

## Gino Fubini Ghiron

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The firstborn of the mathematician Guido and the elder brother of the electrical engineer Eugenio, Gino Fubini Ghiron shared with each of them both a career in academia (even if his tenure was much shorter) and an exile in the United States following his dismissal from his university position in 1938, as a result of the racial laws. In his adopted country, having abandoned teaching, he established himself as a real estate developer and, after having obtained American citizenship, decided not to repatriate at the end of World War II, opting for the same choice that his brother made.

### Education

Gino was born in Turin to Guido Fubini and Anna (Annetta) Ghiron on 17 July 1911. A breech birth resulted in a lesion on one leg that confined him to a mild lameness for the rest of his life. The baby additionally displayed a permanent malformation in which one arm was slightly longer than the other. The physical defects, the inferior intellectual brightness, as compared to his brother, which he revealed since the time they attended elementary school, and the feeling of not being his mother's favorite child rendered Gino a reserved person, leading him to develop somewhat of an inferiority complex in comparison to Eugenio, to the point of implicitly considering himself to be the younger brother<sup>1</sup>. Gino graduated from *liceo classico* [a type of secondary school with a curriculum focused on the humanities] as it was typical of any child born into a bourgeois family at the time like his own was, and on 29 October 1934, he obtained his degree in Civil Engineering with the highest honors from the Politecnico in Turin. In the same year he also passed

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<sup>1</sup> David Fubini, *Let Me Explain. Eugene G. Fubini's Life in Defense of America*, Santa Fe (NM), Sunstone Press, 2009, pp. 29, 32-34, 208.

the qualifying exam for practicing the profession<sup>2</sup>. After 1932, when Fiat launched its Model 508 – the so-called Balilla, the first Italian economy car that, as the advertisement read, had «finally» delivered «the automobile to the people»<sup>3</sup> – Turin became the Italian capital of this industrial sector and seemed to offer excellent employment opportunities even to young engineers. It was perhaps for this reason that, in 1935, Gino enrolled in an advanced specialization school for automobile construction, obtaining his diploma in a few months, even if it was not with a particularly high grade: 90/100<sup>4</sup>. In any case, he soon lost interest in a private sector job and undertook a teaching career at the university, lecturing at the same Politecnico from which he had graduated and where his father was full professor of Mathematical Analysis as well as a lecturer in Advanced Analysis. In December 1935, a few months after finishing his specialization, Gino attained the position of *assistente straordinario* [assistant] to the chair of Bridges and Construction Techniques in the School of Engineering, taking effect as of the resumption of courses the following February. He held the same position as assistant to the chair of Bridge Construction during the subsequent academic year and to the chair of Construction in Wood, Iron, and Reinforced Concrete in 1937-1938. To this latter chair, he eventually became *assistente di ruolo* [tenured assistant] on 1 March 1938, with automatic renewals from year to year after the Politecnico had preferred him to Carlo Guidi Castelli, the other candidate who had successfully qualified at the national examination for that position<sup>5</sup>. Gino could not avoid comparison with his brother even as an instructor. In this case, however, he demonstrated talents that Eugenio lacked. While the latter tended to have an

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<sup>2</sup> *Annuario del Regio Istituto di Ingegneria (Regio Politecnico) di Torino. Anno accademico 1934-35*, Turin, Società Editrice Torinese, 1935, pp. 160, 172.

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Alberto Bellucci, *L'automobile italiana, 1918-1943*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1984, p. 158.

<sup>4</sup> *Annuario del Regio Politecnico di Torino. Anni accademici 1935-1936-XIV e 1936-1937-XV*, Turin, Società Editrice Torinese, 1937, p. 416.

<sup>5</sup> Archivio storico del Politecnico di Torino, Turin, f. «Gino Fubini Ghiron», «Stato personale: Fubini Ghiron ing. Gino di Guido».

aggressive attitude toward students and to devote himself mostly to the most capable ones, Gino showed great patience and availability with all<sup>6</sup>.

### The racial laws

The appointment to tenured assistant by the Board of Governors was communicated to Gino by Giancarlo Vallauri, the director of the Politecnico, on 16 March. Just seven months later, however, on 18 October, Vallauri himself notified him of a further provision of suspension from his position, retroactively to the date of 16 October on account of the implementation of «regulation for the defense of race in the Italian school system»<sup>7</sup>. He would be permanently relieved of teaching duties on 14 December. In compliance with the anti-Semitic legislation, Gino was also expelled from the National Fascist Party, in which he had enrolled in 1933 while he was still a student<sup>8</sup>. Gino applied for inclusion among the discriminated Jews, the linguistically misleading expression that was used to define those who were exempt from the anti-Semitic measures based on special merits<sup>9</sup>. However, even before it became official in October, his dismissal from the Politecnico was easily predictable on the basis of the **Royal Decree Law n. 1390** of 5 September 1938, which had mandated the discharge of Jewish teachers from state and semi-public educational institutions of every kind and grade. Gino, therefore, took remedial action before the Politecnico formally notified him of his expulsion from the position that he had obtained only a few months earlier. The prospect of losing his job and of an indefinite period of unemployment convinced him to follow the rest of his family to the United States, where his father had obtained a teaching position at Princeton University's Institute for

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<sup>6</sup> D. Fubini, *Let Me Explain*, cit., p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> Archivio storico del Politecnico di Torino, f. «Gino Fubini Ghiron», letters from Giancarlo Vallauri to Gino Ghiron Fubini, 16 March 1938 and 18 October 1938.

<sup>8</sup> Archivio di Stato di Torino, Turin, *Sezioni Riunite, Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF) Federazione di Torino*, letter from Pietro Gazzotti, federal secretary, to Dante Maria Tuninetti, secretary of the Fascist Party in Paris, 5 December 1938 <<http://le-case-e-le-cose.fondazione1563.it>> (accessed 24 July 2021).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Advanced Study, in New Jersey. In preparation of his trip to America, Gino had already reached France by September with his parents and brother, passing through Switzerland, to which they had traveled from Turin by car without any luggage, feigning a one-day leisure trip in order to avoid inspection at the border. He stopped with his family in Paris while waiting for the issuance of an *affidavit of identity*, a kind of self-certification of his own identity corroborated by other documents, with which – in the absence of a passport – he was permitted to enter the United States as a dependent family member of his father's<sup>10</sup>. During Gino's stay in France, the ineffable Professor Vallauri sent Gino an additional letter, this time to extend to him his «best wishes» and those of the School of Engineering, in consideration of the «intelligent activity» that the assistant, whom they had just dismissed, had carried out at the Politecnico<sup>11</sup>. The completion of the bureaucratic formalities necessary to immigrate to the United States required several months. It was not until 8 March 1939 that the Fubinis were able to embark on the steamship *Ile de France*, at the port of Le Havre, which was headed for New York, where they arrived on 15 March to later settle down in Princeton<sup>12</sup>.

### **In the United States**

As compared to Eugenio, Gino did not boast any scientific publications of international relevance. Hence, unlike his brother, he quickly gave up the idea of resuming an academic career. A year after his arrival in the United States, he was still «unemployed», according to the testimony of the physicist Franco Rasetti, who was himself an exile in America from the spring of 1940<sup>13</sup>. He, therefore, considered going back to school and enrolling at a

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<sup>10</sup> D. Fubini, *Let Me Explain*, cit., pp. 63-69.

<sup>11</sup> Archivio storico del Politecnico di Torino f. «Gino Fubini Ghiron», letter from Giancarlo Vallauri to Gino Ghiron Fubini, 25 October 1938.

<sup>12</sup> Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search, ad nomen* <<https://heritage.statueofliberty.org>> (accessed 19 July 2021).

<sup>13</sup> As quoted in Alessandra Gissi, *L'emigrazione dei «maestri». Gli scienziati italiani negli Stati Uniti tra le due guerre*, in Angiolina Arru, Daniela Luigia Caglioti, Franco Ramella (eds.), *Donne e uomini migranti. Storie e geografie tra breve e lunga distanza*, Rome, Donzelli, 2008, p. 157.

university in order to acquire some expendable title which would be more effective in the American job market than an Italian degree. He studied structural engineering with John B. Wilbur at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Here, he earned a Master's degree in Civil Engineering on 19 December 1941, pursuing a few courses alongside Davide Jona, the husband of his cousin Anna Foa, a couple who had also fled to the United States after the enactment of the racial laws<sup>14</sup>.

The historian Roberto Sabatino Lopez – another Italian Jew who had taken sanctuary in the United States and a collaborator with the Office of War Information, the federal agency that handled war propaganda in Washington – endeavored to enlist Gino in the US armed forces. His physical ailments, however, prevented him from joining the army<sup>15</sup>. Following his Master's education, Gino worked in Boston as a technical draftsman and then moved to New York City, where he found employment at a company that provided public utility services such as gas and electricity. It was an occupation that Gino found particularly boring, but one that allowed him to earn a living for the remainder of World War II<sup>16</sup>.

At the end of the conflict, making the same decision as his brother, Gino forewent a return to Italy. On 25 May 1946, he obtained American citizenship, a symbolic act more than a legal one that certified his willingness to establish himself in the United States for good<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, in June of the previous year, he had married his neighbor, Gabriella Clelia Rachele Fornari (better

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<sup>14</sup> Anna Foa, *Memorie di Anna Foa*, in Davide Jona, Anna Foa, *Noi due*, Italian trans. Luciana Benigno Ramella, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997, pp. 211-212; Gino Fubini Ghiron, «A Study of the Economics of Pre-Stressing Continuous Truss Bridges», M.A. thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Civil and Sanitary Engineering, 1941, unpublished. For John B. Wilbur, inventor of one of the first prototypes of the calculator, see J.H.R. Speek, *Robot Mathematician Solves Nine Simultaneous Equations*, B.A. thesis, University of Groningen, 2017, pp. 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> D. Fubini, *Let Me Explain*, cit., pp. 100, 103. For Lopez's activities within the purview of the Office of War Information, see Antonio Varsori, *Roberto Lopez: l'impegno politico e civile (1938-1945)*, Florence, Dipartimento di Storia, 1990, pp. 37-55.

<sup>16</sup> A. Foa, *Memorie di Anna Foa*, cit., p. 214; D. Fubini, *Let Me Explain*, cit., p. 103.

<sup>17</sup> *Fubini Case – Decision no. 201*, in United Nations, *Reports of International Arbitral Awards*, New York, United Nations, 2016, vol. XIV, p. 421.

known as Gaby), the daughter of a paper entrepreneur who had herself immigrated to the United States from Rome, with her family, in 1939<sup>18</sup>. He had met her in 1943, and even the marriage was a sign of his intention to root himself in the United States<sup>19</sup>. His wife would give birth to four daughters: Nancy (1946-1994), Denise Gail (1951-2017), Anna (1954-2001), and Joyce, born in 1959<sup>20</sup>.

In the post-war years, Gino made the most of his Civil Engineering training, entering into the real estate industry with capital initially provided in part by his brother and in large part by Marco Moise Ghiron, a maternal uncle who had come to the United States before the Fubini Ghiron family and who had managed to transfer the funds from the company with which he had imported coal from Italy before the implementation of the racial laws<sup>21</sup>. He began with the acquisition of two condominiums in New York, but he later relied especially on the increased demand for new single-family homes that would arise from the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, the provision that – among other benefits – guaranteed honorably-discharged veterans of World War II subsidized loans for the purchase of their first house<sup>22</sup>. Gino began to build homes in the New York City borough of Queens and then extended his business to Long Island, where he built single-floor model units with six rooms for an affordable price along with another builder, Herbert Messer, who had been active in the real estate industry in that area since the beginning of the 1930s<sup>23</sup>. Some initiatives did not turn out to be particularly profitable. This, in particular, was the case with a project developed in East Islip, a small town in Suffolk County about forty miles away from New York

<sup>18</sup> D. Fubini, *Let Me Explain*, cit., p. 129; Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search, ad nomen* <<https://heritage.statueofliberty.org>> (accessed 19 July 2021).

<sup>19</sup> D. Fubini, *Let Me Explain*, cit., pp. 94-95.

<sup>20</sup> Gino G. Fubini, «New York Times», 8 May 1965, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> D. Fubini, *Let Me Explain*, cit., p. 103.

<sup>22</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear. The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 786-787.

<sup>23</sup> *Old Farm Is Sold Near Levittown*, «New York Times», 26 September 1948, p. R6; *L.I. Builders Start New Home Group*, ibid., 24 October 1948, p. R9; *\$2,000,000 Colony Planned in Nassau*, ibid., 19 June 1949, p. R1. For Messer, see *Messer Forms Realty Firm*, ibid., 24 May 1942, p. RE2.

City, where the profits came mainly from the resale of the properties<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless, Gino's business continued to grow. In order to manage this growth, he set up a series of companies such as the Moline Homes Corporation, which he headed in 1951, and the F. & M. Construction Company, from the initials of the two business partners' last names, Fubini and Messer. In the late 1950s, all merged under the control of the Sherman Organization, over which he presided<sup>25</sup>. Gino grew so proud of his housing projects that he gave the name «the house of the future» to the model for the 58 residential units that he built on Long Island, in the district of Hicksville, in 1953. He himself went to live in one of them with his family<sup>26</sup>. A stubborn and untiring smoker, despite the heart problems that afflicted him, Gino died from a heart attack in New York on 6 May 1965, before turning 54 years-old. According to an estimate, by the time of his passing he had built more than a thousand dwellings in the suburbs of the New York Metropolitan area<sup>27</sup>.

### Major publications

- Gino Fubini Ghiron, *Sul calcolo della scala elicoidale*, «Atti della Accademia delle scienze di Torino. Classi di scienze fisiche, naturali e matematiche», 72, 1936-1937, pp. 455-473.

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<sup>24</sup> D. Fubini, *Let Me Explain*, cit., pp. 136-137.

<sup>25</sup> *Builder Acquires Great Neck Estate*, «New York Times», 4 January 1951, p. 37; *Suffolk Builders Show \$7,990 Home*, ibid., 24 August 1952, p. W1; Thomas V. Ennis, *Model in Scarsdale Provides for Addition of Three Rooms*, ibid., 16 March 1958, p. R1.

<sup>26</sup> *New Split-Level Dwelling in Hicksville Has Outward Appearance of a Ranch House*, «New York Times», 24 May 1953, p. R15.

<sup>27</sup> D. Fubini, *Let Me Explain*, cit., pp. 206-207; Gino G. Fubini, cit.

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- Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search, ad nomen* <<https://heritage.statueofliberty.org>>.
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