marcantonio's Congressional district continued to be coterminous with East Harlem there is no reason to doubt that he would have been re-elected indefinitely. A study of the Marcantonio phenomenon is then as much as anything else a study of the people who voted for him.

East Harlem is an area of 253 blocks organized on a grid-like pattern. Its northern boundary is East 142nd Street, its southern boundary East 96th Street, while the East River bounds it on the east, and Fifth Avenue on the west. (See Map 2) In the 1860s the area, then known as Harlem Flats, was a major garbage dump, and the land between East 90th and East 105th Streets was considered the "most unhealthy in the entire metropolis." It did not improve much. An article in an 1875 issue of the New York Times referred to the "villainous" odor that "overspreads this district, and grows more and more perceptible as the season advances." The First Report of the Tenement House Commission of the City of New York, 1901-1902 described the uptown side of 108th Street between Second and Third Avenues as "really an eyesore. The houses are leased and subleased with sordid speculation . . . a circumstance that precluded all attempts on the part of the lessee to make repairs without being compelled to do so by the department [of housing], and this is the reason why rag dealers and peddlers have found

their quarters on this block." This report further documents flooded cellars, dead animals in cellars, yards full of trash, and other signs of a slum. East Harlem, along with Hell's Kitchen on Manhattan's West Side, became a major center of the slaughtering industry, which discouraged all but the poorest New Yorkers from residing there.¹

By 1887 the Second and Third Avenue elevated railways ran to 129th Street; in 1919 the construction of the Lexington Avenue subway reached East Harlem.² The construction of mass transportation led to an "unparalleled wave of residential construction," transforming the area almost overnight into row after row of long, narrow dumbbell tenements and railroad flats along the east side of Third Avenue and north of East 100th Street.³

The bulk of East Harlem's housing stock consisted of massed old-law tenements, that is, multiple-family dwellings built before enactment of the Tenement Laws of 1901.⁴ These later laws mandated, among other things, that only a certain percentage of a lot be occupied by a dwelling, that each room have a window, and that each apartment have a toilet and bathtub. The only area of East Harlem where any significant amount of New Law housing was built was in the previously sparsely populated blocks between Madison and Fifth Avenues immediately north of 100th Street--a section inconvenient to most rapid-transit facilities.

¹As quoted in Nels Anderson, "The Social Antecedents of a Slum: A Developmental Study of East Harlem Area of Manhattan Island, New York City" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1930), pp. 142-43, 189.

²Patricia Cayo Sexton, Spanish Harlem (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 5.

³Jeffrey S. Gurock, When Harlem Was Jewish, 1870-1930 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 15.

⁴Margaret Campbell Tilley, "The Boy Scout Movement in East Harlem" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1935), p. 31.

Here thousands of small three-story private residences were replaced by six-story New Law tenements,⁵ while throughout the rest of the area stores lined the ground floors of tenements facing north-south avenues and some the most important east-west streets. Because most developers escaped the lot-dwelling percentage by building before the new codes were enacted, overcrowding became a massive problem, aggravated further by the almost total absence of parks. Fourteen blocks of East Harlem's western border faced Central Park, but within East Harlem itself there was only one park, Thomas Jefferson Park, which was about three city blocks in area. In the mid-thirties, this extremely constricting environment was somewhat opened by the construction of the East River Drive approach to the Triborough Bridge. As a result of this project, dumps and antiquated industrial structures from Ninety-second to 125th Streets were replaced by landscaped malls with benches and shade trees.⁶

East Harlem has been aptly described as a "dormitory area densely populated at night and largely occupied by housewives and children by day." The district contained no important concentration of business or industry. Several areas that had formerly been devoted to business or industrial use were, by the 1930s, vacant and in a state of transition. In 1937, there were an estimated 75,000 employed persons in East Harlem. The area itself provided only 14,700 jobs. Of the resident employed population, approximately 20 percent worked in East Harlem. East Harlem's primary industry was the servicing of its own

⁵Gurock, p. 45.

⁶Federal Writers' Project, The WPA Guide to New York City: A Comprehensive Guide to the Five Boroughs of the Metropolis--Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Richmond (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), p. 270.

needs. The area did have, however, a sprinkling of other industries, notably fabric and apparel concerns, which were attracted by the availability of cheap loft rents in the area.⁷

East Harlem's most significant assets were its proximity to districts offering jobs and an excellent transportation system to move its people to them. Every avenue had at least one mode of transit, with a subway line under Lexington Avenue and elevated railroads above Second and Third Avenues. The other north-south streets were served by cable cars or streetcars.⁸

The accessibility of East Harlem to the job markets was a major attraction for settling there, but was by no means the only reason for the influx of immigrants. Municipal improvement projects that had occurred during the peak years of immigration forced many immigrants from the Lower East Side and elsewhere downtown to relocate. Newer immigrants were unable to find housing in the traditional areas of settlement which had become too overcrowded to accommodate more families.⁹

The result could have been anticipated: by 1895, East Harlem's

⁷Edwin Friedman, "East Harlem Community Study: 1940-1950" (Masters thesis, New York University, 1954), p. 19.

⁸Abraham Kavadlo, "Housing in Lower East Harlem" (Typewritten, May 15, 1939), p. 17. MP 13, 1 of 2 (Housing in Lower East Harlem).

⁹Gurock, p. 28. Referring to the late thirties Kavadlo (p. 17) noted that: "In evaluating . . . East Harlem by the fourteen standards laid down by [most housing experts] one is forced to the conclusion that the area receives a nod of approval on only one, the last and fourteenth count--more than 80 percent of the total wage earners spend less than forty minutes in travelling to work." Frederick M. Thrasher noted that in 1930, of the 220 street intersections in the area streetcars stopped at 160. "Final Report on The Jefferson Park Branch of the Boys' Club of New York" (Typewritten, ca. 1935), p. 100.

population totaled 241,000, ranking it second in density only to the even more congested Lower East Side.¹⁰ By 1910, housed practically to the breaking point, the population peaked at 341,000.¹¹

The waves of newcomers who inhabited East Harlem never turned it into a melting pot. Rather, they organized themselves into self-contained communities. By 1890, nearly one-half of the district's residents were German- and Irish-Americans who had settled there in almost equal numbers. American-born people now represented less than one-third of the expanding uptown population. The German and Irish communities declined as rapidly as they rose: between 1900 and 1910, the combined German and Irish populations dropped from about 50 percent to less than 20 percent of the total population.¹²

¹⁰Thrasher, "Final Report," p. 67.

¹¹"West Harlem and East Harlem: Population." Compiled by the Welfare Council of New York City, based on United States Census Bureau data. CC. United States Department of Commerce Census Bureau: 1940 (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1940).

¹²Gurock, p. 28. Anderson discovered (p. 183) that it was the Irish-Americans who were responsible for the first recorded instance of radicalism in East Harlem. In 1885 there was a general agitation among tenement dwellers, who banded together in numerous East Harlem street meetings, for rent reductions. The New York Times described this first movement of its kind for the area:

"The sort of talk has been going on in Harlem for nearly three weeks. When the men get home from work at night, they do nothing but talk about organized opposition to the landlords, and during the day the women don't keep their tongues idle. According to the facts given to the Times reporter last night, this 'Parnellism,' as the people concerned are pleased to call it, extends from 100th Street to about 120th Street and from Lexington to First Avenue. It is not a spontaneous movement, but the result of an active canvass on the part of twelve men who got to talking over high rents one night in a grocery store."

Ultimately, many of the striking tenants moved and the landlords were forced to reduce rents.

This decline can be measured by the changing patterns in church membership. In 1930, of the thirty-three churches in East Harlem, only eight had either exclusively or predominantly German and German-American membership, and even that membership had experienced tremendous declines. For example, St. John's Lutheran Church, with two thousand members in 1910, had but 196 in 1930. Overall, the average number of worshippers at most of these eight churches was two hundred, practically all of whom had moved from East Harlem but returned to participate in the German-language services. One German church did conduct a Sunday school, but it had to rely on children from other ethnic groups to increase attendance.¹³

It was the rapidly growing Jewish community that replaced the German- and Irish-Americans east of Third Avenue, eventually peaking in 1919 at 128,000 people. Within a few years the Jewish population declined precipitously: from 122,000 in 1923, to 52,000 in 1927, to 15,000 in 1932, to 4,000 in 1937. The number of synagogues and small places of worship decreased accordingly from twenty-nine in 1920 to three in 1935.¹⁴ Throughout the forties, however, Jews continued to own many of East Harlem's houses and shops,¹⁵ and also represented a significant proportion of its professionals.¹⁶

¹³May Case Marsh, "The Life and Work of the Churches in an Interstitial Area" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1932), pp. 486-97, 500-2.

¹⁴"West Harlem and East Harlem Population."

¹⁵E. Warberg, "Data Regarding the Jewish Population in the Area from 92nd to 122nd Streets between Fifth Avenue and the East River." Typewritten. CC.

¹⁶"Community Survey," ca. late thirties. CC.

West of Fifth Avenue adjacent to Jewish East Harlem was a second Jewish community, this one in Central Harlem, which in 1919 housed fifty thousand people.¹⁷ Both were conveniently lumped together as "Jewish Harlem," even though the two were very different. What distinguished one from the other was the quality of its housing stock. The Jews in East Harlem's deteriorating, overcrowded tenements were recent arrivals from Eastern Europe; Central Harlem's superior housing attracted middle-class Jews of both German and Eastern European origins. In 1905, therefore, 23 to 26 percent of Central Harlem's Jewish heads of households held "high white-collar" occupations, and only 3.5 percent worked in unskilled and menial service jobs; in East Harlem only 2 percent of the Jewish heads of households held high white-collar positions, while 11 percent held unskilled, menial service jobs.¹⁸

By 1930, all ethnic groups except Italo-Americans and Puerto Ricans were in decline: those Germans, Irish, and Jews who remained represented the residue of previous ethnic formations. West of Third Avenue and north of East 120th Street, in what had been part of Jewish Harlem, Blacks began to predominate. East Harlem's Black population increased from 13.7 percent in 1930 to 20 percent in 1950. (Part of the figures includes "colored" Puerto Ricans, who were counted as "Blacks.") The Blacks did not, however, form a separate community in East Harlem. Their presence was the result of Central Harlem's

¹⁷"West Harlem and East Harlem Population."

¹⁸Gurock, pp. 175-77.

expansion.¹⁹

In the period which is most relevant to this work, 1930-1950, East Harlem's population declined from 255,000 in 1930 to 211,000 in 1940, and then in response to the postwar housing shortage and the massive influx of Puerto Ricans, it rose to 246,000 in 1950.²⁰ Its ethnic composition was dominated by two highly self-contained communities, Italian Harlem and El Barrio. These were the largest Italo-American and Puerto Rican communities in the continental United States.²¹ West of Third Avenue and south of East 120th Street, El Barrio grew from 13,000 in 1930, to 20,000 in 1940, to 63,000 in 1950.²² Starting in 1880, the Italians began settling in East Harlem east of Third Avenue. In 1930, Italian Harlem's population peaked at

¹⁹"Population Trends--East Harlem 1930-1940." CC; Friedman, pp. 42-43. A study published in 1953 noted: "Partly because of the subsidiary relationship of the Negro area [of East Harlem] to Harlem, organized social life is considerably less developed than in Central Harlem." This study described the area as a "port of entry" for new arrivals to the city from the South, but also in sizable numbers from the West Indies. These groups were reported to rent apartments in the area for lack of better accommodations and then later "move to better quarters in Central Harlem when they are able to find them." Indicative of this transience was the absence of "any large Black church, and those of medium size have stiff competition with those of Harlem proper." It was noted that this lack might account for the "multiplicity of storefront churches in [the Negro section] of East Harlem." The Protestant Churches of East Harlem: Report of a Survey by the Pathfinder Service for the Churches with Recommendations by Local Protestant Ministers (New York: June 1947), passim. MP.

²⁰Francesco Cordasco, "Ethnic Displacement in East Harlem," Phylon (Fall 1970), pp. 307-9.

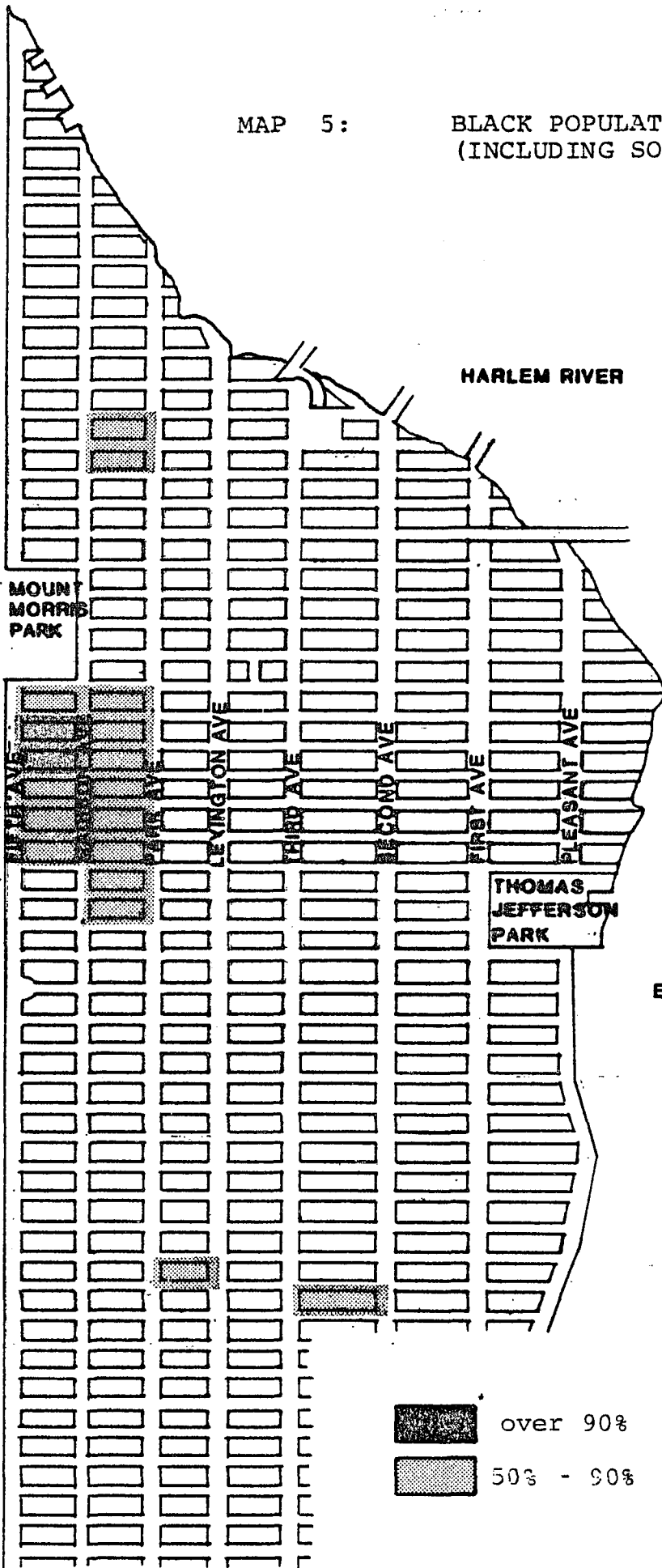
²¹On Italian Harlem as the largest Italo-American community, see footnote 3 on p.16; on El Barrio as the largest Puerto Rican community, see footnote 3 on p. 281.

²²"Concerning Porto-Rican Population in East Harlem," memorandum by E. Warberg, December 2, 1935, based on statistics compiled by the Labor Department of the Government of Puerto Rico; "Population/Trends." CC; Cordasco, "Ethnic Displacement," pp. 307-9.

MAP 5:

BLACK POPULATION IN EAST HARLEM
(INCLUDING SOME PUERTO RICANS) 1950

140 ST
139 ST
138 ST
137 ST
136 ST
135 ST
134 ST
133 ST
132 ST
131 ST
130 ST
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Source: Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio (Honors Paper, Harvard University, 1950), addenda.

80,000: it numbered approximately 50,000 in 1950. (These figures include only first- and second-generation Italians; the third generation was counted as native born.)

From 1938 on, both Italian Harlem and El Barrio provided Marcantonio with similar margins of victory. For example, in 1948, 59 percent of the voters in the Fourteenth Assembly District (which included El Barrio) and 57.5 percent in the Sixteenth Assembly District (Italian Harlem) cast their ballots for him.²³

At first glance, these two communities appear to be very similar and their differences appear to have been largely generational; that is, El Barrio's residents consisted primarily of first- and second-generation, and Italian Harlem primarily of second- and third-generation Americans. Close study, however, reveals many significant differences which resulted in very disparate motivations for their positive response to Marcantonio. For these reasons, it is necessary to study Italian Harlem and El Barrio separately.

²³Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio" (Honors paper, Harvard University, 1950), addenda.

CHAPTER VI

ITALIAN HARLEM: 1880-1950

One scholar described Italian Harlem as the "most Italian neighborhood in the United States."¹ Almost every aspect of this community's reality contributed to decelerating acculturation. The Catholic churches, for example, conducted their religious services in Italian, sponsored feste, and generally endorsed traditional mores. Italian Harlem's very size and homogeneity allowed for the flourishing of voluntary organizations and other subcultural manifestations.² Except for providing employment, the outside world impinged little on this community. (See p. 164)

The most astute observer of Italian Harlem, Leonard Covello, noted:

As it concerns Italians in a community like East Harlem . . . all adjustments, all accommodations, are made in terms of an Italian environment. It is the pronounced gravitation toward old-world Italian social and moral values that makes the community a "Little

¹Salvatore John LaGumina, "Case Studies in Ethnicity and Italo-American Politicians," published in The Italian Experience in the United States, eds., Silvano M. Tomasi and Madeline H. Engel (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1973), p. 152.

²It has been noted that: "The numerical size alone [of an Italian-American community] permits the establishment of many Italian cultural and social services and contributes also to the longer survival of the Italian cultural character. . . ." Patrick Gallo, Political Alienation Among the Italians of the New York Metropolitan Area (Cranbury, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1974), p. 46.

Italy," a galaxy of Italian families each being a world of its own, but attracted to each other by the common family tradition. . . . All tendencies toward accommodation denoted attempts to establish a replica of a southern Italian milieu which would assure a measure of security against demoralization.³

The resultant preservation of Southern Italian folkways affected Italian Harlem in ways both small and large. For example, Southern Italian drinking customs, which limited alcohol consumption to the home, meant that this community had few bars or taverns. On a twenty-block stretch of Third Avenue passing through Italian Harlem there were only eight bars and taverns.⁴

There is every indication that the two most central features of Southern Italian social life--la famiglia and campanilismo--powerfully survived within the milieu of Italian Harlem. La famiglia, the concept of family that prevailed in Southern Italy, included all relatives, both by blood and marriage. A world unto itself, la famiglia tended to submerge the individual and isolate him from those outside its circle.⁵ Covello has noted that among the Southern Italian peasantry, "Anyone not a member of the familial group is called forestiere (foreigner). . . . Outside the family group reigned indifference, often

³Leonard Covello, The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child: A Study of the Southern Italian Family Mores and Their Effect on the School Situation in Italy and America (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1969), p. 349.

⁴"Community Survey," undated (ca. 1932), unsigned, probably compiled by Covello. CC. See also, Phyllis H. Williams, South Italian Folkways in Europe and America: A Handbook for Social Workers, Visiting Nurses, School Teachers, and Physicians (New York: Russell and Russell, 1969), p. 94.

⁵Silvano M. Tomasi, Piety and Power: The Role of the Italian Parishes in the New York Metropolitan Area (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1975), p. 31.

even hostility.⁶ Campanilismo best translates as "village-mindedness," or extreme provincialism: its antonym is cosmopolitanism. Silvano Tomasi states in his study of the Italian immigrants' experience with the Catholic Church that the "southern Italian . . . shows . . . almost a pathological distrust toward persons outside the small circle of family of procreation, distrusting least those who live within the sound of the local church bell."⁷ These mores, which were so well preserved in Italian Harlem, led to a narrow social outlook. In Patrick Gallo's words: "In most of southern Italy and Sicily individualism rather than collectivism prevailed among the peasantry. But it was a family-centered individualism rather than the American version. Loyalty to the family was so strong that it excluded loyalty to a larger community or class. Both socialism . . . and trade unions . . . were foreign to this peasant mentality."⁸ This intense familialism not only prevented identification with extracommunal social movements, it retarded

⁶Covello, Social Background, pp. 4, 356.

⁷Ibid., pp. 152, 420; Williams, pp. 7, 9, 43; Herbert Gans, The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of the Italian-Americans (New York: Free Press, 1965), p. 163.

⁸Patrick Gallo, Old Bread New Wine: A Portrait of the Italian-Americans (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), p. 84. A number of students of the Italian-American experience have commented on the preservation of traditional Southern Italian mores in the United States. Francesco Cordasco and Eugene Bucchioni have commented that: "Fear of isolation and distrust of strangers [among Southern Italian immigrants] became stronger and deeper in a new, strange country." The Italians: Social Background of an American Group (Clifton, N.J.: Kelly Publishers, 1974), p. 74. George Enrico Pozzetta concluded: "Unwilling to give up the ways of Italy, [the Southern Italian immigrant] lived in a densely packed Italian colony which allowed him to comfortably retain many of his treasured customs and traditions. This life sheltered him from the larger American society and resulted in his narrow, provincial view of his adopted homeland." "The Italians of New York City, 1890-1914" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1971), pp. 179-80. See also, Gans, pp. 204-5.

community organization. Italian Harlem's milieu preserved these traditional Southern Italian mores. In a study of Italo-American high school boys conducted in 1943, Covello discovered that immigrant mores persisted among Italian Harlem's second and third generation.⁹

Nonetheless, it was Italian Harlem that provided Marcantonio's major base of electoral support. In 1948, for example, it provided nearly 40 percent of his votes.¹⁰ In this period, aside from voting for Marcantonio, this district showed no other evidence of radicalism, either in its voting patterns or in any other manifestation of political life. Nor is there any other example of any other Italo-American community lending its support to a radical politician. (See pp. 219-25) This chapter will present a detailed socioeconomic portrait of this community. After investigating these realities, we will attempt to

⁹Covello's Social Background of the Italo-American School Child goes far to document this: "At least where the community of East Harlem is concerned, the retention of old-world patterns among the second generation Italo-Americans is considerable." Moreover, his study demonstrated that conformity to traditional Southern Italian mores and attitudes was frequently as great--and in some instances even greater--among third generation Italo-American boys in East Harlem than among second-generation members.

For example, to the question, "Would you want to live your entire life close to your relatives?", 44 percent of all the Italian students surveyed responded positively, while the 44.8 percent of that number who were third-generation responded positively. On the other hand, non-Hispanic whites responded positively less than half as often. To the question, "Do you think it is proper for a high school boy to help his sister wash dishes?", 45.5 percent of the Italian students responded yes, but only 34.4 percent of the third generation answered yes. By contrast, 78.5 percent of all other students (including Blacks, Hispanics, and other non-Italians) responded positively. On the preservation of traditional Southern Italian mores among second- and third-generation Italo-American school boys in Italian Harlem, see pp. 360-81. On the general question of the preservation of campanilismo and intense familialism in the United States, see pp. 150, 175, 177.

¹⁰Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio (Honors paper, Harvard University, 1950), addenda.

uncover the reasons for its enthusiastic response to its native son.

The first Italians arrived in East Harlem in 1878, from Polla in the province of Salerno, and settled in the vicinity of 115th Street between First and Second Avenues.¹¹ Almost immediately, clashes between the Irish and Italian parishioners (see pp. 206-7) led the latter to found Our Lady of Mount Carmel on East 115th Street in 1882, which became the cynosure of Italian Harlem.¹² By 1910, 69,000 Italo-Americans--one third of Manhattan's Italians--lived in this neighborhood.¹³ East Harlem's Italo-American population peaked at eighty thousand in 1930.

The 1940 census recorded an 18 percent population decrease in East Harlem's Italian-American sections. From its population of approximately 60,000 at that date, Italian Harlem's population further declined to about 50,000 in 1950.¹⁴

¹¹May Case Marsh, "The Life and Work of the Churches in an Interstitial Area" (Ph.D dissertation, New York University, 1932), p. 438.

¹²Interview with old East Harlem resident conducted by S. Busacca, January 27, 1936. CC.

¹³Robert Whitney Peebles, "Leonard Covello: A Study of an Immigrant's Contribution to New York City" (Ph.D dissertation, New York University, 1967), p. 78.

¹⁴No statistics on the ethnic composition of East Harlem for 1950 exist. The 1960 census, however, reported that East Harlem's non-Puerto-Rican white population was 37,000. Assuming that the Italo-American proportion of this group remained constant, there were 22,200 Italo-Americans remaining in East Harlem. We cannot arrive at the number of Italo-Americans in East Harlem in 1950 by averaging the figures of 1940 and 1960. The population decrease in the forties was decelerated by the postwar housing crisis and accelerated in the fifties by the widespread population displacement brought about by massive public housing construction. The figure of 50,000 in 1950, therefore, represents an educated guess based on the above considerations. By 1970, only 3,000 Italo-Americans remained in East Harlem. Francesco Cordasco, "Ethnic Displacement in East Harlem," Phylon (Fall 1970), pp. 309-12.

Italian Harlem's original settlers immigrated almost exclusively from Southern Italy. The specific regions of migration were reflected in the prevailing dialects, which in 1921 were identified as Neapolitan, Calabrian, Sicilian, and Salernitano.¹⁵ Immigrants from these various sections--even villages--in Southern Italy tended to settle together in East Harlem. Thus, in 1935, the New York World Telegram reported that: "The majority of New York City's organ grinders were Neapolitans. Most of [them] lived on East 105th Street between Second and First Avenues in East Harlem."¹⁶ One student of East Harlem noted that on every street were immigrants from different localities: on East 112th Street, a settlement of newcomers from Bari; on East 107th Street between First Avenue and the East River, people from Sarno near Naples; on East 100th Street, many northern Italians from Pisciotta; on East 107th Street between First and Second Avenues, Sicilians from Santiago; and on East 109th Street, a host of Calabrians.¹⁷

The best sources from which to glean the earliest experiences of Italian Harlemites are the oral histories collected from old residents by students of Covello. (See f.n. 22, p. 13) In one interview conducted in 1936, the person questioned recalled that

In 1875 a contract was let to the firm of J.D. Crimmins to build the Horse Car Railroad from 125th Street to City Hall. The enterprise required many laborers and up to this point the employees were exclusively Irish. It was customary on payday for all Irishmen to spend his money for liquor, and go on a three- or four-day

¹⁵Edwin Fenton, Immigrants and Unions, A Case Study: Italians and American Labor, 1870-1920 (New York: Arno Press, 1975), p. 41.

¹⁶"The Last of New York's Organ Grinders Drink Valedictory Toast to 'Da Musica,'" New York World Telegram (December 31, 1935), p. 1.

¹⁷Irving V. Sollins, "A Socio-Statistical Analysis of Boys' Club Membership" (Ph.D dissertation, New York University, 1936), p. 43.

binge. . . . Crimmins was compelled to take the drastic steps . . . ruling that anyone absenting himself more than once any month would be dismissed. This ruling angered his employees, and soon a mass meeting was called and [it was] decided to go on strike for more money. The strike completely paralyzed work all along the railway. . . .

It later became known that the parish priest and Crimmins had visited the Cardinal of the Diocese of New York and a few days later he set out for Italy, returning with a shipload of Italians all laborers for the railway.¹⁸

Another interview also conducted in 1936, reported:

Before 1875, there were very few, if any, Italians in East Harlem, but between 1875 and 1876, due to a strike on the railway line then under construction, J.D. Crimmins, the contractor, imported many Italian laborers to take the place of the strikers.

Most of the Italians came from the countryside of Potenza, [and] in many cases the male portion of family came to work for Crimmins, who advanced their transportation and the necessary board and lodgings. This group was composed of about 1,000.

As a whole, the group was illiterate, most of them being of peasant stock.

The original group, upon arrival, were lodged in the stables of the Mount Morris Race Track; as their number increased, they were moved into shanties at 106th Street and First Avenue. In these shanties, groups would be formed, cooking would be done in turn by each individual, food would be brought from the commissary on credit payable on payday, from which they would also deduct part of the fare advanced them, as well as money charged them for breakage of tools. It was not uncommon for some of the laborers, after having worked a whole week, to find himself in debt. . . . Their pay ranged from 95 cents to \$1.25 per day. . . .

The original group of settlers in East Harlem had not intended to stay here permanently and looked forward to the day when, free from debt and with a few accumulated dollars, they could go back home, buy a piece of land or a little house. . . . Each week on payday, most of these workers would make their way downtown to the foreign exchange office and send the major part of their earnings home.¹⁹

Another source discloses that the Italians settling in East Harlem were considered a "source of embarrassment and displeasure to the richer people who lived nearby. The smells that emanated from their 'vile

¹⁸Interview with old East Harlem resident, no other data evident on document. CC.

¹⁹Interview with old East Harlem resident, no other data evident on document. CC.

tenements' annoyed their brownstone neighbors."²⁰

These recollections about Italian Harlem's origins correspond to the general outlines of the Italian immigrants' experience in the United States during this early period. They were widely disdained by the already settled urban residents. Nationwide xenophobia peaked between the years 1908 and 1912, when Italians constituted the largest single immigrant group in the United States. New Yorkers created their own hysteria about Italian criminality, which was heightened by the frequent use of Italian laborers as strikebreakers.²¹

Surrounded by hostility and consigned to poorly paid low-status occupations, the Southern Italian immigrants in East Harlem reacted as did Southern Italian immigrants throughout the United States: they withdrew.²² For this group of immigrants, at least, America was to a large extent a "source of deprivation and exploitation."²³ Arriving in America ill-equipped for socioeconomic mobility and confronted by discrimination, many of them chose the "security of the ghetto as a home, or perhaps a home within the ghetto provided a satisfying

²⁰Pozzetta, pp. 121-22.

²¹See Salvatore John LaGumina, ed., Wop: A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States (San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1973), pp. 72-100.

²²These patterns persisted. Irvin Child's study of Italo-Americans in New Haven in the early forties, for example, found: "On the whole, the Italians appear to have the lowest status of any large white group in the city, with the possible exception of the Poles." Child's study further noted that regardless of the social class to which an Italo-American belonged, Americans of the same class were likely to regard him as being somewhat inferior. Italian or American: The Second Generation in Conflict (New York: Russell and Russell, 1970), pp. 35-37

²³Gans, p. 205.

alternative to the wider American society."²⁴

One of the effects of their alienation was that between 1910-50 Italo-Americans were the most residentially segregated of all the "foreign" communities.²⁵ Italian Harlem was one of the most segregated of these communities in the country. In 1930, of the five Health Areas in New York City composed of at least 75 percent Italo-Americans (that is, first- or second-generation--third-generation Italo-Americans were counted as native-born Americans), three (21, 22, and 26) were located in East Harlem. (See Map 3.) These three health areas formed a contiguous entity bordered by East 99th Street, East 119th Street, the East River and Third Avenue, within which first- and second-generation Italo-Americans accounted for 81 percent of the population in 1930. There were also significant Italo-American concentrations in surrounding areas. For example 47 percent of Health Area 17's population was Italo-American.²⁶

The homogeneity of this area is more striking when one considers that there were blocks in the core of Italian Harlem with the following ethnic components: Italians 672, others 10; Italians 703, others 17; Italians 914, others 18; Italians 207, others 1; Italians 615, others 9.²⁷ In 1930, the concentration of Italo-Americans in the Lower East

²⁴Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 179.

²⁵Ibid., p. 116.

²⁶William B. Shedd, Italian Population in New York (New York: Casa Italiana Educational Bureau, 1934), p. 4 and maps. A Health District contained "about 25,000 people living under similar social economic conditions," p. 3.

²⁷Statistics compiled by Covello from United States Census data. CC.

Side's Little Italy was somewhat higher than that of Italian Harlem--88 percent as contrasted with 81 percent. But the total population of Italian Harlem was three times that of Little Italy.²⁸

For almost all the variables by which an urban community might be judged, Italian Harlem was an undesirable area. (See pp. 161-63) An especially negative aspect of its reality was substandard housing. A 1934 study noted that 90 percent of East Harlem's structures had been built before the enactment of the Tenement House Laws of 1901, the oldest of them in Italian Harlem.²⁹ In 1939, the census tract with the highest percentage of Italo-Americans was reported as having 84 percent of its occupied dwellings without central heating, 67 percent without a tub or shower, and 55 percent without a private indoor toilet. Only 7.5 percent of its housing units contained five or more rooms. More than 95 percent of its dwellings contained two or more families. Many of Italian Harlem's houses originally built for one, two, or at most three families, had been converted into tenements.³⁰ In East Harlem as a whole from 1934 to 1939, more than two hundred dwellings were demolished while only three new ones were constructed.³¹ Reflective of East Harlem's deteriorated housing stock was a tax delinquency and mortgage foreclosure rate that in the late thirties ranked second worst in

²⁸Shedd, p. 3.

²⁹Frederick M. Thrasher, "Final Report on: The Jefferson Branch of the Boys' Club of New York" (Typewritten, submitted to the Bureau of Social Hygiene, 1935), pp. 130, 133-34.

³⁰Margaret Campbell Tilley, "The Boy Scout Movement in East Harlem" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1935), p. 31; Kavadlo, p. 24.

³¹Ibid., p. 18.

Manhattan: one-third of East Harlem's real estate parcels were tax delinquent.³² East Harlem's vacancy rate indicated the unusual undesirability of its housing: in 1933 its percentage of vacant housing units was barely exceeded (by two percentage points) by the Lower East Side and the middle and lower West Side. In the areas where housing was least adequate--that is, in some sections of Italian Harlem--the vacancy rate that year rose to as high as 32 percent.³³

The pattern of inadequate housing persisted into the forties and beyond. For example, from 1939-40 to 1949-50, land values in East Harlem showed a continuous decline from \$118 million to \$93 million. Initially occupied in 1941, East River Houses (near the center of Italian Harlem) represented the first major construction of residential housing in East Harlem in approximately two decades. In the next ten years, four other public housing projects were added, bringing to 5,444 the total number of new units provided by these five projects. Nevertheless, as late as 1950, 78 percent of East Harlem's dwelling units dated from before 1920. In Health Area 30, in which there was no construction whatsoever between 1930 and 1950, 99.1 percent of its reporting units were built before 1920. Because of the continued demolition of older dwellings, the net increase in East Harlem's rental units was only 235 in the forties, a decade that witnessed considerable public housing construction.³⁴

Italian Harlem was extremely overcrowded: in 1930 one of its

³²Edwin Friedman, "East Harlem Community Study: 1940-1950" (Masters thesis, New York University, 1954), pp. 20, 86.

³³Thrasher, "Final Report," p. 127.

³⁴Friedman, pp. 20, 86, 85, 90-91.

census tracts (164) averaged 565 persons per acre, or 362,000 persons per square mile.³⁵ Italian Harlem's severe overcrowding was the result of three conditions: the overwhelming predominance of multiple-family dwelling; the construction of almost all this housing prior to enactment of the Tenement House Laws, which thereby allowed New York City's developers to escape regulations limiting the percentage of the lot occupied by the building; and the almost total absence of parks and other public open areas. Ernest Cuneo, who traversed East Harlem from one end to the other on the back of a truck while campaigning for Fiorello LaGuardia in 1932, recorded his impressions of East Harlem:

It included many huge tenements, where yellow lights shone dimly from the backs of long dark corridors deep within. The black store windows of small ventures which had gone under stared out onto the shabby streets like empty eyeball sockets. Nearly all the buildings seemed insubstantial and oddly nightmarish, like the settings in the German movies being shown at the time. I was strongly reminded of old trees, not uprooted but horribly bent, with all the leaves blown flat against the branches before a tremendous, silent gale.³⁶

The only notable exception to Italian Harlem's residential squalor was East 116th Street, which contained a number of one-and two-family brownstones and became known as "Doctors' Row." This was the street that served as Italian Harlem's corso, or promenade. Of the thirty-nine Italo-American doctors residing in Italian Harlem in 1940, twenty-two lived on this street. So did eight of the eighteen Italo-American lawyers practicing in Italian Harlem, including Marcantonio. Many of the others lived on adjoining streets. Covello owned a

³⁵Abraham Kavadlo, "Housing in Lower East Harlem." Typewritten. May 15, 1939. MP 13, 1 of 2 (Housing in Lower East Harlem), p. 14.

³⁶Ernest Cuneo, Life with Fiorello (New York: Avon Books, 1955) p. 122.

brownstone adjacent to Marcantonio's. In Census Tract 178, which contained East 116th Street (the area with the greatest number of middle-class residents), 109 housing units were owner-occupied in 1940. In the same census tract there were only sixteen one-family and twenty-four two-family dwellings. By 1950, only 121 single-family homes remained in all of East Harlem.³⁷

In 1940, East Harlem's two most predominantly Italo-American Health Areas reported the lowest per capita median school years: Health Area 21, 6.3, and Health Area 22, 6.8. The average for the entire city was 8.3. Of these two Health Areas' total population of approximately 35,500 people, only 230 (or .06 percent) had graduated from college.³⁸ By 1950, the educational attainment of Italian Harlem had improved somewhat, with the most predominantly Italo-American census tracts reporting the average years of schooling per adult as between 8 and 8.4 years. (See Map 6.)

Unfortunately, Italian Harlem had no institution of higher learning to fill the educational gap. Nor did it have a high school until 1934 (which was restricted to boys until 1960) or a public library branch within its borders. Its public schools were old, and the facilities in most fell far short of generally accepted standards.³⁹

Italian Harlem's inadequate housing, extreme overcrowding, and lack of public services combined to assure its continuing status as a

³⁷Friedman, p. 84; Kavadlo, pp. 19-20.

³⁸"Schooling of Persons Over 25 Years of Age." Table probably compiled by Covello. CC.

³⁹Friedman, pp. 24-25, 100-2, 105; Patricia Cayo Sexton, Spanish Harlem (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 52.

dumping ground for the poor. Very few skilled workers and still fewer professionals were counted among Southern Italy's immigrants to the United States. In 1903, for example, in a total of 196,000 immigrants from Southern Italy there were only 103 professionals and 2,000 skilled industrial workers. If children and housewives are excluded, one finds that almost 85 percent of the Italian immigrants were farmers, farm laborers, or laborers.⁴⁰ The remainder were primarily craftsmen, such as barbers, tailors, and seamstresses. Furthermore, the Italian immigrants in 1901 brought with them, on average, \$12.67.⁴¹ Thus, lacking capital and "unsuited and ill-adapted to occupational adjustment within the industrial character of the American economy," they gravitated to the lowest-paid, least-skilled jobs in urban America.⁴²

The progeny of the Southern Italian immigrants later showed remarkably little occupational mobility. This situation was graphically illustrated by a study, commissioned by Casa Italiana in the thirties, that compiled the leading occupations of first- and second-generation Italo-Americans living in New York City. Despite the increase of professionals and clerical workers in the total city-wide labor force, the percentage of Italo-Americans in these positions from 1916 to 1931 rose only slightly, from approximately 1 and 1.5 to 1.5 and 3 percent, respectively. The percentage of Italo-American students fell from 9.3 percent in 1916 to 7.1 percent.⁴³

⁴⁰"Annual Report of the Commissioner of Immigration for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1903." CC.

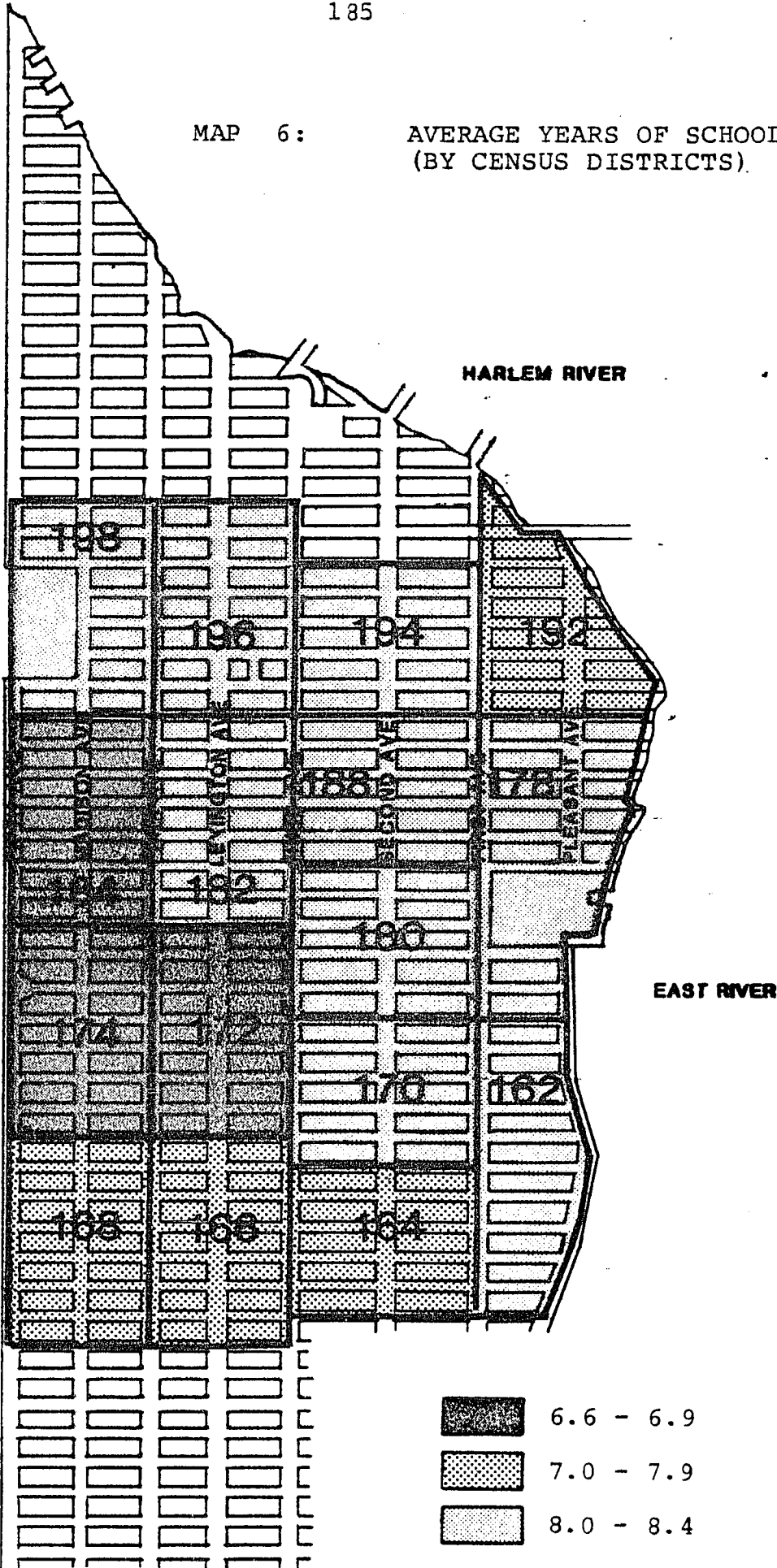
⁴¹Cordasco and Bucchioni, The Italians, p. 66.

⁴²Covello, Social Background, p. 397.

⁴³John D'Alessandre, Occupational Trends of Italians in New York

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MAP 6: AVERAGE YEARS OF SCHOOLING 1950
 (BY CENSUS DISTRICTS)



Source: Edwin Friedman, "East Harlem Community Study, 1940-1950" (Masters Thesis, New York University, 1954), pp. 24-25.

Available data indicate that the occupational distribution among Italian Harlem's residents followed the pattern outlined above. In view of the substandard housing, low educational levels, and negative physical environment that prevailed there, any modification in this overall pattern would likely have been downward. For example, a 1929 sample study of the occupations of East Harlem fathers cited milkmen, vegetable vendors, street cleaners, truck drivers, dock hands, factory hands, builders, plumbers, plasterers, stone masons, painters, and auto mechanics. The number of doctors, teachers, and stenographers was negligible.⁴⁴ A 1940 study found that in East Harlem's two most

City, (Bulletin No. 8, Casa Italiana Educational Bureau, ca. 1936), p. 5. A comparative study of the Rumanian, Italian, and Slovakian communities of Cleveland showed that only one-fourth of second-generation Italians moved into white-collar jobs, and of those second-generation Italians whose fathers held white-collar jobs, only 40 percent managed to remain in this economic sphere. Josef J. Barton, Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City: 1890-1950 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p 141.

Thomas Kessner's The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City 1880-1915 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1977) indicates in this earlier period a somewhat higher rate of upward mobility for the Southern-Italian group. His data show an extremely low rate of ascension into the highest category ("upper white collar") which did not exceed two percent. He discovered considerable movement, however, from the unskilled to the "lower white-collar" category. Italian participation in this group was almost exclusively limited to shopkeeping. Mitigating these gains were the significantly larger percentage of this group, as compared the other immigrant cohort he studied, the Jews, who slipped back into their previous class position after having entered one of the white-collar categories.

The occasionally impressive progress of this group in this earlier period was not greatly evidenced in Italian Harlem, at least until the latter few years of the period of our primary concern, 1934 to 1950. There are two major causes for this: (1) the Great Depression had a particularly devastating effect on the Italian-American group because of their concentration in the most-affected occupations; and (2) it would appear that Italian Harlem's especially inadequate housing stock encouraged the most economically upwardly mobile sectors of this group to move.

⁴⁴Marsh, p. 57.

predominantly Italo-American Health Areas (21 and 22), 63 percent of the employed fell into the categories of craftsmen, laborers, and operatives.⁴⁵

The Depression struck this already impoverished community with a vengeance, because its occupational profile closely corresponded to the areas of the greatest and most prolonged unemployment, especially construction and manufacturing.⁴⁶ Employment surveys conducted among families contacted by the East Harlem Nursing Service in March and December 1930 and December 1931 showed that:

Of 486 heads of families contacted in December 1930, 49 percent were regularly employed, that is, had worked at least twenty days in the four weeks' period; 22 percent had been without any work, and 29 percent had been employed irregularly. . . .

In December 1930, 40 percent of the heads of families were found to be regularly employed. . . . The group of the irregularly employed had increased from 29 to 34.4 percent. . . . The percentage of the unemployed increased [to] 25.2 percent.

In December 1931, our standard regarding "regular work" had decreased to the point where many who had two to three days work a week was considered as "regularly" employed.

In a group of 363 families, 49 percent of the chief wage earners had "regular work" (27.8 percent of 176 men thus employed had work relief jobs; 6 percent had irregular work and 45 percent were unemployed . . . ⁴⁷

A major result of the astounding unemployment and irregular employment rates in East Harlem during the Great Depression was that the community developed the largest number and greatest concentration of charity-organization society cases in Manhattan, "not excluding the

⁴⁵"Memorandum on Child Survey of East Harlem Health Center District, Manhattan," Neva R. Deardorff, Director of the Research Bureau of the Welfare Council of New York City (ca. 1940), pp. 5, 9.

⁴⁶Ronald Bayor, Neighbors in Conflict: The Irish, German, Jews, and Italians of New York City, 1929-1941 (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1978), pp. 11-12.

⁴⁷A Decade of District Health Pioneering, p. 137.

Lower East Side and Negro Harlem."⁴⁸

A sociological study of East Harlem's churches conducted in the early thirties categorized their parishioners' economic status. The lowest category, "very poor," was defined as "unable to pay rent or to provide anything but the barest necessities of life and only with the greatest difficulty." "Poor" was defined as having "enough to eat most of the time but little else"; "fair" as "comfortable living is possible, with no great want but there is nothing to spare." Of the four national Roman Catholic Italian parishes in Italian Harlem (that is, parishes which conducted at least some of their service in Italian), the parishioners of three (Our Lady of Mount Carmel, St. Ann's, and St. Lucy's) fell into the "very poor" category, and Holy Rosary's were found to be "poor." Of East Harlem's three cosmopolitan Roman Catholic parishes (that is, parishes which served a number of ethnic groups), the parishioners of Our Lady of the Angels were predominantly Italo-American; St. Cecilia's were evenly divided between Irish- and Italo-Americans; and the largest ethnic groups attending St. Paul's were Irish- and Italo-American. The economic status of the parishioners of Our Lady of the Angels was "fair," of St. Cecilia's "very poor," and of St. Paul's "poor."⁴⁹

Italian Harlem had four Protestant churches ministering to Italo-Americans. The parishioners of two (St. Ambrose Episcopal and Ascension Presbyterian) were found by the study to be "very poor," of one

⁴⁸Frederick Thrasher, "The Boys' Club Study," Journal of Educational Sociology (December 1932), pp. 136-37.

⁴⁹Marsh, pp. 495-97.

(Jefferson Park Methodist Episcopal) "fair," and of the last (New York Italian Seventh-Day Adventist) from "fair" to "very poor."⁵⁰

A detailed study of Italian Harlem's socioeconomic conditions was initiated in 1928 under the direction of the sociologist, Frederick M. Thrasher. While providing much data on East Harlem as a whole, its primary attention was focused on the heart of Italian Harlem. Thrasher categorized East Harlem as a "poverty-sticken area characterized by low rental, by low incomes and by high rates of dependency and unemployment--the latter particularly in times of depression." Citing rental rates as an indicator of economic levels, Thrasher noted that East Harlem's eastern sector (the Italo-American portion) fell into the lowest rental class along with the Lower East and West Sides, Hell's Kitchen, and a few other scattered census tracts.⁵¹

These high unemployment rates persisted into the forties, despite the many new job opportunities opened by the war effort. In 1940, one-third of East Harlem's labor force was either unemployed or performed public emergency work.⁵²

Italian Harlem's economic picture, however, improved in the years following the war. For example, the 1950 census showed that the average annual family income in East Harlem's two most predominantly Italo-American census tracts (192 and 178) ranged from \$2,501 to \$2,640. (See Map 7) This wage did not catapult the old settlers into the middle class, but it did push them above the poverty level. These modest,

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Thrasher, "Boys' Club Study," pp. 130, 133-34.

⁵²"Memorandum on Child Care Survey," p. 5.

albeit improved, income levels were not the result of occupational mobility. At this date, Italian Harlem's employment profile was almost identical to what it had been ten years earlier. Sixty percent of its work force--only three percent less than in 1940--were still employed as craftsmen, laborers, and operatives.⁵³ From its earliest origins to its near demise, Italian Harlem maintained its proletarian character.

Although small in number, a middle class did exist in Italian Harlem, divided roughly between professionals and small-store owners. A listing of the community's "Leading Citizens" (ca. 1940) named fifty-nine doctors, eighteen lawyers, and a scattering of dentists, morticians, politicians, and labor leaders. Italian Harlem was also served by other professionals who maintained offices on its streets but resided elsewhere in the city. Most of these, including almost all the dentists, were Jewish.⁵⁴

Italian Harlem's middle-class contingent was swelled by the large number of small-scale proprietors residing in the community.⁵⁵ One study made about 1940 indicated that Third Avenue between East 96th Street and East 125th Streets alone contained 625 stores, restaurants, taverns, and the like. Another survey demonstrated that ownership of

⁵³Ibid p. 9.

⁵⁴"Community Survey," undated, unsigned (ca. 1940), probably compiled by Covello. CC.

⁵⁵A wartime survey, for example, noted that of the sixteen women living on an "Italian block" who reported a need for child care, three owned stores. "Memorandum on Child Care Survey," addenda (unpaginated). CC.

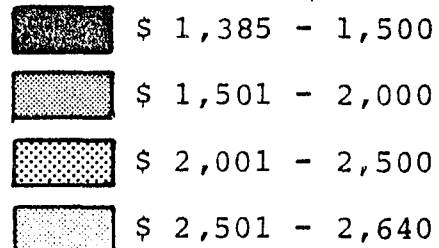
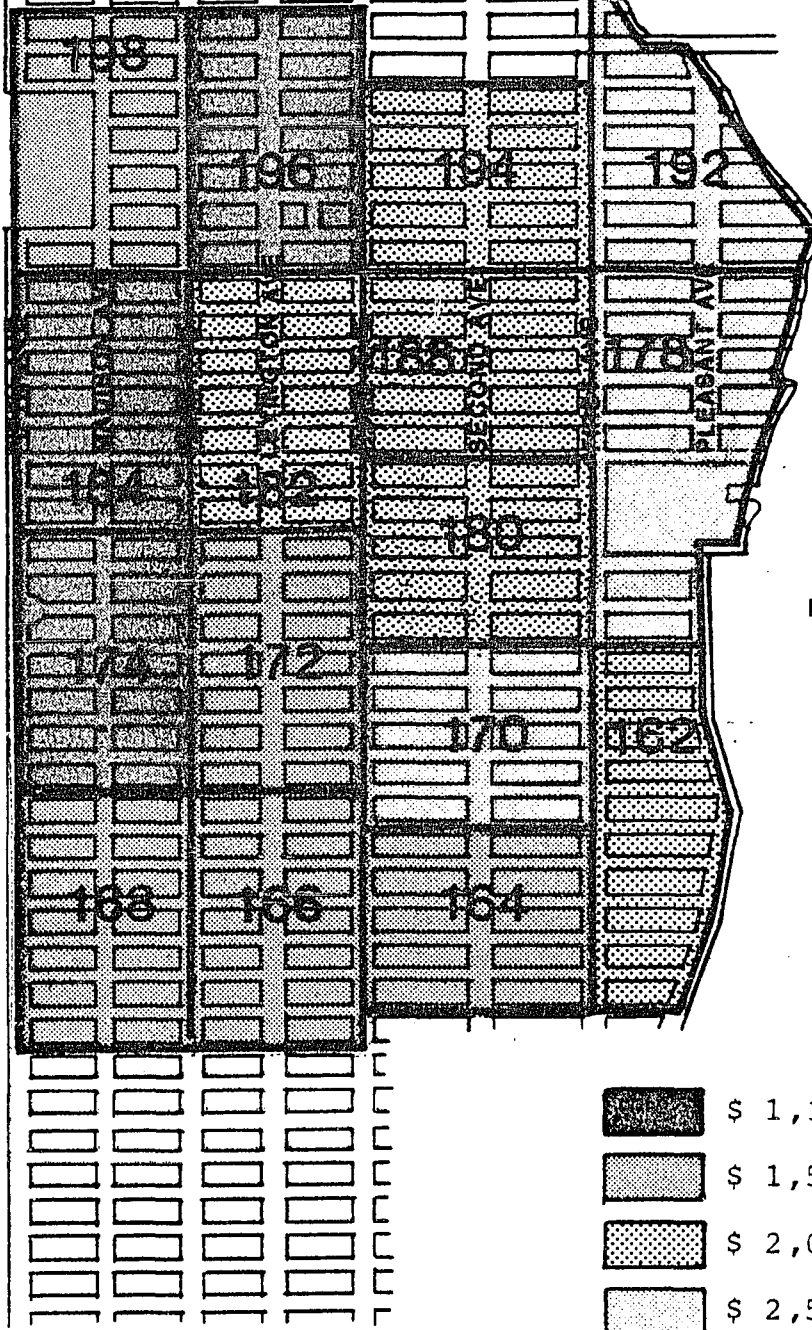
MAP 7:

AVERAGE INCOME PER FAMILY
(BY CENSUS TRACT) 1950

140 ST
139 ST
138 ST
137 ST
136 ST
135 ST
134 ST
133 ST
132 ST
131 ST
130 ST
129 ST
128 ST
127 ST
126 ST
125 ST
124 ST
123 ST
122 ST
121 ST
120 ST
119 ST
118 ST
117 ST
116 ST
115 ST
114 ST
113 ST
112 ST
111 ST
110 ST
109 ST
108 ST
107 ST
106 ST
105 ST
104 ST
103 ST
102 ST
101 ST
100 ST
99 ST
98 ST
97 ST
96 ST
95 ST
94 ST
93 ST
92 ST
91 ST

HARLEM RIVER

EAST RIVER



Source: Table compiled by Covello from United States Census 1950. Deposited in Covello Collection.

these businesses closely followed ethnic lines. On the basis of surnames, the survey revealed that the Irish owned almost all the bars, while the Chinese operated the hand laundries. The Jews owned almost all the clothing, dry goods, electrical appliance, furrier, hardware, jewelry, millinery, rug, and antique stores, and predominated in glazier, iron and metal work, plumbing, roofing, and credit establishments. For the most part, it was the Italians who owned the baking, bedding, fish, flower, fruit and vegetable, grocery, music, and shoe stores, as well as garages and restaurants. They also ran practically all the funeral homes and ice delivery, tile and marble installing, and barber shops. The candy stores, drug stores, meat markets, radio repair shops, printing establishments, real estate brokerages, stationery stores, pharmacies, and upholstery shops were owned by both Italians and Jews in more or less equal percentages.⁵⁶

The growth of Italian Harlem's middle class was stunted by the almost total absence of Italo-American representation on the staffs of public and private social agencies and in the public school system. In 1931, the East Harlem Health Center, which served Italian Harlem, had a non-Italo-American as its chairman, and only two of its eleven officers were Italo-Americans. The minutes of a meeting of the Recreational and Education Committee of the East Harlem Council of Social Agencies held in 1937 indicated that of the twelve representatives of the various social agencies present, none was an Italo-American. Other lists of the staffs of Italian Harlem's social agencies, collected in 1941 as part of

⁵⁶Untitled survey, unsigned and undated (ca. 1940), probably compiled by Covello. CC.

a community survey under Covello's direction, found that none was headed by an Italo-American. An earlier Covello survey, in 1936, showed that not one of East Harlem's twenty-one public schools had an Italo-American principal.⁵⁷

There was one area, however, in which this vast concentration of the poverty-stricken excelled. By 1930, East Harlem could count fourteen social agencies, each focusing on different problems, and each showing varying degrees of success in ameliorating them. All were overseen by an "umbrella" organization known as the East Harlem Council, actually the first such neighborhood council in New York City.⁵⁸ These agencies had the dual tasks of alleviating the very great problems of the area and overcoming the resistance of its largest ethnic group, the Southern Italians, to any interference into family life.⁵⁹ The first of four selected social organizations that directly influenced Italian Harlem is the East Harlem Health Center.

In Southern Italy, hospitals were in large part the equivalent of poor houses. Traditionally, the ill were treated at home; those who went to a hospital for care were persons without families to perform the task—a situation of unspeakable horror to a Southern Italian.⁶⁰

Founded in 1921, the East Harlem Health Center was designed to overcome

⁵⁷Minutes of this meeting and lists deposited in Covello Collection; A Decade of District Health Pioneering, pp. 48-49; see also, Yans-McLoughlin, pp. 147-48.

⁵⁸Tilley, p. 38.

⁵⁹Yans-McLaughlin, p. 147; Gans, pp. 142-62.

⁶⁰Williams, pp. 171-73; see also Yans-McLaughlin, pp. 133, 135, 137.

this cultural opposition to away-from-home health care in Italian Harlem. Situated in a brownstone on East 116th Street, the agency attempted to create a friendly, homey atmosphere that, it was hoped, would allay fears that a more conventional-looking institution might inspire. Interestingly, it described itself as a "department store" of health and welfare.⁶¹

By 1929, the Center could rightfully claim that it had contributed to a dramatic improvement in the health indices of the community. For example, in the period 1920 to 1925 the death rate for all of Manhattan increased 4.9 percent; in East Harlem it actually decreased. Similarly, the area's deaths from pneumonia in the same period dropped from 376 to 166, and those from tuberculosis from 158 to 78.⁶² By 1931, health conditions had improved still further: the general mortality rate had continued to drop at a rate much greater than that of Manhattan as a whole.⁶³ When one considers that East Harlem ranked high among Manhattan's poorest and most congested neighborhoods, these health improvements were no mean achievement and indeed worthy of the favorable attention they received at the time.

Recognizing that its best efforts could not bring about significant change without the involvement of other social agencies, the Center sought to coordinate all the health and welfare work in East

⁶¹A Decade of District Health Pioneering, pp. 42, 45, 108.

⁶²Savel Zimand, "Campaign for Health Wins in East Harlem," New York Times (July 17, 1927), p. 5. See also, "Join in Health Work," New York Times (August 12, 1923), p. 2; and, "Finds Health Work in Harlem a Model," New York Times (March 16, 1924) p. 9.

⁶³A Decade of District Health Pioneering, p. 112.

Harlem. Itself sponsored by the American Red Cross and the New York City Department of Health, the East Harlem Health Center consisted of representatives from eight bureaus of the New York City Department of Health and twenty cooperating community agencies--charitable organizations, settlement houses and health agencies. These bureaus and agencies served as the means for reaching Italian Harlem's residents.⁶⁴

The agency's programs met with success because the Center was sensitive to the health care background of the immigrants it served. In contrast, the East Harlem branch of the Boys' Club, which was founded in 1927, saw its major goal as helping "boys of foreign origin to become real Americans"--in other words, to urge them to discard their cultural heritage as quickly as possible. Its second goal was "to help the boys cultivate character from within [because] the most serious lack in their makeup is a sense of responsibility to themselves, their friends and their government." Lastly, the Boys' Club seemed to be particularly interested in reducing the incidence of petty thievery among Italian Harlem's youth.⁶⁵

The cost of the land and the six-story building (on East 110th Street between First and Second Avenues) housing the club, constructed in 1927, was \$750,000. Concerned mostly with "manly" activities, the organization sponsored "games in special rooms; gymnasium classes,

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 25.

⁶⁵Thrasher, "Final Report," p. 49.

games, and swimming in the club pool; club meetings with occasional parties, special events; fencing, wrestling, and boxing classes; art classes; library; vocational placement," which attracted an average of 2,500 boys from seven to eighteen years of age annually.⁶⁶

Until 1936, Italian Harlem's Boys' Club's activities were closely monitored by a team directed by Dr. Frederick M. Thrasher under the auspices of the New York University School of Education. The general conclusion of the "Boys' Club Study" published in 1936 that "the Club was not an important factor in the prevention of juvenile delinquency" was a devastating blow to the hopes of its founders and officers. According to the study, the number of criminal offenses committed by Boys' Club members actually increased from 1928 to 1931. "Only 18 percent of the offenses of the Boys' Club members occurred before membership, while 28 percent took place after a membership period and 61 percent occurred during a period of active affiliation with the Club," the study reported.⁶⁷

Furthermore, there was a larger percentage of truancy and delinquency among long-term members than among boys who had joined for one year only, leading the study to declare that "progressive participation in the Club was accompanied by increased . . . rather than decreased delinquency rates. . . ." It would appear that in its one quantifiable goal—reducing petty thievery—the Boys' Club failed.

⁶⁶Frederick M. Thrasher, "The Boys' Club and Juvenile Delinquency," pp. 66-80; Thrasher, "Final Report," pp. 75-76.

⁶⁷Thrasher, "The Boys Club and Juvenile Delinquency," pp. 66-80; Thrasher, "Final Report," pp. 75-76.

Moreover, participation in this agency's programs seems to have generally promoted anti-social behavior.⁶⁸

The Home Garden was founded in 1898 by a Canadian Protestant missionary, Anna Ruddy. Headquartered at 114th Street near First Avenue, this settlement house originally consisted of one floor in a brownstone and a back garden. Renamed Haarlem House in 1919, it moved to much larger quarters on East 116th Street. (In 1956 Haarlem House was renamed LaGuardia Memorial House.) Almost at once Haarlem House became the most influential social agency in East Harlem. Although the orientation of its work among adult clients could be broadly categorized as "Americanization," its approach was far different from the Boys' Club ideal of transforming Italian-speaking street urchins into "real Americans."⁶⁹

True, Haarlem House was involved primarily with the teaching of English and preparing the foreign-born for naturalization, but it never neglected their native culture. It held an annual folk music festival for the families and conducted classes in Italian for the immigrants' children. And though massively involved with conventional settlement house activities (for example, the organization of Boy Scout troops), its stress on community organization for mutual self-improvement gave Haarlem House its special character. For instance, the Harlem Tenants

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Haarlem House: 311 East 116th Street, pp. 9, 13-15; Peebles, pp. 87-89; Federal Writers' Project, The WPA Guide to New York City: A Comprehensive Guide to the Five Boroughs of the Metropolis--Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Richmond (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), p. 270.

League, organized by the Haarlem House staff during the post-World War I housing crisis, eventually enrolled some 1,250 families who succeeded in moderating rent increases and forcing landlords to make necessary repairs and improvements on their properties. Haarlem House was also responsible, in the thirties, for organizing the district's pushcart peddlers, whose desire for a sheltered area in which to sell their wares was realized when the city constructed a public market in the early thirties under the New York Central railroad tracks from East 116th to 110th Streets. Finally the improvements to Thomas Jefferson Park, also made in the early thirties, were the result of the community-organizing campaign spurred by Haarlem House.⁷⁰

It can be said that this community organizing had a powerful impact on the future of East Harlem politics. Two of East Harlem's most illustrious leaders, Marcantonio and Edward Corsi, were first clients and then staff members of Haarlem House.⁷¹ Moreover, LaGuardia's successes in East Harlem were based on a political organization with origins that can be traced to a spillover from Haarlem House's community activism. (See p. 36)

Leonard Covello was the director of a unique settlement house called Casa del Popolo, housed in an abandoned church on East 118th Street. Founded in the early twenties and sponsored by the Jefferson

⁷⁰Peebles, pp. 87-89.

⁷¹Haarlem House . . . , passim. Also Salvatore Cotillo, Italian Harlem's first Italo-American elected official (State Assemblyman from 1912 to 1922) was influenced by Harlem House's staff and activities. Thomas M. Henderson, "Immigrant Politician: Salvatore Cotillo, Progressive Ethnic," International Migration Review (Spring 1979), p. 83.

Park Methodist Episcopal Church, Casa del Popolo engaged in conventional settlement house activities. It organized a day nursery, kindergarten, athletic and social clubs, and classes in manual arts, homemaking, and health care for girls and women. In contrast to other East Harlem agencies, it also helped to develop indigenous leadership for the community by preparing students for college. In contrast to most of East Harlem's social agencies, most members of Casa del Popolo's executive board, advisory board, and faculty were Italo-Americans.⁷² Its first brochure (which was printed at its Preparatory School for Young Men) stressed: "All High School and College instructors are skilled teachers who understand your problem because they came out of the same surroundings and experienced the same struggles that you are going through now. The teachers all speak Italian and can consult with your parents."⁷³

⁷²Marie J. Concistre, "A Study of a Decade in the Life and Education of the Adult Immigrant Community in East Harlem" (Ph.D dissertation, New York University, 1943), pp. 249-50. The absence of Italo-Americans on the professional staff of social agencies which served Italo American communities was widespread. In Boston's two major Little Italys, the North End and the West End, there was not one professional social worker who could speak Italian until 1940. Similarly, every professional social worker in these communities was Anglo-Saxon, save one Italian. John F. Stack, International Conflict in an American City: Boston's Irish, Italians, and Jews, 1935-1944 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 38.

⁷³Brochure deposited in Covello Collection. The founding of the Italian Parents' Association at De Witt Clinton High School by Covello is another concrete example of this "bridge-building" approach. The Italian Parents' Association was represented on the school's executive committee and met in Italian Harlem rather than at De Witt, which was on Manhattan's West Side. This encouraged Italian parents to participate freely without concern about such embarrassing problems as language barriers. The Italian Parents' Association discussed school problems and collected money for weekly stipends to be given to Italo-American students. One one occasion it collaborated with Il Circolo Italiano to produce a play in English, using parents as members of the cast. It also produced a play in Italian and cast the children in roles.

These activities reflected a conscious attempt to build a bridge between the Italian community and the resources available for surviving, if not succeeding, in America.

Each Sunday afternoon, in deference to its church sponsor, La Casa held a vesper service, typically drawing four to five hundred people.⁷⁴ Jefferson Park Methodist Episcopal Church, however, did not give La Casa its character, which hardly subscribed to Episcopal Methodist activities. The Federal Writers' Project study, Italians of New York, described La Casa as "a settlement house whose members have leftist tendencies. It is patterned after the Italian Socialist settlement houses of the pre-Fascist era. Besides the regular settlement house activities . . . it sponsors a League of the Unemployed, which, in close cooperation with the La Guardia Political Club, tries to help victims of the depression."⁷⁵ Unlike other social agencies in East Harlem, La Casa made no attempt to Americanize its clients, but rather encouraged second-generation Italo-Americans to learn Italian. This approach was undoubtedly indebted to Covello's concept of community-centered education and commitment to developing Italian leadership in the community.⁷⁶ (See pp. 25-27)

At a time when the Depression was hitting the people the hardest and Casa del Popolo's services were most needed, it closed. One East Harlem student attributed the cause to loss of funding. Another quoted

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 250.

⁷⁵Federal Writers' Project, The Italians of New York: A Survey Prepared by Workers of the Federal Writers' Project (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 106.

⁷⁶Covello, Social Background, pp. 425-26.

the minister of Jefferson Park as stating that La Casa closed because its clientele was attracted away by the superior facilities of the Boys' Club.⁷⁷

Whatever the exact reason, the demise of Casa del Popolo left Italian Harlem with even fewer Italian cultural and educational institutions. This shortage of institutions was remarkable inasmuch as the 1930 and 1940 census data show that Italo-Americans were the largest United States ethnic group unable to speak English.⁷⁸

Italian Harlem did have the use of the Aguilar Branch of the New York Public Library, which contained the largest collection of Italian books in the library system,⁷⁹ and the Italian Book Company and Vanni bookstore carried a wide variety of newspapers, magazines, and books published in Italian.⁸⁰ And there was New York City's Italian-language press, dominated by Il Progresso, which reported the events and concerns of Italian Harlem, but had no special relationship to the community.

In contrast to the paucity of cultural institutions, Italian Harlem supported an astounding number of commercial recreational facilities. The East Harlem of 1945, for example, contained 44 movie theaters, 4 bowling alleys, 47 pool and billiard parlors, 3 amusement

⁷⁷Concistre, p. 250; Marsh, p. 190.

⁷⁸Covello, Social Background, pp. 425-26.

⁷⁹Concistre, p. 130, as published in The Italians: Social Background of an American Group.

⁸⁰Interview with old East Harlem resident conducted by S. Busacca, February 3, 1936. CC.

arcades, 9 shooting galleries, and of course a bocci ball court.⁸¹ Harlem's social agencies, churches, public schools, and libraries also provided recreational outlets, especially for youth. The Union Settlement House in 1940, for example, offered "clubs, gym, dancing, dramatics, arts and crafts (pottery, painting, drawing, sculpture), lending library, sewing, woodwork, English classes, beauty culture, cooking, bamboo pipes, [music] theory, [music] appreciation, concerts, folk dancing." For the talented, the Manhattan School of Music, in the heart of one of the worst areas of East Harlem, provided instruction free of charge in piano, violin, viola, cello, wind instruments, and voice.⁸²

A 1944 "Study of the Recreational Facilities for Teen Age Youth in East Harlem." written by local high school students, however, revealed that most of the young people relied upon their own resources for recreation. Church dances were rejected as "sissy affairs," and the price of admission to a commercial establishment was frequently beyond their means. The study also pointed up the sensitivity of many of East Harlem's rough-and-tumble youngsters. For them, socializing had to take place outside the home, because, in the words of one Italo-American youth: "The children are often ashamed of their home. The furniture is old and shabby so that none of the children want to bring their friends to their homes."⁸³

⁸¹List deposited in Covello Collection.

⁸²Brochures for Union Settlement House and Manhattan School of Music deposited in Covello Collection.

⁸³"Study" deposited in Covello Collection.

Italian Harlem contained a galaxy of voluntary organizations founded, organized, financed, and otherwise operated by residents. The most important type of voluntary organization, the mutual benefit society, flourished in Southern Italy and in every Italian immigrant community. Typically, these societies were composed of residents from a particular locality in Italy and named after its patron saint or birthplace of its members: Independent Clubs of Piedmont Eterno, Societa Montrone de Bari, Societa di M.S. Luminese, Societa di M.S. Sant'Agata Militello Rosmaino, Societa di M.S. Padre della Provvidenza fra Cittadini di Nicosia, Societa di M.S. Cittadini di Tufiello.⁸⁴ They provided recreational and religious activities, death benefits, often sickness and accident benefits as well, and aid in seeking work. Attendance of members at other members' funerals was mandatory. Generally, each society had its own doctor and lawyer, who were also members.⁸⁵

The societies also offered less tangible attractions, such as allowing their members to associate regularly with people from their own localities, speak in their dialects, and perhaps become officers in the organizations. This last point may have been of real importance to members of an ethnic group that faced defamation and discrimination from the wider society. They could make a name for themselves here, perhaps win an election and a title, and gain the stature and respect denied them outside the meeting hall.⁸⁶

⁸⁴Lists deposited in Covello Collection.

⁸⁵Humbert S. Nelli, Italians in Chicago 1800-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 157, 173-79; Williams, 119, 188.

⁸⁶Pozzetta, 244; Nelli, pp. 170-181; Barton, pp. 64-69.

It has been estimated that in the thirties, more than half of Italian adult males belonged to these societies. How ubiquitous the societies were is attested by a single statistic: in 1935, more than 110 mutual benefit societies existed in Italian Harlem, one for approximately every 225 adult males. In some instances these societies had officers who were not residents of Italian Harlem, indicating that membership was drawn to some extent from beyond its borders. (In turn, Italian Harlem's residents must also have been members of mutual benefit societies with headquarters outside Italian Harlem.)⁸⁷

Besides mutual benefit societies, Italian Harlem created other voluntary organizations. For example, a list compiled by Covello in 1941 reported the existence of more than thirty youth organizations. Sporting such names as the Avalons, Big Al Association, and Royal Sporting Club, they were spontaneous responses to the incompleteness of recreational facilities in East Harlem. They also represented an organizational form more comfortable to second- and third-generation Italo-Americans than the mutual aid societies of their first-generation parents.⁸⁸

Most of these organizations were composed exclusively of men. (Important exceptions were the American Labor Party clubs.) The major informal locations for socializing--the coffee shops and barber shops--also excluded women.⁸⁹ The Catholic churches contained women's societies, but their membership was quite limited.

⁸⁷Lists deposited in Covello Collection.

⁸⁸Lists of Italian Harlem's organizations deposited in Covello Collection.

⁸⁹Nelli, pp. 171-181; Barton. pp. 64-69.

Italian Harlem's multitude of mutual aid societies and neighborhood social and athletic clubs represented the natural organizational forms for this family-centered society. Their memberships were small. But more importantly, they were limited to spatially defined segments of the community. It was the "place from which" or the "place where," not particular ideas or interests that determined membership. The shift from mutual aid societies to social and athletic clubs as the prevalent organizational form reflected the shift of the key reference group from the place of origin in Southern Italy to the immediate neighborhood or most often the "block."

Italian Harlem's many voluntary organizations helped perpetuate a world that stood largely outside the wider American culture. These formalized peer groups provided noncommercial recreation, daily face-to-face interaction, and mutual involvement of a type that reinforced traditional values and folkways. Aside from the political clubs--and then only to a limited degree--these voluntary organizations lacked a wider community or direct involvement with similar groups in Italian Harlem. They were at the same time the only means whereby community-wide ethnic activities--such as the annual Columbus Day parade--could be planned.⁹⁰

Italian Harlem's only community-wide organization (with the exception of the Vito Marcantonio Political Association) was the Roman Catholic Church. The relationship of the Italian immigrant community to the Church was extremely problematic. "Of the total number of Italians arriving during the past year [1888]," wrote the United States

⁹⁰Pozzetta, p. 246.

Commissioner of Immigration in New York to Archbishop Corrigan, "all but one-twentieth of one percent were professed Roman Catholics. . . ."91

The near unanimity of the Italian immigrants' Catholicism, however, did not ensure a comfortable reception by the American clergy, who were predominantly of Irish descent. In 1917, for for example, the Archbishop of New York was advised by Father Reilly:

"The Italians are not a sensitive people like our own. When they are told that they are about the worst Catholics that ever came to this country, they don't resent it. If they were a little more sensitive to such remarks they would improve faster."92

From the beginning, Italian Harlem's relationship to Catholicism reflected this special pattern. Catholic churches existing in East Harlem around 1880 excluded Italians from their English-language services at the main altar, forcing them to worship in the basements. One elderly Italian resident of East Harlem who was interviewed in the thirties recalled that when the Italians attended services in predominantly Irish parishes, they were subjected to a barrage of insults and even beatings. Another long-time resident, a Irishman, remembered:

These Italians were strange people, very strange to us. . . . That they dressed in a manner unaccustomed among us, that their language was nothing like what had been told us about the sonority of Italian speech, they they were noisy and ill-mannered mattered little. . . . We even had pity for them. But, for God's sake, when they began to come to our church and make a market place of it, we were sure that they were the people whom the Lord chased from the temple. In those days we were quite sure, and even today, I don't see how they have the nerve to call themselves Christians when they are not.93

91Tomasi, Piety and Power, p. 34.

92Ibid., p. 49.

93 Interview with old East Harlem resident conducted by S. Busacca, February 10, 1934. CC.

To some small degree at least, this hostility was caused by the widespread belief among the Irish-Americans that the Italians were holding the Pope prisoner in the Vatican.⁹⁴

The peculiar nature of this community's relationship to the Catholic Church was reflected in a report written in 1914 by a worker from the Young Men's Christian Association assigned to Italian Harlem. This worker noted that almost all Italo-American men were anti-clerical. But the only conversion to Protestantism he could point out after a year's stay in this community was "one college man who has joined an Evangelical Church with an Italian wife and with several more in the family to follow."⁹⁵

In 1930, Italian Harlem's largest church, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, had one thousand adult male members and three thousand female adult members.⁹⁶ In the forties, Covello found that East Harlem's Italo-American schoolboys adhered to the Catholic Church far less fervently than their contemporaries from other Catholic ethnic groups.⁹⁷ The persistence of these patterns was indicated by a 1947

⁹⁴This myth originated out of the circumstances of Rome's absorption into the Italian state. On September 20, 1870, Italian troops marched into Rome. Soon after, its residents voted in favor of incorporation into the Italian Kingdom. Stripped of his temporal possessions, Pope Pius IX retired within the environs of the Vatican, where he chose to regard himself as a prisoner. Until 1929, Pius's successors continued to refuse to recognize the Italian state and identified themselves as prisoners. See William K. Ferguson and Geoffrey Bruun, A Survey of European Civilization Since 1500, Third Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), pp. 701-2.

⁹⁵Unsigned, carbon copy, p. /. CC. See also Pozzetta, pp. 274-75.

⁹⁶Marsh, p. 489.

⁹⁷Covello, Social Background, p. 379.

study, which reported the existence of only three Italian Protestant churches:

This does not mean that the total non-Protestant Italian population is Roman Catholic. A very large proportion are only nominal Catholics, many have no church relationship whatsoever, and many of the men maintain the anti-clerical attitudes of the old country. Local observers report that it is doubtful whether as many as 50 percent of the Italians could be classified as church members in the sense that Protestant churches understand church membership.⁹⁸

In the words of one lifelong resident of Italian Harlem: "There was no great feeling for the Church in Italian Harlem, it was just part of life."⁹⁹

The presence of the Catholic Church in East Harlem can be traced to 1882, when a group of Italian immigrants celebrated the feast of the patron of its native village, Our Lady of Mount Carmel. This event took place in the front yard of a residence at 110th Street and First Avenue. The following year, this same group obtained rooms on the first floor of a house on East 113th Street, where an Italian priest celebrated East Harlem's first Italian-language Mass.¹⁰⁰ It was in 1884 that East Harlem's growing Italian community memorialized a patron saint by naming its first parish Our Lady of Mount Carmel and building a monumental structure in her honor at 115th Street and First Avenue. Also completed in 1884 was this parish's parochial school, which provided instruction in both English and Italian, and was the first Italian parochial school in New York City. By 1927, the school had an

⁹⁸The Protestant Churches of East Harlem: Report of a Survey by the Pathfinding Service for the Churches with Recommendations by Local Protestant Ministers (June 1947), p. 5.

⁹⁹Interview with Frank Maurelli, New York City, August 23, 1976.

¹⁰⁰Father Enrico Mizzatesta, interview conducted by S. Busacca, no place or date. Transcript deposited in Covello Collection.

enrollment of approximately one thousand.¹⁰¹

East Harlem was especially well endowed with parochial schools. Each of its seven Catholic Churches had one, and there was also a community-wide parochial school, Commodore John Shea, not directly affiliated with any church. For reasons unknown, the resistance of Italo-Americans to parochial school education evident elsewhere did not surface in Italian Harlem.¹⁰²

Our Lady of Mount Carmel sponsored an annual festa in honor of its namesake, which culminated in a massive procession each July 16 and became the chief cultural event of the entire community. Like most feste, the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel had been brought to America in fairly undiluted form. Deeply rooted in the social life of the Southern Italian peasantry and urban dwellers, the feste provided one of the elements of religion--the celebration of a saint--which most strongly appealed to them.¹⁰³

Noting that the "religious observance is quite obscured by the real holiday spirit prevailing," one observer in the early thirties described the most important features of this festa's procession:

A band heads the parade, which is then followed by members of the society of Monte Carmelo. The image of the Madonna is carried by four men. Immediately following the Madonna come the Verginelle (the little virgins), young girls all dressed in white wearing fine white veils. . . . Following them is a banner [on which] are pinned all the dollars which the faithful contribute. At the end of the parade march all those who claim that the Madonna has healed them of

¹⁰¹Domenico Pistella, The Crowning of a Queen (New York: Eugene Printing Service, 1954), pp. 62, 119.

¹⁰²"East Harlem Parochial Schools." Undated list probably compiled by Covello. CC. For Southern Italo-American attitudes toward parochial school education, see, Gans, p. 129; Yans-McLaughlin, p. 227.

¹⁰³Williams, pp. 107, 149; see also Nelli, p. 188.

some malady or performed some other miracle for their benefit, many of whom walk barefoot through the streets of Harlem carrying wax images of the parts afflicted to be presented at the church, and to be melted down as candles. One curious characteristic of these festas is the fact that the bands have never been known to play ecclesiastical music of the Catholic church. Instead, popular gay tunes characterize the Saint's Day parade.¹⁰⁴

As years went by, pilgrimages to the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel were organized from as far away as California, Florida, Louisiana, New Mexico, Texas, and Canada. By the thirties, 500,000 Italo-Americans attended the week-long festivities centered at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church.¹⁰⁵

The great popularity of this Italian Harlem festa can be ascribed in part to the the number of miracles reported to have occurred at the Church, regarded by many as a shrine. Of even greater importance, however, it served as a symbol of this particular manifestation of the Virgin Mary to the Southern Italians. Almost every village in south Italy had a church, chapel, or at least an altar dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. It is noteworthy that by 1913 seven other Italian parishes in the New York City metropolitan area were named for her. What insured the continued popularity of Italian Harlem's festa was the awarding of a golden crown from Pope Leo XIII in 1903 for the statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel enshrined inside the church. Except for another in New Orleans, no other statue in the United States had been so honored by the Vatican up to that time.¹⁰⁶

Our Lady of Mount Carmel was the first exclusively Italian

¹⁰⁴Concistre, pp. 223-24.

¹⁰⁵Pistella, pp. 68, 128.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., pp. 123, 122. 76, 102

national parish in New York City. Yet from its founding until 1919, its pastors were Italian-speaking German- and Irish-Americans. The official historian of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Father Domenico Pistella, ascribed this anomalous situation to the need to "give sufficient care to a large class who understood English [and] above all for official contact with Church Authorities as well as Civil."¹⁰⁷ In view of Pistella's report that in the first year of the church's existence, eighty-six of ninety children baptized were of Italian parents, it is difficult to attribute the absence of an Italian pastor for this quintessential Italian parish to the need to "give sufficient care to a large class who understood English. . . ." It would also seem that it should have been possible to find an English-speaking Italian pastor for the purpose of maintaining "official contact with Church Authorities as well as Civil." Furthermore, Our Lady of Mount Carmel's Italian-language services were held in its basement. Indeed, the statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was not moved from this basement to the church proper until 1923.¹⁰⁸ It would appear, then, that this disregard of the parishioners' dominant nationality was simply an abject example of the American Roman Catholic hierarchy's insensitivity to Italo-Americans.¹⁰⁹

Despite the predominant Catholicism of the district, four

¹⁰⁷Ibid., pp. 114-15, 118, 66.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Illustrative of this situation was the failure of the Roman Catholic Church to appoint an Italo-American bishop in New York until 1954. Jacob Blum and John Wilhelm, "Vito Marcantonio and the Political Organization of East Harlem" (Honors paper, Yale University, 1967), p. 88.

Protestant churches (Jefferson Park Methodist Episcopal, St. Ambrose Episcopal, Ascension Presbyterian, and Seventh Day Adventist) were ministering to the spiritual needs of a scattering of East Harlem's Italo-Americans by 1930. Their combined membership, which boasted a higher-than-average socioeconomic status, never reached one thousand.¹¹⁰ Among them, only Ascension cooperated with such agencies and institutions as the Board of Health, Community Service, and Social Service Exchange, other churches, and the public schools.¹¹¹ To a lesser extent, so did Jefferson Park Methodist Episcopal which sponsored Casa del Popolo up to its demise in 1929, when the church withdrew from participation in "outside" social endeavors.

In order to counter the indifference and occasional hostility of a large segment of the Italian immigrants toward the church, especially toward parochial schools, the American Church created a comprehensive network of church-related organizations and church-sponsored services.¹¹² But from the outset in Italian Harlem, these groups and services had limited appeal. In the early thirties, for example, the membership of parish-connected societies at Italian Harlem's largest church, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, amounted to a scant 180 in both senior and junior branches of the Holy Name Society, and 220 in the Children of

¹¹⁰Marsh, pp. 486-87, 497-98.

¹¹¹Consistire, p. 259. The feeling of competitiveness and hostility on the part of Italian Harlem's Catholic Church toward Protestantism was dramatized in 1903 when, during the coronation of the statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the rector announced that Our Lady of Mount Carmel Society had purchased a Protestant church on 112th Street and wished to use it as an auxiliary chapel for the Sanctuary. Pistella, p. 93.

¹¹²See, for example, Nelli, p. 192.

Mary. By the late thirties, the mutual-aid Society of Mount Carmel Congregation, which had given birth to this church, had a membership of only eighty, while Our Lady of Mount Carmel sponsored an after-school center with an enrollment of one hundred.¹¹³ Furthermore, the Catholic Church in Italian Harlem maintained little contact with non-Catholic social agencies. Although situated on the same block that housed five social agencies, including Haarlem House,¹¹⁴ Our Lady of Mount Carmel ignored their presence. Catholic Charities, however, did maintain an East Harlem office,¹¹⁵ even though the cooperation on community projects one would expect to exist between this organization and the Catholic Church was negligible.

The similarity in both Catholic and Protestant church withdrawal from social involvement in Italian Harlem was noted in the conclusion of May Case Marsh's study of East Harlem's churches in 1930:

The churches have little or no relationship to the life and welfare of the community of East Harlem as a whole. Their doctrine is an individual gospel rather than a social gospel.

They are striving to live up to the first commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." . . . Perhaps the relationship of these churches to the life and welfare of the community can best be summed up in the words of the priest in charge of Mount Carmel, "The results of the church's teaching is [sic] respect for the law, for parents and for God. The community is influenced only insofar as individuals who have this respect, effect it."¹¹⁶

Italian Harlem's Catholic churches' noninvolvement with social or even philanthropic activities was congruent with the Southern Italians'

¹¹³Concistre, pp. 239-40.

¹¹⁴Marsh, p. 420.

¹¹⁵Undated list of social agencies deposited in Covello Collection.

¹¹⁶Marsh, p. 607.

negative feelings toward public or institutional interference into family life.¹¹⁷

From 1930 until the present, Italian Harlem's population has steadily decreased. (See p. 175) Its slum-like conditions ensured that Italian Harlem would be populated almost exclusively by families headed by men in low-status, low-paying jobs. As the economic situation of its residents improved there was a tendency for some to move. One student of East Harlem noted in the thirties, for example, that: "As soon as people have money they move to the Bronx, to Queens, to Long Island."¹¹⁸ Upwardly mobile Italian Harlem residents may have been particularly impelled to move because this area's housing stock all but precluded home ownership, a major goal of Italian immigrants.¹¹⁹ The very slow economic progress of the Southern-Italian group in this period, however, would seem to indicate that at least until after World War II out-migration was not the main cause of Italian Harlem's decline. Moreover, even when presented with the possibility of moving to more adequate situations, the Southern Italians tended to be reluctant to leave their communities.¹²⁰ The out-migration of the second and third generation from Italian Harlem was primarily the result of the almost total absence of housing construction since before World

¹¹⁷Yans-McLaughlin, p. 134.

¹¹⁸Concistre, p. 238.

¹¹⁹Williams, p. 38, Nelli, p. 34; Yans-McLaughlin, pp. 36, 47, 176-77; Kessner, p. 151.

¹²⁰On reluctance of Southern Italians to move from locations of initial residence, see Patrick Gallo, Old Bread New Wine, pp. 260-61. There were, however, various patterns of residential mobility. See, for example, Nelli, pp. 41, 45, 53.

War I. The strata that remained in Italian Harlem--the elderly and the poor--tended to be those most resistant to acculturation.¹²¹

Italian Harlem had its own individual features, but it was not unique among the Little Italys of New York City, or for that matter, elsewhere in the United States. Its population was unusually homogeneous--in 1930, 81 percent first and second generation Italo-American.¹²² Humbert Nelli's study of Chicago's Italo-American population found that between 1880 and 1920 "only limited sections of certain streets" in the Italian communities held more than 50 percent Italo-Americans.¹²³ Boston's West End, studied by Gans in the early fifties, was approximately 42 percent Italo-American.¹²⁴ In New York City in 1930 there was one area of Italian concentration more homogeneous than Italian Harlem: the Lower East Side's Little Italy was 88 percent Italian American.¹²⁵ Italian Harlem's housing stock was overwhelmingly substandard, but again Little Italy's housing antedated it. The importance of Our Lady of Mount Carmel's festa was duplicated by other feste in other Italo-American communities.

Ultimately, it was Italian Harlem's size which set it apart from

¹²¹A 1940 survey of an area almost coterminous with East Harlem reported that 12,830 heads-of-households were born in Italy. If we assume that one-fourth of these were single heads-of-households, over twenty thousand of Italian Harlem's 60,000 Italo-Americans were first generation. (We can assume that almost all the mates of the heads-of-households were also first generation Italo-Americans.) "Memorandum on Child Care Survey," p. 2.

¹²²Shedd, p. 3.

¹²³Nelli, p. 25.

¹²⁴Gans, p. 8.

¹²⁵Shedd, p. 3.

other Italo-American communities. For example, in 1930 Italian Harlem had three times the population of Little Italy.¹²⁶ The large number of Italian-Americans who lived in this small urban area allowed for a completeness of this lifestyle perhaps unrivaled elsewhere. Italian Harlem contained almost every important feature of the typical Italo-American community--churches, mutual aid societies, stores, social clubs of all types, schools whose student populations were largely comprised of Italian-Americans. Importantly, Italian Harlem also had an indigenous lower middle class and a resident professional class. Because of its significant population and compact area, it also had its own elected officials--State Senator, State Assemblyman, and even Congressman. The only thing Italian Harlem lacked was jobs in sufficient number to employ its population. But some observers of Southern-Italian folkways as they have been adapted in the United States have commented upon the lesser importance of work as opposed to other considerations in their hierarchy of values.¹²⁷ For what was considered important--the family, peer-group relations--Italian Harlem offered an ideal milieu. It provided a situation whereby these adapted Southern-Italian folkways could be freely practiced in their widest possible range.¹²⁸

Yet it was this very way of life which Italian Harlem so

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Gans, pp. 122-136.

¹²⁸As Patrick Gallo in Old Bread New Wine (p. 265) stated: "The more the Italians are physically isolated from the host society, the greater their tendency to maintain links with Italy. The residential patterns that I uncovered would seem to indicate that those living in areas with high concentrations of other Italians would be less well assimilated than those who live in nonsegregated areas."

successfully preserved which seemed to militate against left politics. The intense family-centeredness of Italian Harlem caused Covello in 1947 to write:

We do not function as a modern community. We have no neighborhood association of trades people, no overall labor union council, no community-wide Schools Committee, no united Parent-Teachers Associations, no intercultural and interracial programs to develop and give expression to the rich heritage of our people. What we have are a multitude of small organizations, each independent of each other and each working out its own little destiny.

The only organization on a community-wide basis is the East Harlem Council for Community Planning, whose membership is composed almost exclusively of social workers from social agencies in our district, with a few teachers and a scattering of public-spirited citizens who live in the community.¹²⁹

Why would this same community loyally support a pro-Communist politician? The complex causes of this paradoxical phenomenon are explored in our next chapter.

¹²⁹Covello then proposed for the purpose of translating "our great concern into social action," that a community council and a community paper be established. There was never a lasting example of either in Italian Harlem. Covello, "Strength from Within," New View of East Harlem I (April 1, 1947), p. 3.

CHAPTER VII

THE CAUSES OF ITALIAN HARLEM'S RESPONSE TO MARCANTONIO

The great paradox underlying the "Marcantonio phenomenon" is why the relatively conservative community of Italian Harlem rallied so consistently to his side--and before Marcantonio to another radical Congressman, Fiorello H. LaGuardia.

The experience of the Southern-Italian group in the United States evidences scant support for the political left. In the pre-World War I era, for example, the average section of the Italian Socialist Federation (founded in 1902) had only thirteen to fifteen members. The New York City branch boasted about two hundred registered members from an Italian population of 650,000, and the Philadelphia branch mustered only one hundred or so out of its 140,000 Italo-Americans. A Socialist Party organizer of that period complained that of all the nationalities in New York, the Italians were proportionately the weakest in his organization.¹

The radical sentiment that did exist was divided among the Socialist Party, the Socialist Labor Party, and the Industrial

¹Tomasi, Silvano M., Piety and Power: The Role of the Italian Parishes in the New York Metropolitan Area, 1880-1930 (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1975), p. 5; see also, Virginia Yans-McLoughlin, Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 224-25.

Workers of the World. The Italian Socialist Federation had forty sections by 1906, whose affiliations were divided between the Socialist and Socialist Labor parties. Despite the weak organizational response of the Italians to the radical movements of the period, Italians played leading roles in both the Lawrence general strike of 1912 and the Paterson general strike of the following year. Moreover, Italians were prominent in the leadership of these strikes. With the collapse of the Socialist Party and the near demise of the Industrial Workers of the World in the post-World War I era, the Italian-American community was left with almost no contact with the organized left.² Even the Italo-Americans' response to trade unionism was comparatively weak. In 1919, after the successful garment worker unionization drives, Southern Italians were still 18 percent less organized than native-born Americans, and 13 percent less organized than the foreign-born in general.³ The lament of a Socialist Party organizer in 1904 appeared true, "The Italians are not organization men, and while it is comparatively easy to organize them, it is hard to keep up the organization."⁴

The failure of the left, and even the liberal left, to attract the Southern Italian group persisted into the thirties. In the 1935 New York City mayoral election, for example, Socialist and Communist Party

²Marlene Terwilliger, "Jews and Italians and the Socialist Party, New York City, 1901-1917: A Study of Class, Ethnicity and Class Consciousness" (Ph.D. dissertation, Union Graduate School, 1978), pp. 84-85.

³Samuel Bailey, "The Italians and Organized Labor in the United States and Argentina, 1880-1919," International Migration Review 1 (Summer, 1967), as quoted in Terwilliger, pp. 86, 88.

⁴Terwilliger, p. 63.

candidates received, respectively, 2.9 and 1.2 percent of the vote, but only 2.0 and 0.7 percent of the Italo-American vote. Moreover, there never developed in the Italo-American community support for a generalized liberal or progressive ideology. Franklin Roosevelt, because of his verbal attacks on Axis Italy, received only 41 percent of the New York City Italo-American vote in 1940 as opposed to 61 percent city-wide. These non-liberal voting trends were reflected further in the declining number of ballots cast by New York City's Italo-Americans for a prominent liberal officeholder, Governor Herbert Lehman--1932, 78.9 percent; 1936, 66.9 percent; 1938, 59.7 percent.⁵

Not only were Italo-Americans frequently non-supportive of liberal candidates, but their attitudes on specific issues often placed them at the right end of the political spectrum. The responses to one survey on the Spanish Civil War by ethnic group found that among

⁵Ronald Bayor, Neighbors in Conflict: The Irish, Germans, Jews, and Italians of New York City, 1929-1941 (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1978), pp. 41, 47. The Italian-American support for the Republican Party in the thirties was closely tied to their perception of Roosevelt and the Democratic Party as anti-Fascist. The somewhat larger percentage of Italian-Americans who voted on the American Labor Party line (6.3 in 1936 and 5.9 in 1940) than either Irish- or German-Americans (3.2 and 2.3 in 1936, and 5.3 and 3.5 in 1940) does not evidence leftist proclivities. Rather, this was a function of the relatively large representation of Italian-Americans in the unions which sponsored the American Labor Party (for example, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union) and the prestige of Marcantonio and LaGuardia. (Bayor, p. 119) Similarly, the temporary ascendancy of radicalism in prewar Barre, Vermont, Quincy, Massachusetts, and Paterson, New Jersey is indicative of the leftist currents among Northern Italians who predominated in these cities. The Little Italys of the large cities which were overwhelmingly populated with Southern Italians demonstrated no such tendencies. Edwin Fenton, Immigrants and Unions, A Case Study: Italians and American Labor, 1870-1920 (New York: Arno Press, 1975), p. 70; Patrick Gallo, Old Bread New Wine: A Portrait of the Italian-Americans (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), p. 90.

Americans of Irish, German, Italian, and Russian (including many Jews) descent, the Italo-Americans showed the smallest percentage of Loyalist supporters (20 percent) and the largest in favor of Franco (55 percent).⁶

Consistent support for a leftist Congressman notwithstanding, Italian Harlem appeared to conform to this general pattern. Within Italian Harlem the Communist Party had little strength. George Charney, its district organizer for East Harlem during much of the time Marcantonio held office, stated in his memoirs that among the Congressman's "beloved Calabrese, we had but a handful of members."⁷ The Party compensated, in some small measure, for the limited local support by assigning party members of Italian extraction from other districts to Italian Harlem to do political work.⁸ This strategem failed to establish a Communist beachhead in Italian Harlem. In fact, as of 1948, of the approximately ten thousand party members in New York

⁶Bayor, p. 91.

⁷George Charney, A Long Journey (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), p. 113. In Bella Dodd's memoirs, she recalls: "I was assigned [by the Communist Party] to the Garibaldi Branch of the Party, a Party club which concentrated on recruiting Italians. The club was ineffective and drab. . . . [It was located a block from Marcantonio's club.] This branch of fifty or sixty members consisted chiefly of Italians, Jews, Negroes, and Finns." School of Darkness (New York: P.J. Kennedy, 1954), pp. 168-69.

Besides Marcantonio, the only other Italo-American who attained a significant degree of prominence on that part of the left associated with the Communist Party was Peter Cacchione, who served as the first New York City councilman to be elected on that party's ticket. He was elected in 1941 and reelected in 1943 and 1945. He died while in office in 1947. Simon Gerson, Pete: The Story of Peter V. Cacchione, New York's First Communist Councilman (New York: International Publishers, 1976), passim.

⁸Donna Liberman, "Vito Marcantonio: People's Congressman: The New Deal Period" (Honors paper, Radcliffe College, 1970), p. 102.

County only three hundred were Italo-American.⁹

But the party was able to amplify its influence in Italian Harlem by calling for assistance from an Italian-language lodge of the International Workers Order, a fraternal organization located in Italian Harlem with close ties to the Party. Among other activities, this lodge helped circulate a bilingual weekly, L'Unità del Popolo, also closely connected to the party, which consistently stressed the importance of electing Marcantonio.¹⁰ In an article published in 1944, for example, he was described as the "interpreter of the aspirations of the masses of workers of all America and also the only representative who has at heart the interests of the Italo-American community."¹¹

⁹Nathan Glazer, The Social Basis of American Communism (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World 1961), p. 221. Of the 766 delegates to the New York State Convention of the Communist Party, forty-four were Italo-Americans. Glazer, p. 220.

¹⁰In 1940, for example, an IWO official wrote Marcantonio that, "on October 26, at the Verona Theatre, 107th Street and Second Avenue [the IWO] Italian section has arranged a huge meeting with you as the main speaker." M. Horowitz to Marcantonio, October 18, 1940. MP (Miscellaneous Campaign Material).

¹¹July 29, 1944, p. 3. L'Unità del Popolo was largely the creation of refugees from Italy. Interview with John Cammette, New York City, November 7, 1981.

A leftist activist who worked in Italian Harlem during this period assessed the party's presence there:

"I don't think that the Communist Party necessarily had more influence in East Harlem than in other Italian communities. Actually Marc was the progressive force there; he fought evictions, he fought for rent control; he fought for good race relations; there didn't seem room for anyone [else] on the left. And the Party worked harder in the black and Puerto Rican communities--in East Harlem it seemed less of a social force than in other [Italian] communities in the City who didn't have a Marc. This goes for non-Italian communities too; where there was a vacuum on the left, the Party and the American Labor Party could fill it, in East and Lower Harlem Marc was the left."

Mary Bowes, personal letter, November 16, 1976.

While the Communist Party exhibited little strength in Italian Harlem, other leftist groups had no presence there whatsoever. Moreover, there were few signs of political activity in Italian Harlem aside from the frequent street rallies mobilized in support of Marcantonio. Only two instances of political demonstrations have come to light: a march in 1938 held to demand the building of public housing, and a march in 1939 to protest the anticipated entry of the United States into World War II. (See p. 137)

Italian Harlem was swept up in the general Democratic euphoria of 1936. From then until 1948, however, approximately one third of its voters cast ballots for Republican candidates for the State Senate and Assembly. (See Tables 8, 9, 10) Inasmuch as all of these candidates were Italo-Americans, the ethnic factor did not exist. In the Presidential elections of 1940 and 1944, a majority of the community's voters supported Wendell Willkie. After the passage of the Wilson-Pakula Act in 1947, Marcantonio's political machine stressed support for the American Labor Party in general, not only for Marcantonio's own candidacy. (See pp. 401-2) The increased ALP vote in 1948 and 1950 in Italian Harlem indicates that these efforts were quite successful. Interestingly, this increased ALP vote appeared to have been at the expense of the Republican Party. (See Tables 6, 8, 10, 11) The percentage of Italian Harlem's voters willing to vote for a leftist candidate and program per se can perhaps be measured by the percentage of its voters who voted for Henry Wallace in 1948--22 percent. In that election, 57.6 percent of its voters cast their ballots for Marcantonio.¹² Both Wallace and Marcantonio were, of course

¹²George Blake [George Charney] and Al Testerman, "The People Win

running on the American Labor Party line. Marcantonio's positions were in fact more radical than Wallace's but little of that emerged during the campaign. What needs to be accounted for is the three out of five Marcantonio voters who did not vote for Wallace. They were not voting for his full program. What then motivated them to vote for Marcantonio?

Marcantonio's political beliefs and associations were not unknown in Italian Harlem. The New York City press frequently featured Marcantonio in regard to his ties to the Communist Party and his unpopular political stands. Furthermore, Marcantonio did not disguise his politics from his Italo-American constituents. For example, a letter sent to every registered voter in his district in 1948 stated:

I have been an uncompromising opponent of imperialism. I believe that armaments and a peace-time draft--in the service of imperialist policy--do not represent defense of a nation and its people. On the contrary, such armaments have always proved destructive of the peace and security of the American people. Such a program is not defense. It is definitely a program for profit--and more profit--the profit always going to the monopolies; those same monopolies that are today responsible for the lack of decent housing, for 24-cent milk, and for \$1.50 meat. . . .

Consequently, the central issue before the American people is that of peace; and a program of \$21 billion to be expended this year for the present cold war does not make for peace. That is why I have voted against the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. Both these policies are in keeping with the expansion of the power of Wall Street over the entire world--which is definitely not in the interest of the common people of these United States.

While I have voted against this program of despair and war, I have voted FOR and have fought for aid to the needy nations of

with Marcantonio," Political Affairs (January 1949), pp. 90-91. Before evaluating the reasons behind the voting behavior of Italian Harlem residents who voted for Marcantonio and not for Wallace, it should be noted that many who did vote for Wallace may have been responding to Marcantonio's endorsement. On the other hand, any number of these voters may have rejected Marcantonio because of his association with Wallace or disassociation from Truman.

Europe through the United Nations and without conditions, aid without exploitation, aid without regard to political creed or religious beliefs. This proposal . . . is not new. It was first preached in the Sermon on the Mount. . . . I prefer this creed as against the Marshall Plan which has meant the use of your dollars and the sacrifice of your welfare to aid the big trusts in converting such nations as Italy and France into economic colonies of Wall Street.

Since the Democratic Party of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Republicans have merged into one single party with two faces, both the servants of the same masters, the big trusts of Wall Street, I am urging your support for the Progressive Party.¹³

Italian Harlem's nonradical voters knew they were voting for a leftist Congressman.

The efficiency and scope of Marcantonio's political organization cannot account solely for Italian Harlem's potent support. The primary effect of this organization was to realize already existing support by maximizing voter registration and participation.

Much of the political behavior of Italo-Americans--including their heavy support of Marcantonio--has been explained by the ethnic factor.¹⁴ Two studies of Italian-Americans indicate that the ethnic factor was indeed a strong influence on their voting and participation, particularly when the office at stake was of importance.¹⁵

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to overestimate this factor as the major determinant in Marcantonio's political success. In his first four

¹³Undated, CC.

¹⁴See, for example, Salvatore John LaGumina's Vito Marcantonio: The People's Politician (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1969), passim.

¹⁵Herbert Gans, Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of the Italian-Americans (New York: Free Press, 1965), pp. 177, 181-82; Michael Parenti, Ethnic and Political Attitudes: A Depth Study of Italian Americans (New York: Arno Press, 1975), pp. 77, 294.

elections his Democratic opponent, James Lanzetta, was also an Italian, but Marcantonio won three of these elections. In 1942 he overwhelmed other Italo-American candidates in the Democratic, Republican, and American Labor Party primaries. It should also be noted that in the 1941 mayoral election in New York, the most prominent Italo-American officeholder in the country, Fiorello H. LaGuardia, received only 46 percent of the Italian vote, William O'Dwyer having received 53 percent.¹⁶ Nonetheless, there is no question that it accrued to Marcantonio's advantage that between 1944 and 1950 his opponents were Martin Kennedy, Patrick Hannigan, Frederick Van Pelt, John Ellis, James Morrissey, and James Donovan, for it is also obvious that purely ethnic considerations influenced some voters. In 1939, for instance, a man wrote Marcantonio, "I do not belong to your district . . . but being of Italian extraction I feel you are the man who can best help me."¹⁷ Similarly, a woman wrote in 1945: "I am glad you wear an Italian name."¹⁸

Marcantonio also received a vast amount of correspondence from Italo-Americans outside his district and even outside of New York City. The president of a Fur and Leather Workers Union local in Middletown, New York asked him for assistance in obtaining a government loan for building a hospital. He noted that, "Our local union members [are] predominantly of Italian extraction and [and] part of the large Italian population of the city."¹⁹ Especially significant was the

¹⁶Bayor, p. 143.

¹⁷MP 17.

¹⁸MP 2 (Civil Liberties).

¹⁹MP 17, 1 of 2.

invitation tendered to Marcantonio in 1950 by the Italian-American World War Veterans Association, which read: "You're invited to be a head table guest at our dinner . . . which concludes a three day national conference of delegates. . . ."20 In 1950, it would have been inconceivable that any other veterans' organization would have extended such an invitation to Marcantonio.

One rough measure of ethnicity's influence on Marcantonio's candidacies is the voting patterns of an enclave of Italo-Americans with relatively little contact with Marcantonio: in the southernmost reaches (between First and Second Avenues and 60th to 62nd Streets) of his district. He did not live in their neighborhood. Furthermore, because this area was included into his district only after 1944 and was somewhat distant from his headquarters, relatively few of its residents would have been recipients of services from his political organization. Nonetheless, the election districts encompassing this neighborhood voted for him in the range of 30 to 39 percent, as compared with his average Yorkville vote of 20 to 25 percent.²¹ Perhaps the difference between these two sets of figures gauges the ethnic factor.

Despite his leftism, Marcantonio's specific political stances and, to some extent, his general political outlook corresponded to Italian Harlem's political mood. Nowhere was this more true than on the primary political question for many Italo-Americans during much of this period--Fascism.

²⁰MP 8.

²¹Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio" (Honors paper, Harvard University, 1950), addenda.

Prior to assuming Congressional office, Marcantonio was clearly identified with anti-Fascism.²² Furthermore, he was one of the few prominent Italo-Americans to participate in the Grande Dimostrazione contro il Fascismo held at Madison Square Garden in August 1935.²³ After his 1936 defeat, however, he was uncharacteristically quiet on this issue, and until Italy's capitulation he rarely publicly attacked Mussolini or Italian Fascism. Rather, between 1935 and 1943 he dissembled. For example, when, in 1935, the American League Against War and Fascism invited him to sponsor and endorse a demonstration "in the Italian and negro sections of Harlem" to protest the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, he declined. He explained that his sponsorship of several neutrality resolutions precluded active participation in any demonstration that "might in any manner be construed as an effort to involve the United States in any dispute between belligerent nations."²⁴ One month later, when the American League for Italy invited him to a conference to assist in maintaining friendly relations between

²²On May 30, 1927, black-shirted members of the Fascist League of North America, wearing tasseled caps and carrying steel-tipped whips, were marching downtown to participate in a Memorial Day parade when two of them were shot while preparing to board a train in the Bronx. Several weeks later, the police caused a great stir in Italian Harlem by raiding a few radical Italian newspaper offices, arresting more than a dozen prominent anti-Fascists, and subsequently charging two Italian tailors with first-degree murder.

In Italy, the government press and several Fascist deputies clamored for "justice." The American anti-Fascist community, fearing another Sacco-Vanzetti case, was also aroused. The noted civil liberties attorneys, Clarence Darrow and Arthur Garfield Hays, defended the accused tailors. Despite divided sentiments in the Italian community, Marcantonio associated himself with the legal preparation of the case. Liberman, p. 23.

²³Ibid., p. 67; Alan Schaffer, Vito Marcantonio, Radical in Congress (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), p. 50.

²⁴MP 26 (H-J).

the peoples of the United States and Italy (noting that "our sympathies go to Italy" vis-à-vis the Ethiopian invasion), Marcantonio declined, citing the pressure of Congressional duties.²⁵ Between 1936 and 1943, Marcantonio's only published attack on Italian Fascism (without mentioning Mussolini's name) occurred in June 1938, when before a convention of the International Workers Order he announced the founding of L'Unitá del Popolo. As the head of its board of directors, Marcantonio denounced the "Fascist policies of Mr. [Generoso] Pope's [that is, the publisher of Il Progresso and Il Corriere] papers," which he added were responsible for having "moved 600,000 Italian voters in this city into the camp of fascism."²⁶ Despite his general reticence on this issue, his general political position, affiliations, and specific involvements, such as heading the board of directors of L'Unitá del Popolo, identified him as an anti-Fascist.

The cause of Marcantonio's dissimulation on the issue of Italian Fascism is clear. In this period, Italian-Americans' sentiment toward Italy's Fascist regime was roughly divided as follows: a small articulate anti-Fascist group, a small articulate pro-Fascist segment, and the majority "sentimentally and ineffectually" pro-Fascist.²⁷ Or,

²⁵MP 4 (C1-C2).

²⁶"Plans New Italian Daily: Marcantonio Says Anti Fascist Paper Will Be Published Soon," New York Times (June 5, 1938), p. 2. At meetings of leftist Italo-Americans where one might expect Marcantonio to denounce Italian Fascism and Mussolini, he did not. See for example: "Embargo is Proposed on Aggressor Forces: Italian-Americans at Rally Urge Move to Aid Jews," New York Times (November 21, 1938), p. 7; "Garibaldi's Struggle for Liberty Extolled: Marcantonio at Rally Likens It to Our Fight for Democracy," New York Times (July 5, 1939), p. 9.

²⁷Parenti, pp. 55-56.

as Nathan Glazer has pointed out: "Except for a handful of radicals and socialists, almost everyone in the Italian community supported Mussolini, or at least did not oppose him."²⁸ Nonetheless, Marcantonio's tepid public opposition to Italian Fascism incited the burning of an effigy of Haile Selassie in front of his home and contributed to his defeat in 1936.²⁹ Furthermore, his known anti-Fascist position caused Il Progresso, by far the most important Italian-language newspaper in New York City, to promote his 1936 opponent and to treat the radical Congressman as a non-person.³⁰ (See p. 396) Subsequently, on the one issue which had the potential of alienating his major electoral base, Marcantonio remained largely silent.

On other issues Marcantonio and Italian Harlem were of one mind. For example, his anti-preparedness/anti-interventionist position prior to United States entry into World War II, which brought him national notoriety and caused him to be branded as an abject follower of the Communist line, was enormously popular in Italian Harlem. In 1940, his election slogan--"Overalls not Uniforms"--corresponded to the

²⁸Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1963), p. 214. On anti-Fascist sentiment in the Italian-American community, see, Gallo, Old Bread New Wine, pp. 224-26. On pro-Fascist sentiment among Boston's Italo-Americans, see John F. Stack, International Conflict in an American City: Boston's Irish, Italians, and Jews, 1935-1944 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), pp. 78-81. Stack notes that: "On May 11, 1936, over fifty thousand members of Boston's Italian community poured into the streets of East Boston. In a spontaneous demonstration of support for Italian victories in Ethiopia, Boston's Italians chanted 'Il Duce, Il Duce, Il Duce' while they hung Haile Selassie in effigy." (p. 79)

²⁹Text of interview with Miriam Sanders. MP 10 (Biographical).

³⁰LaGumina, Vito Marcantonio: The People's Politician, p. 43.

deepest desire of Italian Harlem's residents, that is, not to go to war against their compatriots. Moreover, his general political position on domestic matters was popular. His constant and deft presentation of rich-against-poor issues were undeniably based on the socioeconomic realities of East Harlem. This political approach can be seen in his political propaganda. For example, a 1950 leaflet entitled You Pay through the Nose, which presented Marcantonio's support of price and wage controls, concluded: "The big money boys who are behind Donovan [Marcantonio's opponent] don't want price controls--they want HIGH PRICES. High prices for them mean HIGH PROFITS. They don't permit their man--Bilbo-Donovan--to come out for price control."³¹ Nor was he fearful of pointing a Zola-like accusing finger at his enemies, as he did in a sixteen-page brochure used in the 1940 campaign to urge preservation of constitutional rights and opposition to the nation's entrance into World War II:

The Working People of the United States are Looking to You, the Voters of the 20th Congressional district, to Send Marcantonio Back to Congress.

Who are Marcantonio's Friends?

The Unemployed

The WPA Workers

The Working Men and Women

The Veterans of the World War

The Italians, the Puerto Ricans, Negroes, and other racial minorities

Who Are Marcantonio's Enemies?

The Bosses

The Munitions Makers

The Puerto Rican Sugar Interests

The Light and Gas Profiteers

Hearst and the Liberty League

Marcantonio's Friends Are Your Friends

Marcantonio's Enemies Are Your Enemies.³²

Marcantonio's appeals to Italian Harlem's residents as victims of

³¹Deposited in Covello Collection.

³²MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

exploitation and discrimination and his imprecations against the perpetrators of these calumnies could only receive an enthusiastic response from a community composed almost exclusively of tenement dwellers, workers in low-paying, low-status jobs who frequently experienced unemployment, and an ethnic group which knew it was widely considered to be inferior.³³ Marcantonio's general political appeal tapped all of the resentments that Italian Harlem's socioeconomic reality engendered. An old-time Italian Harlem resident recalled that he got "goose bumps" when Marcantonio spoke, because: "He said what the people wanted to hear. That is, he would promise to fight for what they wanted. They felt that they would benefit from his election."³⁴ The significant degree of congruity between Marcantonio's political position and those of his Italian Harlem constituents, however, cannot alone account for his electoral successes there. After all, many other similar communities existed in New York City and elsewhere in the United States, which did not support any radical politician over a sustained period. Marcantonio brought many other variables into the equation which consolidated the political loyalty of this unlikely bailiwick for a radical Congressman.

On the House floor, Marcantonio strove mightily and effectively to redress the wrongs dealt out to his countrymen. With the outbreak of World War II, Italo-Americans automatically became objects of deep suspicion for many Americans. Non-citizen Italian-Americans were classified as enemy aliens and in January 1942 they had to register with

³³See footnote 22, p. 178.

³⁴Interview with "Frank," New York City, July 16, 1981.

the police.³⁵ As one of only four Italo-Americans in Congress, and the only one with a national reputation, Marcantonio concentrated on defending his people during that difficult period.³⁶ When, in 1944, an Alabama Congressman stated that Southerners had known what democracy was "one hundred years before the gentleman from New York ever saw the Statue of Liberty," Marcantonio responded to the slur by reminding the House of "the casualties and the number of men from my district who are engaged on every battlefield. . . . While my people did not come over on the Mayflower, . . . my people have always fought for liberty. . . . We are an integral part of the living flesh and blood of our country."³⁷

Before Italy's capitulation in 1943, however, Marcantonio had rarely mentioned the country in Congress. But from that point on, he spoke frequently on matters small and large relating to Italy. In order to "release the untold energies of the Italian people" in the fight against the Axis, he proposed a resolution before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on June 13, 1944, calling for recognition of Italy as a full ally. The granting of this status, he argued, would open the way for Lend-Lease aid, full diplomatic ties, and entry in the United Nations.³⁸ Again, in February 1945, he presented a bill incorporating

³⁵Bayor, p. 124.

³⁶Salvatore J. LaGumina, "Case Studies of Ethnicity and Italo-American Politicians," in The Italian Experience in the United States, eds. Silvano M. Tomasi and Madeline H. Engel (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1973) p. 156. On Marcantonio's legislative activity in behalf of alien rights--an issue of special concern to Italo-Americans--see LaGumina, Vito Marcantonio: The People's Politician, pp. 25-27.

³⁷Congressional Record, May 5, 1944, p. 4888.

³⁸"Marcantonio Seeks Ally Rank for Italy," New York Times (June 14, 1944), p. 8.

many of these same points.³⁹ In subsequent appearances before the Committee, on the floor of the House, and in radio talks Marcantonio hammered away at the following points: accepting Italy as an ally would strengthen the anti-Axis forces; voluntary surrender on a massive scale and the activities of Italian partisans had already proved its worthiness as an ally; and Fascism had been imposed on the country by a traitor, Mussolini, who was now overthrown, and the people had erased the final vestiges of both dictator and dictatorship.⁴⁰

He also addressed a number of vital questions relating to Italy's political life. Heading a delegation to the Italian Ambassador in 1945, Marcantonio presented a petition with 150,000 signatures calling for the establishment of a republic in Italy.⁴¹ He frequently castigated the Marshall Plan as a mechanism for establishing the rule of "Wall Street imperialism" in Italy. More than one-half of the cultivated land, he pointed out, was owned by twenty thousand families, while only 32 percent of the agricultural workers owned land. In great detail, he described the abysmal living conditions of urban workers, insisting that the "imperialist" Marshall Plan would not alleviate them.⁴² (See pp. 68-69, 268) When confronted with the charge that he might favor the coming to power of the Italian Communist Party, he replied: "The Red

³⁹"Bill Plans Aid to Italy," New York Times (February 10, 1945), p. 4.

⁴⁰Congressional Record, May 5, 1944, p. A2196; Radio speech, April 7, 1945. Text deposited in MP 14 (Italy Claims).

⁴¹Text of an article entitled "Congressman Vito Marcantonio Headed a Delegation to Mr. Tarchiana, Ambassador from Italy, Today, and Left a Petition in the Form of a Book with Him." MP 14 (Italy Claims).

⁴²Congressional Record, April 12, 1945, p. A1721.

bogey may frighten politicians here, but it does not frighten the Italian people who are compelled to live under these miserable conditions."⁴³ Marcantonio had more than an Italian surname to attract the positive attention of Italian Harlem's voters. His identification with legislation concerning the old country and his aggressive defense of the Italian-Americans' good name could only have endeared him to the residents of this most Italian of America's Little Italys.

Marcantonio's initial affiliation with the Republican Party was not a political liability in Italian Harlem. Unlike most other working-class immigrant groups in this period, Italian-Americans were attracted to the Republican Party in large numbers. Irish domination of the big city political machines--and in particular Irish domination of Tammany Hall--appeared to have been the largest factor in moving large numbers of Italo-Americans into the Republican fold.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Republicans made serious efforts to attract the Italian immigrants. One observer noted in 1904 that forty Italian Republican clubs had been organized in New York City, while there were not half as many Italian Democratic clubs.⁴⁵ The Italo-Americans' initial identification with

⁴³Congressional Record, December 11, 1947, p. 11304; March 27, 1950, pp. 4168, 4170.

⁴⁴This phenomenon was not limited to East Harlem. In Boston during the same period, the Irish-Americans dominated the Democratic Party, and as a result, of the 110 city councilmen elected between 1924 and 1949 there were only 12 Jews, 9 Yankees, 4 Italians, and one Black. All the remaining councilmen were Irish. By 1930 not a single Italian had been elected to the city council or the state legislature. Consequently, the Italians voted for the Democratic Party in lower percentages than the Irish and their voter participation was low. Stack, pp. 33-34, 39.

⁴⁵George Enrico Pozzetta, "The Italians of New York, 1890-1914" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1971), p. 375; see also pp. 288-89.

the Republican Party in New York City was greatly reinforced-- particularly in East Harlem--by the Republican Party affiliation of the most outstanding Italo-American politician of the city, and indeed of the nation, Fiorello LaGuardia. The tradition of Italo-Americans voting for Republican candidates continued into the thirties because of their perception of the liberal Democrats as being anti-Fascist, which most Italo-Americans confused with being anti-Italian. As a result of this, from 1940 to 1952, Italian Harlem--with the help of American Labor Party votes--generally elected Republicans to the state legislature. (See Tables 8, 9, 10) Marcantonio's Republican Party designation from 1934 through 1944, then, was an asset vis-a-vis his Italian Harlem constituency.

Italian Harlem preferred to vote for Marcantonio on either the Republican or Democratic lines. After 1948, however, when the only way they could vote for him was to vote American Labor, they did so, though in somewhat reduced percentages. (See Table 6) Marcantonio's prominence as the leader of the American Labor Party was at all times an asset with his Italian-American constituents. Studies of Italo-Americans' voting behavior indicated that ethnic identification with a candidate increased with his perceived importance.⁴⁶

More generally, however, there was a lack of strong attachment to either major political party, reflected by the existence of many political clubs in Italian communities without nominal ties to Democrats or Republicans. Typically, these clubs were the personal possessions of

⁴⁶Parenti, p. 77. In his study of Italo-American political attitudes, Parenti specifically cites Marcantonio as the "type" of candidate who elicited a strong ethnic response.

their founders. Then, too, there was the underlying low level of political participation by these newcomers. Most Italians arrived in the United States with little or no political experience; intending in time to return home, they were not encouraged to develop political skills in their new "temporary" environment. Only 16 percent underwent naturalization before 1914, and an even smaller percentage were elected to public office until the post-World War II period.⁴⁷ In the broadest terms, then, the political behavior of Italo-Americans, from the beginnings of their great influx into America about 1900 and continuing through Marcantonio's last term of office in 1950, evinced a high degree of alienation from the major political institutions, indeed from the political process itself.

These tendencies go far to define Italo-American support of Marcantonio. He started out as a nominal Republican, sought the Democratic Party's designation, and deserted both for a third party. The Vito Marcantonio Political Association, which, much more than the American Labor Party, served as the political forum for advancing his fortunes in Italian Harlem, replicated the practice of founding personal political clubs in Italian communities.

This half-century of political alienation was symptomatic of a far more pervasive estrangement of Italo-Americans from the social mainstream. The prevailing scholarly consensus is that the two major social characteristics of the Southern Italian immigrants--campanilismo and intense familialism--turned the Southern Italians inward toward community and immediate family, resulting in wariness and hostility

⁴⁷Pozzetta, pp. 365-66, 385-86.

toward forestieri. In Italian Harlem traditional Southern Italian social institutions and mores were particularly persistent. The basic effect of the preservation of la famiglia and campanilismo in Italian Harlem was to cause it to turn in on itself and close off the outside world. (See pp. 172-74) In different, but crucial ways Marcantonio was alienated from that world. This community could respect someone who was not respected by that world, because it did not respect its values. It firmly held to its own values, and Marcantonio's greatest appeal, perhaps, lay in his conformity to them.

Marcantonio's lifestyle was consistent with that of Italian Harlem. The typical residential immobility of Italian immigrants, and even of their American-born offspring, has been documented. (See p. 215) Except for a short period when he lived with LaGuardia (see p. 46), he never lived more than four blocks from the place of his birth, residing at only three addresses: East 112th Street; an apartment in Haarlem House after his marriage; and the home the Marcantonios purchased, 235 East 116th Street, between Second and Third Avenues.⁴⁸ Thus, in 1939, while arguing for a housing bill, he could state with accuracy that he was "born in the slums, . . . raised in the slums, and still live in the slums."⁴⁹

This tendency to maintain residency in one locality, though not necessarily in the same apartment, reflecting the powerful influence of

⁴⁸Interviews with: Ida Hefner, New York City, August 13, 1975; Annette Rubinstein, New York City, August 21, 1975; Frank Maurelli, New York City, August 23, 1976.

⁴⁹Annette Rubinstein, ed., I Vote My Conscience: Debates, Speeches, and Writings of Vito Marcantonio, 1935-1950 (New York: Vito Marcantonio Memorial, 1956), p. 109.

la famiglia which, at least in an a milieu such as Italian Harlem, persisted almost intact into the second and third generations. Maintaining childhood friendships was a subsidiary but essential element in this structure. These friends were often awarded quasi-familial status through godparentage, which could be achieved by being best man at a wedding, the child of a godparent, or the sponsor at a baptism. Compadrismo, that is, this broad conception of godparentage, was one of the few Italian words still in general usage among the second- and third-generation Italo-Americans whom Herbert Gans studied in the late fifties.⁵⁰ The weakness of the church and other organizations as social influences among Southern Italians enhanced the importance of this network of kin and friends.

Marcantonio's lifelong residence within a few square blocks allowed him to remain a part of this network. Into his home came his widowed mother and paternal grandmother to live in the downstairs apartment with his reclusive brother, Frank. His office occupied the first floor, cousins rented the second floor, and the Marcantonios lived on the third floor. Like her younger son, Marcantonio's mother, Angelina, was a rather reclusive person, rarely leaving the house except to attend church; his grandmother did the shopping. His brother was such a recluse that many of Marcantonio's closest associates, including those who had been to the house many times, were unaware of his existence. Probably schizophrenic, he was institutionalized after his

⁵⁰Gans, p. 74; Williams, pp. 79-80.

mother's death. He was visited weekly by Miriam until her death in 1963. In contrast to his mother and brother, Marcantonio's paternal grandmother was exceptionally outgoing. Angelina never attended political meetings and appeared to be only dimly aware that her son was a Congressman, but his grandmother frequented his street-corner rallies. She was known to have silenced hecklers, and once even hit one with her umbrella. She would bring freshly squeezed orange juice to rallies because of her belief that it could arrest Marcantonio's diabetes, and it was she, not his wife, who cooked his meals. She was also a very active member of the "cathedral" of Italian Harlem, Our Lady of Mount Carmel. She worshipped him, and he fully reciprocated. When an associate asked Marcantonio, who always maintained a certain detachment from people, whether there was anyone he trusted completely, he replied: "Yes, my grandmother." This was not entirely a glib answer, because he considered her to be an accurate barometer of sentiment in his major political base, the Italian community. He was the sole support of her as well as of his mother and brother. Although by Italo-American standards he had an unusually small family, he maintained close relations with his cousins, and was particularly fond of one of his cousin's sons. After the war, his wife's invalid brother moved in with them.⁵¹

Following Italian custom, Marcantonio maintained contact with his childhood friends. His personal physician, Salvatore Cutolo, for example, had been an active member of Il Circolo Italiano at De Witt Clinton. Most of these friends, however, never became doctors; most

⁵¹Interviews with Rubinstein, Ida Hefner, Maurelli.

never even completed high school. In the words of a particularly close friend, the Congressman never forgot the "boy who didn't make it, the boy who fell into bad company, Sammy who worked at the racetrack, the one who worked at the post office."⁵²

He also continued contact with friends who had drifted into the rackets, into the Mafia. Italian Harlem was a major Mafia center, especially in the social clubs and cafes along East 116th Street. None of his associates interviewed for this study would--or could--deny his contact with alleged mafiosi, but it is most difficult to obtain verification of the extent or nature of this relationship.

Marcantonio often used his influence to assist alleged and convicted criminals from East Harlem. He requested executive clemency and submitted private bills in the House to forestall the deportation of convicted felons. In at least two cases, the bills were submitted on behalf of convicted narcotics offenders.⁵³ That he went beyond pro forma efforts to help alleged members of the Mafia is perhaps best documented by this letter from his major legal aide: "It seems that we are up against a stone wall on the Manago bail reduction. Shilback informs me that he has spoken with the police officer who made the arrest, and was told that the Manago boy was working with a ring of dope peddlers, and if he permitted a reduction of bail, he would be putting himself on a spot with the police. He seems anxious to help but his hands are tied."⁵⁴ In 1947 Police Commissioner Arthur Wallender opened

⁵²Interview with Charles Collins, South Norwalk, Conn., August 25, 1976.

⁵³MP 16 (Collaci, F.) and MP 7 (Q).

⁵⁴Aide Report, Fink 1929-40, January 10, 1940. MP 44.

a concerted drive to harass the alleged mafiosi in East Harlem in response to widespread accusations of police laxity that led to drastic shakeups in the department. The first act in the campaign began with the arrest of fifteen members of the Monte Vulture Social Club on East 116th Street for making noise and playing cards for money. Marcantonio stated that, at the moment of the arrest, he was walking down the street from his home, which was almost directly across the street, to buy a newspaper. He went to the aid of the defendants, advising them not to talk and then convincing the judge to dismiss the charges. Later he issued a statement noting that the club had been in existence for twenty-two years and was always on top in bond drives and fund-raisers like the March of Dimes.⁵⁵ The following week he submitted on behalf of fifteen East Harlem clubs a show-cause order restraining Wallender from imposing a curfew on all the district's social clubs.⁵⁶ An aide of Wallender's stated: "A great many of these clubs' members have long police records."⁵⁷ Responding that police abridgment of civil rights in his district had converted East Harlem into a "concentration camp without a fence," Marcantonio charged Wallender with "attempting to exploit malicious prejudices" against the district.⁵⁸

In the 1952 Congressional hearing into Mafia activity,

⁵⁵"Marcantonio May Sue Wallender to Bar 'Harrassing' Harlem Clubs," New York Times (January 29, 1947), p.4.

⁵⁶"Marcantonio Acts on Clubs' Curfew," New York Times (February 2, 1947), p. 28.

⁵⁷"Clubs Protest Curfew," New York Times (February 15, 1947), p. 30.

⁵⁸"Marcantonio Files Reply," New York Times (February 15, 1947), p. 30.

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Marcantonio's name came up at least twice. Vince Rao listed a number of public officials with whom he was friendly, including Marcantonio.⁵⁹ When asked, "Did you contribute a loan to [Marcantonio]?" Tommy Lucchese replied: "[Marcantonio] said [when I offered him money], 'No, Tom, I have all the money I need.'"⁶⁰ Marcantonio had appointed Lucchese's son to West Point in 1947.⁶¹

The Congressman's connections with the Mafia were widely reported in the press, often in the most sensational manner. For example, the Daily Mirror from August to Election Day 1946 ran a series of articles attacking his alleged Mafia connections headlining some of these articles as follows: "Marcantonio's Underworld Machine," "Marcantonio's Underworld Empire: The Inside Story," "Marcantonio Had Dinner with Harlem's Vice Queen," "Marcantonio Has Dinner with Harlem Underworld Chieftain," "ALP Stronghold being Operated by Convicted Dope Peddler," "Dope Peddler Sought Marc," "Floaters, Gorillas Get Votes for Marc," "Marc Accompanied by Body Guard of Five," and "Convicts, Traitors, Thugs Campaign for Marcantonio."⁶² The extensive Congressional investigations into the possible criminality implied in these newspaper stories uncovered no evidence to sustain them. Nor is there any indication that such constant attacks engendered a negative effect on his East Harlem constituency. If anything, they created a

⁵⁹"Rao, Lanza Knew Public Officials," New York Times (November 18, 1952), p. 27.

⁶⁰"Lucchese Testifies to Social Contacts with Mayor, Judges," New York Times (November 18, 1952), p. 11.

⁶¹FBI File. Agent's Report.

⁶²August 4, August 4, August 6, August 6, August 8, August 11, August 16.

simmering resentment, since once again the attacks were viewed as directed against the community as much as against Marcantonio. The residents simply did not regard their community as a "racket-ridden, gun-dominated district." Even more important, it seems that Marcantonio's attitude and behavior toward the Mafia corresponded to those prevailing in Italian Harlem. Hostility toward the outside world allowed it to condone the activities that others called illegal. As long as they did not hurt the community, little or no disapproval was expressed toward gamblers, even racketeers.⁶³ One long time Italian Harlem resident recalled that when the police would arrest members of social clubs, Marcantonio would go to the precinct, point to the arrested men and say, "I'm concerned about these men." He further remembered that the police showed him obvious respect.⁶⁴

Marcantonio's relationship with members of the Mafia might best be described as mutually respectful, but circumspect. They knew that open support for him would have made him vulnerable. His bodyguards were probably tied into the Mafia, and Charney reported that individuals of the "gangster world [were] part of Marc's entourage. . . ."⁶⁵ Perhaps because of their appreciation that a vilified but famous man was willing to be associated with them, even sub rosa, the Mafia provided discreet but substantial assistance to his campaigns. Of considerable importance to Marcantonio was the use of Mafia-related social clubs as centers of election activities. Most important, it never opposed him;

⁶³Gans, p. 127.

⁶⁴Interview, "Frank."

⁶⁵Charney, A Long Journey, p. 108.

had it done so, the "Marcantonio phenomenon" might have been stillborn.⁶⁶

With no Mafia interference to contend with, Marcantonio made certain he never intruded upon its turf. East Harlem had an overworld consisting of absentee landlords, nonresident businessmen, and banks; and an underworld, the Mafia. Marcantonio chose to fight the overworld, while never denying he knew the local mafiosi. At the preliminary hearing of the Congressional investigation into his 1946 campaign, he was specifically asked about his relations with an alleged racketeer mentioned in a Daily Mirror article. He explained:

Joseph Bofaro lives across the street from where I live and I know him. I was born and raised in that district and I know everybody in that district, good, bad, doctors, lawyers, Indians, thieves, honest people, everybody. Outside of discussing the weather and any other innocuous thing, I have no financial, no political, and no social connection with Joseph Bofaro. . . .

People come to me for help. People who are not in trouble do not come to you for help. The people who come to you for help are the people in trouble, and if anybody is in need of help, and if he can in a legitimate manner be helped, such as offering free legal counsel or anything like that, I have done it and I am going to continue to do it.⁶⁷

Marcantonio's natural impulse was to help the underdog, and he included racketeers in that category. To him, they were the clever boys from the neighborhood who never had the chance to attend De Witt Clinton.⁶⁸ He blamed society, not the criminal, for crime. Crime, he said:

cannot be extirpated by the police. Its causes cannot be eliminated

⁶⁶Interview with Francesco Cordasco, August 25, 1976; interviews with Edward Wallenstein, New York City, August 5, 1976; interviews with Maurelli and Ida Hefner.

⁶⁷MP 12.

⁶⁸Interview, Maurelli.

by the rotten police system. The causes of crime are much more fundamental than the failure to enforce the law. They are rooted in the overcrowding of people in our community, in our dilapidated houses, in the sickness produced by these conditions, by the lack of health facilities, by the exploitation of the workers, by unemployment, and by the economic and social conditions that cry out for reform.⁶⁹

In other crucial ways, Marcantonio's attitudes and behavior were congruent to those prevailing in Italian Harlem. For example, his brand of Catholicism mirrored that of most second-generation Italo-American males. Although identifying himself as a Catholic in campaign literature and in public statements,⁷⁰ he did not attend mass or in any other way practice his professed religion. He did, however, march in the annual street procession during the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and contributed to local churches.⁷¹ All his adult life he wore religious medals and carried religious amulets; when he died, three such

⁶⁹"'La criminalidad en Harlem, producto de la situacion alli'--V. Marcantonio," La Prensa (April 21, 1939), p. 4. George Charney noted the "tolerant attitude he displayed toward people with whom he grew up, who drifted into the gangster world. With them he shared the common heritage of the streets of East Harlem; the common deep-seated resentment of an immigrant, peasant people against the hostile world that surrounded them. He rejected their way, though he would not preach against them. Though some of these men were part of Marc's entourage, we [that is, the Communist Party] reasoned they were an inescapable feature of ghetto politics." A Long Journey, p. 108.

The considerable racketeer presence in Italian Harlem is noted by David Durk in The Pleasant Avenue Connection (New York: Harper & Row, 1977): "The men who processed and distributed more than half of this country's heroin supply began working out of fixed locations on Pleasant Avenue in East Harlem sometime in the late 1940's." According to Durk, this situation continued until 1973. (pp. 26, 174)

⁷⁰"Isaacs Backs Right to Appoint Gerson," New York Times (March 13, 1938), p. 31; Biography of Vito Marcantonio: ALP Candidate for Mayor, 1949. Campaign brochure. MP 25 (Miscellaneous Correspondence 1939-53 1 of 3) In this regard, Pozzetta remarked upon "the peculiar ability of Italians to think of themselves as Roman Catholics regardless of the state of their devotion and attachment to that institution." (p. 303) See also Williams, p. 122.

⁷¹Interviews with Rubinstein and Maurelli.

medallions were found among his effects.⁷² Once, when he lost his wallet, he told another Congressman, Eugene McCarthy, that he greatly regretted the loss because the wallet contained a medal of Mother Cabrini, an Italo-American who had been recently canonized, and another medal he had received when he was confirmed.⁷³

He was frequently asked to speak at communion breakfasts and other events sponsored by church-related societies. He almost invariably accepted such invitations as the following: "The members of the Holy Name Society of Our Lady Queen of Angels cordially invites you to attend a social to be given on Sunday. The purpose of the entertainment is to raise funds for supplying the men of our Society and parish in the armed forces with religious articles for their own personal use and for erecting a shrine in their memory."⁷⁴ In addition, he performed many important services for the local clergy, such as interceding with the Department of Welfare on behalf of their parishioners. Perhaps even more important, he assisted one priest's relative to resolve an immigration problem.⁷⁵ When another priest died, he sent the following telegram: "Shocked to learn of Father Sebastian's death. Will fly in to be present at funeral tomorrow."⁷⁶ A Father Norbert, who was pastor of Our Lady Queen of Angels, sent Marcantonio congratulations on both his name day and on election victories. After

⁷²Schaffer, p. 90.

⁷³Congressional Record, August 10, 1954.

⁷⁴Dated May 22, 1944. MP 50 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

⁷⁵Aide Report: Tornese '42. MP 48.

⁷⁶Marcantonio to Rev. Norbert, April 6, 1939. MP 4 (Ca-C1).

Marcantonio's 1940 win, the priest wrote: "Permit me to express to you my sincere congratulations on your reelection to the House and I wish you every success. Permit me also to bring to your attention a petition that has been placed with me for you. . . ."77

An undated verbatim transcript entitled "Conversation between V. Marcantonio and Father Kelly: Saint Cecilia's Rectory," captures the quality of Marcantonio's relationship with the Roman Catholic church in East Harlem.

VM: I am calling you because I have been informed of the following situation. I do not believe it. That is why I am taking it up directly with you. Pedro Colon . . . was ejected from your organization because he was active for me. A committee called to see you in his behalf and they were told that that was the reason for his expulsion.

Father Kelly: Pedro was not expelled for that reason at all. He was expelled for very good reasons from the club, which I cannot mention to you. I would like to know the persons who have telling these stories.

VM: I do not want to involve anyone. I knew I would get the truth from you. If you say that the fact that he worked for me was not the reason he was expelled, then the matter is closed.

Father Kelly: I am quite concerned about it and I have to look into the matter, if they are making accusations. This is not a civil club, it is a religious organization.⁷⁸

Occasionally the differences between Marcantonio's political positions and those of the official church surfaced. In January 1939 he received a communication from a priest who had been assigned to a parish in East Harlem: "I feel duty bound to protest any action that would lead to the abolition of America's neutrality vis-a-vis Spain. More specifically, any action on America's part in favor of the Valencia

⁷⁷Norbert to Marcantonio, June 5, 1940, and November 14, 1940. MP 7 (Ca-C1).

⁷⁸MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

government, which is patently communistic and therefore anti-religious. . . ." Marcantonio replied: "This is to acknowledge receipt of your communication which will receive my consideration."⁷⁹

The Congressman's religious behavior drew no criticism from the local Italian clergy. He conformed to common Italo-American male behavior. (See pp. 207-8) As a result, the East Harlem clergy never opposed him politically, even in 1950, when the Roman Catholic church was deeply immersed in the anti-Communist crusade. By contrast, one East Harlem resident recalled that the nuns from the parochial school he attended advised their students to tell their parents not to vote for Marcantonio.⁸⁰ This school was staffed by an order of German-American nuns that originated in Wisconsin. One of Marcantonio's campaign captains recalled that in one Yorkville parish, the priest would fulminate against Marcantonio from the pulpit before Election Day.⁸¹ There is no comparable example of this in an East Harlem Roman Catholic church.

Even when the Roman Catholic Church attacked Marcantonio, as occasionally happened outside of the local Italian clergy, the effect on his Italian Harlem constituents was minimal because under the prevailing Southern Italian mores, the influence of the church was severely restricted. Indeed, according to Covello: "The important factor is that the Americanization of . . . an Italian church goes on much faster

⁷⁹Rev. Osmond O'Connell to Marcantonio, January 11, 1939; Marcantonio to O'Connell, January 18, 1939. MP 52 (Spanish Research).

⁸⁰Interview with anonymous informant, New York City, August 1, 1980.

⁸¹Interview with Robert Rusch, New York City, August 5, 1976.

than that of the Italo-American community itself. And the result is that the church becomes more and more remote from the emotional patterns, the sentiments and mores of the community. The church retains its canonic dignity, but its social rapport with the people weakens."⁸² Another student of Southern Italian immigrants noted that "in America the Italian turned to the politician when he was in trouble, and to the church for solace if the politician's power proved illusory."⁸³ At least one parish minister in East Harlem recognized the weakness of its churches vis-à-vis Marcantonio's "power" when he stated: "The God of the churches which East Harlem knows stays in celestial splendor far above this earth, but the God of this life is Vito Marcantonio and his Kingdom is the American Labor Party. Obviously the God who can get the plumbing fixed becomes the center of faith for the great majority."⁸⁴ This comparative lack of influence of the church in Italian Harlem, then, had the effect of neutralizing one potentially powerful source of opposition within the community to Marcantonio's alleged communism.

Marcantonio adhered to the Italian lifestyle in innumerable lesser ways. When urged to take off his jacket on warm days, he would invariably respond: "But there are women here!" He would never carry bags of groceries, explaining that such an unmacho activity "would ruin me in the neighborhood." When once he was seen washing dishes, he said,

⁸²Leonard Covello, "Cultural Assimilation and Church," Religious Education (July-August 1944), p. 233.

⁸³Lawrence Frank Pisani, The Italians in America: A Study and History (New York: Exposition Press, 1957), p. 64.

⁸⁴Patricia Cayo Sexton, Spanish Harlem (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 85.

"I'll kill you if you tell anyone!" He never cursed or used vulgar language in front of women, but he could be quite coarse in male company.⁸⁵ During the 1948 campaign, Henry Wallace asked him how it was progressing. "I'm doing all right," he replied. "I never take any shit from anyone and I'm not going to take shit from anyone this time." He continued in this vein for some time. When Marcantonio departed Wallace observed, "Don't you think Vito uses picturesque language?"⁸⁶

Most students of Italo-American communities have noted the people's "insatiable appetite for group experience."⁸⁷ Marcantonio was never known to stay alone, preferring to travel in a group and revel the night away with his neighborhood friends and political associates. He also adhered to much of the folk religion of Southern Italians. He was quite superstitious, believing, for example that it was good luck to touch the hump of a hunchback. Every election night he insisted that the final tally be counted by the same trusted associate. When he cast his ballot he would wear a threadbare coat, as his talisman of victory in past elections.⁸⁸

But in some ways, he departed from tradition. When an Italian family asked him to be the godfather of their child (Marcantonio was purportedly godfather to hundreds of East Harlem children), explaining

⁸⁵Interviews: Rubinstein and Ida Hefner.

⁸⁶MacDougall, p. 96.

⁸⁷Gans, p. 21; Phyllis H. Williams noted: "Southern Italians cling to the outstanding features of their old ways, especially group living. . . ." South Italian Folkways in Europe and America: A Handbook for Social Workers, Visiting Nurses, School Teachers, and Physicians (New York: Russell and Russell, 1969), p. 45.

⁸⁸Interviews with: Rusch, Rubinstein, Ida Hefner, Wallenstein; LaGumina, The People's Politician, p. 132; see Williams, p. 103.

their intention to name the child Vito, he exploded: "Don't do that, give the child an American name!"⁸⁹ Many observers have noted that in Italo-American social situations and voluntary organizations there was an almost total segregation of the sexes.⁹⁰ In this regard Marcantonio broke sharply with the mores of his community. He had a large number of women associates with whom he worked and socialized. Most sources have identified Lillian Landau as the closest of all. Her primary responsibility was supervision of his political apparatus, which was more than half female, but she was a valued confidant and may have written some of his speeches. He also had a very close political and personal relationship with Anna Damon, the executive director of the International Labor Defense and an important figure in the Communist Party.⁹¹

Marcantonio's greatest break with the mores and folkways of his community was his marriage to Miriam Sanders. Exogamy (often narrowly defined as marrying an Italian from a different region of Italy) was severely frowned upon. A study of intermarriage rates among various ethnic groups in New Haven indicated that in 1900 less than 3 percent of Italians intermarried and that, as recently as 1950, 75 percent of the Italo-American group married endogamously. In fact, Italo-Americans wanting to separate themselves from the mores and strictures of the family and community most often found exogamy to be the means of

⁸⁹Interview, Collins.

⁹⁰Gans, p. 41.

⁹¹Interviews with Ida Hefner, Rubinstein, and Louise Berman, New York City, July 27, 1976.

accomplishing this goal.⁹² The politically negative reaction of Italian Harlem to Marcantonio's marriage to a non-Italian was diminished because Sanders was a figure in her own right within the community. Her position as head social worker in Haarlem House--a position she held from around 1920 until after her husband's death--gave her considerable status. Although she did not share in Italian Harlem's culture, she was not an outsider. (See pp. 39-40).

Marcantonio's break with the mores of his community occurred in the most personal and private area of his life, but in the public arenas, particularly in his function as a politician, he completely fulfilled the expectations of the community. As Herbert Gans noted, the kind of politician desired by a community of Southern Italian immigrants was one who would act as an "ambassador to the outside world." Since government was perceived as a system through which individuals sought to maximize their advantages, the Southern Italian considered the willingness and ability of a politician to do favors as the "most important index for evaluating him." In this area no one could best Marcantonio: his willingness and ability to deliver "favors" were legendary. Gans observed that Southern Italian-Americans preferred calling on a local politician rather than on settlement houses and other social agencies for the services that either was capable of performing because the politician "provides a service to voters in exchange for political loyalty. In return, he is able to spare them contact with missionary caretakers who want to change their behavior, or who ask

⁹²Parenti, P. 33; Child, pp. 96, 111. A lifelong resident of Italian Harlem recalled: "Marcantonio, Corsi, and LaGuardia all married non-Italians and many hated them for it." Peter Pascale, New York City, July 16, 1981.

questions which imply to [the people of the Southern Italian community] that they ought to change their behavior. Thus, he shelters them from discomfort and rejection by the outside world."⁹³ Gans explored two other characteristics expected of politicians by the Italian community he studied, which (aside from its small size) bore many similarities to the Italian Harlem of Marcantonio's time. First, they were obligated to provide information "not only to fill the news vacuum, but to deliver unpublished information about behind-the-scenes activities and about motivations so that [the people] may interpret the news according to their own theory of government." Second, politicians were there to provide, even if vicariously, the means for constituents to vent frustrations--to "arouse them, and to express for them their own anger at the outside world." Marcantonio fulfilled these requirements spectacularly. It was as if he had read Gans' statement that if a politician were "willing to do favors and to vote properly on the few issues that concern them, he is free to act as he sees fit. He can vote his conscience, and make alliances that will help him politically and financially."⁹⁴ This freedom was elastic enough to permit Marcantonio often to cast the lone vote in the House of Representatives and not lose the support of Italian Harlem. Within a community governed by Southern Italian mores, Gans also found:

The major criteria for ranking, differentiating, and estimating compatibility are ingroup loyalty and conformity to established standards of personal behavior, as well as interpersonal relations. The members of this community expect each other to maintain prevalent social practices and consumer styles, to marry within the ethnic--or at least the religious--group, and to reject

⁹³Gans, pp. 171-72.

⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 173, 176.

middle-class forms of status and culture.⁹⁵

Gans further noted: "The highest status accrues to the person who makes the most material and nonmaterial contributions to the group, without using these to flaunt or to indicate his economic or cultural superiority."⁹⁶ A similar point about the expectations nourished by the Italo-American family toward its children was made by Glazer and Moynihan:

Accomplishment for the Italian son is felt by the parents to be meaningless unless it directly gratifies the family--for example, by maintaining the closeness of the family or advancing the family's interests through jobs and marriage. There are distinctive solutions to this problem of expressing individualism while staying within the group. One can become a local lawyer, staying in the neighborhood and active in politics, or a local doctor, or a local businessman.⁹⁷

Marcantonio's career as, a neighborhood lawyer, and then as a local politician fit these precepts.

Actually, from the time of Lanzetta's final defeat in 1940, there was no meaningful opposition to Marcantonio, political or otherwise, in his home base. From that point on, all would-be dethroners came from outside the community. The result of this "foreign" opposition, therefore, may very well have served to consolidate Italian Harlem's support of its beleaguered Congressman. As Gans noted, Southern Italian-Americans were willing to "subordinate themselves to someone

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 27.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Glazer and Moynihan, pp. 197-98. See also Pisani, p. 137; Leo Grebler, Housing Market Behavior in a Declining Area: Long-Term Changes in Inventory and Utilization of Housing on New York's Lower East Side (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 140.

whom they recognized as a leader [but] they will bitterly reject the individual who is imposed as a leader from outside--or who tries to impose himself."⁹⁸ Marcantonio, after all, was the quintessential insider, his opponents unquestionably outsiders. This was of inestimable importance in enabling him to maintain political leadership of Italian Harlem.

Marcantonio not only exemplified, but also defended the community and its mores. For example, he responded swiftly to any attack on his own Italian background. On October 25, 1946, when the World Telegram wrote cavalierly that the "people in [Marcantonio's] district are getting fed up with the the old-world Padrone [sic] attitude [of his]," he issued a broadside to "All Italian Speakers" (that is, all his campaign workers who delivered speeches in Italian) encouraging them to incorporate references to this phrase in their street-corner speeches. The memorandum noted:

This is a slur on the intelligence and integrity of people of Italian origin. Everyone knows that the Italians emancipated themselves from the Padrone system long, long ago. The use of the word Padrone is Italian-baiting. . . . In carrying out its anti-Italian campaign the World Telegram is concentrating its guns against Marcantonio. . . . First it's hoodlums [here Marcantonio is referring to the paper's articles on organized crime in Italian Harlem]--now it's Padrone attitude. The only answer is a united vote for Vito Marcantonio. . . .⁹⁹

Similarly, in 1949, when Marcantonio's Democratic opponent in the mayoral campaign, William O'Dwyer, referred to "Marcantonio's fine Italian hand," Marcantonio demanded a public apology. "This language of yours only serves to incite race hatred in this campaign," he

⁹⁸Gans, p. 85.

⁹⁹MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

thundered.¹⁰⁰ About the same time, a columnist for the Brooklyn Eagle commented: "American Laborites complain that Vito Marcantonio's Mayoralty campaign is getting a newspaper blackout. Couldn't happen to a nicer fish-peddler!" Marcantonio's prompt response was a campaign leaflet in English and Italian that noted:

"FISH PEDDLERS!" You've heard the expression from the time you were small. You know what it means in their mouths.

This Mr. Harris [the Eagle columnist], this salesman of Democratic politics, dips his pen into the cesspool of anti-Italian prejudice and smears the name of VITO MARCANTONIO, pupil and friend of FIORELLO LAGUARDIA, Italian-American fighter for all the people.

WIPE OUT THE INSULT!

Throw out the officeholders of the Democratic and Republican Party.

Elect VITO MARCANTONIO.¹⁰¹

Though there is no way to measure the effect, it seems quite certain that these slurs on Marcantonio's ethnic background and his responses to them solidified even further the support of Italian Harlem behind him.

Marcantonio also came to the defense of individual Italo-Americans who experienced defamation or discrimination. A highly publicized incident of this nature occurred in 1945 when an Italo-American living in Brooklyn wrote Sen. Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi castigating him for opposing continuation of the Fair Employment Practices Commission. (On numerous occasions, Marcantonio personally pressed this Commission to investigate discriminatory acts against Italo-Americans.) In his response, Bilbo addressed the the woman as: "My dear Dago." Marcantonio demanded an apology, pointing out that the woman had three brothers in the Armed Forces, one of whom had died

¹⁰⁰"Marcantonio Asks U.S. School Help," New York Times (October 18, 1949), p. 32.

¹⁰¹Covello Collection.

during the war. Bilbo refused, sending the Congressman a bristling two-page letter:

It is through you and your gang, and I dare say many of them are gangsters, from the sin-soaked, communistic sections of the great metropolis of New York that practically all the rotten, crackpot, communistic legislative schemes are being thrown into the Congressional "mill." . . . The country should know that you ran for office on the Communist Party ticket. . . . You are neither fish nor fowl--you are neither a Democrat or Republican--you are a notorious political mongrel. . . . Your main purpose is to arouse enmities and antagonism, hatreds, and animosities--that is the stock and trade of all Communists in America.

Marcantonio published in the Congressional Record some of the vast correspondence generated by the principals in this incident, but not his own reply, which called Bilbo "Hitler's inconsolable male widow." This well-publicized controversy concluded with Bilbo insisting he was motivated solely by a desire "to fight against the mongrelization of the two races in America. . . . With the respect and love that I have for the Caucasian blood that flows not only in my veins but in the veins of Jews, Italians, Poles and other nationalities of the White race, I would not want to see it contaminated with Negro blood."¹⁰²

Anti-Italian defamation was, of course, nothing new to Marcantonio in the late forties. In 1936 a New York City high school principal criticized a teacher's approach to instructing Italian and Polish students:

¹⁰²Bilbo to Josephine Piccolo, July 1, 1945; Piccolo to Marcantonio, July 18, 1945; Marcantonio to Bilbo, July 21, 1945; Marcantonio to Piccolo, July 24, 1945; Bilbo to Marcantonio, July 24, 1945; Marcantonio to Bilbo, July 25, 1945; Sen. James M. Mead to Marcantonio, July 30, 1945; Marcantonio to Piccolo, August 2, 1945; Bilbo to Marcantonio, September 4, 1945; "Bilbo Refuses Apology to Brooklyn Woman for Addressing Her as 'My Dear Dago'," New York Times (July 24, 1945), p. 15; "Apology from 'Dago' Demanded by Bilbo," New York Times (July 12, 1945), p. 2; Congressional Record, July 2, 1945, pp. 7994-99.

You claim to know these pupils and that they must be led gently. I think that your knowledge is not very deep. You have never once mentioned one real problem, that of racial antagonisms. I have a considerable knowledge of the background of these boys and girls, I lived thirty-five years of my life in Greenpoint. The majority are Polish and Italian, they cling to their kind, they cannot distinguish freedom from license, they obey only when they must, they consider kindness as a sign of weakness, freedom to choose must be taught gradually.

Marcantonio issued a protest to the Commissioner of the Board of Education that led to a reprimand of the principal and the establishment of the study of Italian as part of the curriculum in that high school.¹⁰³

In 1946, Marcantonio protested to the management of the Roxy Theater because of its screening of The House of Strangers (in which Edward G. Robinson played a small-scale Italian banker), which he claimed discredited Italo-Americans.¹⁰⁴ In 1953, Marcantonio angrily reacted to a New York Times editorial concerning the Italian elections, which in part stated: "Of course, the greatest culprit is the Italian citizenry, which is so congenitally recalcitrant, so politically fickle, so ungrateful even to good government, so instinctively inclined to anarchical opposition that millions prefer to go to extremes when the moderation of freedom and democracy is offered to them." In a press release, an angry Marcantonio, then out of office, characterized these comments as an "arrogant expression of your contempt for a people who will not bow to your will."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³J. Siegal to Marcantonio, February 8, 1936; Marcantonio to Dr. Albert C. Bonaschi, Commissioner of the Board of Education, April 23, 1936; Bonaschi to Marcantonio, April 27, 1936; Marcantonio to Charles J. Hendley, president of the Teachers Union. MP 8 (Teachers Union).

¹⁰⁴LaGumina, "Case Studies," p. 159.

¹⁰⁵press release, June 11, 1953. MP.

Many of the newspaper attacks on Marcantonio backfired because they contained negative evaluations and descriptions of Italian Harlem. In the 1948 campaign, the column "Broadway and Elsewhere" in the New York Daily Mirror stated that "Marcantonio with his following of hoodlums, reliefers, Communists, and jobholders in his East Harlem section has instructed many of them . . . to write his name on the paper ballots of [the parties other than the American Labor Party in the primaries]." ¹⁰⁶ In 1946 another Daily Mirror article lambasted Marcantonio as a

complex production of our turbulent years; a swashbuckling, domineering tyrant, who smashed and squirmed his way to unbridled power in one short decade--with the aid of motley minions recruited through depression and war years from the ranks of radical partisans, professional adventurers, and the scum of the slums. . . . Today he has fastened a deadly and grimy grip on a good part of the world's most civilized city; his clubs are infested with police characters, dope peddlers and ex-convicts ¹⁰⁷

Another article in the same series stated, "East Harlem is almost a world unto itself: . . . with a polyglot population full of old and new prejudices and superstitions; tenements, poverty, colorful markets, attracting rich and poor, decent and dissolute alike, and harboring a Mecca of mediocre night life." ¹⁰⁸ This sort of press tirade was not confined to the Daily Mirror. From the New York Herald-Tribune came the report that "East Harlem is an area of 'hot-bed apartments'--in which beds are slept in on eight-hour shifts and never cool. It is an area of juvenile gangs, some of which have under-age girl friends carry their

¹⁰⁶August 24, 1948, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷August 4, 1946, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸"Marcantonio: A Great Depression Disaster," New York Daily Mirror (August 5, 1946), p. 4.

weapons."¹⁰⁹ A 1946 World Telegram headline blared: "East Harlem Key [Narcotics] Center, U.S. Reveals." According to this article, "The revived Mafia (Black Hand) is controlled by the sons of immigrants who operated the original organization, . . . and has been . . . subsidizing political clubs to gain protection from the police" ¹¹⁰ Not to be outdone, a New York Sun story, headlined "Mafia Runs East Harlem Crime, Says U.S. Narcotics Chief Here," reported that the "so-called Marcantonio district in East Harlem has become one of the toughest, most lawless in the city."¹¹¹ A Time magazine article from 1946, entitled "Veto Vito?" stated: "The core of Manhattan's sprawling 18th Congressional District is a verminous, crime-riddled slum called East Harlem. [Populated by] hordes of Italians, Puerto Ricans, Jews, and Negroes" ¹¹² A 1948 Daily Mirror article on "Raid in Reefer Nets Record \$30,000," reported:

Just off "Reefer Row"--one of the most wretched areas in Representative Vito Marcantonio's domain, the Eighteenth Congressional District--three members of the Narcotics Squad made an all-time haul of "Devil's Weed" (Marihuana, the Youth Killer) the other day. A year ago, Garland Williams, chief of the United States Narcotics Bureau, pointed out Marcantonio's East Harlem District is the center of not only the marihuana trade but of America's dope traffic.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹"Inquiry Focuses Spotlight on Ills of East Harlem," New York Herald-Tribune (December 15, 1946), p. 1.

¹¹⁰December 19, 1946, p. 1.

¹¹¹"Police in Marcantonio's District About to Face Drastic Shakeup," New York Sun (December 1, 1946), p. 1.

¹¹²November 4, 1946, p. 24.

¹¹³"Heavy Blow Dealt to Marihuana Racket," New York Daily Mirror (November 14, 1948), p. 3.

Perhaps unknown to East Harlem's residents, their community was also portrayed negatively in a scholarly work. A doctoral dissertation "The Boy Scout Movement in East Harlem," described the territory as an "interstitial area," a term coined by sociologist Frederick Thrasher and defined as "a region characterized by deteriorating neighborhoods,

Slurs on Italian Harlem even occurred in the House of Representatives. When, on the floor of the House, Marcantonio accused the "big trusts of profiteering and wholesale racketeering," a Republican colleague from Pennsylvania rejoined:

Hugh D. Scott: I want to pay tribute to the gentleman as an expert on what constitutes racketeering.

Marcantonio: The gentleman is a much better expert on that than I am.

Scott: No.

Marcantonio: As a matter of fact, I think the gentleman qualifies eminently as an expert on that subject.

Scott: The gentleman knows what racketeering is, and in his own district, too.

Marcantonio: My district is just as good, if not better than the gentleman's district, and I am mighty proud of my district. My district is a district of homes, schools, churches, and workers whose people gave their sons for freedom¹¹⁴

Periodically, the police joined with the press and politicians in expressing disfavor toward Italian Harlem life. Though both continued to exist in Italian Harlem through the fifties, the mutual aid societies based on the members' birthplace were gradually replaced by informal social clubs.¹¹⁵ Given the centrality of familialism and campanilismo, both forms of organization were endemic to Italian Harlem. The sexually segregated social life and general absence of social drinking gave further impetus to the growth of these clubs. (See pp. 203-6.) To the New York City police, few of whom were Italo-Americans,

shifting population and the disorganization of the slum It is to a large extent isolated from the wider culture of the wider community by the process of competition and conflict which have resulted in the selection of the population." Margaret Campbell Tilley, "The Boy Scout Movement in East Harlem" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1935), p. 22. Also, according to Tilley, "A large number of boys in [East Harlem] appear to be mentally retarded." (p. 145)

¹¹⁴Congressional Record, April 15, 1947, p. 3419.

¹¹⁵See, for example, Caroline F. Ware, Greenwich Village 1920-1930: A Comment on American Civilization in the Post-War Years (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 157; and Gans, p. 108.

these clubs, unlike the neighborhood pubs they frequented, were considered to be gambling dens. Marcantonio reported that in 1942, on the eve of the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, he received a call from the pastor of the church complaining that two policemen had entered the Apollo, a social club on East 116th Street, and that shots had been fired. More than fifty club members were arrested. Marcantonio represented them, and the judge dismissed all charges and castigated the arresting police officers. Again, in 1947, the police commissioner imposed a curfew on East Harlem's social clubs following the murder of Joseph Scottoriggio, a Republican Party election district captain who was murdered on Election Day 1946.¹¹⁶ (See pp. 413-22)

There is no doubt that Italian Harlem resented these attacks on their community and police incursions into their clubs. After Scottoriggio's murder, another barrage of press articles portrayed East Harlem negatively. Spearheaded by Leonard Covello, the response was formation of an East Harlem Citizens Committee. A clarion call for action, signed by Covello and listing thirty prominent community leaders, invited the residents to a meeting at Benjamin Franklin High School for a very specific purpose: "As a resident or business or professional man in East Harlem, we are inviting you to join with us in taking adequate measures against the numerous derogatory statements about our community in the press, which are destructive to its business, its property, its social, religious, and educational institutions, and

¹¹⁶"Preliminary Investigation into Alleged Election Irregularities in the Primary Election and General Election in the 18th Congressional District, New York." Testimony of Marcantonio before Robert B. Baker, assistant general counsel and chief investigator of the House Campaign Expenditures Committee, pp. 43-46. MP.

demoralizing to its people."¹¹⁷ The subsequent mass meeting at the school was attended by fifteen hundred persons. Sponsored by the Committee of United Veterans of East Harlem, this group issued a statement charging that the "community was being subjected to a newspaper campaign of slander and vilification which was detrimental to the economic, spiritual, and social well-being of the people."¹¹⁸

These protests notwithstanding, the press attacks continued unabated. How vitriolic they were is exemplified by a Daily Mirror article published during Marcantonio's 1948 campaign. He was, according to this mass-circulation tabloid, a "political pestilence"; someone who "seeks to destroy America so that it can fall easy prey to its Communist enemies"; a "political rotter and a traitor to the interests of his own country." Then it intoned: "Let the Wallaces, the Marcantonios, the Isaacsons rave and lie and hold together a few weaklings, soiled ships and malodorous goats."¹¹⁹

There is no evidence that these assaults eroded Marcantonio's support that year or earlier. Inasmuch as Italian Harlem did not have a community newspaper, the press was regarded as a noisome part of the outside world and treated with great skepticism.¹²⁰ A close and long-time political associate of Marcantonio's recalled that on Election Day, lines of voters would queue up in Italian Harlem. Under the arms of many of these pro-Marcantonio voters would often be a copy of the Daily

¹¹⁷Dated December 20, 1944. CC.

¹¹⁸Transcript not titled or dated. CC.

¹¹⁹"Maybe Vito Is Through" (August 26, 1948), p. 6; "Bryant Leads Fight on Marc" (August 23, 1948), p. 5; "The Big Burg is Red, White, and Blue" (August 26, 1948), p. 5; "Defeat Marcantonio" (October 19, 1948), p. 1.

¹²⁰Gans, pp. 118-19, 194.

Mirror or New York Daily News, which would invariably contain one final blast against the people's favorite candidate.¹²¹

To an outsider, Italian Harlem signified social disintegration, but the insiders participated in a culture that gave them a sense of belonging and dignity denied them elsewhere.¹²² Uncertain that they wanted to be a part of the American mainstream, the Southern Italian immigrants and their progeny were in any case largely excluded from it to begin with. They clung to their families, their social clubs, their church, and their communities.¹²³ The residents of Italian Harlem did not think of it as a crime-ridden slum, and press reports to that effect continued to be deeply resented.¹²⁴ Indeed, when the newspapers hurled the epithet "red" at Marcantonio, the people may have heard "wop."

Marcantonio defeated his last Italo-American opponent, Frank J. Ricca (see p. 405) in the 1942 Democratic primary. After all, Marcantonio's rivals for office were not only non-Italo-American, but also nonresidents of East Harlem. The importance to Italian Harlem in attempting to ensure that an insider continued as their political leader was greatly accentuated by the stark reality that almost all the institutions that impinged on their life--the public schools, the Democratic Party, the Roman Catholic Church, the social agencies, the police--were controlled by non-Italian-Americans.¹²⁵ (See pp. 42, 193,

¹²¹Interview, Ida Hefner.

¹²²Arthur Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times 1882-1933 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 132.

¹²³Yans-McLaughlin, p. 116.

¹²⁴For example, see Gans, p. 20.

¹²⁵Yans-McLaughlin, p. 118.

211-12) And as late as 1941, of the eight Democratic and Republican clubs in East Harlem, only one was led by an Italo-American.¹²⁶

After Lanzetta's final defeat in 1940, only two of Marcantonio's opponents made any real effort to win over some of his Italian Harlem support--John Ellis, Republican-Liberal, in 1948, and James Donovan, the 1950 coalition candidate of the Democratic, Republican, and Liberal Parties.

Unlike Marcantonio's other opponents from outside of the district, Ellis understood the social realities of Italian Harlem. (See pp. 371, 428-29). His political sophistication warned him that the repeated depiction of Marcantonio as an associate of gangsters and a vendor of relief checks implied broad criticism of the residents of East Harlem. He asked the newspapers supporting him, which included all of them except the Daily World and PM, to mention his name in every headline with Marcantonio and not "run down the neighborhood."¹²⁷ Specifically, this request meant omitting any mention of the Scottoriggio murder, and apart from one feature story on November 1 in the New York Post, there were few references to it in the campaign coverage. Ellis himself never once publicly mentioned Scottoriggio during the campaign.¹²⁸ The Daily Mirror, however, continued to publish material offensive to the community.

Ellis was particularly persistent on linking the "Communist issue" to the concerns of Italo-Americans. He was aware that the first

¹²⁶List deposited in Covello Collection.

¹²⁷Interview with John Ellis, quoted in Bingham, p. 115.

¹²⁸Ibid.

postwar elections in Italy had aroused considerable anti-Communist sentiment among Italo-Americans, and also that this sentiment had been galvanized by a nationwide letter-writing campaign on behalf of the opposition Christian Democrats organized by Generoso Pope, editor of Il Progresso, with the approval and support of the State Department and the active participation of the Catholic Church.¹²⁹

On April 11, 1948, Ellis announced that he would personally observe the Italian elections to learn the electoral methods used by the Communists.¹³⁰ He accompanied a United States commission to Italy as a paying member, and had himself photographed in as many towns as possible, sending these pictures back for publication in New York. He procured an election poster used by the Italian Communist Party showing Marcantonio saying: "Truman and Marshall are not Americans. When a truly democratic government has been instituted in Italy, we will regard it with great sympathy." Ellis affixed this poster to his campaign truck.

In his campaign literature and speeches, Ellis stressed Marcantonio's opposition to the Marshall Plan as proof that the incumbent placed Communist Party doctrine above the needs of Italy. Marcantonio's responded by sponsoring the Committee for Free Elections in Italy, which reprinted his speeches in Congress on his anti-Marshall Plan stance.¹³¹ (See pp. 68-69, 235) Ellis also pledged that he would

¹²⁹Ibid., pp. 126-27. The center of this campaign was New York City. Gallo, Old Bread New Wine, p. 235.

¹³⁰"Ellis to Attend Italian Elections," New York Times (April 11, 1948), p. 55.

¹³¹Bingham, p. 127.

demand the return to Italy of its former colonial possessions, a position in stark contrast to Marcantonio's. In response to a letter from Walter White, secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, soliciting Congressional support for placing the former Italian colonies under United Nations mandate status, Marcantonio declared:

Please be advised that I have always been opposed to colonies. I am strongly for:

1. The return of Eritrea and Somaliland to Ethiopia.
2. As for the children of the Italian colonies, they should be placed under a United Nations trusteeship to be trained for self-government and then granted their independence.

I have advised my Italian colleagues from time to time that colonies have only been a burden on the backs of the Italian peasants. They have made them poorer and made the exploiters richer.¹³²

Ellis's campaign literature and speeches contained statements such as: "He is constantly in rebellion against the United States, and predominantly in favor of Russia's communistic ideologies."¹³³ Marcantonio had survived such generalized attacks from the beginning of his career, but Ellis's protracted, concentrated efforts to demonstrate that his opponent's pro-Communist leanings injured the interests of Italy were of a different order. Here Ellis's efforts to erode Marcantonio's main bastion of support met with some success. In 1946, Marcantonio's vote in the Sixteenth Assembly District (Italian Harlem) was 11,517 on the Democratic line and 4,755 on the American Labor Party line, for a total of 16,272, to Bryan's 4,332 on the Republican line--a margin of 3.5 to 1. In 1948, the district provided 3,637 votes for

¹³²"Ellis Blasts Marcantonio's Record, Despite Promises," New York Daily Mirror (October 4, 1948), p. 2; Marcantonio to Walter White, April 29, 1949. MP 3 (Negro).

¹³³Signed by Robert F. Wagner, Jr., dated October 11, 1945.

Ellis on the Republican ticket and 1,656 on the Liberal line for a total of 5,293, while the Democratic Party candidate, John P. Morrissey garnered 5,735 for a grand total of 11,028 to Marcantonio's 14,476--a margin of 3 to 2. In Italian Harlem's assembly district, 57.5 percent of the vote was for Marcantonio, and in its core over 60 percent.¹³⁴

Closer examination, however, reveals that only a fraction of this increased anti-Marcantonio vote resulted from Ellis's campaign. First, it is most striking that the ineffective, inactive Morrissey attracted more votes than Ellis. (See pp. 425-28) Here the appeal of the Democratic label, which Marcantonio himself had worn in 1946, would seem to have been decisive. Overall, the fact that 1948 was a Presidential election year appears to have hurt Marcantonio. That year five thousand more voters cast ballots in the Sixteenth Assembly District than had in 1946. Evidently, these more casual voters, attracted to a Presidential candidate or his party, were less likely to vote for Marcantonio than voters who trudged to the polls every election. This phenomenon had affected Marcantonio in earlier elections (See Table 12).

Ellis's failure to upset Marcantonio's majority in Italian Harlem was due to a remarkable match between the latter's strengths and the former's weaknesses vis-à-vis the electorate. Marcantonio never moved from the area; Ellis was the ultimate outsider, residing in a fourteen-room apartment at 131 East 66th Street, in the Silk Stocking Congressional District. Moreover, he was a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant and a stockbroker listed in the Social Register.¹³⁵

¹³⁴Bingham, addenda.

¹³⁵Ibid., pp. 118-20.

Marcantonio made much of all this. He would flourish a copy of the Social Register and shout: "Do you want one of the Four Hundred, or me, one of the 140 million working Americans?" The ploy worked, with his audiences appearing genuinely disturbed at the notion than anyone, no less a potential Congressman, would live in an apartment consisting of fourteen rooms. Taking a cue from show business, Marcantonio would appear on the back of a truck with a ventriloquist dressed in tails and top hat holding a dummy that represented Ellis. Marcantonio would then introduce the dummy as his opponent--the "mouthpiece of Wall Street." And while the Communist issue worried a large number of Italian Harlemites, for them it was not the only issue. Ellis offered anti-Communism and a very vague liberalism. Marcantonio was more direct: over his clubhouse hung a huge sign: "Don't pay rent increases. If your landlord asks for a rent increase, report here and I shall help you fight the real estate trust. Your Congressman, Vito Marcantonio."¹³⁶

Marcantonio's 1949 mayoral campaign bore meager results city-wide, but Italian Harlem's response was encouraging to his future political prospects. The Sixteenth Assembly District gave him a majority of 16,796 to his two opponents' total of 13,681 votes.¹³⁷ (See pp. 371-73, 430-31) Interestingly, his electioneering elicited a strong response in traditional Italian neighborhoods, but little of this was translated into votes.¹³⁸

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷"Election Results," New York Times (November 10, 1949), p. 6.

¹³⁸The Times gave this account of a night's campaigning in Italian sections of Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side:

"Eighteen hundred persons greeted him enthusiastically at Elizabeth and Prince Streets where the setting off of fireworks

Like Ellis before him, James Donovan hit hard on Marcantonio's opposition to the Marshall Plan while wooing voters in Italian Harlem in 1950. (See pp. 68-69; 432-35)

In 1948, Marcantonio voted against aid to Italy. He said . . . [the Marshall Plan] was designed to enslave the Italian people. Now the Pope of Rome said, "The Marshall Plan is the greatest blessing that Italy has received since the War.

I'm going to ask you one question, ladies and gentlemen. I'll stake my election on your answer to this question: Who is the liar? The Holy Father, or Vito Marcantonio?

A Marcantonio supporter was heard to reply, "We ain't electing the Pope," but one observer of the election noted that Donovan's question was usually met with an "instant hush."¹³⁹

Marcantonio's 1950 campaign had stressed themes already familiar to the people. This time, however, he led off by assailing what he termed a "gang-up" on himself, which appealed to his East Harlem audiences, who defined fairness in a fight as "one-on-one."¹⁴⁰ Like Ellis, Donovan was not a resident of the district, but lived at 400 East 58th Street, in the exclusive Sutton Place area. Again, Marcantonio made much of the advantages of a fashionable address, calling him a "Sutton Place Dixiecrat."¹⁴¹ He repeatedly pointed to a Daily Mirror

saluted his arrival and departure. Speaking in English and Italian, the candidate predicted that O'Dwyer had slipped so badly that he would run third on Election Day. At Avenue C and Third Street a crowd of 750 awaited his arrival after 10:30 P.M. . . . At Bleecker and the Avenue of the Americas [the crowd] reached 500 and at Sullivan and Prince Streets 300." "Mayor Desperate, Marcantonio Says," New York Times (November 1, 1949), p. 12.

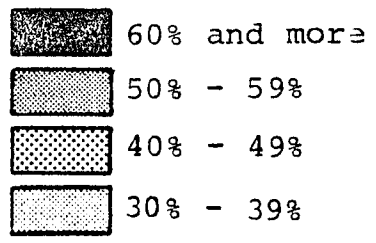
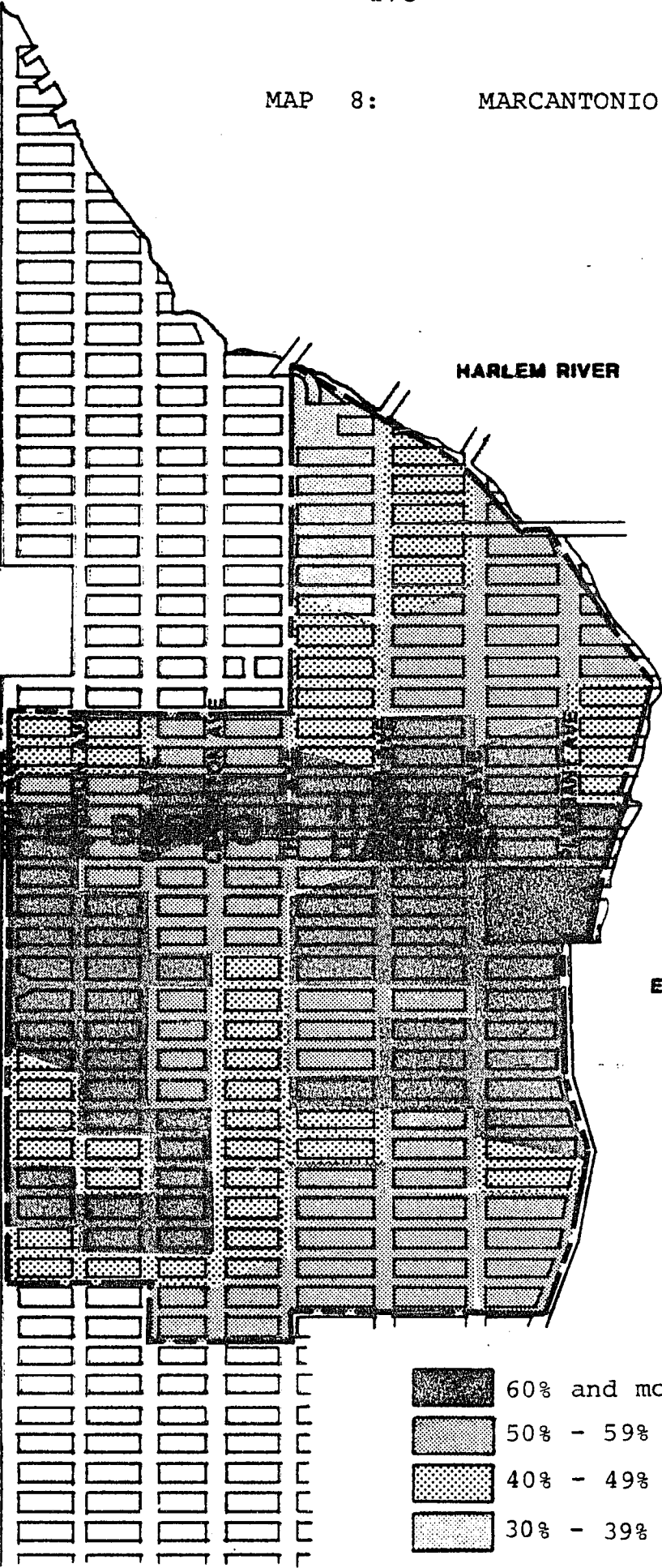
¹³⁹Bingham, p. 130.

¹⁴⁰The intensity of Italian Harlem's sentiments about the "gang-up" was demonstrated for me when during two of the three interviews I conducted there on July 16, 1981, the respondents both stated: "They ganged up on him." Peter Pascale and "Frank."

¹⁴¹"Marcantonio to Run Again; Assails 'Gang-Up' by Foes," New York Times (June 21, 1950), p.1.

MAP 8: MARCANTONIO'S 1948 VOTE

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Source: Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio" (Honors Paper, Harvard University, 1950), addenda.

article in which Donovan was quoted as describing Marcantonio's supporters as "burglars . . . hustlers . . . and milk bottle thieves!", and plausibly enough accused Donovan of maligning the Italian and Puerto Rican people.¹⁴² He also charged: "Donovan's past is a lurid one. His tie-up with anti-Semitic activity in this City is well known to those who remember his activities in Yorkville years ago. His friendship for Bundists and McWilliamites has not been forgotten by the residents of Yorkville who deeply resent this character being foisted on them by political bosses."¹⁴³

Marcantonio's roots in Italian Harlem went so deep that his popularity could be described as organic. Perhaps because of his confidence that his support there would never wane, he never appealed directly to the community until his last campaign, in 1950. Then he sent a letter to every registered voter having an Italian surname:

For fourteen years in Congress I have served the best interests of our people. Because I have defended the interests of the working people, the small businessman, tenants, veterans, and the needy, I have antagonized the big corporations who control the press, the radio, and the Republican, Democratic, and Liberal Party bosses. They have ganged up against me and nominated one who does not even live in the District and who has nothing in common with our people. He expresses nothing but contempt for us.

I have given everything in the fight for you. I have fought against discrimination that has denied jobs and opportunities to our people. I have consistently fought for liberalized immigration laws and against discriminatory immigration laws.

Immediately following the Armistice I demanded the recognition of Italy as an ally. I fought for and obtained permission to send packages to relatives in Italy and obtained from President Roosevelt the reopening of the mail service between the United States and Italy during the war. . . .

I demanded and obtained an increase of bread rations for the

¹⁴²Press release dated October 1, 1950. ALP Series I, L-M (Marcantonio 1950).

¹⁴³Text of speech before campaign workers. ALP Series I, 1950, Li-M (Marcantonio 1950--Election Campaign).

Italian people in areas occupied by our troops. I have consistently supported aid and rehabilitation to Italy, at first through . . . [The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration] and then through the United Nations, as Fiorello LaGuardia did. I have opposed the exploitation of Italian industries and Italian labor by Wall Street corporations.

I have at all times fought for an independent Italy, with an economy that would guarantee the Italian people a decent standard of living.

I have been on the job every day of the week in Congress, fighting for all the little people, and every Saturday . . . and every Sunday [in the community].

I now count on you to help me against the ganging up of the political bosses. . . .¹⁴⁴

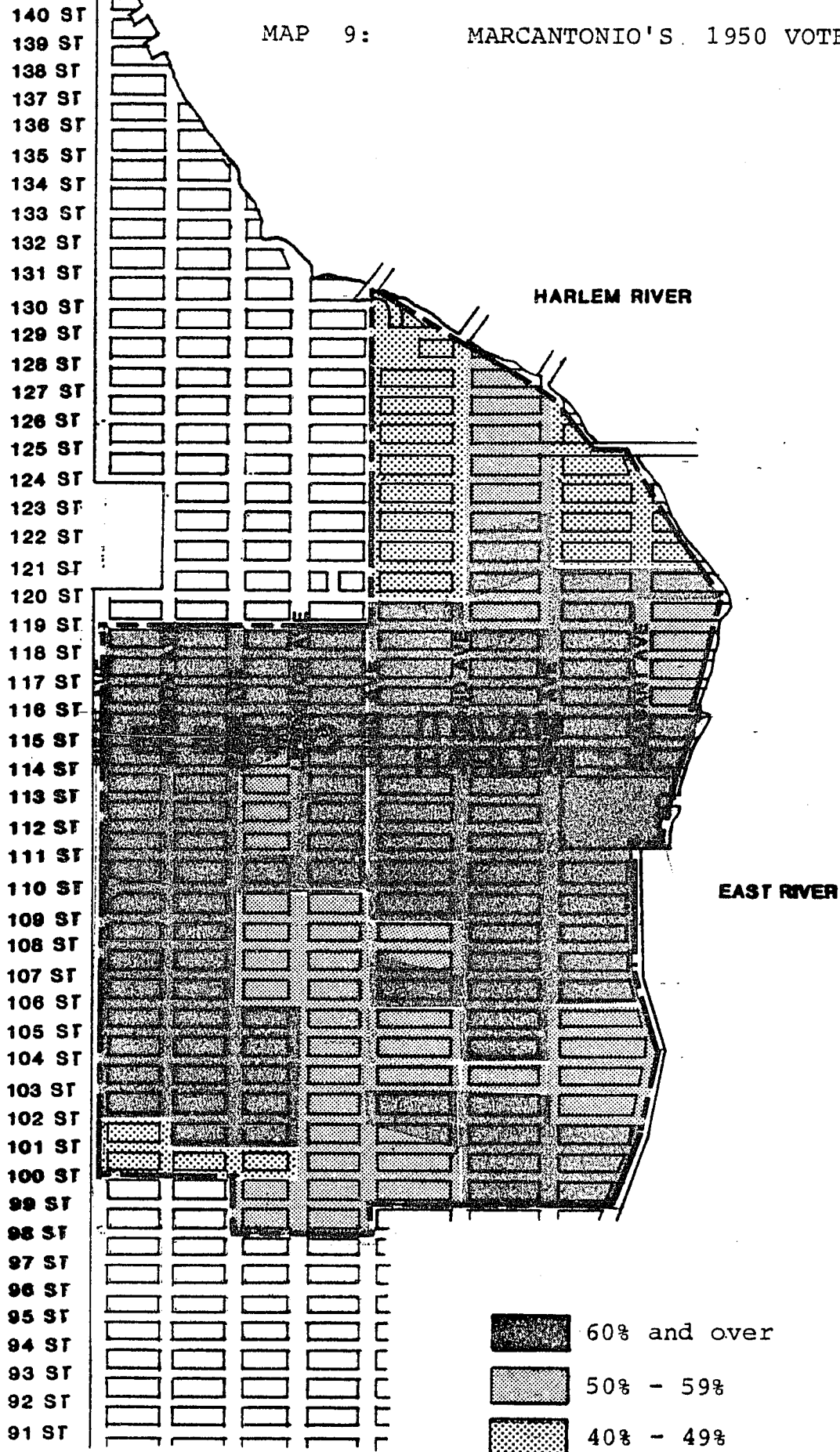
This recitation of his extensive legislative work on behalf of Italians was not the basis of Marcantonio's appeal. Rather, the phrases "our people," "us," and "you"--meaning Italo-Americans--were most telling. And so was his description of his opponent as someone "who has nothing in common with our people. He expresses nothing but contempt for us." Here was the insider appealing to other insiders against the outsiders. It worked. Although he lost the election, his vote in Italian Harlem increased from 57 percent in 1948 to 62 percent, with Marcantonio receiving 14,639 votes to Donovan's 8,857--2,386 on the Republican, 4,787 on the Democratic, and 1,684 on the Liberal lines.¹⁴⁵

Aspects of the political implications of the adaptive Southern Italian social structure redounded to Marcantonio's favor. Campanilismo implied a high degree of group solidarity, and Marcantonio was clearly a member of the group. His origin in the community and adherence to its mores were greatly valued characteristics. It is certainly not without

¹⁴⁴Undated. CC.

¹⁴⁵Bingham, addenda. The unprecedentedly high vote for the ALP's State Senate and State Assembly candidates, William Bianchi and Lee Bosco, in Italian Harlem is at least in part demonstrative of this community's deep reaction to the "gang-up" on Marcantonio perpetrated by the other parties. (See Tables 9, 10)

MAP 9: MARCANTONIO'S 1950 VOTE



Source: Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio (Honors Paper, Harvard University, 1950), addenda.

political significance that scores of families in East Harlem named their children Vito and some Puerto Ricans, Marco Antonio.¹⁴⁶

Furthermore, within this value system, their native son's lonely political opposition to the powers that be--regardless of its political content--would be viewed as heroic. Conversely, attacks on Marcantonio by establishment figures could only be viewed with loathing.

The suspicion of the outside world generated by these Southern Italian mores was most intense when confronting government and the law.¹⁴⁷ "Forces opposing civil authority," one classic study of Southern Italians noted, "thus received the support of these people with little regard for their broader implications."¹⁴⁸ That these sentiments were strongly felt in Italian Harlem was pointed up in one study of East Harlem that stated: "In a district like East Harlem there was disunity in everything except its opposition to the world of institutions."¹⁴⁹

Marcantonio was also aided by the weak party loyalties of this group. His earlier multi-party designations and shift to running solely under the American Labor Party banner in 1948 met little resistance. Furthermore, after Lanzetta's defeat in 1940, no other figure in Italian Harlem even attempted to challenge him. This was due in part to his enormous prestige and vote-getting power. Perhaps even more crucial was his ability to award the American Labor Party endorsement for Italian Harlem's State Senate and State Assembly seats. (See pp. 411, 427-28,

¹⁴⁶Interviews with Ida Hefner and Collins.

¹⁴⁷Gans, p. 163.

¹⁴⁸Williams, p. 7.

¹⁴⁹Bruck Kendrick, Come Out the Wilderness: The Story of an East Harlem Protestant Parish (New York: Harper, 1962), p. 6.

434) In a district where the Democratic and Republican Parties were fairly evenly matched, these endorsements meant the difference between victory and defeat. (See Tables 8, 10)

At all times, the service-dispensing aspect of the Vito Marcantonio Political Association reinforced his appeal. The beneficiaries of its efforts formed a clientele. And in this family-centered community the entire family would respond with gratitude when any one family member benefited. Marcantonio was the padrone par excellence, the godfather for all of Italian Harlem. (See p. 378.) And these sentiments were transformed into votes by the systematic voter registration and electioneering efforts of his organization.

The only liability that Marcantonio possessed vis-a-vis this community was that aspect of his politics which identified him with Communism. Within this tightly-knit, inward-looking enclave, however, nonideological factors loomed larger. Their pleasure at having this important person living among them and sharing their lives took precedence over accusations--however well-founded--that he believed in Communism. The local priests, the neighborhood racketeers, the poor who needed the services of the machine, the parishioners of his family's church, his boyhood friends, and life-long neighbors viewed him as a decent, even saintly man. They chose to disregard that part of the picture which would have necessitated renunciation of their leader.

CHAPTER VIII

EL BARRIO: 1900-1950

After Marcantonio's district was expanded in 1944, he could no longer win elections solely based on Italian Harlem's votes. In Yorkville, in 1948, for example, he garnered only approximately 25 percent of the vote. The majority he received from Italian Harlem in this three-way race alone could not have overcome this disadvantage. The balance of his winning votes came from El Barrio. This community provided margins of victory for Marcantonio often slightly larger than those in Italian Harlem. Moreover in the postwar period its population swelled while Italian Harlem's decreased. It did not, however, produce the same number of Marcantonio votes because: (1) its adult population was smaller; (2) the English-language literacy requirement for voting disqualified many potential voters; and (3) the recency of arrival of many of its residents created serious obstacles to political participation. Therefore in 1948, for example, although like Italian Harlem almost 60 percent of its voters cast their ballots for Marcantonio, the number of Marcantonio votes in El Barrio was 5,616 compared to Italian Harlem's 14,476. In that election, however, Marcantonio's margin of victory was 5,067.¹ El Barrio was an essential component of Marcantonio's electoral successes. This chapter will

¹Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio (Honors paper, Harvard University, 1950), addenda.

present a socioeconomic portrait of this community, and will then attempt to uncover the causes for this community's positive response to the radical Congressman.

The first recorded evidence of a Puerto Rican presence in East Harlem was the establishment in the 1890s of a club, Dos Antillas, affiliated with the Partido Revolucionario Cubano. Having both Puerto Rican and Cuban members, Dos Antillas was located at 1758 Third Avenue near East 100th Street. The secretary of this organization was the Puerto Rican intellectual, Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, founder of the world-renowned Schomburg Collection, which forms the basis of the materials housed in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture located in Harlem.

Upon his arrival in New York in 1916, the author of the most important sources of information on El Barrio's early life, Bernardo Vega, recalled that "in the Jewish ghetto extending along Park Avenue, between 100th and 111th Streets and the streets east of Madison Avenue, . . . lived not more than fifty Puerto Rican and Cuban families." Most of the Puerto Ricans were cigar-makers who occupied furnished rooms, the larger number of them centered in the vicinity of 101st and 102nd Streets near Third Avenue.

During World War I, East Harlem's Puerto Rican population grew rapidly. By 1916, a second major concentration had been established around East 116th Street between Third and Fifth Avenues. To serve the needs of this growing community, Puerto Rican-owned businesses--boarding houses, barber shops, bodegas, and restaurantes criollas began to open. According to Vega, an estimated ten thousand Puerto Ricans had

settled in El Barrio by 1919.² Although this estimate seems inflated, by this date El Barrio was firmly established as the largest Puerto Rican community in the continental United States,³ as well as the acknowledged center of New York City's Puerto Rican population.

Almost all the important institutions and businesses that served the city's Puerto Rican population were situated there. For example, in the thirties the Meinhard Memorial Health Clinic, specializing in tropical diseases, was established on East 101st Street. About the same time, the Department of Labor of Puerto Rico established an employment service in the heart of El Barrio. Casita Maria Settlement, the first all-Puerto Rican settlement house, was organized in 1934 with the assistance of Catholic Charities on East 107th Street. In June 1951 the

²Bernardo Vega, Memorias de Bernardo Vega: Contribucion a la historia de la comunidad puertorriquena en Nueva York, Cesar Andreu Iglesias, ed. (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Huracan, 1977), pp. 118-19, 45-46, 131, 139, 144. Vega's memoir (published from an incomplete draft, though extensively edited) is an invaluable source for this study. There are some inconsistencies and dates and statistics are not always accurate. Used with some caution, however, this work provides an invaluable source for an insider's view of El Barrio, and particularly for this community's political life.

³Lawrence Chenault, Puerto Rican Migration (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 91-92.

In the twenties, the net annual migration of Puerto Ricans to the continental United States was fewer than two thousand; in the thirties it decreased to fewer than one thousand. The unavailability of transportation during World War II minimized migration during these years. The postwar period witnessed a massive influx of Puerto Ricans, which peaked in 1953, when a net migration of 69,000 was recorded. Approximately 85 percent of these migrants settled in New York City, where they were concentrated in a relatively few areas, El Barrio being the largest and most concentrated settlement. Robert T. Novak, "Distribution of Puerto Ricans on Manhattan Island," Geographical Review 46 (April 1954), p. 182.

On migration patterns from Puerto Rico see: Chenault, pp. 54, 57, 62-63, 96; and, C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior, and Rose Kohn Goldsen, The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants (New York: Harper, 1950), pp. 43-44, 47, 50, 56, 58.

First Evangelical Church, the oldest Protestant Spanish congregation in the city, moved to East 106th Street. "La Marqueta," a city-owned public market, which extends along Park Avenue under the New York Central viaduct from 111th to 116th Streets, has been since the early thirties a major attraction for New York City's Puerto Rican community.⁴

The Puerto Rican migrants arriving in El Barrio in the thirties left a land devastated by the greatest natural calamity in the island's modern history, the hurricane of 1932, and the greatest economic calamity in Puerto Rico's entire history, the Great Depression.⁵ The Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Association, issued in 1935, stated that only 35 percent of the potential working population was employed. The average annual per capita income in 1927 was estimated to be \$111 compared with \$738 for the continental United States. These miserable conditions quite naturally impelled many lower-class Puerto Ricans to migrate. And it was New York City, then as later, that was their major place of settlement.

Although Puerto Rico was at that time overwhelmingly rural in character, these migrants came from towns and cities. Puerto Rico's peasantry, los jíbaros, were entirely too impoverished and socially

⁴References to El Barrio's institutions: Meinhard Clinic and employment agency, Chenault, pp. 122, 72; Casita Maria and First Evangelical Church, "Mayors Committee on Puerto Rican Affairs in New York City." Chairperson, Raymond Hilliard, November 1953, pp. 29, 31; "La Marqueta," Federal Writers' Project, The WPA Guide to New York City: A Comprehensive Guide to the Five Boroughs of the Metropolis--Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Richmond (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) p. 266.

⁵For conditions in Puerto Rico during the thirties see: Henry Wells, The Modernization of Puerto Rico: A Political Study of Changing Values and Institutions (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), p. 114.

isolated to contemplate migrating to New York City. In the thirties a slightly higher percentage--about 28 percent--of the migrants were "colored" compared with their percentage living in Puerto Rico (26 percent).⁶ Because it was generally easier for Puerto Rican women to find work in New York City, the proportion of females greatly exceeded that of males.⁷

The Great Depression struck El Barrio with exceptional force. Jobs abandoned by earlier immigrants and made available to this newest immigrant group were now the goals of fierce competition. As non-English speakers and often of mixed racial ancestry, Puerto Ricans fared poorly in this dramatically shrunken job market. To combat these disadvantages, the Department of Labor of Puerto Rico in 1930 established an employment service in the heart of El Barrio. Its annual reports reveal an utterly abysmal situation: between 1930 and 1936, the department was able to place only 2,000 men and slightly more than 3,600 women. This disparity between the number of men and women able to secure employment in part reflected the larger percentage of women in El Barrio's population. More fundamentally, however, it revealed the type of employment available to the residents, that is, the very lowest paying service and unskilled manufacturing jobs. Almost 42 percent of the women were placed as domestics; the two largest categories for El Barrio's men consisted of laborers and construction workers. The employment service reported that the salaries paid in the occupations held by a majority of El Barrio's Puerto Ricans fell below the levels of

⁶Chenault, pp. 44-45, 61-62.

⁷Mills et al., pp. 26, 142.

the WPA (\$110 monthly) and the Home Relief Bureau (\$50-60 per month for a family of five plus a clothing allowance).⁸

Up to about 1945, few of El Barrio's working population belonged to unions. The Cigar Makers' International Union, boasted the largest number of Puerto Rican members, but it declined as machines were developed to replace manual manufacturing methods. A Spanish-speaking local of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union also had a large Puerto Rican membership, but on the whole there was widespread discrimination against Puerto Ricans within the city's unions.⁹

Substandard housing constituted a constant reality in El Barrio, with the vicinity of the initial Puerto Rican settlement (100th and 101st Streets, between Madison and Fifth Avenues) containing the worst of all. North of this area, the housing was somewhat more adequate. In 1938, 90 percent of El Barrio's housing units had been built about 1900. Only 12 percent of the buldings were in good condition, 70 percent needed minor repairs, 15 percent needed major repairs, and 3 percent were unfit for human habitation. On the other hand, more of El Barrio's apartments contained either a tub or a shower than the city as a whole, and almost all had steam heat. Actually, El Barrio's housing facilities were superior to those found on the Lower East Side or in Central and Italian Harlem.¹⁰ A comparison of housing in the most heavily Puerto Rican census tract with that in the most heavily Italian-American census tract in East Harlem in 1939 indicated the following:

⁸Chenault, pp. 72-74.

⁹Ibid., p. 79; Vega, p. 159.

¹⁰Chenault, pp. 97-98.

TABLE 3

HOUSING CONDITIONS IN EL BARRIO AND ITALIAN HARLEM

	El Barrio	Italian Harlem
Average rent per week	\$6.44	\$5.05
Persons per acre	340	230
No central heating	16.0%	74.0%
No tub or shower	14.0%	42.5%
Five-room apartments	24.0%	0.7%
Six- or seven-room apartments	22.0%	0.4%
Single-family dwellings	0.9%	4.7%

Source: Abraham Kavadlo, "Housing in Lower East Harlem" (Typewritten, May 15, 1939), pp. 24-27. MP 13, 1 of 2 (Housing in Lower East Side Harlem).

El Barrio's relatively better housing was the result of the Puerto Ricans having replaced the previous ethnic group in this section of East Harlem, the Jews. Many had moved into this area to occupy housing superior to what existed in their initial area of settlement (the Lower East Side) and had begun to vacate East Harlem from 1920 to 1930 in order to obtain still better housing in the East Bronx. But the advantages this housing provided the Puerto Ricans were largely mitigated by its aging and the extreme overcrowding, and no new units were built in El Barrio until the advent of public housing projects after World War II.

Far more than its housing stock, overcrowding gave El Barrio the appearance of a slum area. In 1930, for example, packing from two to five hundred persons into each acre (one block equalled three to six acres), eleven of its fourteen census tracts had the highest density classification as established by the Real Property Inventory. In 1946

the block bounded by Park and Madison Avenues and 102nd and 103rd Streets contained 1,800 people. This overcrowding was in part the result of an almost total absence of parks, playgrounds, and other open areas that would have alleviated the congestion. Large families (nine or more persons), which were twice as prevalent in El Barrio as in any other part of Manhattan, also contributed to overcrowding.¹¹ Moreover, there was a great deal of "doubling up." In 1947 El Barrio, 33 percent of the households included relatives other than the immediate conjugal unit, and 16 percent had boarders. Although extreme instances of overcrowded apartments were fairly common by then in El Barrio, the average household lived in an apartment of 4.2 rooms with a median density of 1.2 persons per room.¹²

Extremely poor health conditions prevailed in El Barrio. Mortality rates for syphilis, malnutrition, and "fevers of unknown origin" were much higher in El Barrio than elsewhere in New York City, and its general health conditions were lower. Parasitic diseases such as malaria and hookworm affected many Puerto Ricans.¹³ In the period 1929 to 1933, the core area of El Barrio had an infant mortality rate of 84 per 1,000 compared with 55 per 1,000 in New York City as a whole, and a tuberculosis rate two and one-half times as high as the rest of the

¹¹Chenault, pp. 127, 56, 101.

¹²Mills et al., p. 94. In 1947, a social worker from an East Harlem settlement house reported that in one apartment twenty-three Puerto Ricans lived in four small rooms, and in another, fifteen occupied a two and one-half room apartment. "Sleeping bags are at a premium," he said. "Aid Planned Here for Puerto Ricans," New York Times (January 12, 1947), p. 25.

¹³Chenault, pp. 114-15.

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city.¹⁴ A 1929 study pointed out the health dangers of living in El Barrio's congested quarters and the fact that children were often exposed to the last stages of tuberculosis and other diseases.¹⁵

The general socioeconomic situation of El Barrio caused one observer to describe it in 1938 as a "slum area where all of the social problems arising out of extreme poverty, deplorable housing, and other unfavorable influences exist." He continued: "The conditions of the Puerto Rican group in this section are among the worst to be found in New York."¹⁶

Although it was true that Puerto Ricans had many good reasons for leaving their homeland in the thirties, they had few good reasons for migrating to El Barrio. Consequently, by 1940 the population of El Barrio had increased to only 20,000, about 7,000 more than in 1934. The large postwar migration, however, catapulted its population to 63,000 by 1950.¹⁷

Compared with the migration of the thirties, the postwar influx of Puerto Ricans to El Barrio reflected markedly improved levels of

¹⁴East Harlem Health Center, Inc.: Department of Health and Twenty-One Cooperating Agencies: A Handbook of Information on Neighborhood Health Facilities and Statistical Referenc Data. Unpaginated. Aguilar. Chenault (pp. 114-115) reported that in the thirties "mortality rates from tuberculosis in Puerto Rico are as high as, if not higher than, those in any country in the world for which statistics are available.

The mortality rate for tuberculosis among Puerto Ricans living in New York is about one-third higher than on the island. . . ."

¹⁵Chenault, pp. 110-25.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁷"Concerning Porto-Rican Population in East Harlem," Memorandum by E. Warburg, Dated December 2, 1935, CC; "Population Trends--East Harlem 1930-1940," probably Covello. CC.

employment in both Puerto Rico and New York City. Seventy-five percent of the immigrant men, for example, reported that they had been employed in Puerto Rico prior to migrating to New York City. Their occupational distribution, however, showed a sharp decrease in the percentage of those who held white-collar jobs in New York City compared with the last job held in Puerto Rico--for males from 24 percent to 15 percent, and for females from 17 percent to 9 percent. The language barrier may explain the inability of many of these immigrants to retain their white-collar status upon arrival in El Barrio, and their consequent downward occupational mobility. Based on the last occupation held in Puerto Rico versus the first occupation obtained in New York City, C. Wright Mills found:

TABLE 4

DIRECTION OF OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY OF
PUERTO RICAN MIGRANTS TO NEW YORK CITY

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
Upward	13	15
Stable	45	51
Downward	42	34

Source: C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior, and Rose Kohn Goldsen, The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants (New York: Harper, 1950), pp. 66-67, 69.

Continuing the trend already evident in the thirties, postwar Puerto Rican migrants to El Barrio were urban dwellers--only one in five could be considered of rural origin. Ninety-one percent of all persons in Mills's sample had lived in the island's urban centers before coming to New York, compared with 28 percent of the total population classified as urban in the 1940 census. Puerto Rico's two largest cities--San Juan and Ponce--accounted for fully one half of the migrants. Moreover,

they were long-term urban dwellers--80 percent of the sample had lived in one place during the previous ten years on the island.¹⁸

Reflecting their urban background, only 5 percent of the postwar arrivals in El Barrio had been employed in agricultural work, one-eighth of the percentage engaged in such work in Puerto Rico in 1947. Twice as many of El Barrio's postwar arrivals had worked in manufacturing and service industries compared with the entire working population of the island, while a slightly higher percentage had been employed in Puerto Rico--54 percent compared with the general population's 52 percent. The pay of those who migrated while still in Puerto Rico was one-fourth higher than the average take-home pay in Puerto Rico. The typical postwar El Barrio arrival had more education than the average island resident. For example, only 8 percent were illiterate compared with 17 percent in San Juan and 32 percent in Puerto Rico as a whole. Nonetheless, by the standards of the continental United States, educational levels in El Barrio were low. (See Map 6) A larger percentage of women continued to migrate to El Barrio than men, so that they outnumbered men three to two.¹⁹

The experience of El Barrio's prewar and wartime migrants indicated that, even after working in New York City for some time, only slightly improved occupational mobility occurred. Mills's study found: "Once they are in New York very few [Puerto Rican] migrants rise above the level of their first job. Only the males tended over time to ascend to the occupational status they had reached on the island--few

¹⁸Mills et al., pp. 32-33.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 34-35, 37, 30, 88.

rose above it." There was remarkably little difference in the income levels of El Barrio's workforce based on the time of arrival. Mills found that the median weekly wage of El Barrio's workers by sex, race, and time of arrival in 1950 was:

TABLE 5

WAGES OF PUERTO RICAN MIGRANTS TO NEW YORK CITY

<u>Time of arrival</u>	<u>Men</u>		<u>Women</u>	
	<u>White</u>	<u>Colored</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Colored</u>
Prewar	\$50	50	35	32
World War II	45	43	35	32
Postwar	43	31	26	32

Source: C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior, And Rose Kohn Goldsen, The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants (New York: Harper, 1950), pp. 69, 75.

The evidence of minimal upward mobility in these figures underscores the motivation of these migrants, that is, the possibility of earning increased wages.²⁰ In March 1945, for example, the average weekly wage of Puerto Rico's agricultural workers (who still comprised 38 percent of the workforce) was \$5, and \$12 for manufacturing workers. In the same year, the average manufacturing worker in the continental United States earned \$47 per week. Prices on the island were comparable to those in New York City.²¹ While the wages of El Barrio's residents were much higher than those obtainable in Puerto Rico, they remained abysmally low

²⁰By this time, however, Puerto Ricans owned most small retail establishments in El Barrio. See Mills et al., pp. 34-37, 66-71, 86; see also Chenault, p. 71. Mills et al., did find, however that the postwar migrants' movement into highly unionized hotel, restaurant, and garment industries led to a high rate of union membership. No less than 51 percent of El Barrio's employed population reported union membership. (p. 110) The low wages of this group were somewhat compensated for by benefits and job protection associated with union membership.

²¹Ibid., p. 18.

by continental United States standards. In 1950, the average annual family income in El Barrio's core areas ranged from \$1,385 to \$1,500. (See Map 7)

The employment of El Barrio's population in low-paying, low-status jobs in the postwar period was in part compensated for by a high employment rate. In 1949, the New York Times reported that 90 percent of New York City's Puerto Rican families were self-supporting, with only 10 percent receiving public assistance.²²

A much higher percentage of El Barrio's postwar population was "colored"--43 percent--than the percentage of "colored" people on the island or in comparable Puerto Rican communities in the Bronx (23 percent). It would appear that "colored" Puerto Rican migrants were less willing to move out of El Barrio, because they would then be treated like Afro-Americans, that is, as second-class citizens. It should also be noted that the race of the Puerto Rican migrant correlated with a great many other socioeconomic variables. For example, the nonwhite Puerto Ricans' educational levels averaged lower than those of white Puerto Ricans.²³ From this we might conclude that on the whole El Barrio's residents earned less on the whole than Puerto Rican migrants outside of El Barrio.

These migrants created a rich organizational and social life in El Barrio. In 1936, when its Puerto Rican population less than twenty thousand, El Barrio had four political clubs (two Democratic, one Republican, and one independent); a score of fraternal and social organizations; ten radical and left-wing organizations (see pp. 338-42);

²²"Work Is Limited for Puerto Ricans," New York Times (October 6, 1949), p. 38.

²³Mills et al., pp. 27, 31.

and miscellaneous groups such as El Centro de Estudios Teosóficos and the headquarters of a local Cigar Makers' Union. The fraternal and social clubs, such as El Círculo Aguadillana, were mostly organized by residents from the same locality in Puerto Rico.²⁴ (See p. 344)

Though significant in number and influence, the clubs and organizations in El Barrio were somewhat fewer than in Italian Harlem, possibly because of the larger role that churches played in the Puerto Rican community. (See pp. 206-14) In the late 1940's almost one-half of El Barrio's Puerto Rican residents reported attending church at least once or twice a month.²⁵ While most professed Catholicism, very few sent their children to parochial schools. The first Catholic church founded for Puerto Ricans in El Barrio, Holy Agony, on Third Avenue and 103rd Street, was established in 1930. In 1939, however, the New York

²⁴On the letterhead of the F.H. LaGuardia Political Club, Puerto Rican Branch, is a list of community organizations, dated February 4, 1936, with the heading, Puerto Rican Societies. CC. "List of Organizations in the Community," undated list of Hispanic organizations in East Harlem and elsewhere in New York City, circa 1940. MP 52 (Puerto Rico). Untitled list of El Barrio's organizations. MP 13, 1 of 2 (East Harlem--'39-40). "Puerto Rican, Spanish and Other Spanish-American Organizations in Harlem," undated list of organizations (ca. 1940). MP 15 (General Correspondence).

Chenault found that "Puerto Ricans in the Harlem section have many social organizations, and new ones are constantly being formed." (p. 148) Mills found that "such Puerto Rican organizations as do exist are few and weak . . . only 6 percent of all the migrants belong to organizations which could be called Puerto Rican." (p. 105) A number of factors may account for what appears to be Mills's underestimation of the scope and vitality of El Barrio's organizational life: (1) the great mass of Puerto Ricans arriving in the postwar period may not have had time to establish organizations or affiliate with existing ones; (2) this study encompasses a Puerto Rican community newer than El Barrio, Morrisania, where there may not have been time to establish organizations; and (3) many Puerto Ricans may have belonged to organizations such as El Centro Obrero Español and El Amparo Latino, which drew their membership from Hispanics of various nationalities.

²⁵Mills et al., p. 111.

City archdiocese abandoned the formation of national parishes, which served particular nationality groups, in favor of integrated parishes which served particular geographic areas. This decision led in 1940 to Saint Cecilia's (near the border of Italian Harlem and El Barrio) being assigned to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, an American order which had been working in Puerto Rico since 1900. Its Spanish-speaking clergy continued to serve the remaining non-Puerto Rican parish members, while ministering to the needs of the expanding Puerto Rican community.²⁶ Also in 1947, there existed in El Barrio twenty-three Protestant Puerto Rican congregations with a total membership of 3,300. Of this number, many came from outside El Barrio, because El Barrio was the center of Protestant church life for the entire New York City Puerto Rican community. Most of these churches were small. Only one, the First Spanish Evangelical Church, had a membership larger than five hundred: sixteen had memberships of less than one hundred. All of these churches conducted their services entirely in Spanish, and provided an intensity of personal interaction which compensated for the disruption of extended family life brought about by the migration. El Barrio's Protestant parishes had greater appeal to women; only 27 percent of their membership was male.²⁷

Aside from community clubs and churches, El Barrio's social life centered on the home and its immediate vicinity. Few places of

²⁶Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), pp. 124-25.

²⁷The Protestant Churches of East Harlem: Report of a Survey by the Pathfinder Service for the Churches with Recommendations by Local Protestant Ministers. June 1947, pp. 8, 10, 11, 14, 18. See also Chenault, pp. 129, 146, 152.

commercial amusement existed. The Puerto Rican family typically contained relatives of the primary family group. It sometimes included compadres or comadres (literally co-fathers and co-mothers), that is, ritual kin attached to the family by serving as baptismal and wedding sponsors. These large extended families often tended to reside in the same apartment building shared by others who had resided in the same community in Puerto Rico. The migrant milieu was, therefore, stringently localized. The household, the tenement, and the street formed the concentric circles of El Barrio's social world.²⁸ By the thirties, however, Teatro Latino, at Fifth Avenue and 110th Street, and Teatro Hispano, at Fifth Avenue and 116th Street, showed Spanish-language films--the latter also presented Spanish vaudeville. Several cafes and nightclubs drew their patronage from the city-wide Hispanic population.²⁹

The isolation of El Barrio's residents from the wider New York City society was intensified by their minimal contact with the media. Mills's study found that only 25 percent of the postwar migrants had been "highly exposed" to mass media, which he defined as reading at least one magazine more or less frequently, going to the movies about once a week, reading at least one newspaper at least once a week, and listening to the radio somewhat regularly. To a very large extent, the media with which even these relatively few persons were acquainted were in Spanish. For example, 40 percent of those responding that they read a newspaper read a Spanish-language newspaper, typically El Imparcial,

²⁸Chenault, p. 128; Mills et al., pp. 99, 122, 8, 95. Mills's study found that 64 percent of the men and 83 percent of the women usually socialized with friends in their homes.

²⁹Federal Writers' Project, WPA Guide, p. 267.

which was published on the island. And the Spanish-language newspapers and other media concentrated on news about Puerto Rico and New York City's Puerto Rican communities. Thus, even the relatively low exposure to the media that Mills discovered exaggerated the average resident's contact with the United States mainstream.³⁰

Everything the residents of El Barrio needed (shops, churches, social clubs, the family) was present inside its own borders, with one notable exception--jobs. Since El Barrio was a dormitory community, it was necessary for most residents to find work outside its boundaries in the English-speaking world. (See pp. 163-64)

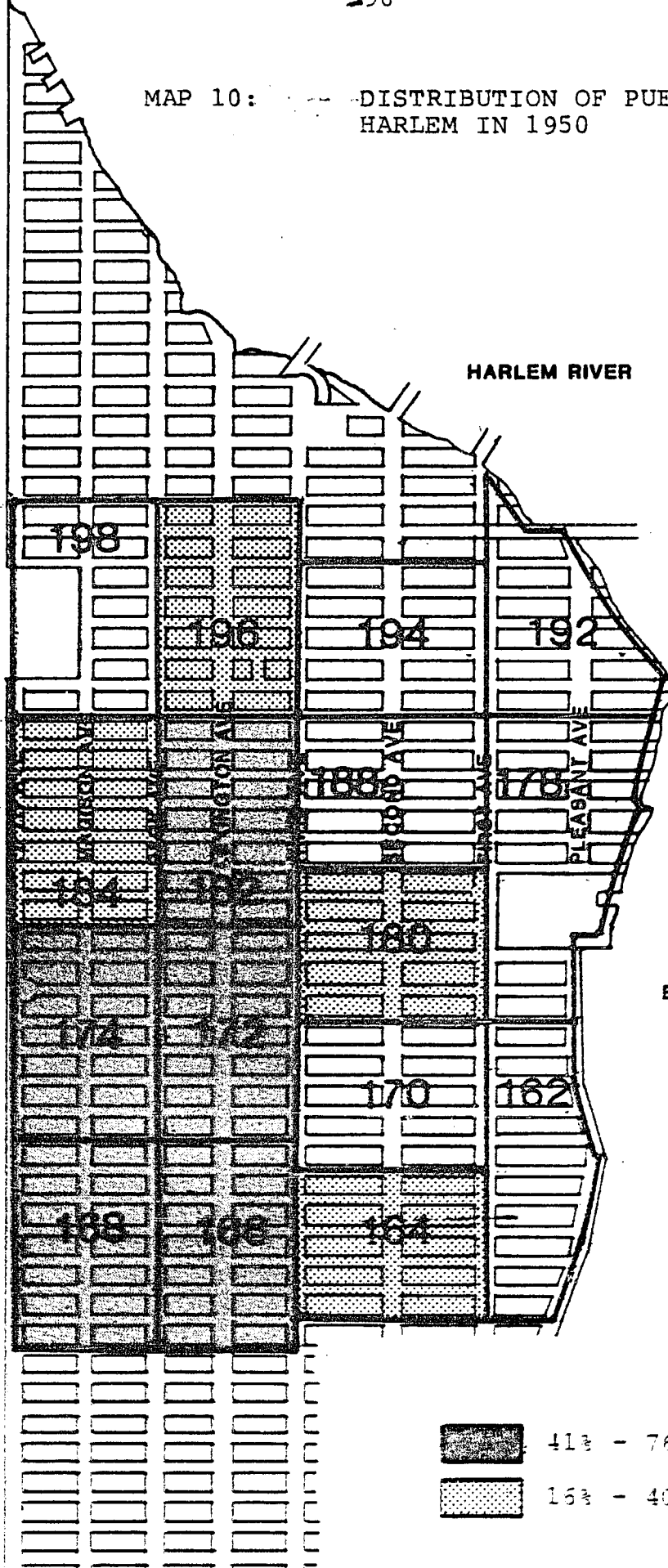
Although unmistakably a Puerto Rican community, El Barrio never was as ethnically homogeneous as Italian Harlem. (See pp. 179-80) In 1950 only five of El Barrio's census tracts were composed of approximately 50 percent first- and second-generation Puerto Ricans, and only one of these approached 75 percent.³¹ (The boundaries of the latter were East 112th Street on the north, East 106th Street on the south, Fifth Avenue on the west, and Park Avenue on the east.) Its relative heterogeneity vis-a-vis Italian Harlem did not mean that the El Barrio environment was more conducive to acculturation. However, a very large percentage of El Barrio's non-Puerto Rican population consisted of other Spanish-speaking peoples. Prior to the settlement of the first Puerto Ricans, other Hispanics, particularly Cubans, had lived there, renting apartments from Sephardic Jews, who owned buildings in the



³⁰Mills et al., pp. 119-21.

³¹Novak, p. 185.

MAP 10: DISTRIBUTION OF PUERTO RICANS IN EAST HARLEM IN 1950

140 ST
 139 ST
 138 ST
 137 ST
 136 ST
 135 ST
 134 ST
 133 ST
 132 ST
 131 ST
 130 ST
 129 ST
 128 ST
 127 ST
 126 ST
 125 ST
 124 ST
 123 ST
 122 ST
 121 ST
 120 ST
 119 ST
 118 ST
 117 ST
 116 ST
 115 ST
 114 ST
 113 ST
 112 ST
 111 ST
 110 ST
 109 ST
 108 ST
 107 ST
 106 ST
 105 ST
 104 ST
 103 ST
 102 ST
 101 ST
 100 ST
 99 ST
 98 ST
 97 ST
 96 ST
 95 ST
 94 ST
 93 ST
 92 ST
 91 ST



 41½ - 76½
 15½ - 40½

Source: Robert T. Novak, "Distribution of Puerto Ricans on Manhattan Island", *Geographic Review*, 46 (April 1954), p.185.

vicinity of 110th Street and Fifth Avenue.³² Indicative of the continued presence of non-Puerto Rican Hispanics in El Barrio in the thirties was the existence of the following organizations: Club Obrero Espanol, Casa Interamericana, Mutualista Obrera Mexicana, Castillo Cervantes, Club Obrera Tampa, Club Obrero Chileno, Comite Por Democracia Espanol, and La Pasionaria Spanish Workers' Club.³³ So when the Puerto Rican residents of El Barrio were not interacting among themselves, they were most often interacting with other Spanish-speaking people, thereby reinforcing their maintenance of the Spanish language and a latino lifestyle as well as further insulating themselves.

Here, then--except for employment--were the makings of a complete life where the Puerto Rican heritage and folkways would be strictly observed and little English either spoken or heard. A description of El Barrio in the late twenties noted:

In this entire sector the people lived according to the traditional [Puerto Rican] lifestyle. According to the ways of the cigar workers, blacks and whites lived in harmony. Already by this time there existed large numbers of Latin businesses: bodegas, barber shops, butchers, etc. At the doors of these establishments hung

³²Vega, p. 45.

³³Also in El Barrio there existed a Club Operario Portugues. Lists of Organizations deposited in CC and MP. Mills et al., noted (pp. 136-38) in postwar El Barrio the Puerto Ricans' growing feeling of solidarity with other Spanish-speaking people. They pointed to the adoption by Puerto Ricans of food common to other Latin countries and the increased interest in these countries' music. Puerto Ricans had begun to join with other Hispanics in celebrating Columbus Day as "el dia de la raza." A fraternal organization, El Amparo Latino, with a membership drawn from many Hispanic nationalities, existed in El Barrio. Significantly, many Puerto Ricans referred to themselves as "Latinos" and to El Barrio as "el Barrio Latino." This study noted that "among some of the more articulate there is the . . . further tie of a common enemy: they may unite in an anti-United States policy because of the United States' past behavior in her role of the 'colossus of the north.'"

stalks of plantains and outside on the sidewalks they exhibited food and vegetables. In the stores and on the streets one only heard Spanish.³⁴

Another observation of El Barrio describing it more than forty years later indicated that little had changed: "The spirited Latin music of East Harlem, pouring out from open tenement windows in every block, is Puerto Rican. Many signs, directions, conversations are in Spanish. The culture, the dark and tight style of dress and the way of life, the store front pentecostal churches, the pleasantness and gentleness are among Puerto Rico's contributions to East Harlem."³⁵

Strengthening the estrangement of its residents from the wider society, El Barrio attracted and retained those Puerto Ricans most resistant to acculturation. Both Chenault and Mills commented on the absence of middle- and upper-class residents. Chenault noted:

Many Spanish speaking people in New York refuse to identify themselves with the Harlem group in any way. The upper class Latin American, whether he be from Puerto Rico, Colombia, or any of the other countries, refers to the Harlem settlement as one of "working people." . . . Only a few prominent Puerto Ricans, who almost invariably live outside of the settlement, have ever attempted to provide it with any sort of leadership or to assist in the solution of the problems of the people.³⁶

Mills discovered that "'successful migrants' who might otherwise provide leadership usually move out of the core areas and lose their 'Puerto Ricanness.'"³⁷

El Barrio's substandard housing stock, of course, ensured that

³⁴Vega, p. 197.

³⁵Patricia Cayo Sexton, Spanish Harlem (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 3.

³⁶Chenault, p. 147.

³⁷Mills et al., p. 106.

the least mobile would remain there. This was the stratum with the least to gain by shedding its culture. The relatively larger percentage of Puerto Ricans of mixed-racial background in El Barrio also contributed powerfully to the persistence of its isolation. Assimilation for this group--especially in this period--meant consignment to a socially inferior caste. It also raised the specter of families breaking up along racial lines.³⁸

Surrounding this Spanish-speaking enclave was a hostile world. The postwar Puerto Rican migration was the first massive immigration of non-English-speaking people to New York City since the immigration laws of 1920-24. The press reflected the hostile reception they received. (See pp. 362-68) This caused Puerto Ricans to look inward and rely upon their own resources, especially their traditions and language.

In comparison with East Harlem's Italo-Americans, its Puerto Rican residents had fewer ways out of their ghetto and even fewer reasons to try them. Their homeland was a few hours and less than \$100 away. It was easier to leave El Barrio for Puerto Rico than to leave it for the wider American society.

In one other major respect the residents were very different from those of Italian Harlem. Unlike the Southern Italian immigrants who populated Italian Harlem before 1920, many Puerto Rican migrants to El Barrio in the thirties and forties had been politicized and, to some extent, radicalized in their homeland, a topic explored in considerable detail later in these pages. It is fair to suggest that El Barrio's

³⁸Ibid, pp. 87, 27, 94.

socioeconomic reality provided a receptive environment for a radical politician: The following chapter explores Marcantonio's legislative and political activities which helped realize this potential.

CHAPTER IX

MARCANTONIO'S LEGISLATIVE AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES ON BEHALF OF PUERTO RICO

From 1936 to 1950, Vito Marcantonio was the most prominent advocate of Puerto Rican rights in the Congress, indeed in the continental United States. In legislative matters he generally played a more important role than the resident commissioners, Puerto Rico's non-voting representatives in the House of Representatives. In fact, he had two constituencies in the House: his Congressional district (which included El Barrio) and Puerto Rico itself.

Marcantonio's appointment in his first term to the Committee on Territories, from which bills relevant to Puerto Rico were initiated, placed him in a strategic position to learn about and do something for Puerto Rico. In view of his future fame as an ardent supporter of Puerto Rican independence, it is interesting to note that in 1935 he supported a proposal by Santiago Iglesias Pantin, the resident commissioner, for Puerto Rico's statehood. At the moment he viewed this as a positive step because "statehood would make unconstitutional any commercial discrimination against Puerto Rico."¹

On May 6, 1936, Marcantonio first publicly identified himself with the cause of Puerto Rico's independence by introducing a bill on

¹Felix Ojeda Reyes, Vito Marcantonio y Puerto Rico: por los trabajadores y por la nación (Rio Piedras, P.R.: Ediciones Huracán, 1978), p. 17.

its behalf. Actually, his bill was in response to one introduced in the Senate a month earlier by Sen. Millard Tydings (Democrat, Maryland) which proposed that Puerto Rico be granted full sovereignty after four years of Commonwealth status. Tyding's bill was precipitated by the assassination by two nationalists of the chief of the insular police, Colonel E. Riggs, a close personal friend of Tydings, on February 23, 1936. Marcantonio characterized this bill as "punitive" and introduced his own bill for Puerto Rico's independence.²

The text of the freshman Congressman's bill explained that in view of the depressed state of the island's economy, independence would have to be accompanied by measures to rehabilitate its economy. He argued that: "Puerto Rico, taken as the booty of war from Spain in

²Henry Wells, The Modernization of Puerto Rico: A Political Study of Changing Values and Institutions (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), pp. 120-22. Luis Muñoz Marín immediately expressed opposition to Tydings bill and proposed that Congress enact legislation that would give "independence with economic justice." (Ibid.) It is very likely that Muñoz Marín conferred with Marcantonio in the drafting of the latter's independence bill. Interview with Harry Hefner, New York City, July 18, 1976. Marcantonio's sentiments about the Tydings bill are more fully expressed in "The Opinion of Congressman Vito Marcantonio about the Tydings Bill," presumably a press release in Spanish dated April 25, 1936:

"The Tydings Bill is a fake. It is a plot by the sugar magnates in combination with Wall Street interests. If this Bill becomes law . . . then the American government will demand that Puerto Rico sign a contract and in this way the United States will continue to control the economic resources of the island. This farce is against the interests of the workers and only will benefit the sugar magnates of the island, Wall Street, and a group of the privileged class in Puerto Rico. The Tydings Bill is an act of vengeance on the people of Puerto Rico on the part of the reactionary bloc in the Senate and the United States.

Congressman Vito Marcantonio will present within a few days a Bill for the Independence of Puerto Rico which will not benefit the sugar magnates of the island, nor Wall Street, but which will be for the benefit of the Puerto Rican people in general."

1898, has been successively ruined." He pointed out that sugar composed 75 percent of its exports, and that coffee and tobacco cultivation had drastically declined. He added:

Four large American sugar corporations own over half the good sugar land. . . . The once land owning farmers, dispossessed by huge sugar plantations, today work the infertile mountain soil or are landless. Only 7 percent of the native dwellers in the rural regions are land owners in Puerto Rico. . . . Over the heads of these small farmers hangs a total mortgage debt of about \$25 million. . . . The landless peasants have been converted into a great army of colonial slaves in the sugar plantations, or are unemployed.

Moreover, he cited the findings of the Brookings Institute in 1929 to the effect that since 1898, "American citizens had extracted \$400 millions [from Puerto Rico]." Repeatedly, Marcantonio stated, "Responsible . . . for this misery, hunger, and disease is the maintenance of Puerto Rico as a colony of the United States, thus giving ample room for American interests to penetrate as deep economically as they wished."³

In order to rectify this damage to the island by the United States, Marcantonio's bill provided for the indemnification of Puerto Rico, and insisted that no tariff be levied on Puerto Rican products shipped to the United States, or any restrictions on such products, or on Puerto Rican immigration to the United States. The purpose of his bill, therefore, was twofold: "Genuine independence and the declaration of the responsibility of the United States for the disastrous state of the economy of Puerto Rico and the abysmal poverty of its people."⁴ His

³Annette Rubinstein, ed., I Vote My Conscience: Debates, Speeches, and Writings of Vito Marcantonio, 1935-1950 (New York: Vito Marcantonio Memorial, 1956), pp. 375-78.

⁴Ibid.

bill was never enacted into law, but Marcantonio was undeterred. On four other occasions (the last in 1950), he introduced similar independence bills.⁵

The assertion that independence was a requirement for the rational development of Puerto Rico's economic and social life, as well as for the prevention of further exploitation of its people and resources, was the major thrust of Marcantonio's bills. The 1943 bill presented further arguments for independence. Here, he noted that "as a result of more than 100 years of constant struggle against Spain [Puerto Ricans] attained in 1898 an irrevocable autonomous status, which permitted them essential sovereignty and self-government, including the right to enter into foreign treaties, impose tariffs and completely control Puerto Rico's internal affairs. . . ." The taking over of Puerto Rico "without the consent of its people," he continued, meant an enormous retrogression in terms of the political status of the island. In this bill Marcantonio also connected the demand for independence to the need to "cement the ties of mutual friendship between [the United States and] the more than 100,000,000 Latin American peoples" The opening sentence of this bill states most succinctly, perhaps, the least debatable reason for independence: "The people of Puerto Rico, after four centuries of common economic, cultural, social, and political experience [have] developed into a distinct nation. . . ."⁶

Marcantonio believed that the anticolonial sentiment arising out of the war years greatly enhanced the possibility of Puerto Rican

⁵See, for example, Congressional Record, June 17, 1943, p. 6028.

⁶Congressional Record, June 16, 1947, p. 7077.

independence. In an article published by the International Labor Defense in 1945, he wrote: "The people who fought Fascism everywhere in the world are determined that no Fascist relic, no matter in what form, shall remain. Colonialism is Fascism." Logically, he maintained, it was this antifascist struggle that was causing "the issue of Puerto Rico's independence to reach its historic hour Anyone who seeks to evade the issue of Puerto Rican independence is unrealistic and is attempting the impossible. He is attempting to postpone that which the march of events had made inevitable and its fruition immediate."⁷

By 1950, however, the political atmosphere had changed dramatically and his hopes were dashed. A bill titled the "Organization of Constitutional Government by the the People of Puerto Rico" (H.R. 7674) called for neither statehood nor independence, but its establishment of a "Free Associated State," whereby Puerto Rico would gain some greater control over purely local matters. This position was supported by the largest political party in Puerto Rico, the Popular Democratic Party, and by its leader, Luis Muñoz Marín. Characterizing the proposed "Free Associated State" as a "supine reaffirmation of the status quo in Puerto Rico under the guise of a meaningless self-government," Marcantonio insisted that the Free Associated State represented thinly veiled colonialism, inasmuch as Puerto Rico would have no right to participate in national elections and would be ruled by the United States executive, legislative, and judicial branches.⁸

Fearing that passage of H.R. 7674 would effectively remove Puerto

⁷Legislative Service (September 1945), p. 1. Draft deposited in MP 22 (Miscellaneous 5 of 8).

⁸Rubinstein, p. 416.

Rico's independence from the political agenda for the foreseeable future, Marcantonio conducted an exhaustive, desperate parliamentary campaign to delay, if not defeat, this bill. Before the Committee on Public Lands, from which the bill emanated, he strongly objected to the failure of the committee to hold hearings in Puerto Rico itself and documented the considerable opposition to the bill. He noted, for example, that both El Mundo and El Imparcial in San Juan and El Dia in Ponce, as well as El Diario in New York City, unequivocally opposed H.R. 7674. He concluded: "Puerto Rico was not discovered when General [Nelson A.] Miles landed in Ponce in 1898. For almost 450 years these people have been living in Puerto Rico with a culture, a language and a tradition completely their own."⁹

Marcantonio positioned his stand against Commonwealth status for Puerto Rico primarily in economic--not political--terms. He retold the economic history of Puerto Rico since 1898: the displacement of the small independent farmers by United States-owned plantations and the inability of industry to develop because of the absence of a protective tariff system. He pointed out that under the Sugar Act, Puerto Rico was permitted to refine only 15 percent of its total sugar production, the other 85 percent being refined in the United States, resulting in a loss of more than \$30 million to the Puerto Rican economy. He charged that because of the lack of tariff protection, Puerto Rican coffee production had so declined that it now imported coffee, adding: "We produce no coffee in the United States. Our tariff is drafted to protect our crops. If we protect sugar, which is a Puerto Rican product, it is

⁹"Statement Made in Opposition to HR 7674," June 8, 1950. MP 22, 1 of 2 (Puerto Rico).

because we produce 2 million tons of sugar right here in the United States." Marcantonio also emphasized the negative economic effects of the inclusion of Puerto Rico in the coastwise shipping laws. These laws restricted the transshipment of products to the continental United States to vessels flying the United States flag, which resulted in enormously increased transportation costs. Puerto Rico's political status, he noted, effectively excluded it from world markets, causing the island to purchase 98 percent of its imports from the United States. "In short, we have a stranglehold upon the Puerto Rican economy and have reduced that country to a state of misery and abysmal poverty."¹⁰ This impassioned speech simultaneously polemicized against H.R. 7674 and supported his resubmitted bill for "independence coupled with extensive economic aid from the United States."¹¹

This speech, the longest in his Congressional career, evoked no response. At its conclusion, another representative rose to give thanks to the Irish embassy "for sending over these beautiful green carnations." He was seconded by another representative, who pointed out that the green carnations which "all the representatives are wearing today remind us that tomorrow is St. Patrick's Day." HR 7674 passed the House 269 to 1.¹²

The failure of his colleagues even to reply to his words typified

¹⁰Congressional Record, March 16, 1950, pp. 3542-48.

¹¹"Free Puerto Rico Asked," New York Times (March 17, 1950), p. 27.

¹²Congressional Record, March 16, 1950, p. 3548; "Puerto Rico Gets Chance to Write Constitution as Truman Signs Bill," New York Times (July 4, 1950), p. 1. After this bill passed the Senate, Marcantonio submitted a resolution calling for its recommittal. His motion was defeated 250 to one. "How Members From This Area Voted in Congress During Week," New York Times (July 3, 1950), p. 8.

what Marcantonio considered the House's disinterest in Puerto Rico. From his first term in office, he insisted "Puerto Rico has been kicked around too long."¹³ He attempted to combat this House indifference in a number of ways. When bills relating to Puerto Rico arose, he insisted they be treated seriously. For example, he required that a quorum be present for the debate on H.R. 7674. This infuriated one representative who accused him of dilatory tactics and "causing this House to be inconvenienced to the extent of forty minutes by calling the roll." To this Marcantonio replied:

I have a perfect right to make a point of quorum when you call up this bill at this late hour when so little attention is given to something which is so important to 2,200,000 people. Since we are going to meet tomorrow, he did not have to call it up at this late hour. This demonstrates the contempt in which the House leadership holds the people of Puerto Rico. Since when does the leadership bring up any important bill at this late hour? It does so because we are dealing with Puerto Rico.¹⁴

Marcantonio was well aware of the ignorance of most Congressman on questions relating to Puerto Rico. In the introduction of various bills, in debates, and by insertions in the Congressional Record, he presented remarkably detailed accounts of the political, social, educational, and economic realities of Puerto Rico's history from its discovery to the present.¹⁵ He repeatedly attempted to enhance the significance of Puerto Rico in the House by placing its political status and needs within the context of United States relations with Latin America: "Little is known of the facts [of Puerto Rico] by the people

¹³Congressional Record, February 3, 1936, p. 1396.

¹⁴Congressional Record, June 29, 1950, p. 9504.

¹⁵See especially: Congressional Record, July 17, 1942, pp. A2809-10; and July 29, 1950, pp. 505-512.

of the United States. . . . To the people of Latin America . . . these facts are only too well known. . . . So long as Puerto Rico is not free, they wonder: 'If the United States wants Puerto Rico as a colony what are its true intentions toward the other 200,000,000 Latin American peoples and their republics?'"¹⁶

Marcantonio's support for Puerto Rican independence ranged far beyond legislative activity. In July of 1936, he announced his intention to visit the country "particularly to study the conditions affecting sugar field and needle workers." He stated that while he believed overwhelming sentiment existed among Puerto Ricans for independence, he wanted to see for himself "just what the real situation is."¹⁷ (This visit was the only occasion Marcantonio traveled outside the continental United States.) Between the time of this announcement and his arrival in Puerto Rico in July 31, 1936, Don Pedro Albizu Campos, the founder of the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico and seven of its members were convicted of conspiring to overthrow the United States government.¹⁸ Their prison terms ranged from two to ten years. The circumstances surrounding their trials were most unusual. Tried in San

¹⁶Congressional Record, July 17, 1942; see also May 22, 1940, pp. 6654-55, and November 12, 1942, p. 8810.

In a radio address, broadcast on June 3, 1941 as a reply to one of Roosevelt's fireside chats, Marcantonio again placed the question of Puerto Rico's political status within the general context of United States-Latin American relations. He insisted that the Latin Americans would "never forget our tyranny over Puerto Rico." The full text of this address was republished in the Appendix to the Congressional Record, June 3, 1941, p. 2655.

¹⁷"To Get Puerto Rican Data," New York Times (July 19, 1936), p. 25.

¹⁸"Albizu and Seven Aides Get Prison Terms," New York Times (August 1, 1936), p. 3.

Juan, their first trial had ended in a hung jury. The jury for the second trial consisted of ten continental Americans and two Puerto Ricans.¹⁹

A letter to Marcantonio from José Santiago, a Communist Party leader in El Barrio, dated March 16, 1936, reveals something of the background of Marcantonio's trip. Santiago reminded Marcantonio that he had said he was going to Puerto Rico as soon as the current session of Congress ended. Alluding to Riggs's assassination and the death while in police custody of two Nationalists suspected of perpetrating the assassination (see p. 302), Santiago said, "the Puerto Rican situation has aroused a great deal of discussion in Harlem." He proposed that a "delegation of investigation" be composed of trade unionists, men in public affairs, workers (American and Puerto Rican) in which you would participate as an individual." Santiago further recommended that the "work of organizing the delegation would be placed in the hands of a small, active committee." Marcantonio replied that he was "definitely going to Puerto Rico," and that he would "be very happy to have a delegation of trade unionists, liberals, and others interested in Puerto Rico come along with me." This was, of course, not what Santiago had in mind. In any case, Marcantonio went alone. A Communist organizer, Harry Hefner, did precede Marcantonio with the purpose of preparing mass meetings for Marcantonio to address. Hefner had previously organized sugar plantation workers and was a founder of the Communist Party of Puerto Rico. These contacts must have greatly contributed to the

¹⁹"Moves New Albizu Trial," New York Times (August 4, 1936), p. 3.

massive reception Marcantonio received during his ten-day stay in Puerto Rico.²⁰

Upon his arrival in San Juan on August 1, Marcantonio was greeted by Don Jesús Benitez Castano, administrator for the capital, and many other prominent political figures, including Muñoz Marín.²¹ Before this group, Marcantonio pledged to assist Albizu Campos and the other convicted Nationalists in any way they might request. They at once engaged him as their counsel. In a post-trial motion, he argued that the verdict convicting Albizu Campos and the others had been contrary to the law and evidence. Further, the defendants had not had a fair trial because three jurors had been biased. Marcantonio also alleged that the court had erred in not sustaining the objection of Albizu Campos's lawyer to District Attorney Snyder's reference to Albizu Campos as an assassin, a demagogue, and a leader of assassins. On August 4, Marcantonio brought to court two discharged employees of the National City Bank, who presented affidavits alleging that a juror who was an employee of the bank had expressed an opinion concerning Albizu Campos's guilt in advance of the trial. His objections to the trial's proceedings were not sustained, and along with Gilberto Concepción de Gracia, a leader in the Puerto Rican independence movement, Marcantonio became co-counsel for the alleged conspirators' appeal.²² The rest of his two-week stay Marcantonio spoke at two or more mass meetings a day

²⁰Santiago to Marcantonio, March 16, 1936; Marcantonio to Santiago, March 24, 1936. MP 16 (General Correspondence). Interview with Harry Hefner, July 18, 1976.

²¹Ojeda Reyes, p. 25.

²²"Moves New Albizu Trial."

on behalf of the convicted Nationalists. The most important of these took place in San Juan under the auspices of the National Congress for the Freedom of the Political Prisoners. There, Marcantonio's address concluded by comparing the Nationalists' plight with the "tragically celebrated cases of Eugene V. Debs, Sacco and Vanzetti, and the Scottsboro boys." He then expressed his confidence in the American people's support for the "cause for the liberation of these Puerto Rican political prisoners."²³ During an August 11 radio broadcast, he averred that the most important issue before the island was the freedom of Albizu Campos and his fellow Nationalists. Furthermore, he stated that the goal of Puerto Rico's independence necessitated close cooperation between United States workers and the Puerto Rican people.²⁴

His efforts to obtain clemency for the Nationalists continued unabated until their release in 1943. He worked assiduously to mobilize support for this aim in Puerto Rico itself. During the war years, in letters to Rexford Tugwell, the Governor of Puerto Rico, Marcantonio stressed that the "Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico had expressed its support for the ideals expressed by President Roosevelt in the Conference of the Atlantic and the Policy of Good Neighborhood adopted by the State Department under his wise guidance."²⁵ Marcantonio viewed the release of the prisoners as "of great aid in solidifying the people of Latin America behind the war."²⁶ In a similar vein, he urged Roger

²³Ojeda Reyes, pp. 28-29.

²⁴"Marcantonio Sees Albizu," New York Times (August 3, 1936), p. 4; see also "Puerto Ricans Organize to Obtain Statehood," New York Times (August 12, 1936), p. 4.

²⁵Press release, January 30, 1943. MP 22 1 of 2 (Puerto Rico).

²⁶Marcantonio to Baldwin, April 13, 1942. MP 2 (Campos).

Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union to encourage Muñoz Marín to call for the release of the Nationalists as a means of "fighting against the reactionaries in Puerto Rico."²⁷ He also raised the question of clemency with Roosevelt numerous times,²⁸ and in 1941 delivered to the White House a clemency petition signed by Ernest Hemingway, Ruth Benedict, Sherwood Anderson, and Theodore Dreiser, among others.²⁹ He activated the National Lawyers Guild and the International Labor Defense on this issue,³⁰ and argued frequently for clemency, even on the floor of the House.³¹ But no effective movement was ever formed to assist the Nationalist prisoners.

With little hope of reversing their conviction, Marcantonio then expended a considerable part of his energies in attempts to alleviate their misery. Sent to Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, they were effectively prevented from receiving visitors, although Marcantonio did visit them a few times and help to secure visitor passes for others. He communicated constantly with the Department of Justice on their behalf, especially to obtain medical treatment for the Nationalist prisoners.³²

Upon the release of these prisoners, Marcantonio made certain to arrange to have someone there to greet them. To an aide he wrote,

²⁷Marcantonio to Baldwin, April 4, 1942. MP 2 (Campos).

²⁸Donna Liberman, "Vito Marcantonio: People's Congressman: The New Deal Period" (Honors Paper, Radcliffe College, 1970), p. 84.

²⁹MP 2.

³⁰MP 2.

³¹Congressional Record July 17, 1942, p. A2810.

³²Gerald Meyer, "Vito Marcantonio y el partido nacionalista puertorriqueño," Signos (January-March 1980), pp. 4-6.

"Can't you do anything with any of the unions to get [Luis Velázquez] a clerical job."³³ He prevented the reincarceration of Clemente Soto Velez on charges of draft evasion.³⁴ On July 3, 1943, Albizu Campos was released on probation. Suffering from a heart condition and partial paralysis of his left arm, the Nationalist leader was admitted to Columbus Hospital, thanks to Marcantonio's arrangements, where he remained for almost two years.³⁵

Marcantonio frequently visited Albizu Campos at the hospital, and a trusted aide of Albizu Campos, Ruth Reynolds, conveyed verbal and written messages between the two. When Albizu Campos discovered a microphone hidden behind his hospital bed, he immediately called for Marcantonio. Upon his arrival, Marcantonio shouted obscenities into the microphone and then ripped it out with his own hands.³⁶

At Albizu Campos's request in 1949, Marcantonio sent his aide, Manuel Medina, to Puerto Rico for the purpose of conferring on the imminent repression of the Nationalist Party. On October 19, 1949, Marcantonio stated in Congress:

The Nationalist Party is daily harrassed and terrorized by the police and the territorial government of the island. And the leader of that party, Pedro Albizu Campos, is hounded like a common criminal.

In 1947 he returned to his home after ten years of exile in the United States. . . . Today he lives in San Juan under the type of

³³Marcantonio to Coleman, October 6, 1941. MP 3.

³⁴Interview with Clemente Soto Velez, New York City, September 26, 1975; MP 44 (Aide's Report, Fink '43).

³⁵Oscar Collazo, personal letter, September 22, 1976; Federico Ribes Tovar, A Chronological History of Puerto Rico (New York: Plus Ultra, 1973), p. 487.

³⁶Interview with Ruth Reynolds, New York City, August 26, 1975.

police surveillance and intimidation that could only have been duplicated in Hitler Germany.³⁷

Marcantonio's deep personal involvement with the Puerto Rican independence movement on several fronts was motivated in large part by his belief that legislation alone would not achieve freedom. As he declared at the conclusion of his speech introducing the independence bill in 1936: "It is up to the people of Puerto Rico to take the initiative; and the more they develop that and make it known to the entire world, the better are the chances of the passage of my bill and the achieving of independence."³⁸

Marcantonio rallied every conceivable means of furthering the cause, even raising the independence question with Presidents Roosevelt and Truman.³⁹ He had inserted in the Congressional Record numerous supportive documents⁴⁰ and acted as a resource person for various left-wing unions and organizations, such as the United Public Workers of America and the National Maritime Workers, which became interested in this issue.⁴¹ But even on the left he was unable to overcome the indifference toward the cause of Puerto Rican independence among the United States public.

³⁷Rubinstein, p. 415; see also Congressional Record, June 19, 1948, p. 9282.

³⁸Rubinstein, p. 378.

³⁹Liberian, p. 84; Press release, May 22, 1946. MP 15 (General Correspondence).

⁴⁰See, for example: Congressional Record, July 3, 1943, p. A3887; September 6, 1945, p. 8413; and September 6, 1945, A3800.

⁴¹Marcantonio to Ewart Guinier, United Public Workers of America, October 20, 1947; Paul Palazzi, Agent, National Maritime Union, October 23, 1947. MP 16 (General Correspondence).

Marcantonio was keenly disappointed by his unsuccessful efforts in 1948 to commit the Progressive Party to independence. Although he was a member of the party's highest leadership circles, the opposition of Rexford Tugwell to the original draft of the plan, entitled "The New Party Will Grant Independence to Puerto Rico," blocked its adoption. Tugwell insisted that Puerto Ricans be given the right to choose between independence and statehood. Marcantonio contended that in the repressive atmosphere of colonialism, no free referendum on this subject could ever occur. Consequently, he believed that Congress should vote for independence, after which the island could apply for statehood status, if it so desired. Ultimately, Henry Wallace prevailed upon Marcantonio to compromise and accept the following formula: "The people of Puerto Rico have the right to independence."⁴²

Marcantonio also propagandized within Puerto Rico itself. His extensive message to the 1943 Congress for the Independence of Puerto Rico held in San Juan stressed the more purely nationalist argument for Puerto Rican independence: "My plan [for the independence of Puerto Rico] recognizes the cardinal principal that the people of Puerto Rico themselves, occupying the same geographic area for centuries, experiencing the identical economic and social conditions, and united by several centuries of history and tradition, have developed into a nation of people who have the indefeasible right of self-determination."⁴³

Whether the sentiment for Puerto Rican independence ebbed or flowed, Marcantonio's advocacy remained constant. He viewed Puerto

⁴²Curtis D. MacDougall, Gideon's Army (New York: Marzani & Munsell, 1965), pp. 545, 547.

⁴³MP 22 (Puerto Rico).

Rico's colonial status as an anachronism that ran counter to the "trend of the time . . . towards the liquidation of colonialism everywhere."⁴⁴ What most motivated his championing of independence, however, was his belief that without it there could be no hope of erasing "these scars of imperialist control."⁴⁵ In 1950 he stated: "I am not so naive to think that independence would overnight end all the problems of the Puerto Rican people. But I know that independence would release the energy and the creativeness of these fine people to meet their problems and to solve them by their own efforts. Without independence I see no solution."⁴⁶

Marcantonio's activities on behalf of the cause of independence met with interest in Puerto Rico. Newspaper editors, Puerto Rican legislators, trade union officials, and the leaders of various organizations indicated that his pro-independence efforts were greatly encouraging to and appreciated by broad sectors of the Puerto Rican public. As one representative of the 1944 Congreso Pro-Independencia de Puerto Rico said: "We have come to the clear and firm conclusion that you are a legitimate representative of Puerto Rico."⁴⁷

Marcantonio's involvement with the Puerto Rican independence movement is still much remembered. Almost unrecorded, however, are his prodigious efforts in more mundane--though often far-reaching--issues

⁴⁴Congressional Record, December 15, 1942, p. A4411.

⁴⁵Marcantonio to Congress for the Independence of Puerto Rico (meeting at San Juan, August 15, 1943), August 5, 1943. MP 15.

⁴⁶Congressional Record, June 29, 1950, p. 9512. .

⁴⁷Francisco Perez Quinones, President of El Comité Delegación Municipal al Congreso Pro Independencia de Puerto Rico, February 24, 1944. MP 15 (General Correspondence).

concerning Puerto Rico.⁴⁸

In strictly legislative matters, Marcantonio frequently played a more important role in Congress than the non-voting Resident Commissioners. Whether because the Resident Commissioners were not particularly effective or because they were unable to vote, it was Marcantonio who served as the Congressional spokesman for Puerto Rican interests. For this second, non-voting constituency he fulfilled all the functions of a Congressman: writing bills to meet their special needs, providing services they could obtain nowhere else, and in general championing their rights.

Marcantonio first addressed a question concerning Puerto Rico in the House in 1935, when he relayed a petition from the New York State Senate requesting Congress to consider raising Puerto Rico's sugar quota.⁴⁹ (In subsequent years, Congress actually reduced the quota.) The expanding importance of sugar to Puerto Rico's economy caused him frequently to try to right the wrongs he felt this crop had inflicted on Puerto Rico. In 1939 Marcantonio received a petition from a group of sugar workers. They pointed out that while the sugar corporations received government grants, for "those who give all and get nothing but misery and hunger . . . it is necessary that misery and hunger which rule our homes disappear and that prosperity take their place." Marcantonio submitted the petition to Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes.⁵⁰ His continued awareness of the plight of the Puerto Rican

⁴⁸For an extended presentation of this area of Marcantonio's work, see Gerald Meyer, "Vito Marcantonio, Congressman for Puerto Rico: 1934-1936, 1938-1950." La Revista del Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico 43, 1 (February 1982), pp. 67-98.

⁴⁹Congressional Record, April 8, 1935, p. 5284.

⁵⁰MP 15 (General Correspondence).

sugar workers led him to object to the omission of guarantees from a bill concerning the sugar industry that the workers would receive payment in full for their work and be compensated at a "fair and reasonable wage to be fixed by the Secretary of Agriculture."⁵¹ Time and again, Marcantonio pointed to the negative effects of extensive sugar production on the Puerto Rican economy. In 1942, he stated: "[Puerto Rico] was reduced to a monoculture, a sugar colony of the United States. To the people of Latin America, Puerto Rico has a diabetic economy."⁵²

The expansion of American-owned sugar plantations had come about largely at the expense of the island's small independent farmers. Marcantonio concentrated a good deal of attention on their defense. In response to a request from the Asociación de Agricultores de Puerto Rico, Marcantonio succeeded in 1942 in convincing Henry Wallace, then chairman of the Supply, Priorities, and Allocation Board, that the government should purchase the large quantities of Puerto Rican coffee that had accumulated because of the virtual impossibility of shipping products to the mainland during the war.⁵³ Also on behalf of small agricultural producers, Marcantonio submitted a resolution to provide for the cancellation of loans to Puerto Rican farmers made by the Puerto Rican Hurricane Relief Commission and other federal agencies.⁵⁴

⁵¹Congressional Record, July 9, 1947, p. 8556.

⁵²Congressional Record, July 7, 1942, pp. 2809-10.

⁵³Marcantonio to Wallace, May 4, 1936; Marcantonio to Wallace, December 22, 1941; Wallace to Marcantonio, May 6, 1942; M. Gonzalves Quinones, Secretary of the Asociación de Agricultores de Puerto Rico, to Marcantonio, March 5, 1942. MP 52 (Puerto Rican Research).

⁵⁴Text entitled "Joint Resolution" and letters of support from individuals and organizations, for example, the Adelphi Lodge No. 1 of Mayagüez. MP 15 (Farm Tenants Association).

Many of Marcantonio's efforts on behalf of Puerto Rico centered on qualifying its residents as participants in various federal legislation and programs. His most significant single success was the inclusion of Puerto Rico in the 1939 extension of the Social Security Act, which added benefits for survivors and dependents of annuity policyholders. Marcantonio took full credit for this tremendously important measure and, in view of the absence of activity on the part of any other Congressman on matters concerning Puerto Rico, there is little reason to dispute his claim.⁵⁵

He was also responsible for the passage in 1942 of a bill conferring United States citizenship on all who had been born on the island. Before this law was enacted, in order to attain the right of United States citizenship, it was necessary to prove that both parents had been born in Puerto Rico, which in turn caused Puerto Ricans to be treated as aliens upon their arrival in the United States, and sometimes even led to their deportation.⁵⁶ In other successful fights, Marcantonio brought Puerto Rico into a program for the prevention of tuberculosis, and incorporated it into numerous other pieces of social legislation and appropriations.⁵⁷

In 1939 and 1940, Marcantonio argued on eight separate occasions

⁵⁵MP 16 (General Correspondence); see also letter from Marcantonio to Oswald Garrison Villard, February 28, 1939. MP 16 (General Correspondence).

⁵⁶"Immigrant Ban Protested," New York Times (July 9, 1939), p. 25; press release issued July 10, 1939. MP 15 (General Correspondence); text of bill and press release issued August 2, 1939. MP 15 (General Correspondence); "House Passes Puerto Rico Bill," New York Times (October 20, 1942), p. 12.

⁵⁷Untitled and undated campaign speech (circa 1944). MP 22 (Miscellaneous 4 of 8); see also Marcantonio to editor of El Imparcial, June 10, 1939. MP 16 (General Correspondence).

in the House in a futile debate to maintain the minimum 25-cent hourly wage in Puerto Rico. He accused the sugar companies and the "chiseling industry, the needlework industry" of ignoring the Fair Labor Standards Act. Moreover, he stated that Governor Blanton Winship "on many occasions, not only in speeches but in conferences, advised [the needlework industry] not worry about the law; that the day was not far off when this law would be changed." He informed the House that when the Territorial Representative of the Wage and Hour Division of the Department of Labor in Puerto Rico attempted to enforce the law, he was shot at and otherwise threatened.⁵⁸

Bolívar Pagan, the Resident Commissioner, and various Congressmen advocated limiting the minimum wage to solve the island's economic problems. When asked by a Congressman, "Are the sugar companies opposed to paying \$12 a week?," Pagan replied "That is a question for the industry."⁵⁹ When the elimination of the minimum wage was presented as somehow substituting for an appropriation of \$3 million in relief to the islanders, Marcantonio attacked Pagan, stating: "The cause of unemployment in Puerto Rico is due to a virulent and oppressive imperialism, against which the gentleman from Puerto Rico should be fighting instead of training his guns on the wage and hours law, which was enacted for the protection of his people."⁶⁰

The Congressional committee that reported on the wage-and-hours

⁵⁸Congressional Record, May 11, 1939, pp. 5466-67.

⁵⁹Congressional Record, May 1, 1940, p. 8865.

⁶⁰Congressional Record, April 26, 1940, p. 5655.

bill withheld its recommendation for supplementary relief for Puerto Rico, because although "obviously there is urgent need for something to be done to meet this aggravated condition, the answer is not to provide work relief for a relatively small part of the number of [unemployed] but to restudy with a view to lifting or narrowing the application of the Fair Labor Standards Act as it relates to Puerto Rico." Marcantonio replied that Puerto Ricans found themselves "in their present plight because of exploitation and tyranny," not because of a seldom-enforced 25-cent hourly minimum wage. In any case, he insisted that it was absurd to deny such relief on the grounds it would not solve the country's economic problems. This same committee, he continued, would never come before the House and recommend that no appropriation for relief be granted to the eleven million unemployed in the continental United States because it would not resolve the entire unemployment problem.⁶¹ Incensed by what he perceived as the imminent passage of this bill, Marcantonio castigated his colleagues: "What consideration are we giving the people of Puerto Rico? In this relief bill we have cut Puerto Rico from \$7 million to \$5 million for relief purposes. On the other hand, we give the vilest gang of labor exploiters . . . by virtue of this bill, relief from the provisions of the wage-hour law. What a mockery."⁶²

Because the minimum-wage issue directly affected such a large proportion of the population and because of the prominent role of Pagan in trying to limit its coverage for Puerto Rico, the response on the

⁶¹Congressional Record, March 22, 1939, p. 3124.

⁶²Congressional Record, May 30, 1940, p. 8865.

island to Marcantonio's resistance was considerable. Petitions, resolutions, and letters came from all over the island encouraging and supporting the embattled Congressman. A group of sugar workers wrote: "It is very paradoxical that a North American like you is the spokesman of the suffering and exploited classes of Puerto Rico while there is in the same Congress a representative of our island, President of the Socialist Party who calls himself a defender of Puerto Rican labor, . . . defending the corporations and its interests."⁶³ While Marcantonio's campaign to maintain the minimum wage gained him enormous goodwill, he ultimately failed. In 1940 Congress abandoned a fixed minimum wage for Puerto Rico and replaced it with a flexible system, based on an industry-committee procedure which established separate wage rates for each island industry engaged in interstate commerce.⁶⁴

Marcantonio was involved as well with narrower matters concerning Puerto Rico. He submitted a bill that would have treated Puerto Ricans working in the continental United States during World War I (who were called expedicionarios) as military personnel and hence make them eligible for veterans' benefits. Potential beneficiaries of this bill established Committees of Expeditionary Industrial Wartime Laborers in a number of Puerto Rican localities and in El Barrio. These organizations, and many individual expedicionarios, corresponded with Marcantonio. Typically, their letters--as well as those he received from Puerto Rico regarding other legislative matters--contained two

⁶³List of signatures, dated May 10, 1940. MP 16 (Wages and Hours).

⁶⁴Gordon K. Lewis, Puerto Rico: Freedom and Power in the Caribbean (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963), p. 219.

components: a description of great deprivation and an appreciation of Marcantonio. "In this present time," wrote one expedicionario, "parts of us are suffering of hunger and without clothes. As you are the man regarded to defend us in this case we demanded of you all you can."⁶⁵

Of enormous importance to Puerto Rico was Marcantonio's blocking of the Cole Amendment in 1944, which would have transferred the revenue from the sale of rum from the Treasury of Puerto Rico, to which it had been assigned since 1900, to the United States Treasury. In 1943 the sum involved was \$70 million. Marcantonio stated that not only would the amendment cripple Puerto Rico fiscally, but it would also erode what remained of Puerto Rico's sovereignty by making the island even more financially dependent on Washington. El Imparcial editorialized:

"Puerto Rico is again in debt to . . . Vito Marcantonio. Once again, the vibrant voice of the New York leader, has been raised in the House of Representatives in order to defend the right of Puerto Rico, in order to stop an unjustifiable blow, in order to condemn and prevent a sinister plot against the vital interests of the Island."⁶⁶

A checklist of Marcantonio's Congressional activities on behalf of Puerto Rico shows that he aimed most of his appeals at immediate economic relief. In his initial House speech on this issue, in February 1936, he carefully articulated the basic reason that made such assistance imperative: "Puerto Rico is the most tragic victim of American imperialism."⁶⁷ He echoed this critique in all his subsequent

⁶⁵Text of resolution, dated February 25, 1940; Maria Martinez to Marcantonio, February 24, 1940. MP 16 (General Correspondence).

⁶⁶Congressional Record, February 7, 1944; see also March 27, 1944, p. A1533.

⁶⁷Congressional Record, February 3, 1936, p. 1396.

speeches on the subject. Four years later, leveling an attack against a reduction in an appropriation for direct relief to Puerto Rico, he asserted:

According to Department of Labor statistics, 400,000 employable persons in Puerto Rico . . . are unemployed. This means that you have 1,225,000 people out of a total population of 1,800,000 who are in need of some kind of assistance.

Can we permit in the Caribbean, on an island which every Latin American is looking to, that these people starve, people whom we have expropriated? Their plight is not due to any fault of the Puerto Rican people. It is the consequence of imperialism.⁶⁸

During the war, the already depressed Puerto Rican economy further declined particularly because of the shortage of ships for commercial use. Again and again, from the floor of the House and directly to Roosevelt, Marcantonio heralded the new crisis and warned of its consequences. In November 1942, in his first major speech explaining the havoc being wreaked by this shortage, he pointed out that whereas before the war Puerto Rico received 100,000 tons of shipments a month from the continental United States, it now received less than 30,000 tons. Shortages of food and other basic consumer goods ignited runaway inflation and "literally speaking, thousands and thousands of families in Puerto Rico are facing starvation." Moreover, in Puerto Rico there was no war boom at all, and the gasoline shortage was practically paralyzing the country. Puerto Rico found itself, he averred, "in a plight which in some respects is worse than the plight of some of the [Axis] conquered nations."⁶⁹ Later that year, he authored an omnibus bill program for immediate relief, demanding the exemption of Puerto Rico from the coastwise shipping laws, appropriation of a minimum

⁶⁸Congressional Record, May 22, 1940, p. 6655.

⁶⁹Congressional Record, November 12, 1942, pp. 8810-12.

of \$50 million in food relief, price subsidies, and a land reform program to encourage the cultivation of subsistence crops. He particularly cited the need for constructing canneries, refineries, and other essential facilities, "which we have never permitted Puerto Rico to develop."⁷⁰ The House took no action.

Aside from addressing the general crisis of wartime Puerto Rico, Marcantonio devoted himself to resolving various specific problems created by the war. Two examples are illustrative of many such actions. A small rum producer wrote Marcantonio complaining that the proposed reduction in the rum quota would mean a profit of \$9.30 per month for him. He added: "I have no income, I am heavily in debt and facing a foreclosure. My case, of course, is not unique. . . . We small distillers aspire to no big profits; we just want to be able to make a living at a trade in which we have been for years."⁷¹ In the second example, a distressed Marcantonio pointed out that "the cost of living index of the Economic Review of the Chamber of Commerce of Puerto Rico shows that the living costs on the island have risen from 100 in the base year of 1939 to 141 in December, 1941," and urged the Commissioner of the Work Projects Administration to raise the wages of WPA workers in Puerto Rico to reflect this rate of inflation.⁷²

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Signature illegible, September 6, 1944. MP 15 (General Correspondence).

⁷²Marcantonio to Howard O. Hunter, Commissioner of the Work Projects Administration, March 24, 1942; Malcolm Miller, Assistant Commissioner of the Work Projects Administration, to Marcantonio, March 26, 1942; Marcantonio to Galo Gomes, President of the Unión de Trabajadores de la WPA, Mayagüez, April 2, 1942. MP 15 (General Correspondence).

In the postwar period, Marcantonio began to combat a major problem in Puerto Rico's educational system. In a letter dated May 22, 1946, which he personally delivered to President Truman, he argued at length for the reinstatement of Spanish as the language of instruction in Puerto Rico's public schools. He buttressed his case by pointing to the fact that not only was Spanish the vernacular of Puerto Rico, but it was also the language of the courts, legislature, churches, and government offices. The use of English in the educational system, therefore, violated "the fundamental pedagogical principle that instruction should be transmitted in the vernacular language of the students." He then traced the conflicting language policies decreed by the various commissioners of education. "Since 1898 to date, Puerto Rico has unfortunately been taken as a field of experimentation in the language realm." The vacillation between English and Spanish had resulted in "confusion, misuse of the monies appropriated for education, suffering on the part of the student, excessive time given to language study, and inability to master either Spanish or the English language." Citing the overwhelming support in Puerto Rico for the reinstatement of Spanish as the language of instruction, Marcantonio closed by calling upon the President "in the name of the children of Puerto Rico who are being tortured by the prevailing system . . . to fight cultural chauvinism and to correct past errors" and sign the bill, passed by the legislature of Puerto Rico over the objections of the Resident Commissioner of Education, to restore the Spanish language in the public schools. Truman signed it.⁷³

⁷³Congressional Record, May 22, 1946, pp. 2894-95; press release, May 22, 1946. MP 15 (General Correspondence).

In 1949, before the House Subcommittee on Education and Labor, Marcantonio bitterly attacked the Federal Aid to Education Bill as "both inadequate and viciously discriminatory" against Puerto Rico. He pointed out that although 30 percent of the island's budget was devoted to education, only 50 percent of the children were attending school, and only 30 percent of Puerto Ricans over the age of fifteen had completed more than two years of schooling. He documented the appalling educational situation in Puerto Rico still further by citing statistics indicating that, in 1940, 72 percent of all fourteen- to seventeen-year-olds living in the continental United States were attending high school, as compared with only 6.7 percent of Puerto Rican youngsters. Despite the obvious need to expand the island's educational facilities, this bill would have provided Puerto Rico with less than half the aid per child vis-a-vis the continental United States. Calling for the distribution of federal educational aid to Puerto Rico "on exactly the same basis as that provided for children living in the continental United States," Marcantonio concluded: "Only independence will give these people the control of their own destiny, and through independence, with hard work and common effort, they can raise their standard of living, achieve greater security, and resolve their problems in their own way and in their best interest."⁷⁴

Marcantonio's participation in Puerto Rican affairs extended to orchestrating the removal from office of Blanton Winship, the governor of Puerto Rico. Winship, governor from 1934 to 1939, was an enemy of the Puerto Rican independence movement. During his term, two great

⁷⁴Transcript of testimony, dated June 2, 1949. MP 15 (General Correspondence).

landmarks of that movement occurred: the arrest and conviction of Pedro Albizu Campos and the Ponce Massacre.

On Palm Sunday, March 21, 1937, the Nationalist Party called for a march in Ponce, Puerto Rico's second largest city, to commemorate the death of two Nationalists who had died violently while in police custody. The police fired on the crowd as the march began, killing nineteen persons, including a seven-year-old girl, and wounding more than two hundred, two of whom later died of their wounds. The mayor of Ponce had been willing to grant a permit for a peaceful demonstration but Winship (who later figured prominently in the campaign to exclude Puerto Rico from the minimum wage law) forced him to cancel the permit. Furthermore, he ordered the police to adopt extreme security measures.⁷⁵ In an extensive Congressional speech entitled "Five Years of Tyranny in Puerto Rico," delivered on August 5, 1939, Marcantonio recounted his charges against Winship, whom he labeled the "Caribbean Nero": "In order to finance his extravaganza [of corruption], this island of honest people, who have been crushed into abject wage slavery, is compelled to pay 100 percent tax on salt. Nowhere in this world has such a condition existed since the pre-Revolutionary days of the French Revolution."⁷⁶

The response to Marcantonio's campaign against Winship predictably followed the political alignments in Puerto Rico. He was praised by the radical El Martillo and pro-independence El

⁷⁵Tovar, A Chronological History, pp. 471-72.

⁷⁶Congressional Record, August 5, 1939, p. 4068.

Imparcial.⁷⁷ From the other side of the political spectrum, Rafael Martinez Nadel, president of the Puerto Rican Senate, stated that Marcantonio had "no right to speak for Puerto Rico in the American Congress," and that he "does not represent Puerto Rico. He represents only a bunch of Harlem nationalists and Communists from Puerto Rico in New York." Calling Martinez Nadel "the political tarantula of Puerto Rico," Marcantonio boasted: "I carried every single election district in which Puerto Ricans reside, by a majority of two to one."⁷⁸

On April 13, 1937, Marcantonio began a concerted, vigorous campaign to remove Winship as governor. His opening salvo was to send to John Bernard, a Farmer-Labor Minnesota Congressman, a draft of a resolution calling for an investigation into the administration of Puerto Rico. He urged Bernard to submit the resolution within a week because "the people of Puerto Rico intend to stage a demonstration on Friday [and] it is essential that this be introduced not later than Thursday, so that newspapers in Puerto Rico carry the story."⁷⁹ (In this and other matters concerning Puerto Rico, Marcantonio was able to use Bernard's services during the period 1936 to 1938, when he was not sitting in Congress.) During an appointment on April 14, 1939 with Roosevelt, Marcantonio charged that Winship's administration was

⁷⁷"Marcantonio Anuncia Destitución Winship," El Martillo (April 15, 1939), p. 1; "Guerra Contra Winship," El Imparcial (clipping, no date) p. 5. MP 15 (Winship).

⁷⁸"Puerto Rican Spurns Marcantonio," New York Times (May 30, 1939), p. 2; Marcantonio to the Editor of San Juan El Mundo, May 10, 1939. MP 15 (Puerto Rico).

⁷⁹Text of Resolution MP 15; Bernard to Marcantonio, April 15, 1937; Marcantonio to Bernard, April 13, 1937. MP 22, 1 of 2 (Puerto Rico).

characterized by "graft, crime, and corruption,"⁸⁰ and presented evidence of malfeasance and nonfeasance, which Marcantonio had earlier presented to Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes.⁸¹ Assured of victory, Marcantonio, in a letter of February 10, 1939, promised the leftist intellectual José Enamorado Cuesta that "off the record, there will be a new Governor. I have a promise to that effect."⁸² On May 12, 1939, Roosevelt removed Winship as governor of Puerto Rico, an action for which Marcantonio took fully deserved credit.⁸³

As the founder and leader of the Popular Democratic Party (which became the dominant party almost from its formation in 1938) and the architect of both the Free Associated State and Operation Bootstrap (that is, the use of various incentives to attract further investment from the mainland) Luis Muñoz Marín was the most important figure in the history of the island since its annexation by the United States. Marcantonio's relationship with him ran a course that paralleled the latter's changing position on the question of independence for Puerto Rico. As long as Muñoz Marín remained an advocate of independence, close collaboration existed. In 1939, for example when a group of WPA workers protested a cut in their hourly pay, Muñoz Marín forwarded their

⁸⁰"President Defers Naming Six Aides," New York Times (April 14, 1939) p. 15.

⁸¹Ickes to Marcantonio, December 19, 1939; Marcantonio to Ickes, December 29, 1939; Marcantonio to Ickes, July 11, 1939; Ickes to Marcantonio, July 18, 1939. MP 15 (General Correspondence).

⁸²Marcantonio to Cuesta, February 10, 1939. MP 15 (General Correspondence). Tovar. A Chronological History p. 462.

⁸³Ibid., p. 458. See, for example, full-page advertisement in Pueblos Hispanos, July 15, 1944. Winship was succeeded by Admiral William Leahy, who served until December 5, 1940. He was succeeded by Rexford Tugwell--a very important figure in Puerto Rican history.

petition to Marcantonio. He stated: "They have appealed to me here and to you there as the only forces in which they have confidence."⁸⁴ Muñoz Marín's eventual rejection of independence and authorship of Operation Bootstrap led to an acrimonious breach. From the floor of the House, Marcantonio called Operation Bootstrap "Operation Booby Trap" and characterized Muñoz Marín as the "Nero of La Fortaleza." In return, Muñoz Marín called Marcantonio "a follower of the Communist Party line."⁸⁵ Muñoz Marín's fulminations against his erstwhile ally, however, had no measurable effect on Marcantonio's electorate.

Marcantonio's activities on behalf of Puerto Rico impinged on many of the most central concerns of its people. He lent the prestige of his office to the defense of the Nationalists whom many Puerto Ricans considered victims of judicial persecution. He effectively acted as Congressman for this part of the United States which was denied Congressional representation. He persistently advocated independence as the solution for the island's anomalous political status and its chronic economic problems. These initiatives were widely reported in Puerto Rico's press and in New York City's Spanish-language press. El Barrio was composed almost entirely of recent migrants, who maintained close ties to the island. Their awareness of Marcantonio's legislative and political work for their homeland lent the Italo-American radical enormous prestige. This is why Jesús Colón, a left-wing journalist writing in the fifties could declare with such confidence that the "American idol" of Puerto Ricans "was and still is Vito

⁸⁴Muñoz Marín to Marcantonio, September 9, 1939. MP 15 (WPA).

⁸⁵Congressional Record, March 16, 1950, p. 3545; "Puerto Ricans Get Campaign Warning," New York Times (October 17, 1949), p. 29.

Marcantonio."⁸⁶ El Barrio's positive response to Marcantonio is detailed in the next chapter, but a major component of this support resulted from his painstaking and effective use of his elective office to act as a tribune for a people whose political status denied them a voice in the legislative body which largely determined their fate.

⁸⁶Jesús Colón, A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches (New York: International Publishers, 1982), p. xii.

CHAPTER X

EL BARRIO'S RESPONSE TO MARCANTONIO

From 1938 until Marcantonio's defeat in 1950; Italian Harlem's percentage of support for the radical Congressman never declined significantly. But as more and more Italo-Americans left East Harlem, particularly in the years immediately following World War II, Marcantonio's re-election depended upon the growth of his other base of support, El Barrio. In 1934, when Marcantonio first ran for office, the population of Italian Harlem was about 80,000 and that of El Barrio about 13,000. In 1950, the last time he appeared on the ballot, the communities numbered approximately 50,000 and 63,000, respectively.¹ Thus, he had lost almost 40 percent of his Italo-American constituency in just sixteen years, while his Puerto Rican population constituency increased almost 500 percent. Although El Barrio's electoral support of Marcantonio was strikingly similar in degree to that given him by Italian Harlem, the underlying causes for this support were different.

¹"East Harlem and West Harlem: Population" and "Population Trends--East Harlem 1930-1940." Tables listing ethnic and racial background of East Harlem's population based on United States Census Bureau data. "Concerning Porto-Rican Population in East Harlem." Memorandum, by E. Warburg, dated December 2, 1935; data based on statistics of the Labor Department of Puerto Rico. CC. See also, Francesco Cordasco, "Ethnic Displacement in East Harlem," Phylon (Fall 1970), pp. 302-12.

In contrast with Italian Harlem, there is considerable evidence that many Puerto Rican immigrants arrived in East Harlem with a leftist persuasion. Hence, unlike Italian Harlem, there was from the beginning a significant left-wing contingent in El Barrio, which had an important impact on the political life of this community.

Before World War I, La Escuela Francisco Ferrer y Guardia, a type of settlement house serving Hispanics influenced by anarchist ideas, flourished in El Barrio. Apparently, other anarchist groups competed for followers there. One of them published a newspaper, El Corsario, for its adherents, who became known as los corsarios. When the United States entered the war in April 1917, El Corsario was forced to cease publication and a number of the corsarios were arrested on charges of conspiring to assassinate President Wilson. Though these charges were ultimately dropped, the Spaniards among the corsarios were deported.²

In 1918, the first Puerto Rican section of the Socialist Party in the continental United States was founded. Shortly afterward the Asociación Nacionalista came into existence. From this early date, then, there existed in El Barrio several organizational expressions of socialism and Puerto Rican nationalism--two distinctly radical political tendencies. The presence of a leftist contingent in this community in part accounts for the great enthusiasm with which it greeted the Presidential candidacy of Robert La Follette in 1924. The votes of its Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics helped East Harlem to become the congressional district outside of Wisconsin where the Progressive Party

²Bernardo Vega, Memorias de Bernardo Vega: Contribución a la historia de la comunidad puertorriqueña en Nueva York, ed., César Andreu Iglesias (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Huracán, 1977), pp. 72-73; 157-58.

did best. When Eugene V. Debs was imprisoned in 1919, a protest took place there. On Labor Day 1923, more than one thousand Hispanics met to protest the affiliation of the Puerto Rican labor movement with the American Federation of Labor. At least two socialist-oriented educational institutions existed in El Barrio.³

To some degree, these manifestations of El Barrio's political radicalism may have been associated with the community's growth within the heart of the second largest Socialist Party center in New York City--Jewish Harlem. In 1919, 128,000 Jews lived in East Harlem--most west of Third Avenue.⁴ By the closing years of World War I, East Harlem's Jewish community had become a center of Socialist Party politics: in both 1918 and 1920, the most heavily Jewish Assembly District gave a clear majority to the Socialist Party's candidate, Morris Hillquit.⁵ In 1918, although unable to campaign because of poor health, Hillquit received more than 40 percent of the East Harlem vote,

³Ibid., pp. 150, 158, 176, 182-84, 190. On La Follette see Simon W. Gerson, Pete: The Story of Peter V. Cacchione, New York's First Communist Councilman (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p. 91.

⁴"West Harlem and East Harlem Population." Jeffrey S. Gurock, When Harlem Was Jewish, 1870-1930 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 176-77.

⁵Morris Hillquit, Loose Leaves from a Busy Life (New York: MacMillan, 1955), pp. 118-19. These electoral campaigns plunged Jewish East Harlem into Socialist Party activity. During the 1916 Congressional campaign, for example, the Socialist Party distributed 150,000 pieces of campaign literature, which had been printed in English, Italian, Yiddish, and German. The Call, the Socialist daily, reported that on the weekend before the election, no fewer than "fifty rousing Socialist street meetings were held" in East Harlem. "Hillquit Sure of Election" (October 29, 1917).

losing to Isaac Siegal, the coalition candidate of the Democratic and Republican Parties. In the 1920 Presidential election, Eugene V. Debs received 14 percent of East Harlem's vote--mostly from its Jewish community. Again, Hillquit received more than 40 percent of the vote and again he was defeated by coalition candidate Siegal.⁶ The presence of the Socialist Party on East Harlem's streets was not confined to electioneering. Bernardo Vega recalled that in this period:

Harlem was a Socialist bastion. The party had numerous clubs established in the vicinity. In these the young workers met, not simply because of political concerns, but also because of cultural concerns. Moreover, these clubs carried out sports activities and celebrated popular holidays. There functioned two centers inspired by the Socialist Party: Harlem Terrace, a branch of the Rand School, on 104th Street, and the Harlem Educational Center on 106th Street between Madison and Park. To these could be added other cultural societies and a great number of workers' cooperatives. The center of assemblies and great indoor events was the Park Palace, a relatively large auditorium. The public forum was the corner of 110th Street and Fifth Avenue. There everything was discussed--political, economic, social, philosophical problems, and every night there were more than a half a dozen orators who expressed their point of view with the active participation of the public.⁷

(See pp. 20-21, 390)

⁶Hillquit, p. 119; Donna Liberman, "Vito Marcantonio: People's Congressman: The New Deal Period" (Honors Paper, Radcliffe College, 1970), p. 7.

Hillquit ran for mayor of New York City in 1917 on an antiwar platform. The general ferment surrounding the campaign engendered a most remarkable occurrence in Jewish Harlem--a strike of one to four thousand public school children. The lengthening of the school day until 5:00 (apparently to allow women to enter the work force) caused, in the words of a New York Tribune article: "Fully 1,000 children [to] surge through the east side of Harlem during school hours." The connection of this demonstration with the mayoralty campaign, however, was evidenced by the presence of "youths and girls who bore Hillquit banners and placards" East Harlem's Jewish community was second only to the Lower East Side in giving its vote to Hillquit. It also elected a Socialist assemblyman, August Claessens, and a Socialist alderman, Maurice Calman. "Heaviest Vote Brings Joy to Socialist Camp," New York Tribune (November 8, 1917).

⁷Vega, p. 47.

Beginning in the twenties and increasingly in the thirties, the Communist Party's presence in El Barrio grew. Founded in 1927 and composed of Spaniards, Puerto Ricans, and other Hispanics, El Centro Obrero Español served as a major center of Communist Party influence in El Barrio. El Centro Obrero Espanol sponsored a newspaper, La Vida Obrera, and took part in a successful labor-organizing campaign, which resulted in the founding of the first Hispanic branch of the Hotel Workers Union. Another organization, La Liga Anti-imperialista Puertorriquena, branched out from El Centro Obrero Español.⁸

One important manifestation of the rise of the left in El Barrio was the International Workers Order (IWO), a fraternal organization closely affiliated with the Communist Party. Founded in 1930, its lodges were organized along nationality lines. A list of IWO lodges in East Harlem, circa 1939-42, contains the names of the secretaries of twelve lodges. Judging by their surnames, two secretaries were Jewish, one was Italian, and nine were Hispanic.⁹ (See pp. 74, 223)

In June 1940, Marcantonio received a letter from Unidad Fraternal Hispana Lodge IWO congratulating him on behalf of its members "for your positions of fighting for the maintenance of progress, civil liberties, and peace in the United States."¹⁰ The enormously detailed work the IWO

⁸Ibid., pp. 201-3.

⁹MP 13, 1 of 2 (East Harlem, 1939-40).

¹⁰June 28, 1940. MP 49 (Campaign 1940). Again illustrating the type of assistance the IWO provided Marcantonio are these letters dated August and September 1940, which Marcantonio received from the director of the "IWO Committee to Elect Marcantonio":

"Our Spanish Section recently conducted a Health Survey in Harlem among children and of the 100 examined, a great number needed treatment, . . .

performed for Marcantonio was evidenced in another 1940 letter sent to him by the leader of the Spanish language section, Jesus Colon:

I have an idea of announcing [at a rally for an American Labor Party candidate from Brooklyn who was Puerto Rican, at which Marcantonio was the keynote speaker] a chain letter stunt a "visit-your-friend-in-lower-Harlem-and make-him-vote-for-the-Marcantonio-campaign, for Puerto Ricans living outside your district. The idea is to mobilize all help for your election in any way you [sic] can. If you think this is a good idea we might be able to do the same around the Puerto Ricans in the Bronx, around the IWO Spanish speaking lodges up there.¹¹

Apart from such organizational bases as the IWO lodges and El Centro Obrero Espanol, the Communist Party's influence was greatly enhanced by its sponsorship of a Spanish-language newspaper. The earliest one was La Vida Obrera, founded in the late twenties. La Voz, which was published from September 1937 to December 1939, had professional-looking layout and was filled with advertisements. La Voz did not have the appearance of a sectarian propaganda organ. At least

In the near future, we expect to conduct a bigger survey and to start this survey with a mass meeting where we will put forward the demand for additional health facilities in Spanish Harlem. We do this for two reasons: 1. to arouse the people of the community; and 2. we want to put you forward as the champion of the health service needs of the people in your Congressional District.

. . . you promised to speak at a meeting arranged by us on October 18. This meeting will deal specifically with the health problems, especially of the children, in the 20th Congressional District.

At this meeting we hope to project a campaign for a hospital in your district. . . .

Will you . . . send a letter endorsing IWO activities on behalf of the people in Spanish Harlem as well as supporting our program for a hospital in the 20th Congressional District?"

M. Horowitz to Marcantonio, August 9, 1940. MP 3 (Civil Liberties, G-Z). Horowitz to Marcantonio, September 28, 1940. MP 3 (Civil Liberties, ILD, 1939-40).

¹¹Jesus Colon to Marcantonio, August 23, 1940. MP 3 (Civil Liberties, ILD, 1939-40).

once a week an article would appear, often with an accompanying picture, reporting Marcantonio's activities. A 1939 editorial entitled "Elect a Distinguished Candidate" best captures La Voz's approach to Marcantonio: "It is our estimation that no man could be a better candidate in the 20th District than Vito Marcantonio, friend of the poor, of the Puerto Ricans and of Puerto Rico, as well as all the Spanish speaking community; untiring defender of martyred Spain; champion of liberalism on all fronts, and crusader for Right and Justice."¹² The demise of La Voz was likely the outcome of the heavy financial and membership losses that the Communist Party incurred by endorsing a policy of nonintervention in World War II. Thereafter, the party was able to support only a weekly, Los Pueblos Hispanos which, like its predecessors, promoted leftist causes and Marcantonio as the leader of El Barrio. Probably as a result of the postwar repression, Los Pueblos Hispanos was succeeded by a smaller weekly, Liberación, which continued, on a more modest scale, the functions of its predecessors.

By 1930 the Communist Party had organized a public club, El Club Eugenio Maria de Hostos, which Vega noted, was a "center of multiple activities." In particular, he cited its sponsorship of various political classes and conferences. The same memoirist stated: "In Harlem and in El Barrio [circa 1930] there began to be felt the influence of the Communists, among whom there could be counted many Negroes and not a few Puerto Ricans. . . . In this period the Communist Section in Harlem had great influence [and] its local leaders, Negro and

¹²September 20, 1939, p. 9.

Puerto Rican, were outstanding figures in the community."¹³

By 1938, when El Barrio's population numbered approximately 20,000, there were over four hundred Party members, and over four times that number affiliated in organizations sympathetic to the Party.¹⁴

In the thirties and forties there was a great variety to the organizational forms that El Barrio's leftism took, and Marcantonio was an active participant in all of them. In March 1936, he received a letter from the Comité Pro-Puerto Rico acknowledging his acceptance of an invitation "to be present and speak in a mass-meeting on Puerto Rico."¹⁵ On September 1941, he received a request to speak at a "Smash Hitler and Franco Rally" sponsored by the Comités Femenos Unidos. The purpose of this rally was to "collect funds which [combined with] those collected by Spanish refugees in Mexico, to send [an] ambulance bearing

¹³Vega, pp. 215, 220, 237.

¹⁴George Charney, interview, quoted in Jacob Blum and Peter Wilhelm, "Vito Marcantonio and the Political Organization of East Harlem" (Honors paper, Yale University, 1967), p. 164. The considerable strength of the Communist Party in El Barrio is perhaps best revealed in an article by George Charney and Al Testerman, "The People Win with Marcantonio," published in Political Affairs (the theoretical journal of the Communist Party) in January 1949. In assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the Party's work in El Barrio during the 1948 campaign, the authors noted: "In the two climactic, final days of the heroic struggle of the Puerto Rican people in the registration campaign, our Party recruited forty workers in [El Barrio]." Perhaps even more illustrative of the Party's strength in El Barrio was the author's assessment of the negative side of its work in El Barrio: "From time to time the line between the Party and mass movements blurred to the detriment of both. (p. 94.) In other words, the Party was openly sponsoring and leading a large part of the political life of this community. Similarly in 1950, Charney characterized the Communist Party in El Barrio as having a "powerful base and influence. . . ." "The Marcantonio Election Campaign," Political Affairs (January 1951), p. 89.

¹⁵F. Quintano to Marcantonio, March 19, 1936. MP 16 (General Correspondence).

the name of the heroic city [of] Madrid to the Soviet Union."¹⁶ In August 1943, he was invited to a meeting sponsored by La Asociación Pro-independencia de Puerto Rico and El Congreso Pro-independencia de Puerto Rico.¹⁷ A January 1941 list of youth organizations, deposited in the Covello Collection, noted the existence of the following left-wing youth organizations and adult organizations that sponsored youth programs in El Barrio: American Labor Party Youth Club, Women's Peace Committee, La Pasionaria Spanish Workers Club, two lodges of the Youth Fraternalists (IWO), Comité Pro Democracia Española, and Madres Unidas/Jovenes Unidos.¹⁸ Marcantonio's involvement with these organizations provided much-needed forums within this community and cadres of loyal supporters; hence, diminishing the liabilities of his outsider status.

¹⁶Dated September 15, 1941. MP (District Organizations, 1942-44).

¹⁷Modesto Munoz to Marcantonio, August 18, 1943.

¹⁸List of organizations, no heading. CC. The sophisticated character of these youth organizations' political style is captured in a letter of May 1936 to Marcantonio from the secretary of the Committee Pro-Youth Center:

"In the name of six youth organizations we are addressing this letter to you. These organizations are: Club Líderes del Porvenir, Club Deportivo Puertorriqueño, Youth Section of the Unemployment Council, Young Communist League, American Student Union Chapter of Harlem Evening High School, and exiled members of Joven Cuba.

From these organizations a committee has been formed composed of two members from each organization. The task of this committee is to find ways and means for the opening of a Youth Center in Spanish Harlem. The committee has arranged a big festival in the Lexington Hall on May 30th.

We know that you are an antifascist and also a lover of peace. We know too that you have endorsed the American Youth Act. To any other person who is holding important public office at the present time we do not venture to ask for any help."

Yorkina Romero to Marcantonio, March 19, 1936. MP 16 (General Correspondence).

El Barrio's radical politics and activism frequently spilled into the streets. A 1938 study noted that "parades and demonstrations . . . have become almost a part of the life of the colony." It goes on to state: "Intense excitement prevails at all these demonstrations; there are numerous banners, people are protesting, and women are talking in high-pitched voices." Apparently the most common themes of these demonstrations related to Puerto Rican independence and support for Loyalist Spain. Carrying placards reading "Down with Fascist Aid," "La Contra Revolucion Fascista Española," and "Viva el Frente Popular Español," thousands of Puerto Ricans paraded through Harlem when the Spanish rebels bombarded Madrid in the summer of 1936.¹⁹ The tradition of mass demonstrations continued through World War II. In June 1942, Marcantonio received a letter from the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade requesting a meeting in order to discuss a parade it intended to hold in El Barrio on the anniversary of Franco's uprising.²⁰ The following year, Marcantonio received a letter from the Harlem Win the War Committee: "We invite you to participate with us in leading in this parade of great importance toward winning the war. The issues in this parade will be the key to winning of the war, the opening up of the Second Front, the release of the Spanish Refugees in the concentration

¹⁹Lawrence Chenault, Puerto Rican Migration (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), p. 154. Chenault also noted that the "Puerto Rican on relief usually becomes a member of the Workers Alliance," and that many demonstrations for relief took place in front of the welfare center in El Barrio. (pp. 130, 154-55.) In part, El Barrio's fervent support for Loyalist Spain reflected the fact that many Puerto Ricans still had relatives in Spain. See Rosa Estades, Patterns of Political Participation of Puerto Ricans in New York City (Rio Piedras, P.R.: Editorial Universitaria, 1978), p. 31.

²⁰MP 4 (General Correspondence, A-C1).

camps in North Africa, the Puerto Rican issue . . . We invite you to speak at the post parade rally."²¹ In his memoirs, George Charney recalled El Barrio's activism in left-wing causes:

[El Barrio] was in ferment [during this period]. . . . Politics embraced the entire family, from the youngest to the oldest. The women were as active, as embroiled, as tenacious as the men. Poverty was widespread, the diet, rice and beans. Yet the struggle, while grim, so animated the people that the smallest triumph was greeted by wild enthusiasm. I never knew a people or a community so passionately involved in the Spanish Civil War. It was their cause; no group could cry out the slogan "No Pasaran" as they could, or contribute as much as they did in dimes, quarters, and dollars.²²

This general atmosphere was reflected in the politicization of ostensibly nonpolitical clubs. An item in one of Marcantonio's aide's reports from 1936 reads: "Call up the Prompt Sign Company to put up a sign [reading] 'Guaybana Social Civic and Political Organizations affiliated with the All People's Party endorses Vito Marcantonio, defender of Puerto Rico and the American Working Class.'"²³ This was a "hometown" club which consisted of people who originated from the Puerto Rican town of Guaybana. (In the postwar period, "hometown" clubs were the most typical form of social organization in the Puerto Rican communities in the continental United States. (See p. 292)²⁴ In 1942, another social club, Club Jose Rivera, wrote Marcantonio: "The newly elected offices of this organization being aware of your magnificent work on behalf of the working class of Lower Harlem and of the Puerto

²¹Alma Garcia de Muñoz, April 16, 1943. MP 6.

²²George Charney, A Long Journey (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), pp. 106-7.

²³MP 46 (Aide's Report, Mucciola, 1936).

²⁴Estades, p. 39.

Rican community in particular, wish to extend to you the full support of our organization in any and all issues on behalf of said community.²⁵

One of Marcantonio's key lieutenants in El Barrio, Clemente Soto Velez, recalled that all the organizations--whether social, religious, or political--participated in Marcantonio's campaigns. He cited as an example the support proffered by the Spanish Grocers Association.

Considering the important social functions of the bodegas in the Puerto Rican communities, its support must have been a great boon to him. Soto Velez then recalled that, during one campaign, a street corner at which Marcantonio's supporters had intended to hold a meeting was occupied by a group of Pentecostal evangelists. The former told Soto Velez that they intended to evict the evangelists from "their corner." He stopped them, saying, "In a year or two [the evangelists] will be with us. And later they were. Indeed, all of the churches were."²⁶ This assertion was confirmed in a letter dated October 3, 1940 from Marcantonio to a Reverend Lugo of the First Pentecostal Church in El Barrio: "I have been advised by our mutual friend of your vibrant lecture in my behalf at your Sunday school meeting last Sunday morning. . . . Convey my sincerest good wishes to your congregation. Please be free to call on me at any time if I may be of service to you or any member of your church."²⁷

El Barrio's leftist organizations and existing support for left causes created a political force which directly fed into Marcantonio's

²⁵MP 14.

²⁶Interview with Clemente Soto Velez, New York City, September 26, 1975.

²⁷MP 6 (L).

electoral campaigns. It was Marcantonio's legislative and political advocacy on behalf of Puerto Rican causes, however, which realized these potentialities.

The first time Marcantonio ran for Congress in 1934, he received only 28.2 percent of the vote from the predominantly Puerto Rican Seventeenth Assembly District.²⁸ By the 1936 election, however, Marcantonio's popularity had risen enormously in El Barrio by virtue of his submission of the first bill for Puerto Rico's independence, his journey to Puerto Rico, and his legal assistance to Albizu Campos. (See pp. 301-4, 309-12) El Barrio's electoral support for Marcantonio was foreshadowed when, on his return from Puerto Rico on August 30, 1936, El Barrio held the largest demonstration in its history. The New York Times reported:

Ten thousand Puerto Ricans, representing a score of political and social clubs in the city, paraded for three hours through the streets of lower Harlem yesterday afternoon to protest the attitude and actions of "Imperialistic America" in making "slaves" of the island.

Spurred by the comments of Representative Vito Marcantonio, who recently returned from a two weeks' visit to the island and denounced conditions there, the paraders shouted "Free Puerto Rico!" and "Down with Yankee Imperialism!" so loudly that thousands of other residents in the area, populated mostly by Negroes and Spaniards, leaned out of windows and over the edges of roof tops and added their protests to those of the demonstrators.

Mr. Marcantonio, discussing the "political lynching" of Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos, said that the Puerto Rican's case "will go down in history as another Tom Mooney or Scottsboro boys frame-up."

"Thirty-eight years of American imperialism has converted the island of Puerto Rico into a slave country," he said, speaking from a sound truck parked between Fifth and Lenox on West 113th Street. "Return it to Puerto Rico's people and then it will be a real country, with no tyranny of any sort. . . ."

²⁸Blum and Wilhelm, p. 160.

The crowd disbanded with cheers when Mr. Marcantonio concluded his speech with a pledge to the effect that he "will inform the President of the gruesome details on the island and demand a Presidential investigation."²⁹

Vega noted that the primary sponsors of this rally were the Puerto Rican lodges of the International Workers Order, the Harlem sections of the Communist Party, El Centro Obrero Español, the Tobacco Workers Union, and the Committee Against Fascism and War. At this rally he recalled: "The multitude applauded deliriously [when Marcantonio read] a text of a telegram, addressed to President Roosevelt, demanding the freeing of the Nationalist prisoners and insisting that there come to an end the despotic rule of Governor Winship. At this demonstration, Marcantonio announced that he would . . . present [in Congress] a law conceding independence to Puerto Rico."³⁰

The strength of Marcantonio's ties to the Puerto Rican and local Nationalist Party caused it to make an exception to its policy of abstaining from participation in elections. "I urgently beg," stated Don Pacheco Pedro, a Nationalist leader in El Barrio in an open letter distributed during the 1936 campaign, "[that] all Puerto Ricans [cast] a single vote, for a single candidate, at a single moment, because it is a Puerto Rican need, political support of Vito Marcantonio."³¹ Thus did

²⁹"10,000 Parade Here for Puerto Ricans," New York Times (August 30, 1936), p. 24.

³⁰Vega, pp. 234-35.

³¹MP 19 (1936 Election Folder). Evidence that Marcantonio had had some contact with the Nationalist Party prior to his trip to Puerto Rico is found in a letter from an aide, Leopoldo Lopez, dated February 25, 1936: "A meeting will be held at the Lexington Hall. . . sponsored by the Nationalists, protesting the two killings at San Juan . . . by the Insular police. I met José Santiago [leader of the Communist Party in El Barrio] . . . and he informed me that the Nationalists were going to invite you to same" MP 44 (Aide Reports, Lopez, 1936).

the young Italo-American lay the foundation of popularity in the Roosevelt landslide year of 1936 that would eclipse Lanzetta's and indeed that of every other political rival for the duration of his political career.

Throughout this period, Marcantonio maintained his ties with the Nationalist Party, which in turn continued to support him. Under the headline, "The Campaign for Vito Marcantonio Has Already Begun in Harlem," La Voz reported in September 1938, "Before a gathering of more than 2,000 persons, the Puerto Rican Junta [of the Nationalist Party] celebrated the 75th anniversary of the proclamation of the republic in Puerto Rico at a mass meeting in El Barrio." Marcantonio headed a speakers' list that included Earl Browder and Juan Antonio Corretjer, one of the Nationalists convicted with Albizu Campos.³² In June 1943, a mass meeting was organized by the Communist Party to celebrate the release of Albizu Campos from Atlanta Penitentiary. Again, Marcantonio was a featured speaker, along with Benjamin Davis (Communist City Councilman from Harlem) and Corretjer.³³ To the annual assembly of the Nationalist Party held at the Atheneum in December 1948, Marcantonio sent a message: "I realize that there cannot be a permanent solution of the problem of Puerto Rico until that nation has absolute liberty. I shall continue my fight with the consistent cooperation of the Puerto Ricans and victory will be ours."³⁴ The next year, when Marcantonio was

³²September 5, 1938, p. 4.

³³Agent's Report. FBI File.

³⁴Synopsis of article from Los Pueblos Hispanos. FBI Files.

running for mayor as the American Labor Party candidate, the secretary of the Junta of the Nationalist Party in New York City, Oscar Collazo, wrote:

The sincerest friendship that has for so many years kept us working side by side for the common cause of freedom will give us one good reason to continue ahead--no matter how many setbacks we meet in our way--in the long and hard struggle against the enemies of both your people and our people.

We want to reiterate our sincere intentions of giving you all the needed support in the long fight against tyranny and oppression that has made ours a common cause.

Later that month Marcantonio sent a contribution of \$500 to Collazo for the defense of Puerto Rican political prisoners.³⁵

Against Marcantonio's significant record of involvement in Puerto Rican concerns stood his Republican Party affiliation. This was perceived as a major handicap by an ethnic group devastated by the Great Depression. The All People's Party, a Communist Party-led formation consisting of a coalition of the Communist Party and various fraternal, community, and trade union organizations, founded in 1936, converted his soaring popularity in El Barrio into votes. In El Barrio the party received the endorsement of many Puerto Rican "hometown" clubs. The All People's Party favored Puerto Rican independence and Social Security financed by general taxation, but its platform made no mention of Socialism or the dictatorship of the proletariat. Actually an organizational expression of the Communist Party's transition from the self-isolation of the so-called Third Period to the Popular Front, it continued to run Congressional candidates elsewhere in New York City. But in East Harlem the Communist Party ran no candidate in 1936: the All

³⁵Dated November 16, 1949, and November 22, 1949. MP 16.

People's Party endorsed the Republican candidate, Vito Marcantonio.³⁶

Marcantonio now had his own political vehicle in El Barrio to complement the Fiorello LaGuardia Political Association in Italian Harlem. Through the All People's Party, he could publicize his positions and activities in areas of special concern to the Puerto Rican community. The party also provided him with an ideal platform to attack Lanzetta as a tool of the sugar interests in Puerto Rico, a charge that Marcantonio substantiated by pointing to the contributions made to Lanzetta's 1934 campaign by sugar magnates and a lobbyist for the sugar refineries. In 1936, the All People's Party gave 5,096 votes to Marcantonio--almost one out of every seven cast.³⁷ In the predominantly Puerto Rican Seventeenth Assembly District, Lanzetta received 4,784 votes to Marcantonio's 3,513--2,010 of which were cast on the All People's Party line.³⁸ Whereas Roosevelt carried 85 percent of El Barrio's vote, Marcantonio was able to hold Lanzetta to 60 percent, largely because of the All People's Party's assistance.³⁹

The enthusiasm with which El Barrio greeted Marcantonio's defense of Albizu Campos and his advocacy of Puerto Rico's independence

³⁶Lieberman, p. 64; Alan Schaffer, Vito Marcantonio, Radical in Congress (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), pp. 52-53.

³⁷Lieberman, p. 65; Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio" (Honors paper, Harvard University, 1950), pp. 40, 139. The All People's Party was a transitory phenomenon whose components helped to form the much larger American Labor Party. Apart from providing the necessary entree for the young Italo-American politician into the Puerto Rican community, the All People's Party concretized the nascent political alliance between the Marcantonio and the Communist party.

³⁸Blum and Wilhelm, p. 283.

³⁹Lieberman, pp. 66-67.

reflected two of the residents' most fundamental concerns. The majority may have been recent arrivals from Puerto Rico; what made them unique among all other immigrant groups was their continued close relationship with their homeland. Their frequent travels to and from Puerto Rico led one observer of the Puerto Rican experience in the United States to conclude:

The links between the New York Puerto Ricans and the island Puerto Ricans are close and complex, and quite different from the relationship of earlier migrant groups to their homelands. Puerto Rico is a part of the United States, and there is no control over movement between the island and the mainland. Puerto Rico is brought relatively close by air, and air passage is not too expensive. The island government takes a strong interest in its people. . . . A great part of the movement between New York and San Juan consists of people going back and forth for visits, to take care of sick relatives or to be taken care of, of children being sent to stay with one family or another. . . .⁴⁰

Other students of the Puerto Rican community have noted its abiding involvement with the political life on the island. In the late thirties, Lawrence Chenault stated: "The activities on the island continue to be the main ones among the group here. The men still converse on island politics."⁴¹

News of the "Ponce Massacre" in 1937, for example, jammed the Park Palace, East Harlem's largest meeting hall, to the rafters. (See p. 329) The crowd had come to hear Marcantonio, Gilberto Concepción de Gracia, and José Santiago, a leader of the Communist Party in El Barrio, protest the tragedy. Smoldering resentment caused by the killings and the later death of one of the wounded (his wife was one of the nineteen

⁴⁰Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1963), pp. 99-100.

⁴¹Chenault, p. 154.

who died the day of the massacre) sparked the formation of a subsequent protest: a parade followed by a mass outdoor rally, at which Marcantonio was the principal speaker.⁴²

Illustrative of the nature of Marcantonio's appeal to El Barrio is the following full-page advertisement supporting his 1944 candidacy, entitled "Puerto Ricans Vote for Marcantonio Because":

1. Marcantonio defends the independence of Puerto Rico
2. Marcantonio defended . . . the political prisoners of Puerto Rico.
3. Marcantonio was successful in bringing about the removal of TYRANT BLANTON WINSHIP.
4. Marcantonio succeeded in saving for Puerto Rico the \$70 million from the rum contribution
5. Marcantonio obtained guarantees of citizenship for Puerto Rican immigrants.
6. Marcantonio has defended the right of Puerto Ricans in New York to obtain work and to get relief benefits.
7. Marcantonio defends a cheap cost of living and he works to have the weight of taxes not fall on the poor.
8. Marcantonio fought for . . . the G.I. Bill of Rights.
9. Marcantonio defends the New Deal and the Good Neighbor Policy.
10. Marcantonio advocates price control in rents
11. And because it is necessary to maintain the spokesman for Puerto Rico in Congress.⁴³

Published in Los Pueblos Hispanos and also distributed as a campaign brochure, this advertisement's concentration on island-related problems and Marcantonio's role in trying to solve them underscored his political organization's awareness of their powerful impact on El Barrio.

The prominence that the political advertisement gave to Marcantonio's pro-independence stand reflected the perceived strong

⁴²Press release issued by the American Committee for the Defense of Puerto Rican Political Prisoners, May 14, 1937. MP 22, 1 of 2 (Puerto Rico). Vega's memoir is replete with examples of responses in El Barrio to political events in Puerto Rico. See for example pp. 158, 226-27, 252.

⁴³Agent's Report, July 15, 1944. FBI File. Campaign brochure is deposited in MP.

support in El Barrio throughout this period for Puerto Rico's independence. Chenault noted that "the sympathy of the [Puerto Rican] group in New York was apparently entirely on the side of those favoring independence." Charney recalled that in the late thirties and early forties "Puerto Rico Libre" was the resounding slogan, and "emissaries went to and from the island to bolster popular support for Marcantonio in return for this support in Congress." In the fifties Mills noted that independence sentiment in El Barrio remained strong.⁴⁴

Support for Puerto Rico's independence appeared to be stronger in El Barrio than on the island. In 1950, for example, the Puerto Rican Independence Party received only slightly more than 10 percent of the votes.⁴⁵ This phenomenon was likely the result of the Puerto Ricans' negative experiences upon arrival in New York City, which bolstered nationalistic tendencies. Marcantonio's advocacy of independence, therefore, struck a responsive chord among many--if not most--of El Barrio's residents.

Puerto Rico's political party structure during the thirties reflected to the population's politicization and radicalization. Puerto Rico's Socialist Party was, in fact, fairly conservative and pro-statehood. Nonetheless, it popularized trade unionism and labor politics among much of the island's working class. Puerto Rico's other

⁴⁴Chenault, p. 153; Charney, A Long Journey, p. 107; C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior, and Rose Kohn Goldsen, The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants (New York: Harper, 1950), p. 109. Charney further recalled: "The main issues [in El Barrio] were unemployment and Puerto Rican independence, . . . The nationalist movement in Puerto Rico, headed by Pedro Albizu Campos, dominated the politics of 'El Barrio.'" "

⁴⁵Federico Ribes Tovar, A Chronological History of Puerto Rico (New York: Plus Ultra, 1973), p. 504.

major party, the Republicans, remained conservative and anti-independence. The Nationalist Party of Albizu Campos never achieved a large membership or vote (after 1935 it took the position of boycotting elections). Albizu Campos's conviction in 1936 on charges of conspiracy to overthrow the United States government along with other events identified with his party, however, kept the island in a constant state of political excitement and engendered widespread support for his general cause, if not for his organization. (See pp. 311-12.) Party affiliation aside, anti-American sentiment dominated Puerto Rico's politics during the thirties.⁴⁶ The tremendous upsurge of nationalism in Puerto Rico was based largely on criticism of United States domination of the island's economy.⁴⁷ This nationalism contained, therefore, strong social, even socialistic leanings. The Liberal Party's left wing, led by Muñoz Marín, veered in a strongly nationalistic and socialistic direction and led to the formation of the Popular Democratic Party. The rapid rise of the Party galvanized these radical political tendencies. Swept into office in 1940, the party adopted a socialist-style approach to Puerto Rico's economic problems. The government opened a small number of factories. It bought the electric companies and vast tracts of land, and set up a central

⁴⁶Henry Wells, The Modernization of Puerto Rico: A Political Study of Changing Values and Institutions (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), pp. 118-20. On this subject Wagenheim observed: "The years between World Wars I and II were grim ones; thousands of Puerto Ricans were ravaged by starvation and disease. Absentee investors continued to acquire control of the economy, and some of them used their dollars to manipulate the elections. It was almost inevitable that, under such conditions, militant anti-American political forces should emerge." Karl Wagenheim, ed., with Olga Jimenez de Wagenheim, The Puerto Ricans: A Documentary History (New York: Anchor Books, 1973), p. 177.

⁴⁷Chenault, p. 21.

planning agency and a development bank. Its slogan "Land-Bread-Freedom" encapsulated this left-populist program.⁴⁸ The political experiences of the Puerto Ricans arriving in El Barrio, therefore, prepared them to respond favorably to the leftist currents already existing there. It was the All People's Party and the American Labor Party which most closely corresponded to the political allegiances these migrants had developed in their homeland.

Furthermore, these new settlers had no ties to either of the two major parties. The Puerto Ricans' political-party loyalty would veer, therefore, toward the first party to act on their behalf. The All People's Party in 1936, and the American Labor Party shortly afterward, were the only parties that actively recruited Puerto Ricans into the political process during the thirties and forties.⁴⁹

Any doubts that El Barrio was moving into the American Labor Party's camp were dispelled in November 1937, when Oscar Garcia Rivera, the American Labor-Fusion-Republican candidate, was elected to the New York State Assembly--the first Puerto Rican ever to win a major office in the United States.⁵⁰ At that time, El Barrio shared the Seventeenth

⁴⁸"Bard of Politics," San Juan Star (July 25, 1962), p. 18; reprinted in Wagenheim, The Puerto Ricans, p. 244.

Once in power, however, the Popular Democratic Party began to move away from its commitment to political independence and otherwise moderated its political positions. Gordon K. Lewis, Puerto Rico: Freedom and Power in the Caribbean (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963), pp. 143-66.

⁴⁹James Jennings, Puerto Rican Politics in New York City (New York: University Press of America, 1977), p. 115.

⁵⁰Vega, p. 241; Charney, A Long Journey, pp. 113-14; Liberman, pp. 72-73. The Harlem Legislative Conference (See pp. 129-149) sponsored a two-day "Latin American, West Indian, American Negro Unity Conference." The underlying purpose of this conference was clearly to help create a multi-ethnic, multi-racial coalition to enhance Oscar Garcia Rivera's possibilities of electoral success. "Call to a Latin American, West Indian, American Negro Unity Conference." Brochure. CC.

Assembly District (in 1944 renamed the Fourteenth Assembly District) with the eastern half of Central Harlem. (See p. 141) In 1938, Garcia Rivera, running solely under the ALP banner, narrowly bested his Democratic and Republican opponents. (See Table 8) This victory not only contributed to Marcantonio's sweep of El Barrio, but to his win by three American Labor Party votes to every one Republican Party vote.⁵¹ Marcantonio's political leadership of El Barrio had been confirmed. On Election Eve a march of three thousand Puerto Ricans wended its way through the community, bearing a coffin representing Lanzetta's political hopes.⁵²

In 1940, however, the Democratic Party machine in Central Harlem elected Hulan Jack, a West Indian, to Garcia Rivera's seat. (See p. 405) In 1948 and 1950, the ALP ran Marcantonio's major Puerto Rican lieutenant, Manuel Medina, who was Black. Medina's multi-racial election committee "urged [the voters of the Fourteenth Assembly District in 1948] to vote for a real fighter for the Negro and Puerto Rican people." His candidacy was linked to that of Harlem's Communist councilman, Benjamin Davis, and endorsements were obtained from Paul Robeson and other prominent Blacks.⁵³ In 1950 Medina lost by 906 votes.⁵⁴ These persistent though unsuccessful efforts to elect a Puerto Rican to high office contributed not only to Marcantonio's margins of

⁵¹Blum and Wilhelm, p. 309.

⁵²George Charney, interview, as quoted in Liberman, p. 77.

⁵³Various campaign leaflets and brochures in English and Spanish are deposited in MP 25 (ALP, Campaign Assembly District, 14th, 1945-46). Other campaign material pertinent to Medina is deposited in the Covello Collection.

⁵⁴Blum and Wilhelm, p. 372.

victory, but to El Barrio's consistent support of the entire American Labor Party slate to a degree almost without parallel elsewhere in New York. (See Tables 8, 10, 11) El Barrio became the only New York City community in which the ALP constituted the majority party. Of the thirty election precincts in the entire United States to give a plurality to Henry Wallace's presidential candidacy in 1948, eight were situated in El Barrio.⁵⁵

The American Labor Party in general and Marcantonio's East Harlem political organization in particular combined forces to overcome obstacles to voter registration of their potentially large Puerto Rican constituency. Under New York State law, a registrant had to present a certificate or diploma from a school in which "English is the official language of the institution" or pass a literacy test in English. Despite the official status of English as the language of instruction in Puerto Rico until 1946, election inspectors denied the validity of Puerto Rican diplomas and insisted that Puerto Ricans take the literacy examination.⁵⁶ The Puerto Ricans' pro-Marcantonio and pro-American Labor Party proclivities were most certainly the cause for this situation. The effects of this were twofold: to discourage many Puerto Ricans from even attempting to register and to make the registration process in Puerto Rican areas unusually time-consuming. In 1948 Marcantonio instituted proceedings in the New York State Supreme Court

⁵⁵Samuel Lubell, The Future of American Politics (New York: Harper, 1953), pp. 206-7.

⁵⁶Press release, September 30, 1948, on letterhead of the American Labor Party State Committee. MP 25 (ALP Campaign, Assembly District, 14th, 1945-46).

to restrain Eleanor Uris, Special Assistant Attorney General, from "using [the] powers of her office to deny unlawfully the right to register Puerto Ricans and to restrain her specially appointed deputies from harassing and intimidating Puerto Rican voters in polling places." In 1949 Marcantonio declared with reference to interference with Puerto Rican voter registration: "The people are not going to be bullied, tricked or cheated out of their right to register. The American Labor Party will be at every polling place to guard this right to the hilt."⁵⁷ He followed up his vow by taking direct action on this issue. When one of the American Labor Party's poll watchers in El Barrio reported, "PR pushed around," Marcantonio sent this letter to the woman in question: "Please be at the School, 141 East 111th Street on Friday, October 11th at about 8 P.M. in order that I can assist you in registering." In 1948, registration in El Barrio was further inhibited by the reduction in the number of election districts from twenty to ten. This added to the delays encountered by El Barrio's residents when they attempted to register. When long lines developed at the election sites, Marcantonio's organization sent guitar players and other entertainers to perform for those waiting to register.⁵⁸ (See pp. 126-27)

⁵⁷Ibid.; Press release, September 29, 1948, on letterhead of American Labor Party. MP 25 (ALP Campaign, Assembly District, 14th 1945-46); "Marcantonio Warns of Fight to Register," New York Times (October 3, 1949), p. 17; see also, "Election Aides Rob Puerto Ricans of Vote," Daily Worker (October 1, 1948), p. 5.

⁵⁸August 5, 1976; Poll watcher's note, and letter of Marcantonio to Helen Lopez, October 10, 1946. MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns); "Recordad." Campaign leaflet. MP 25 (ALP).

El Barrio's positive response to Marcantonio was also the result of his defense of the Puerto Rican people against constant discrimination and defamation. The Puerto Rican population in the continental United States in 1930 numbered only 52,774, and it rose very slowly until the great postwar migration.⁵⁹ The fact that the Puerto Ricans on the mainland were few in number and United States citizens did not deter the widespread discrimination they suffered. They were popularly regarded as foreigners and their mixed racial heritage made them subject to racism. In this entire period no other individual was more publicly identified with responding to these attacks on the Puerto Rican people than Marcantonio.

In his first term in office, Marcantonio rose to refute what he termed "a most slanderous attack . . . made on Puerto Rican children living in New York City." He was referring to a "Study on Reactions of Puerto Rican Children in New York City to Psychological Tests," which was issued by the Special Committee on Immigration and Naturalization of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York and published in Psychological Clinic. This article purported to "prove" that Puerto Rican children had significantly lower I.Q.'s than American-born white children. Based on an investigation that he initiated, Marcantonio published in the Congressional Record a refutation of this study. Among other things, this rebuttal indicated that the "motive of the Chamber of Commerce for undertaking the investigation was [in the words of the study] in connection with an 'agitation now afoot to include Puerto Rico as a State in the Federal Union.'" Marcantonio's criticism further

⁵⁹Chenault, p. 57.

pointed out that the control group for this study came from localities that "contain the best housing and school facilities that New York City has to offer." Moreover, he added, the control group consisted of "children of native-born parents, from the highest occupational levels, with English as their native language." Conversely, the Puerto Rican children came from El Barrio, "an area which has become one of the worst of overcrowded slums in New York City." These were the "children of impoverished Puerto Ricans of the lower occupational levels with Spanish as the native tongue and the language of the home and the street, and English is the language used at school." Marcantonio concluded by charging that the report proved something else: "that there is such a thing as racketeering even in the field of psychology."⁶⁰

Throughout his political career, Marcantonio labored to reverse acts of discrimination against Puerto Ricans. In 1935, after a biscuit company in Queens had fired fifty-one Puerto Ricans, Marcantonio wrote the owner: "I have learned of very shocking activities carried on by your management. . . . I request a conference with you, so that I may place before you, all the facts which will conclusively prove discrimination against Spanish Americans as well as against those who have participated in labor organizing activities."⁶¹

During the war years, Marcantonio fought discrimination in the Armed Forces. He wrote Secretary of War Henry Stimson concerning a Puerto Rican who was denied flight training on the basis of his nationality and was instead assigned to a Negro company. He closed by

⁶⁰Congressional Record, June 19, 1936, pp. 10301-11.

⁶¹Marcantonio to Wiles Biscuit Company, November 2, 1935. MP 2, 1 of 2 (Civil Liberties).

requesting "a statement from you whether there now exists in the Army Air Force or any other branch of the army limitations upon the service of Puerto Ricans." Stimpson replied:

It is not known whether this soldier is white or colored, since upon enlistment he specified his race as Puerto Rican. However, the Commanding General, Army Air Forces, has been directed to investigate the matter more fully and to reassign Private X to a white organization should it be found that he is of the white race. . . . With regard to your inquiry as to whether there are limitations on the service of Puerto Ricans, you may be assured that there are none, provided the soldier is mentally and physically qualified to perform the duties or undergo instruction in such training as he may desire.

A later letter from Stimpson amplified the situation: "The Adjutant General's office has since informed my office that because of the color of the boy's skin, his hair texture and racial characteristics he 'is not wanted in a white organization.'" An irate Marcantonio replied: "The boy's parents are both Puerto Rican. He is not a Negro. And in view of your letter to me stating that no limitations were placed upon Puerto Ricans in the armed services, I am writing to ask for early reassignment of the soldier . . . since the only reason for the change of his assignment has been as stated above." In the end, the soldier was reassigned to Puerto Rico.⁶²

Also in the early forties, in innumerable letters to President Roosevelt, cabinet officers, government officials, and in speeches on the floor of the House, Marcantonio persisted in protesting discriminatory wage rates on government jobs in Puerto Rico. In a letter to the officer in charge of the Naval Air Station in San Juan, Marcantonio demanded "equal wages for equal work" and an end to the

⁶²Marcantonio to Stimpson, April 9, 1943; Stimpson to Marcantonio, May 1, 1943; Stimpson to Marcantonio, May 4, 1943; Marcantonio to Stimpson, July 29, 1943. MP 3 (Civil Liberties).

"practice of maintaining a differential in wages at the Naval Bases in Puerto Rico."⁶³ In a letter to Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, published in the Congressional Record, Marcantonio cited a Puerto Rican labor organization's report to the effect that, "A Puerto Rican worker is being paid 40 cents per hour to teach a worker from the continental United States, who receives \$1.50 per hour while he is learning." Noting that this was not the first letter he had sent to the Secretary on this matter, Marcantonio declared:

I am placing [this issue before the House] at this time because it deals with a matter which should receive the attention of every one of us. Puerto Rico is part of the United States. The people of Puerto Rico are citizens of the United States of America. Puerto Rico is an Atlantic outpost of great military importance. And yet Puerto Rico is very often considered a foreign land and the people of Puerto Rico treated like stepchildren or worse.⁶⁴

The postwar period saw a mass influx of Puerto Ricans into the continental United States: between 1946 and 1956 more than forty thousand arrived each year, 85 percent of whom settled in New York City, El Barrio in particular.⁶⁵ The reaction to this in-migration of Puerto Ricans only can be described as xenophobic and racist. The most striking manifestations of this reaction were to be found in the press, where many articles linked the Puerto Ricans and Marcantonio in the most

⁶³Press release, no date. MP 22, 1 of 2 (Puerto Rico).

⁶⁴Marcantonio to Knox, January 22, 1942; Combs to Marcantonio, January 28, 1942; Marcantonio to Knox, January 30, 1942 and February 13, 1942. MP 15 (General Correspondence). Congressional Record, February 6, 1942, p. A409.

⁶⁵Francesco Cordasco, ed., with Eugene Bucchioni, The Puerto Ricans, 1493-1973: A Chronology and Fact Book (Dobbs Ferry, N. Y.: Oceana Publishers, 1973), p. 66; Robert T. Novak, "Distribution of Puerto Ricans on Manhattan Island," Geographical Review, 46 (April 1954), p. 182.

negative ways.⁶⁶ In turn, he led a counterattack on publishers and editorial writers alike.

A series of articles published in the New York World Telegram between October 21 and 23, 1947, ran the following headlines: "City's Disease Rate Raised by Migrant Tide"; "Tide of Migrants Pushing Relief Load Through Roof"; and "Crime Festers in Bulging Tenements." Aside from vilifying Puerto Ricans, these articles linked them to Marcantonio in a manner insulting to both. For example, one article stated that "into the relief picture Vito Marcantonio, pro-Communist Representative from the East Harlem district, has injected himself with vigor and success."⁶⁷

"Our Worst Slum: Can We Save It From Going Red?", was the title of a 1949 American Magazine article in which the dangers of harboring "a great Communist-breeding slum . . . in the heart of our largest city"

⁶⁶The earliest major example of a racist reaction in the media to Puerto Rican migration predates the mass postwar migration. The March 1940 issue of Scribner's Commentator contained an article entitled "Welcome: Paupers and Crime: Puerto Rico's Gift to the United States." The article began by describing the debarkation of eighteen Puerto Ricans in New York City. Without a single reference to either published or unpublished materials, the author asserted:

"The Porto Ricans have brought [the dope habit] to America with them as naturally as their fine needlework. As a result, their fraternal contact with America's black population has bought to the negroes all the alien corruption of the Indies. They have introduced the narcotics trade to New York's negroes. . . .

Despite their tiny portion of New York's population, Porto Ricans provide half the sex cases on the New York criminal docket, and a similar disproportionate number of delinquent youngsters."

Charles E. Hewitt, "Welfare and Crime: Porto Rico's Shocking Gift to the United States," Scribner's Commentator (March 1940), pp. 11-17.

⁶⁷"City's Disease Rate . . ." and "Tide of Migrants . . ." appeared on page one, "Crime Festers . . ." appeared on page two.

were explored at great length. The article continued: "Most of [El Barrio's] teeming inhabitants are not Reds, but the miserable conditions under which they live make them highly susceptible to radical ideas, and the great majority of them give unswerving loyalty to a political leader who follows the Communist Party line."⁶⁸

By far the most extreme and persistent examples of negative--even slanderous--linkages between Marcantonio and the Puerto Ricans were to be found in the Daily Mirror, which in 1948 had a daily circulation of one million and a Sunday circulation of almost twice that.⁶⁹ The Daily Mirror was responsible for spreading the extremely widespread myth that Marcantonio enticed the Puerto Ricans to New York City. For instance, in 1948, the paper asserted that "Ellis [Marcantonio's Republican opponent in the 1948 election] will bring forth the facts on how Puerto Ricans were lured en masse to live in filthy slums, feeding off public relief so that they could swell the number of bullet votes for Marcantonio."⁷⁰ The following month an article entitled "The Fight Against a Maggot" [that is, Marcantonio], reported that "Randolph Thomas, a leader of New York's Puerto Rican community deplores Marcantonio's practice of importing Puerto Ricans with gold promises."⁷¹ Finally, one week prior to the election, the Daily Mirror

⁶⁸Clarence Woodbury, pp. 30, 32.

⁶⁹John Lait and Lee Mortimer, New York Confidential! (Chicago: Ziff-Davis, 1948). Daily Mirror's circulation quoted on dust-jacket flap.

⁷⁰"Marc Meets a Fighter," New York Daily Mirror (September 16, 1948), p. 3.

⁷¹New York Daily Mirror (September 16, 1948), p. 3.

boasted that it "has often pointed out that Puerto Ricans were being colonized to move into Marcantonio's bailiwick, where many were placed on relief rolls immediately. They were frequently herded into obsolete planes and landed on obscure fields. . . ."72

But the single most defamatory example of the simultaneous slander of Marcantonio and of the Puerto Ricans appeared in New York Confidential!, written by two Daily Mirror columnists, Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer, and published in 1948:

During the last ten years and growing every year, there has descended upon Manhattan Island like a locust plague an influx of Puerto Ricans. . . . They are mostly crude farmers, subject to congenital tropical diseases, physically unfitted for the northern climate, unskilled, uneducated, non-English speaking and almost impossible to assimilate in an active city of stone and steel.

A majority of these people were lured here deliberately because, as American citizens, they can vote. They are a power behind Congressman Vito Marcantonio. . . . Very few Puerto Ricans have or ever had \$20.00 [for the passage to New York City from Puerto Rico]. But the money seems to come from somewhere The callous exploitation of these weaklings is one of the dirtiest crimes in the long and shameful record of practical politics.⁷³

Apart from Marcantonio's own attempts to debunk this myth, the only instance of a published refutation took up two column-inches in a 1947 New York Times article, which reported that: "The Commission of Labor [of Puerto Rico] and other sources here said today that they knew of no effort, governmental or private, to instigate or stimulate migration of Puerto Ricans to New York City."⁷⁴ The article made no

⁷²"Congress Probes Marc's Vote List," New York Daily Mirror (November 1, 1948), p. 1. This fantasy gained even wider circulation when it was repeated in Woodbury's article (p. 30).

⁷³Lait and Mortimer, pp. 126-30.

⁷⁴"Migration Spontaneous," New York Times (August 1, 1947), p. 3. Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, in Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of

mention of Marcantonio.

In what developed into a tremendously uneven battle, Marcantonio fought back. He wrote a characteristically vehement letter to the editor of the World Telegram in response to that newspaper's 1947 series of articles, which was not printed:

The latest attack on the people of Puerto Rico which has appeared in the World Telegram is vicious and cowardly. It is an example of the ruthless distortions that are printed every day in the World Telegram. [The World Telegram] is engaged in a rat race with the Hearst press to see which will excel in vilification. . . . We shall continue to unite to expose the real cause of Puerto Rican migration, imperialism and colonialism. We shall fight for slum clearance and housing and against discrimination and for job opportunities and justice and freedom for Puerto Rico. Once again we shall resist this vile effort, which is part and parcel of a plot to force Puerto Ricans into a state of second class citizenship, and make them easy prey for a cheap labor market.⁷⁵

Marcantonio immediately spearheaded a counterattack. On October 23 an emergency meeting of the Executive Board of the Pan American Grocers Association was held in El Barrio to plan a picket of the World Telegram offices. On October 27 another meeting, this one sponsored by the Convencion Pro Puerto Rico, gathered to organize this protest. Finally, on a rainy, cold October 31st, hundreds of demonstrators

Migration to the Mainland (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), has noted "the myth that . . . Marcantonio . . . was bringing the Puerto Ricans to New York and arranging to get them on public welfare in order to get their votes. It is surprising that such a belief--and it was widespread--could have developed." (p. 15) Schaffer points out: "A great many New Yorkers still remember Vito Marcantonio as 'the guy who brought the Puerto Ricans to New York.'" (p. 196) Since I began working on Marcantonio, I often poll various categories of people about my subject. Whites who were adults and living in New York City at the time when Marcantonio held office most frequently recall him as: (1) a "Communist"; and (2) the "guy who brought the Puerto Ricans to New York City." The latter point is generally further embellished with, "and put them on relief in order to get their votes."

⁷⁵Transcript dated October 20, 1947. MP 22, 1 of 2 (Puerto Rico).

converged at the entrance of the World Telegram building. Included in the rally were representatives of the Asociacion Pro Independencia de Puerto Rico, the National Maritime Union, the Communist Party, and the Nationalist Party. The protesters then marched--led by Marcantonio--to the headquarters of the National Maritime Union, where a rally was held.⁷⁶

In response to these articles, Marcantonio also organized a two-session conference in September 1947 to "develop ways and means to protect the residents of the City of New York of Puerto Rican origin against the campaign of vilification which has been launched by the reactionary elements in and out of the press."⁷⁷ Vega recalled: "Again Vito Marcantonio took the initiative and convened a rally to repudiate this campaign of defamation in the press. The Park Palace [located at Fifth Avenue and 110th Street, near El Barrio's center] was filled with residents of the Latin Barrio. Speaking, among others, [were] Manuel Medina, Jesús Colón, . . . and our own Marcantonio."⁷⁸ In December of the same year, Marcantonio gave a radio speech, which he had inserted into the Congressional Record, attacking these articles for having two purposes: "(1) To conceal who is responsible for the conditions in Puerto Rico; [and] (2) By vilification, cause discrimination against the

⁷⁶Pages 44 and 45 of Marcantonio's FBI File. Vega, p. 279.

⁷⁷Calls to these conferences signed by Marcantonio, dated September 8 and September 17, 1947. MP 16 (General Correspondence, M); "Defends Puerto Ricans: Marcantonio Sees Them Forced into Second-Class Citizenship," New York Times (September 23, 1947), p. 18. See also "Statement Issued by Congressman Vito Marcantonio with Reference to the Conference in Defense of the Puerto Rican People" MP 22, 1 of 2 (Puerto Rico).

⁷⁸Vega, p. 275.

three hundred some odd thousand Puerto Ricans in the City of New York, and thereby force them into a condition of second class citizenship, and force them into a cheap labor market."⁷⁹

He also brought a \$25,000 libel suit against the Daily Mirror, which for reasons unknown was never seriously pursued.⁸⁰ Pointing out that "this is the first time this year I have made a request for radio time over the Mutual Broadcasting System to discuss the subject of Puerto Rican migration," he was informed that time was not available.⁸¹

Because these press articles smeared the entire Puerto Rican community, Marcantonio's counterattacks earned him even greater support. For many El Barrio Puerto Ricans whose ties with the island were weakening or did not support independence, Marcantonio's defense of their community provided sufficient reason to regard him as their spokesman. These defaming articles also had the effect of discrediting among Puerto Ricans a major anti-Marcantonio force, New York City's popular press.

Marcantonio also came to the aid of individual Puerto Ricans who were victims of police brutality. In 1942, an attorney on his staff reported to him that when the members of an El Barrio branch of the Workers Alliance held a dance, a police officer issued summonses for an unlicensed dance hall, seized the membership cards of those present, and removed the club's books. The same year, this aide reported police

⁷⁹Rubinstein, pp. 408-9.

⁸⁰Press release, August 5, 1946. MP 22, 1 of 2 (Speeches and Press Releases, 1 of 8).

⁸¹Marcantonio to Dave Driscoll, September 16, 1947. MP 16 (General Correspondence); Driscoll to Marcantonio, September 22, 1947. MP 8.

interference with the social activities of the American Spanish and Puerto Rican Independent Democratic Club. In 1946, he alerted Marcantonio that a policeman "beat [a Puerto Rican] without cause or provocation." And in 1948, this aide noted that two Puerto Ricans in El Barrio were beaten by plainclothes men. In each of these cases, the facts (for example, the names of the police officers) were established and Marcantonio requested that the Police Commissioner conduct an investigation.⁸² In the most extreme cases of police brutality, even more drastic measures were taken. An undated flyer announced a "Grand Meeting of Protest" because of the "beating by the police and a landlord of a Puerto Rican mother of eight children." The featured speakers were Marcantonio and Manuel Medina.⁸³ In the tight-knit community of El Barrio, word of Marcantonio's responses to these incidents could only solidify its support for the radical Congressman. (See p. 141)

The amplitude of Marcantonio's involvement in Puerto Rican concerns created general support for his candidacy among this group. Particularly because of the vitriolic opposition of New York City's English-language press, this approval was especially evidenced in the Spanish-language press. In 1947, La Opinion sent the beleaguered Congressman fifty copies of an issue whose front page article "bears your statement condemning the attacks of the American press on the Puerto Ricans." This letter further reported that "five hundred copies of this number have been sent to the press in Puerto Rico and to private individuals, as well as to all radio networks in the island."⁸⁴ In

⁸²Aide Reports: (Fink, 1944), (Fink, 1945), (Fink, 1948). MP 44.

⁸³ALP Series I 1950, LI-M (Marcantonio--1950 Campaign). ALP.

⁸⁴R. Ruiz de Hoyo to Marcantonio, October 31, 1947. MP 16 (General Correspondence).

1948, El Imparcial endorsed Marcantonio, stating:

The Puerto Rican voters registered in the Eighteenth [Congressional] District will do an act of justice if they unite in a compact bloc to back actively the re-election of Congressman Vito Marcantonio. . . . Marcantonio has given his mind to the study of the problems of all Puerto Ricans and has devoted his efforts to try to solve them. The name of Vito Marcantonio has been closely associated for a long time with all noble and consistent efforts for the Puerto Rican people.⁸⁵

In 1950, the editor of La Prensa personally wrote Marcantonio to "thank you for your active and practical interest in the affairs of the Spanish-speaking community of New York and for your unflinching cooperation with us whenever we have occasion to call on you."⁸⁶ The importance of this support to Marcantonio is demonstrated by Mills's discovery that around 1948, of all the Puerto Ricans who reported reading a newspaper at least once a week, 34 percent read New York English-language dailies, 22 percent Spanish-language papers, and 28 percent both.⁸⁷

So despite the rising crescendo of anti-Communism, El Barrio's high estimation of its Congressman never wavered. In 1946, Marcantonio's opponent, the Republican Frederick Van Pelt Bryan III, ran a single-issue (anti-Communist) campaign that met with no response in El Barrio. It cast 1,279 votes for Bryan to 6,045 for Marcantonio (2,599 on the Democratic Party line and 3,446 on the American Labor Party

⁸⁵As printed in the Daily Smirror, a campaign newspaper which mimicked the Daily Mirror's format. MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

⁸⁶July 26, 1950. MP 7.

⁸⁷Mills et al., p. 118.

line).⁸⁸ (See pp. 411-12) In 1948, Marcantonio's Democratic opponent, John P. Morrissey, made no attempt to win El Barrio away from the incumbent. (See pp. 425-28) His Republican opponent, John Ellis, limited his electioneering in El Barrio to one street-corner rally where he shouted at his audience: "All [Marcantonio] helps you to do is to get on relief."⁸⁹ Whatever inroads Ellis might have made in El Barrio were dashed by his assertion that Marcantonio brought thousands of Puerto Ricans to New York City in order to create voters to advance his own political fortunes. (See pp. 365-67) Marcantonio's Spanish-language brochure pointed out that Ellis lived outside of the district in a "mansion that consists of twelve rooms and three bathrooms, with separate accommodations for the servants."⁹⁰ Despite being compelled to run solely on the American Labor Party line in a Presidential election year, which normally attracted the more casual--and therefore less pro-Marcantonio--voters, Marcantonio carried El Barrio 5,616 to 3,749--2,435 for Morrissey and 1,314 for Ellis.⁹¹ (See pp. 267-71, 428-430)

In 1949 Marcantonio ran for mayor on the American Labor line against Democrat William O'Dwyer and Republican-Liberal-Fusionist Newbold Morris. (See pp. 271, 430-31) Perhaps for the first time since 1936, Marcantonio faced real opposition in El Barrio, on opposition emanating from Puerto Rico itself. Governor Muñoz Marín urged Puerto Ricans to disassociate themselves from Marcantonio's candidacy lest they

⁸⁸ Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio." (Honors Papers, Harvard University, 1940), addenda.

⁸⁹"Ellis Accepts 'Dare'," New York Times (October 8, 1948), p. 4.

⁹⁰"Recordad." MP 25 (ALP Campaign, Assembly District 14, 1945).

⁹¹Bingham, addenda.

be accused of favoring his political ideology. Felisa Rincon de Gautier, the first woman mayor of San Juan, came to New York to campaign against Marcantonio. From the other side of Puerto Rico's political spectrum, Gilberto Concepción de Gracia travelled to New York City to campaign for Marcantonio, causing the New York Times to explain his visit in a front-page headline: "Muñoz Marín's Foe Comes to Steer Puerto Rican Vote to Marcantonio."⁹² Two months before the election, in what appeared to be an effort to attract some of Marcantonio's enormous Puerto Rican following, incumbent O'Dwyer created a "Mayor's Committee on Puerto Rican Affairs in New York City." The establishment of this committee caused Marcantonio to comment: "The Puerto Ricans have been neglected and discriminated against in housing. They have been picked on for especially cruel and inhuman treatment by O'Dwyer's Department of Welfare. The areas in which they reside have been neglected by O'Dwyer's Department of Sanitation. They are targets of police

⁹²"Puerto Ricans Get Campaign Warning," New York Times (October 17, 1949), p. 29; "Puerto Ricans to Back O'Dwyer, Woman Mayor of San Juan Says," New York Times (October 27, 1949), p. 1; "Muñoz Marín's Foe Comes to Steer Puerto Rican Vote to Marcantonio," New York Times (October 27, 1949), p. 1. After Marcantonio's defeat in 1950, Muñoz Marín sent the victor, James G. Donovan, a congratulatory message. It stated: "The vast majority of Puerto Ricans are very happy because of your triumph." "Puerto Ricans Glad for Donovan," New York Times (November 12, 1950), p. 24. Another aspect of the anti-independentistas's involvement with El Barrio and Marcantonio is recalled on page 230 of Vega's memoirs:

"In San Juan I confirmed my suspicion that the political leaders, especially of the Popular Democratic Party, were observing our [that is, Puerto Rican leftists and independentistas in New York City] actions. They resented Vito Marcantonio's influence and his role in the Puerto Rican struggles. Evidently, they sought to impose their policies through the recently established offices of the Government of Puerto Rico in New York. They feared radical politics and the predominance of independentista thinking in our activities."

brutality. Suddenly they are singled out for another privilege--that of serving O'Dwyer's political purposes."⁹³ On Election Eve 1949, before more than fifteen thousand people on Marcantonio's "lucky corner" in the center of Italian Harlem, he stated: "Yes, I do defend the Puerto Ricans as our most recently arrived, as against the kind of discrimination that was practiced against the Irish, the Jews, and the Italians in the past."⁹⁴ That year, El Barrio voted 9,358 for Marcantonio against the combined total of 8,893 garnered by his opponents.⁹⁵

In the 1950 campaign, the coalition candidate of the Democratic, Republican, and Liberal Parties, James Donovan, made one attempt to reach El Barrio's voters. (See pp. 272-75, 432-35) Accompanied by a police cordon rivaling the number of its participants, 150 Donovan supporters marched in a torchlight parade, sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, through El Barrio. Using amplifiers, the marchers urged bystanders to reject "Moscow-echo-Marc."⁹⁶ The substance of Donovan's program for Puerto Ricans is contained in the following excerpt from a radio address largely devoted to linking Marcantonio with the cause for Puerto Rico's independence:

⁹³"City Acts to Help Its Puerto Ricans," New York Times (September 12, 1949), p. 23; "ALP Omits Naming State Candidates," New York Times (September 14, 1949), p. 36; "46 Named to Help City Puerto Ricans," New York Times (September 17, 1949), p. 28; "Bias Is Laid to O'Dwyer," New York Times (October 23, 1949), p. 88.

Four years after its founding, this committee issued its official report. "Mayor's Committee on Puerto Rican Affairs in New York City." Chairman, Raymond M. Hilliard, November 1953.

⁹⁴Text of speech, November 7, 1949. MP 22 (1949 Campaign, 3 of 3).

⁹⁵"Election Results," New York Times (November 10, 1949), p. 8.

⁹⁶"Marcantonio Foes Guarded in Parade," New York Times (August 18, 1950), p. 7.

"I regard Puerto Rico as a national problem that can never be solved by the City of New York, a problem that lies right in the lap of the Federal Government. In the 82nd Congress, I shall try to enact legislation to solve the Puerto Rican problems, not here in New York, but in the Island of Puerto Rico from which all the trouble, all the distress stems."⁹⁷

On November 1, six days before Marcantonio's last election, two members of the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico, Oscar Collazo and Griselio Torresola, attacked the guards at Blair House in an attempt to assassinate President Harry S. Truman. (Blair House was being used as the Presidential residence while the White House was undergoing renovation.) One Secret Service man was killed and another wounded. Torresola, who was carrying in one of his pockets a letter from Albizu Campos, was killed. Collazo, who had worked closely with Marcantonio in El Barrio, was charged with murder.⁹⁸ Marcantonio interceded with a law associate, Abraham Unger, to represent the surviving would-be assassin. Marcantonio's identification with the Nationalist Party was seized upon by the press to further vilify him. Donovan promptly

⁹⁷Bingham, p. 166.

⁹⁸Tovar, A Chronological History, pp. 512, 515. Marcantonio was scheduled to accompany Collazo's wife to Washington to petition President Truman for clemency the same day that Collazo's death sentence was commuted, June 24, 1952. Interview with David Freedan, New York City, August 25, 1976.

Collazo's and Torresola's assassination attempt on Truman was timed to coincide with a Nationalist uprising in Puerto Rico. On October 30 five armed Nationalists attacked La Fortaleza, the Governor's mansion in San Juan; there were bloody uprisings in other island towns, causing twenty-seven deaths and ninety gunshot injuries. See: Edward F. Ryan, "I Love My Country," The Washington Post (March 2, 1954), p. 1. Reprinted in: Karl Wagenheim with Olga Jiménez de Wagenheim, eds., The Puerto Ricans: A Documentary History (New York: Anchor Press, 1973), p. 255. "Assassin Spared by Truman in Gesture to Puerto Rico," New York

accused Marcantonio of helping a Puerto Rican "ex-assassin." Donovan referred to Clemente Soto Velez, who had been among the Nationalists convicted with Albizu Campos in 1936, but who had never been associated with an assassination.⁹⁹ Marcantonio's response was to issue this statement: "The safety of the President is the concern of all Americans, no matter what our political differences may be. I hope that in all fairness the action of these two madmen will not be used to instigate hatred or discrimination against the Puerto Rican people."¹⁰⁰ To El Barrio Marcantonio issued a leaflet in Spanish, which in part stated:

Now is the hour for the true friends of Puerto Rico to gather to its side. Now is the hour for those who believe in democracy, liberty, and the self-determination of all peoples, to rise in the struggle for the liberation of Puerto Rico.

As for me, I must say that I have been fighting for its liberty and have defended the Puerto Rican people during the fourteen years that I have been in Congress and in this hour of sorrow, when the cause of Puerto Rico needs more than ever its defenders, I am willing to intensify my efforts for its liberty and to dedicate all of my energies for the defense of the Puerto Rican people, regardless of what my enemies say against me.

Puerto Ricans: I was with you yesterday, I am with you today, and I will be there tomorrow all the days of my life.¹⁰¹

In this, Marcantonio's final election, El Barrio--as it had in six previous elections--provided a substantial majority for its adopted son. Almost every block in El Barrio gave Marcantonio over 60 percent of its vote. (See Map 9) Marcantonio received 5,347 votes to 2,855 votes for Donovan--621 on the Republican, 1,638 on the Democratic, and

Times (July 25, 1952), p. 5.

⁹⁹"Donovan Assails Marcantonio Ties," New York Times (September 29, 1950), p. 22; Bingham, p. 161.

¹⁰⁰"Representative Backs People," New York Times (November 2, 1950), p. 16.

¹⁰¹Carta Abierta a los Puertorriqueños. Leaflet deposited in Covello Collection.

596 votes on the Liberal lines.¹⁰²

In the period of Marcantonio's ascendancy, El Barrio provided a receptive environment for a radical politician. Its housing stock ensured its proletarian character. Furthermore, its isolation from the mainstream was reinforced by the completeness of its life and the discrimination its residents faced outside its environs. This ghetto was (like many others of its time) as much a fortress as a prison. When combined with the ability of Marcantonio's political organization to intercede in a massive way to provide services and get out the vote, these conditions naturally led El Barrio directly into his political camp.

Two unique factors, however, ensured that its response to him would be monumental. The first was Puerto Rico's peculiar political status by which it was a part of the United States but had no political representation in the federal government. For much of his term in the House of Representatives, Marcantonio served as de facto Congressman for Puerto Rico. The second was the status of Puerto Ricans as citizens of the United States. Unlike other immigrant groups, they did not have to sever their ties with their homeland. They remained closely concerned about the fate of Puerto Rico and responsive to Marcantonio's activities on its behalf.

To a much greater degree than Italian Harlem, El Barrio endorsed Marcantonio's politics. El Barrio's residents gradually began to feel that this Italo-American was their leader. It was he who represented the disenfranchised island in the halls of Congress. And although

¹⁰²Bingham, addenda.

Marcantonio was not the sole source of the community's leftism, he did reinforce its appeal. No one else, from either the political center, or the right, seemed to care about Puerto Rico or the progress of its migrants.

Marcantonio's political work on behalf of Puerto Rico and his defense of, and advocacy for, the Puerto Rican migrant community made him a significant figure in the history of the people during the thirties and forties. El Barrio's response to such a figure was fairly predictable. Similarly, the significant radical contingent within this community made its acceptance and support of a radical politician unsurprising. Furthermore Marcantonio's political style was closely congruent with the expectations of the Puerto Rican immigrants. A fundamental feature of Puerto Rican society (especially in this period) was padrinismo. The padrino is someone of a higher class who has a personal relationship with a poorer person and acts as an intermediary between the poorer person and the larger society of law, government, and employment. Marcantonio was a padrino par excellence.¹⁰³ The patterns of political participation of the Puerto Rican migrant of this period, identified in Estades's recent study, are "personalism, party loyalty, dependence on a centralized authority in both party and governmental structure, the desire for a solution to the political status question . . . and the willingness to accept a reform program, if proposed

¹⁰³Fitzpatrick defines (p. 91) a padrino as a "person strategically placed in a higher position of the social structure who has a personal relationship with the poorer person in which he provides employment, assistance at time of need, and acts as an advocate if the poorer person becomes involved in trouble. The padrino is really the intermediary between the poor person . . . and the larger society of law, government, employment, and service."

by a strong political leader." Especially because of his status as a leader of the American Labor Party, this description almost perfectly describes Marcantonio.¹⁰⁴ (See p. 278)

To a very large extent, however, El Barrio's support for Marcantonio rested on two other factors. One was the absence of an attractive opposition figure. After James Lanzetta's final defeat in 1940, no congressional candidate made any genuine attempt to woo away Marcantonio's Puerto Rican constituency. (In the 1949 mayoral campaign, William O'Dwyer's efforts to disaffect Puerto Ricans from Marcantonio were perhaps directed more toward those Puerto Ricans living outside El Barrio.) Indeed, his major opponents in the postwar period--Ellis and Donovan--made statements insulting to the Puerto Rican community. Moreover, the absence in El Barrio of a major party machine which could deliver services gave Marcantonio a clear field with that segment of this community which would have been politically influenced in this manner.

¹⁰⁴Rosa Estades, Patterns of Political Participation of Puerto Ricans in New York City. Rio Piedras, P.R.: Editorial Universitaria, 1978. p. 26; see also p. 80. Lewis has also noted (p. 36) that in Puerto Rico: "One single factor of paramount importance . . . is the factor of personalismo. Its roots go back to the absolutist political methods of Spain, and, on the economic plane, to the personal authority of the patron in the rural life of the society. In politics it expresses itself in the exaggerated role played by the leader"

Wells also stressed (p. 33) that: "It is personal power that Spaniards, as well as Puerto Ricans and most Latin Americans have traditionally regarded as desirable. . . . People follow a man not only because they see in him the kind of person they would like to be or think they really are, but also because they can make contact with him as a man."

It can be easily overlooked, however, that El Barrio's residents were not solely concerned with issues of immediate impact on Puerto Rico or the migrant community. As citizens who were poorly housed, badly paid, and subject to discrimination, they responded to Marcantonio's overall advocacy of social change on behalf of the disinherited. His general positions on housing, civil rights, labor legislation, and the like all corresponded to the needs and desires of this community of poor immigrants.

Although Marcantonio was not Puerto Rican, his Southern-Italian life style, with its emphasis on family and community, was close to the Puerto Rican life style, and certainly closer to theirs than the prevailing mainstream American life style. Marcantonio, after all, was a latino, he spoke some Spanish, and could effectively read speeches in Spanish.¹⁰⁵ It was not very difficult for El Barrio to embrace him as their own native son. In many ways, between El Barrio and Marcantonio there was an almost perfect marriage of a constituency and a political leader.

¹⁰⁵"Marcantonio Assails Morris and O'Dwyer," New York Times (October 8, 1940), p. 30.

CHAPTER XI

MARCANTONIO AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Marcantonio's maneuverings within the web of New York City's political party structure were indeed complex, and his success in manipulating this structure proved essential to his survival as a radical politician. In the nine Congressional elections he contested he was the candidate of five political parties: Republican, City Fusion, All People's, American Labor, and Democratic. In two elections (1948 and 1950) he held the designation of one party, in five (1934, 1936, 1938, 1940, and 1946) he held two, and in two (1942 and 1944) he ran on three tickets. (See Table 6) This chapter focuses on the electoral effects of Marcantonio's constantly changing relationships with these parties. Particular emphasis is devoted to the role of the American Labor Party in influencing the political behavior of the major parties toward Marcantonio.

Marcantonio entered the 1934 Congressional campaign with the valuable legacy of his ten-year relationship with Italian Harlem's native son and New York City's premiere politician, Fiorello LaGuardia.¹ The seeming disadvantage of his Republican affiliation in a

¹"Support of Roosevelt Asked by LaGuardia In Endorsing Republican in His Old District." New York Times (October 30, 1934), p. 1.

TABLE 6

CONGRESSIONAL PRIMARY AND GENERAL ELECTION RESULTS FOR THE TWENTIETH (1934-42)
AND EIGHTEENTH (1944-50) CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS

<u>Primaries</u>			<u>General Election</u>				
1934				Marcantonio	13,083		
				Lanzetta	12,483		
	(no contested primaries)		<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>Socialist</u>	<u>City Fusion</u>	
			Marcantonio	Lanzetta	Cassidy	Marcantonio	
			12,428	12,483	1,196	655	
1936				Marcantonio	17,212		
				Lanzetta	18,772		
	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>Socialist</u>	<u>All People's</u>	
	(no contested primaries)		Marcantonio	Lanzetta	Coronel	Marcantonio	
			12,116	18,772	688	5,096	
1938				Marcantonio	18,960		
				Lanzetta	12,376		
	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>ALP</u>	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>ALP</u>	<u>Socialist</u>
	Marcantonio	Lanzetta	Marcantonio	Marcantonio	Lanzetta	Marcantonio	Gross
	2,296	4,252	1,759	10,059	12,376	8,901	403
	Kupferman	Marcantonio	Lanzetta				
	199	1,930	170				

TABLE 6
(continued)

CONGRESSIONAL PRIMARY AND GENERAL ELECTION RESULTS FOR THE TWENTIETH (1934-42)
AND EIGHTEENTH (1944-50) CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS

<u>Primaries</u>			<u>General Elections</u>		
1940			Marcantonio	25,254	
			Lanzetta	15,160	
<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>ALP</u>	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>ALP</u>
Marcantonio (uncontested)	Marcantonio N.A.* Lanzetta N.A.*	(uncontested)	Marcantonio 14,737	Lanzetta 15,160	Marcantonio 10,517
1942			Marcantonio 18,924		
<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>ALP</u>	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>ALP</u>
Marcantonio 2,784 Mucciolo 291	Marcantonio 5,247 Ricca 2,529	Marcantonio 2,049 Mucciolo 234	Marcantonio 7,890	Marcantonio 7,533	Marcantonio 3,501
1944			Marcantonio 83,121		
<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>ALP</u>	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>ALP</u>
Marcantonio 2,945 Palmer 2,723	Marcantonio 10,120 Kennedy 9,570	(uncontested)	Marcantonio 31,675	Marcantonio 37,070	Marcantonio 13,476

* not available

TABLE 6
(continued)

CONGRESSIONAL PRIMARY AND GENERAL ELECTION RESULTS FOR THE TWENTIETH (1934-42)
AND EIGHTEENTH (1944-50) CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS

<u>Primaries</u>			<u>General Elections</u>			
1946			Marcantonio		42,229	
			Bryan		35,693	
<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>ALP</u>	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>ALP</u>	
Marcantonio	Marcantonio	(uncontested)	Bryan	Marcantonio	Marcantonio	
2,760	9,778		35,693	27,341	14,888	
Bryan	Hannigan					
3,641	9,216					
1948			Marcantonio		36,278	
			Morrissey		31,211	
			Ellis		30,899	
(no contested primaries)			<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>ALP</u>	<u>Liberal</u>
			Ellis	Morrissey	Marcantonio	Ellis
			26,038	31,211	36,278	4,861
1950			Donovan		49,448	
			Marcantonio		36,095	
(no contested primaries)			<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>ALP</u>	<u>Liberal</u>
			Donovan	Donovan	Marcantonio	Donovan
			19,030	25,215	36,095	5,203

Source: Municipal Archives of the City of New York.

TABLE 7

ELECTION RESULTS FOR THE PORTION OF THE
SEVENTEENTH STATE SENATORIAL DISTRICT WHICH WAS
INCLUDED IN MARCANTONIO'S CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT*

	<u>DEMOCRATIC</u>	<u>REPUBLICAN</u>	<u>AMERICAN LABOR PARTY</u>
<u>1938</u>	Leon Fischel	<u>Frederick Coudert</u>	Harold Baer
17th A.D.	7,752	2,487	4,870
Total	23,502	33,383	10,340
<u>1940</u>	Gerald Murphy	<u>Frederick Coudert</u>	Andrew Macleod
17th A.D.	13,544	2,507	3,835
Total	41,430	52,085	8,057
<u>1942</u>	Jerry Finkelstein	<u>Frederick Coudert</u>	Jerry Finkelstein
17th A.D.	4,914	3,346	1,725
Total	16,993	32,989	7,632

*Victorious candidates' names are underscored. Approximately one half of the Seventeenth Assembly District was El Barrio, the other half was Central Harlem.

Source: Municipal Archive of the City of New York.

TABLE 8

ELECTION RESULTS FOR THE PORTION OF THE EIGHTEENTH STATE SENATORIAL DISTRICT
WHICH WAS INCLUDED IN MARCANTONIO'S CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT*

	<u>DEMOCRATIC</u>	<u>REPUBLICAN</u>	<u>AMERICAN LABOR PARTY</u>
<u>1938</u>	<u>John McCall</u>	<u>Michael Giller</u>	<u>Victor Gettner</u>
18th A.D.	9,879	6,552	4,028
Total	23,879	12,532	5,797
<u>1940</u>	<u>John McCall</u>	<u>Charles Muzzicato</u>	<u>Charles Muzzicato</u>
18th A.D.	11,938	12,155	4,023
Total	27,134	24,717	6,096
<u>1942</u>	<u>John McCall</u>	<u>Richard Costenzo</u>	<u>Richard Costenzo</u>
18th A.D.	6,123	7,310	2,186
Total	13,844	15,817	3,874

*Victorious candidates' names are underscored. The Eighteenth Assembly District was approximately coterminous with Italian Harlem.

Source: Municipal Archive of the City of New York.

TABLE 9

ELECTION RESULTS FOR THE SEVENTEENTH (RENAMED FOURTEENTH
IN 1944) AND EIGHTEENTH (RENAMED SIXTEENTH IN 1944) ASSEMBLY DISTRICTS*

	<u>DEMOCRATIC</u>	<u>REPUBLICAN</u>	<u>AMERICAN LABOR PARTY</u>
<u>1937</u>			
17TH	A.D.Meyer Alterman 6,218	<u>Oscar Garcia-Rivera</u> 3,966	<u>Oscar Garcia-Rivera</u> 4,236
18th A.D.	<u>Salvatore Ferenga</u> 9,759	Hamlet Catenaccio 5,392	Alfred Scotti 5,487
<u>1938</u>			
17th A.D.	Meyer Alterman 6,208	John Rossi 3,164	<u>Oscar Garcia-Rivera</u> 6,443
18th A.D.	Salvatore Ferenga 10,147	<u>Joseph Boccia</u> 7,568	<u>Joseph Boccia</u> 4,347
<u>1940</u>			
17th A.D.	<u>Hulan Jack</u> 12,171	Oscar Garcia-Rivera 3,134	Oscar Garcia-Rivera 5,887
18th A.D.	Joseph Cioffi 14,243	<u>Hamlet Catenaccio</u> 10,700	<u>Hamlet Catenaccio</u> 3,819
<u>1942</u>			
17th A.D.	<u>Hulan Jack</u> 4,890	Lasson Walsh 2,344	<u>Hulan Jack</u> 1,706
18th A.D.	Joseph Cioffi 7,423	<u>Hamlet Catenaccio</u> 6,621	<u>Hamlet Catenaccio</u> 2,147

TABLE 9
(continued)

ELECTION RESULTS FOR THE SEVENTEENTH (RENAMED FOURTEENTH
IN 1944) AND EIGHTEENTH (RENAMED SIXTEENTH IN 1944) ASSEMBLY DISTRICTS*

	<u>DEMOCRATIC</u>	<u>REPUBLICAN</u>	<u>AMERICAN LABOR PARTY</u>	<u>LIBERAL</u>
<u>1944</u>				
14th A.D.	<u>Hulan Jack</u> 12,582	Lasson Walsh 3,124	<u>Hulan Jack</u> 6,121	
16th A.D.	Frank Rossetti 12,478	<u>Hamlet Catenaccio</u> 10,901	<u>Hamlet Catenaccio</u> 3,408	Frank Rossetti 508
<u>1946</u>				
14th A.D.	<u>Hulan Jack</u> 5,087	Israel Davila 3,955	<u>Hulan Jack</u> 4,056	
16th A.D.	<u>Louis Cioffi</u> 12,668	Hamlet Catenaccio 5,878	Hamlet Catenaccio 3,571	<u>Louis Cioffi</u> 416
<u>1948</u>				
14th A.D.	<u>Hulan Jack</u> 10,278	Israel Davila 2,432	Manuel Medina 6,453	<u>Hulan Jack</u> 1,273
16th A.D.	<u>Louis Cioffi</u> 15,158	Vincent Vellela 6,028	Mairo Eliseo 8,220	Eugene Teeter 1,177
<u>1950</u>				
14th A.D.	<u>Hulan Jack</u> 6,748	Carlo Blasini 1,672	Manuel Medina 5,842	Pedro Torres 1,229
16th A.D.	<u>Louis Cioffi</u> 9,504	Giro Cestano 4,451	Lee Bosco 9,716	<u>Louis Cioffi</u> 1,877

*Victorious candidates' names are underscored. One half of the Fourteenth Assembly District was in El Barrio, the other half in Central Harlem. The Sixteenth Assembly District was approximately coterminous with Italian Harlem.

Source: Municipal Archives of the City of New York

TABLE 10

ELECTION RESULTS FOR THE PORTION OF THE TWENTY-SECOND STATE SENATORIAL DISTRICT
WHICH INCLUDED MARCANTONIO'S CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT*

	<u>DEMOCRAT</u>	<u>REPUBLICAN</u>	<u>AMERICAN LABOR PARTY</u>	<u>LIBERAL</u>
<u>1944</u>	<u>Phillip Zichello</u>	<u>Richard Costenza</u>	<u>Richard Costenza</u>	Phillip Zichello
14th A.D.	12,475	2,868	6,218	504
16th A.D	11,908	11,265	3,332	517
Total	40,390	29,983	14,203	1,888
<u>1946</u>	<u>Alfred Santangelo</u>	<u>Michael Angelo</u>	<u>Alfred Santangelo</u>	(no candidate)
14th A.D.	5,147	3,331	4,161	
16th A.D	12,028	5,857	4,113	
Total	28,886	24,857	12,390	
<u>1948</u>	<u>Alfred Santangelo</u>	<u>William Duggan</u>	<u>Alfred Santangelo</u>	Ferenc Gondor
14th A.D.	10,330	2,462	6,424	1,182
16th A.D	14,038	6,028	8,917	1,254
Total	42,278	23,142	22,077	3,796
<u>1950</u>	<u>Alfred Santangelo</u>	<u>William Bianchi</u>	<u>William Bianchi</u>	Alfred Santangelo
14th A.D.	6,495	1,715	5,396	977
16th A.D	9,916	3,737	9,799	2,130
Total	30,018	15,250	21,638	4,809

*Victorious candidates' names are underscored. One half of the Fourteenth Assembly District was in El Barrio, the other half in Central Harlem. The Sixteenth Assembly District was approximately coterminous with Italian Harlem.

Source: Municipal Archives of the City of New York.

TABLE 11

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS FOR THE SEVENTEENTH (RENAMED FOURTEENTH
IN 1944) AND EIGHTEENTH (RENAMED SIXTEENTH IN 1944) ASSEMBLY DISTRICTS*

	<u>DEMOCRATIC</u>	<u>REPUBLICAN</u>	<u>AMERICAN LABOR PARTY</u>	<u>LIBERAL</u>
<u>1936</u>	Roosevelt	Landon	Roosevelt	
17TH A.D.	18,382	2,375	1,146	
18th A.D.	19,307	6,237	1,588	
<u>1940</u>	Roosevelt	Willkie	Roosevelt	
17th A.D.	14,931	2,757	4,782	
18th A.D.	12,998	14,048	3,952	
<u>1944</u>	Roosevelt	Dewey	Roosevelt	Roosevelt
14th A.D.	13,554	3,098	6,464	1,053
16th A.D.	10,740	14,052	3,248	505
<u>1948</u>	Truman	Dewey	Wallace	Truman
14th A.D.	11,825	2,628	6,248	900
16th A.D.	16,586	7,756	7,000	1,356

*Approximately one half of the Seventeenth/Fourteenth Assembly District was El Barrio, the other half was part of Central Harlem. The Eighteenth/Sixteenth Assembly District was approximately coterminous with Italian Harlem.

Source: Municipal Archives of the City of New York.

district comprised of first- and second-generation immigrant workers was mitigated by the close ties of its largest ethnic group, Italian Americans, to the Republican Party. (See pp. 236-37) These affiliations were strongly reinforced by LaGuardia's decade-long tenure as its Republican Congressman. Aside from the Republican Party proclivities of many of the Italian-Americans, Tammany Hall's hegemony in this district was undermined from 1910 to 1922 by the significant strength of the Socialist Party. It is sufficient here to note that in the 1920 Congressional race Morris Hillquit received 43 percent of East Harlem's vote.² (See pp. 20-21) LaGuardia's ascendancy in East Harlem from 1922 to 1931 further undermined Tammany Hall. In 1924, LaGuardia ran as a Socialist, and in his other races as a Republican. In all his races, except that of 1922, he also ran on another line: in 1924, Progressive Party; in 1926, Progressive Labor Party; in 1928, Wet Party; and in 1930 and 1932, the Liberal Party.³ (See pp. 41-52) The variegated party pattern in East Harlem countered the habit of loyalty to the Democratic party which was so prevalent in other immigrant urban districts. Aside from the Upper East Side's "Silk Stocking District," East Harlem was the only Congressional district in Manhattan which did not have an entrenched Tammany machine.⁴

²Jeffrey S. Gurock, When Harlem Was Jewish, 1870-1930 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 81.

³No election statistics are available for these minor parties, because the New York city Bureau of Elections only reported them on a city-wide basis. Jacob Blum and Peter Wilhelm, "Vito Marcantonio and the Political Organization of East Harlem" (Honors paper, Yale University, 1967), p. 257.

⁴Arthur Mann, La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times 1882-1933 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 245.

Marcantonio's 1934 opponent, Alderman James Lanzetta, had narrowly defeated LaGuardia by a vote of 16,477 to 15,227 in the Democratic landslide year of 1932. Lanzetta seemed to have a number of qualifications for continued political success in this community. First and foremost he was an Italo-American born and raised in East Harlem. He was educated as an engineer at Columbia University. He was witty, affable, and good-looking. Moreover, he was sufficiently astute politically to have built a political base in East Harlem's growing Puerto Rican community.⁵ (See p. 346) Marcantonio was handicapped by the presence of both Socialist and Communist Party candidates on the ballot, who siphoned votes away from him. Moreover, his Italian ancestry could not be politically exploited--"Lanzetta" and "Marcantonio" were equally good Italian names. Lanzetta's advantages in this contest were dissipated by his ineptitude in Congress. He was largely inactive, and as a result obtained scant coverage in the New York press. On one of the few occasions when he spoke in the House, he committed the political faux pas of defending landlords. "Many tenants have been unable to pay rent," he explained, "but they, nevertheless, have been permitted to remain because of the friendly feeling existing between the owners and the tenant, from a long and intimate association."⁶

⁵Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio" (Honors paper, Harvard University, 1950), addenda (unpaginated); La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times, pp. 317-18.

⁶Alan Schaffer, Vito Marcantonio, Radical in Congress (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), p. 23; Salvatore John LaGumina, Vito Marcantonio: The People's Politician (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1969), p. 43.

Using the slogan "Fill the Empty Seat," Marcantonio waged a highly ideological campaign. Moving far to the left of Lanzetta, the Republican candidate declared that if he were elected, "I will prove by my actions that the cause of the organized worker is the cause of Vito Marcantonio." Anti-Tammany Hall, labor, and civic groups vigorously supported his candidacy. Luigi Antonini, leader of the powerful Italian Dressmakers Local 89 of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, headed a labor committee which worked for Marcantonio's election. Fifty labor unions endorsed him. Among national labor leaders, only William Green, President of the AFL, opposed him. Marcantonio received a number of personal endorsements as well, but none was as important as that of the recently elected mayor.⁷

Although he left little lasting impact as a Congressman, Lanzetta had begun to speak on behalf of immigrants in the House. For example, he called for the automatic admission to citizenship of aliens who had resided in the United States for many years, but who had been unable to meet educational requirements for naturalization.⁸ This was of considerable interest in a district whose population contained a cohort of only eight-and-one-half percent native born of native parents.⁹ However, Marcantonio adroitly attacked in an area of even greater interest to this community, Lanzetta's failure to respond promptly to

⁷Donna Liberman, "Vito Marcantonio: People's Congressman: The New Deal Period" (Honors paper, Radcliffe College, 1970), p. 29.

⁸Salvatore John LaGumina, "Case Studies in Ethnicity and Italo-American Politicians," in The Italian Experience in the United States, ed., Silvano M. Tomasi and Madeline H. Engel (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1973), p. 149.

⁹A Decade of District Health Pioneering: Ten Year Report of the East Harlem Health Center, report prepared under the direction of Kenneth D. Widdemer (New York, 1932), p. 108.

constituents' requests for assistance. Apparently, whenever a constituent approached Lanzetta for a favor, he replied he would take care of it "next week." Marcantonio, who had extensive experience serving LaGuardia's constituents, dubbed Lanzetta, "Jimmy Next-Week." The nickname haunted Lanzetta.¹⁰

Still, the advantage lay with Lanzetta--an incumbent Democratic candidate running in a landslide Democratic year. The Democratic gubernatorial candidate, Herbert Lehman, for example, swamped his Republican opponent in East Harlem by almost two to one. Yet Marcantonio--with the 655 votes he garnered on the City Fusion line--beat Lanzetta by 257 votes.¹¹ The most significant contributing factors to Marcantonio's victories were probably his superior organization and Lanzetta's overconfidence.

Thirty-two years old, voluble, handsome, LaGuardia's protégé set off for Washington.

His radicalism in Congress and activism in New York City attracted an enormous amount of early press coverage: the Times, for example, mentioned him twenty times in 1935 and sixty times in 1936. And Time reported that: "Perhaps [the] most vigorous of all the House's youngsters is swarthy, little Vito Marcantonio."¹²

By defying the dictum that freshman congressmen should listen and learn, Macantonio entered the 1936 campaign as a worthy successor to Fiorello LaGuardia. The Nation had included him on its 1935 "Honor

¹⁰Interview with Ida Hefner, New York City, August 13, 1975.

¹¹Schaffer, p. 26; Bingham, addenda. For complete voting figures on Marcantonio's congressional races, as discussed in this chapter, see Table 6.

¹²"National Affairs," Time (April 22, 1935), p. 15.

Roll" as the congressman "who has been in the forefront of the struggle against social injustice." The New York Post endorsed him for re-election and called him the "champion of the unemployed."¹³

Not all the press attention that he received, however, was positive. The New York News on February 1936 stated that at a demonstration of Work Projects Administration employees, an "inflammatory harangue by Vito Marcantonio touched off a riot."¹⁴ In any case, Marcantonio returned to his electorate after one term with a reputation as an active, outspoken legislator.

Marcantonio's 1936 electoral prospects were enhanced by a number of other factors. Running as a Republican, he received the assistance of the local Republican organization. A Non-Partisan Committee for the Re-election of Vito Marcantonio, organized by leading liberals (including Heywood Broun, Morris Ernst, and Clarence Darrow), broadened his base beyond the Republican Party. Other prominent figures endorsed his candidacy, including Maury Maverick, Luis Muñoz Marín, Father Charles Coughlin, and Hamilton Fish.¹⁵

Marcantonio almost lost the most important endorsement of all, that of his erstwhile mentor and now increasingly powerful mayor, Fiorello LaGuardia. In 1936, Marcantonio was arrested for leading a demonstration of fifteen thousand WPA and relief workers in a march in defiance of a police ban. Marcantonio accused LaGuardia of bearing

¹³As quoted in Liberman, p. 62.

¹⁴"Cops battle 10,000 in Riot Over Relief," New York News (February 16, 1936), p. 2.

¹⁵Liberman, p. 76.

responsibility for his arrest and the arrest of many of the demonstrators. With several newspapers emphasizing the close relationship between the two up to that moment, Marcantonio stated: "I will never forget my first encounter with the police. That was in 1926 during the dressworkers' strike. One morning I got a call from LaGuardia. He asked me to accompany him on the picket line. [We] were arrested. I believe the Mayor was right that time. How can I be condemned if I believe in 1936 what the Mayor taught me in 1926."¹⁶ Perhaps for personal as much as political reasons, LaGuardia endorsed the fiery radical.¹⁷

In 1936, despite Marcantonio's far-ranging and much-publicized activities and impressive outside support, for the first and only time, East Harlem failed to give him a majority of its votes and returned his immediate predecessor to office. Running on the Democratic line, Lanzetta received 18,722 votes to Marcantonio's 17,207--12,111 on the

¹⁶"Marcantonio Seized in Relief Row: Defies Police in March of 15,000," New York Times (February 16, 1936), p. 1; "Marcantonio Lays Disorder to Police," New York Times (February 17, 1936), p. 19; see also, "Valentine Derides Marcantonio Row," New York Times (February 18, 1936), p. 3.

¹⁷"Mayor for Marcantonio," New York Times (October 26, 1936), p. 2. Although LaGuardia increasingly identified with the American Labor Party's right wing, he never failed to endorse Marcantonio. In part, this was due to the Republican mayor's need for left-wing support for re-election, but a good deal of the explanation can be ascribed to enduring paternal sentiment. LaGuardia's father complex toward Marcantonio led him to refer publicly to him as "Vito, my good son," or when he displeased him as "my erring son." "Red Darling," Newsweek (November 15, 1946), p. 31. A letter of endorsement from LaGuardia to Marcantonio in 1938 was published in the campaign brochure, I Want to Be Your Congressman, deposited in CC. See also: "Marcantonio Wins La Guardia Backing: Mayor's 'Fatherly Interest' Is Said to Offset Differences" New York Times (November 5, 1940), p. 14; and, "Mayor Gives his Support to Marcantonio, Chided by Antonini for 'Beaut of a Mistake,'" New York Times (July 30, 1942), p. 23.

Republican and 5,096 on the All People's Party lines.¹⁸ (On his relationship to the latter see pp. 349-50.) In part, Marcantonio's defeat was the result of his anti-Fascist sentiments, which certainly had some negative effect on his Italo-American constituency. He entered the 1936 campaign while Italy was invading Ethiopia, and pro-Fascist feeling was running high in the Italian community. (See pp. 229-32) Marcantonio's anti-Fascist reputation most certainly also led to the pro-Fascist Il Progresso Italo-Americano (the largest Italian-language daily in the United States) completely omitting his name from its pages during this campaign, while giving Lanzetta extensive coverage.¹⁹

Among the factors contributing to Marcantonio's defeat at Lanzetta's hands (and LaGuardia's defeat by Lanzetta in 1932)²⁰ as well as Marcantonio's victories over Lanzetta in 1934 and 1938, were the size differentials for the East Harlem electorate in off-year versus presidential-year elections:

TABLE 12

NUMBER OF VOTES CAST FOR CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES
IN THE TWENTIETH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1932	31,664
1934	26,763
1936	36,672
1938	31,739

Source: Municipal Archives of the City of New York

¹⁸Lieberman, p. 78.

¹⁹LaGumina, pp. 24, 43.

²⁰Howard Zinn, LaGuardia in Congress (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958), pp. 184, 249.

Apparently, the five thousand or so additional East Harlem voters who voted only in the 1932 and 1936 presidential elections were attracted to Roosevelt and voted the straight Democratic ticket. (See p. 270)

As a defeated candidate of what was clearly becoming the minority party of his district, Marcantonio might never have again sat in Congress had it not been for the founding of the American Labor Party in 1935. (The ALP did not run Congressional candidates until 1938.) Two weeks after his defeat in 1936, the radical Republican enrolled in the the newly founded party.²¹

New York's American Labor Party was the creation of the anti-Communist leadership of the needle-trades unions (especially, Alex Rose, David Dubinsky, and Luigi Antonini). Their primary organizational motive was to devise a means for traditional Socialist voters, who were concentrated in those unions, to vote comfortably for Franklin Delano Roosevelt. As a center for anti-Tammany politics, the Party also served to garner votes for LaGuardia, whose Republican label was anathema to many who were otherwise attracted to his political positions.²²

The American Labor Party's program was not socialistic, but it was further to the left than the New Deal. For example, in its Declaration of Principles of 1937, the last of a list of thirteen points stipulated that there should be a "sufficient planned utilization of the natural economy so that coal, oil, timber, water power, and other natural resources that belong to the American people of this and future

²¹Blum and Wilhelm, p. 28.

²²August Heckscher with Phyllis Robinson, When LaGuardia Was Mayor: New York's Legendary Years (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 138.

generations shall be protected from predatory interests."²³ In a similar vein, a press release dated January 1943 stated:

A suitable job and a fair distributive share of abundant production is the due of every willing worker. The state must strive to secure this for all workers. To make democracy effective, there must be economic, social, and cultural justice, as well as juridical and political equality. . . . Nor can these objectives be attained by traditional "free enterprise." There must be established a State Economic Council . . . to plan the extension of industrial activity, where there is a failure of private business to engage in . . . a recommended enterprise, within ninety days the Council may organize a public corporation to engage in such an industry.²⁴

The thrust of the ALP's program, however, was support of the more "leftist" New Deal domestic doctrines. It deviated sharply from the liberal wing of the Democratic Party primarily in foreign policy, particularly during the Soviet-German Non-Intervention Pact and the postwar periods.

Apart from the general appeal of its program to the large liberal and leftist blocs in New York City, it was the support of unions with large memberships that guaranteed the viability of the ALP as a bona fide third party. The unsavory reputation of the regular Democratic Party, and the unacceptability of the Republican Party label to much of the city's electorate, further enhanced the new party's fortunes. Moreover, the new party had two charismatic spokesmen in LaGuardia and Marcantonio. The ALP's endorsement of Roosevelt and other popular figures of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party further solidified its position. In 1937, LaGuardia's vote for mayor on the ALP line was 482,559 and in 1944 Roosevelt secured 582,594, or 23 percent of his New York City total, on the same line. Despite intensifying accusations

²³Handbook of the American Labor Party. Tamiment.

²⁴Press release, January 4, 1943. Tamiment (ALP, 1943).

that the ALP was Communist controlled, as its 1949 mayoral candidate, Marcantonio attracted 356,626 votes.²⁵

Totally unanticipated by the ALP's founders, the intense Popular Front atmosphere of the late thirties allowed the rise of a Communist-led wing within the party. Almost from its inception, Marcantonio was the leader of this wing, and his election on October 1, 1941, as chairman of the crucial New York County Committee of the party, signaled the defeat of the right wing.²⁶ A further series of left-wing victories in the other New York City County Committees followed. The final city-wide primary battle between the ALP's two wings occurred in August 1943. Again the right lost, leading this wing by 1944 to leave the party altogether and form the Liberal Party. This departure left the Marcantonio wing firmly in control of the ALP, a position that was fortified in 1948 when the ALP affiliated with the Progressive Party, causing the major centrist organization in the ALP--the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union--also to walk out. Although Marcantonio was officially elected ALP chairman in 1948, he wielded comparable power as early as 1941.

The existence of the American Labor Party was essential to Marcantonio's electoral victories from 1938 to 1948, as well as his surprisingly strong showing in 1950. As the only Congressman who sat in the House under its banner, the ALP channeled a major part of its city-wide resources to help ensure his victories. The ALP also contributed to his electoral successes in at least three other major ways: (1) by

²⁵Curtis Daniel MacDougall, Gideon's Army (New York: Marzani & Munsell, 1965), p. 197; "Election Results," New York Times (November 10, 1949), p. 6.

²⁶"Connolly Scores O'Dwyer on Reds," New York Times (October 3, 1941), p. 16.

providing the margins of victory; (2) by creating the possibilities for political deals with the major parties advantageous to Marcantonio; and (3) by allowing for political deals to be struck in East Harlem with local Democratic and Republican leaders, quelling any potential opposition in Marcantonio's own bailiwick.

To some extent, all of these factors entered into each of Marcantonio's Congressional campaigns under the ALP aegis. The scenario for these deals always began with the nomination of a full slate of ALP candidates for the various contested offices. The ALP leadership would then wait for the major parties to approach with proposals for "arrangements," that is, favors, patronage, or cross-endorsements in return for the ALP's withdrawal of its own candidates. Deals with Tammany Hall and the ALP were fostered by the former's exclusion from city patronage by LaGuardia and by the increasing expansion of civil service. The Republican Party's perennial status as a minority party in New York City made it amenable to deals with the ALP, without which very few elected offices could be won.²⁷ When it came to making these deals, the ALP was literally willing to sacrifice almost everything to ensure the re-election of its only holder of national office and its leader. At least in the short term, little or no sacrifice was involved. On its own, the ALP was incapable of winning those offices of greatest interest to the party machines--borough presidencies and judgeships, which were sources of considerable patronage. Conversely, Tammany Hall had slight interest in Congressional seats because they carried with them almost no

²⁷Robert F. Carter, "Pressure from the Left: The American Labor Party, 1936-1954" (Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse University, 1965), pp. 74, 206. See also Warren Moscow, Politics in the Empire State (New York: Knopf, 1948), p. 98.

patronage.

From 1938 until his district was expanded in 1944, Marcantonio was in an enviable, perhaps impregnable, position. In 1938 he entered the Democratic primary against James Lanzetta and won almost one third of the vote.²⁸ In the general election he defeated Lanzetta 19,000 to 12,000--a spectacular margin in a district accustomed to close races. Significantly, 9,000 of his votes were garnered on the American Labor Party line.

The ALP's politically important, even decisive, role in this district was the result of a number of factors. First, its native son's adoption of its label was of great importance in swinging votes to this column. Moreover, another native son, now Mayor, Fiorello LaGuardia, was also enrolled in the new party. For many reasons discussed elsewhere, East Harlem's Puerto Ricans were especially strongly attracted to the ALP. The long tradition of third-party politics in the Twentieth Congressional District ensured a positive response to the newly created labor party. The more or less even strength of the two major parties provided an environment conducive to the success of a third party. In 1942, when Marcantonio ran unopposed in the general election, his Republican and Democratic vote in East Harlem was approximately equal: 7,890 and 7,533 respectively (he also garnered 3,501 ALP votes). The addition of Yorkville to the district diluted the strength of the ALP and added to that of the Democratic Party. In 1944, when he ran unopposed for a district now including both East Harlem and Yorkville his vote was: Republican, 31,675, Democratic, 37,070, and

²⁸Lieberman, p. 76.

ALP, 13,476.²⁹ The growth of the ALP vote after the passage of the Wilson-Pakula Act had the effect of equalizing the votes of the three parties; in the 1948 Congressional race, the ALP, Democratic, and Republican candidates each received approximately one-third of the total vote.

When Marcantonio was forced to run solely on the ALP ticket, in the 1948 and 1950 Congressional and 1949 mayoral races, East Harlem was willing to vote on this line. Moreover, Marcantonio's exclusion from participation in the major party primaries after 1948 caused his organization to stress the ALP slate in general, not only his individual candidacy. As a result, the ALP vote significantly increased for all contested offices. Nevertheless, with the exception of central El Barrio, the ALP was nowhere the majority party. It was the approximate parity of the two major parties that gave the ALP such great impact in Marcantonio's district. This gave the ALP the balance of power. Elsewhere in New York City (for example, the Lower East Side, Central Harlem, and Brighton Beach) there were districts where the ALP was the second party to the Democratic Party, but its influence was far less elsewhere than in East Harlem in particular, and in Marcantonio's Congressional District in general. To hold second place to the Democratic Party which garnered 70 to 80 percent of the votes and where the Republican Party had only a nominal presence, prevented the ALP from becoming a major political force. Ultimately, the unusual--that is, for New York City--political party voting patterns of Italian Harlem and after 1944 Marcantonio's broadened district was crucial to the influence

²⁹Bingham, addenda.

of a third party and by extension to the survival of this radical politician.

Most crucially, by holding the balance of power within the district, the ALP served as the fulcrum for constantly changing political deals with the major parties. In the 1938 race the official Republican Party neither disowned nor opposed him. In view of Marcantonio's disavowal of his Republican affiliation and his highly visible alliance with the Communist party, this appears inexplicable. This anomalous situation is explained by the machinations of a political deal: the American Labor Party endorsed four East Harlem Republican candidates in return for the Republican endorsement of Marcantonio. In 1937 the ALP endorsed the Republican candidates for State Assembly from Italian Harlem, Joseph Boccia, and El Barrio, Oscar Garcia-Rivera, who won as a result of American Labor Party votes.³⁰ The election of Republicans from these traditionally Democratic districts made it worthwhile for the Republican Party to ignore Marcantonio. This was further encouraged by the reality that Marcantonio was powerfully entrenched in East Harlem. In 1938 the three Republican clubs there supported his candidacy. This was the result of the ALP's endorsement of the Republican candidate for State Assemblyman from Italian Harlem which then provided his margin of victory. (See Table 9)

The near impossibility of launching a challenge to Marcantonio independent of the major party machines is illustrated by the campaign of one independent, Samuel Kupperman, who entered the 1938 primary proclaiming the sole electoral issue was "republicanism versus

³⁰Blum and Wilhelm, pp. 297, 191.

communism." Marcantonio defeated this political unknown by 2,296 to 199.³¹ By not opposing Marcantonio, however, the Republican Party was of course enabling him further to consolidate his already formidable hold on East Harlem.

In 1940, the ALP arrangements with the Republican Party continued. The ALP endorsed the Republican candidates for State Senate and Assembly from Italian Harlem and provided the margins of victory for both. (See Tables 8 and 9.) At this point a further inducement was probably offered to the Republicans. In return for not opposing Marcantonio in the Republican primary, the American Labor Party ran its own candidate in the Seventeenth Congressional district (the so-called Silk Stocking District). By refusing to endorse the Democratic Party's candidate, the liberal vote in this district was split, thereby ensuring that the Republicans would maintain this, their only Manhattan Congressional seat.³²

Again, Marcantonio entered the 1940 Democratic primary against Lanzetta, and lost by only 184 votes. In the general election that year the ALP-Republican designee amassed 25,136 votes to Lanzetta's 14,898. The Twentieth Congressional District had never before witnessed a landslide of this dimension.³³

In 1942, after being denounced by Thomas Curran, the Republican county chairman, as a man "who gets his orders from a foreign

³¹Lieberman, p. 75; Simon Gerson, Pete: The Story of Peter V. Cacchione, New York City's First Communist Councilman (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p. 95.

³²Schaffer, pp. 97-98.

³³Blum and Wilhelm, pp. 100, 306.

power,"³⁴ Marcantonio nevertheless received the full support of the local Republican establishment. The ALP again endorsed the Republican State Senate and Assembly candidates from Italian Harlem and again provided both their margins of victory.³⁵ (See Tables 8 and 9.) Charles Mucciolo, who entered the 1942 Republican primary and also represented Marcantonio's opponents in the American Labor Party, was left to his own devices. As a result, he was swamped 2,784 to 291 in the Republican and 2,049 to 234 in the ALP primaries.

More significantly, the 1942 election saw the beginnings of a political relationship between Marcantonio and the Democratic Party. In the primary, the Democrats ran Frank Ricca, a local Tammany leader, who is not known to have made a single campaign speech. Not surprisingly, he was defeated by a vote of 5,247 to 2,529. There is every indication, but no hard evidence, that Ricca was a sacrificial lamb offered up as part of a deal worked out between Tammany Hall and the ALP.³⁶ This deal may have involved ALP endorsement of Hulan Jack for State Assemblyman in the Seventeenth Assembly District. (See pp. 355-56) The left wing's almost total ascendancy in the ALP by this date, however points to various city-wide arrangements, the details of which remain unknown. In any case, the combination of the now closely interrelated factors of Marcantonio's political strength in East Harlem and the deals worked out among the ALP and the Democratic and Republican parties enabled Marcantonio to win all the party primaries, thereby allowing him to run

³⁴"Marcantonio Read Out of the Party by Curran as 'Agent of Kremlin,'" New York Times (June 6, 1942), p. 1.

³⁵Blum and Wilhelm, pp. 306, 311.

³⁶Ibid.

unopposed in the general election.

Marcantonio's ascendancy in East Harlem was so complete that he appeared to be its undefeatable leader. In 1944, however, the historic Twentieth Congressional District, which was coterminous with East Harlem, was abolished. In its stead, the Eighteenth Congressional District was formed. The newly created district included all of East Harlem and an equally populous area to its south. The latter consisted of Yorkville (whose boundaries extended approximately from East 96th Street to East 79th Street and from Park Avenue to the East River) and a narrower strip east of Third Avenue extending south to East 59th Street. Yorkville's population was predominantly German- and Irish-American. One study of the political orientation of New York City's German- and Irish-American communities from 1929 to 1941 concluded that "fear of Communism . . . permeated the German and Irish Catholic communities." One of the effects of this was the widespread support for Father Charles E. Coughlin's proto-fascist movement in these communities. Moreover, Yorkville attained nationwide notoriety as a major center of the German-American Bund. But the area to the south of Yorkville contained smaller Hungarian-, Czech- and Italian-American communities more responsive to the radical Congressman. (This study refers to the entire additional area of Marcantonio's Congressional District as "Yorkville.") Unlike East Harlem, which was almost exclusively a tenement area populated by the very poor, Yorkville contained a range of income levels starting at a low level, but which rose to securely upper-middle-class brackets. From 1944 on, then, Marcantonio had to appeal to an electorate of ethnic and income groups

hostile to his politics.³⁷ For example, in 1948, only one and one-half blocks in Yorkville awarded Marcantonio as much as 50 percent of their vote. And it was only in the primarily Czech area and the enclave of Italo-Americans that he garnered between 30 to 39 percent of the vote. Despite Marcantonio's sudden vulnerability, however, neither the Democratic nor the Republican Party fully exploited his weakened position. The emerging possibility of unseating Marcantonio simply could not compensate sufficiently for the value of the political deals which continued to be made among the American Labor Party and the two major parties.

Marcantonio entered the 1944 Democratic primary against Martin Kennedy, who despite his six-term incumbency as Yorkville's Congressman was a feeble candidate. One study of Marcantonio's election campaign described Kennedy as an "elderly Tammanyite of inferior professional quality . . . who spent most of his time on his insurance business, and had a high record of absence in Congress."³⁸

Though Tammany Hall officially supported Kennedy, the outlines of some sort of political deal between the American Labor Party and Tammany Hall are evident. The New York Times reported that during the discussions leading to Tammany's designation of Kennedy, James M. Pemberton, who represented El Barrio, supported Marcantonio's candidacy outright. In a maneuver apparently intended to assist

³⁷For a discussion of the political behavior of New York City's Irish- and German-Americans in this period see: Ronald Bayor, Neighbors in Conflict: The Irish, Germans, Jews, and Italians of New York City, 1929-1941 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978).

³⁸Bingham, p. 89.

Marcantonio, Frank Rossetti, a Tammany leader from East Harlem, suggested that a compromise candidate be designated. When Tammany announced its designation of Kennedy, Eugene P. Connolly stated that the American Labor Party would be unable to deal with Tammany Hall. At this point, Tammany must have reconsidered its own actions; it essentially left Kennedy to his own, somewhat limited, resources. Kennedy himself blamed his defeat on a "deal" worked out between Marcantonio and "certain elements in Tammany Hall." Kennedy's charges were substantiated when, one week after the primary, the ALP reversed its decision to withhold its endorsement of a Tammany candidate for the State Supreme Court.³⁹ Marcantonio won the Democratic primary by 2,550 out of 18,092 votes cast. His margin of victory was almost totally supplied by his bailiwick, Italian Harlem, where he outpolled Kennedy 3,191 to 945.⁴⁰

The Republicans entered an absentee candidate, Robert C. Palmer, a naval lieutenant. Palmer raised two issues during this campaign: "real Republicanism" and "communism." His campaign literature boasted

³⁹"Tammany Rejects Marcantonio Bid," New York Times (June 2, 1944), p. 1; "Connolly Attacks Head of Tammany," New York Times (June 3, 1944), p. 26; "Marcantonio Foes Will Seek Inquiry," New York Times (August 3, 1944), p. 26; "Tammany Choices Accepted by ALP," New York Times (August 15, 1944), p. 14; "42 Primary Races Listed for State," New York Times (July 31, 1944), p. 9.

The political opportunism of these deals between the ALP and Tammany Hall is illustrated by the ALP's support of William O'Dwyer for mayor in 1945, on the one hand, and Tammany's endorsement of the re-election of a Communist City Councilman, Benjamin Davis, who also had the ALP's designation. An uproar followed in the wake of the latter, and Tammany was compelled to withdraw its support of Davis. "O'Dwyer Suggests Rediscovery of US," New York Times (October 13, 1944), p. 9; "Tammany Supports Davis, Communist" New York Times (July 21, 1945), p. 1; see also Carter, p. 231.

⁴⁰Bingham, pp. 91-92.

that he was opposed by "Hillman, Browder, and the Communists' Congressman." Palmer lost by 222 votes out of 5,669 cast. Reflecting the new interests of the reconstituted district, Palmer won heavily in Yorkville, but in the Sixteenth Assembly District (that is, Italian Harlem) he lost 262 to 1,604. In part, this margin was the result of the support of East Harlem's local Republican leaders for Marcantonio. Clearly, for them the ALP's providing the margins of victory for its State Senate and Assembly candidates, Richard Costenzo and Hamlet Catenaccio, countered any urge they might have harbored to campaign against Italian Harlem's native son. (See Tables 8 and 9.) Significantly, the Republican leaders in the Sixteenth Assembly District declined to accept from Palmer the money customarily given to pay campaign workers.⁴¹ In 1944, Marcantonio again ran unopposed.

The radical Congressman emerged from the war years in a position of great strength. The 1944 election proved his ability win an election which included areas outside his bailiwick. However, had the all-party candidate not had the means to deflect opposition from the major parties by making deals with his party, his tenure in office in a much-changed district would have ended abruptly.

Marcantonio's victories in the 1944 Republican and Democratic primaries masked the precariousness of his new political situation. After all, he had won the first by a mere 222 votes and the second by 2,550 out of 18,092 votes.⁴² Clearly, the radical Congressman's control of the Republican Party's designation was slipping. The large number of

⁴¹"Most Candidates Replaced by ALP," New York Times (July 6, 1944), p. 16; Bingham, pp. 91-92.

⁴²Ibid., addenda.

traditional Republican voters in Yorkville would soon outnumber the less conventional Republican voters of Italian Harlem, which was rapidly losing population. (See p. 175) It was within this new political context that the political deals between the ALP and Democratic Party became even more important.

In 1946, the Democratic Party would seem to have had a real chance to win in the Eighteenth Congressional District. The changed political climate made Marcantonio an increasingly isolated and vulnerable figure. Rather than contesting this seat with a sham candidate, as in 1942, or tendering half hearted support to its avowed candidate, as in 1944, however, Tammany gave Marcantonio the official Democratic Party designation outright.⁴³

The outlines of a deal between the American Labor Party and Tammany Hall were never clearer. In return for Tammany's endorsement, the ALP endorsed the Democratic Party's Congressional candidates in the other four Manhattan districts, as well as five of the Democratic Party's State Senatorial candidates. Most telling was the ALP's endorsement of Arthur G. Klein, who was running for re-election from the Lower East Side. In a special election a few months earlier, ALP candidate Johannes Steel made a very strong showing, garnering 13,481 votes to Klein's 17,360 and Republican Thomas Shea's 4,314. Thus, the ALP was willing to forego all other potential electoral gains in New York County in return for the Democratic Party designation for Marcantonio. Despite Tammany's support for the radical Congressman, a political neophyte, Patrick Hannigan, entered the Democratic primary and

⁴³Carter, p. 256.

came very close to defeating Marcantonio. The final vote was 9,778 to 9,216.⁴⁴ A Democratic candidate fully supported by the still-powerful Tammany organization would have beaten Marcantonio. When one considers that Marcantonio received two votes on the Democratic line for every one he received on the ALP line in the general election, the importance of the ALP to Marcantonio purely as a means for making deals with the major parties becomes clear. But to a remarkable extent New York City's Democratic Party was dependent on the ALP. In 1942, for example, of the 112 victorious candidates with Democratic nominations in the city, forty-three had had ALP endorsements.⁴⁵ The loss of Marcantonio's Republican designation caused the ALP in East Harlem to endorse a Democrat, Alfred Santangelo, for its State Senatorial seat. In the general election, the ALP votes elected him. The ALP continued to back Hulan Jack for Assembly in the Fourteenth Assembly District, but its votes were superfluous. (See Table 9)

After 1946, on a county- or city-wide basis, there were no further deals made between the American Labor and Republican Parties. Marcantonio's radicalism and the death of LaGuardia made the ALP anathema to the Republicans. In 1946, the Republicans entered Frederick Van Pelt Bryan in the race. After an exhausting campaign, he defeated Marcantonio in the primary 3,641 to 2,760.⁴⁶ An analysis of

⁴⁴Blum and Wilhelm, pp. 321, 481.

⁴⁵Wallace S. Sayre and Herbert Kaufman, Governing New York City: Politics in the Metropolis (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1960), pp. 188-89. See also pp. 183-92 for Democratic Party dependence on third party support in New York City and to a great extent, New York State.

⁴⁶Blum and Wilhelm, p. 326.

this vote indicates, however, that the local East Harlem Republican leaders did little or nothing to aid Bryan. In the general election in East Harlem, Bryan received only 5,611 votes to Marcantonio's 22,394 of which 14,116 were on the Democratic line and 8,198 on the American Labor Party line. For the entire district, he won the election by 7,000 votes: Bryan 35,693; Marcantonio 42,229 (22,341 Democratic and 14,980 ALP).⁴⁷ (See p. 370)

After the election, the Republican candidate recalled that his campaign workers in East Harlem were "at best apathetic."⁴⁸ The Times, commenting on Marcantonio's victory, noted that "as head of a minority party movement, he was at the same time the under-the-surface leader of all political parties in the area, including the Democratic and Republican parties. He was the 'organization' in the area and the major parties accepted his rulings."⁴⁹ Although the ALP did change its endorsement for State Senator to the Democrats, it continued to endorse the incumbent Republican State Assemblyman, Hamlet Catenaccio, from Italian Harlem. Its votes were, for the first time, insufficient to enable him to win office. (See Table 10) In the scheme of East Harlem's politics, however, for the local Republican clubs the ALP endorsement for a State Assemblyman was of greater significance by far than supporting a Yorkville Republican for Congress. Indeed, even if the local Republicans did not get all they wished from Marcantonio, they

⁴⁷Bingham, addenda.

⁴⁸"Preliminary Investigation into Alleged Election Irregularities in the Primary Election and the General Election in the 18th Congressional District, New York." Testimony of Marcantonio and others before Robert B. Baker, Assistant General Counsel and Chief Investigator of the House Campaign Expenditures Committee, p. 20. MP.

⁴⁹"Sketches of Winners for Congress in City Races," New York Times (November 6, 1946), p. 6.

certainly could not expect to make their accustomed deals with Frederick Van Pelt Bryan III.

On the very day of Marcantonio's election triumph an event occurred which caused him considerable future political damage. While on his way to a polling place in East Harlem on Election Day, November 5, 1946, Joseph Scottoriggio, a Republican Party election district captain, was beaten by three or four men. Six days later, without regaining full consciousness, he died. Because the murder occurred on Election Day, it had no perceptible bearing on the election results. But the longer-range effects on Marcantonio were profound. Despite his protestations, he was coupled specifically to what was popularly considered to be the first political murder in New York City in forty years, and was generally linked to the underworld. (See pp. 242-47) The day Scottoriggio died, Gov. Thomas E. Dewey termed the murder an "attempt by left-wingers to intimidate others working for a free election."⁵⁰

What ensued was a massive investigation that interrogated 1,300 East Harlem residents and impaneled the longest-seated grand jury in the history of the city.⁵¹ (It was in session from November 1946 to June 15, 1949, but was officially dismissed on December 15, 1949.)⁵² While the grand jury was conducting its probe, the Special Committee to Investigate Campaign Expenditures of the House of Representatives was

⁵⁰"Election Captain Dies of Beating; Dewey and Police Pledge Capture," New York Times (November 12, 1946), p. 1.

⁵¹"Preliminary Investigation into Alleged Election Irregularities in the Primary Election and the General Election in the 18th Congressional District." MP.

⁵²"Jury Has Long Life," New York Times (December 10, 1948), p. 13; and "Scottoriggio Jury Quits After Three Years," New York Times (December 16, 1949), p. 26.

inquiry, the committee refrained from any recommendation on his right to be seated in the new Congress. Instead, it proposed that the case be reopened after completion of the grand jury investigation "if facts are developed to warrant action."⁵³

In addition to these two investigations, Marcantonio was also the defendant in a case brought by his defeated opponent in the Democratic primary, Patrick Hannigan, who charged that Marcantonio's organization had intimidated voters. Justice Bernard Botein of the New York County Supreme Court ruled that: "No evidence whatsoever has been introduced of electioneering, coercive tactics or any other form of improper activity."⁵⁴ Marcantonio cited this finding to the Special Committee of the House and the New York City grand jury in support of his contention that there was no connection between him and Scottoriggio's murder, but his statements were lost amid the sensational and sometimes bizarre details of the case.

Soon after Scottoriggio's death, three East Harlem residents, including two of Marcantonio's election district captains, were held as material witnesses.⁵⁵ They were later released without being charged. The most sensational aspect of the case, however, was the holding of Joey Rao and "Trigger" Mike Coppola as material witnesses on bail of \$250,000 each. Both were one-time key figures in the Prohibition Era underworld who had apparently declined over the years to less exalted

⁵³"Marcantonio Seat is Unchallenged," New York Times (January 1, 1947), p. 3.

⁵⁴Advertisement sponsored by the "Labor and Citizens' Committee to Uphold Free Elections," PM (December 22, 1946), p. 17.

⁵⁵"ALP Aide Held in Election Death," New York Times (November 17, 1946), p. 1.

positions in the criminal hierarchy. The Times stated, "The records of Rao and Coppola constitute virtually the history of gangland here in the Twenties and Thirties." The forty-six-year-old Coppola had been arrested a total of twenty-seven times, and Rao, one year younger, twelve times. The charges against Rao ranged from homicide to pocket-picking; those against Coppola included homicide, burglary, assault, and robbery. Both protested their innocence to the grand jury, noting that they had neither voted nor in any other way taken part in the election campaign. After being held in jail for four months, they were released on \$25,000 bail each.⁵⁶

Four months later, Coppola was brought back into the center of the investigation, and his pregnant wife was also arrested as a material witness and released on \$15,000 bail. Mrs. Coppola, her father, and her three-year-old son had disappeared seven months earlier, on the day Coppola and Rao were first held as material witnesses. Shortly after, her father, David T. Lehmann, was booked as a material witness and also released on \$15,000 bail. Subsequently, perjury charges were handed down against Mrs. Coppola and her father, but they were indefinitely postponed because of Mrs. Coppola's pregnancy.⁵⁷

Almost one year after the murder, District Attorney Frank Hogan announced to the press that the "fate" of Joseph Scottoriggio had been sealed the night before the election at a "conference" in Coppola's

⁵⁶"Two in Poll Slaying Protest Innocence," New York Times (November 21, 1946), p. 64; "Two Held in \$250,000 in Polls Murders," New York Times (November 25, 1946), p. 1; "Rao, Coppola Freed, Each on \$25,000 Bail," New York Times (March 16, 1947), p. 8.

⁵⁷"Mrs. Coppola Held in Election Killing," New York Times (July 17, 1947), p. 1; "In-Law of Coppola Held as Witness," New York Times (July 30, 1947), p. 8.

home. Hogan explained that "deals" had been arranged among East Harlem political leaders to swing Republican votes to Marcantonio. Because of Scottoriggio's fierce anti-communism, Hogan continued, he refused to cooperate. Because he was considered able to swing six hundred votes, it was decided that Scottoriggio "be put put of action on Election Day."⁵⁸

Hogan's hypothesis was problematic in several respects. First, no evidence or witnesses were presented in its support, nor were any ever presented. Further, it is difficult to understand how beating Scottoriggio into unconsciousness on Election Day would change the vote in that district. The electioneering, after all, had already been concluded. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine any supporter of Marcantonio not perceiving the great political damage that such an incident would wreak on the candidate.

Ultimately, the linkage of Rao, Coppola, and Coppola's wife and father-in-law to Scottoriggio's murder was never again raised. On March 19, 1948, Mrs. Coppola died in childbirth. The Times reported that "5,000 persons crowded the area [East 116th Street] as the casket of silver and bronze was carried from the chapel to the hearse."⁵⁹

Still another element of this case was the death of one of Marcantonio's election captains, Anthony Langana, who had been questioned by the police following Scottoriggio's murder. He disappeared on December 11, to be found floating in the East River three

⁵⁸"Order to Beat Scottoriggio Traced to Coppola's Home," New York Times (November 7, 1947), p. 1.

⁵⁹"Mrs. Coppola Dies After Baby is Born," New York Times (March 19, 1948), p. 3; "5,000 at Coppola Rites," New York Times (March 23, 1948), p. 27.

months later.⁶⁰ Langana had been despondent over the loss of his job, and so the police concluded that his death was a suicide.

The findings of the special House committee notwithstanding, the discovery of Langana's body led Hogan to ask Congress to reopen its inquiry into the Scottoriggio case. He offered Speaker Joseph Martin complete transcripts of the testimony of his own investigations, which he had earlier refused to give to the special committee. Later Hogan revealed that the grand jury had written the following appeal to Martin: "During the investigation, we have heard the testimony of many witnesses. It reveals a condition shocking to all decent citizens. From the evidence, we are convinced that this killing was politically motivated and, as stated in an editorial of the New York World-Telegram on April 10, 1947, was 'an outrageous and infamous attack on the freedom of elections.'"⁶¹ Martin denied ever receiving this appeal. At this point, however, he turned over the grand jury records he had received from Hogan to the House Administration Subcommittee, which apparently never acted on them.⁶²

Marcantonio was unable effectively to defend his reputation. He had immediately signed a waiver of immunity and had testified before the grand jury.⁶³ His openness with the special House committee is also notable. His efforts to assist the murder investigations, however,

⁶⁰"Vanished Witness in Polls Murder Found Drowned," New York Times (May 25, 1947), p. 1.

⁶¹Ibid.; "Scottoriggio Case Continues to Lag," New York Times (May 28, 1947), p. 21.

⁶²"Martin Gives Testimony to Jury," New York Times (November 26, 1946), p. 1.

⁶³"An Unsolved Crime," New York Times (January 2, 1947), p. 28.

either went unnoticed in the press or were swamped in the general coverage of the case. The New York Times, for example, editorialized that the "District Attorney here has declared that all evidence so far uncovered points to a 'political murder.'" The following excerpts from editorials from the Daily Mirror, World Telegram, and Journal American illustrate how the newspapers treated the case:

[Bilbo and Marcantonio] are two punks out of the same polluted political pot. We can give you facts, figures, names, dates, and places about Marcantonio, Mr. Priest [chairman of the special House committee].

The House of Representatives is, under the Constitution, the judge of elections, returns and qualifications of its own members. That certainly ought to include the campaign tactics and methods, especially where intimidation and murder are involved, by which a member was re-elected.

[Scottoriggio] was brutally lynched by a mob of goons and political gangsters, some of whom presumably were imported.⁶⁴

The uniquely prolonged investigation further contributed to the seemingly endless damage to Marcantonio. The Times, for instance, published fifty-nine articles on the case, any number of which appeared on the front page.

Marcantonio's frustration with the coverage was expressed in a letter he sent on December 19, 1946 to Carl T. Curtis, a member of the special House committee:

I call your attention specifically to the news item which was buried away in the late editions of the afternoon papers of New York yesterday at the end of the continuation story concerning police "shake-up."

A few words in that story revealed that General Sessions Judge Garrett Wallace dismissed the bail concerning Domenic Petrone

⁶⁴Marcantonio to J. Percy Priest, chairman of the Campaign Expenditures Committee of 1946, no date. MP 49 (Campaign Expenditures). The excerpts from the Daily Mirror, World Telegram, and Journal American articles were all published on November 27, 1946.

and that Petrone has been released from the custody of the District Attorney.

I call this to your attention specifically because of the blazing headlines which announced that Petrone, an ALP captain, had been picked up by the police and that at the request of the District Attorney bail was fixed at \$20,000; and the subsequent story, similarly blazing on the front pages of the New York press, announcing that Supreme Court Judge Callahan had reserved decision on an application of Petrone's attorney for a reduction of bail, which was strenuously resisted by the District Attorney.

It is a sad commentary on the objectiveness of the New York press in all matters in any way relating to me, that a man like Domenic Petrone who has absolutely no police record, and who was a sincere and honest campaign worker in my behalf, should have received such notoriety without just cause, and that upon his discharge from bail should not have been similarly absolved in the press.⁶⁵

Not only was the Scottoriggio case never solved, but certain facts were never publicized, suggesting that there may have been more than one explanation for the murder. The Harding Republican Club in Scottoriggio's neighborhood (the Tenth Assembly District North) was headed by David Levy. In a letter to Rep. Percy Priest, chairman of the Campaign Expenditures Committee, Marcantonio charged that:

David Levy is the leader of the Harding Republican Club which was raided by police in 1939 upon a charge that Levy was operating one of the biggest dice games in the city. Following the raid, the police maintained police in the club and Levy sought an injunction preventing police interference with his activities. His application was denied, a trial was ordered, but Levy did not press the suit. The police remained on duty at his club until late in 1943. Another GOP club in which Levy was interested, the Florida Republican Club, . . . was raided as a gambling joint in October 1942, and Levy was charged with common gambling. Levy was a prohibition agent in 1926 but was discharged. . . .

Levy is generally reputed to be a common gambler and to have no visible means of support now or in the past for a great many years while living in good style; and Scottoriggio was one of his captains. . . .

In the meantime, Scottoriggio's nonpolitical activities have gone unreported although representatives of the press . . . are fully aware of the victim's nonpolitical activities. Because of the nature of the "political" activities conducted at the Republican

⁶⁵Marcantonio to Carl T. Curtis and Oren Harris, December 19, 1946. MP 49 (Campaign Expenditures).

Club of which Scottoriggio was a member, it is entirely possible that his "political" associates might have had something to do with this crime.⁶⁶

Further, in his testimony before the assistant general counsel and chief investigator of the special House committee, Patrick Hannigan was asked, "What kind of man is Levy?" He replied: "He didn't impress me too favorably. . . . Levy is mixed up with the underworld crowd up there. He has been with them all these years gone by, and he is up to his neck with them." In the summary of Hannigan's testimony it was noted that: "Levy had a bad reputation, and ran a clubhouse where gambling was permitted."⁶⁷ In the above-mentioned letter to Priest, Marcantonio pointed out that PM (a New York tabloid favorable to him) reported that Scottoriggio had been "involved in numerous bitter arguments and at least two fist fights."⁶⁸

Nonetheless, there is no evidence directly linking Scottoriggio to the underworld. He was seemingly a unique figure in East Harlem, effectively working to get votes for Frederick Van Pelt Bryan. Hannigan described him as a "capable and good organizer and an outstanding election district captain." Hannigan also noted that he did not have any district captains equal to Scottoriggio in his organization. He then mentioned that on Election Day 1946 he visited about seventy-five polling places in East Harlem and found that "many of the Republican [election] captains had disappeared; that Scottoriggio was the outstanding and solitary rebel . . . that almost the remainder of David

⁶⁶Marcantonio to J. Percy Priest.

⁶⁷FBI.

⁶⁸Sixth Witness Held in Scottoriggio Probe," PM (November 25, 1946), p. 14.

Levy's captains went along with Congressman Marcantonio and the same can be said of Mr. Bruno's captains [Republican leader of the Sixteenth Assembly District]."⁶⁹

In his testimony before the special investigator of the special House committee, Bryan noted that "Scottoriggio's election district did very well for me in the primary." He further noted that Scottoriggio had formerly worked for Marcantonio but had broken with him in 1939 or 1940. Bryan stated that Scottoriggio was "very anti-Communist, and had expressed himself quite favorably on that score."⁷⁰

Scottoriggio, as an ideologically motivated Republican election district captain connected with a notorious political club, was a striking anomaly in East Harlem. Was Scottoriggio's work viewed as a betrayal of a political deal among Levy, other local Republican leaders, and Marcantonio? Possibly. But there are other plausible explanations for the assault on Scottoriggio. If he had political ambitions, he might have been considered threatening to Levy or other local Republicans.

The murder apparently had no appreciable effect on Marcantonio's East Harlem vote two years later. In 1948 his vote in East River Houses, which had been Scottoriggio's residence and area of political work, averaged 55 percent. (This housing complex is between First Avenue and the East River Drive, between East 102nd and 106th Streets. See Map 2.) The tally, however, was somewhat less there than in the

⁶⁹"Statement by Hannigan in 'Report of Special Committee'." FBI.

⁷⁰FBI file.

surrounding blocks, all but one of which registered a Marcantonio vote of 60 percent or higher. Though this might suggest that there was at least some negative reaction to Marcantonio because of the murder, it is significant that in East Harlem the James Weldon Johnson Houses also averaged 55 percent. (This project is between Park and Third Avenues and East 112th and 115th Streets.) His vote in the surrounding blocks ranged between 55 and 60-plus percent.

Marcantonio's vote in East River Houses remained stable in 1950, but, as it did generally throughout East Harlem, rose somewhat in the James Weldon Johnson Houses. There would seem to be some evidence, therefore, that Marcantonio did less well in the public housing projects than in the older housing-stock areas, possibly because the projects contained many families whose previous residences were outside East Harlem. There is, however, no indication that Scottoriggio's murder caused any great number of Italian Harlemites to desert the Congressman. The effects of this sensational affair in Yorkville, however, may have been considerable. The question of "Who killed Scottoriggio?" haunted Marcantonio's last two campaigns.

Despite the damage done to Marcantonio by the Scottoriggio affair, his political position was strong. It now appeared that if his opponents could not beat him at the polls, they would attempt to legislate him out of office. In 1947, the New York State Legislature enacted a major change in the state's electoral law, which the standard text on New York City politics states was intended to "block Congressman Vito Marcantonio."⁷¹ The Wilson-Pakula Act (which Marcantonio said had

⁷¹Sayre and Kaufman, p. 151.

everything but his picture on it) required the assent of the county executive committee to allow candidates of one party to be nominated by another party as well. In reporting the adoption of this bill, the Times described it as "designed to make it more difficult for Representatives Marcantonio and Adam Clayton Powell to enter the primaries of more than one recognized party."

Not only denying Marcantonio the possibility of entering the Democratic and Republican primaries, the Act further required that persons circulating election petitions be enrolled voters of the same political party and be "residents of the same political subdivisions of such qualified voters."⁷² The last provision was even more directly aimed at Marcantonio, inasmuch as a large percentage of his campaign workers came from outside his district. (See p. 122) The ALP argued in the Court of Appeals of the State of New York that the Act was unconstitutional in that it: (1) was directed specifically at Marcantonio; (2) limited the voters' right to make nominations; and (3) reinstated "party bossism with terrific power." The Wilson-Pakula Act was unanimously upheld.⁷³

Marcantonio was now presented with his greatest political challenge. He had always secured at least one major party designation, and in 1942 and 1944 he had both. These designations naturally provided him with votes from people whose loyalties were primarily to a party rather than to a particular candidate--in that period, not an

⁷²"Assembly Adopts Marcantonio Curb," New York Times (March 11, 1947), p. 30.

⁷³"New Primary Law is Constitutional," New York Times (July 3, 1947), p. 21.

insignificant number. Moreover, the designation of the American Labor Party was becoming an increasing liability. It was one thing to go among the electorate seeking votes under the ALP label when such figures as Franklin Roosevelt, Herbert Lehman, and Fiorello LaGuardia aspired to its designation; it was quite another to do so now, when at a time of rising anti-Communist hysteria the party was being increasingly identified with Communism. The New York City press (with the exceptions of The Daily Worker and PM) constantly referred to the ALP as "Communist-dominated."⁷⁴

Within the Eighteenth Congressional District, the passage of the Wilson-Pakula Act presented its own peculiar problems. Although the Vito Marcantonio Political Association was affiliated with the American Labor Party, it made almost no attempt to instill loyalty to the party. For example, in 1944, of New York City's twenty-three state assembly districts, the Sixteenth (Italian Harlem) ranked nineteenth in numbers of American Labor Party members. The Fourteenth Assembly District (El Barrio) where the ALP polled the highest percentage of votes, ranked seventeenth in ALP membership.⁷⁵ Clearly, for Marcantonio to contest the Democratic and Republican primaries, his organization had encouraged his supporters to enroll in these parties.

Before the passage of the Wilson-Pakula Act, Marcantonio's association rarely issued campaign literature in the name of any party; instead, it would bear the name of a committee, such as "Veterans' Committee for the Re-election of Vito Marcantonio." In this way,

⁷⁴Carter, p. 406.

⁷⁵List titled: "American Labor Party, New York County." MP (New York County Organization of ALP 1942-45).

Marcantonio could appeal for the votes of Democrats (mostly Puerto Ricans) and Republicans (primarily Italo-Americans) without disturbing their party loyalties.

Marcantonio's electoral success was not hampered by the necessity of supporting a slate of candidates, one or more of whom may have been unpopular with his constituents. But this strategy could have varied results: in 1936 the main reason for his defeat had been the Roosevelt landslide; conversely, in 1940 Marcantonio's disassociation from Roosevelt was extremely popular with his Italo-American constituency.

Within East Harlem, the all-party or non-partisan Vito Marcantonio Political Association did not interfere with the local Democratic and Republican Parties' foremost--perhaps sole--concern: the selection of state and city candidates. As a result, and perhaps also because of the enormous power Marcantonio wielded there, East Harlem's Republican organizations never opposed him and, after 1940, the local Democratic Party ceased efforts to unseat him.

An almost entirely new political situation now confronted Marcantonio. He entered the 1948 campaign solely as the candidate of the American Labor Party. It was the first time in his career that his name was entered on the ballot under only one party, and the first time he did not have the designation of at least one of the major parties. Furthermore, only a minority of his votes in his previous elections had been obtained under the aegis of the ALP.

In spite of the unusually good chances of unseating a six-time Congressman, the Democrats nominated a singularly weak candidate, John P. Morrissey in 1948. Time magazine referred to him as a "stumble-tongued electrical contractor and ward boss, who likes to boast

of his 'far-fetched knowledge' of electricity." Marcantonio regaled his Italian-speaking supporters by calling Morrissey testa di cappuccio or "cabbage head."⁷⁶ Moreover, he ran a campaign described by the New York Telegram as "quiescent, to put it mildly."⁷⁷ According to newspaper accounts, his headquarters on East 86th Street remained closed most of the time, and he is known to have made only three speeches during the entire campaign.

While rumors of a Marcantonio-Tammany Hall deal spread, an August 27, front-page New York Times article reported a breakdown of relations between Marcantonio and the Democratic Party. Mayor William O'Dwyer had dismissed all non-civil service employees who were members of the American Labor Party from the city payroll. Marcantonio responded by calling O'Dwyer a "double-talking, double-dealing hypocrite." He also revealed a complicated deal tendered by O'Dwyer and Tammany Hall leader Hugo Rogers. Marcantonio asserted that O'Dwyer had called him to ask that the ALP withdraw its candidate for Surrogate of New York, O. J. Rogge, and substitute the Democrat John A. Mullen. In reply, Marcantonio asked that Tammany Hall withdraw Morrissey and substitute himself as Democratic candidate from the Eighteenth District. He reported some of the dialogue of this telephone call:

We are friends of yours. I want you to show your friendship for this kid who is alongside of me, that is, Hugo Rogers and give him a break. You can do it by not substituting Rogge's name today and by substituting Mullen's name [that is, Tammany Hall's candidate] instead.

We intend to help you all we can in your campaign. As a matter of fact, your opponent is a dumbhead and we shall see to it that the leaders in your district will help you out. . . . The three of us can do plenty in this town.

⁷⁶Schaffer, p. 187.

⁷⁷As quoted in Bingham.

O'Dwyer told the press the day Marcantonio released his statement that: "I see nothing in the Communist Party, including the Henry Wallaces and the Marcantonios . . . but an attempt to destroy the Democratic Party. . . ."78

Despite this public break, there is every probability that some kind of deal had been made between Marcantonio and Tammany. Running without the designation of either major party at a time when the left was under intense attack, Marcantonio was a very vulnerable candidate. Yet Tammany Hall pushed an inactive, inadequate candidate. Meanwhile, his Republican opponent, John Ellis, convinced that a deal had indeed been struck, charged on October 22 that the Democratic Party had effectively abandoned all work on behalf of Morrissey. He further asserted that many local Democratic leaders were openly urging votes for Marcantonio in return for ALP endorsement of State Senator Alfred E. Santangelo. Morrissey publicly denied the existence of any "deal."⁷⁹ Further evidence of a deal between Marcantonio and Tammany was the ALP's endorsement of Paul O'Dwyer (the mayor's brother) for Congressman in a very close race against Republican-Liberal Jacob Javits. Furthermore, the ALP had endorsed two other Manhattan Congressional candidates, Arthur Klein and Adam Clayton Powell, three Democratic incumbents in Kings County, and numerous candidates for the state legislature.⁸⁰ In short, the ALP's entanglements with Tammany Hall had not been severed.

⁷⁸"Marcantonio Calls O'Dwyer 'Hypocrite' on ALP Ousters," New York Times (August 27, 1948), p. 1; Carter, p. 349.

⁷⁹"Morrissey a Victim of Deal, Says Ellis," New York Times (June 28, 1948), p. 11.

⁸⁰Carter, p. 350.

Marcantonio sent a letter to every registered voter in the district, reminding them that:

Here are some facts that the people should know. 1. The first time Mr. Morrissey was elected to the Assembly he won only because of the vote he received from the American Labor Party. 2. In 1946, Mr. Morrissey again won because of the vote that he received from the American Labor Party. . . . Only last year not only did Mr. Morrissey seek and receive the vote of the American Labor Party, but he also begged for and accepted financial contributions from the American Labor Party through me.⁸¹

The most conclusive evidence pointing to a deal between Tammany Hall and Marcantonio, however, emerged out of a surprising attempt by Morrissey to quash rumors of a sell-out. He drafted a letter of endorsement from Rogers, took it to Tammany headquarters for Rogers's approval, and then released it to the newspapers. It is not clear whether Rogers ever signed the letter, but the day after its release Rogers denied he had. He further stated that he could not allow unauthorized statements to be made in his name, and that Morrissey had been pompous in suggesting in the letter that his race was second in importance in the entire nation to President Truman's.⁸² To Italian Harlem's Democratic Party leaders, the endorsement of the American Labor Party for their State Senatorial candidate, Santangelo, was of infinitely greater importance than the election of a Yorkville Irish-American ward heeler to Congress. (See Table 10.) At least in East Harlem, the Democratic Party made no effort to unseat Marcantonio.

In great contrast to the conduct of the Democratic Party, the Republicans presented a strong candidate--indeed, the strongest Marcantonio ever faced--John Ellis. (See p. 371) He was a stockbroker

⁸¹Dated July 25, 1947. MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns, 1947).

⁸²Bingham, p. 77.

by profession and a newcomer to politics, but his campaign was remarkably well-conceived and financed. Ellis's chances were further enhanced by his gaining the endorsement of the Liberal Party. Ellis emphasized the Communist issue almost to the exclusion of everything else. After the primary elections for example, Ellis stated, "Marcantonio . . . stands alone for the first time as the champion of those subversive forces so alien to everything American."⁸³ Ellis made persistent efforts to erode Marcantonio's support in Italian Harlem. (See pp. 267-70) His inability to undermine Marcantonio's bastion must to some degree be ascribed to his opponent's continued cordial political relations with Italian Harlem's local Republican leadership. As the Times noted: "What distinguished the representative in his district is his ability to build up a Marcantonio organization that cuts through all political lines, sometimes on the surface, often-times undercover by 'arrangements' known only to the very inner circles of the Republican and Democratic party organizations."⁸⁴

The nature of these "arrangements" between Marcantonio and the ALP on the one side and the local Republican leadership on the other remains a matter of speculation. For the first time, the ALP failed to endorse at least one of the Republican candidates from Italian Harlem. Nonetheless, the Republican Party in Italian Harlem may have considered it prudent to continue its covert support of Marcantonio for two reasons. Its number of votes was significantly decreasing, probably due

⁸³"No ALP Gain Seen in Primary Results," New York Times (August 26, 1948), p. 42.

⁸⁴Personal Prestige Aids Marcantonio," New York Times (November 3, 1948), p. 42.

to the decline in the Italo-American population and to the growing attachment of this group to the Democratic Party now that Roosevelt was no longer its leader. (See pp. 236-37) The Republican's weakened position made the party's local leaders in Italian Harlem more dependent than ever upon the ALP. The hope of future deals was probably sufficient to prevent a break with Marcantonio. Also, not to be disregarded was the close personal relations among contemporaries who had grown old together, probably while living on the same street, "Doctors' Row," that is East 116th Street. (See pp. 182-83)

Marcantonio won with 36,000 votes to Ellis's 31,500 and Morrissey's 31,200 in the largest outpouring of the Eighteenth Congressional District's electorate.⁸⁵ Most significantly, Marcantonio demonstrated his ability to win solely under the ALP's banner, having increased his ALP vote 169 percent over the previous election.⁸⁶ Almost equally impressive was the dramatic general change in Italian Harlem's voting patterns evidenced in the doubling of ALP vote for State Senator and State Assemblyman. (See Tables 9, 10)

The widening breach between the American Labor Party and the Democratic Party meant that the ALP would have to stand on its own. In 1949, in order to help the ALP survive, Marcantonio ran for mayor of New York City under its banner. (See pp. 271; 371-73) In the race against incumbent Democrat William O'Dwyer and Republican-Liberal Newbold Morris, Marcantonio received 356,423 votes, less than 14 percent of the

⁸⁵Schaffer, p. 190.

⁸⁶Bingham, p. 120.

vote. More significant for Marcantonio's future, however, was his excellent showing in East Harlem where he won a majority, 26,154 against his opponents' 22,574. In the Eighteenth Congressional District, Marcantonio polled 35,900 votes against 34,600 for O'Dwyer, and 18,700 for Morris. His percentage of the vote increased from 36 in 1948 to 39.⁸⁷

The results of the 1948 congressional and 1949 mayoral campaigns seemed to indicate beyond any reasonable doubt that in the usual three-way race Marcantonio could win re-election to Congress in 1950. To defeat Marcantonio would require a coalition candidate. Precedents in New York City politics for such a move existed. Coalition candidates representing the Democratic, Republican, and Liberal parties had defeated the two other standard-bearers of the left in public office in New York City: Benjamin Davis, Communist City Councilman from Harlem in 1949, and Leo Isaacson, American Labor Party Congressman from the South Bronx in 1948.⁸⁸ Much earlier, in 1920, Morris Hillquit had been prevented from winning East Harlem's congressional seat by the fielding of a coalition candidate representing the Democratic and Republican parties. Even before the 1948 and 1949 elections, coalition opposition against Marcantonio had been discussed and, to some extent, practiced. In 1942, for example, the leadership of the right wing of the American Labor Party (who were soon to depart and form the Liberal Party) had negotiated with the New York County organization leadership of the

⁸⁷"Election Results," New York Times (November 10, 1949), p. 8.

⁸⁸"Marcantonio Maps Three Primary Fights," New York Times (July 1, 1948), p. 4; "Marcantonio Foes Seek to Unite," New York Times (November 28, 1949), p. 1.

Democratic and Republican Parties with a view to naming a coalition candidate to oppose Marcantonio.⁸⁹ Further, when Martin Kennedy felt himself doomed in the Democratic primary of 1944, he began to praise the Republican nominee, Robert Palmer, in public statements. Patrick Hannigan, Marcantonio's Democratic primary opponent in 1946, campaigned on behalf of the Republican candidate after his defeat.⁹⁰

Between May 8 and June 10, 1950, numerous contenders came forward for the increasingly probable coalition designation. Among those who either placed their names in contention or who were being considered were Mrs. Wendell Willkie, Thomas F. Murphy (prosecutor in the Alger Hiss case), Jonathan Bingham (state chairman of the Americans for Democratic Action), and James Lanzetta. The Liberal Party was reported to favor Murphy because his success in the prosecution of Alger Hiss would make communism the leading issue in the campaign.⁹¹

A former State Senator representing Yorkville, James G. Donovan, was ultimately chosen as the coalition candidate. Donovan stated that he regarded his selection as "a solid and unified answer to communism in America and its fifth column."⁹² In his first public statement of the campaign, Donovan indicated that communism would necessarily be the main

⁸⁹"Marcantonio Maps Three Primary Fights," New York Times (November 28, 1942), p. 36.

⁹⁰Bingham, p. 148.

⁹¹See these New York Times articles: "Marcantonio Foes Offer Candidates" (June 2, 1950), p. 19; "Clements Enters 18th District Race" (May 8, 1950), p. 11; "Mrs. Willkie Put in Congress Race" (May 17, 1950), p. 1; Tammany Lists Hiss Prosecutor as Possible Foe of Marcantonio" (May 20, 1950), p. 1; "Bingham Is Urged for Congress Race" (May 22, 1950), p. 14.

⁹²"Coalition Selects J. G. Donovan to Win Marcantonio Seat," New York Times (June 10, 1950), p. 1.

issue of the campaign.⁹³ In fact, in one form or another, communism was the only issue Donovan raised. Labeling his opponent "The Red Echo in Congress" and "the little Red Congressman," Donovan accused Marcantonio of helping a Puerto Rican "ex-assassin" to go into hiding after the attempted shooting of President Truman by two Nationalists.⁹⁴ (See pp. 374-75) During the campaign, Donovan called for the outlawing of the Communist Party as "a conspiracy serving Soviet Russia and should the threat to our national security loom larger, I propose that the leaders and spokesmen out of jail be put behind wire. I shall turn the spotlight on all subversives and treasonable elements. In Congress I shall vote to put more teeth in laws against subversives."⁹⁵

The possibility of further deals between the American Labor Party and the major parties seemed precluded. Tammany Hall placed a total ban on Democratic Party candidates accepting ALP endorsements.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, there is every indication that Marcantonio's arrangements with East Harlem's local Democratic and Republican leadership continued. Marcantonio had extremely close political and personal relations with the leader of Italian Harlem's Tammany Hall Club, the Pocasset Democratic Club, located directly across the street from Marcantonio's headquarters. During the 1950 campaign, the Pocasset Club

⁹³"Communism Issue, J. G. Donovan Says," New York Times (June 11, 1950), p. 1.

⁹⁴"Donovan Assails Marcantonio Ties," New York Times (September 29, 1950), p. 22; Bingham, p. 161; "Marcantonio Foes Guarded in Parade," New York Times (November 4, 1950), p. 6.

⁹⁵"Marcantonio Foes See His Defeat," New York Times (August 18, 1950), p. 7.

⁹⁶"Tammany Puts Ban on ALP Support," New York Times (April 25, 1950), p. 24.

displayed a huge sign over its door promoting the Democratic mayoral candidate Ferdinand Pecora--but no sign for Donovan appeared. Nor was any Donovan literature available in the club. Moreover, the Democratic State Assmebly candidate in the Sixteenth Assembly District, Louis Cioffi, refused to commend Donovan at street corner rallies.⁹⁷ The most stunning proof of Marcantonio's continued hegemony over all of the political parties in East Harlem was the endorsement of Marcantonio by the Republican State senatorial candidate, William J. Bianchi, who also accepted the American Labor Party's designation. Bianchi explained his decisions by stating that there was no comparison between Marcantonio and his "boss-backed opponent." He further charged that Donovan had made "many statements deprecating of racial minorities in this district." He added: "The bosses can't force us to swallow Donovan if the people don't want him." Bianchi was expelled from the New York Republican Club, but was elected to represent East Harlem.⁹⁸

Interestingly, Bianchi received four ALP votes for every three Republican votes. The ALP also did extremely well in the other two Italian Harlem offices it contested solely under its own banner. In the Fourteenth Assembly District, Manuel Medina came within 906 votes of beating Hulan Jack, and in Italian Harlem, Lee Bosco came within 1,665 votes of winning its State Assembly seat. (See Tables 9 and 10)

Marcantonio lost to Donovan 36,095 to 45,448, with 25,215 on the Republican, 19,215 on the Democratic and 5,202 on the Liberal Party

⁹⁷Bingham, pp. 78, 168.

⁹⁸"Bianchi Expelled by Young Republican Club for His Acceptance of ALP Nomination," New York Times (October 26, 1950), p. 45.

lines.⁹⁹ Although he lost, the radical Congressman's percentage of the vote increased from 36 in 1948 to 42. The survival of his traditional relations with the two major parties in East Harlem contributed to minimizing the margin of his opponent's victory.

Aside from the inestimable value of the American Labor Party as a means of making political deals with the major parties, the ALP served to advance Marcantonio's political fortunes in other ways. The ALP concentrated all its city-wide resources in his district. Every single precinct, regardless of location, was expected to produce canvassers and funds for his election. In a letter encouraging his candidacy in 1954, the chairman of a West Side American Labor Party club wrote, "As you know, . . . this club . . . has always fulfilled the largest quotas of canvassers and funds for work in your district. . . . This year we pledge to do even better."¹⁰⁰

Such total mobilization of ALP forces contributed greatly to Marcantonio's successes, but it also depleted the party's resources. It is no coincidence that the only other ALP-sponsored Congressman, Leo Isaacson, won in a special South Bronx election in 1947. In a 1946 special Congressional election on the Lower East Side, the ALP candidate, Johannes Steel did extremely well against the entrenched Democratic incumbent, Arthur Klein. (See p. 410) In both instances, the full resources of the party were concentrated on their campaigns; in a general election, however, they were allocated solely to Marcantonio's district. Furthermore, the elimination of proportional representation

⁹⁹Bingham, addenda.

¹⁰⁰Illegible signature to Marcantonio, July 2, 1953.

on the New York City Council in 1947 foreclosed the possibility of the election of ALP candidates to that body. The ALP's decline caused Marcantonio to loom ever larger over the party.

The extreme concentration of the ALP's resources on the re-election of Marcantonio undermined the ALP's ability to build its own strength. The excessive endorsements of major-party candidates as a result of deals to benefit Marcantonio caused Paul Ross, the ALP's Vice Chairman, to complain in later years that the ALP had become "the personal instrumentality of Marc's." Conversely, Arthur Schutzer, the State Executive Secretary of the ALP, defended the ALP's course of action vis-a-vis Marcantonio. He argued that attempts to elect other candidates could not be given the same priority as keeping Marcantonio in Congress. He further pointed out that resources could not have been so easily redeployed, as people were specifically drawn to Marcantonio.¹⁰¹

The phenomenon of an electorally successful radical New York City politician in this period depended in large part upon the existence of a third party, and its willingness to subordinate almost any other political advantage to the single goal of electing that politician. This crucial factor, however, would have been of little consequence had the two major parties been unwilling to deal with it. To various degrees at various times, the major parties were willing to make deals in their perceived self-interests which benefited Marcantonio. The withdrawal, first by the Republican and later by the Democratic Party from these arrangements weakened Marcantonio's chances for re-election.

¹⁰¹As quoted in Blum and Wilhelm, pp. 201-6.

Yet, in East Harlem these deals persisted. Here, the strength of Marcantonio was so great that opposition to him was an unattractive prospect for the local Democratic and Republican leaders. Furthermore, until the end he was able to deliver important prizes to the local organizations. Finally, Marcantonio's personal qualities never faltered. He persisted in his single-minded quest for continuation in office. His energies never flagged, his attention was never diverted from service to his constituents. He always lived among them, overseeing the myriad details which help ensure political success. Nonetheless, despite the loyal support of his fellow East Harlemites, the radical Congressman succumbed to the Democratic-Republican-Liberal coalition.

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

A study of Vito Marcantonio inevitably raises a number of questions. The most important of which is why was there only one Vito Marcantonio? Radical Congressmen were occasionally elected, particularly in the early thirties, but none survived more than one or, at the most, two terms. Usually, these other radicals were swept into office under uncommon circumstances, such as the Democratic landslides of 1932, 1934, and 1936, and were unable to overcome electoral swings to the right, as in 1938 and 1946. Once entrenched, however, Marcantonio withstood these swings to the right, the expansion of his district, increasingly virulent press attacks, and the Wilson-Pakula Act. Had it not been for a Democratic-Republican-Liberal coalition candidate in 1950, he would very likely have remained in Congress until he died.

Marcantonio's electoral successes depended upon the unique combination of factors examined in this study, a combination that did not exist elsewhere. Marcantonio's bastion, East Harlem, was populated almost entirely by the alienated urban poor, giving Marcantonio reason to boast in 1940 that he was the "representative of a 100 percent working-class American district."¹ But the United States had other

¹Text: "Addressed by Honorable Vito Marcantonio, Member of Congress to the Emergency Peace Mobilization, Chicago Stadium, August 31, 1940. MP 22, 1 of 2 (Miscellaneous 4 of 8). In the same year, before a meeting held under the auspices of La Confederacion de

demographically comparable Congressional Districts. Manhattan's Lower East Side and Central Harlem also had large populations of poor workers, but neither district supported an avowed leftist Congressman for more than two terms during this period. Yet, even when Marcantonio's district was expanded in 1944 to include ethnic and social-class elements antagonistic to his politics, East Harlem's electoral margins were sufficient to return him to Congress.

Although, as this study shows, the ethnic composition of East Harlem was not uniquely favorable to the fortunes of a radical politician, its relative homogeneity (with only two essentially non-antagonistic groups comprising the bulk of the population) contributed to Marcantonio's consolidation of political power. Relations between East Harlem's Italo-Americans and Puerto Ricans were good. In the late thirties, Chenault reported that the "unanimity of opinion [was] that the Puerto Rican gets along well with the Italian." In the early fifties, Mills noted that only 10 percent of El Barrio's Puerto Ricans said they disliked working with Italians. In response to a question intended to measure their sentiments toward various ethnic groups, Puerto Ricans expressed their most positive feelings toward Italo-Americans.² Marcantonio once commented that Italian-Puerto Rican

Trabajadores Puertorriqueños, he stated: "I am conscious of the fact that I represent working men and women." Text deposited in MP 22, 2 of 2 (1949 Campaign, 1 of 3). In 1942, in response to his endorsement by the Greater New York Industrial Union Council, he stated: "It is my privilege to represent in Congress a district which is made up of working men and women." MP 49 (Campaign Endorsements, 1942-44).

²Lawrence Chenault, Puerto Rican Migration (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), p. 82; C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior, and Rose Kohn Goldsen, The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants (New York: Harper, 1950), p. 31. Bernardo Vega describes a prolonged and serious pogrom against East Harlem's Puerto Ricans in 1926. He does

relations in East Harlem were much better than Irish-Italian relations in his youth.³

By almost every conceivable social index, Italian Harlem was more or less one generation ahead of El Barrio. For example, in 1950 the average number of years of schooling per adult in the heart of El Barrio was 6.6 to 6.9 and 8 to 8.4 in Italian Harlem.⁴ Aside from these "generational" differences (which after all basically reflected the length of time these two groups were in the continental United States), the two communities had striking similarities. They both endured poor housing, overcrowding, inadequate public services, unemployment, and the like. But more crucially, they were both homogenous, inward-looking communities. They were not in competition with each other. They shared the same high school, Benjamin Franklin, and the same Congressman, and both the school's principal and Marcantonio consciously strove to prevent intergroup conflict. (See pp. 134-35, 141-44) Except along the unofficial but very real Third Avenue border, there was little contact between East Harlem's Italo-Americans and Puerto Ricans. They worshipped in different churches, shopped in different stores, and sought recreation in different locations. Italian Harlem and El Barrio were adjacent but separate worlds. Most significantly, even though to

not, however, identify the national background of the perpetrators. Memorias de Bernardo Vega: Contribución a la historia de la comunidad puertorriqueña en Nueva York (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Huracán, 1977), pp. 188-89. For one Puerto Rican's experience with the hostility of Italo-American youths in East Harlem in the early forties--and the limits of this hostility--see: "Alien Turf," in Piri Thomas, Down These Mean Streets (New York: Signet, 1967), pp. 33-39.

³Interview with Annette Rubinstein, New York City, August 21, 1975.

⁴Edwin Friedman, "East Harlem Community Study: 1940-1950" (Master's thesis, New York University, 1954), pp. 24-25.

some extent after the great postwar migration, El Barrio grew at the expense of Italian Harlem, its demise was not the result of the displacement of Italian-Americans by Puerto Ricans. Due to an aging population, a declining housing stock, and the spread of affluence in the postwar period, Italian Harlem's population--which had been declining since the early thirties--began to drop precipitously. And the coup de gr^âce was the accelerated construction of mammoth housing projects, which completely disrupted the social ecology of the community.⁵ As one long-time resident put it in 1968, "in came the bulldozers, and out went the Italians."⁶ Had the Italian-Americans perceived that in came the Puerto Ricans, and out went the Italians, Marcantonio would have gone down to defeat amid the breakup of his dual constituency.

The absence of conflict between East Harlem's two largest ethnic groups, however, would not have in itself provided the political basis for a radical politician. Its two constituent communities were, with great persistent effort, receptive to a radical leader. In Italian Harlem, Marcantonio achieved what was not accomplished elsewhere in the United States, that is, the mobilization of the latent rebelliousness of the Southern Italians.⁷ Their loyalty to their native son seemed to

⁵"Housing Projects Make Bitter D.P.'s: Some [East Harlem] Merchants Cite Loss of Business and Savings as City Confiscates Land," New York Times (March 18, 1957), p. 29; Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities (Middlesex, England: Pelican, 1964), p. 307.

⁶"The Harlem Italians," New York Times (October 15, 1968), p. 49.

⁷Leonard Covello, The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child: A Study of the Southern Italian Family Mores and Their Effect on the School Situation in Italy and America (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1969), p. 86.

intensify with every outside effort to dislodge him. In large measure they supported him in spite of his politics (or at least those elements of his politics which associated him with Communism), because for them non-ideological questions loomed larger. It was as if by his living among them, selflessly serving their individual and communal needs, buying his daily newspaper from the corner newsstand, being shaved daily at the local barber, holding all-night conferences in a run-down cafe, he became a member of the family. To the older generation he was perhaps like an errant but loyal son, to the younger generation perhaps like a successful and beneficent father. In a milieu where little, if anything, outside the family was trusted, Marcantonio by his transparency could be trusted. His life was on daily display and what the people saw they liked very much. He was not exactly like them, but then if he had been they would not have given him recognition as a leader. But the small and large ways he conformed to their mores engendered a powerfully positive response. In a community where suspicion of outsiders prevailed, Marcantonio's quintessential insider status was invaluable. Italian Harlem knew quite well what the outside world thought of it, but its residents thought quite differently. Marcantonio--a "big" man--by his presence and by his partaking in the general lifestyle of this community, reaffirmed the collective existence. The emotion with which some of Italian Harlem's remaining residents speak of Marcantonio, the ease with which they say "Marc," is truly moving. "Communist" or not, they did everything they could to make sure he was not humiliated by an outsider, indeed, by a "foreigner."

After the expansion of Marcantonio's district in 1944, the electoral margins he gained in Italian Harlem were not sufficient to

offset his scanty vote in Yorkville. Because of its inexorably declining population, Italian Harlem had ever fewer votes to cast. The radical Congressman's electoral success, therefore, became increasingly dependent upon the loyalty of El Barrio, a community whose population was increasing. In contrast with Italian Harlem, to some large extent, El Barrio supported Marcantonio because of his politics. For these recent immigrants who maintained close on-going ties with their homeland, Marcantonio's legislative work for Puerto Rico earned him enormous prestige. It was indeed a fortunate circumstance for Marcantonio that East Harlem's newest ethnic group originated in a United States commonwealth with no representation in Congress. Marcantonio's assumption of this role solidified the support of almost all the politically conscious elements in El Barrio. Furthermore, his defense of this group from persistent attacks in the press and elsewhere won him the status of their spokesman. It was no small matter that a Congressman would speak, write, and even picket on their behalf. The strong leftist currents in Puerto Rico's politics in the thirties and early forties made the Puerto Rican migrants highly receptive to Marcantonio and, in general, to the American Labor Party. In any case, they had no longstanding loyalties to the Democratic or Republican Parties. El Barrio was one of the poorest, if not the very poorest, community in New York City. Many of its residents desperately needed the service of Marcantonio's political organization. Its (and in the minds of these people his) ability to resolve problems was legendary, and of great political benefit to Marcantonio. Although Marcantonio was not a puertorriqueño he was a latino, and although he did not live in El Barrio, his home and his political headquarters were less than two

blocks away. For these reasons, El Barrio provided majorities for Marcantonio almost exactly equal to those of Italian Harlem.

East Harlem's political party history also made the district unusually receptive to a radical politician. Unlike the Lower East Side, for example, in East Harlem the radicalism of the period of the rise of the Socialist Party and the radical upsurge of the thirties was bridged. Between Morris Hillquit's near-successful candidacies of 1916 to 1920 and Marcantonio's terms in office, Fiorello LaGuardia maintained the radical tradition. Hence in East Harlem there was an unbroken presence of socialist, leftist, or third-party politics, a situation which (at least, on such a scale or for so long a period of time) existed in no other American city. The attraction of many Italo-Americans to the Republican Party and LaGuardia's nominal affiliation with that party had the effect of creating a genuine following for that party in East Harlem. Within New York City's other working-class districts, Democratic Party majorities were so large and so consistent that a third party had little chance of achieving the balance of power and thereby providing a vehicle for sustaining the fortunes of a radical politician. In Marcantonio's Congressional District, the ALP held the balance of power from its inception. Because the ALP's endorsement of East Harlem's major party candidates for State Senator and State Assemblyman was so crucial to election, no major party opposition to Marcantonio existed: the local Republican Party never opposed him, and the local Democratic Party ceased any efforts to unseat him after 1940. The absence of either a Democratic or Republican machine in East Harlem allowed the American Labor Party to fill the power vacuum.

On a city-wide basis, the electoral strength of the American

Labor Party permitted "arrangements" with the two major parties favorable to Marcantonio. Largely because of this, Marcantonio faced no serious Democratic opponent between 1942 and 1948, and no serious Republican opponent until 1946. Furthermore, because the ALP made his re-election its top priority, the party's considerable resources were mobilized for this purpose. Closely related to this were the contributions to Marcantonio made by the wide array of unions, nationality groups, and publications influenced by the Communist Party. In short, there was an astounding infusion of resources from outside Marcantonio's district. One effect of these efforts to ensure Marcantonio's re-election was the depletion of resources and foregoing of other political opportunities, which prevented the potential election of other leftist candidates. Outside of New York City, there was probably no other place in America where such resources and the apparatus for delivering them existed on behalf of a left-wing candidate.

These resources had enormous impact because they fueled a powerful political machine operated on a year-round basis to further his political fortunes. Through its service-dispensing aspect, it created a vast clientele, and its electoral activities ensured the realization of Marcantonio's popularity through maximizing voter registration and actual voter turnout.

All of these components of Marcantonio's victories were necessary. The elimination of any one of them was sufficient to undo the "Marcantonio phenomenon." When the demise of city-wide deals between the American Labor Party and the Democratic Party in 1950 forced Marcantonio to confront a coalition candidate of the Democratic, Republican, and Liberal Parties--he was defeated.

Marcantonio's personal qualities were essential ingredients in his electoral successes. His victories would not have been possible without all the factors examined in this study, but he was not simply the creature of them. It was his own decision to continue living in Italian Harlem. He was the creator and supervisor of his political machine. He was the leader of the American Labor Party. He insisted that the Communist Party deliver resources. He used his elected office particularly in behalf of his Puerto Rican constituents. East Harlem might have been politically inert, another bailiwick of an unremembered officeholder, had it not been for the particular qualities of Marcantonio.

Perhaps, most importantly, he never wanted anything more than to live in East Harlem. One of his associates remembered that each week when he returned there from Washington, he would become more and more animated the closer he got to East Harlem. Another recalled that he would frequently ask, "Isn't Harlem the greatest community in the world?"⁸ And his love for his community and its people was genuine; there was nothing at variance between the inner and the outer man. For almost forty years he listened to their problems; in Washington he read reports and correspondence endlessly enumerating these same problems. He could have done this because it was politically wise; he could have done it as a labor of love. But the reason he did it was that he liked to do it. He was the padrone/padrino, if you will, the godfather. The people needed him and he needed them. They trusted him and related to him largely in generational terms: the elderly thought of him as a son,

⁸Interview with Annette Rubinstein.

youngsters as a father. His defeat in the 1949 mayoral race and then in the 1950 Congressional campaign led to an outpouring of letters reflecting the people's feelings of concern and loss:

I am deeply sorry that you didn't win. It was a hurting thing because I am still feeling it and I do know how you had never let the people down and to think they would turn on you. Marc, I still won't let you down. If there is anything I can do let me know, will you?

On my person I have one of your letters. . . . I have been faithful to you and will continue until the last moment.

So have faith and we wish you a higher triumph than ever. Accept my sincere sympathy at this time and please remember that darkness is only the absence of light. Light and wisdom will eventually prevail. You have planted the seeds; some of these seeds will grow into powerful trees, some of these trees will bear fruit. It is only a matter of time, but sure as the sun rises in the east, the consciousness of the people will awaken and grow and keep on growing until light will replace darkness and righteousness will replace evil.

Let us grow strong under the weight of the cross and like Jesus says, "Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing." Hoping to be of service to you again at some future occasion and wishing you everlasting happiness for work well done.

You was and still you are the bread of the poor people.⁹

Belying the popular notion that officeholders enrich themselves, Marcantonio's political style and lifestyle virtually impoverished him. Congressional salaries in that period were not high and the allowance for staff was, by contemporary standards, similarly low. Because of his office and prominence, however, Marcantonio was able to attract lucrative accounts to his law firm, specifically those of many left-wing unions. This source of income was largely eliminated in the Cold War period because of the destruction of these unions or changes in

⁹MP 50 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

their leadership.¹⁰

Yet all his associates recalled that "he was always broke, he never had a dime even to buy a cup of coffee and a piece of cake."¹¹ Where did the money go? Although it is true that he was the sole support of his mother, grandmother, and brother, those expenses could be balanced against his childless marriage and his wife's income. He lived an exceedingly modest life. His apartment consisted of four or five rooms indifferently furnished. He did not own a car; indeed, he never learned to drive. Aside from weekly trips to Washington, he rarely traveled, and when he did, it was for political, not vacation, purposes. I have found no instance when he traveled farther west than Minneapolis or farther south than the nation's capitol. He often spoke of visiting Italy, but the only time he left the continental United States was to make a two-week-long trip to Puerto Rico in 1936. (See pp. 309-12) Until his defeat in 1950, he rarely took a vacation. Choosing to live in a modest hotel, he did not maintain a permanent residence in Washington; and from there he often walked to the Capitol for lack of carfare.¹²

There is no indication that any of his income was spent on the vices to which other politicians are often heir. Early in life he stopped smoking cigarettes, although he was known to smoke an occasional

¹⁰Interview with Ida Hefner, New York City, August 13, 1975.

¹¹Interviews with: Edward Wallenstein, New York City, August 5, 1976; Frank Maurelli, New York City, August 23, 1976; Ida Hefner.

¹²Interviews with: Jane Benedict, New York City, September 2, 1976; Ida Hefner, Maurelli, Rubinstein; Arthur Walker Bingham, "The Congressional Elections of Vito Marcantonio" (Honors paper, Harvard University, 1950), p. 59.

cigar. In part because of diabetes, he rarely drank except for a glass of wine with dinner. Nor did his taste in entertainment involve money. He enjoyed staying up late with friends and sending out for pizza or Italian ices, though he rarely had money to pay the bill.¹³

A common recollection among friends and associates was that he "spent money like water." He did, but only for his organization and for his constituents. In spite of the substantial donations his organization received and the veritable horde of volunteers who manned it, Marcantonio spent large amounts on the salaried staff.¹⁴ Much was expended in small sums--hand-outs, given to indigent constituents. The records of his organization document scores of instances in which he did this personally. For example, he bought glasses for a young girl because the Welfare Department had made no provision for them in the family's allowance.¹⁵ A man wrote that his wallet was stolen and that "you know my mother very well, she was one of the first members of your club. Please help me Mr. Marcantonio and God bless you for all you have done for the people." Marcantonio paid his rent.¹⁶ To the admitting physician of a hospital he wrote: "I am anxious to have Mr. Jose Santiago treated at Mt. Sinai. While he is in no position to pay, if there should be any charges, I suggest that you bill me and I shall be

¹³Interview with Louise Berman, New York City, July 27, 1976.

¹⁴Interview, Ida Hefner; see also testimony before Robert B. Barker, chief investigator of the Special Committee to Investigate Campaign Expenditures of the House of Representatives, December 16, 1946. MP.

¹⁵MP 9. (D).

¹⁶MP 11 (J-K).

very happy to pay some."¹⁷ One of his closest and oldest friends recalled that he often went into his political club with \$200, but by the time he left would not have enough to buy a cup of coffee. "He would pay people's rent many, many times," he added.¹⁸

There were, however, limits to Marcantonio's generosity. To one constituent he wrote: "I am sorry that I am not able to assist you further in the matter of your last request for financial aid. You know that I was glad to give you the money on the three past occasions and I certainly wanted to help you as much as I could."¹⁹ When, in 1937, he received an indignant letter from a man in the Bronx to whom Marcantonio had returned four tickets to a benefit, he replied:

I have given the best that was in me for the Italian People. This does not mean I must spend my own private funds to assist anyone. . . . I am not a rich man. I left public office poorer than when I went into it, consequently there is no obligation on my part to assist anyone from my pocket. My militant struggle in behalf of the Italian workers is not to be judged by whether or not I might be able to contribute to your assistance or anyone else's.²⁰

He was usually unconcerned about money. When the new treasurer of an Italian welfare organization wrote him inquiring whether the \$60 which was recorded as having been received from him was in the form of a donation or a loan, Marcantonio answered that "I honestly don't remember."²¹ True, his beneficence and simple lifestyle helped him

¹⁷Marcantonio to Dr. Leslie, July 24, 1936. MP 26.

¹⁸Interview, Maurelli.

¹⁹November 11, 1946. MP 49 (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

²⁰January 13, 1937. MP (General Correspondence).

²¹May 31, 1942. MP (Miscellaneous Campaigns).

politically, but there seems to have been little or no calculated motive behind the distribution of his limited largesse. Once, while the Congressman was walking with an associate and a radical leader, a derelict approached the radical and asked for a hand-out. The radical ignored him and whispered, "We'll never make a revolution that way." Visibly angered, Marcantonio hurried over to the derelict, gave him a dollar, and shot back at the radical leader: "That fellow can't wait for the revolution!"²²

After his 1950 defeat, Marcantonio lost his only sources of regular income: his Congressional salary, staff allowance, and legal clients. Always planning a comeback, he maintained both his political offices and a strenuous schedule. His donation to needy persons continued. The major source of funding for his organization--the left movement--was in disarray. But he accepted (gratis or for a nominal fee) an increasing number of cases involving persons and organizations in legal jeopardy because of their alleged or open Communist connections. His legal practice for the last three and one-half years of his life was largely absorbed by his co-defense of the Communist Party against government attempts to have it register its members. The party did pay its debts, but it was hardly a lucrative account. (See p. 77) When he died, there was insufficient money to pay for his funeral.²³ The Times reported: "The entire estate of former Representative Vito Marcantonio was left to his widow. . . . It is valued at less than \$10,000."²⁴

²²Interview, Rubinstein.

²³Interview: Rubinstein, Wallenstein.

²⁴"Marcantonio Estate to Widow," New York Times (August 19, 1954), p. 31.

Marcantonio's generosity and closeness to the people of East Harlem gave him an almost saintly aura that persisted in the minds of some Italo-Americans still resident in the district interviewed at random. The first, a former employee of a drugstore and an activist in a Communist-led union, remembered:

Marcantonio was a very humane man. He was always broke. He had a good heart. He even worked for the people in West Virginia [he was referring to a 1936 Congressional investigation, which Marcantonio spearheaded, into the large number of deaths from silicosis resulting from the excavation of a tunnel]. He was like LaGuardia. He had an eccentric brother. He always led a clean life. The Tammany club across the street also helped people, but for a favor. Marc would help anybody.

A man who operated a newsstand on East 116th Street for decades recalled: "Marcantonio was always broke. He didn't put on any airs. His apartment was just like any other house in East Harlem. He was humanitarian. He would help anybody. Nobody would speak badly of him." When I asked whether people were disturbed by his association with Communists, he replied, "That's his business, you know, like if you had a friend in the numbers. That's his business."²⁵ Two years later I again interviewed some of the old residents. When I asked one man if anyone in Italian Harlem opposed Marcantonio, he replied, "Weren't there people who opposed Christ when He was walking the earth?" Then, with great feeling he blurted out, "I wish there were three or four Marcantonios in the United States right now!"²⁶

No one could have entered this community from outside and accomplished what Marcantonio did; he would have been regarded as a

²⁵Various interviews conducted on the streets of Italian Harlem in July 1979.

²⁶Interview with "Frank," New York City, July 16, 1981. "See also "The Harlem Italians," p. 49. "There is great nostalgia for the time of Marc--the late Vito Marcantonio"

"foreigner." Of his contemporaries who remained there, their relationship was typically of a professional/client or merchant/customer nature. America has always provided considerable upward mobility for the cleverest and most industrious of the immigrant and native-born poor. Marcantonio experienced this mobility--the son of a carpenter who became a Congressman--but he never left the ghetto. Why? This is a difficult, perhaps impossible question to answer. Upward mobility involved alienation from the values and lifestyle of the community. Success required acculturation. Yet Marcantonio's alienation from the value system of Italian Harlem was minimal. Why Marcantonio followed this atypical course is perhaps primarily due to the influence of Leonard Covello. In any case, all the threads of Marcantonio's life seem to come together in the four days between his death and burial.

On August 9, 1954, after returning from the printer where he had left the proofs for petitions for his candidacy for Congress on the Good Neighbor ticket, Marcantonio fell dead on the east side of Broadway at Warren Street--with City Hall Park in the background. Because he had a metal crucifix, one religious medal, and one St. Frances Xavier Cabrini religious medal on his person, a priest was summoned and the last rites of the Catholic Church were administered.²⁷

On the grounds that "he had not practiced his religion in a great many years and was not reconciled with the church before his death," the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York denied Marcantonio a Catholic

²⁷"Vito Marcantonio Falls Dead in Street," New York Times (August 10, 1954), p. 1.

burial,²⁸ causing great indignation in Italian Harlem. He had never renounced his Catholic origins, he had contributed to neighborhood parishes, he had marched in the processions, although he did not attend mass or partake of the sacraments. He had adhered to the religious practices precisely as popular Italian custom prescribed for men. Petitions were hastily circulated, and hundreds of letters were forwarded to the Archdiocese requesting that Marcantonio be granted a Catholic burial. One of the letters to Cardinal Spellman stated:

The cruelty of your decision is only exceeded by its stupidity! I attended the last rites for a loved and respected friend, Vito Marcantonio. Among the thousands of mourners three out of four were Roman Catholics and in the chapel and on the street with my own ears I heard expressions of bitterness and bewilderment that the friend they mourned had been denied the last rites of their church.

Your action was an un-Christian injury to the living--not the dead, for ecclesiastical malice wields no power over them.²⁹

The intensity of Italian Harlem's feelings were based on their long-standing grievances against the Irish-American hierarchy. A long-time Italian Harlem resident recalled, "when the church wouldn't bury Marc, many people left the church."³⁰ These sentiments were not confined to Italo-American Catholics. Almost thirty years after Marcantonio's death, a reporter from El Diario remembered that shortly after the Church's refusal to bury Marcantonio, a memorial mass was celebrated for the President of Panama.³¹

²⁸"Tribute Is Paid to Marcantonio," New York Times (August 13, 1954), p. 36.

²⁹Muriel I. Singleton to Francis Cardinal Spellman, August 15, 1954. CC.

³⁰Interview with Peter Pascale, New York City, July 16, 1981.

³¹Interview with a reporter from El Diario who wishes to remain anonymous, July 18, 1980.

One student of Italo-American life has noted that the "unity of each community was strongly expressed in death rites."³² Italian Harlem joined in a massive display of communal concern and sense of loss. Giordano's Funeral Home, located at East 115th Street and First Avenue (four blocks from Marcantonio's birthplace and two blocks from his residence) was festooned with hundreds of mass cards. Private masses were celebrated in neighborhood churches filled with priests and residents saying their rosary beads. Black-bordered signs appeared in many shop windows and hall doors and windows of dwellings reading simply "We Mourn Our Loss."³³ A newsstand bore a sign reading, "Closed because of death in the family."³⁴ By eleven o'clock on the first day of the wake ten thousand persons had passed by the bronze coffin. One of Marcantonio's associates recalled that when she reached Marcantonio's bier, a Black man in front of her lifted up his son and said, "I want you to say goodbye to the best friend the Negro people ever had."³⁵ The following day, a funeral parlor spokesman said twenty thousand persons had viewed the bier between 9 A. M. and 11:35 P. M. when the doors were closed.³⁶

On the day of his burial, a thousand more people viewed the bier

³²Phyllis H. Williams, South Italian Folkways in Europe and America: A Handbook for Social Workers, Visiting Nurses, School Teachers, and Physicians (New York: Russell and Russell, 1969), p. 198.

³³"Throngs at Bier of Marcantonio," New York Times (August 11, 1954), p. 9.

³⁴National Guardian, August 16, 1954.

³⁵Mary Bowes, personal letter to Gerald Meyer, November 16, 1976.

³⁶"Private Masses Set for Marcantonio," New York Times (August 12, 1954), p. 17.

and over five thousand more crowded the sidewalks in front of the funeral home.³⁷ At the funeral service eulogies were delivered by the Reverend Nicolo Notar, pastor of the Jefferson Park Methodist Church, W. E. B. DuBois (with whom Marcantonio had maintained a particularly close friendship), and by life-long friend and barber Luigi Albaelli.³⁸ Speaking in Italian and English, Albaelli addressed his dead compatriot: "Your life was ever dedicated to lighten the load of the people who were in need. You lived fearlessly and courageously, with affection in your heart for the common man. You were a man of the people and the people loved you."³⁹

Honorary pallbearers included a cross-section of his male friends: Leonard Covello, Gilberto Concepción de Gracia, left-wing political and labor leaders, neighborhood friends, East Harlem politicians, and law associates. On its way to Woodlawn Cemetery, to a burial site fifty feet from LaGuardia's grave, the ninety-seven-vehicle cortege, including fifteen flower cars, passed his home, his office, and the Vito Marcantonio Political Association. At the last place, where a black-draped sign read "We Mourn Our Loss," an unidentified woman began crying hysterically. Except for that single incident, the Times reported, there was no disturbance.⁴⁰

³⁷Tribute Is Paid to Marcantonio," New York Times (August 13, 1954), p. 36.

³⁸Funeral Announcement, "Funeral Service for Vito Marcantonio." CC.

³⁹Text (untitled) deposited in Covello Collection.

⁴⁰"Throngs at Bier," p. 2; "Tribute Is Paid," p. 36.

A little after two o'clock P. M. on the afternoon of August 12, 1954, the fiery East Harlem Congressman joined his equally fiery mentor in the silent ground.

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