
Abstract:

For Italy, unprecedented mass migration in the late nineteenth century overshadowed the European Scramble for Africa. To secure Italy’s place in the new imperial order, Francesco Crispi proposed to harness emigration for colonial expansion, by settling Italy’s East African colonies with the surplus Italian population. Defeat at Adwa in 1896 shattered Crispi’s project, and turned attention to colonial possibilities elsewhere. Luigi Einaudi and other Liberals trumpeted the value of Italian collectivities or colonie across the Atlantic, where Italy exerted only indirect influence. In theory, these ‘spontaneous colonies’ would boost the Italian economy at little expense. Italian colonialist societies turned from Africa to the Americas, working to make Italian migration more prestigious, successful and profitable. After 1908, however, Enrico Corradini and the Italian Nationalists mocked these initiatives, and called upon the Italian state to return to traditional imperialism in Africa.