lace-edged cloth” (Gabbacia 1984, 82–83). The concept of an archeology of working-class material life functioning as bedrock to working-class struggles and developed by a team of scholars dedicated to the memory of the Ludlow mining massacre (Larkin and McGuire 2009) is also deeply inspirational. While in relation to dramatic events like the Ludlow massacre, seeking to retrace the roles of traditional clothing artifacts may seem paltry, I see it as an indispensable element in the retrieval of the life of immigrant women, not only through events and quantified data, but through the lived experience of daily materiality, and as a stepping stone to understanding the delicate relationship of visibility and invisibility that defined Italian American women for at least half of the twentieth century.

The expectation that immigrants should immediately divest themselves of material trappings such as clothing from their homeland or else be irremediably consigned to a cultural backwater inimical to progress is thus both harsh and unreasonable. It negates the impact of migration trauma and the needed comfort of familiar things. As Ferdinando Fascé (1993) points out, although immigrants demonstrated the ability to negotiate complex relations with intermediaries and conditions of arrival, one should not undervalue the effects of “le dolorose rinunciate una parte di sé e, in una certa misura, lo ‘sradicamento’ che l’emigrazione comportò” (the painful renouncing of a part of oneself, and to a certain extent, the violent uprooting that emigration involved, 98). Therefore, I prefer the term *divesting* to *discarding* to denote the process of separating, often piece by piece, from homebound traditional clothing and textiles. To look at this as a process rather than a radical break (a *sradicamento*) leads to connections to the building of identity among immigrants. The immigrants, Fascé suggests, did not bring *Italianità* with them, but rather it developed in response to combined pressures and forms of mistreatment—from compatriots, U.S. government officials, hegemonic or competing ethnic groups, and local elites in their communities (105). From this early form of consciousness gradually arises another: the building—or invention—of ethnicity as a project and a creative act, rather than as a given (Conzen et al., 1992).

The Problems with Visual Evidence

This article makes use of photographs, journalistic prints, drawings, and paintings by professional artists. The photographs are the lynchpin of my proposed archeology of immigrant women's material culture, and we know that reading and interpreting them poses many problems. First, there is the intentionality of the photographer or the social or political uses of the photograph. It has been suggested that early photographs were readily used by mercantile society as a form of consumption and as souvenirs before even becoming