

City University of New York (CUNY)

## CUNY Academic Works

---

Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects

CUNY Graduate Center

---

2-2019

### Immigration, Small Business and Assimilation: Three Stories of Small-Time Capitalism on the Lower East Side

Marcus Hillman

*The Graduate Center, City University of New York*

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc\\_etds/3064](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/3064)

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

---

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: [AcademicWorks@cuny.edu](mailto:AcademicWorks@cuny.edu)

IMMIGRATION, SMALL BUSINESS AND ASSIMILATION:  
THREE STORIES OF SMALL-TIME CAPITALISM ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE

by

MARCUS HILLMAN

A master's capstone submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,

The City University of New York

2019

©2019

MARCUS HILLMAN

All Rights Reserved.

Immigration, Small Businesses and Assimilation:

Three Stories of Small-Time Capitalism on the Lower East Side

by

Marcus Hillman

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the capstone project requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

---

Date

---

Karen Miller

Capstone Project Advisor

---

Date

---

Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis

Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

## ABSTRACT

Immigration, Small Businesses and Assimilation:

Three Stories of Small-Time Capitalism on the Lower East Side

by

Marcus Hillman

Advisor: Karen Miller

Small businesses in New York City have often been a catalyst to assimilation for individual immigrants, their families and their communities. For this capstone project, I have recorded conversations with three small-time entrepreneurs on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and created a narrative audio piece that explores some of the important and study-worthy characteristics of New York City including economic opportunities in the city, immigration, assimilation and the ways that New Yorkers share space, just to name a few. These themes are threads that ran through all three of the conversations that I had and are crucial elements of what makes New York City such an exceptional topic for scholarship. My hope is that with these personal and family stories, I have been able to convey how the unique economic, entrepreneurial and cultural environment that exists in New York City has helped my subjects, their families and countless people like them to overcome the hardships of immigration and assimilation and become New Yorkers. The audio piece can be accessed at the following link:

<https://archive.org/details/MarcusHillmanGraduateSchoolProject>

## Preface

*A great city is, to be sure, the school for studying life*

*-Samuel Johnson (Boswell 918)*

Skyscrapers, subway cars, sandy beaches, schmears of cream cheese and sewer alligators (allegedly) are just a few of the S's that one can find in New York City. One could pick any letter and do this exercise in such complex place. For me, the most meaningful S of them all stands for the stories told by the city's people. New York's streets have been home to Herman Melville, O Henry, Langston Hughes, Edgar Allen Poe and many more of history's greatest storytellers. I myself have made a living for years as a tour guide and in talk radio, two fields in which being a storyteller is part of the job. As long as I have understood what this city is, I have been a "New York-o-phile." I love so much about this place, but one of the things that intrigues me most, is that for centuries, often under difficult circumstances, millions of people, of almost every conceivable background, have arrived here to start anew. They are the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free," that Emma Lazarus spoke of in her 1883 sonnet "The New Colossus" (Ratcliffe). Many have struggled, but it is remarkable how many have succeeded. Some are writers, poets, filmmakers, playwrights or comedians. We hear their stories often. But to me, the most important stories are told by New York's everyday citizens. In a city where people are constantly up close to one another, you hear stories everywhere, from fellow passengers on trains and buses, from chatty taxi drivers and pedestrians, and in businesses, shops, cafes and delis which is where I heard the stories for this project. The three businesses I have showcased have allowed two families and one individual to thrive in a place that can be challenging, but that has been rewarding for so many, including me. These businesses gave their owners a chance to create their own stories which I hope tell a small part of the greater New York City story.

## Acknowledgements

There have been many times when I thought that I could never finish this project and that I should give up. I started graduate school unsure if I was capable of taking myself seriously as an academic or of relearning how to write with anything approaching confidence. I had no idea what I would do with the knowledge I was gaining and the master's degree I hoped to eventually earn. At the time, I enjoyed working as a tour guide, but dreamed of returning to radio. During my time at the Graduate Center, I have somehow gained a greater appreciation and love for New York City, I have learned how to write again (maybe) and a class that I took and two internships that I had while I have been here led me back into radio. Thank You Graduate Center! I am grateful to the MALS program and the entire CUNY system. Thanks to all of the professors, faculty and staff. Thank you to my subjects Robert Zerilli, Sammy Gluck and Ray Alvarez for just being the raconteur New Yorkers that they are and to my friend Matt Slaby for helping me record said raconteurs. The patience and support of a few people in the MALS department is worth a specific mention. Thank you Karen Miller, Elizabeth McCauley-Lewis, Katherine Koutsis and Matt Gold. I sent all of you many emails. Thanks to my parents for believing in me and giving me space. A special note to Cindy Lobel, my original advisor, who recently lost her battle with cancer. Thank you Cindy for our discussions and your candidness and kindness throughout the time that I knew you. Your memory will serve as an inspiration to me for the rest of my life. My ride at the GC has been long, but well worth it. I will miss it, but I'll be around.

Oh yeah! To my wife Lyndsey! Hey Sweets. I did it. I know. It's about time! Thank you for your immense amount of patience, not just while I finished this project but for quite a few other things, (you know what I mean). Now I can get to back to work on all that other stuff that I have been talking about lo these many years! (Again, you know what I mean) Love you so!

## Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Preface	v
Acknowledgments	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Figures	vii
Digital Manifest	ix
Chapter 1: Capitalism, Immigration and Assimilation in New Amsterdam/New York	1
Chapter 2: Relationship to Track and Previous Course of Study	22
Chapter 3: Evaluation	27
Chapter 4: Continuation of the Project	28
Chapter 5: Appendix: Script for the Audio Piece	29
Bibliography	43



List of Figures

Map of the Lower East Side of Manhattan (Maffi 13)

5

## Digital Manifest

- I. Capstone Whitepaper (PDF)
  
- II. A streaming mp3 file of the audio piece can be accessed at the following link:  
<https://archive.org/details/MarcusHillmanGraduateSchoolProject>

## CHAPTER 1: CAPITALISM, IMMIGRATION AND ASSIMILATION IN NEW AMSTERDAM/NEW YORK

The Dutch Republic's policy of tolerance made it a haven for everyone from Descartes and John Locke to exiled English royalty to peasants from across Europe. When this society founded a colony on Manhattan Island, that colony had the same features of tolerance, openness and free trade that existed in the home country. Those features helped make New York unique and in time influenced America in some elemental ways.

-Russel Shorto (Shorto, 6)

In 1625, The Dutch West India Company established New Amsterdam as the capital of the New Netherland colony on the southern tip of the island of Manhattan. Soon after, in May or June of 1626...Director (of the colony, Peter) Minuit "purchased" Manhattan from the indigenous Lenape tribe for "sixty guilders' worth of trade goods" (Burrows 1999, 23). It is quite fitting that a business transaction (at least from the perspective of the Dutch), would eventually lead to floods of immigrants arriving in what is now New York City, many of whom would create businesses themselves, in a place that would become a symbol of global capitalism. This small outpost of the Dutch empire at the mouth of the Hudson River was quite different from its colonial North American neighbors. It was not founded for religious reasons, "on the shores of Massachusetts Bay by radical Calvinists as a new Zion" like the Plymouth Colony or with the aim of "seizing control of awestruck Indian kingdoms and putting their new subjects to work mining gold and silver" as had been the original intent in the Colony of Virginia (Woodard 4 & 45). The goals of those in charge in what eventually became New York City were never quite as lofty or intense. That is not to say that there were not religious zealots in New Amsterdam or that the colonist's interactions with the indigenous people of the area were always harmonious:

But this small village was already unlike anywhere else in North America. Established as a fur-trading post, it was an unabashedly commercial settlement with little concern for either social cohesion or the creation of a model society. A global corporation, the Dutch West India Company, dominated the city's affairs and formally governed New Netherland for the first few decades (Woodard 53-54).

This template for a city, mercantile, one governed by capitalism, trade and entrepreneurship established by the Dutch centuries ago created a unique cultural and economic environment that thrives in the New York City area to this day and still greatly influences the region, the nation as a whole and indeed the world:

While short-lived, the seventeenth-century Dutch colony of New Netherland had a lasting impact on the continent's development by laying down the cultural DNA for what is now Greater New York City. Modeled on its Dutch namesake, New Amsterdam was from the start a global commercial trading society: multi-ethnic, multi-religious, speculative, materialistic, mercantile, and free trading, a raucous, not entirely democratic city-state where no one ethnic or religious group has ever truly been in charge. New Netherland also nurtured two Dutch innovations considered subversive by most other European states at the time: a profound tolerance of diversity and an unflinching commitment to the freedom of inquiry (Woodward 6).

So many of the reasons that I love New York City are summed up in the previous passage. One could change around a few words and create a tourism advertisement or a real estate brochure about why New York City is such an amazing place to visit or live. In fact, some of these concepts "multi-ethnic...free trading...tolerance of diversity...unflinching commitment to the freedom of inquiry," although not always present throughout the country are what many Americans and people across the world would likely list as the greatest strengths of the United States.

The spirit these words invoke in me along with the endless thoughts and curiosities that spring into mind when I read them are why I chose to apply for the MALS program with a New York Studies focus. Exploring a small part of "the cultural DNA for what is now Greater New York City" was appealing to me because of my personal interests about this region but also because when one studies the New York City area, one is actually studying so much more. Americans might not learn about it much in school, but the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch era in the New York region had a huge influence on creating so many the features that people cherish about the United States, mainly the economic system and the heterogeneity of the population. It could

easily be argued that New York was the first modern city in the western hemisphere and perhaps the world. Societies that have free markets, diversity and open-mindedness, which at least in principal have all existed in the New York region since the colonial era are not perfect. The enslavement of New Amsterdam's African population is just one historical proof of this fact. But the experiment that started here long ago promoting these ideas was crucial to why New York City developed the way that it has and why its influence on the country and the world has been profound. These ideas changed the way that humanity thinks about how cities can develop. Because of the template that it was built on, New York City has continued to adapt and reinvent itself over and over again, running a mercantile experiment on repeat into modern times. I wanted to find a present-day context where I could see these phenomena at work.

After many classes, discussions, presentations, long papers and of course a bit of thought, the way to do this became obvious to me. I have never had a problem interacting with strangers which is part of the reason I am able to work as a New York City tour guide. Long before I was a guide, for many years and still to this day, I have regularly struck up conversations with New Yorkers of all stripes, usually strangers and learned so much about a seemingly endless number of topics. Because of my time in graduate school, I now know that I had been using methods similar to those that many sociologists use in ethnographic studies. I wanted to implement this habit of mine into my project. I also considered my background in radio, and the audio pieces I had enjoyed creating in the past that told human stories. In order to study capitalism, immigration, assimilation, diversity, neighborhood change, small business and whatever else came up related to New York Studies, I decided that I would to record a few conversations with small business owners that were either immigrants or their descendants. I would then create an audio piece that would help me explore some of these themes which are so important to the study

of New York City for my capstone project. This would allow me to combine my love for the city with my love for storytelling and radio.

### LOCATION, LOCATION, LOWER EAST SIDE!

New York City is obviously large in both geographic size and population and I knew I wanted to speak to people from at least few different backgrounds. In a city as diverse as New York I figured this would not be a problem. Most of the city's neighborhoods are full of various types of commercial enterprises and in a place populated by so many chatty people, at least a few of them would likely be willing to speak with me. For logistical and thematic purposes, I thought that limiting myself to a specific neighborhood would be helpful. But where? It did not take me long to decide on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

It is unlikely that any urban locale in the world personifies the immigrant experience like Manhattan's Lower East Side. But where is it? Neighborhoods in New York do not have official boundaries and the names that people have for specific areas change over time. Some are strict in proclaiming that the Lower East Side is south of Houston Street. But, it is easy to find Alphabet City or East Village residents that have lived in the same rent controlled apartments for decades who tell you that they live on the Lower East Side. For the purposes of this project, they are not wrong. The Lower East Side will be defined as "bounded to the north by 14th street, to the east by the East River, to the south by Fulton and Franklin streets and to the west by Pearl Street and Broadway" which is how Columbia professor Kenneth T. Jackson identified the area in his encyclopedia of New York City (Jackson 696). It roughly correlates with Italian scholar Mario Maffi's map from his 1995 book *Gateway to the Promised Land* (See Map 1).



III. 1  
 Map 1: The Lower East Side Today

The Lower East Side has been teeming with new arrivals for generations and throughout its history has been the home to many of New York's most prominent and influential ethnic and sociological groups. Often they were fleeing famine, poverty, persecution or violence and their struggles did not end after they settled into the neighborhood. The tenements of the Lower East Side have a history of crowdedness, crime, poverty and so many of the other problems associated with urban life. Despite this environment, countless New Yorkers have persisted through their difficult circumstances and eventually thrived. Although many of these "LESers" have moved on, I knew that there were some businesses still around today that have a long history and a connection to an immigrant past. I also knew that there are others that may not be as old but could easily be representative of some the themes I hoped to explore.

## THE CONVERSATIONS

When it came to who I would speak with, I could obviously not talk with someone from every sociological subgroup that has ever lived on the Lower East Side. However, I believe I found three subjects that serve as representatives of three groups that are worthy of focus and that have played and continue to play important roles in shaping New York's culture and economy. All three of them also have amazing stories.

## ITALIAN IDENTITY, FOOD AND ASSIMILATION

Southern Italians, most of whom were impoverished and from rural areas began to arrive in large numbers in New York City in the 1880s. At this time, the City of New York consisted of the island of Manhattan and parts of what is now the borough of the Bronx (Jackson 278). Consolidation of the other three boroughs and the rest of the Bronx would not happen until



January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1898 (Wallace 60). Italians flooded into a few parts of the city, the largest populations moved to East Harlem and an area on the Lower East Side that today, despite seemingly having more Italian restaurants than Italian-American residents, is still known as Manhattan's Little Italy. This phase of Italian immigration to the United States slowed significantly when "In 1921, Congress established a temporary quota system designed "to confine immigration as much as possible to western and northern European stock," making this bar permanent three years later in the National Origin Act of 1924" (Lopez 27).

During this era, cultural and regional differences were strong on the Italian peninsula, which had only been fully unified into the Kingdom of Italy with the capture of Rome in 1870 (Parasecoli 29). Most Italians in New York shared the Catholic religion and because of their southern origins, the experience of discrimination, from northerners at home and from many in America that now saw them as outsiders in their new country. It was in this environment that a strong diasporic Italian identity emerged and that Italian-Americans became and continue to be a collective force in New York City life.

Perhaps the most significant mark Italian-Americans have made on the New York region and around the country as a whole is a result of their cultural relationship with food. There is a certain irony to this fact because during their migration period, "their diet was considered poor (and) incomplete" (Parasecoli xi). In her book "Hungering for America" scholar Hasia Diner notes that at this time in impoverished southern Italy "food was limited, getting it difficult, but knowledge about it was widespread."(Diner 34). The newly urban Italians in places like New York, knew that in their home country "in cities rich people and travelers from abroad ate in *restaurants, public places designed to show people eating where others would see them*" (emphasis added) (Diner 34 & 41). Eating outside the home signified a type of elitism that the

Italians in the United States desired, but that most of them could never have afforded in the old country. However, in America where food was in greater abundance and less expensive, even poor Italians could eat reasonably well. Diner notes that this led to Italian-Americans, “taking possession of rich food associated with the well-off (which)...contributed to the emergence of their new identity.” (Diner 49-50)

Most southern Italian immigrants may have been poor upon arrival, but “the poverty of the vast majority...was not a permanent condition” and “some of them became self-employed as they tried their hand at small-scale enterprises, *with food businesses a particularly popular choice*” (emphasis added) (Diner 50). In other words, food for many Italian-Americans became not only a source of pride and identity but also a pathway toward economic independence and achievement of the American dream.

Around much of the United States today, because of this generation of Italian immigrants, the largest population of which was in New York, “Italian Food is everywhere—not only in “Italian” but also self-described “American restaurants” (Ray 98). This to me is the ultimate assimilation story. I wanted to capture this historical phenomenon in my project by talking to someone whose life and livelihood is a direct result of it.

Robert Zerilli, a descendant of the huge wave of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian immigrants helped me tell a part of this story. His business is not in the aforementioned East Harlem or Little Italy. There are many other predominant Italian areas throughout the five boroughs and there are also often small, satellite ethnic enclaves of just a few residencies, shops and businesses on one or two streets. One such area exists in the East Village section of the Lower East Side on and around Second and Third Avenues between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets. Since 1908, the Italian restaurant John’s of 12<sup>th</sup> Street has stood around the corner from, Russo's

Mozzarella and Pasta grocery store which opened the same year. Right next to Russo's is a business called Veniero's Pasticceria on 342 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street which opened in 1894. These are a just few of the Italian businesses in this area that have been around for decades, in various forms and have seen many neighborhood changes.

Zerilli is the fourth generation owner of Veniero's, an Italian bakery. Stories that he told me about his relatives and himself allowed me to showcase one family's connection to common trends that Italians in New York experienced during immigration and assimilation. I heard stories perhaps some based truth and others in part on family lore about Zerilli's great uncle, Antonio Veniero, who was born in 1870 in the southern Italian coastal town of Vico Equense. He came to New York in 1885 and worked in a candy factory on the Lower East Side. After three years at the factory he was made manager and he began to save. He eventually earned enough money to buy a piece of property. In 1894 he purchased the building where Veniero's Pasticceria stands to this day.

At first Antonio Veniero opened a social club where he offered a place for his guests to be among their fellow Italians and enjoy, home-made candies, not surprising, considering his previous job. According to Robert Zerilli, his great uncle also became one of the first people in the United States to serve roasted espresso. The fact that the patrons were enjoying espresso was not insignificant to me because in Italy as early as "the seventeenth century, new drinks like...coffee became fashionable with the nobles and the developing bourgeoisie" and "Coffeehouses, or *caffè* became the meeting place" for those aspiring to be among or in the process of joining them (Parasecoli 143). New York City food historian Cindy Lobel discussed how ethnic food businesses like Veniero's catered "to the emotional, social and economic needs of immigrant New Yorkers," in her book *Urban Appetites: Food and Culture in Nineteenth-*

*Century New York* (Lobel 181). New York had become a city filled with Italian cafés “Alive with activity, these establishments hosted men drinking coffee, smoking and sometimes gambling.” (Lobel 182). Hardworking laborers were being provided a place to relax. Veniero’s was one of many of these establishments, in one small section of the Lower East Side and it became a popular neighborhood establishment where recent immigrants and their families could publicly showcase their aspirations or their newly earned status or perhaps just take it easy for a few hours.

Although the exact date is not known by Robert, around the turn of the century, Antonio Veniero decided that something was needed to go with his espresso and candies. He brought over master bakers from Italy and Veniero’s Pasticceria or pastry shop was born. He also brought over a few other people from Italy. For Italian migrants of this time, “A very large proportion of the immigration was composed of migratory laborers who came here to work on construction or other seasonal jobs for eight or nine months of the year and returned to spend the winter in Italy” (Nelli 43). These men, who would send money home to their families were known as “birds of passage” and according to Robert, even though he was an entrepreneur, his great uncle Antonio was one of them. After one of his lengthy visits home, Antonio returned to New York with his wife and children who joined him in New York permanently. The family moved upstairs from the bakery and eventually there were four daughters and three sons in the Veniero family.

Antonio died in 1931 and his three sons, Michael, Freddy and Peter took over the business. The business had made their father’s New York dreams come true and was the source of their family’s success which allowed the sons to pursue their own version of the American dream. Legend has it that Freddy was a playboy that dated Ginger Rogers but who unfortunately died fairly young. At some point Peter left New York for Hollywood with his wife to try and

make it showbiz and Michael ran the bakery which he continued to own even after he invested in hotels and went to live in Miami Beach.

Many extended family members also helped out at the bakery and one of their first cousins, Frank Zerilli began working there full-time after returning from service in World War II. Frank eventually became manager and as the neighborhood began to change in the 1960s, he bought the business from his cousins. He did not however change the name which had brand recognition in the neighborhood and beyond.

Robert Zerilli the current owner started working at Veniero's for his father Frank in the early 1980s. The Zerillis had moved to New Jersey before Robert was born and he had lived in a town where he experienced discrimination for being a dark skinned Italian. He told me these experiences as well as not growing up in the city caused him to lose touch with his immigrant heritage. It was only when he started working for his father at the bakery that he began to reconnect with his family's immigration story. This is another aspect the assimilation process that I think is important. Eventually the descendants of immigrants become Americanized yet they are still connected to their past. In fact, Robert told me that it is one of the reasons that Veniero's employs so many immigrants today. He feels a responsibility to immigrants who sacrifice a lot to make better lives for themselves and their families just like his grandparents and his great-uncle Antonio had done in the past.

Another point that I was able to discuss in the piece is something that Robert brought up to me a few times in our conversation. He says that if his family did not own the building where their bakery is, they would not be in business. This touches on the issue of rising rents in gentrifying neighborhoods like the Lower East Side and so many other places in New York City.

One can easily see why Veniero's was a great place to explore the themes of my capstone

project. I see Veniero's Pasticceria as a place where the New York story of capitalism, diversity, immigration and assimilation has been told for over a century and is continuously being told everyday over and over again.

## JEWS IN NEW YORK, THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY, ORCHARD STREET AND HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

The small business I focused on for the next part of my project does not go back quite as long as Veniero's. It is post-World War II migration story about triumph over tragedy, but it is also a very connected to much older aspects of New York history and the type of city that it is. The poverty that so many southern Italians fled during their heaviest period of immigration was obviously difficult. But for a very long time, New York has had a way of absorbing people coming from all kinds of circumstances, even those that are among the worst that humanity has ever seen. For millions the city has been a refuge.

Jewish presence in New York City goes back to the Dutch era, specifically to 1654 when "In early September of that year twenty-three Jewish refugees—four couples, two widows and thirteen children—landed in New Amsterdam" (Hertzberg 19). The group had come "from Recife, (it was called Pernambuco in those days), Brazil, the eastern-most point of South America, which the Dutch had conquered from the Portuguese in 1630 and had held until it was surrendered back to the Portuguese in January 1654" (Hertzberg 19). The community was made up of Sephardic Jews that were descended from people expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492. The Portuguese Empire was Catholic and the Inquisition still existed. If the community wanted to continue to practice Judaism, they had to leave. They were not permitted to remain in the Caribbean Islands of Jamaica and Cuba either, which were controlled by the also Catholic

Spanish Empire so they headed to the capital of the North American Dutch colony of New Netherland. They were initially not welcomed by the majority of New Amsterdam's residents, most importantly the colony's leader who attempted a theological explanation for wanting the Jews to move on. He wrote to the colonial directors back in Amsterdam and invoked "the usual formulas of religious invective—he called the Jews "repugnant," "deceitful," and enemies and blasphemers of Christ"" (Hertzberg 21). But something other than bigotry was at work:

The governor of New Amsterdam, Peter Stuyvesant, did not like Jews. Though he did use such terms as "Christ killers or "Christ rejecters," as he fought against letting them stay in town, his quarrel with them was primarily economic. (Hertzberg 20).

As I have already discussed, the mercantile nature of the New Netherland colony was unique and business was what mattered. Investments had been made by wealthy citizens in Amsterdam, profit was expected and the fact remained that:

The governor of New Amsterdam, was an employee of the Dutch West India Company, and the purpose of this firm was not to foster Christianity among the Indians; it existed to make money for its stockholders—and the company was not doing well. (Hertzberg 22).

Stuyvesant and many citizens in New Amsterdam thought that the new arrivals would be a public charge and interfere with the already struggling market. The Jewish community in New Amsterdam hoped that influential Jews in Amsterdam could help them with their plight in the colony by appealing to the decision makers at the Dutch West India Company and that they could remain. Stuyvesant hoped for the opposite and tried to appeal to economic concerns that the company might have when he stated of the community that ""Their usual usury and deceitful ways towards the Christians" made them undesirable colonists" (Burrows and Wallace 60). This was a crucial moment for New York City's future because it turned out that "The company's managers didn't see it that way" (and, after) pressure from Amsterdam's Jewish leaders, they rebuked Stuyvesant for his intolerance and pointed out to him that it would be "unreasonable and unfair" to expel the Jews from New Amsterdam" (Burrows and Wallace 60).

Jews were granted the right to stay in New Amsterdam and practice their religion in their homes. They in fact ended up greatly contributing to the colony's economy because this ruling spurred wealthier Jews into joining them in New Amsterdam. This decision based in part on economics and in part on principle was a precursor to ideas about religious freedom and the separation of religion and government that directly led to New York becoming a safe haven not only for Jews but religious minorities in peril to this day.

It is therefore probably not surprising that since these events, there has always been a Jewish community in New York. It is a community that grew tremendously during several different waves of immigration, the largest of which took place between the 1880s and 1920s, like the Italian wave I discussed earlier. This influx consisted of mostly eastern European Jews, the majority of whom went to a neighborhood that was very used to newcomers:

By 1892, 75 percent of the city's Jews lived on the Lower East Side. The percentage declined to 50 percent in 1903 and to 23 percent by 1916; and nearly two-thirds of East Side Jews had left the area by 1905. But the absolute number of Jews, augmented by newcomers crowding into the district, continued to climb until it reached its peak of 542,000 in 1910. The Lower East Side bristled with Jews. (Sorin 70-71).

Even though Jews were slowly leaving the area for other parts of the city and country, the continuing migration made the Lower East Side one of the most Jewish places on earth in terms of sheer numbers. In fact, even today, other than the Tel Aviv area in Israel, the Jewish population in the New York City region is still the largest of any metropolitan area in the world. (Dashefsky, DellaPergola and Sheskin 25). Much of that population has its roots on the Lower East Side.

Historically Jews in New York have participated in many aspects of the economy but have a particularly fascinating history with the garment industry, often known in Yiddish as the "schmatta" (rag) trade. The previous generation's Jewish migration had been made up mostly of Jews from the German states. They had also lived on the Lower East Side when the area was



known as “Kleindeutschland” or Little Germany. They lived among a large non-Jewish German population and established textile businesses in the area starting in the 1840s, prior to the arrival of their Eastern European co-religionists. Countless Lower East Side Jews worked in and assimilated into American life through the clothing industry. This history runs deep in the neighborhood:

As early as 1890 almost 80 percent of New York’s garment industry was located below 14th Street, and more than 90 percent of these factories were owned by German Jews. Lower New York, therefore, was a powerful magnet for the Eastern Europeans throughout the period of mass immigration. Immigrants were attracted by jobs and by Jewish employers who could provide a familiar milieu as well as the opportunity to observe the Sabbath. By 1897 approximately 60 percent of the New York Jewish labor force was employed in the apparel field, and 75 percent of the workers in the industry were Jewish. (Sorin 74)

The retail part of this industry for many decades had one of its major shopping areas on Orchard Street where people from all over the New York would come to purchase clothing and accessories. The Jewish relationship with the clothing industry today has changed drastically. A majority of the descendants of the large immigrant wave moved to other places and into other industries. However, if you look hard enough, you can still find a modern version of this history and it is story I wanted to capture for my project.

Sammy Gluck can often be found standing outside of G and G Global International Men’s Clothiers, his menswear store at 62 Orchard Street. He is a direct link to the once thriving world of New York’s Jewish clothing industry. You can find him almost any time of day except between sundown Friday and sundown Saturday, which constitutes the Jewish Sabbath, standing outside his shop having chats with potential customers. Watching him charm strangers and attempt to put them in a new suit or coat is something anyone that loves New York City should see at least once. After chatting with him on tours many times and learning more about his life, I knew he would make a great subject.

Sammy's story is important not only because of his connection to the Jewish clothing trade of the past, but because he is also the son of Holocaust survivors. Following World War II, there were millions of displaced persons, many of them Jewish, all over Europe. From the middle of 1945 until the end of 1952, almost 140,000 Jews, most of whom had been greatly affected by the war immigrated to the United States and over 85,000 of them consisting of 62 percent of this population settled in the New York City area (Dinnerstein 288). The people in this wave of Jewish immigration had experienced a collective trauma that is difficult to comprehend. I wanted to tell the story of someone who was the child of this trauma and see how the opportunities in New York City had affected their outcomes and outlook.

Sammy's father, Ignat Gluck was born in Romania. As he young boy he lived in small town with his family. Because like most parts of Europe, Romania had a long history of antisemitism and it was also a member of the Axis powers during the war, it was obviously not a good time for the country's Jews. His family were eventually transferred to concentration camps. Ignat was sent to Buchenwald, where somehow, he survived. But when he returned home, his worst fears were confirmed, his immediate family had been wiped out. He did not have time to think much about what had happened. The war had obviously been beyond damaging in unimaginable ways. Because communists were taking over Romania, he suspected life as an observant Jew was not going to be particularly easy in the country of his birth moving forward.

Sammy does not know all the details of what his father experienced but he knows that he fled to France and ended up in a Jewish garment district where he learned how to make ties. He then was given permission to come to New York as a refugee. Ignat also discovered that one of his female cousins had survived the war and they were married, which was not uncommon in his religious community.

Upon arrival in New York he quickly found work on the Lower East Side making ties. Ignat saved his pennies and within a few years, he ran several clothing stores and manufacturers in the garment district in midtown. He and his wife had six children. They lived in a home in Williamsburg, Brooklyn which had become a community with lots of observant Jewish Holocaust survivors.

With more mouths to feed and business, going so well, Ignat decided to open a menswear shop on Orchard Street where his son Sammy still works to this day. Like the Veniero's and the Zerillis, the Glucks purchased the building where they opened their shop. This is likely why they are still in business today.

Despite his trauma, Ignat was able to create a life for himself by his belief that in New York and the United States, if you worked hard, you could make a living. He is not alone in this belief among the survivor community. William Helmreich has written in his book *Against All Odds: Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives They Made in America* that for those that had been prisoners of the Nazis, "During the long years of the war, work became synonymous with survival, especially in the camps" (Helmreich 86). Being forced into slavery at a death camp while watching thousands die would obviously have an effect all aspects of one's life and the way survivor community saw work was forever altered:

In addition to the normal goals and attitudes that characterize those who work, they greatly appreciated the things that most of us take for granted in the area—payment for work, the right to quit a job, the opportunity to select an occupation, the availability of training programs, fixed hours of work, vacations. In short, for survivors work was a privilege as much as it was a necessity and this often determined what they chose to do as well as how they did it. (Helmreich 87)

The stories that Sammy told me about his father seem to prove this point. Sammy also feels that work is a privilege and joy. Because he owns the building where he works, he could probably rent the space where for a considerable amount of money, however, he loves his job

and carrying on the legacy of his parent's lives. He does this not only with his nine children and 36 grandchildren, but with his father's business.

Religious minorities in New York, the Jewish relationship with the clothing industry, the Holocaust survivor community and their descendants in New York, these are all subjects so worthy of study and I am glad I got to tell a small part of them by talking to Sammy. In the case of the survivors, so many phoenixes rose from the ashes and created something in a place that gave them the chance to do so. They sought refuge but were also able to find dignity and meaning in large part because of the economic opportunities that were available to them in New York City. Ignat Gluck was just one of them and I'm glad I got to tell his story as well as the story of his son that carries on his legacy.

#### AN UNDOCUMENTED ENTREPRENEUR AND AN EASTSIDE STORY

Jews and Italians are obviously well known as two of the most influential immigrant, ethnic groups that have ever come to New York City in large numbers. For my last story, I wanted found an unusual and amazing story about someone that doesn't fit as easily into a category. As I more or less stated in the preface of this paper, a good New York story could well be my favorite thing in the world. I found one in a man who is usually called Ray Alvarez.

In our current political climate, it is virtually impossible to tune out the rancorous discussions about immigration. These debates of course include many emotional conversations about undocumented migrants. According to a 2017 Pew Research Center report, New York City's undocumented immigrant population is estimated to be approximately 525,000 (Passel and Cohn). Most of them have come to New York for economic opportunity and they participate in many aspects of the economy. Behind these over half-a-million people, and all the rhetoric are

actual individuals. There are of course many without legal status who are working in factories, in construction, as delivery persons and as restaurant employees, as well as countless other professions throughout New York City. But to stick to theme of small business owners in New York City for my project, I had to dig.

Ray Alvarez arrived in New York under very unusual circumstances in 1964. He told me about how he had come from Miami, Florida where had arrived six months earlier. In Miami, he worked at a coffee company and on a day off at Miami Beach, he was been detained and sent to a local jail for not having proper identification. After bailing himself out, he fled for New York on a Greyhound bus. Like so many others before him, he thought he could find a job in the nation's largest city.

Despite being named Alvarez, Ray had not arrived in Miami from Latin America as one might suspect. His real name is Asghar Ghahraman. He is from Iran. As a child, while watching American Westerns, he dreamed of all the horses he would see if he ever made it to the US. But he did not have the money to leave his home country so he joined the Navy. He got to travel the world but he had a specific destination in mind. When his vessel was docked at Norfolk, Virginia in 1963, he waited for those on guard to fall asleep, jumped into the ocean and swam to shore. He got on a train that took him to Miami. One day, he told a Puerto Rican friend how lucky he was to have an American driver's license. That friends name was Ramon Alvarez. He handed Asghar his ID and said "Now you are an American." This is how he became known as Ray. He was able to obtain a social security card with this ID and because of this, he paid taxes under his assumed name. I was glad he discussed this with me because it is not well known how often people without proper documentation pay taxes.

After arriving in cold New York in the winter of 1964, Ray worked odd jobs and lived at

the YMCA at Fourteenth Street and Seventh Avenue for a year. Because most people thought his name was Ray Alvarez people would interview him in Spanish which he was learning at the same time he was learning English. Eventually he got a steady gig in a kitchen near Rockefeller Center washing pots. He found an apartment in the Alphabet City section of the East Village which in the mid-1960s had a large Puerto Rican community.

Ray worked hard, was made a waiter and saved his money. He dreamed of being his own boss. At all times, he always carried 3,000 dollars in cash on him, in case he ran into an immigration official or police officer that could make trouble for him. He figured, it would be enough to bribe anyone. Ray didn't want to stay in New York only because he had grown to love the city. He claimed to me that even today, if he were sent back to Iran, he would be immediately executed by firing squad because of his military desertion.

By 1974, Ray had saved enough money to buy a business. He paid \$33,000 for a Candy Store on Avenue A between Seventh Street and St. Marks Place and he moved into the apartment upstairs. The neighborhood was pretty rough in these days. This started his many decades long saga as a New York City entrepreneur that lived and worked without full legal status.

Because his Ray Alvarez persona was not actually him and the photo on his ID did not look much like him, he was constantly in vulnerable. His business, Ray's Candy Store is the ultimate East Village establishment, right across the street from Tompkins Square Park. He makes all kinds of salty and sweet snacks for the community and has become something like a neighborhood prophet. He is beloved in the area. During the Tompkins Square Park riot of 1988, his business was spared because the rioters all knew and loved him.

For so many years, Ray constantly had to strategize about how to stay in the United States while making a living for himself. He lived through changes in the government's attitude

about those without legal status when the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 passed. Because he had been in the United States for well over five years, he was supposed to be able to apply for legal status. He went to Queens to registration and received a temporary green card, but due to a clerical error, he never heard from the government about permanent residency. Ray continued to be live under his fake name until one of his customers took him to a lawyer. After years of bureaucracy and back and forth, Ray received his citizenship in 2011 and described to me how he cried tears of joy.

Ray's story encapsulates quite a bit of what I wanted to get across with my project. He had always dreamed of coming to the United States and he came to New York because he thought he could find a job. Even though for many years, he did not have legal status, he contributed to a community with his small business.

Ray Alvarez, the Veniros, the Zerillis and the Glucks were all able to make lives for themselves in New York City and I hoped that through conversations with them and the magic of audio editing I would be able to tell their stories. I think for the most part I succeeded.

## CHAPTER 2: RELATIONSHIP TO TRACK AND PREVIOUS COURSE OF STUDY

The description of the New York Studies track on the CUNY Graduate Center website starts as follows: “This specialization is a 30-credit program for students wishing to pursue an interest in the history of New York City and its cultures.”

And ends with this sentence: “Depending on their interests and expertise, students will consider New York City’s past, its populations, and its productions from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.”

My coursework during my time at the Grad Center has most certainly allowed me “to pursue an interest in the history of New York City and its cultures” and this project is a result of my “interests and expertise” coming together to “consider New York City’s past, its populations and its productions from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.”

When I reflect on the courses I have taken at the Graduate Center in the New York Studies program, I can say with confidence that they all contributed in some way to me finishing this project and added to what I wanted to get out of my particular track.

About a decade had passed since I had completed my undergraduate education and the thought of going to graduate school had not occurred to me until a few months before I was accepted into the MALS program. I had never been the most focused student, but I thought that studying something that I have always had a passion for would be a challenging and fulfilling experience. I was very worried about being able to write academically at a graduate level. Shifra Sharlin’s “Introduction to Graduate Liberal Studies” immediately confirmed that it was not going to be easy. I struggled during every minute of that class but fought my way through until the very end. I had actually become a bit irrational because of this particular course and thought that I might



not be able to continue in MALS towards the end of that first semester. After many conversations with professor Sharlin and many late nights, I turned in my final paper. When I earned an A, I was so exhausted, I was not even happy for a few weeks. However, I eventually realized that I had proven to myself that I could do this kind of work and that I should continue.

During that first semester I also took Elizabeth Macauley-Lewis's course "Narratives of New York: Ancient Forms in New Worlds: The History and Archaeology of the Classical World in New York City." This class was exactly what I wanted out of the New York Studies program. It took away from some of the stress of my other class. I learned so many new things about a city that I made my living talking about. It made me think a lot about the way space is used throughout New York's neighborhoods and all of the decisions that go into architecture, whether it is a monument like Washington Square Arch, which I wrote my final paper on or a pre-war tenement building like the one that three businesses I profiled are in. This class also taught me to further consider issues related to ownership and the renting of buildings in New York. I discussed these topics with all three of my subjects for my audio project.

In my second semester, the course I took with Cindy Lobel, "A Political, Historical, and Sociological Profile of New York City" was extremely helpful in broadening the way I think about New York's importance to modern urban development. My final paper was called "The Petri Dish" and discussed how New York City often is the first place where specific urban phenomena occur and therefore becomes the testing ground for urban experiments for other places in the country and around the world. I explored this theme in my project when I focus on the early capitalism and mercantilism of the New Amsterdam colony and how it shaped the economic system, and ethnic, racial and religious diversity that now pervades big cities in most of the country and increasingly in much of the world.

During this same semester I also took a class in the Graduate Center's sociology department taught by William Helmreich called "The Peoples of New York City," which helped me learn a lot about ethnographic approaches to studying New York. When I took his course, Professor Helmreich had recently completed a book titled *The New York Nobody Knows: Walking 6,000 Miles in the City*. He did a giant ethnographic study of the entire city by walking every block of the five boroughs of New York City. He had spent years walking around New York talking to people and making observations and had written a book based on his experiences. This was very inspiring to me. When I took Professor Helmreich's course, I had already walked around exploring the city for years and had in fact written my essay for my CUNY Graduate Center application about this habit. Many times, I had referred to this practice as "aimless wandering." This class made me realize even more how valuable this "aimless" activity had in fact always been. For the final paper I wrote about a dive bar called Kabin in the East Village and how many of those establishments were dying out in an area that used to be full of them. I spent time at the bar interacting with the patrons and taking notes on my phone. I implemented many of the techniques I had used in this class into my interviews with my subjects for my capstone project. I was not shocked that the bar I had written about closed not too long after I finished my final paper, proving something which we had discussed a lot in both of the classes I took that semester: things always change in New York City. It is obvious how the two courses from my second semester have influenced this project.

In my third semester I took, Robert Singer's course "Narratives of New York: Literature and the Visual Arts" and a writing politics seminar in Political Science taught by Peter Beinart. In Professor Singer's course, we read New York stories and poems, watched New York Films and discussed in great detail the narrative art that gets created in this city. This gave me a further

appreciation for all of creativity that comes out of New York and the fact that it is the people here that create it. There are so many stories that get told that I appreciate. The class also alerted me to all the stories that do not get told. A few years later, with this project, I am telling some of those stories.

The “Writing Politics Seminar” that I took during my third semester with Peter Beinart epitomizes what a New York class is to me. As I discussed earlier in this paper, “an unflinching commitment to the freedom of inquiry” is one of New York’s great appeals for me. Weekly discussions about political journalism in today’s fast-paced news environment as well as writing my own opinion pieces sharpened my skills and increased my confidence about sharing my opinions. I also learned to listen better to things I disagree with. This helped me during my conversations with my subjects because I think this class prompted me to think in new ways and probably ask questions that I would not have asked otherwise.

“Radio News Writing and Reporting” was an elective course that I took at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism in the following semester that in many ways led to some big changes in my life. Without this class, my final project would probably not be an audio piece and I doubt I would have my current job at SiriusXM. I had done some radio pieces years earlier as an undergrad but my radio jobs since then had been mostly production roles. In this class taught by instructor Alex Goldmark, I relearned audio editing and was able to report, write and edit a few radio pieces that had narrative structure. These pieces were undoubtedly the precursor to this project and the fact that Alex was a helpful consultant for my work is proof of this.

Next I took a sociology course taught by Philip Kasinitz called “Race and Ethnicity.” We covered many topics, and as it is one of the most diverse places on earth, many of them focused on New York City. I learned quite a lot about the discrimination that certain groups have faced

when they arrived in the US including Italians like the Venieros and the Zerillis and Jews like the Glucks. We also extensively discussed undocumented immigration which relates directly to Ray Alvarez. I have always loved New York City's diversity and this class helped me to learn even more about it.

“Sociology of Religion’ with John Torpey was the last class I took. It was strictly out of interest and there was not a specific New York slant to it. We did read a lot of Max Weber which enhanced my sociological knowledge. Because New York has always been a religiously diverse place and my three subjects all come from different religious backgrounds, I would say that this class still made me further appreciate New York City's diversity.

I also took two thesis workshops with Mark McBeth and George Fragopoulos that helped me realize the importance of having supportive relationships when one is working on a big goal which sounds like a very New York lesson to me. Lastly I was lucky enough to complete two internships at SiriusXM Radio while I was a student at the Graduate Center and as a result I was able to get back into the business I had dreamed of returning to for so long.

## CHAPTER 3: EVALUATION

*“Art is never finished, only abandoned”*

*-Often misattributed to Leonardo da Vinci*

Whoever made the above statement or some variation of it is not relevant, after my experience in MALS, I know it definitely applies to academics. Part of me believes that the fact that I am finally turning this project in is all that matters. Therefore, the process of completing it has gone well.

I have created something that has a solid foundation and that I have a right to be proud of. I told the kind of stories about New York City that I wanted to and I feel have contributed to the academic conversation. I really am happy that I have finished and am ready to move on. I was able to convey much of what I wanted to when I first proposed the idea of doing a long form audio piece.

However, it is difficult to read this white paper or listen to my audio piece and not think about what I could have done better. Anyone who has ever undertaken this kind of project can obviously relate. I certainly experienced setbacks and challenges along the way. I know that some of the audio that I recorded is not of the best quality. For me this takes a bit away from the listening experience. Also, when I listen to the transcribed conversations I had with my subjects, I think of many questions that I wish I had asked or phrased differently. Because my interview style is fairly conversational, I was not always able to get my subjects to address some of the points that I hoped they would. My time management for the project definitely could have been much better partially because I became very busy with my job, which I likely would not have gotten without the Grad Center so I think I can forgive myself.

## CHAPTER 4: CONTINUATION OF THE PROJECT

As I have discussed in several parts of this paper, the MALS track in New York Studies has given me the opportunity to pursue my fascination and love for New York City from an academic perspective, while simultaneously getting back into radio. And as far as my other job as a tour guide, so much of the reading and writing that I have done for my classes and the conversations I have had with fellow students and professors are present in my tour guiding. As a direct result of being enrolled at the Graduate Center, I was able to tie my academic goals to my career goals. On and off for two years while I was enrolled in this program, I did a weekly internet radio show where I talked about New York City issues. The show has been on hold while I have been working on the project but I would like to start it again.

I say all this to point out that I can continue this project in many ways. My plan is to share it with some of my radio colleagues and associates. Perhaps some of them can help me tweak it a bit and that I can play it for a wider audience. If I start up my internet radio show again or perhaps a podcast, I can share it also.

I would love to do more stories like this audio piece. There are certainly plenty of them to tell in New York. Some of them could be about businesses, but there are more topics that I could cover. To me, New York City is the most interesting place on earth. Hopefully someday soon, if the right people enjoy my piece, the stories that I told with this project are only three of a much larger number of audio tales that I tell. There are certainly enough of them and I already have many ideas in mind!

## APPENDIX

Below is the script for my audio piece: Length: 36:00

**Prologue: Marcus (Narr 1A) (28 Seconds):** Since it was founded as New Amsterdam by the Dutch West India Company in the 17th century, two constants in New York City have been the presence of capitalism and immigration. For my capstone project, I wanted to explore how these two elements of the country's largest city have converged and helped to shape a unique culture of assimilation. I visited three small businesses on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and found out how they helped their owners and their families become New Yorkers.

**Marcus (Narr Prologue) (51 Seconds):** A quick note. Neighborhoods in New York do not have official boundaries and the names that people have for specific areas change over time. Although some New Yorkers will proclaim that the Lower East Side is strictly below Houston Street, it is not hard to find Alphabet City or East Village residents that have lived in the same rent controlled apartments for decades, who will tell you that they live on the Lower East Side. For the purposes of this project, they are not wrong. The definition of the Lower East Side used will be the same as Columbia professor Kenneth T. Jackson's encyclopedia of New York City which is **(QUOTE)** "bounded to the north by 14th street, to the east by the East River, to the south by Fulton and Franklin streets and to the west by Pearl Street and Broadway." **(UNQUOTE)** Unless, noted otherwise, names like the East Village, the Eastside and the Lower East Side will be used interchangeably.

[[START FADING UP THE AMBIENT SOUND HERE **(Street Noise)** (Traffic noise, the hustle bustle of an urban street, fade it underneath narration]] **(Note:** For copyright concerns, this sound was removed from the archived version of the audio piece)

**Marcus (Narr 2A) (30 Seconds):** In 1964, Ramon Alvarez, who responds to many names, but is called Ray by most found himself in the hands of local authorities in a Miami, Florida jailhouse. He had luckily 20 dollars to bail himself out of custody. He did not however have any form of identification. Mr. Alvarez was told to report to court in a month to explain to an immigration judge what he was doing in the United States. He had a different idea.

**(Ray Project 1) (12 Seconds):**

Ray: As soon as I got out of there I went to Greyhound bus station to New York.

Marcus: And, why New York?

Ray: I thought maybe I can get a job easy. New York is the place I can get a job.

**Marcus (Narr 3) (1 Minute 14 Seconds):** I spoke to Mr. Alvarez late one evening on Avenue A, near the corner of East 7th Street in the Alphabet City section of Manhattan's Lower East Side, where he lives and works. His deli, Ray's Candy Store has been a neighborhood gathering place for snacks and conversation for almost five decades. His story, he arrived in a new place from far away with almost nothing, found work and made a life for himself, epitomizes the mythos of the American dream. It is not an uncommon tale in the United States, but it has particular resonance in this neighborhood. It is unlikely that any urban space in the world personifies the immigrant experience like Manhattan's Lower East Side. For generations, people

have arrived from across the globe and ended up in the neighborhood. Often they were fleeing famine, poverty, persecution or violence. Their journeys could be perilous and their struggles did not end after they settled. The tenements and businesses of the Lower East Side have a history of crowdedness, crime, poverty and so many of the other problems associated with urban life. Despite this environment, countless immigrants have persisted through their difficult circumstances and eventually thrived. For many of these immigrant New Yorkers, true assimilation and success have come when they, like Ray started their own business.

**(Ray Cut 17) (19 Seconds):**

Ray: Ice cream right?

Customer: Yup, yup.

Ray: What kind you want? Tell me. Customer: I'm just gonna do vanilla.

Ray: In a cone?

Customer: Yup.

Ray: With Rainbow?

Customer: Yes please

Ray: Yeah yeah.

Customer: Thank you very much.

Ray: Vanilla, rainbow, yes sir. OK! Coming up! Vanilla-Rainbow!

[[AMBIENT SOUND OF ICE CREAM MACHINE CROSS FADES INTO ITALIAN Tarantella Music - Balla Di Napoli - - Big Score Music - WHICH THEN FADES DOWN BUT STAYS UNDERNEATH THE SOUND]] (**Note:** For copyright concerns, this sound was removed from the archived version of the audio piece)

**(Zerilli Cut 1) (8 SECONDS):** My name is Robert Zerilli, I am a fourth generation owner at here at Veniero's Pasticceria, right here on 11th street between First and Second Avenue.

**Marcus (Narr 4A?) (1 Minute 44 Seconds):** In the 1880s, rural, southern Italians, many of whom were impoverished began to arrive in large numbers in New York City. They settled in several areas, especially East Harlem and the area on the Lower East Side still known today as Little Italy. During this period of immigration, cultural and regional differences were strong in Italy, which had only been unified as a modern nation state in 1871. However, in America, a strong diasporic Italian identity was emerging. Italians became and continue to be a collective force in New York life. Perhaps the most significant mark that they've left on the city is a result of their cultural relationship with food. In her book "Hungering for America," scholar Hasia Diner discusses how (**QUOTE**) "food was limited getting it difficult, but knowledge about it was widespread (and, that) in cities rich people and travelers from abroad ate in restaurants." (**UNQUOTE**). Eating outside the home signaled a type of elitism that the Italians who had come to the United States desired, but that most could have never have afforded in the old country. In America where food was in greater abundance, even poorer Italians could eat reasonably well. This led to Italian-Americans, (**QUOTE**) "taking possession of rich food associated with the well-off (and)...contributed to the emergence of their identity. (Because) the poverty of the vast majority...was not a permanent condition... (many) ...of them became self-employed (and) tried their hand at small-scale enterprises, with food businesses a particularly popular choice."



(UNQUOTE) Food became directly tied to Italian-American identity, a source of pride as well as a source of income. Robert Zerilli is a direct descendant of this wave of Italian immigrants.

[(ITALIAN MUSIC FADES)]

**(Zerilli Cut 2) (17 Seconds):** Veniero's is one of the premier Italian pasticcerias. In fact, some people have said our pastry is even better than Italy itself. We make handmade cookies, cakes, mini pastries, our ice cream, our own gelato and the old school ice cream, tortoni, spumoni, tartufo.

**Marcus (Narr 5) (2 Seconds):** Veniero's provides modern services as well.

**(Zerilli Cut 3) (6 Seconds):** We also do a lot of shipping and our website. It's just a big operation, over 50 people here.

**Marcus (Narr 6) (18 Seconds):** Veniero's did not start out as a 50 person operation with a website. Robert and his family have maintained the business for almost 125 years by making great desserts but also by being adaptive and investing wisely. It all started with the bakery's namesake Antonio Veniero:

**(Zerilli Cut 4) (13 Seconds):** That would be my great uncle, my father's uncle, he was born in 1870, I think he came to America in 1885 and he worked in a candy factory downtown. After 3 years they made him manager and he must have saved up enough money.

**Marcus (Narr 7) (6 Seconds):** It was time for Antonio to make an investment, so he purchased the building where Veniero's still stands today.

**(Zerilli Cut 5) (10 Seconds):** We don't know, but I would guess the building was in the \$5,000 range, you know, but he, that was a lot of money back then, when everything was nickel and dimes and you know everything was cheaper. He opened shop here in 1894.

**Marcus (Narr 8) (2 Seconds):** Antonio Veniero was open for business.

**(Zerilli Cut 6) (17 Seconds):** It started out like a social club and he was making homemade candies, cause remember the candy factory. But then someone said, "Well, we want something to go with the candies," so he started to roast his own espresso in the backyard of this building. You know espresso, he was probably one of the first to introduce espresso to New York. Now there's a billion Starbucks every corner.

**Marcus (Narr 9A) (42 Seconds):** The fact that the southern Italian patrons in Veniero's were enjoying espresso is not insignificant. In his book *Food Culture in Italy*, Fabio Parasecoli points out that in Italy as early as (QUOTE) "the seventeenth century, new drinks like...coffee became fashionable with the nobles and the developing bourgeoisie...Coffeehouses became the meeting place" (UNQUOTE) for those aspiring to be among them or in the process of joining them. Veniero's was becoming a popular neighborhood establishment, where recent immigrants and

their families could publicly showcase their aspirations or their newly earned status and Antonio Veniero was about to offer them more.

**(Zerilli Cut 7) (10 Seconds):** He brought over master bakers from Italy, I don't know what year, I would say around the turn of the century and those guys started to put us on the map, meaning they started really making baked pastries and cakes and all that.

**Marcus (Narr 10) (42 Seconds):** Veniero's coffeehouse was transformed into Veniero's Pasticceria. Nine years after arriving in New York, Antonio Veniero had gone from lowly candy factory worker to thriving business owner. Veniero's was a place where people from the immigrant community that he was a part of could get a little taste of home and experience pride while eating their desserts in public, something most of them never could have afforded to do in Italy. In her book *Urban Appetites: Food and Culture in Nineteenth-Century New York*, New York City food historian Cindy Lobel discussed how ethnic food businesses like Veniero's catered [QUOTE] "to the emotional, social and economic needs of immigrant New Yorkers." [UNQUOTE] This is crucial characteristic of the assimilation process in New York. Members of immigrant communities can exist in spaces where their heritage is celebrated in their own new, little section of the world. Veniero's didn't just help Antonio, in more ways than one, it helped his whole community.

**(Zerilli Cut 19) (8 Seconds):** Veniero was a big part of changing this neighborhood. I mean he was the one who brought electricity into the neighborhood, back in the day, Antonio, the founder. They were very powerful in this neighborhood.

**Marcus: (Narr 11) (18 Seconds):** Like many Italian immigrant men in this era, Antonio had come to New York without a family. On one of his return trips home, he came back to the US with a wife and children. His family moved into the building and eventually he and his wife had seven children. As he aged, he stayed dedicated to his business.

**(Zerilli Cut 8) (18 Seconds):** He worked until he passed away in 1931 and he had four girls, three boys and the boys ran the business and there was Michael, Freddy and Peter and they lived in the building here.

**Marcus (Narr 12A) (21 Seconds):** The Veniero boys inherited the building and the business from their father and had a workforce that included members of their extended family. It also gave them a source of steady income and allowed them to pursue other American dreams. Freddy apparently dated Ginger Rogers and Peter spent time in California attempting a career in showbiz. But there was always someone around to mind the fort.

**(Zerilli Cut 10) (15 Seconds):** Mike Veniero, he was the main guy, he's the one who stayed right through and ran this business, like I mean tough, and really made all these competitions. We won all these awards from Rome, Bologna and New York World's fair and that was in the twenties and thirties.

**Marcus (Narr 14A) (6 Seconds):** Michael built on his father's success at the pastry shop. Things were going so well, he decided to make his own investments.

**(Zerilli Cut 11) (9 Seconds)** (About Michael Veniero): He bought hotels in Miami Beach, Florida like where South Beach is and all that and now, you know it's a hot area, but he was one of the first to get down to Miami Beach, I mean, but he had a lot of money.

**Marcus (Narr 15A) (20 Seconds)**: The business had done so much for the family and it turned out, it was about to do more. Peter Veniero, perhaps s back from his Hollywood adventures was working at the bakery when one of their cousin's, Frank Zerilli, current owner Robert's father, returned from service in World War II. Frank had reached a time in his life when he had some decisions to make.

**(Zerilli Cut 13) (15 Seconds)**: So when he got out of the war, my grandfather Zerilli, I think it was Andrea Zerilli, he told him, "Look you have a choice, "What do you want to do? You want to go back to Italy with me? Do you want to make a career in the army? Or do you want to work for your uncle Pete I mean, Cousin Peter?" So he worked for Pete, he worked for the bakery, they made him a manager.

**Marcus (Narr 16) (12 Seconds)**: As the years went by, the neighborhood and the business environment changed and the Veniero's decided it was time to get out of the business that their father started decades earlier. Their longtime manager and Cousin Frank saw an opportunity.

**(Zerilli Cut 14) (12 Seconds)**: He bought the business off of Mike. It was literally going bankrupt. This is the sixties, people were moving out of here, it was a dangerous area and it was tough, Mike got out of the business and they bought the building and the business for like under a hundred grand, I mean it was a steal.

**Marcus (Narr 17A) (13 Seconds)**: Shortly after purchasing the business and the birth of his son, Frank Zerilli, like so many second generation Americans during the era of white flight decided it was time to move to the suburbs, where things weren't always easy for Robert.

**(Zerilli Cut 34) (13 Seconds)**: I grew up in New Jersey, in Haworth, little town. It was basically, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant. I'm like a Sicilian. I'm very dark, you know. I was prejudiced upon. I know what it was like, I got prejudice because everybody was like, you know, that's how they were back then.

**Marcus (Narr 18) (18 Seconds)**: This is perhaps what led to Robert feeling somewhat disconnected from his family's immigrant heritage, which in some ways might be the ultimate sign of assimilation. However, in the early 1980s, Robert became involved in the business and he was regularly back in the neighborhood that so much of his family had grown up in.

**(Zerilli Cut 15) (13 Seconds)**: So I was working on weekends to make money, the old man was giving me good money. I went to Pace for one year, dropped out of there, the one downtown. And then my father said, "Alright, well then this is gonna be your university, right here, like, you gotta work." And that's what I did, I just stayed.

**Marcus (Narr 19) (20 Seconds):** At his new university, Robert didn't just learn about pastry and espresso. As the East Village and other parts of the Lower East Side became a more desirable location in the mid-90s, with a sharp decrease in crime, he learned about another big problem facing small businesses in New York today and he realized how lucky his family to own the building where they make their living.

**(Zerilli Cut 35) (14 Seconds):** That's why we're still here. If it wasn't for owning the building, we'd be gone. I don't want to say it's not middle class friendly or whatever, but it's getting hard and uh, like I say, if we didn't own the building, we'd be out of here, it's over because there are a lot of buildings that they'll just jack up the rent and you're done.

**Marcus (Narr 21) (16 Seconds):** This is one of the huge issues facing small business owners today in New York City and one of the reasons that it might be harder for recent and future newcomers to start their own businesses. This fact isn't lost on Robert and it is part of the reason he employs so many immigrants today.

**(Zerilli Cut 30) (18 Seconds):** The way we see it, I see Veniero came here as an immigrant and he had his children and now we're working the business and you know we've been employing a lot of people from all over the world, mostly, but a lot of Latin Americans and now we're giving them a chance cause their kids are already going to college, they're getting a whole life because of Veniero's and it's amazing. It's just another generation, its mind blowing.

**Marcus (Narr 22) (3 Seconds):** It's been a long story for Robert and his extended family.

**(Zerilli Cut 32) (13 Seconds):** 125 years. Not everyone can say, the same, in the family, a pastry shop nonetheless and 125 years, that's a huge success story and I hope it goes another 125.

**Marcus (Narr 23) (7 Seconds):** Like the city where it is located, Veniero's Pasticceria is still a place that makes the dreams of immigrants come true.

**(Zerilli Cut 31) (14 Seconds):** You know it is a New York success story, I mean you always hear those New York success stories. I mean it could be anywhere in the country but I think New York, because of the concentration of business, it, it's, they say, like the song, Frank Sinatra, who actually was a customer of ours, said, you know, "If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere."

[[[SFX: Frank Sinatra's *Theme from New York, New York* starts playing halfway through the final Zerilli Cut..]]] **(Note:** For copyright concerns, this sound was removed from the archived version of the audio piece)

**Marcus (Narr 24A) (5 Seconds):** The Venieros and their cousins the Zerillis have made it, they've become New Yorkers, but they are not the only ones.

[[[SFX: Fade up New York, New York music and then fade it down for transition.]]]

**Marcus (Narr 25) (2 minutes 9 Seconds):** While economic opportunity has surely motivated many to come to New York City, others have sought refuge. In 1654, 23 Jews arrived from Pernambuco, known today as Recife, Brazil. They left when the city was retaken from the Dutch by the Catholic Portuguese, rather than face the Inquisition. Upon arrival in what was then still New Amsterdam, they were not welcomed with open arms. According to Arthur Hertzberg’s book, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter*, Peter Stuyvesant, the colony’s director wrote the authorities in Amsterdam and invoked (QUOTE) “the usual formulas of religious invective—he called the Jews “repugnant,” “deceitful,” and enemies and blasphemers of Christ” (UNQUOTE). But Stuyvesant was reminded that he (QUOTE) “was an employee of the Dutch West India Company, and the purpose of this firm was not to foster Christianity... it existed to make money for its stockholders.” (UNQUOTE) The Jews were granted permission to stay, practice their religion and participate in the economy. Jews and other religious minorities have seen New York as a refuge ever since. German Jewish immigrants started to come New York in significant numbers in the 1840s. Then a massive movement of Jews escaping the pogroms in Eastern Europe came from the 1880s to the 1920s. Many lived on the Lower East Side and worked in the clothing business, known in Yiddish as the “schmatta” trade. Scholar Gerald Sorin, in his book *The Jewish People in America: A Time for Building* explains that (QUOTE) “By 1897 approximately 60 percent of the New York Jewish labor force was employed in the apparel field, and 75 percent of the workers in the industry were Jewish.” (UNQUOTE) After World War Two, an additional wave of Jewish migrants came to New York, many of whom had experienced the trauma of the Nazi Holocaust. Lower East Side menswear shop owner Sammy Gluck has told the story of one of those survivors many times.

**(Sammy Project Cut1) (16 Seconds):** My Father Ignat Gluck, born in 1928, family of five, two sisters and three brothers, they all went kaput. When he came back home to Romania after eight months being in Buchenwald, in the war and the family is all gone.

**Marcus (Narr 26) (8 Seconds):** When on Orchard Street, one can often find Sammy, standing outside his shop, charming strangers and perhaps finding his newest customer.

**(Sammy Project Cut 15) (15 Seconds):** We sell men’s clothing, starting from coats, to jackets, pants, shirts, ties, suits, everything a man could wear, cufflinks, belts and we sell high class for a better price. We do tailoring in the premises.

**Marcus (Narr 27) (2 Seconds):** The store has been around for decades.

**(Sammy Project Cut 14) (11 Second):** This store is a history of 70 years at the same place, at the same location, 70 years at 62 Orchard Street, G and G Global International.

**Marcus (Narr 28) (20 Seconds):** The fact that this shop exists at all is a testament to how New York City has helped those fleeing the worst of circumstances. After the horrors of Buchenwald, Ignat Gluck returned home to the reality that his family had been wiped out. He did not have time for reflection. Things were changing fast in Eastern Europe.

**(Sammy Project Cut 3) (2 Seconds):** When you stay in Romania, finished, you cannot come out because communists took over.

**Marcus (Narr 29) (18 Seconds):** Ignat correctly assumed that life as an observant Jew would not be easy in Romania moving forward. Sammy does not know all the details of his Father's escape but knows that he fled to France and ended up in a Jewish garment district. He thought of his now gone parents and inquired at a clothing factory.

**(Sammy Cut 2) (13 Seconds):** I always see my parents working, I want to work, don't pay me nothing. And he went into a company. What you could do? Make ties, how you cut the ties, stuff like that. And he start to work, came to the United States, English he couldn't speak a good head he had.

**Marcus (Narr 30) (9 Seconds):** Ignat wanted to use the skills that he had learned in France and the good head that he had and he felt sure about the chance to do so in his new country.

**(Sammy Project Cut 26) (13 Seconds):** He was a man that want to work. My father said, "United States, that time, if you wanted to work, you could make it." Anyway, he start to work and he go to a tie company. In one hour he made 20 ties, he's so good.

**Marcus (Narr 31) (28 Seconds):** Ignat made ties on the Lower East Side for a while. He also discovered that one of his female cousin's had survived the war. It was not uncommon for cousins in their orthodox Jewish communities to marry and perhaps their shared trauma of the Holocaust made them a better match. They married and lived in Williamsburg, Brooklyn where a growing community of survivors also lived. According to scholar Leonard Dinnerstien, The couple eventually had six children all together. As Ignat's family, he became more ambitious.

**(Sammy Project Cut 25) (20 Seconds):** He went up to the garment district, to 36<sup>th</sup> street, 38<sup>th</sup> street to take the ties and he'd go customers to customer, like you do today. And I remember he opened a little store, like a small window, he used to sell and work and then he opened a bigger store and then he opened another store and then he went in partnership with somebody.

**Marcus (Narr 33) (1 Minute):** Ignat Gluck's success might be surprising to some considering what he had experienced in Europe. But in fact, it is not uncommon as one might think. In his book *Against All Odds: Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives They Made in America*. William Helmreich writes that for this population, [QUOTE] "During the long years of the war, work became synonymous with survival, especially in the camps". [UNQUOTE] After being forced into slavery and witnessing the deaths of thousands, [QUOTE] "work was a privilege as much as it was a necessity and this often determined what they chose to do as well as how they did it." [UNQUOTE] Because of its economic opportunities, New York City was a place that so many, including Ignat Gluck were able to move on from such an ugly chapter in human history. In his new life, Ignat was ready to take an even bigger step forward. Orchard Street, where his son Sammy still works today had long been a place for discount retailers in the clothing business.

**(Sammy Project Cut 21) (20 Seconds):** My father moved down this area, opened the store here because this area used to be discounted on Sundays and Saturdays because all the department stores used to be closed, even Macy's used to be closed Sundays. There was no business and this area used to be a shopping area and then they opened a little store. Business was booming.

**Marcus (Narr 32) (4 Second):** He also made a financial decision that has likely keeps his son in business today.

**(Sammy Project Cut 20) (11 Seconds):** He bought the building because and I remember, mother said, “Why you need a headache of a building, why you need such a?” My father said, “I pay rent, let me buy the building.” He didn’t think about the real estate.

**Marcus (Narr 34) (20 Seconds):** After the war, Sammy’s parents were seeking refuge anywhere and were able to find it in New York City, but they were able to find something more, dignity. Like so many before him and after him, Ignat found economic opportunities in a city that helped give his life meaning. Sammy has been able to carry on his legacy of his parent’s lives with his own family.

**(Sammy Project Cut 11) (9 Seconds):** Me, I have 36 grandchildren and nine kids. Six boys and three daughters. Married 41 years. My wife is always right, even when she’s wrong.

**Marcus (Narr 35) (10 Seconds):** And on the Lower East Side, he is also able to carry out his family’s business legacy which he does in a very New York way that honors Orchard Street’s old fashioned shopping practices.

**(Sammy Project Cut 28) (14 Seconds):** Traffic is not like many years ago. That’s why I go out, get the customer, talk to them, make them friendly and have a connection with the customer, ah come in, we’ll help you.

**Marcus (Narr 37) (11 Seconds):** In the age of online shopping, watching Sammy chat to strangers on the Orchard Street is a treat no one should miss but to Sammy, the biggest treat of all is the city that he gets to do it in.

**(Sammy Project Cut 29) (22 Seconds):** Everybody has a place here. Whoever wanted to work, New York was the common word. You want a job? New York. If I go to another city, I don’t live. This is living life. New York, you wake up in the morning, you have what to live, you go home, you go to sleep, next day, tomorrow, another day, cuz it’s a passion of living here. People love it here. That’s why I like New York.

[[[SFX: Fade up New York Klezmer Orchestra Performs: "A Nakht In Gan Eydn". music and then fade it down for transition.]]] (**Note:** For copyright concerns, this sound was removed from the archived version of the audio piece)

**Marcus (Narr 36B) (11 Seconds):** The Glucks, Venieros and Zerillis became New Yorkers through rather typical means for their ethnic groups but in New York, it isn’t hard to find people with assimilation stories that are one of a kind.

[[[UP SOUND OF AMBIENT TO ESTABLISH THE SCENE OF THE RAY’S CANDY STORE]]]

**(Ray Cut 19) (37 Seconds)**

Ray: Did you order a beignet?

Customers: “Yes” “Wow look at that” “And I think we’ve got some fried Oreos coming

Ray: That’s five dollars.

Customer: And I think we’ve got some fried Oreos coming

Ray: Yeah. Oreos is five dollars also, five dollars. Here is change

Customer: Thank you very much.

Ray: Oh yes sir. (Cha Ching of register) Okay, lots of dough. You know in my country I used to make 75 cents a week. I used to make elastic for the underwear.

**Marcus (Narr 38) (30 Seconds):** That is Ray Alvarez, who we heard from at the beginning of this piece, chatting to two customers surrounded by the buzz of ice cream machines and freezers. Ray often chats about his life before he came to the United States. According to Pew Research over 500,000 immigrant New Yorkers are undocumented. For many years, Ray was one of them. As a child he dreamed of coming to America and considering he has lived in the most urban environment in the country for over half a century, it is funny when you hear what made him want to come.

**(Ray Cut 2) (13 Seconds):** I used to see in the movies, the western horses and wild-west and lots of cows and running and I said “man, I like those cows!”

**Marcus (Narr 39A) (16 Seconds):** Because most people know him as Ray Alvarez, one might expect that he is originally from Latin America but as was said earlier, Ray responds to many names, including his given name Asghar Ghahraman. He grew up poor in Northern Iran and wanted more than anything to come to the United States.

**(Ray Cut 3) (19 Seconds):** I couldn’t buy a ticket, I had no money. So I joined Navy. We went different countries, it was warship you know? India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Libya. We end up in Norfolk, Virginia and I say “that’s it, this is my country!”

**Marcus (Narr 41) (10 Seconds):** But being on an Iranian naval vessel a mile from the shore and being in what he already saw as his newly adopted home are not the same thing. Ray took a big chance.

**(Ray Cut 4) (18 Seconds):** In the middle of the night, everybody was sleeping and I jumped the water and I swim like 15 minutes, then I was in the shore before you know it. I went to train station and I got a ticket, I didn’t care where it goes. They were going to Miami so I end up in Miami.

**Marcus (Narr 42) (6 Seconds):** He slept under a bridge in Miami for a few days and found work at a coffee company and eventually found a place to live.

**(Ray Cut 7) (13 Seconds):** They used to give us every two weeks pay, every week was 53 dollars, after tax, oh I was paying tax, they took out of my pay, 47 dollars take home.



**Marcus (Narr 43) (16 Seconds):** Paying taxes is actually quite common among undocumented immigrants in the United States. These workers are contributing to society in many ways, often without receiving benefits in return. Ray was meeting lots of people at this time but was deliberately ambiguous about where he was from.

**(Ray Cut 8) (14 Seconds):** I was afraid to tell them who I am. So one day, I told a guy “You are lucky, you are American.” He says “You want to be American, he gives me his driver’s license, here, now you are American.” Ha ha, thanks a lot!

**Marcus (Narr 44) (1 Seconds):** That man’s name?

**(Ray Cut 9) (4 Seconds):** Ramon Alvarez, so he made me American.

**Marcus (Narr 52) (7 Seconds):** Ray of course wasn’t really American and this could present a problem. It did one day at the beach when he and his friends ran into some trouble.

**(Ray cut 12) (18 seconds):** We were walking on the stree , the guy came, tie and jacket and says “FBI!” What! And I didn’t know that FBI means police. So everybody against the wall. “ID!” Everybody gives ID and I said I don’t have ID.

**Marcus (Narr 53) (Seconds):** This not the kind of situation he wanted to find himself in, but it got worse.

**(Ray cut 13) (11 seconds):** So I went to police station, finger print and all the photos, pictures, they put me and lock me in the slammer so I say “man look at this.”

**Marcus (Narr 54) (10 Seconds):** Ray was lucky because he was able to bail himself out. He immediately went to the Greyhound station and headed straight for New York City with no plan and no place to stay.

**(Ray cut 15) (14 seconds)** I went YMCA, I said I have no money and no place to stay and need your help. They say one dollar private room and the dormitory 25 cents. So I stayed there six months.

**Marcus (Narr 47) (7 Seconds):** Ray worked odd jobs and looked for something more permanent. His English was improving after six months but so was something else.

**(Ray Cut 20) (5 Seconds):** Most places interview me in Spanish language. I had to learn fast.

**Marcus (Narr 48) (10 Seconds):** During one of those interviews, he was offered a job washing pots at a restaurant near Rockefeller Center for a dollar twenty five-an-hour. Now he needed a place to live.

**(Ray cut 16) (15 Seconds):** So I walked 14<sup>th</sup> street all the way to East River then I made a right turn, it was Avenue B, then I make another turn, I see the sign that says “Apartment for Rent.” Its 32 dollars a month.

**Marcus (Narr 49) (13 Seconds):** Ray moved right into the middle of a neighborhood with generations of immigrant heritage which was becoming predominantly Puerto Rican at the time. He decided the best way to not arouse suspicion among his neighbors was to be a little dishonest.

**(Ray Cut 21) (27 Seconds):** I say, I am Spanish I am Puerto Rican, they took care of me, they protect me. You know?

**Marcus (Narr 50) (8 Seconds):** Ray was saving well and although he had a job, a place to live and a neighbors that were protective of him. He constantly lived in fear:

**(Ray Cut 23) (15 Seconds):** I had always 3,000 dollars in my pocket, cash for an immigration officer, whoever say that “Hey Man!–this” and I would give him everything and say, “Let me go please.”

**Marcus (Narr 55) (3 Seconds):** These kinds of fears are common among undocumented immigrants.

**(Ray Cut 53) (16 Seconds):** I was always running and hiding, you know? When I see the policeman this side of the street, I go other side of the street. I was always scared, every morning I pray to god, “Oh I hope today is alright.” It was scary.

**Marcus (Narr 56) (10 Seconds):** Ray dreamed of security, citizenship and becoming his own boss. He kept saving his cash and finally when he was ready, he went to have a conversation with someone he knew in the neighborhood.

**(Ray Cut 52) (30 Seconds):** I had 33,000 dollars, you know I’m looking for a restaurant. The guy says “I have an Italian Restaurant, you don’t need it, every day we have new problems,” says “the candy store is for sale, grab that candy store”

**Marcus (Narr 57) ( Seconds):** He found the candy store’s owner who was of Ukrainian heritage and enquired about the business. The man was not exactly tactful when Ray enquired about the store.

**(Ray Cut 28) (23 Seconds):** He says “What kind of money you got?” I say, “Look at my bank book, 33 thousand dollars.” He says “You know I am racist? I sell it to Ukrainians 5 thousand dollars, for Polacks 10 thousand dollars, for you 33 thousand dollars. You want it or not?” I say, “Yeah I want it. Ha, ha, ha.”

**Marcus (Narr 58) (20 Seconds):** Ray took over the Candy Store 1974. To this day, he still makes all kinds of treats for his customers. Egg creams, French fries, milkshakes and his famous fried Oreos among others. There are people that want snacks at all hours of the night in this neighborhood. Ray very quickly realized he was going to have unusual hours.

**(Ray Cut 54) (6 Seconds):** Night, I do more business than daytime and also I protect not to get robbed. I haven't sleep in my apartment, no night, never, ha, ha, ha. I am there 43 years. In the daytime I sleep.

**Marcus (Narr 59) (16 Seconds):** In the 70s, this part of the Lower East Side was notoriously dangerous. Ray saw it all. Drugs, stabbings, shootings but he made sure that the candy store was a safe place for everyone. He didn't judge people although but he did try to help the many addicts in the area.

**(Ray Cut 60) (13 Seconds):** The alcohol or drugs, I always try to give them, like a fatherly advice, "Listen, your life is more important than cocaine or herion."

**Marcus (Narr 60) (12 Seconds):** Ray's nonjudgmental and fun loving ways clearly endeared him to his neighbors. But he still worried about his immigration status. During the Reagan administration, there was a sign that this might change.

**(Ray Cut 29) (19 Seconds):** Ronald Reagan say that if you are five years in America, you are legal. That was 1985-86. So, uh, I had to go all the places I worked, get the paper that I worked for you. I am here more than five years so I had to prove that.

**Marcus (Narr 61) (17 Seconds):** Ray went to register and received a temporary green card, but due to a clerical error, he never received his permanent residency. He continued to live in limbo. Even with a successful business, he could never feel truly secure but being close with your customers has many advantages.

**(Ray Cut 55) (10 Seconds):** There was a lawyer who used to come here, he said, "I know a woman, she can help you, she teaches the law in Cardozo law school."

**Marcus (Narr 62) (5 Seconds):** Ray found out that despite being undocumented, there were quite a few documents about him.

**(Ray Cut 35) (19 Seconds):** She called immigration that um, any document concerning this guy, I want it in my office my office, so they send a disc and she put it in the computer, she got 400 pages document, my navy, where I born and this and that. I didn't know that, they had, they know all about me.

**Marcus (Narr 63) (2 Seconds):** It looked like Ray's luck was changing.

**(Ray Cut 56) (6 Seconds):** She got me permanent residency then she says "How about citizenship?" I say, "Yeah I love it."

**Marcus (Narr 64) (9 Seconds):** In 2011, after a bit more legal wrangling, Ray was sent to the Civic Center neighborhood of Manhattan to become a United States citizen.

**(Ray Cut 57) (21 Seconds):** Downtown, we were 700 of us, different color, tall, short, fat, Spanish, black, Russian. They called everybody by their country name, says Iran! I went “That’s me?” Oh man, I cried, I say, “Man I can’t believe I am American.”

**Marcus (Narr 65) (17 Seconds):** Ray’s dream had come now true and something else had changed. After so many years living and working in a bad neighborhood, in the early 2000s the Alphabet City area turned around. But unlike the Venieros, the Zerillis and the Glucks, Ray has never owned the building where he work. This brought a new set of problems.

**(Ray Cut 44) (12 Seconds):** My rent is now, used to be a hundred and twenty five dollars, now, five thousand two hundred dollars. It’s very hard to make it.

**Marcus (Narr 66) (5 Seconds):** Eventually he experienced an all too common issue for entrepreneurs in today’s New York City.

**(Ray Cut 61) (17 Seconds):** It was a bad winter, no business so at the beginning of the month, I called my landlord, I say, “I don’t have money to pay this month, how about next month?” He say “No, you can’t do that, this is a business!” Next day I got an eviction notice.

**Marcus (Narr 67) (7 Seconds):** After decades in the same location. People were devastated that Ray might close. It was not a beautiful day in the neighborhood but Ray had always admired one of America’s greatest icons.

**(Ray Cut 46) (13 Seconds):** You know what I like to be? I like to be Mr. Rogers’s Neighborhood. You know that guy? Freddy Rogers, I want to be him. He was a real gentleman. I used to watch his show.

**Marcus (Narr 68) (7 Seconds):** It turned out that many of Ray’s friends and customers cared for him even more than he knew. A fundraising effort began and the results were amazing.

**(Ray Cut 62) (7 Seconds):** They had a concert and all the money come to me and they raised five thousand dollars.

**Marcus (Narr 69) (19 Seconds):** Five thousand dollars, raised for a small business owner who had risked his life to come to the United States decades earlier and pursued and succeeded in his dream of becoming his own boss. Some call him Asghar, many call him Ray, but there is one thing that everyone can call him...a New Yorker.

**(Ray Cut 58) (10 Seconds):** Oh, New York, they call it melting pot. So people come here, they work their way up, New York is special, especially this part.

**Marcus (Narr 70) (21 Seconds):** Robert Zerilli and Sammy Gluck would probably agree that the neighborhood where their businesses are is special, But the truth is, these stories don’t just happen on the Lower East Side. There are tales like them in every neighborhood in New York City. Things change but small business have always, and will continue to help people from all over the world become New Yorkers.

END

## Bibliography

- Boswell, James. *Life of Samuel Johnson*. R.W. Johnson (ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976. 1791.
- Burrows, Edwin G., & Wallace, Mike. *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Dashefsky, Arnold, Sergio DellaPergola & Ira Sheskin. *World Jewish Population, 2017*. New York: Berman Jewish DataBank, 2018.
- Diner, Hasia R. *Hungering for America: Italian Jewish Food Ways in the Age of Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001
- Dinnerstein, Leonard. *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Helmreich, William B. *Against All Odds: Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives They Made in America*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992.
- Hertzberg, Arthur. *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989.
- Jackson, Kenneth T. *The Encyclopedia of New City*. New York: Yale University Press, 1991.
- Maffi, Mario. *Gateway to the Promised Land: Ethnic Cultures on New York's Lower East Side*. New York: New York University Press, 1995.
- Lobel, Cindy. *Urban Appetites: Food and Culture in Nineteenth-Century New York*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014.
- López, Ian Haney. *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. New York University Press, 2006.
- Nelli, Humbert S. *From Immigrants to Ethnics: The Italian Americans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983
- Parasecoli, Fabio. *Food Culture in Italy*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004.
- Ratcliffe, Susan (Ed). *Oxford Essential Quotations: First Edition*. Oxford University Press, 2014. [www.oxfordreference.com](http://www.oxfordreference.com).
- Ray, Krishnendu. *The Ethnic Restaurateur*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

Passel Jeffrey S. and Cohn, D'Vera. *20 metro areas are home to six-in-ten unauthorized immigrants in U.S.* Pew Research Center, 9 February, 2017.  
[www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/09/us-metro-areas-unauthorized-immigrants/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/09/us-metro-areas-unauthorized-immigrants/)

Shorto, Russell. *The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America.* New York: Doubleday, 2004.

Sorin, Gerald. *The Jewish People in America: A Time for Building, The Third Migration: 1880-1920.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

Wallace, Mike. *Greater Gotham: A History of New York City from 1898 to 1919.* New York: Oxford University Press. 2017.

Woodard, Colin. *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America.* New York. Penguin Group, 2011.