

# Mythbusting! Ellis Island

**Rosemary Meszaros**

**Government Documents & Law**

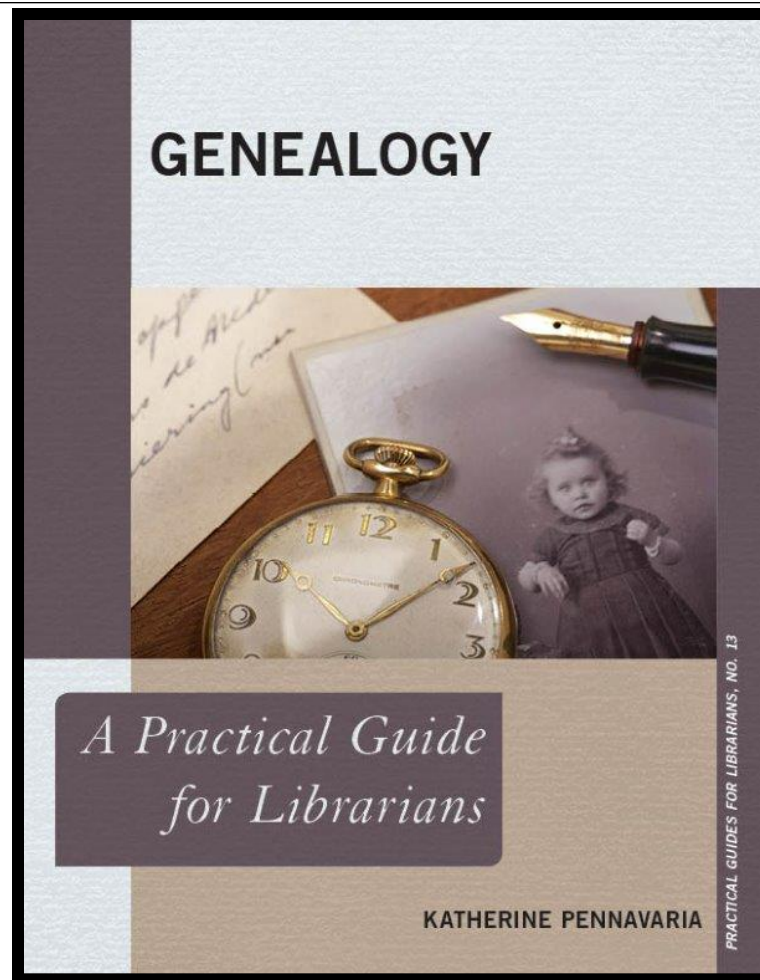


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# GENEALOGY: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR LIBRARIANS

**Katherine Pennavaria**

Rowman & Littlefield

**March 2015**



# ELLIS ISLAND

Immigration Center, 1893—1954





# The Godfather



**CLIP FROM *THE GODFATHER II*,  
SHOWING THE ARRIVAL OF VITO  
ANDOLINI (CORLEONE) IN THE  
UNITED STATES (4m):**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Trff2lqlySI>

**WHAT WAS TRUE?**

**WHAT WAS FALSE?**

**How do we determine  
the truth  
about the past?**

**EVIDENCE**



# WHAT IS GOOD EVIDENCE?

**RECORDS  
CREATED AT  
THE TIME**



**AND WHO HAS CREATED THE BEST  
IMMIGRATION-RELATED PAPER  
AND FILM RECORD COLLECTION?**

**THE U.S.  
GOVERNMENT**



# THE EVIDENCE TO EXAMINE:

1. federal laws relating to immigrants
2. ship manifests (i.e. passenger lists)
3. contemporary films + photographs

**THESE ARE BETTER SOURCES FOR THE TRUTH THAN A MOVIE IS.**

THE  
STATUTES AT LARGE

OF THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

FROM

DECEMBER, 1881, TO MARCH, 1883.

AND

RECENT TREATIES, POSTAL CONVENTIONS, AND EXECUTIVE PROCLAMATIONS.

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EDITED, PRINTED, AND PUBLISHED UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF  
AN ACT OF CONGRESS, AND UNDER THE DIRECTION  
OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

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VOL. XXII.

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WASHINGTON:  
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE.  
1883.

# INSTRUCTIONS TO SHIPPING COMPANIES:

**“Report a list of all passengers taken on board, including name, sex, age, and occupation.”**

**(March 2, 1819)**

**“Immigrants shall be listed in convenient groups... and no [list] shall contain more than 30 names.”**

**(March 3, 1893)**

**“Give me your tired, your poor  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore”**

**Actually, it was a bit  
more complicated.**



# **FEDERAL LAWS REFUSED ENTRY TO:**

**AVOWED ANARCHISTS**

**KNOWN PROSTITUTES**

**CONTRACT LABORERS**

**ANYONE DISABLED IN ANY WAY**

**ALSO NOT WELCOME:**

**CHILDREN UNDER 16 TRAVELING  
WITHOUT A PARENT OR  
IMMEDIATE RELATIVE**










# LPC:

**“LIKELY TO BECOME A PUBLIC CHARGE”**

**Anyone in the categories listed above  
was sent home, and at shipping  
company expense.**

# TRUE

-  **BARRIERS AND BENCHES**
-  **LINES, NOISE AND CONFUSION**
-  **OFFICIALS AND TRANSLATORS**
-  **LARGE MANIFEST BOOKS ON DESKS**
-  **TAGS ON CLOTHING**
-  **MEDICAL EXAMS**
-  **CHILD BEING PUT IN DETENTION**

# FALSE

**Officials mistaking someone's point of origin for their name.**

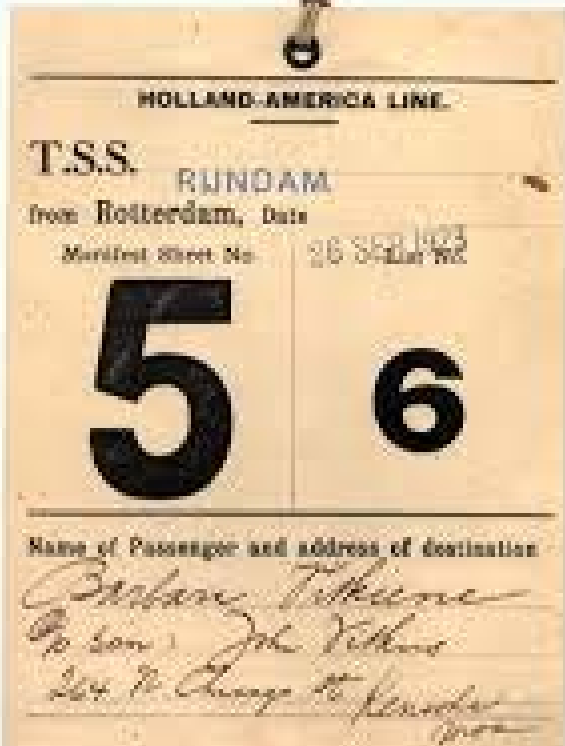
**Officials writing people's names down.**

**An unattached child being released to the mainland.**

Over the number 5,  
the words say:

**“Manifest Sheet No.”**

That told the  
officials which line a  
person should be in.



HOLLAND-AMERICA LINE.

T.S.S. RINDAM  
from Rotterdam, Date  
Manifest Sheet No. 26 SEP 1903

**5** **6**

Name of Passenger and address of destination  
*Barbara Tilkens  
Op 300, John Tilkens  
204 N. Chicago St. Philadelphia  
Pa.*

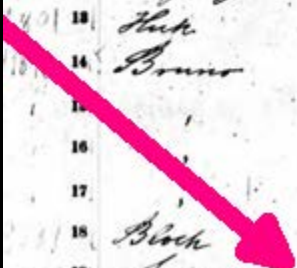
**The captain was required by federal law to deliver an accurate list of every person who had been on the ship.**

# LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Required by the regulations of the Secretary of Commerce and Labor of the United States, under Act of Congress approved February 20, 1907, to be delivered

S. S. *St. Paul* sailing from *Southampton* October 1<sup>st</sup> 1910

1 No. on List.	2 NAME IN FULL.		3 Age.	4 Sex.	5 Married or Single.	6 Calling or Occupation.	7 Able to Read. Write.	8 Nationality. (Country of which citizen or subject.)	9 Race or People.	10 Last Permanent Residence.		11 The name and complete address of nearest relative or friend in country whence alien came.	12 Final Destination.	
	Family Name.	Given Name.								Country.	City or Town.		State.	City or Town.
<del>1</del>	<del>Kluwask</del>	<del>Simon</del>	<del>40</del>	<del>M</del>	<del></del>	<del></del>	<del></del>	<del>Polek</del>	<del>American</del>	<del>Poland</del>	<del>Brooklyn</del>	<del>Brooklyn</del>	<del></del>	<del>Brooklyn</del>
2	Kluwask	Simon	40	M				Polek	American	Poland	Brooklyn	Brooklyn		Brooklyn
3	Tschir	Isidor	15	M				Russian		Russia	Brooklyn	Brooklyn		Brooklyn
4	Lutwin	Isidor	15	M				Russian		Russia	Brooklyn	Brooklyn		Brooklyn
5	Polozinski	Thomas	20	M				Russian		Russia	Brooklyn	Brooklyn		Brooklyn
6	Nygolinski	Sofia	15	F				Russian		Russia	Brooklyn	Brooklyn		Brooklyn
7	Kristoi	Carmel	12	F				Russian		Russia	Chicago	Chicago		Chicago
8	Moroye	Marya	20	F				Russian		Russia	Chicago	Chicago		Chicago
9	Miklo	Miklo	13	M				Russian		Russia	Chicago	Chicago		Chicago
10	Rica	Jose	18	M				Hebrew	Galicia	Warson	New York	New York		New York
11	Beile	Beile	45	M				Hebrew	Galicia	Warson	New York	New York		New York
12	Bogutzki	Wladimir	38	M				Russian	Russia	St. Louis	St. Louis	St. Louis		St. Louis
13	Huk	Lois	39	F				Russian		St. Louis	St. Louis	St. Louis		St. Louis
14	Bruno	Anthony	48	M				Polish	England	London	Wheaton	Wheaton		Wheaton
15	Anna	Anna	33	F				Polish	England	London	Wheaton	Wheaton		Wheaton
16	Witold	Witold	16	M				Polish	England	London	Wheaton	Wheaton		Wheaton
17	Bognislawa	Bognislawa	12	F				Polish	England	London	Wheaton	Wheaton		Wheaton
18	Bloch	Jacob	36	M				Hebrew	Russia	London	New York	New York		New York
19	Schindler	Isidor	21	M				Hebrew		London	New York	New York		New York
20	Sallon	Isidor	24	M				Hebrew		London	New York	New York		New York
21	Isidor	Isidor	16	M				Hebrew		London	New York	New York		New York



**NON IMMIGRANT ALIEN**  
**NON IMMIGRANT ALIEN**

S  
S  
S

UNITED Kristoi  
UNITED Marriage  
UNITED

Carnel  
Marya }  
Nikolai }

Jan 57

12

200  
1/3 m  
1/5 m  
1/2 m  
2934  
M  
P  
P



# RECORD OF ALIENS HELD FOR SPECIAL INQUIRY.

No. 148

W. S. S.

ST. PAUL American

*arrived* October 9, 1910, 190, M., from

Index No.	NAME	MANIFEST.		CAUSE OF DETENTION.	INSPECTOR.	ACTIONS OF THE BOARDS OF SPECIAL INQUIRY.												DEPARTMENTAL AND EXECUTIVE ORDERS.		DEPORTED.				REALS.			
		Group.	No. Passes.			DEF.-EXCL.				REHEARING.				ADMITTED.				DATE.	RECORD No.	ORDERS.	DATE.	SHIP.	OFFICE.	REARREST.	DEFER.	SURREN.	
						Date.	Page.	Sec'y.	Thru.	Date.	Page.	Sec'y.	Thru.	Date.	Page.	Sec'y.	Thru.										
46f	1 Laurence, Edith	3	20	1	lpc cabin with No.	11.	Snid	10/6 Clark												10/21 56 Jan. 7 <sup>10</sup>		3 4 3					
43f	2 Vendenheim, Louise	3	19	1	lpc cabin cert with No. 1	11.	Snid	<i>Placed in hospital</i>												10/25 OPS 12 W. S. City		— 1 —					
45f	3 Stokes, Ruth & oh	1	8	2	lpc	11.	Snid													10/51 Clark 11 <sup>25</sup>		— — —					
18m	Edward																					— — —					
14m	4 Privolos, Nicolas	12	28	1	lpc cabin	11.	Conv	10/50 700 10/27 20 Landed												10/11 4 pm		6 7 6					
21m	5 Osborne, William	3	30	1	lpc cabin	11.	Snid													10/86 Gold 1		— 1 —					
23m	6 Aggove, Benjamin	2	29	1	ol cabin	11.	Snid													10/976 Gold 17 <sup>50</sup>		— 1 —					
22m	7 Bailey, William	1	1	1	ol	11.	Snid													10/978 Gold 17 <sup>55</sup>		— 1 —					
23m	8 Nile, Richard	3	9	1	ol	11.	Snid													10/982 Gold 1 <sup>10</sup>		— 1 —					
30m	9 Wills, Joseph	2	23	1	ol	11.	Snid													10/981 Gold 1 <sup>05</sup>		— 1 —					
64m	10 Bugri, Giacomo wf 3 oh	12	6	5	lpc cert cabin	11	Con													10/953 Clark 11 <sup>30</sup>		— — —					
56f	12 Maria																					— — —					
27f	13 Melana																					— — —					
21m	14 Domenico																					— — —					
19f	15 Catherina																					— — —					
16m	11 Dimitre, Anastas	5	1	1	lpc	11.30	Schl													10/117 R 10 <sup>10</sup>		2 2 2					
17m	12 Serbin, Ilia	5	19	1	lpc	11.40	Schl													10/1078 Ld 4 <sup>30</sup>		1 2 1					
12m	13 Kristoi, Carnel &	4	7	3	lpc	11.35	Cove	10/1065 Clark												10/13194 Chase of		10/512					
20f	Marye, Marya																					— — —					
3/12m	Miklo																					— — —					

12m	13	Kristoi, Carnel &	4	7	3	1p0
20f		Marnye, Marya				
3/12m		Miklo				

"likely to become a public charge"

MEALS.		
BREAKFAST.		
DINNER.		
SUPPER.		

12/5/12

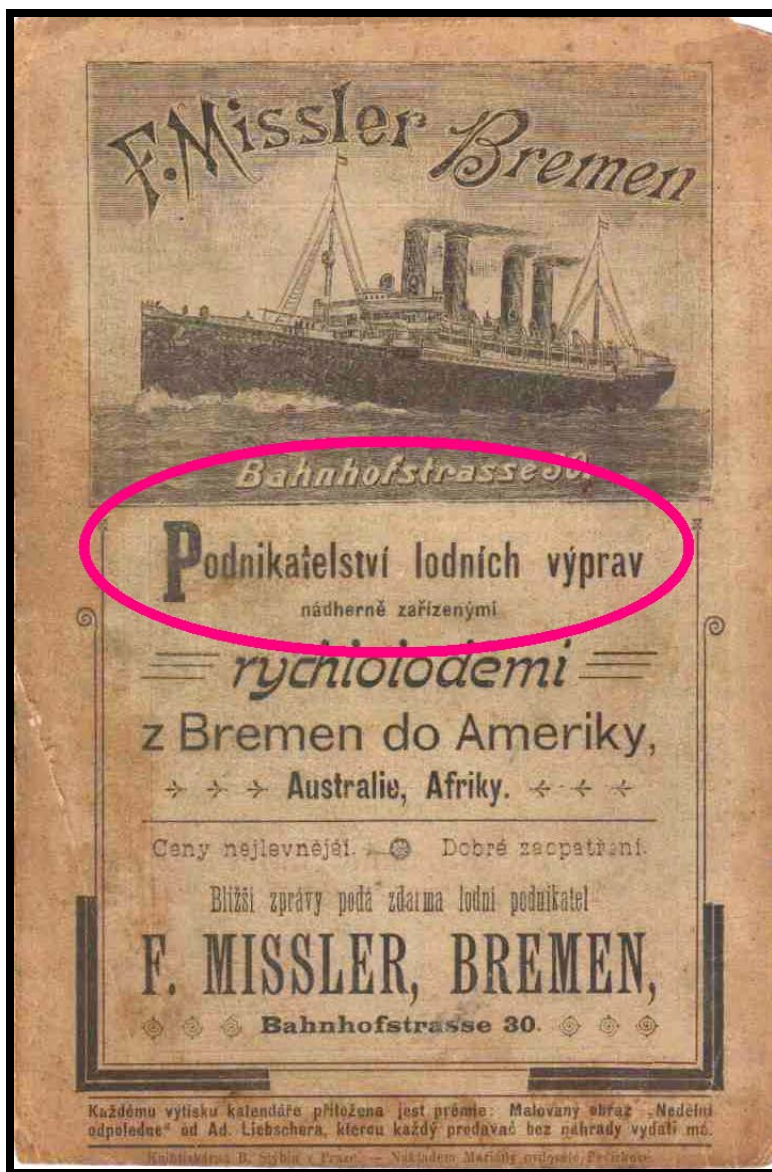
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another myth...





An advertisement from a shipping company, in Czech.

“Podnikatelství lodních výprav” means

“boat trips for entrepreneurs”



**“For the great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie (deliberate, contrived, and dishonest), but the myth: persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic.”**

**(JFK, from a commencement speech at Yale University, June 11, 1962)**

**“MY FAMILY’S SURNAME WAS  
CHANGED AT ELLIS ISLAND.”**

**HAVE YOU HEARD THAT ONE BEFORE?**

**Didn't happen.**

**HISTORIANS AND  
PROFESSIONAL  
GENEALOGISTS  
KNOW THIS IS A *MYTH*.**

**But it's a persistent myth...**



***STICKINESS:*** “The elusive quality that some ideas and concepts have—they catch on and don’t let go.”

Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*



# ...IF YOUR NAME WAS CHANGED at Ellis Island

by Ellen Levine

illustrated by  
Wayne Parmenter

DATE DUE

--If your name was changed at Ellis Island  
Juv 325,10973 L578i  
80 p. : col. ill. ; 20 x 24 cm.  
BOWLING GREEN PUBLIC LIBRARY  
3 3583 00075 7084

# From the Internet...

## COMMENT:

“Some of my relatives' surnames were recorded incorrectly on arrival.”

## ASSUMPTION:

Immigrants' names were “recorded” upon arrival.

REALITY: Immigrants' names were recorded by the shipping company at the *point of origin*, when the tickets were purchased.

## COMMENT:

“The bastards at Ellis island decided [my ancestor’s] last name was too Irish and changed it.”

## ASSUMPTION:

Officials were of different ethnicities than the immigrants.

REALITY: Quite often the officials were hired precisely *because* they knew the languages of the immigrants.

# **FIORELLO LA GUARDIA**

## **ELLIS ISLAND TRANSLATOR and MAYOR OF NEW YORK**

**(spoke English, Yiddish, German, French, and Italian)**



COMMENT: “My family name was probably shortened from something Eastern European to something German, certainly at Ellis Island.”

COMMENT: “My great-grandfather came through and the name was shortened and changed by the worker.”

ASSUMPTION: Immigration officials had the *means* and *motivation* to change names.

REALITY: They had neither.

In the *Statutes at Large*, the U.S. government spelled out exactly how the immigrants were to be treated and documented.

The officials would have been breaking the law if they had altered the officially recorded names.

**They would have lost their jobs!**

# THE KEY QUESTIONS:

## MOTIVATION:

Why would the immigration officials change the names?

## METHOD:

How would the officials have achieved a permanent name change for the immigrants with whom they *briefly* interacted?



**If we assume, for a moment, that the myth is true... by what means did the immigrant carry away his or her “new” name?**

**Did the officials hand them a piece of paper with their new name?**



**From *Island of Hope, Island of Tears* (1989 documentary) – 23.55**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viHuhzPOAu0>

Form No. 1  
 Department of Commerce and Labor  
**106**  
 IMMIGRATION SERVICE

SALOON, CABIN, AND STEERAGE ALIENS MUST BE COMPLETELY MANIFESTED.

# LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Required by the regulations of the Secretary of Commerce and Labor of the United States, under Act of Congress approved February 20, 1907, to be delivered

S. S. PRINCIPE DI PIEMONTE sailing from GENOVA 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1903

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		11	12		
									Country	City or Town		State	City or Town	
List	NAME IN FULL	Age	Sex	*Calling or Occupation	Allies to— Read. Write.	Nationality (Country of which citizen or subject.)	Race or People	Last Permanent Residence.		The name and complete address of nearest relative or friend in country, whence alien came.	Final Destination.			
	Family Name							Given Name	Yrs. Mos.		Married or Single	Country	City or Town	State
1	Corno	Nikorio	16	m	Carpenter	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Moncalvo	Luther Burgio & Moncalvo	N. Y.	New York
2	Ortono	Alberto	25	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Sorvalunga	Wife Coruth Regina & Sorvalunga	N. Y.	New York
3	Scantozia	Achille	10	m	Laborer	no	no	Italian	Italy	Italy	Prothammur	Wife Maria Corrima & Keyloch Men	La	New Orleans
4	Soldo	Giovanni Beninimio	25	m	Miner	no	no	Italian	Italy	Italy	Carlofort	Mother Cospini Anna Ursin & U.	N. Y.	New York
5	Lione	Salvatore Olegio	20	m	Miner	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Tramatro	Mother Pera Cagnolha & P.D.	N. Y.	New York
6	Astorini	Francesco	24	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Mauciano	Wife Coruth Luigi & Man	La	Brooklyn
<hr/>														
7	Battori	Carlo	19	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Mauciano	Luther Battori Leonardo & Ca	La	Freedom
8	Baldelli	Nello	19	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Mauciano	Luther Battori Doro & Ca	La	Freedom
9	Pellegrini	Luigi	34	m	Teacher	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	U. S.	Clifton	Luther Pellegrini Maria & N. Y.	N. Y.	Clifton
10	Pellegrini	Catharina	47	f	housewife	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	U. S.	Clifton	Luther Pellegrini Maria & N. Y.	N. Y.	Clifton
11	Pellegrini	Margherita	47	f	housewife	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	U. S.	Clifton	Luther Pellegrini Maria & N. Y.	N. Y.	Clifton
12	Pellegrini	Luigi	34	m	Teacher	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	U. S.	Clifton	Luther Pellegrini Maria & N. Y.	N. Y.	Clifton
13	Pellegrini	Isabella	34	f	housewife	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	U. S.	Clifton	Luther Pellegrini Maria & N. Y.	N. Y.	Clifton
14	Pellegrini	Isabella	34	f	housewife	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	U. S.	Clifton	Luther Pellegrini Maria & N. Y.	N. Y.	Clifton
15	Medichini	Leone	47	m	Miner	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Precechi	Luther Domenico Mabelitini Jim	La	Galveston
16	Zucconi	Albino	35	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Dreunio	Luther Andrea & Dreunio	N. Y.	New York
17	Lamberti	William	67	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Dreunio	Luther Andrea & Dreunio	N. Y.	New York
18	Prinetti	Luigi	44	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Dreunio	Luther Andrea & Dreunio	N. Y.	New York
19	Prinetti	Albino	44	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Dreunio	Luther Andrea & Dreunio	N. Y.	New York
20	Pella	Nicola	41	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Genova	Luther Pella Marietta & M. S.	N. Y.	Brooklyn
21	Astorini	Albino	17	m	Laborer	no	no	Austrian	Austria	Austria	Prinetti	Luther Z. Astorini Vincenzo	Ill.	Chicago
22	Shoyka	Mark	17	m	Miner	no	no	Austrian	Austria	Austria	Prinetti	Luther Giovanni & Prinetti	Ill.	Chicago
23	Genovese	Adole	20	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Prinetti	Luther Giovanni & Prinetti	N. Y.	New York
24	Corina	Gerolama	27	f	housewife	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Prinetti	Luther Giovanni & Prinetti	N. Y.	New York
25	Stradella	Stasio	41	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Prinetti	Luther Giovanni & Prinetti	N. Y.	New York
26	Balocchi	Genovino	26	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Messa M.	Luther Balocchi Antonio	Cal.	S. Francisco
27	Orsolini	Leopoldo	26	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Messa M.	Luther Balocchi Antonio	Cal.	S. Francisco
28	Orsolini	Lina	2	f	housewife	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Messa M.	Luther Balocchi Antonio	Cal.	S. Francisco
29	Orsi	Salvatore	36	m	Laborer	yes	yes	Italian	Italy	Italy	Zadroni	Wife Casula Remaranda S. M.	N. Y.	New York
30	Orsi	Autio	42	m	Laborer	no	no	Italian	Italy	Italy	Godini	Wife Mura Maria & Jordan	N. Y.	New York

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\*Instead of showing occupation of tourists and aliens in transit, state in column whether they are "tourist" or "in transit."  
 †"Race or People" is to be determined by the stock from which aliens sprang and the language they speak. List of races will be found on back of this sheet.

The blank manifest books were designed and printed by the **US government** with intention of getting records that would remain their property.

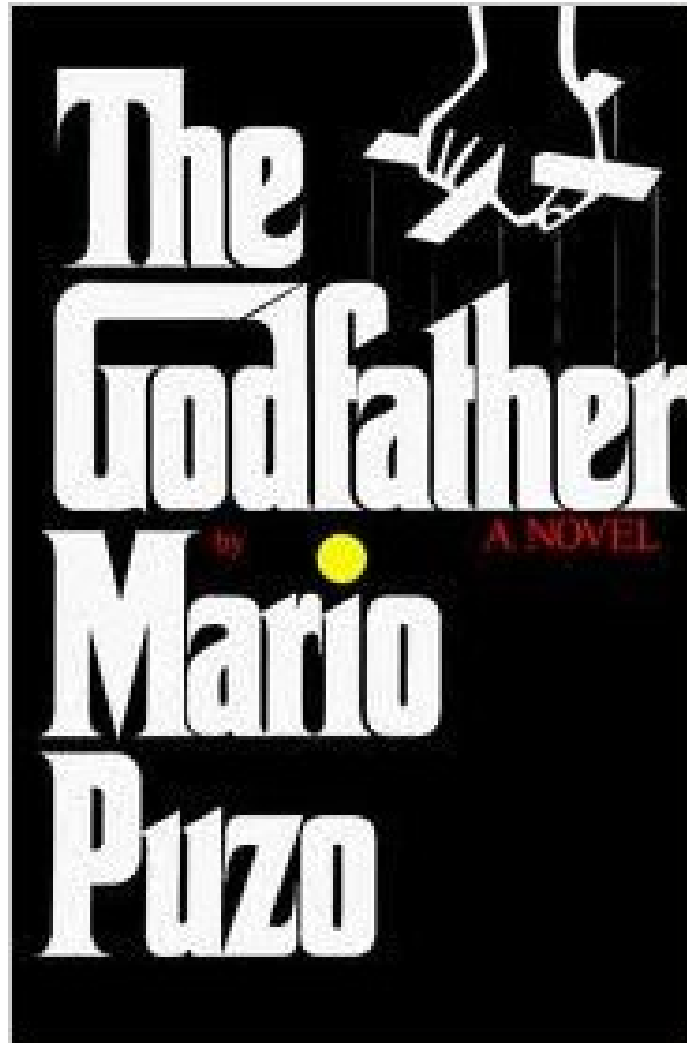


**The officials had no authority to alter names on the manifests.**

**Name changes had to be approved by a board of inquiry.**

Many names definitely were  
changed... later.

**BY THE IMMIGRANTS THEMSELVES.**



**THE BOOK GETS IT RIGHT.**

## Here's what the book says:

“The Don was a real man at the age of twelve. Short, dark, slender, living in the strange Moorish-looking village of Corleone in Sicily, he had been born Vito Andolini, but when strange men came to kill the son of the man they had murdered, his mother sent the young boy to America to stay with friends. And in the new land **he changed his name to Corleone** to preserve some tie with his native village.”



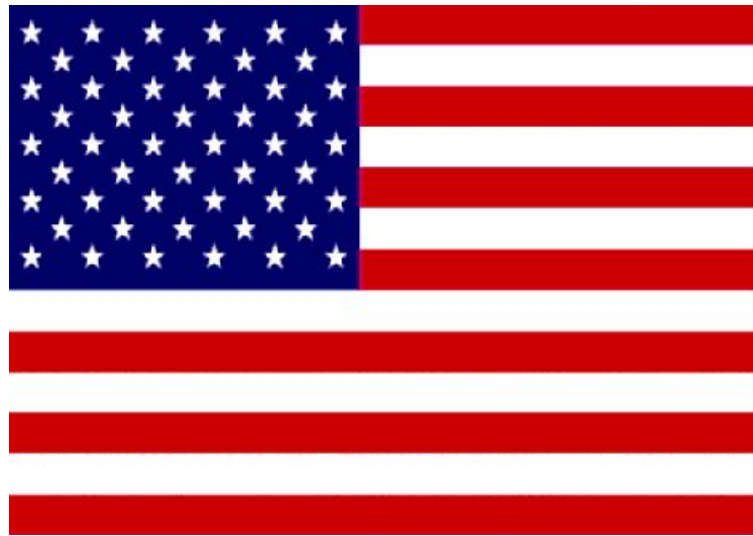
# BOTTOM LINE:

There is **NO**  
evidence for the  
“name changed at  
Ellis Island” idea.

*But there is **LOTS**  
of evidence that it  
did not happen.*

**“GOOD ENOUGH FOR GOVERNMENT WORK”?**

**At Ellis Island, that work was done  
exceptionally well!**



# HISTORY MATTERS.

## EVIDENCE MATTERS.



***THANK YOU!***

# *Thank you!*

Katherine Pennavaria

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