This special issue of the *Italian American Review* on Italian-American foodways participates in work that has been a cornerstone of food studies scholarship, namely examining the role of food and foodways in shaping individual and group identities. In doing so, it joins the work of others who have engaged these questions through the specific lens of Italian and Italian-American foodways and identities. At the same time, the three articles published here both build upon and extend much of this foundational scholarship. Each article does so by looking at recent trends in food and food-related media from a historical and critical perspective. Both individually and collectively, they bring together scholarship in food studies and Italian American studies to offer provocative arguments regarding the role of foodways in shaping the real and imagined identities of Italian Americans and non-Italian Americans across the U.S. cultural landscape.

These essays examine foodways as a foundational set of practices through which Italian-American experiences and values are made manifest in American culture. The conceptual framework shared by these three articles is their investigation of “ethnic culinary capital,” a phrase that extends Naccarato and LeBesco’s (2012) concept of “culinary capital,” which they utilize “to understand how and why certain foods and food-related practices connote, and, by extension, confer status and power on those who know about and enjoy them” (3). The authors here apply this concept toward an understanding of the specific ways in which ethnic foodways serve to create and sustain ethnic identities. For individuals and communities seeking to maintain an ethnic Italian identification, food practices provide an important (perhaps essential) means of doing so. Within such communities, knowing, valuing, and replicating what one understands to be the “traditional” and “authentic” foodways (real or imagined) of one’s ancestors confer status by affirming one’s ethnic credentials. These credentials, our authors additionally assert, may be available to Italian Americans and non-Italian Americans alike, thereby revealing the ideological work performed by ethnicity in a multiethnic American culture. Annette Cozzi offers in her essay a critical analysis of her own engagement with her Italian-American heritage and its concomitant foodways, while Suzanne Cope represents a range of artisans who make claims to authenticity by means of participating in those foodways. For all of these Italian-American subjects,
the foodways that they associate with their heritage correlate powerfully
to their gender, class, and generational positions. At the same time, Cope’s
consideration of non-Italian-American artisans who make similar claims
to heritage-based authenticity demonstrates the extent to which ethnic
culinary capital becomes a commodity divorced from any actual family
lineage. These artisans, however, represent only the most recent iteration
of such commodification, as Zachary Nowak’s longer historical analysis of
the reception of Italianate food in the United States makes clear. In sum, all
three articles offer insight into the subtle and sometimes conflicting ways
in which food and foodways serve to confer status both within and outside
of Italian-American communities.

In “Now ‘That’s Italian’: Food, Culture, and the Gendering of Italian-
American Identity,” Annette Cozzi uses her personal story of growing up as
a second-generation Italian-American girl to investigate how both her lived
experiences and television advertising served to frame and influence her
ethnic and gendered identity. Remembering herself as a young girl trapped
in her grandmother’s kitchen and seeing a commercial for Prince Spaghetti
in which Anthony runs free through the streets of Boston, Cozzi marks the
beginning of a process that led her to internalize and eventually challenge
prevailing ideologies of gender and ethnicity. At the heart of Cozzi’s inves-
tigation is a personal and political struggle to resist the received gender
roles and stereotypes of Italian Americans in general, and Italian-American
women in particular, that were embedded in this and other media represen-
tations. At the same time, she reflects on what she gained and lost in doing
so, teasing out the complicated relationships among gender, ethnicity, and
identity. Having rejected most markers of her Italianness in favor of a more
privileged “American” and a more enlightened feminist identity, Cozzi
thinks through her desire to reclaim her ethnic identity as she embraces food
practices that she once considered unacceptable because they replicated
a problematic gender hierarchy. Ultimately, Cozzi offers a sophisticated
analysis that rejects not only traditional gender roles assigned to Italian-
American women (and their stereotypical representations in the media)
but also the romanticized nostalgia of much contemporary food writing
that would seek to reinvigorate these roles in the service of an imagined
postfeminist female identity.

Like Cozzi’s article, Zachary Nowak’s “Café au Lait to Latte: Charting
the Acquisition of Culinary Capital by Italian Food in America” uses media
references to Italian foods and foodways as the jumping-off point for his
analysis of shifting attitudes toward Italians and Italian Americans in
the United States. Offering a content analysis of representative issues of
Bon Appétit magazine, Nowak constructs a timeline that traces the rise of
Italianate foods and foodways across the cultural landscape. In doing so, he pays particular attention to the class dynamics of this transition, noting that Italianate cuisine garnered cultural cachet for upper-class diners while simultaneously earning popularity with middle-class Americans and serving as an affordable staple for the working class. Nowak reads these shifts within the longer history of Italian immigration and the role these foodways have played in characterizing (and often stereotyping) these immigrant communities. Nowak’s analysis of the shifting status of Italianate foods and foodways helps us understand not only when they “took off” in America but also how the discursive practices deployed within the food media established their rising “culinary capital.”

Understanding the status of Italian-American foodways in relation to contemporary food trends also informs Suzanne Cope’s “Artigiani: The Italian Roots of the Artisanal Food Movement in the United States.” With increasing consumer demand for “artisanal” foods, this contemporary culinary trend has simultaneously embraced a variety of traditionally ethnic Italian foods and foodways while romanticizing, downplaying, or outright erasing their ethnic roots, Cope argues. Positing that these foods and foodways have paved the way for the current artisanal boom, Cope brings together historical documentation and personally conducted interviews to understand this influence and to consider what is at stake when its ethnic roots are (and are not) acknowledged by contemporary food artisans. If Italian and Italian-American foodways have been absorbed across the U.S. culinary landscape, then to what extent does such assimilation erase the influence on the artisanal-food movement of the values that inform these food practices? Does the successful integration of traditionally Italian and Italian-American food practices, along with the values that inform them, into the artisanal-food movement mark the height of their achievement, the loss of their ethnic roots, or both? As Cope interviews contemporary food purveyors who have both real and adopted roots within Italian-American families and communities, she echoes Annette Cozzi’s warning about romanticizing the past under the guise of honoring it.

Read collectively, the three articles that compose this special issue of the Italian American Review build upon foundational scholarship in both food studies and Italian American studies while extending this work in new and exciting directions. From television commercials to magazine advertisements, representations of Italianate foodways have played a crucial role in shaping or reflecting individual and group identities for Italian Americans and non-Italian Americans alike. At the same time, while ethnic Italian foods and food practices have shaped the U.S. culinary landscape for generations, these articles bring into focus how the values
that inform these practices continue to influence the most recent culinary trends. Viewing these contemporary practices in the context of the lengthy history of Italianate food in the United States discloses the extent to which historical experiences and material practices are transformed as they are represented within consumer culture and historical memory. In short, this special issue of the *Italian American Review* weaves together a consideration of the evolution of Italian-American foodways with an assessment of the present state of those food-based practices in order to establish an important bridge between past, present, and future.

**Works Cited**