



# The Transformation of American Society

## PRIMARY SOURCE READING

### *An Immigrant's Story*

*Italian American writer Constantine Panunzio (1884–1964) was one of thousands of immigrants who came to the United States during the early 1900s. Soon after his arrival in 1902, Panunzio decided to pursue an occupation that used his head instead of his hands. He attended several colleges, eventually earning a doctorate. He worked in settlement houses and for the YMCA in immigrant communities until 1920, when he became a university professor and writer. In his book *The Soul of an Immigrant* (1921), he recounts his experiences coming to America and assimilating into a new culture. In the following excerpt Panunzio, newly arrived in America, has befriended a Frenchman named Louis, who has been a sailor. Read the selection, and answer the questions that follow.*

### *The Soul of an Immigrant*

Not far from the recreation pier on which [Louis and I] met is located the Italian colony of "North End," Boston. To this Louis and I made our way, and to an Italian boarding house. . . . It was a "three-room apartment" and the landlady informed us that she was already "full," but since we had no place to go, she would take us in. . . . Our coming made fourteen people. At night the floor of the kitchen and the dining table were turned into beds. . . .

We began to make inquiries about jobs and were promptly informed that there was plenty of work at "pick and shovel." We were also given to understand by our fellow-boarders that "pick and shovel" was practically the only work available to Italians. . . . I practiced for a day until I could say "peek" and "shuvle" to perfection. Then I asked a fellow-boarder to take me to see what the work was like. He did. He led me to

Washington Street, . . . where some excavation work was going on, and there I did see, with my own eyes, what the "peek" and "shuvle" were all about. My heart sank within me, for I had thought it some form of office work. . . .

Now, though Louis and I had never done such work, because we were Italians we must needs adapt ourselves to it and go to work with "peek and shuvle." (Louis, desiring to be like the Romans while living with them, for the time being passed for an Italian.)

So we went out to hunt for our first job in America. For several mornings Louis and I went to North Square, where there were generally a large number of men loitering in groups discussing all kinds of subjects, particularly the labor market. One morning . . . we saw a fat man coming toward us. "Buon giorno [good morning], padrone," said one of the men. "Padrone?" said I to myself. Now the word "padrone" in Italy is applied to a proprietor, generally a respectable man, at least one whose dress and appearance distinguish him as a man of means. This man not only showed no signs of good breeding in his face, but he was unshaven and dirty and his clothes were shabby. . . .

The "padrone" came up to our group and began to wax eloquent and to gesticulate<sup>1</sup> (both in Sicilian dialect) about the advantages of a certain job. . . . "It is not very far, only twelve miles from Boston. . . . The company has a 'shantee' in which you can sleep, and a 'storo' where you can buy your 'grosserie' all very cheap. "Buona paga," he continued, "(Good pay), \$1.25 per day, and you only have to pay me fifty cents a week for having gotten you this 'gooda jobba.' I only do it to help you and because you are my countrymen. . . ."

The magnanimity [generosity] of this man impressed Louis and I very profoundly; we looked at each other and said, "Wonderful!" We decided we would go. . . . On reaching our