

SOCIAL RESPONSE TO ETHNIC GROUPS IN
OMAHA, NEBRASKA: 1892-1910

by

CARY DeCORDOVA WINTZ

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Approved by:

Victor R. Green
Major Professor

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INTRODUCTION

During the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century the attitude of Americans toward European immigrants shifted one hundred eighty degrees. In the years immediately following the Civil War an America whose economy was rapidly expanding welcomed Europe's sons to her shores with open arms. The country needed men to settle the Great Plains, men to build railroads, and men to labor in factories and mines. America seemed to be a limitless land capable of receiving and assimilating any number of men from any number of backgrounds. Americans regarded their country as a haven for the oppressed and destitute of the world. This belief culminated in the dedication of the Statue of Liberty in 1886, and in Emma Lazarus's poem which was enscribed on its base:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

By 1910 this attitude no longer existed. The statue was still in New York harbor, but Americans no longer welcomed the European hordes. The reason for the reversal in attitude came at the turn of the century. By then social and political unrest caused Americans to lose confidence in their ability to assimilate the waves of immigrants. By 1910 Americans who had at one time welcomed this migration, were seriously searching for effective means to restrict or terminate immigration.

As early as 1882 Congress began to reconsider its policy toward immigration. In May of that year Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which suspended Chinese immigration for a period of ten years, and forbade

the naturalization of Chinese.¹ Three months later Congress enacted the first general federal immigration law, which imposed a head tax of fifty cents upon every immigrant and excluded convicts, lunatics, idiots, and those liable to become a public charge.² Three years later in February, 1885 Congress passed the Foran Act, which prohibited contract labor by making it unlawful "to assist or encourage the importation or immigration of aliens . . . under contract or agreement . . . to perform labor or service of any kind in the United States."³ These three acts did not spring from an attempt to completely restrict immigration, but were devised to meet specific, unrelated situations.⁴ The first was to solve the racial unrest caused by the presence of Chinese on the West Coast; the second was to provide a federal subsidy to finance the landing station at Castle Garden; and the third was instituted at the insistence of organized labor.⁵

In the 1890's agitation for immigration restriction became much more widespread and intense. What had been criticism against certain specific features of immigration evolved into a general tirade against all aliens in America. During the next two decades the immigrant became the scapegoat for all of America's ills. The economic depression of the 1890's and the subsequent labor turbulence was expressed through nativism. A number of business

¹Maldwyn Allen Jones, American Immigration (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 249.

²Ibid., pp. 250-51.

³Ibid., p. 251.

⁴Ibid., p. 252.

⁵Ibid., pp. 249-51.

organizations, such as the Boston Merchants' Association and the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, argued in favor of a literacy test to limit immigration on the grounds that the depression was greatly aggravated by "the presence among us of thousands of idle and vicious foreigners who have not come here to work for a living but to stir up strife and to commit crime."⁶

As a consequence of this attitude Congress attempted to further restrict immigration. In the summer of 1894, fearful of rising social disorder as evidenced by the assassination of the French President and increased labor violence in this country, the Senate passed a bill to exclude and deport alien anarchists.⁷ This bill died in the House because of disagreement over the definition of the word "anarchism." Senator Chandler of New Hampshire introduced similar legislation in 1895 and 1897, but these proposals never got out of committee.⁸ In 1896 Congress passed for the first time a bill providing for a literacy test. This measure was vetoed by President Cleveland, and similar bills were defeated in Congress in 1898, 1902, and 1906. Restrictionists, although still unsuccessful, had increased in number and influence during the last years of the nineteenth century.

In the first decade of the new century those opposing immigration regrouped their forces and launched new and more effective campaigns. An old measure, the exclusion and deportation of alien anarchists, received popular support following the assassination of President McKinley by Leon F.

⁶John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns in American Nativism 1860-1925 (New York, Atheneum, 1965), p. 70.

⁷William Preston, Jr., Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933 (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 28.

⁸Ibid., pp. 28-29.

Czolgosz. Although he was native born, and had only tenuous connections with anarchism, Czolgosz became the symbol of alien anarchism.⁹ Shocked by the murder of McKinley, Congress finally passed a bill in 1903 authorizing the government to prohibit the immigration of foreign anarchists, and to deport those already in the country.

Nativists received an additional boost through the application of pseudo-scientific racial and genetic theories to the problem of immigration. By about 1906 the Boston intellectuals who directed the Immigration Restriction League began to point to genetic principles as a scientific basis for their claim that immigration restriction was essential to preserve American racial purity.¹⁰

Thus by 1910 the traditional American tolerance toward immigrants had changed to uncertainty. Although the period 1892-1910 was nominally a period of social and political reform, it was also an era of intense nativism. This brief survey of the growth of nativism has not given the complete picture. Dealing, as it has, with events nationally it omitted developments locally. Even in a democracy federal policy is at best an imperfect reflection of the desires and attitudes of the people. The extent to which nativism was prevalent among the people can be most accurately determined by examining their reaction on a local level to the problem of immigration.

The city of Omaha, Nebraska lends itself very well to such a study. Not only was Omaha an urban area with a large immigrant population during this period, but it was the only large city in the area of the Mid-West that

⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

was a hotbed of Populist-Progressive reform which contained a high concentration of foreign-born. Therefore, an investigation of the response to ethnic groups in Omaha should be a meaningful measure of the extent of anti-immigrant sentiment in the Mid-West during the period 1892-1910.

Early in Omaha's history immigrants were attracted to the city. In 1866 Omaha was just a village. Already, though, its future was insured. In July of that year ex-General Jack Casement, the chief tracklayer of the Union Pacific, assembled a thousand men and began construction of the first trans-continental railroad. From this point on the city assumed the position of an important rail center and "gateway to the West." For the next twenty years the city and the railroad were one. The economy of Omaha was the Union Pacific; its citizens, besides being citizens of the city, the state, and the nation, were above all citizens of the Union Pacific Railway.¹¹ It was this railroad, the very lifeblood of Omaha, which attracted the first immigrants to the city. They came first to build the railroad, then to settle its land and to work in its shops.

By the late 1880's the supremacy of the railroads was challenged, and a second force entered the Omaha economy. Because of its location with regard to railway lines and the fact that it was situated in the center of grain producing areas and in direct communication with grazing districts on the Union Pacific, Omaha developed into a major meat packing center.¹² Through gifts of land, cash, and stock, Omaha promoters induced the main Chicago

¹¹George R. Leighton, Five Cities: The Story of Their Youth and Old Age (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), pp. 156-57.

¹²Minnie Eliza Ferguson, "South Omaha Packing Industry" (unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Nebraska, 1934), pp. 23-24.

packers to locate in the vicinity of the Gate City.¹³ In April, 1888 Gustavus Swift began slaughtering beef at South Omaha; Philip D. Armour and Michael Cudahy quickly followed suit.¹⁴ Like the railroads, the packing houses dominated a sizeable segment of the Omaha economy, and to an even greater degree than the railroads they attracted thousands of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe.¹⁵ Railroads and meat packing were the two dominant forces in the Omaha economy.

By 1890, with a population of over 140,000, Omaha had become one of the major cities in the Mid-West. Omaha's population slipped to 102,555 in 1900, but its growth soon resumed, and by 1910 was 124,096. During the same period the population of South Omaha, Omaha's suburb which housed most of the packing industry, soared from 8026 to 26,259. The immigrant population of both cities increased only slightly with the total number of first and second generation immigrants remaining at approximately fifty per cent of the total population. Significantly, however, the source of the ethnic groups shifted from the north and west to the south and east of Europe. Thus while nativism spread on the national level, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe flowed into the city, replacing the traditional German, Scandinavian, and Irish settlers. It was this "new immigration," this scum of Europe, that was the anathema of the restrictionist.

The pattern which appeared in Omaha was that the older immigrant groups

¹³Leighton, p. 174.

¹⁴ibid., p. 175.

¹⁵Nebraska Federal Writers' Project, Omaha Guide, Part I, "History of the City" (unpublished manuscript in the files of the Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln), pp. 45-46.

TABLE 1
FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION IMMIGRANTS IN OMAHA AND SOUTH OMAHA^a

Nationality	Omaha			South Omaha	
	1890	1900	1910	1900	1910
Austria	834	1,313	6,553	739	5,325
Canada	3,368	2,238	1,649	458	303
Czechoslovakia	6,541	6,167	... ^b	4,300	... ^b
Denmark	10,065	6,558	4,788	765	502
England	6,477	3,826	2,433	480	300
France	594	363	219	94	31
Germany	23,661	17,148	11,711	3,807	2,341
Greece	5	14	486	-	59
Hungary	342	281	849	19	560
Ireland	13,787	9,375	5,530	2,969	1,845
Italy	1,185	1,155	3,084	18	137
Norway	1,442	766	667	164	106
Poland	527	1,735	... ^c	931	... ^c
Russia	1,440	2,154	4,100	287	1,411
Scotland	2,391	1,642	900	239	131
Sweden	14,797	10,814	7,435	1,246	649
Turkey	13	20	188	-	72
Wales	579	218	143	50	12
Total immigrant population	60,790	56,257	66,663	13,832	16,862
Total population	140,542	102,555	124,096	26,001	26,259

^aCalculated from: U. S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890, Vol. XVI, 670-74; U. S. Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900, Vol. I, 876-77; U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910, Vol. III, 19,48,68. The statistics themselves are not entirely accurate since the definition of nationality varied from census to census during this period. Also there was no agreement on exactly who should be considered a second generation immigrant. Nevertheless these statistics do clearly show the population trends.

^bCzechoslovakian immigrants for the year 1910 were included with Austria and Hungary.

^cPolish immigrants for 1910 were included with Germany and Russia.

seemed to become assimilated rapidly and easily while the new nationalities seemed to resist Americanization. Omaha sociologist Earl T. Sullenger noted, "There has been a gradual tendency for the northern immigrant groups to become assimilated while the opposite is generally true with the southern immigrants. This is exemplified by their physical location in the city and also by the gradual acceptance of these peoples by their native-born American neighbors."¹⁶ He further stated that the Irish, Germans, Scandinavians, and Czech Protestants merged quickly and easily with the native population, while the rest of the Czechs along with the Poles, the Italians, the Russian Jews, and the other nationalities from eastern Europe maintained segregated communities within the city.¹⁷ Although Sullenger failed to take into account the complex factors involved in the process of ethnic assimilation which would explain the apparent delay in the Americanization of the new immigrants, he does reflect accurately the fact that the eastern and southern Europeans were becoming the most visible ethnic groups in Omaha after 1890.

The stage was set. Omaha in the two decades at the turn of the century was a medium-sized Midwestern city with a large and highly visible foreign population. It was also situated in an area which abounded with Populist and Progressive reformers. Therefore the popular response to ethnic groups in Omaha should be indicative of the attitude which would be displayed by Midwesterners when confronted with sizable concentrations of immigrants.

¹⁶ T. Earl Sullenger, "Problems of Ethnic Assimilation in Omaha," Social Forces, XV (March, 1937), p. 403.

¹⁷ T. Earl Sullenger, Studies in Urban Sociology (New York: The Survey, 1933), pp. 74-78; and T. Earl Sullenger and Lillian Hill, The Immigrant in Omaha (Omaha: Municipal University of Omaha, 1932), pp. 3-7.

The time limits placed on this study are the years 1892-1910. Any attempt to periodize in history is highly arbitrary, and the present case is no exception. There are certain factors which influenced the selection of the limits, however, which merit some discussion. 1892 was a significant year in Omaha's history. During that year the agricultural distress of America's rural regions led to the Populist national convention which was held in Omaha in July. The economic unrest spotlighted in that year foreshadowed the four years of depression which would cripple Omaha and the nation from 1893-1896. Also the early 1890's corresponded with the upsurge of nativism that swept the country.

By 1910 the country had experienced over a decade of almost uninterrupted economic prosperity, and Populism had given way to the Progressive movement. The source of immigration had clearly shifted to southern and eastern Europe. At the same time the restrictionist movement was making substantial headway on the national level. The nativistic attitudes which would result in the repression of minorities during the World War and the Red Scare and culminate in the restrictionist laws of the 1920's were already evident in 1910. In 1911 those opposed to immigration received the semi-official stamp of the government when the United States Immigration Commission released its voluminous report recommending a reduction of immigration through the adoption of a literacy test. Thus by 1910 the country was well set on a course toward restriction. The period 1892-1910 should, therefore, provide information on the extent to which the citizens of Omaha corresponded to the national pattern, and what forces were determinant in forming their reaction to their foreign neighbors.

Omaha newspapers were used in order to determine the attitude of the

people of Omaha toward the immigrant population of the city. At the turn of the century newspapers were in most cases the only sources of information and opinion to which the people had access. Therefore, they provided a reasonably accurate indication of what the masses were thinking. In both editorials and news items the Omaha press informed the people of the city what was happening in the rest of the country and in doing so played a major role in determining the response of the population to events in the news.

CHAPTER 1

NATIVISM AND HARD TIMES 1892-96

According to historian John Higham one of the major factors influencing nativism was the social and economic dislocation during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.¹ The period from 1885 to 1897 was one of continual and almost unrelieved discontent, culminating in the severe depression of 1893-1897.² The resulting frustrations manifested themselves through a political reformation, the Populist Party, and through an attempt to find a scapegoat for the nation's ills. Essential to the American way of life is a deep-seated optimism. When this optimism is challenged, as it was in the 1890's, the response which often occurs is to explain the apparent failure by manufacturing a conspiracy. One of the Populist responses to the distress of the farmer was to affix the blame on a "sustained conspiracy of the international money power" which was said to have controlled America since the Civil War.³

The farmer certainly had legitimate reasons to complain during the 1890's. He found himself confronted by new economic forces which he did not comprehend. A world-wide economic network and impersonal price-and-market system which the farmer did not understand had replaced self-sufficiency.⁴

¹ John Higham, "The Origins of Immigration Restriction," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXIX (June, 1952), p. 77.

² Higham, Strangers in the Land, p. 68.

³ Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R. (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 70.

⁴ Samuel P. Hays, The Response to Industrialism: 1885-1914 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 27.

In addition the debt-ridden farmer received low prices for his produce, and faced a deflationary monetary system. Obviously, the farmer himself was not to blame. After all, his neighbor who had been driven off the farm had succeeded in the city.⁵ It was little wonder that he believed that "someone was walking off with the surplus," or that "certain influences were at work, like thieves in the night, to rob the farmers of the fruits of their toil."⁶

Hand in hand with the agrarian distress against which the Populists battled came another apparent challenge to the American system. Violent labor disturbances rocked America, the land of plenty, during the very period that agrarian unrest was at its peak. Never before had labor and capital been engaged in such vicious private warfare as would develop at the Homestead strike in 1892; never had the public become more alarmed over the dangers of industrial strife than during the Pullman strike of 1894.⁷ This disorder, too, initiated a search for a scapegoat. In this case the immigrant received a considerable portion of the blame.

The city of Omaha was seriously affected by the social and economic turmoil of the 1890's. Omaha seemed caught between the two forces: rural and urban unrest. On one hand, as a midwestern city Omaha was deeply involved in the Populist uprising. In fact the Populists held their National Convention in that city in the summer of 1892, and William Jennings Bryan,

⁵John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 55.

⁶Ibid., pp. 55, 59-60.

⁷Foster Rhea Dulles, Labor in America: A History (New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1949), p. 166.

their nominee for President in 1896, was a citizen of Omaha and an occasional editor of one of the city's major newspapers, the Omaha World-Herald. So, the city found itself closely associated with the Populist movement.

On the other hand, Omaha as an urban industrial area was deeply concerned with the increasing labor radicalism. Although the city was fortunate enough not to have any really violent labor disturbances, Omaha felt herself to be continually in the shadow of social revolution. The labor wars of Chicago, Pennsylvania, and the Colorado mining regions were close enough to Omaha to create uneasiness. The numerous violent labor strikes of the period, combined with the wide spread agricultural unrest, added to the feelings of frustration and discontent within the city.

In addition to these outside disturbances the depression brought Omaha problems of her own. As in any economic crisis the city suffered from widespread unemployment and poverty. On December 15, 1893 the Omaha Mercury announced that the city's work force had been reduced by twenty-five per cent since December first.⁸ By January 12 of the next year an estimated 3500 heads of families were unemployed in the city.⁹ To make matters more serious organized relief for the poor was practically nonexistent. Besides the physical hardships placed on the citizens of Omaha by the depression, the city received an additional blow. For the first time the city's remarkable physical growth was checked. Indeed, the population of Omaha decreased almost thirty per cent during the decade of the 1890's. Thus with its growth halted, with armies of jobless roaming the streets, and faced with a

⁸ Omaha Mercury, December 15, 1893.

⁹ Ibid., January 12, 1894.

challenge to the American system emanating from the farm and the factory, the people of Omaha sought some factor to explain the troubles of society.

While trying to cope with these social and economic problems, Omaha attracted the attention of the nation's depressed classes in the summer of 1892. Amid an abundance of enthusiasm and ceremony the Populist Party convened its nominating convention there on July 4, 1892. From the beginning an undercurrent of anti-foreign sentiment was present. This feeling took two forms: an ill-defined anti-Semitism and strong statements against imported pauperized labor. The anti-Semitism, although the more visible of the two, found less official recognition within the party leadership. The derogatory anti-Semitic references were usually in the context of Jews as agents of an international financial conspiracy. For example, the Connecticut delegation carried a placard reading: "Congress (Not the People) Be Damned, Shylock's Twins, Grover and Ben."¹⁰ At a memorial service held during the convention for Colonel L. L. Polk, a Populist leader from North Carolina who had recently died, Emma Ghent Curtis read her poem "Ode to Polk" which in part praised the Colonel for his fight against Shylock:

Our faith so deeply rooted in
A leader fearless, staunch and brave,
Grows sick and dizzy now that he
Lies hidden in the silent grave.
So valient and so strong was he
In his fight against Shylock's crimes and greeds,
We find it hard to walk aright
When his strong hand no longer leads.¹¹

In all fairness it must be said that there were no racial undertones to the Populist anti-Semitism, nor was there any agitation to restrict Jewish

¹⁰ World-Herald (Omaha), July 3, 1892.

¹¹ Ibid., July 4, 1892.

immigration to the United States. The Populists stereotyped the Jew as the banker or merchant who served as the middle-man and robbed the farmer of the fruits of his labor. It was this figure that the Populists attacked as the agent of a world wide financial conspiracy.

The Populists directed the other phase of their attack against ethnic groups as contract labor. They saw what appeared to be great numbers of imported workers and strike breakers weakening organized labor and driving wages downward. The preamble to their platform charged that "The urban workmen are denied the right of organization for self-protection; imported pauperized labor beats down their wages . . ." ¹² The platform further stated:

Resolved, That we condemn the fallacy of protecting American labor under the present system, which opens our ports to the pauper and criminal classes of the world, and crowds out our wage-earners; and we denounce the present ineffective laws against contract labor, and demand the further restriction of undesirable immigration. ¹³

The Populists appealed not against voluntary immigration, but against the policy of importing foreign labor for the purpose of securing an easily dominated working force, thereby depriving native Americans of employment. For all practical purposes this practice had ceased with the enactment of the Foran Act in 1885. ¹⁴ Therefore, instead of trying to find a logical solution to the existing problems of labor, the Populists sought again to uncover some sort of conspiracy, in this case the use of contract labor to

¹²Quoted in Hicks, p. 440.

¹³Ibid., p. 444; Bee (Omaha), July 4, 1892.

¹⁴Jones, p. 190.

oppress the American working class.

The Populists were not essentially nativists. They did not seek to end, or even to seriously restrict immigration to this country. What they were trying to do in Omaha in the summer of 1892 was to cement political ties between the farmer and the urban worker. In doing so they committed themselves to opposing the importation of contract labor--a practice which in fact did not exist.

Although Omaha did not vote Populist in the election of 1892, there was a considerable amount of support for Populist ideas in the city. In addition, with the Populist Party platform debated in their midst the people of Omaha were very much aware of the issues involved. The Populist attack on the immigration of pauper and criminal classes and on contract labor received effective coverage in the press of the city and therefore had at least some influence on the population. Populist anti-immigrant propaganda, however, was soon overshadowed by the outbreak of labor violence, and reports of disorder in other sections of the country.

Before the Populists had left the city, the citizens of Omaha read shocking reports of rioting immigrants in Ohio. On July 6, 1892 the World-Herald under the headline "Riotous Hungarians, Filled with Liquor They Became a Mob of Howling Maniacs," carried the report that a gang of drunken Italians met a mob of drunken Hungarians on July 4 in Steubenville, Ohio, and a turbulent fight ensued.¹⁵ These two east European immigrant groups hardly made a favorable impression with such rowdy behavior on Independence Day. Such reports helped establish the stereotype of these ethnic groups as

¹⁵World-Herald, July 6, 1892.

lawless, intemperate and irresponsible.

On the heels of this event came one of the most serious labor disturbances of the decade. On July 6, H. C. Frick, the manager of the Carnegie works at Homestead, Pennsylvania, ordered a reduction of wages, and the entire labor force went out on strike.¹⁶ Frick responded by recruiting a force of some three hundred Pinkerton guards and sending them to take charge of the company property at Homestead.¹⁷ The strikers armed themselves and held their positions. In the resulting gun battle nine strikers and three Pinkertons were killed before the detectives withdrew.¹⁸ The strikers held the Company at bay until July 12, when the governor sent eight thousand of the state militia, after Frick's appeal for aid, to take control of Homestead under martial law.¹⁹

In Omaha the reports of the strike gave credibility to the belief that widespread social disorder was just around the corner. The first news from Homestead claimed in bold headlines "THE WAR BEGINS," and went on to state that authorities feared a general riot in Pittsburgh.²⁰ The World-Herald reported that as a result of the first day's violence, "groans of the dead mingle with sobs of grief-stricken widows and orphans."²¹ There seemed no foreseeable end to the disorder. Although there had been no large scale

¹⁶ Henry Pelling, American Labor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 97.

¹⁷ Ibid., Dulles, pp. 166-67.

¹⁸ Pelling, p. 97.

¹⁹ Dulles, pp. 167-68.

²⁰ World-Herald, July 7, 1892.

²¹ Ibid.

outbreak since the first night, the World-Herald described the situation as "A Slumbering Volcano," and pointed out that "the strikers now have nearly nine hundred first-class Winchesters and still hold the mill."²²

Both of Omaha's major newspapers, the Bee and the World-Herald, were pro-labor in this strike. Both believed that Frick had gone beyond his rights when he hired a mercenary army to quell the strikers, but both papers also thought the union men had no right to seize the property of the company by force.²³ As the Bee noted, "such doctrine incites anarchy and strikes at the basis of our institutions . . ."²⁴ It was this fear of anarchism which was most influential in determining the attitude about the strike in Omaha. Not only did the workers display a flagrant disregard for the sanctity of private property, but the Bee feared that demagogues such as General Weaver would use the events at Homestead to spread rumors of general unrest.²⁵

Events seemed to justify such fears. Before the strike in Pennsylvania had been settled, a new outbreak of labor violence furnished a parallel to the Homestead tragedy. On July 11, fourteen were killed in a clash between union and non-union men in the Idaho mines, and once again a state militia had to be called in to restore order.²⁶ Certainly the occurrences of July, 1892 seemed to foreshadow a period of widespread social disorder.

It was not difficult to connect the Hungarian-Italian riots in Ohio

²²Ibid., July 8, 1892.

²³World-Herald, July 9, 1892; Bee, July 13, 1892.

²⁴Bee, July 13, 1892.

²⁵Ibid., July 8, 1892.

²⁶World-Herald, July 12, 1892.

with the outbreaks of labor violence in Homestead and Idaho. What better way to explain the breakdown of American law and order than through the presence of scores of east European immigrants in the trouble areas? The World-Herald clearly adopted this explanation of the disorder. Early in the strike the World-Herald, reported: "The people of Homestead are American citizens and voters, most of them of German, English, Irish, and Yankee birth."²⁷ The situation soon got out of hand. After criticizing the strikers for not respecting company property, the paper reprinted an editorial from the Cincinnati Commercial Gazette under the title, "Who Wants the Scum of Europe?"

"The horrible Homestead riot cries out to ears that are open to common intelligence and common sense of social protection that we must have at once a severe stiffening of our immigration laws and the rigid enforcement of them. We are getting strong elements in this country that are positively dangerous. Our institutions are good and strong in their way, but not enough to support all the scum from children of ignorance, crime, and sedition of Europe."²⁸

The World-Herald then continued:

Who is it, we would like to know, most seeks to attract the scum of Europe to our shores? Who is it that invited the off-scourings of foreign ports to come here and take the places of self-respecting workmen--the latter, or the tariff barons?²⁹

Thus the World-Herald echoed Populist charges of contract labor, not only attacking industrialists for using immigrant workers to beat down the wages of American citizens, but also condemning them for importing disorderly elements into the country. Even more significantly, the press reacted

²⁷ Ibid., July 9, 1892.

²⁸ Ibid., July 11, 1892.

²⁹ Ibid.

to the pressure of increasing social disorder by turning against the immigrant. This corresponded to a pattern in which nativism reflected the frustrations resulting from social unrest. Just as the Populists blamed the problems of the proletariat on contract labor, the Omaha press responded to the unrest demonstrated by the Populist convention by emphasizing a relatively minor clash between Italians and Hungarians in Ohio, and responded to the Homestead riot by again attacking east European immigrants. This pattern would dictate the response to ethnic groups in Omaha during the next two decades.

In the spring and summer of 1893 the country plunged into panic and depression. By September it was apparent that the American people were in the throes of an economic disaster unprecedented in their experience.³⁰ This economic crisis, when added to the amount of social ferment already existing, increased the fear of anarchism which had been born in the labor unrest of the year before. Again this fear was directed toward the immigrant who was claimed to be responsible for the apparent decay of American institutions.

The depression was soon felt in Omaha, but at first its immediate effects did not seem too serious. In April the Bee noted that although economic conditions were not too favorable, thousands of settlers were pouring into Nebraska, and that, "they are all industrious citizens . . . few of them are foreigners, the majority being honest farmers from the eastern and middle western states."³¹ Within days this optimism disappeared. On

³⁰ Harold U. Faulkner, Politics, Reform and Expansion, 1890-1900 (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 142.

³¹ Bee, April 16, 1893.

April 17, five hundred Union Pacific iron workers walked out in the largest strike in Omaha since 1884. Although labor and management settled the dispute peacefully within a week, the attitude in the city toward ethnic groups was already becoming less tolerant. During the strike the Bee warned Canada to stop smuggling objectional immigrants into the United States.³² In the following months as unemployment and economic distress grew, nativism also increased. In November Mary Ellen Lease spoke in the city and renewed the Populist charges of a Jewish-Wall Street conspiracy.³³

Throughout this period the attack on immigrants was limited to the nationalities from southern and eastern Europe. The older immigrant stocks were not criticized. Both newspapers reported very favorably the social events of the German community, and in May, 1894 when the Ancient Order of the Hibernians held their national convention in Omaha, both the Bee and the World-Herald welcomed the Irish with open arms.³⁴ Likewise, Swedish-Americans were praised as a wealth-producing element of the population.³⁵ The only exception to this was the development of a strong anti-Catholic movement, which of course opposed the Irish and German Catholics. This movement will be discussed in a later chapter.

In 1894 labor unrest reached a climax. Between May and August every possible kind of disturbance broke loose in almost every section of the country. In Omaha the newspapers put forth an image of violence and

³²Ibid., April 20, 1893.

³³Ibid., November 3, 1893.

³⁴Ibid., May 7-12, 1894; World-Herald, May 7-12, 1894.

³⁵Bee, December 10, 1893.

lawlessness which would give credibility to claims that the country was on the verge of anarchy. As in the unrest of two years before the immigrant was linked with the disorder, and became the scapegoat for the nation's social problems.

May Day, 1894 marked the beginning of four months of unrest during which the press continually bombarded the population of Omaha with vivid images of violence which intensified feelings of frustration within the city. On that day demonstrations in several cities in the country, and in fact throughout the world, seemed to indicate that widespread disorder was in danger of exploding at any moment. The most spectacular demonstration was that of Jacob S. Coxey and his army of "Commonwealers" who arrived in Washington on May 1, and attempted to deliver a petition requesting Congress to provide a public works program for the more than two and a half million unemployed.³⁶ The Commonwealers were dispersed by nervous police swinging their clubs, and Coxey and two of his lieutenants were arrested for carrying banners on the capital grounds and walking on the grass.³⁷ Coxey's march underscored the state of social unrest created by the depression.

May Day was not a day for optimism in Omaha. Newspapers reported the arrival of Coxey in Washington, and noted that one of the Commonwealer's proteges, Kelley, was stranded with his industrial army in Des Moines, Iowa, and refused to move until transportation was provided.³⁸ Violence appeared imminent in the strike on the Great Northern Railroad, and President

³⁶Hays, p. 43; Faulkner, pp. 163-67.

³⁷Faulkner, p. 167.

³⁸World-Herald, May 1, 1894.

Cleveland was threatening to send troops to arrest the strikers.³⁹ Riots broke out in Hyde Park, London, and in Cleveland, Ohio. In the Cleveland riot the state militia was required to finally break up the mobs.⁴⁰ The World-Herald noted that "within the last thirty days the militia was called out in Council Bluffs, Cleveland, Duluth, Ogden, Columbia, Denver, Oakland and other places to quell disorders."⁴¹ Indeed the nation seemed to be a powder keg needing only one spark to cause an explosion.

The spark was not long in coming, and significantly, an immigrant lit the fuse. On May 5, Hungarian workers rioted at the McClure Coke Company in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania. Under the headline "Hungarian Strikers Fall Like Bulls before Deadly Winchesters" the World-Herald reported that during the melee in which at least ten Hungarians were shot, "the Huns, men and women, were armed with clubs, hatchets, staves, and picks, and more blood thirsty, desperate mob never before raided the coke region."⁴² The image of the immigrant established here formed the basis of anti-immigrant agitation during the long summer of 1894. The people of Omaha responded to labor unrest by identifying the foreign born with lawlessness and anarchy, and demanded that the nation's social problems be resolved by eliminating the flood of undesirable immigrants that yearly poured into the country.

Omaha newspapers acted promptly to point out the dangers of immigration. On May 18, the World-Herald discussed the report of a committee of

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., May 3, 1894.

⁴¹ Ibid., May 4, 1894.

⁴² Ibid., May 5, 1894.

the English government sent to America to study the effects of immigration in the United States. The committee noted that although English, Irish, German, and Scandanavian settlers assimilated easily and were highly desirable, these groups had been overwhelmed in numbers recently by less desirable nationalities.⁴³ The report continued, "swarms of other races, more particularly the Slavs and the Italians have come in whose traits, habits, and modes of life are so unlike those of the older inhabitants of the United States that their assimilation with them is practically impossible; and it is now ascertained that there are many settlements of aliens who do not desire to speak the language, who refuse to conform to its laws, and who are utterly at variance in many ways with the genius of the American people."⁴⁴

Omaha had its suspicions verified by an outside source. It certainly appeared that large segments of the population no longer had any respect for American laws and customs. The World-Herald concluded, "If a foreign race cannot assimilate and become Americanized, this country does not want them."⁴⁵

These prejudices soon appeared to be justified. On May 26, violence again broke out among Hungarian miners in Pennsylvania, and the following day miners in Cripple Creek, Colorado began a bloody strike. In Pennsylvania a gun battle between deputies and miners resulted in the death of a number of "Slavs."⁴⁶ Three days later three Hungarian strikers on a mission

⁴³ Ibid., May 18, 1894.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Bee, May 25, 1894.

of sabotage shot and seriously wounded the night watchman of the Moyer Coke Works in Scottsdale.⁴⁷ In Cripple Creek events seemed to be even more serious. Headlines on May 26, reported "ELEVEN ARE DEAD" as a result of the first confrontation between strikers and deputies.⁴⁸ The situation rapidly became more critical. By the end of the month the Bee reported in vivid headlines that a battle was imminent:

Ready for the Fray; Cripple Creek strikers have captured all the arms in sight; Attack expected at any time; All miners compelled to join the military bands; Army of deputies also increased; Everything indicates that a bloody battle will soon take place.⁴⁹

Fortunately the battle never materialized. The strike was settled peacefully on June 6.

Both of these incidents increased the sense of unrest in Omaha. The Cripple Creek strike further reminded people that labor conditions threatened to spawn violent uprisings against the established order. The riots at Scottsdale illustrated once again the relationship between immigrants and social disorder. Both of these events set the stage for the Pullman riots in July, 1894.

The Pullman strike had begun in May, 1894 when the company refused to bargain with representatives of the American Railway Union concerning the wage cuts which the Pullman works had given to its employees. The strike spread as railroad workers throughout the country boycotted the Pullman cars. During the first week of July the strike erupted in violence as 3400

⁴⁷Ibid., May 29, 1894.

⁴⁸Ibid., May 26, 1894.

⁴⁹Ibid., May 30, 1894.

armed men arrived in Chicago to keep the trains running.⁵⁰ There were clashes between strikers and deputies; rioting broke out and railway property was destroyed; and in response to pleas by the Pullman Company, President Cleveland sent federal troops to restore order, safeguard the mails, and protect interstate commerce.⁵¹ With Federal troops on the scene the riot was quelled and the strikers gave up their futile efforts.⁵² Federal troops were withdrawn on July 20.

In Omaha the strike did not appear as simple as that. News stories carried alarming accounts of mob action and battles with the police and troops. The general impression was that the entire city of Chicago was in the throes of anarchy and revolution. The World-Herald reported that Eugene Debs had arrived in Chicago on July 4, and had warned that there was a threat of civil war in the railroad strike.⁵³ The same day Grand Master Workman Sovereign addressed a Knights of Labor picnic in Omaha underscoring the power of labor:

In the ages gone by labor has hurled governments into oblivion, ground cities into dust, and hurled kings into unrecognized graves.

Exasperated labor is the volcanic matter at the heart of organized society.⁵⁴

For the next several days anarchy appeared to be running rampant

⁵⁰ Dulles, p. 176.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., p. 178.

⁵³ World-Herald, July 5, 1894.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

through the streets of Chicago. The Omaha press cried: "RIOT IN FULL SWAY; Violence, Anarchy, and Arson Ran Wild in Chicago's Busy Streets."⁵⁵ Even with the arrival of Federal troops the Bee could see no end to the disorder. Under the headline "MOBS STILL RULE," it reported, "Instead of diminishing in force the strike situation in Chicago has become more serious in spite of the presence of United States troops."⁵⁶ Rumors flew that no more federal forces could be sent to the trouble area because the President was worried about outbreaks in other parts of the country.⁵⁷ To these speculations was added the real threat by Debs that a nationwide general strike would be called.⁵⁸

As the riots continued, the Omaha press began to place the blame for the violence on immigrants. The World-Herald described the leaders of the mobs that roamed Chicago's streets as "nearly all foreigners."⁵⁹ The following day the papers reported one of the most serious outbreaks in which the troops opened fire on the strikers inflicting numerous casualties. The World-Herald placed the blame for the incident on east European immigrants, claiming that, "the affray was solely precipitated by the mob, which was made up in the main of foreigners, the large neighborhood [in which the incident occurred] being inhabited almost exclusively by Bohemians and

⁵⁵ Ibid., July 6, 1894.

⁵⁶ Bee, July 6, 1894.

⁵⁷ Ibid., July 7, 1894.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ World-Herald, July 7, 1894.

Pollacks."⁶⁰

Even after the strike ended the attack on the immigrants who were claimed to have precipitated it continued. On July 27, the Omaha Mercury commented sarcastically, "There was recently incorporated in Springfield, Ill., the 'Towarzystow Niepokolanezj Pomercy Nr. S. W. of Chicago.' And yet we wonder that there is violence in that city."⁶¹ Any foreign-sounding name was viewed with suspicion, and in some way linked with the Chicago riots. The same paper launched a bitter attack on Italian immigrants:

There are many good, law-abiding Italians in the United States, but there are still more who are dirty, ignorant, and vicious. They never learn our language, never understand our institutions, but breed disease and disseminate anarchy and confusion.⁶²

The immigrant was blamed for the events which exploded in violence during the Pullman strike. Logically the next step would be to devise a plan to keep these foreign trouble makers out of the country. This step was taken August 6, when the Senate passed a bill which prohibited the immigration of foreign anarchists to this country. The bill made it illegal for an alien anarchist to land at any port in the United States, and further stipulated that if it was determined that any landed immigrant "is an anarchist or that he is not a man of good character; or that he is not attached to the principles of the United States; or that he is not well disposed to the good order and happiness of the same, and that his remaining in this country will be a menace to the government or to the peace and well being of society in

⁶⁰ Ibid., July 8, 1894.

⁶¹ Omaha Mercury, July 29, 1894.

⁶² Ibid., August 3, 1894.

general . . . he shall be deported."⁶³

While Congress debated this far reaching legislation, the people of Omaha received more proof of the necessity of such action. On July 30, the Butchers Union at Swift and Company in South Omaha walked off the job protesting wage reductions, and within three days the strike had spread throughout the South Omaha packing industry. After a week of relative peace the strike erupted in violence. The World-Herald reported "SOUTH OMAHA RIOTS," that a crowd of two hundred men led by a man carrying a red flag converged on a group of strike breakers and the riot began.⁶⁴ The disorder continued until troops were dispatched to the area four days later.

As one might expect immigrants were blamed for a great deal of the violence. The city's ethnic minorities were accused of two crimes during the strike: Bohemians, Italians, and Negroes served as strikebreakers, thereby alienating the working class of the city; and these "scabs" were armed and therefore appeared to be a lawless element.⁶⁵ Colored scabs carried revolvers and razors, and the Italians wielded knives and pistols as they marched past large groups of strikers on their way to work.⁶⁶ The violence which occurred was usually centered around these groups of armed, foreign strikebreakers, thus reinforcing the popular image of them as being agents of anarchy.

As violence flared at their doorstep the Omaha press acted to endorse

⁶³ World-Herald, August 7, 1894.

⁶⁴ Ibid., August 8, 1894.

⁶⁵ Ibid., August 8, 1894; August 10, 1894.

⁶⁶ Ibid.; Bee, August 8, 1894.

legislation to prohibit the immigration of anarchists. The World-Herald declared:

The bill passed by the Senate concerning the deportation of alien anarchists is the first systematic step of the United States to act in harmony with the European nations for the eradication of anarchy . . . Anarchists whose object in life is to nibble, mole-like at the roots of society and to destroy all wholesome things. . . . To close our doors to such and to go on record as so doing is something of which every true American will approve.⁶⁷

Although the House refused to pass the alien anarchist bill, Omaha did not give up its demands that something be done to eliminate undesirable immigration. The Omaha Mercury supported a plan to stop the influx of undesirable foreigners by establishing a literacy test and a one hundred dollar cash requirement, increasing the naturalization period to ten years, and by increasing the size of the army!⁶⁸ The paper also noted that the fear of foreigners was becoming more widespread after the Pullman riots, and claimed that one-half of the paupers in the United States were immigrants who had arrived within five years.⁶⁹ Thus the immigrant had been stereotyped as the factor in American life that was responsible for the widespread social and economic unrest.

Little happened to change this image of the foreigner. As long as economic prospects were dim in Omaha, and while social disorder spread through the country, the people of Omaha displayed no sympathy for the groups whom they held responsible for the distress. Indeed events only reinforced the

⁶⁷ World-Herald, August 9, 1894.

⁶⁸ Omaha Mercury, September 14, 1894.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

stereotype. In 1895 dissension within the Omaha Polish community resulted in a riot in "Sheelytown," the Polish section of the city.⁷⁰ Such outbreaks among the foreign population did nothing to improve their image in Omaha.

Throughout the depression years the immigrant was the scapegoat for social unrest. Wherever disorder appeared, the foreigner was blamed. Unemployment was blamed on pauper immigrants who robbed native workers of their jobs and lowered wage scales; when Americans struck for higher wages or better working conditions, immigrants were imported as strikebreakers; and yet in the violent labor wars that rocked the nation the immigrant was blamed for spreading anarchism! In Omaha the immigrant became the target for all the frustrations that were created by the depression.

⁷⁰World-Herald, March 13, 1895.

CHAPTER II

ANTI-CATHOLICISM: THE AMERICAN PROTECTIVE

ASSOCIATION IN OMAHA

Thus far we have defined ethnic groups according to nationality. During this same period there was a revival of religious nativism in Omaha. The American Protective Association, a militantly anti-Catholic organization, found a sizeable amount of support in the city. Indeed, as early as the fall of 1891 the APA was strongly in evidence in Omaha, and from 1893 to 1895 the society dominated the city's politics.¹ The American Protective Association differed from conventional nativism in several respects. First the movement was essentially anti-Catholic rather than anti-immigrant. The APA defined its brand of Americanism as depending on the focus of an individual's loyalty, not on the country of his birth. In fact a large part of its membership was made up of foreign-born Americans such as Englishmen, Scotch-Irish, Irish Orangemen, Canadians, Scandinavians, and Germans.² Given such a make up and given the fact that the APA was officially open to all American citizens regardless of the country of their birth, the organization would be expected to refrain from open hostility to immigration, except, of course, the immigration of Catholics.

The APA also differed from traditional nativism in that the APA was a highly organized and highly structured, secret society which was able to

¹Humphrey J. Desmond, The A.P.A. Movement: A Sketch (Washington: The New Century Press, 1912), pp. 64, 69.

²Martin E. Carlson, "A History of the American Protective Association in Nebraska" (unpublished Master's Thesis, Colorado State College of Education, 1947), pp. 52-53.

gain political power simply by the sheer weight of its members at the polls, whereas nativism, at least in Omaha, was a totally unorganized movement. As such the APA was better able to mobilize its forces, and exerted more influence than would be expected from the number of hard core members which it had.

Finally the American Protective Association was unique among similar organizations in that it was successful in politics. Profiting from the mistakes of one of its predecessors, the Know-Nothing Party of pre-Civil War America, the APA overcame the temptation to form a third party. Instead the organization concentrated on capturing control of the existing party apparatus at the local level.³ In many areas the society was effective in dominating the machinery of the Republican party and was able on occasion to dictate nominations at the party caucuses.⁴ In this sense the APA held considerably more power and wielded more influence than any other group that opposed ethnic groups in Omaha. In fact the APA was the only such group of any importance in the city during this period. In all other cases nativist pressure was unorganized, and although those opposed to immigration might have outnumbered the anti-Catholics, from 1892 to 1897 they were second to the APA in influence.

The American Protective Association was founded at Clinton, Iowa, on March 13, 1887, by Henry F. Bowers. The purpose of the organization was to counteract the alleged efforts of representatives of the papal government in

³ Byron Marshall Holmes, "The American Protective Association Movement" (unpublished Master's Thesis, University of California, 1939), p. 80.

⁴ Carlson, p. 137.

the United States to dominate American politics with the "spirit of ecclesiasticism" attempting to establish a union of church and state.⁵ The founders based their suspicions on the "many appropriations to church institutions"; on the "segregation of the subjects of the Pope" in most of the large American cities, which made the "election of a non-papist" to any public office a rarity: and the fact, as stated, that "from sixty to ninety percent of the public officeholders and employees" were "followers of the Pope."⁶ From this the founders concluded that the corruption and inefficiency of our local governments was the result of a massive papal plot to undermine American institutions.⁷

From its origins in Iowa the APA spread rapidly through the mid-section of the country. Additional councils soon were established in other Iowa cities, and a branch with a large membership was instituted in Chicago. A national council was organized at a convention of delegates from local councils held at Chicago in 1888. By 1891 the movement had spread eastward and westward from Iowa, and was active in Detroit and Omaha. The area of most APA strength was a belt extending through northern Ohio, eastern Michigan, northern and central Illinois, and eastern Kansas and Nebraska.⁸ By 1894 this strength had spread to nearly a dozen other states.⁹ At its crest in 1895 the American Protective Association claimed two and one-half million

⁵Holmes, pp. 28-29.

⁶Ibid., p. 29.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Carlson, p. 43.

⁹Holmes, p. 58.

members (which was a more realistic measure of its "influence" than its actual membership), and claimed nationwide influence.¹⁰

The APA was basically an organization of contradictions. It claimed no prejudices about a person's nationality, and yet it favored the restriction of immigration; it favored religious freedom, but opposed the Catholic church; it desired to protect the constitutional liberty enjoyed in the United States, but sought to deprive Catholics of those very liberties; and it claimed to be an organization to promote one hundred per cent Americanism, and yet was un-American itself.¹¹ Its purpose was most precisely stated in paragraph sixteen of its "Declaration of Principles";

Our mission is to awaken the people of America from their lethargy, indifference and overconfidence--external vigilance is the price of liberty, yet the Protestants of this republic have ceased to be vigilant and in conscious strength are intently chasing the almighty dollar or quietly dozing while we are swiftly drifting toward a more tremendous and terrible crisis than this country has yet known.

Birthplace is not the sole test of American loyalty. We have men born in several countries remote from this that are as loyal as any native, but they are not Romanists, American loyalty consists in devotion to our constitution, laws, institutions, flag, and above all, our public schools, for without intelligence, this representative republic will go to pieces. We oppose the teaching of perverted history in our schools and the mutilation of reference books to cover the infamies of the so-called church which is more political than religious. We are opposed to priests and prelates as such taking part in elections and voting their laity as a unit in the interests of a foreign corporation with intent to injure this nation and its institutions.¹²

¹⁰ Donald L. Kinzer, An Episode in Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), pp. 177-79.

¹¹ Ruth Knox Stough, "The American Protective Association (unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Nebraska, 1931), pp. 3-5.

¹² American (Omaha), March 23, 1894; Stough, p. 5.

The first APA council in Omaha was instituted in 1890. Before it was divided into four other councils, the Omaha group with a membership of nearly two thousand claimed to be the largest in the world.¹³ By 1891 APAer's in the city numbered between 2,400 and 4,000 with about nine hundred in South Omaha.¹⁴ In March, 1893 the Supreme Council of the APA reported nearly six thousand active members in Omaha alone.¹⁵

More important to the growth of the American Protective Association and its influence in Omaha was the establishment of the Omaha American, which was the official organ of the APA in the city. The paper, established in 1891 through the sale of stock to APA members in the Omaha area, did much to stimulate the movement in Omaha.¹⁶ The American carried the slogan, "America for Americans" and stated that "we hold all persons Americans who swear allegiance to the United States without a mental reservation in favor of the Pope."¹⁷ From the start the American claimed that the APA had taken Omaha and South Omaha by storm. The paper's circulation increased from 6,000 copies in the fall of 1892 to over 18,500 in the spring of 1894.¹⁸ Throughout this period the newspaper echoed the policy of its parent organization.

The APA and the American concerned themselves with two problems in Omaha: the supposed Catholic threat to America, and the similar and more

¹³Carlson, pp. 44-45.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 112-13.

¹⁷American, any issue.

¹⁸Ibid., October 27, 1892; March 23, 1894.

general threat to this country's way of life coming from unrestricted immigration. Against both of these dangers the APA launched a full scale attack. The APA did, though, consider the Catholics a far more pressing danger, and therefore directed the brunt of their efforts against them, turning their attention to immigration restriction second. Their campaign against immigration was strongly influenced by their fear of Catholics, especially since the rapid growth of the Catholic church, which created so much concern in the APA, was closely connected with the increase of Catholic immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. In addition their nativism was tempered by the fact that the APA was committed, at least in principle, to the policy of equality for foreign born citizens provided that they demonstrated loyalty to the United States. Therefore, anti-Catholicism superseded nativism in the APA campaign in Omaha, although the latter was always present as a secondary theme.

Anti-Catholicism was the most obvious doctrine spread by the Omaha American. The paper carried on an unrelenting campaign against the Catholic Church in America. The tactics adopted were similar to those used by the Know-Nothings forty years earlier; supposed Catholic ritual was revealed, ex-priests and nuns disclosed the horrors of the inner circles of the Church, horrible crimes were attributed to priests, and alleged decrees which instructed Catholics to prepare to overthrow the American government were circulated. The American kept standing columns of materials defamatory to the Catholic Church such as alleged Jesuit and cardinal oaths, cannon law, quotations ascribed to Catholic sources, serial stories and numerous cartoons.¹⁹

¹⁹Carlson, p. 112; American, any issue.

The American spelled out its policy in one of its first issues when it stated that the APA was not against individual Catholics, but opposed the institution of the Church and papal control. They believed in religious freedom, but felt that there was a conspiracy dictated by Rome and spread by a "Roman political machine" which sought to take over the government and destroy American liberties.²⁰ The American supported their claims by disclosing an alleged "Jesuit Oath" in which all Jesuits swore to help destroy all heretical (Protestant) governments, swore not to obey Protestant officers or magistrates, asserted that all governments were illegal unless confirmed by the Church, swore to aid in breaking down Protestantism, and swore to be "solely and wholly a Roman--the servant and willing tool of the man in Rome."²¹

The Catholic conspiracy not only threatened American government and liberties, but also presented a grave danger to American children. The American carried accounts of daughters being forcefully abducted to convents, and of priests committing perverted acts on children and young girls. The American reported that Father Quay, a priest at Snohomish, Washington had been charged with "enticing little girls and boys into his rooms and making outrageous and nameless assaults on them."²² The APA claimed that Catholicism was responsible for such outrages.

The American was soon able to report some success in its campaign against Catholicism. In April 1892, C. P. Miller, a member of the APA, was

²⁰ American, August 8, 1891.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., August 13, 1891.

elected mayor of South Omaha. The American joyfully announced that "Americans win the election in South Omaha" and went on to say, "the American is able to assure its many readers that South Omaha has been redeemed; that boodlerism is a thing of the past, and that it will not be either a pleasant or profitable pastime for drunken Roman Irish to congregate on street corners and malign Protestant-Americans . . ." ²³

This success, however, was short lived for in October Mayor Miller was found dead. Although much of the evidence pointed to suicide, the APA and the American were certain that he had been assassinated by Catholics. The paper announced that Miller was "the first martyr the American Protective Association is called upon to mourn." ²⁴ The American was convinced that because of his connection with the APA and because he had launched a campaign to rid the government of South Omaha of Catholic influence, Miller had been executed by members of the Roman Church. ²⁵ In fact the paper reported overhearing a Catholic in the street who said, "We fixed the ___ of a ___ this time; and we will fix more of them before we get through." ²⁶ The APA certainly was not pleased with the investigation of the death. It was never determined whether Miller was murdered or committed suicide, and two Catholic suspects were released because of lack of evidence. Since the crime was never explained, it was easy for the APA to place the blame on Catholic

²³ American, April 8, 1892.

²⁴ Ibid., October 14, 1892.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

conspirators.²⁷

The APA considered the death of Miller to be only a preview of what could be expected from Catholics in the near future. The movement warned that a full-scale Catholic uprising against American Protestants was imminent. In 1893 the APA publicized a forged papal encyclical attributed to Leo XIII which demanded the immediate overthrow of the United States and the slaughter of Protestants:

We proclaim the people of the United States to have forfeited all right to rule said Republic, and also all dominion, dignity, and privileges appertaining to it. We likewise declare that all subjects of rank and position in the United States and every individual who has taken any oath of lowality to the United States in any way whatsoever, may be absolved from said oath, and also from all duty, fidelity, or obedience . . . and on or about the feast of Ignatius Loyala, in the year of our Lord 1893, it will be the duty of the faithful to exterminate all heretics from within the jurisdiction of the United States.²⁸

This document struck panic in the hearts of many Protestants. Many were sure that the order to kill and burn had gone forth and prepared to defend themselves by stockpiling arms and ammunition.²⁹

When the bloodbath failed to appear as predicted, the APA was undaunted. The warning had alerted Protestants and prevented the attack; now Catholics were waiting to catch Americans off guard.³⁰ New signs of the coming massacre were reported. The American again in 1894 warned "Threat of Armed Catholic Attack!" and reported that the conspiracy to subvert the state by

²⁷Kinzer, p. 63.

²⁸Quoted in Holmes, p. 38.

²⁹Carlson, p. 99.

³⁰Holmes, p. 39.

the Roman Church had progressed rapidly.³¹ The threat now came from military units at Catholic colleges which were being drilled by officers of the American army. The paper noted:

Captain John Dunn, of the 10th infantry has been ordered by Secretary of War, Lamont, to report to the Jesuit college of St. Xavier to take the Professorship of Military Science at that institution.

Very recently a military instructor had been placed at Seton Hall College, New Jersey, another Popish institution. It is surely bad enough to permit the forming of Romish military companies, without furnishing them with arms and discipline at the expense of the government they are sworn to destroy. Will Americans even now fail to see the urgency of the necessity of enrolling themselves in the A.P.A.? If they do not, they shall be taken unaware as surely as past history can certify the treacherous character of Popery. The man who hesitates any longer is unworthy of respect.³²

The response of the APA to these threats was two-fold. First they publicized rumors of hostile Catholic activity and used scare psychology to increase their membership. They they used the power of their numbers to try to drive Catholics from positions of political or economic power in the city. First all members swore, "never to employ a Roman Catholic in any capacity if they could get a Protestant's service; to help retard and break down the power of the Pope; to oppose Roman Catholics for any public office; and to endeavor at all times to place the political positions of this government in the hands of Protestants."³³

The branch of government most influenced by Catholics was the Omaha police department. In the fall of 1891, an APA member filed a complaint

³¹American, February 9, 1894.

³²Ibid.

³³Carlson, p. 19.

against a Catholic for assault. When the case was thrown out of court, the APA interpreted it as a license to Roman Catholics to assault or attack APA members at any time or place.³⁴ Two years later the American accused the Irish-dominated police department of police brutality when dealing with Protestants.³⁵ By 1895 the power of the APA had increased sufficiently to enable the society to launch a successful campaign against police control by Catholics. In that year the APA dominated state legislature passed a bill placing the Omaha fire and police commissions under the jurisdiction of a three-man police board, of which two of the members were APA. In Omaha the anti-APA mayor tried to prevent the new police board from assuming control, but he was opposed by the pro-APA city council. In the resulting power struggle the APA scored a victory. The police board replaced the police commissioner with someone acceptable to the APA and the issue was settled, but not before the incident had inflamed public sentiment in Omaha against Catholics.³⁶

Although nativism was subordinated to the principle APA theme, anti-Catholicism, the organization did become more and more involved in the movement to restrict immigration. The fact that APA membership was open to natives of all countries, and that foreign born citizens were numerous in the society, did nothing to deter the APA from advocating restriction of immigration especially Catholic immigration. In fact nativism was always an essential feature of the organization. National president W. J. H. Traynor

³⁴ Stough, pp. 49-50.

³⁵ American, June 30, 1893.

³⁶ Carlson, pp. 154-56; Kinzer, p. 156.

recalled that two of the reasons for establishing the APA were:

That the conditions governing our national immigration were such as to weaken our democratic institutions and form of government not in harmony therewith.

That the immigrant vote, under the direction of certain ecclesiastical institutions had become so dominant a factor in politics as to virtually control it.³⁷

In its "Fundamental Principles" the APA demanded that something be done to restrict the flood of Europeans rushing to our shores, and that our naturalization laws be made stricter.³⁸ Indeed immigration presented a threat to America of almost the same magnitude as the Catholic conspiracy. Actually the two were often seen as being closely interrelated.

The American reflected this aspect of the APA as well as anti-Catholicism. In late 1891 it demonstrated the dichotomy of the APA position on immigration. On one hand it announced the platform of the APA, which demanded that immigration be restricted, while one month later it declared that "we welcome all Protestant foreigners."³⁹ This apparent contradiction explained the essence of APA thought. Catholics and immigrants were considered dangerous because they were thought to represent a threat to American institutions. The APA thought that the greatest danger came from a Catholic conspiracy, and believed that Catholic immigrants were a pawn in Roman manipulations to subvert the American way of life. The American publicized the relationship between the Catholic Church and immigration in the following editorial:

³⁷W. J. H. Traynor, "Policy and Power of the A.P.A.," North American Review, CLII (June, 1896), p. 659.

³⁸Carlson, pp. 15-16.

³⁹American, August 8, 1891; September 24, 1891.

Why is it that the Roman Catholic hierarchy are locating all over this northwestern country colonies of Poles, of Frenchmen, of Irish, of Italians and Bohemians, surrounding them with the customs of their fatherland, using their mother tongue and teaching them to look upon the Pope as greater than the President, and upon all Protestants as being almost beneath contempt? Is it that they may become Americanized, that they may learn our ways, our customs, that they may honor our flag and love our institutions, or is it to keep them in ignorance of all that goes to make a true, loyal, sacrificing American citizen?

You know why it is being done. We know. It is to make them Roman Catholics first and citizens afterward. Is it right, is it just that such things should be permitted? If our ways, our institutions, or our laws do not suit them, the sooner they go back to where they came from the sooner will this country be the ideal one which Americans have hoped to see.

Let us have fewer colonies, better naturalization laws and more strict enactments relating to immigration.⁴⁰

As time passed, and as nativism increased in other quarters, the APA broadened their attack on the immigrant. Although the idea that immigration was one aspect of the Catholic conspiracy was not rejected, it tended to be neglected as the APA expanded its attack on anything un-American. Immigration became a threat to American labor and American prosperity apart from its relationship to international Catholicism.

In early 1892 the American expressed this sentiment in their support of a law prohibiting the employment of foreigners in government jobs:

We agree with the sentiments contained in the above [a proposed law to make aliens ineligible to hold U. S. government jobs], but it does not go far enough. A law should be enacted prohibiting the employment of "dagoes," "Huns," and other objectionable aliens upon the public works in this country. . . . There are American citizens who would only too willingly perform the labor now done by hoards of

⁴⁰ ibid., October 29, 1891.

ignorant aliens who have no regard for our form of government or for the institutions of the country.⁴¹

To this the paper added the image of the scum of Europe swarming to America under the direction of the papacy. The front page carried cartoons depicting the "scum from Poland, Roman Catholic paupers, Roman Catholic criminals, Jewish scum from Russia," and "scum from Hungary" crawling out of the "slums and gutters of Europe" and "bound for the United States"; other cartoons demanded that the gates be locked against this flood from Europe.⁴² In their restrictionist campaign the APA attacked even those nationalities which were considered acceptable or desirable by most Americans in the 1890's. Irish and French-Americans were objected to because of their connection with the Catholic Church. In addition the German language press was bombarded in the American: "German Language Newspapers [are] as Un-American as Catholics."⁴³ As a patriotic organization the American Protective Association dedicated itself to preserving American institutions and opposing anything that appeared to threaten these institutions:

The Chicago World's Fair of 1893 provided another target for APA nativists. The rumor of a threat to the success of the fair in the form of cholera brought to this country by infected immigrants encouraged the APA to demand a temporary closing of the gates in order to give Congress time to debate the issue.⁴⁴ The American turned its attention to the speculation that Chinese were using the fair as a means to evade the Chinese Exclusion

⁴¹ Ibid., February 11, 1892.

⁴² Ibid., January 13, 1893; May 4, 1894.

⁴³ Ibid., April 21, 1893.

⁴⁴ Kinzer, p. 96.

Act and smuggle themselves into the country. The American gave wholehearted support to the exclusion of Chinese, describing them as "animals" and associating them with opium and slavery.⁴⁵ The paper went on to say:

If any person thinks the "heathen Chinese" are greatly abused, let them go through Chinatown and get a correct history of them. . . . They are a daylight robbery on this country. They buy nothing in America if they can get it from China, and every dollar they get goes back to their native country, and it is estimated that \$170,000,000 in the last twenty years has gone to China, never to return to Uncle Sam, and the people of the Pacific sloap [sic] have just cause to make war on that class of their inhabitants.⁴⁶

In the later 1890's the APA tended to conform more with the mainstream of American nativism. As late as December, 1895 the American still linked immigration with Catholicism when it warned: "America in Danger----Imperiled by the influx of Romanized Foreigners."⁴⁷ However, the American also began expressing more traditional anti-immigrant appeals. In 1896 and 1897 the paper undertook to warn workers of the perils of foreigners. It remarked, "If the working men of America were fully alive to their own vital interests, they would unanimously demand the absolute prohibition of the undesirable and dangerous Italian immigration to these shores."⁴⁸ The APA also started distinguishing between new and old immigration. Older immigrants, British, German, and Scandanivan were described as being, "historically free, energetic, and progressive," as contrasted to the Slav, Latin, and Asiatic races

⁴⁵American, November 16, 1894.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., December 6, 1895.

⁴⁸Ibid., April 24, 1896.

who were stereotyped as "historically downtrodden, atavistic, and stagnant."⁴⁹

Thus nativism was an essential feature of the American Protective Association. In their demand "America for Americans" the Omaha APA attacked both Catholics and immigrants. Although the organization was established primarily to wage war against the alleged Catholic conspiracy, the group soon added the immigrant to their "black list." Originally the APA turned restrictionist because of the increasing numbers of Catholic immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. Immigration was considered to be part of the papal plot to destroy American freedoms. Soon, however, nativism became a major aspect of the APA in its own right. To the super-patriotic APA the immigrant was no less a threat to American institutions than the Roman Catholic.

As mentioned above the American Protective Association became strongly entrenched in Omaha in 1891, and virtually controlled the city's politics from 1893 to 1895. The APA reign of power in Omaha lasted from late 1891 through 1896. During that period the organization was not only influential politically, but permeated nearly every aspect of life in the city. APA lecturers appeared frequently, the association exercised a considerable amount of control over the public schools, and perhaps most importantly, its weekly newspaper, the American, was circulated to over 18,000 families at one time, comparing favorably to Omaha's two daily papers. Although it is impossible, due to the secret nature of the APA, to estimate accurately its membership in the Omaha area, it is safe to say that the organization exerted

⁴⁹ Ibid., December 10, 1897.

substantial influence in the city during the early 1890's.

The most obvious expression of the extent of APA power in Omaha was the organization's political influence. The political strategy adopted by the APA was to control elections by manipulating the votes of its members. During every campaign the APA published a list of those candidates who were acceptable (who had made the necessary tribute to the organization). For example the American discussed at length the relative merits of the presidential candidates in 1892, finally endorsing Harrison because "his election would be less a recognition of popery than that of any other candidate."⁵⁰ Similarly the paper supported Populist J. N. Gaffin in an 1894 local race for his stand on "Americanism," noting that his platform was "one all Americans can stand upon."⁵¹ In 1892 the World-Herald even published the APA list of recommended candidates.⁵²

This tactic proved very successful for the APA. The society scored its first political victory in the Omaha area in the spring of 1891 when its candidate became mayor of South Omaha. The following November the American was able to announce that "indications point to the election of every man endorsed by the APA."⁵³ APA candidates were elected by large majorities to nearly every city position, turning out the Democrat machine which had usually ruled Omaha.⁵⁴ The following year Omaha remained under APA control,

⁵⁰ Ibid., November 4, 1892.

⁵¹ Ibid., August 31, 1894.

⁵² World-Herald, November 9, 1892.

⁵³ American, November 5, 1891.

⁵⁴ Stough, p., 61.

as did its neighbor South Omaha. In both cities, with one or two exceptions, every elected official from the mayor down was said to be a member of the order.⁵⁵

The APA continued to ride their wave of success for the next two years. In the summer of 1895 Henry D. Estabrook of Omaha told the Chicago Evening Post, "the APA controls the politics of the city and state. . . . The APA controls the legislature of Nebraska and the city council of Omaha . . ." ⁵⁶ The same summer the order demonstrated the effectiveness of this control in the battle over the city police commission. That fall although Rosewater, editor of the Bee, opposed the APA with all the resources at his disposal, the organization maintained its domination over all branches of the city government.⁵⁷

In 1896 the tide began to turn. The APA candidates were not successful as a whole that fall, even though the order claimed to be satisfied with the election in Omaha. The turning point had been reached, however. Never again did the APA play a significant role in the politics of the city.⁵⁸

The influence of the APA was also evident in other areas. Numerous APA officials, Protestant ministers, and Catholic ex-priests and ex-nuns were brought to Omaha to lecture. In one case the American solicited enough money to bring ex-priest Charles Chiniquy, author of the APA best seller Fifty Years in the Church of Rome, to the city to deliver a series of

⁵⁵Carlson, p. 147; World-Herald, November 9, 1894; November 12, 1892.

⁵⁶Stough, p. 50.

⁵⁷Carlson, p. 159.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 176.

lectures.⁵⁹ In addition a large segment of the Omaha Protestant clergy openly endorsed the movement. Two Methodist ministers gave a series of lectures on the dangers of Roman Catholicism and the threat of the Catholic hierarchy to the public school system.⁶⁰ Other prominent Omaha clergy of various denominations indicated their support to the APA through sermons from their pulpits.⁶¹ There was, however, a sizeable segment of the Protestant clergy which denounced the APA, particularly as the order slipped from power after 1896.

The growth of the APA in Omaha reflected the same frustrations evident in the spread of other forms of nativism. The parallels between the two were striking. Both sought to explain the social unrest of the 1890's by the means of an external conspiracy or threat which ate away the roots of American institutions. In the case of the APA it was the dual villain, Roman Catholicism and undesirable immigration, that was responsible for the nation's ills.

The relationship between APA propaganda and social unrest was clearly visible in the movement's activities in Omaha. The APA press made effective use of labor conflicts in their membership campaigns. Catholics and immigrants were charged with instigating the strikes and violence which shook the nation in 1892 and 1894. The APA thesis regarding labor was that Catholics either tried to wreck unions through internal dissension, or else they instituted a hopeless strike, holding out until all Protestants were

⁵⁹ American, October 8, 1891.

⁶⁰ Carlson, p. 119.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 119-20; American, November 4, 1892; March 10, 1893.

replaced before returning to work.⁶² In any case Protestants suffered. Labor strife was not a struggle between capital and labor, but was interpreted by the APA to be part of the Catholic scheme to destroy the liberties of Protestants.

As labor unrest increased, the APA attempted to explain the disorders as part of a papal conspiracy intensified. Following the Homestead riots the American posed the rhetorical question, "What is an anarchist? A member of the Society of Jesus."⁶³ As the crisis reached the boiling point in the spring and summer of 1894, the APA was ready with appropriate explanations. During Coxey's march the American noted:

In the midst of all this excitement among all classes with regard to the advent of the Coxeyites into Washington might it not be well to stop and ask whether there is not some secret object in back of it all? Many of the leaders are said to be Roman Catholics, and we do not believe that twenty-five per cent of the men who compose the vast army really understand the object of their mission.⁶⁴

The APA accused the Coxeyites of being unaware of the Roman manipulations behind their march to Washington, and of playing into their hands by fermenting social unrest.

The real power of the Catholic conspiracy was revealed in the Pullman riots. The American exposed the real nature of the disturbance to its readers:

The American does not claim that all who participated in that strike were Roman Catholics, but we assert that the leaders, from Eugene V. Debs down were the tools of the Roman machine. . . . The powers which manipulated the strike

⁶² American, August 13, 1891.

⁶³ Ibid., August 14, 1892.

⁶⁴ Ibid., April 20, 1894.

were controlled by them--just as has been the case with most if not all the strikes in America for many years past. . . .

So long as Roman Catholic leaders like Debs can entrap people into rebellion against the federal government, and bluntly advise their subordinates to pay no attention to the injunctions of our courts; so long as the enemies of all government take advantage of labor troubles to destroy property to the value of millions of dollars, the cause of industrial progress is hampered.⁶⁵

The paper then went on to identify the growth of the APA with the prevention of such outbreaks in the future:

'It was the principles for which the A.P.A. stands that prevented a great revolution in 1894. Those principles were endorsed by the voters of this country on November 6th, partly because of the great railroad strikes of this summer.⁶⁶

The immigrant also received a share of the blame for labor strife. The American pointed out that it was "the Micks, the Huns, the Slavs, and the Dages" who were led by Debs "in their mission of misrule, anarchy and revolution."⁶⁷

Thus the APA held the Catholics and immigrants responsible for the labor troubles which beset America in the 1890's. In this respect they corresponded to the pattern set by the nativists in Omaha. The frustrations bred by social unrest were directed at the minority groups. When labor violence threatened the security of Omaha, middle class Americans were comforted by the APA's explanation that their troubles were caused by the influx of lawless foreigners and by the manipulations of a foreign conspiracy.

⁶⁵ Ibid., November 16, 1894.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., December 10, 1897.

In the same manner the APA was able to take advantage of the economic hardships caused by the depression of 1893-1896. The business depression, unemployment, and bread lines functioned in the same manner as labor unrest to drive hundreds into the APA fold.⁶⁸ Again the order offered solace to their anxieties. In this case immigrants received the brunt of the condemnation; the panacea for the city's economic ills was restriction. The American reported, "I have only one sure cure for hard times: Suspend immigration until the men already in the country have something to do."⁶⁹ In a more bitter attack upon immigration the paper argues:

I am uncompromisingly in favor of the suppression of immigration for twenty years. Why? Because the disastrous consequences of wholesale immigration have blighted our prosperity, blasted our national reputation, undermined our educational institutions and threatened our federal government. . . . The new wave of immigration became a scavenger to the slums of Europe--Austro-Hungary, Russia, Poland, Bohemia, Italy, Ireland, Spain, and Portugal. . . .

Hordes of cheap immigrants have taken the place of honest American working men in the fields, factories, stores, and workshops.⁷⁰

The APA put itself on record in Omaha proposing immigration restriction as a cure-all for the depression. As such it increased the hostility to ethnic groups in the city. Foreigners once more assumed the role of scapegoat in Omaha.

The American Protective Association was another chapter in the history of nativism in Omaha. The organization reflected unrest in Omaha and offered a solution to the problems of the city. Like the Populist who spoke

⁶⁸ Carlson, p. 86.

⁶⁹ American, June 28, 1895.

⁷⁰ Ibid., July 19, 1895.

of an international financial conspiracy, and nativists, including the Omaha press, who saw immigrant anarchists provoking labor disorder, and immigrant pauper labor undermining American prosperity, the APA saw similar foreign threats to this nation. They envisioned a papal conspiracy supported by an unchecked flood of immigration, which aimed at the total destruction of the United States. Thus the APA reinforced the stereotype of the immigrant as the agent of disorder, and increased the hostility of citizens of Omaha toward their ethnic groups. This hostility remained unabated throughout the depression.

CHAPTER III

CONFIDENCE, PROSPERITY, AND TOLERANCE: 1897-1901

During the four years of intense feeling against ethnic groups in Omaha nativism was closely related to the despair and dislocation which followed the depression and labor disturbances of the period. Social frustration and nativism went hand in hand. In 1897, however, the depression lifted and prosperity returned to the city. With prosperity came a more tolerant attitude toward immigration and the role of the immigrant as a scapegoat for social unrest no longer defined the relation between ethnic groups and the native population. With prosperity the immigrant no longer appeared to be a threat to American institutions. The confidence which prevailed in Omaha during the last years of the nineteenth century permitted the immigrant to come or go at will. Instead of being an object of suspicion immigrant groups were either accepted as an integral segment of the city's life, or else they were totally ignored. Indeed, it is easy to get the impression that between 1895 and 1898 the foreign population of Omaha evaporated into thin air. Whereas during the depression the Omaha press was full of derogatory references to immigrants, during the era of prosperity the press praised the various ethnic groups, or else made no mention of them at all.

Perhaps the most important factor in this shift of public opinion was economic recovery. Coupled with this was the exhilaration of a short and successful war which sent America on the road of imperialism, and for Omaha the glory of hosting an international exposition. Economic recovery was rapid after the election of 1896. In a period of generally rising prices

farm goods rose more rapidly than other prices.¹ By early 1897 it became clear that the economy was again on an upward swing and that the four years of depression were over. Agrarian radicalism collapsed as the farmer began to reap the benefits of rising prices, and although strikes continued, the bitter industrial warfare of the preceding years did not.² All in all as the century came to a close, "American civilization seemed to gain its second wind."³

This wave of confidence swept through Omaha early in 1897. One Omaha citizen recalled:

The year 1897 brought with it hope and cheer; the clouds were presenting a silver lining; the sun of prosperity had begun to shed its radiant light through the dense fog and mist that for five years had enveloped the financial world. Evidence of coming prosperity began shortly after the presidential election, and confidence was fast taking the place of doubt and despair. . . . Soup houses and charitable organizations were fast disappearing--Thank God, never to return.⁴

The observer went on to report that 1897 was the year in which plans for the Trans-Mississippi Exposition were finalized and that "this gave added impetus to the growing boom."⁵

In 1898 this new prosperity merged with the Exposition to create an era of social and economic confidence unparalleled in the city's history. As

¹Douglass C. North, Growth and Welfare in the American Past: A New Economic History (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 146.

²Higham, Strangers in the Land, p. 106.

³Ibid.

⁴Edward F. Morearty, Omaha Memories: Recollections of Events, Men, and Affairs in Omaha, Nebraska from 1879-1917 (Omaha: Swartz Printing Co., 1917), p. 57.

⁵Ibid.

Edward Morearty noted in his recollections of Omaha, "In 1898 the joy bells began to ring, not in gay Malehide, but in Omaha; nature seemed to have removed that staring, dejected and melancholy look from the faces of the people, and in its stead left a look of joy, hope, confidence and contentment."⁶ This spirit also appeared in the welcoming speech given on the first day of the Exposition by its president, Gurdon Wattles:

Amid the financial depression of the greatest panic of recent years, amid the gloom of drouth and distress which followed this panic, the first steps were taken in this great enterprise. . . . all doubts were dispelled, and the people of this community and of the entire west rose above the calamities of the hour and united in the work with an energy which ensured success.⁷

The Exposition became the concrete symbol of restored prosperity and confidence in the future for the citizens of Omaha. The simple fact that the city was strong enough to support a great Exposition and carry it through to success dispelled much doubt and frustration regarding the future.⁸

The success of the Omaha Exposition added to its effectiveness in creating an atmosphere of confidence. The Trans-Mississippi Exposition was the only one during this period which paid its stockholders a substantial return on their investment.⁹ As the official history of the Exposition reported:

⁶ Ibid., p. 58.

⁷ James B. Haynes, History of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898 (St. Louis: Woodward and Tiernan Printing Co., 1910), p. 337.

⁸ Ibid., p. 293.

⁹ Alfred R. Sorenson, The Story of Omaha: From Pioneer Days to the Present Time (Omaha: National Printing Co., 1923), p. 641.

This was the only Exposition in America promptly opening its gates to the public on a completed show on the day and hour originally appointed; the first to open free from mortgage or pledge of all or some of its gate receipts; the first to make money each and every month of the Exposition season, and the first to repay to its stockholders any considerable portion of the funds advanced by them. In these respects the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition stands without a rival.¹⁰

In short, at least in the eyes of Omaha, the Exposition was an unprecedented success. As such it helped create the era of confidence which reinforced the faith in prosperity that followed the depression.

The third factor in influencing public opinion was the war with Spain. When John Hay referred to the Spanish-American war as "a splendid little war" he reflected the attitude of most Americans toward the conflict. To a considerable extent this war answered a very real need of the American people. It was not coincidence that jingoism was particularly intense in the regions where agrarian radicalism had flourished, for agrarians, defeated in their struggle for domestic reform, happily embraced the war as an outlet for their crusading zeal.¹¹

Although the United States easily defeated Spain, the extent of the American victory astounded many. The World-Herald noted as early as January, 1897 that if war were to result between the United States and Spain over Cuba the American navy could expect an easy victory over the Spanish; yet, the fantastic reports of American successes helped create a festival atmosphere in Omaha.¹² This, plus the Exposition and economic prosperity

¹⁰Haynes, p. 304.

¹¹Faulkner, p. 228.

¹²World-Herald, January 2, 1897.

created an almost intoxicating air of confidence in the city. The war completely overwhelmed what social radicalism still existed in the Omaha area, and demonstrated that regardless of the unrest earlier in the decade, the nation was still capable of united action. The recent labor unrest and tremendous influx of foreigners seemed less of a threat in light of the apparent ease in which America carried her "splendid little war" to a most satisfactory conclusion.

Both the war and the Exposition had a significant effect on the response toward immigrants in Omaha. Both, on the whole, tended to lessen the hostility toward ethnic groups by creating an atmosphere of confidence in which the foreigner no longer seemed to be a danger to the country. The one exception to this was that remnants of the American Protective Association in the city interpreted the Spanish-American war in light of the alleged Catholic conspiracy. As such the conflict with Catholic Spain must be a part of the plot to subvert America, and therefore the loyalty of Catholic-Americans must be viewed with suspicion. The American responded to the sinking of the Maine by placing the blame on Roman Catholic treachery.¹³ As the war scare increased the APA press carried the following headlines in Omaha:

Americans Generally Believe that the Traitorous Roman Catholics Will Be the Last Volunteers and the First to Create Internal Strife.

The Foes Within Are More Dangerous than those Without.

We believe that we can see the Roman Catholics of the entire world arrayed on the side of Spain and against

¹³American, February 18, 1898.

the United States . . . every Roman you see is counseling peace.¹⁴

Fortunately the American did not reflect the opinion of most of the people of the city. By 1898 the APA was an anachronism and the American was on its last legs. For most the Spanish-American war demonstrated the loyalty of the ethnic groups. In the first place during 1897 and 1898 news of events in Cuba and of deteriorating relations between the United States and Spain replaced news of domestic unrest, and tended to redirect public concern away from the problems of immigration and labor and toward foreign affairs. Even more impressive were the reports of how the immigrants responded to the needs of their adopted country in time of war. The World-Herald happily reported:

One of the most quiet and effective recruiting agencies for the prospective Spanish-American war since the Cuban question has been torrid is that of the Danish-Americans of Omaha. . . . all are good fighting men.¹⁵

The volunteers were organized by William Neve, who noted "that the patriotism of the Danes for the country of their adoption is most gratifying, and their ready responses indicate their feeling at the present time."¹⁶ The Danes were not the only ethnic group in the Omaha area which demonstrated their support to American foreign policy. The Russian-Jewish community also organized a militia company in preparation for the war.¹⁷ The overwhelming reaction was that expressed by Chauncey Depew in his address at the

¹⁴ Ibid., February 25, 1898.

¹⁵ World-Herald, April 22, 1898.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., April 30, 1898.

Exposition: "The war with Spain has unified the country."¹⁸ This belief more than anything else, reflected the attitude toward immigrants in Omaha during the war.

The Exposition also created a tolerance toward ethnic groups. The Exposition epitomized the growth and progress of western America during the last fifty years and the promise of future advance. In such an atmosphere of confidence there was no place for nativism. In fact the immigrant was considered to have made a significant contribution to the growth of the region. This was reflected in several ways. First, several immigrant groups were awarded special days during the exposition season on which to demonstrate their contributions in the growth of the West. Germans, Bohemians, and Swedes were allowed such days, and the publicity received did much to improve the image of these groups.¹⁹ For example in conjunction with Bohemian Day the World-Herald announced that "they [Czechs] are good citizens of our own country, good people, good neighbors, and today are entitled to every pleasure they may derive from their visit to the city, to their Omaha brethren and to the exposition."²⁰ The Omaha press also heaped praise on the parade which highlighted Bohemian Day stating that it "was one of the most noteworthy demonstrations in connection with the great fair since opening day."²¹

The Germans and Swedes received comparable recognition on their

¹⁸Haynes, p. 455.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 245-47.

²⁰World-Herald, August 27, 1898.

²¹Ibid., August 28, 1898; Bee, August 28, 1898.

appointed days. Although the people of Omaha and the Exposition officials were not ready to bestow similar honors on the Poles, the Italians, or other east Europeans, the fact that some recognition was given to others besides the native Americans for their role in building up the country was significant in itself.

In addition to recognizing immigrant groups who participated in the Exposition, the people of Omaha were proud of the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the fair, and tended to emphasize this aspect of their accomplishments. For example, the official history of the Exposition reported that during the Fourth of July celebration, "mingling with the vast throng of American men, women and children assembled on the Exposition grounds were Turks, Algerians, Arabs, Moors and Chinese, who participated in the great celebration in honor of the stars and stripes."²² In the same spirit the first stanza of the "Song of Welcome and Ode to the Exposition" proclaimed:

Welcome, thrice welcome, to the people of our land;
Welcome to the people, the people of the world;
Here, North and South and East and West, united hand in hand,
Have reared a city and their flag unfurled.
Welcome, welcome, welcome to the people of the world!²³

That the city of Omaha could attract visitors from all corners of the globe was very gratifying to the citizens of Omaha. Although this welcome was not directed toward immigrants per se, the fact that Omaha embraced such diverse and alien nationalities signified a tolerance which could be applied to those aliens who settled in the United States. This tolerance was expressed in two major addresses of the Exposition season.

²²Haynes, p. 79.

²³Ibid., p. 62.

The first of these speeches was the opening day address by Exposition president Gurdon Wattles. Wattles praised the accomplishments of fifty years of civilization in the West and the hope for the future that the region offered to mankind. In concluding he echoed the sentiment of the inscription on the base of the Statue of Liberty, describing the Exposition as holding aloft a torch proclaiming the West as the haven for the oppressed of the world:

Like a great beacon it sends its rays throughout the land and challenges the attention of the world. To the homeless millions of less-favored lands it is a messenger of promise. To the weary mariner whose fortunes have been wrecked on the seas of adversity it is the harbinger of hope.²⁴

On Nebraska Day Constantine J. Smyth, State Attorney General, elaborated on the role of immigrants in the progress of the nation:

Go into the buildings, look at the evidence there of what man has done, and then say if you will, that his achievements in the Trans-Mississippi country have not been surpassingly great. But do not be surprised, for in this region we possess the best blood and brains of our country. From the East, and from every nation under the sun, have come to us energy, independence of character and irresistible progressiveness that knows no halt until it reaches its goal or the grave. From what race has sprung these men? The Anglo-Saxon? . . . Men who deal in facts and not in fancies answer. 'No.' Read the names of those who perished with the Maine, who supported the immortal Dewey, or who went into the jaws of death with the heroic Hobson. Were they all Anglo-Saxon? Who will say so? Truth declares that many races were represented there. The Dane and the Swedish; the Germans and the Irish. Shoulder to shoulder they stood behind the guns of their adopted country, offered their lives on her alter, and thanked God they were Americans, the best race that ever blessed the earth, the combination of all that is good in all the races of the world.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid., p. 340.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 361-62.

The Exposition was instrumental in helping to create a new image for ethnic groups in the city. Whereas four years earlier the citizens of Omaha only heard what a threat the scum of Europe was to American prosperity and liberty, in 1898 they saw and read about the contributions that immigrant had made in the growth of the country, and were told that America's greatness was due to the diversity of American nationality.

The climax of this summer of festivity came with the Jubilee Week celebration from October 11 through October 15. Jubilee Week celebrated the two achievements of the year 1898; the American victory in the Spanish-American war and the success of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition. Eminent public figures from all parts of the country, including the President, his Cabinet, officers from the Diplomatic Corps, and the prominent generals of the army and navy came to Omaha in honor of the occasion.²⁶ For the city of Omaha the week was the crowning glory of a brilliant year. As the World-Herald proclaimed on the day of McKinley's visit to the city:

This is the greatest week in Omaha's history, and this is the greatest day in Omaha's greatest week. The city is filled to overflowing with visitors who have come to greet the President of the United States and celebrate with him and with us the advent of peace. . . . The doors of the city are open.²⁷

As Jubilee Week approached the glory of the coming event seemed to insure a prosperous and expanding future for the city. The Bee noted that "from every point of view the prospects for Omaha are brighter and more promising than they have ever been."²⁸ This confidence was the legacy from the summer

²⁶ Ibid., p. 86.

²⁷ World-Herald, October 10, 1898.

²⁸ Bee, October 5, 1898.

of 1898 that the city would enjoy for the next three years.

Although events were not so promising in Omaha in the years following 1898, confidence remained unshaken. Prosperity continued unabated well into the first decade of the new century, but there was also a renewed outbreak of labor trouble and the United States experienced growing pains related to her recently assumed role as an imperialistic power. Certainly the nation did not return to the dark days of the depression, but at the same time the future did not seem as rosey as in the summer of 1898. Throughout the period until the fall of 1901, however, tolerance toward ethnic groups was a more powerful force than nativism in Omaha. Even though some of the promise predicted during the Exposition did not materialize, optimism and hope continued to outweigh frustration.

The threat to confidence came from two quarters. First, America's territorial acquisitions during the Spanish-American War soon involved the nation deeply in affairs in the Pacific and raised serious questions about the relationship between democracy and imperialism. More importantly, the annexation of the Philippines entangled the United States in a lengthy and costly war against the Philippine national groups who had fought along side the Americans in the war with Spain, and who believed that American victory would mean Philippine independence.

In Omaha the World-Herald championed the cause of the Filipinos and opposed American imperialism. Throughout the spring and summer of 1900 the paper reminded Omaha readers of the battle to suppress the Filipino insurrection, and the heavy burden it placed on this country. The paper warned that "at the present rate all our boys will be slain before the Filipinos can be conquered," and demanded that the Philippines be granted

immediate independence.²⁹ Although the other major Omaha newspapers supported American imperialism, the war did present a challenge to self-confidence. The United States had involved itself in a war, which cost more in both lives and money than the entire war against Spain, to compel the Filipinos to accept the blessings of American democracy.³⁰

The United States also became embroiled in the Boxer Rebellion in China when it dispatched a force to join the European powers attempting to rescue the trapped legations at the city of Peking. The Boxer Rebellion created hostility toward Chinese-Americans in many American cities, including Omaha. There were conflicting reports of the amount of anti-Chinese feeling and the extent to which Chinese in Omaha were in danger. The Omaha Daily News announced that Lee Wah, who ran a laundry in Omaha, was accosted by a mob of youths who shouted "Kill the Boxer" and pelted the Chinaman with tin cans and bricks.³¹ Two days later the World-Herald claimed that, "Chinese feel safe in Omaha. No attempts even made to commit acts of violence upon the Celestials who reside in this vicinity."³² At any rate there was no organized campaign against the Chinese as a result of the Boxer Rebellion. Both of these incidents, however, served to illustrate the new role America was to play in foreign affairs in the twentieth century, and demonstrated the new stresses that America would undergo in the coming years. For the first time in one hundred years foreign affairs significantly influenced nativism

²⁹ World-Herald, May 14, 1900; July 29, 1900.

³⁰ Foster Rhea Dulles, America's Rise to World Power, 1898-1954 (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 54.

³¹ Daily News (Omaha), July 16, 1900.

³² World-Herald, July 18, 1900.

in America.

The other source of unrest was domestic. Throughout the years 1900 and 1901 a revival of labor restlessness and sporadic outbursts of anarchistic activity seemed to threaten the tranquility of the nation. This new disorder never reached the level of the depression years, but it did provide a radical contrast with the peace evident in 1898. Again threats to internal unity appeared in the form of social unrest.

During the spring and summer of 1900 labor unrest was more serious than at any time in the preceding five years. The immigrant, as usual, was deeply involved in the series of strikes and violence of that year. However, his implication did not result in a revival restrictionist demands. In fact in the midst of the difficulty the city maintained a most tolerant attitude toward ethnic groups.

The difficulties began when five hundred state troops were called out to deal with striking Italians at a dam project in New York. On April 16, the Daily News reported under the headline "Armed Strikers Will Do Battle" that:

The trouble at the Croton dam which was feared Saturday is likely to cause a serious fight and probably bloodshed if affairs continue in their present state. The striking Italian Laborers are camped at the dam. . . . The strikers are in an ugly frame of mind as compared with yesterday, and declare they will resist the soldiers. They are armed with clubs, pistols and carbines . . .³³

That very day violence erupted as the strikers charged the troops. The World-Herald reported, "Strikers get first blood," that "Forty armed Italians carrying an American flag and two Italian flags" rushed the state troops.³⁴

³³ Daily News, April 16, 1900.

³⁴ World-Herald, April 17, 1900.

Order was soon restored in New York, but the same day additional disorder broke out in Pennsylvania. Omaha read: "Three killed in a Riot"; that a strike resulted in a drunken row and bloodshed at a Pennsylvania mine in which one Italian supposedly murdered three people.³⁵

During the summer there were also several minor strikes in Omaha, but fortunately none resulted in violence. A carpenters strike in the city threatened to spread to other industries, but was settled before this happened. Also, police raided a Chinese opium joint in the city and discovered young girls "in the lowest stages of debauchery" affiliating with "brutes of whatever nativity."³⁶ Other than this there was no anti-immigrant activity in the city.

In August and September anarchy and labor violence seemed to be on the rise across the country. In August a "Diabolical plot of Anarchists" was uncovered in which twenty-seven men, nearly all Italians, left America pledged to slay the rulers of the world.³⁷ The same day a meeting of anarchists in New Jersey was exposed. The radicals were described as being foreigners, "there being many Frenchmen, a number of Spaniards and a few Austrians in the assemblage which consisted for the most part of Italians."³⁸ The following month violence erupted among immigrant strikers in the coal regions of Pennsylvania. The strike, which involved over a hundred thousand miners, was transformed into a riot when sheriff's deputies fired into a

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., April 23, 1900.

³⁷ Daily News, August 3, 1900.

³⁸ World-Herald, August 3, 1900.

threatening crowd, killing one Hungarian and wounding scores of others.³⁹ The Daily News reported a somewhat different account, emphasizing the role played by foreigners. The paper claimed that "the trouble was precipitated by an attack of a mob of foreigners upon a number of deputies who were guarding a crowd of miners in route to their homes."⁴⁰ The paper continued:

FOREIGNERS ARE COWED

The shooting of yesterday has so cowed the foreigners that if they can be kept from getting together in large numbers there will be no more rioting. . . . The soldiers . . . through the foreign quarters. Many of the splendid officers are English speaking miners and say they will protect their homes and families against the foreigners, with their lives if necessary.⁴¹

In almost the same terms used in the previous decade immigrants were described as being the agents of anarchism and labor radicalism.

In the summer of 1900 there was one significant difference in the attitude toward the foreigner. Although again he was blamed for the unrest present in the country, there was no corresponding demand that America's gates be closed to the hoards of Europe. Rather, the tolerant attitude toward ethnic groups evident during the Exposition still prevailed. No cry for restriction was heard; instead, the press remained relatively friendly toward immigrants. Even though Americans blamed foreigners for labor violence and anarchism, enough confidence existed to convince the native population that no real danger existed from the ethnic groups.

In Omaha the newspapers expressed this attitude by continuing the

³⁹ Ibid., September 22, 1900.

⁴⁰ Daily News, September 22, 1900.

⁴¹ Ibid.

favorable coverage of the activities of the city's immigrant groups which they began during the war and exposition. In May the press reported the celebration among the city's Poles of the anniversary of the adoption of the Polish constitution. Mayor Moores was to have attended, but sent his speech to be read instead.⁴² Nevertheless it was significant that one of the lowly groups from east Europe received such recognition. In the summer of 1900 the World-Herald reported proudly that Omaha would probably soon attain the dignity of acquiring an archbishop.⁴³ That such a prospect was viewed as an honor clearly demonstrated that the APA no longer had much influence in the city. The clearest indication of how deep-rooted tolerance had become in Omaha became evident during the violence in the fall of 1900. In the midst of the labor disorder the World-Herald reprinted the following editorial from Harper's Weekly:

We have been employed in assimilating [sic.] an amount of foreign immigration, the likes of which no other nation has undertaken to absorb in the history of the world. Our success has, on the whole, been wonderful. If not in the first generation, then in the second, European immigration has been readily assimilated into American citizenship.⁴⁴

This attitude continued into the next year. The St. Patrick's Day celebration of the Irish received extensive, coverage that year. At the same time the World-Herald expressed continued economic prosperity in a series of editorials. Most promising of all was the fact that in the summer of 1901 a steel strike involving sixty thousand workers was settled without violence. It appeared that perhaps even the social unrest of the preceding

⁴² Ibid., May 4, 1900.

⁴³ World-Herald, July 18, 1900.

⁴⁴ Ibid., September 3, 1900.

year might be a thing of the past.

From the end of the depression in 1897 through the first year of the new century prosperity and confidence prevailed in Omaha. Along with this prosperity came a more tolerant attitude toward ethnic groups. Gone was the intense nativism of the depression years; instead of being faced with demands for restriction the immigrant was either welcomed as a legitimate element of the community, or at worst ignored and allowed to seek his destiny in peace. Even the labor flare-ups in 1900 did not bring with them widespread fear, nor the impression that all-out warfare between capital and labor was imminent. No longer was the immigrant the scapegoat for the ills of society--society, in fact, appeared to be in very sound health. Indeed, as the summer of 1901 drew to a close it appeared that nothing could challenge the confidence and prosperity of the period; it appeared that perhaps the nativism of the depression years was an isolated occurrence rather than a deep seated force in American life.

CHAPTER IV

ASSASSINATION AND ANARCHISM: 1901-1907

While attending the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo, New York, William McKinley was shot on September 6, 1901, by Leon Czolgosz. Although Czolgosz had only briefly flirted with anarchism and was native born (although obviously of foreign extraction), he became the symbol of the dangers of unrestricted immigration, and inspired a new wave of nativism.¹ In addition the assassination of the American President undermined the spirit of confidence that had existed in Omaha since the end of the depression. Although this new nativism was not nearly as intense as it was in the previous decade, it did represent a significant challenge to the period of tolerance that existed during the last few years of the decade. Again the immigrant became the scapegoat for the threat to America manifested with the assassination. A new wave of restrictionist agitation followed the death of the President which culminated in legislation against alien anarchists. With this accomplished anti-immigrant sentiment became an ever-present undercurrent in American life until the end of the decade. The era of confidence which existed before Czolgosz fired his revolver at McKinley never returned to the American scene.

The news of McKinley's assassination shattered the equanimity that had existed in Omaha since the Trans-Mississippi Exposition of 1898. As an Omaha observer recalled, "unfortunately the joy of that occasion was soon turned into gloom, as it was that year [1901] that the noble McKinley was

¹Preston, p. 30; Higham, p. 111.

assassinated at the Buffalo Exposition, by an anarchist whose name I cannot and do not wish to remember."² The city was in a state of shock. For the week between news of the attack on the President and his death excitement and fear ran wild through Omaha.³ Crowds congregated in front of the news offices searching for late word on the President's condition. In effect for the week that McKinley lingered between life and death all normal life in the city ceased. Newspapers were filled first with the shocking story of how "noble McKinley" fell to an obscure gunman, then the press combined optimistic reports of the President's chances of survival with speculations that Czolgosz was but a pawn of a gigantic conspiracy of anarchists. Finally they reported to their horrified readers that McKinley had died.

It was not surprising that a scapegoat should be sought in relation to McKinley's death. First, McKinley was shot by an obscure anarchist, who had never accomplished anything worthwhile in his life. That such a man with apparent ease could strike down the President of the United States was something that was hard to accept. Also, faith in science that was so important late in the nineteenth century was shaken by the fact that the country's best medical resources could not save McKinley from what were relatively simple wounds. Finally, once again the optimism which had prevailed since the depression was seriously weakened because an irrational act had shown its ability to threaten rational America.

In Omaha the immediate response was to blame foreign anarchists for the President's assassination. September 7, the World-Herald broke the news of

²Morearty, p. 63.

³Ibid.

Czolgosz's deed with the headline "PRESIDENT M'KINLEY SHOT BY AN ANARCHIST."⁴ Already the Omaha police had acted to round up all anarchists in the city. The night before a socialist meeting in the city was dispersed by authorities because of their criticism of the administration.⁵ The following day the paper carried the statement by Governor Savage of Nebraska: "Anarchism is treason. Anarchists should be treated as traitors to our country and anarchistic utterances in public or private should constitute treason."⁶ In their haste to uncover the conspiracy that was supposed to have plotted the assassination, no one was concerned about the civil liberties of a handful of anarchists. The Omaha paper reported that throughout the country nests of anarchists were being routed by diligent authorities and it predicted that the hotbed of the conspiracy would soon be exposed.⁷

Almost immediately the immigrant was implicated in the crime. Czolgosz himself fit the image of the foreign radical. It was easy to overlook the fact that he was a native American when his name so clearly labeled him as one of the "scum of Europe." The World-Herald pointed out that the assassin's parents were Russian Poles, and for anyone who still might be blind to the obvious, the Omaha Daily News emphasized the foreignness of the name "Czolgosz."⁸ Americans refused to consider the possibility that an American could commit such a crime. The Polish communities of Philadelphia and New

⁴ World-Herald, September 7, 1901.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., September 8, 1901.

⁷ Ibid., September 9, 1901.

⁸ Ibid., September 8, 1901; Daily News, September 9, 1901.

York carried this same logic to its extreme when they proclaimed that Czolgosz was a Russian, not a Pole.⁹ The Mercury summarized this attitude in Omaha:

But there are no American anarchists. It is impossible for an American, born in this country, with its splendid opportunities, its freedoms, its glorious past and its brilliant promise for the future, to be an anarchist. It is from Europe that these black-hearted red-handed degenerates come, and the one redeeming feature of this attempted murder of the head of our government is the certainty that it will result in a closer scrutiny hereafter into the character of residents of foreign lands seeking homes with us and also the repression of those who seek to influence the minds of the ignorant and criminal by incendiary speech and publication.¹⁰

The response to the assassination in Omaha was clear. The press echoed the demand that the anarchists who infested the country be driven out, and then that European anarchists be prevented from finding refuge in America. Anarchism and assassination were considered to be un-American. Therefore the cause of unrest must lie with the immigrant, not with the American.

In Omaha the forces of order responded in two ways to the death of the President. First radicalism was driven from the city. As already mentioned, on the night of the assassination Omaha police dispersed a meeting of socialists who were accused of criticizing the McKinley administration. After the President died, the police continued their search for disloyalty. On September 14, Frank Stiger was threatened in an Omaha bar for his "anarchistic talk" and finally was arrested.¹¹ Such incidents created a feeling of apprehension in the city. Convinced that their city and country were

⁹World-Herald, September 9, 1901.

¹⁰Omaha Mercury, September 13, 1901.

¹¹World-Herald, September 15, 1901.

menaced by foreign radicals, the citizens of Omaha demanded that something be done to meet the threat.

The second step taken to defeat anarchism and sedition was the demand that the government take some action to eliminate the influx of immigrant radicals. The Daily News demanded that measures be taken in this direction:

The immigration laws are apparently in need of revision. Industrious foreigners are welcome; but the riff-raff should be excluded.

The United States has her doors open to the world. She allows alike the honest immigrant and the rabid anarchist to land on her shores. The scum of the world collects under the American flag, because here they are safer than anywhere else in the world.¹²

President Roosevelt adopted this attitude and added to anti-immigrant sentiment in his first message to Congress. The new President devoted a portion of his recommendations to the subject of alien radicalism. The Omaha press reported that Roosevelt "would have the immigration laws made more strict so as to keep out of the country all undesirable classes," and that special precautions should be taken to exclude anarchists.¹³ Congress was quick to react to Roosevelt's suggestion. The World-Herald informed Omaha readers that the Senate was discussing the case of anarchists who infested the country and Senate leaders called for stricter immigration laws.¹⁴

This was nearly the last direct tie between the assassination and immigration restriction. In 1904 the Mercury reminded its readers of the dangers inherent in immigration, reviewing the successful campaign waged against

¹²Daily News, September 8, 1901.

¹³World-Herald, December 4, 1901.

¹⁴Ibid., December 6, 1901.

foreign radicalism after the assassination. "Succeeding the assassination of McKinley by an anarchist . . . the federal government decided that anarchists were not desirable and March 3, 1903 passed a bill stating that anarchists cannot immigrate."¹⁵ In May, 1904 the Supreme Court upheld the conviction of John Turner under the anti-anarchist law. The Mercury applauded the court's decision, noting that, "one of the greatest perils of modern times is the influx to this country of the scum of Europe."¹⁶ Except for this all reference to the assassination disappeared from the Omaha press. Even when Congress passed the bill prohibiting the immigration of anarchists and providing for the deportation of alien radicals, the Omaha press did not take notice. Only the Mercury mentioned the Supreme Court decision upholding the law.

The assassination of McKinley instantly recalled public alarm over immigrant radicalism. However, the nativistic response as reflected in Omaha newspapers was mild compared to the desperate reaction to Haymarket and Pullman. Even though the murder of McKinley was a terrible shock, and the assassin so obviously fit the stereotype of the alien radical, the reaction in Omaha was short-lived and moderate. Still, while hard-core nativism did disappear--or better, go underground--there did remain in Omaha an undercurrent of hostility toward the immigrant which was always ready to break the surface. For the rest of the decade nativism lurked in the background and occasionally became an issue in the city. Thus the assassination of President McKinley illustrated both the enduring sensitivity of the

¹⁵ Omaha Mercury, July 29, 1904.

¹⁶ Ibid., May 20, 1904.

nativist heritage and its weakness at the turn of the century.¹⁷

One reason for the weakness of nativism at the dawn of the new century was the prosperity that prevailed in Omaha during this period. In many respects the first decade of the twentieth century was the golden age of Omaha and Nebraska. There was certainly no feeling of frustration in the city such as had existed during the depression years. The period 1901-1907 in contrast was an era of great affluence in Omaha. During these years real estate investments in the major business district increased from five hundred to a thousand per cent.¹⁸ Banking profits showed corresponding increases during this period. The basis for this prosperity was farm prices. Between 1900 and 1910 the average value per farm in Nebraska had risen from six thousand to sixteen thousand dollars, and in 1911 the purchasing power of corn stood above the prices which Nebraska farmers paid for manufactured goods.¹⁹ Although concealed in this prosperity were signs of economic problems, the city of Omaha remained unaware of any threat to its prosperity and maintained a high degree of business confidence.

Another threat of the preceding decade, labor unrest, likewise was met in a positive manner. In 1903 the Omaha Business Men's Association was established with the prime purpose of upholding the open-shop in Omaha and because of the "apparent determination on the part of the labor organizations of the city to either control or ruin every business enterprise."²⁰ From

¹⁷ Higham, Strangers in the Land, p. 111.

¹⁸ Leighton, p. 205.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 201.

the businessman's point of view the organization was a total success. Although it did not prevent strikes, after its creation there was scarcely a successful strike of any kind in the city.²¹ The association was instrumental in defeating several strikes in the city during the decade.

It is possible to overemphasize the tranquility of this decade. Sporadic unrest prevented a return to the exhilarated confidence of the late 1890's. Periodic labor disorder broke the relative calm, and as in the previous decade the immigrant was held partly responsible for the trouble that did exist. Although neither the amount of unrest nor the degree of nativism equaled that of the depression years, hostility toward ethnic groups did not disappear from Omaha. There was a constant undercurrent of anti-immigrant sentiment in the city throughout this period.

The one voice that continued unabated in its denunciation of immigrants was the Omaha Mercury. Whereas the other three Omaha papers became very moderate in their attacks on ethnic groups, the Mercury, which was the voice of the city's professional class, maintained a strongly anti-immigrant policy; whereas the other papers tended to be less specific in their nativism than during the early 1890's, the Mercury continued undiminished its hardline nativism. Reacting to both the steel strike of 1901 and the McKinley assassination, the Mercury reflected the fear of anarchism in this country. In September, just after the President was shot and before the strike was settled, the paper commented that some of the most prominent union officials in Omaha were concerned with the spread of anarchism among

²¹ Ibid.

their members.²² A month later the paper presented a detailed attack on unions, claiming that they had become the tool of non-citizens for the exploitation of Americans:

There are 500,000 vacancies every year in the ranks of manual labor in this country. As far as the unions are concerned these vacancies are generally filled by foreign immigration, and are denied to native born Americans.

In all the leading industrial states a majority of labor union members are foreigners. They cannot vote until they have been here five years, but by immediate admission into the unions they exercise a power greater than the ballot and use it to forbid American citizens the right to labor, and to the exercise of that right without their license and consent they attach the death penalty! . . . It [unions] gives to foreigners and non-citizens the power to outlaw our native population on their own soil under their own flag.²³

The Mercury also claimed that unions were un-American and that they caused unnatural strife between employer and employee.²⁴ The paper then concluded:

In all this I raise no outcry against foreign immigration. All foreigners who come to be American, to enjoy our liberty and opportunity and stand equal under our flag, are welcome. But those who come to band together in labor unions, to outlaw American citizens, to appeal from American courts to Rome, are not welcome, and it is time to close the gates against them.²⁵

In this editorial the Mercury echoed many of the prejudices which were common in Omaha during the crises of the 1890's, including a reference to Rome that was reminiscent of the APA.

In 1902 peace was again threatened in the city. Early in the year the

²² Omaha Mercury, September 13, 1901.

²³ Ibid., October 18, 1901.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Mercury continued its war against immigration with an attack on the new immigrants. The paper applauded the enactment of the latest Chinese Exclusion Act but questioned why Congress was so diligent in restricting the Orientals and yet ignored the threat from other equally dangerous ethnic groups.²⁶ In the summer of that year labor unrest erupted in Omaha. In July a strike on the Union Pacific line spread into the city. While Omaha readers read of sporadic outbursts of violence as a result of the strike in Cheyenne, Wyoming, strike breakers moved into Omaha.²⁷ During the next months the disorder seemed to be spreading. The World-Herald reported a riot among the Assyrian colony in La Crosse, Wisconsin which involved more than three hundred foreigners; and state troops were required to quell violence in a coal strike in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania.²⁸

The Mercury responded to these problems with a blast against the mass of immigrants that were pouring in from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Russia, and Italy. The paper reprinted an editorial from the National Criterion which warned that seventy per cent of the immigration to this country was from those and other south and east European countries:

This is by no means an encouraging showing, for the people of the last named countries, with exceptions, of course, are not very desirable, not well calculated to develop into intelligent, lawabiding, patriotic citizens.

The vast number of these people that are flocking to our shores are producing disturbances in labor circles, swelling the ranks of the pauper and criminal class, and leading to the general disorganization of our social and economic affairs. It would be a bold political leader who would

²⁶ Ibid., April 11, 1902.

²⁷ World-Herald, July 2-4, 1902; Bee, July 3, 1902.

²⁸ Ibid., July 7, 1902; August 1, 1902; August 4, 1902.

urge restriction of immigration from these and some other countries in south eastern Europe. Yet the day will come when such a course will have to be adopted.

It cannot be made a political question, yet patriotic Americans of both parties ought to give the matter grave consideration with a view toward stating a non-political movement with a view to correcting what has already become a menace, and may well become something much worse in the near future. America must not become the dumping ground for the pauper and vicious classes of the old world. We have legislated against the Chinese and the problem that is fast formulating itself will doubtless prove a hard one to figure to a satisfactory conclusion.²⁹

The other Omaha papers refrained from drawing parallels between the immigrant and labor unrest. Although ten years earlier they had been as quick as the Mercury to place the blame for the nation's social problems on the influx foreigners, in 1902 and in 1903 when there was additional labor trouble in the city there was no attempt to make the immigrant a scapegoat for the unrest. The descriptions of the strikes and riots in 1902 and 1903 did not have the same emotional tone as those of the 1890's. There was none of the foreboding or sense of imminent social upheaval that had been present a decade earlier. For example in 1903 Congress enacted a bill which made "anarchists, or persons who believe in or advocate the overthrow by force and violence of the Government of the United States, or of all government or of all forms of law, or the assassination of public officials" ineligible for entry, and which provided that any alien who had slipped into the country as an anarchist or had become one after he arrived was subject to deportation if arrested within three years of the date of his entry.³⁰ This bill was the culmination of the federal government's attempts to legislate

²⁹ Omaha Mercury, July 25, 1902.

³⁰ Preston, p. 32.

against anarchism following the assassination of McKinley and President Roosevelt's message to Congress in 1901. However, the Immigration Act of 1903 was completely ignored in the Omaha press. None of the city's newspapers even mentioned the incident. By 1903 the assassination had almost been forgotten. At least its memory did not bring demands that action be taken against the scum that had murdered McKinley. This disregard of a bill restricting immigration was an indication of the weakness of nativism in Omaha in 1903. Certainly the strikes of 1902 and 1903 did not create the apprehension which followed every strike of the early 1890's. Prosperity had developed enough confidence in Omaha to allow these minor incidents to be taken in stride.

The Mercury again was alone among Omaha newspapers in maintaining a hard line against immigration. Although the paper did not comment on the Immigrant Act of 1903, it did continue its support of nativism the following year. In April the Mercury expressed concern that the St. Louis Exposition facilitated the smuggling of Chinese into the country. The paper reminded its readers how the Chinese used the Trans-Mississippi Exposition to evade the Chinese Exclusion Act:

We all remember how before the exposition opened here, any number of Chinamen were to be seen in the streets, and when it came time to deport them hardly one-twentieth of them were to be found. Some steps should be taken to see that these people are kept by the exposition companies and bond given that they will be forthcoming at these close of the fair that they may be deported as required by law.³¹

Not satisfied with excluding just the Chinese, the Mercury turned against east European immigrants too, many of whom were considered to be more

³¹ Omaha Mercury, April 1, 1904.

objectional.

One of the greatest problems that this country will ever have to face is the question of restricting the immigration of countless hordes of the scum of the European countries, some of which have gone so far as to offer inducements to certain classes of their people to leave their homes and settle here. There are many things that are as bad as the "yellow peril." The usually inoffensive Chinamen make better settlers than do most of the ignorant Europeans who come over in droves to make their petty pile and then go home to spend it.³²

An outbreak of labor trouble in the summer of 1904 increased the hostility toward ethnic groups in the city. In July and August a nation-wide packing strike resulted in minor rioting in several packing centers including Omaha. The first attempt by the packers to import strikebreakers into Omaha almost led to an armed confrontation between the strikers and the scabs. Although the strikebreakers were provided with police protection, they defected when confronted by an angry mob of strikers.³³ Other cities were not so fortunate. Omaha citizens read of riots between inflamed union men and the police in Sioux City and St. Paul.³⁴ After the initial failure of the management to bring the strike to a satisfactory conclusion with strikebreakers, a negotiated settlement was reached. However, within days the union resumed the strike with increased furor, claiming that the packers had not lived up to the agreement. This time Omaha was not spared violence. A series of "riotous" demonstrations in South Omaha in which many of the strikers and strike sympathizers wielded pistols led to full scale riots in

³² Ibid., June 17, 1904.

³³ World-Herald, July 17, 1904; July 20, 1904.

³⁴ Ibid., July 17, 1904.

the city.³⁵ The packers with the cooperation of the Omaha Business Men's Association successfully imported strikebreakers and the union was defeated.

The packing strike left a legacy of immigrant hostility in Omaha. Although foreign radicals were not blamed for the riots, immigrant strikebreakers were held responsible by the working class for the defeat of the union. Greeks and Japanese had been brought in by the packers to take the place of the union men in the yards.³⁶ After the strike most remained in Omaha, and their presence created hostility which would flare up in the future.

Within a year enmity against the Japanese led to a serious confrontation between Japanese and American school children in South Omaha. In April, 1905 students in a school protested against two Japanese students. Urged on by parents who remembered that the Japanese had entered Omaha as strikebreakers, the small disturbance grew into a full scale riot. The World-Herald reported that "sentiment which has been growing against Japanese students ripens into revolt."³⁷ The students and parents demanded that the Japanese immigrants be prevented from attending the same schools as white Americans. Although at this time city authorities upheld the right of Japanese to attend public schools, the hostility toward this ethnic group was clearly evident. Even more significantly, hostility toward all Omaha ethnic groups was increasing.

During the next two years the attitude of the Omaha press became more

³⁵ Ibid., August 14, 1904; August 22, 1904.

³⁶ Ibid., August 23, 1904; August 24, 1904.

³⁷ Ibid., April 18, 1905.

openly hostile to immigration. Two incidents in June of 1906 were used to denounce immigration. First, Congress passed an immigration bill which established a commission to study the effects of immigration and to discover a way to redirect the source of the migration away from eastern and southern Europe. The World-Herald agreed that some method must be found to exclude the less desirable Italians, Hungarians, Poles, and Slovaks, but not effect the flow of German, Scandinavian, Irish, and Scotch immigrants.³⁸ Four days later prejudices against the new immigrants was reinforced by news of rioting Italian workers. Under the headline, "ITALIANS STRIKE AND USE WEAPONS IN BIG RIOTS," the World-Herald reported widespread violence and lawlessness among Italian strikers on the Grand Trunk railroad near Kingston, Ontario.³⁹ According to the press the foreigners used pistols and knives to spread terror and disorder until they were finally surrounded by units of the Canadian army. This outbreak in America's neighbor to the north helped to create the image that the east European was the agent of anarchy and unrest.

Thus far twentieth century nativism had been tempered by the optimism and social confidence which had resulted from economic prosperity. In 1907 this basis for tolerance received a severe shock. In the fall of that year financial panic struck the country bringing in its wake several months of business recession and a sharp rise in unemployment. Although the Panic of 1907 did not equal the depression of the 1890's in either severity or duration it did challenge the prosperity of the decade. Between 1907 and the first World War complaints of hard times became common in the United States;

³⁸ Ibid., June 26, 1906.

³⁹ Ibid., June 30, 1906.

after the Panic there was no real business recovery until 1915.⁴⁰ In Nebraska agricultural prosperity began to display signs of weakness. The number of farms operated by tenants was increasing, and the rate of population growth was decreasing.⁴¹ As the foundation for economic prosperity was weakening in Omaha, the confidence which had been a moderating influence on nativism began to disappear.

The period from the death of President McKinley to the panic of 1907 was a period of sporadic nativism in Omaha. Immediately following the assassination public opinion demanded that foreign anarchists be eliminated from the country. Within a few months, however, continued prosperity caused this demand to be forgotten. Only one Omaha paper continued a campaign in support of immigration restriction during these years of confidence. The strikes in 1902 and 1903 created no outbreak of nativism, but beginning with the 1904 packing strike this attitude began to change. Immigrant strikebreakers created a legacy of anti-foreign sentiment in the city. By the time that the Panic of 1907 interrupted prosperity nativism appeared to be on the rise in Omaha. John Higham in Strangers in the Land regarded the period 1897 to 1905 as "the return of confidence," and the years 1905 and after as "the loss of confidence."⁴² With minor exceptions these labels describe the situation in Omaha. Certainly after the packing strike, nativism again began to spread through the city.

⁴⁰Thomas C. Cochran and William Miller, The Age of Enterprise: A Social History of Industrial America (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), pp. 182, 195.

⁴¹Leighton, p. 206.

⁴²Higham, pp. 106, 158.

CHAPTER V

THE DEMISE OF TOLERANCE

As the first decade of the twentieth century came to a close, a wave of intense nativism swept through Omaha. The period of confidence that had been growing steadily weaker throughout the latter half of the decade crumbled completely during the next two years. Although there were no spectacular outbreaks of labor violence as in the early 1890's, hidden frustrations from that earlier period and new frustrations resulted in a new wave of nativism. Economic stagnation, the unsuccessful confrontations between reformers and immigrants, and fears created by the unparalleled flood of new immigrants which entered the country each year completely destroyed what tolerance had survived since the turn of the century. The immigrant again became the scapegoat for the ills of society. Once more the immigrant was transformed by prejudice into the "scum of Europe," and renewed fears of foreign radicalism unleashed a new furor of anti-immigrant sentiment.

The first outbreak of nativism followed two incidents involving crimes committed by foreign anarchists. This was the first time since the McKinley assassination that anarchism appeared to be strong enough to present a serious threat to the stability of the country. The first incident occurred in Denver, Colorado in February, 1908. Guiseppe Allo, an Italian anarchist, shot and killed a Catholic priest. The Omaha press claimed that the murder of Father Leo was part of anarchist plot against the Church.¹ Six other foreign anarchists were arrested and charged with being involved in the

¹ Bee, February 26, 1908.

crime. The crime in Denver was reportedly committed because Father Leo had declared war on anarchism. This was only part of a campaign early in 1908 to uncover and destroy hotbeds of foreign radicalism. During the same week police in Philadelphia also cracked down on radicalism by trying to stop anarchist meetings in the city's immigrant ghettos.²

The city of Chicago waged the most intense campaign against anarchism, and also precipitated the most spectacular reprisal. Less than a week after the murder of Father Leo in Denver, a Chicago anarchist, apparently incensed by the police department's raids on anarchist meeting halls, entered the home of the Chicago Police Chief and attempted to assassinate him. The Chief escaped with minor wounds, but his son, who rushed to his aid, and the assassin were both killed.

The response to this crime in both Chicago and Omaha was immediate, and was directed mostly against the immigrant. Few people doubted that a foreign radical had committed the crime, and thought that the way to deal with such action was to drive the foreign scum out of the country and enact stricter legislation prohibiting lawless radicals from finding refuge in the United States.

In Omaha people read of the attempted assassination under the headlines, "CHICAGO CHIEF OF POLICE ATTACKED BY ANARCHIST," and learned that Chicago police had retaliated immediately, invading the Italian and Ghetto districts of the city and raiding all places known as headquarters of secret societies suspected of anarchistic tendencies.³ The only evidence that the

²World-Herald, February 25, 1908.

³Ibid., March 3, 1908.

police originally had that the dead assassin was an anarchist was that the Chief had created enemies among the city's radical foreigners, and the fact that the murderer "looked like an anarchist."⁴ The following day when more evidence came to light, this accusation was proven correct. The police identified the killer as Lazarus Averbuch, a Jewish immigrant of known anarchist tendencies. Convinced that Averbuch's crime was part of a much larger conspiracy, the police issued a city-wide "dragnet for anarchists."⁵

In their search for a conspiracy the police centered their attack largely on Chicago's immigrant community. Joseph Freedman, a Jew, was arrested for "seditious speech."⁶ Isadore Maron, a Russian Jew and companion of Averbuch was also arrested, and "considerable anarchistic literature was found in his possession."⁷

From the reports of the crime appearing in the Omaha press there was no question that the assassination was the work of foreigners. Averbuch, his companion Maron, and the Jew arrested for seditious speech were all aliens. In case there was any doubt, the World-Herald pointed out under the headline, "Cannot Read English," that Maron not only could not read English, but that he also spoke the language badly.⁸ During the interrogation of the sister of the assassin it was noted that "most of Miss Averbuch's story was told in broken English, but part of the time she talked through an interpreter."⁹

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Bee, March 4, 1908.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ World-Herald, March 4, 1908.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ ibid.

It almost seemed that the inability to speak the English language fluently branded one a dangerous radical.

The immigrant was again stereotyped as a lawless radical and an anarchist. In both Denver and Chicago new immigrants, particularly Jews and Italians, became involved in crimes based on their political beliefs. The image which appeared in the Omaha press was that of immigrant radicalism. The belief expressed after the McKinley assassination, that "there are no American anarchists" again determined the Omaha reaction to these crimes. Certainly if one was to search for anarchists one would go into the foreign neighborhoods, not the American ones. The way to combat radicalism was by immigration restriction.

In response to the incidents in Denver and Chicago the Bee called for all-out war on anarchists, and claimed that freedom of speech did not apply to those who "openly proclaim war on society and law."¹⁰ The paper continued:

These undesirable citizens should be deported whence they came, with due notice to the authorities of such countries. The naturalized citizen who becomes an avowed anarchist should have his citizenship papers annulled. Such treatment, it is believed, would solve the problem so far as imported anarchy is concerned, and so far as it is out in the open, secret oathbound anarchism is harder to combat. Anarchism, however, is not an American institution, and every possible precaution should be taken against transplanting it to American soil.¹¹

This summarized the new attitude toward ethnic groups in Omaha. Once again Americans feared and distrusted the foreigner. He was believed to be the importer of radical and alien political doctrines that threatened American

¹⁰ Bee, March 4, 1908.

¹¹ Ibid.

democracy.

For the next two years intolerance continued to grow. Frustrations, which had been increasing since the middle of the decade, helped create hostility toward ethnic groups in the city. Economic recovery after the Panic of 1907 was far from satisfactory. A sharp setback to trade took place in 1908-1909, and unemployment rose above the two million mark.¹² Although there were no serious labor disturbances during 1908, fears of labor radicalism increased with the growth of the left-wing of the American labor movement. In 1908 and 1909 the International Workers of the World solved their internal squabbles and began their "free speech" strikes. Unlike the moderate American Federation of Labor, the IWW was not committed to the American free enterprise system, and since a large portion of their membership consisted of aliens, they fell victim to charges of immigrant radicalism. To complicate these two problems immigration reached one of its highest points during this period. From 1908-1910 over two and one-half million foreigners entered the United States.¹³ Little wonder that Americans again turned to the immigrant as a scapegoat for their problems.

Unrest became evident early in 1909. During the first week of February several disturbances appeared. The World-Herald reported "Riot trouble at coal mine," resulting from a conflict between union and non-union men near Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.¹⁴ Also in Pittsburg racial friction threatened to result in violence between Negroes and whites. Within two days more than

¹²Pelling, p. 104.

¹³ Benjamin Munn Ziegler (ed.), Immigration: An American Dilemma (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1953), p. 17.

¹⁴World-Herald, February 6, 1909.

one hundred and thirty Negroes were arrested for attacks on "young white girls."¹⁵ The World-Herald disclosed that "a strong and undercurrent of racial feeling is present and needs but a slight excuse to make it break forth in violent form."¹⁶ The same paper editorialized in favor of the segregation of Japanese and Americans in public schools:

The Japanese is at least as much an alien to the Caucasian race as the American Negro. There is surely as good ground for objection for social equality with one as with the other, and as much reason for guarding against indiscriminate intermingling of white children with Japanese as with negroes [sic].¹⁷

Up to this point nativism in the Omaha area had been nonviolent. The campaign against immigrants had been a war of words and of propaganda; the aims had been restriction and the elimination of alien radicals by legal means. In February, 1909, however, the hostility which had been building up exploded in violence in South Omaha. At about three o'clock in the afternoon of February 21, 1909, an unrestrained mob swarmed into the Greek quarter of South Omaha spreading violence and destruction from one Greek establishment or boarding house to another.¹⁸ By midnight authorities had subdued the riot, but not before an estimated thirteen hundred refugees were driven from the city, and over a hundred thousand dollars damage was done to Greek property.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ John G. Bitzes, "The Anti-Greek Riot of 1909--South Omaha" (unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Omaha, 1964), p. 42.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 55-62.

On the surface the riot was caused by crowds seeking to avenge the death of patrolman Edward Lowery, who was shot while trying to arrest a Greek, John Masourides. On the evening of February 19 Masourides met Lillian Breese, who had been teaching him English, and escorted her home. Neighbors who saw the couple enter Miss Breese's apartment together summoned the South Omaha police. Officer Lowery, without a warrant, entered the apartment and arrested Masourides for vagrancy. On the way to the police station Masourides shot and killed Lowery. The exact circumstances surrounding the slaying were never determined. According to Masourides on the way to the station he tried to discard a pistol that he had in his pocket. Lowery then opened fire, and Masourides returned the fire, fatally wounding his captor. Masourides claimed that "I fired at him to save myself."²⁰

Regardless of the actual circumstances surrounding the slaying, it was interpreted in Omaha and South Omaha as another example of lawlessness among immigrants, and it convinced people finally that something drastic must be done to drive the "scum" out of the city. The press did not question that Masourides was arrested only for being in the same apartment with a "white girl," or that the Greek might have fired in self-defense. If anything the Omaha press, with the exception of the Bee, helped inflame the city against the Greeks. The Daily News carried the headline: "Officer Lowry [sic] of South Omaha Is Shot To Death By Greek."²¹ The World-Herald was even more inflammatory. It also proclaimed in bold headlines that Lowery was shot and killed by a Greek, and carried the following article:

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 26-28.

²¹ Daily News, February 20, 1909.

CALL MASS MEETING

Copies of the following resolution are being circulated about the city and hundreds have already signed it. The mass meeting will no doubt be one of the largest ever held in the city:

Whereas, A condition of outlawry exists in this city among the Greeks, and

Whereas, Many instances of their flagrant disregard and insolence of our laws and ordinances of this city have occurred during the past years, and

Whereas, The so-called quarters of the Greeks are infested by a vile bunch of filthy Greeks who have attacked our women, insulted pedestrians upon the street, openly maintained gambling dens and many other forms of viciousness, and

Whereas, On the evening of February 19, these conditions culminated in the cowardly and brutal murder of officer Ed Lowery, one of the most highly respected citizens of this city.

Therefore be it resolved. That we, the undersigned citizens and taxpayers of the city hereby believe that a mass meeting should be held on Sunday afternoon, February 21, 1909, at the city hall to take such steps and to adopt such measures as will effectually rid the city of the Greeks, and thereby remove the menacing conditions that threaten the very life and welfare of South Omaha.²²

The next day the paper printed the following indictment of Masourides, which also served as a stereotype for all ethnic groups:

His life was filled with the brightness of freedom and his pockets filled with the easy gold. He was made to feel that he was a human being. He grew fat in arrogance and pushed aside the native sons or used them as mere rungs of his ladder of success.

And then when a gentle hand sought to restrain him for a moment from wrong doing his thought was only to kill, to kill craftily.²³

With these words fresh in their memory approximately twenty-five

²² World-Herald, February 20, 1909.

²³ Ibid., February 21, 1909.

hundred people assembled in South Omaha for the mass meeting Sunday afternoon at two o'clock. The meeting was presided over by Henry C. Murphy, former city attorney of South Omaha.²⁴ In his address Murphy eulogized the deceased officer, condemned the morals and habits of the Greeks, dwelling particularly on their molesting of women, and concluded by demanding that action be taken against the Greek menace.²⁵ He advised:

It is about time for the citizens to take steps to rid the city of this menace. We should use means to get the corporations hiring this class of labor to desist. We should immediately lay this matter, with the great necessity of the case, before these corporations.²⁶

A motion was introduced to prevent Greeks from handling foods. It was claimed that:

It is currently reported that the so-called Greeks, a large number of whom are employed in the packing houses of this city, have brought with them to this city not only a condition of outlawry and viciousness, but that a large percentage of them are suffering and their bodies are affected by vile, loathsome and contagious diseases, and that a large number of them are suffering from syphilitic and other taints and yet are permitted to handle food and eatable products consumed by the people of this city and the public at large.²⁷

The Greeks were charged with every evil imaginable. They were said to be lawless, vile, vicious, immoral, filthy, and carriers of loathsome diseases. The mass meeting, which made these accusations and demanded that something be done to meet the Greek menace, remained peaceful. However, within minutes after the meeting dispersed, a mob gathered and the anti-Greek

²⁴ Bitzes, p. 38.

²⁵ World-Herald, February 22, 1909; Bee, February 22, 1909.

²⁶ Bee, February 22, 1909.

²⁷ World-Herald, February 22, 1909.

riot began.²⁸

The riot lasted from three o'clock in the afternoon until shortly after midnight. During that time mobs roamed at will through the Greek quarter of South Omaha destroying every vestige of the Greek community that could be found. Armed with bricks and clubs they reduced Greek stores and lodging houses to shambles.²⁹ At night the mob added arson to its weapons. What they did not destroy they looted. The Greeks, shocked and overcome, tried to flee for their lives but often fell into the hands of the rioters, who subjected them to insults and severe beatings.³⁰ Those who armed themselves and attempted to defend their property only further infuriated the mob. For all practical purposes the police did nothing to prevent the riot from spreading until the entire Greek neighborhood had been decimated. By the time the mob dispersed, virtually every Greek had been driven from the city.³¹

The anti-Greek riot in Omaha reflected deepseated resentment against not only Greeks, but all ethnic groups in the city. Certainly the riot was not simply the response to the shooting of a South Omaha policeman. The list of grievances presented in the petition for the mass meeting contained a variety of complaints against the Greeks, the majority of which applied to all of the new immigrant groups in the city. The petition even noted that it was these other grievances that culminated in the murder of officer

²⁸ Bitzes, p. 41.

²⁹ Bee, February 22, 1909.

³⁰ Bitzes, p. 43.

³¹ For a more extensive account of the riot see Bitzes, pp. 42-53.

Lowery. The underlying cause of the riot according to an ex-city official was "that the town has no use for Greeks and wants them to understand it. Our people do not want anybody killed nor any property destroyed but they want the Greeks to get out."³²

Actually it went even deeper than that. The city had reached the point where it felt that it had no use for any new immigrant group--the Greeks became the object of these frustrations. The Greeks, like the other ethnic groups, were visibly alien; they lived in slums, their dress, language and customs were foreign to native Americans. The Greeks also suffered because they had entered the city as strikebreakers. It was believed that they, like other immigrants, lowered the wage scale and standard of living in the United States. Then when a Greek became involved in the death of a policeman the hostility of the entire community was unleashed.

On several occasions during the riot the mob directed its violence at foreigners as a whole, not just the Greeks. The Daily News reported "All Foreigners Attacked," that "while the fury of the rioters was supposed to be centered on the Greeks alone, every man who looked like a foreigner fell victim to its frenzy."³³ This was reflected in the early casualty figures which showed three Americans, six Greeks, and four Poles seriously injured.³⁴ The mob "attacked every building occupied by anyone who was dark complexioned. Stores and stands of Italians, Jews, and Roumanians, besides the Greek

³²World-Herald, February 23, 1909.

³³Daily News, February 22, 1909.

³⁴Ibid.

establishments were smashed."³⁵ In addition Turkish and Austro-Hungarian citizens also suffered at the hands of the rioters.³⁶ What started as a riot against Greeks evolved into an attack on anything or anyone foreign.

On February 22, 1909 dawn broke on a quiet South Omaha. The riot was over, the fires were out, and refugees of the night's warfare returned to gather what they could find of their belongings before leaving the city for good. Meanwhile the people of Omaha and South Omaha began to assess the riot. The concensus of opinion among the press was that although violence was not justified, South Omaha did have legitimate grievances against the Greeks and did have the right to rid the city of undesirable elements of the population. The Bee took the strongest stand against the riot. It maintained that responsibility for the riot lay with the "demagogues" who organized the "disgraceful public meeting," and was disturbed that a whole race was punished for the crime that one of its members committed.³⁷

The World-Herald also censured the violence, but blamed the Greek community and the "dregs" of South Omaha for the riot. According to that paper deepseated resentment against the Greeks created the riot situation:

South Omaha wants the Greeks to get out, and no one makes any secret of that fact. . . . It is felt that they are undesirable citizens, as they live on something akin to a Chinese basis and send their money out of the country.

A feeling of prejudice has grown up on sociological lines, and has been intensified by the knowledge of the drinking, gambling and immorality that has prevailed in the Greek district. Frequent cases have been reported of insults

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Bitzes, p. 52.

³⁷ Bee, February 23, 1909.

offered women on the streets, and the Greeks had succeeded in making themselves before one of their number killed a policeman who stood in high public esteem.³⁸

The World-Herald claimed that the "mob did not represent the citizenship of South Omaha. It represented only its dregs."³⁹ The World-Herald even went so far as to blame the violence on immigrants, describing the mob as follows:

Picture in your mind an aggregation of about four hundred men, about half under the age of 21 years. Of these perhaps one-fourth are negroes [sic], and of the balance a majority are unmistakably of foreign birth.⁴⁰

The Daily News, which had the largest circulation of any Omaha newspaper, adopted the strongest anti-Greek policy. It also used the riots to demand restriction of the immigration of cheap labor regardless of nationality. The Greeks were only one of several nationalities that must be excluded. Like the other two Omaha papers the Daily News deplored the use of violence, but felt that it was an understandable reaction to the problems of immigration. The following editorial reflected their view of the riot:

There can be ABSOLUTELY NO EXCUSE for the mob spirit which prevailed in South Omaha Sunday. Even if it is granted that the Greeks are undesirable citizens, South Omaha WAS NOT THEREBY JUSTIFIED in attempting to drive them out BY VIOLENCE. . . .

However, the fact is not to be overlooked that South Omaha has been greatly irritated by the presence of the Greek colony.

Evidence indicates that these Greeks HAVE NOT BEEN A DESIRABLE ELEMENT.

Their quarters have been unsanitary; they have insulted women; in other ways they have made themselves repulsive in

³⁸ World-Herald, February 23, 1909.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

the eyes of the great majority of the people of South Omaha-- and Omaha too.

The packing house workmen have been especially irritated by their presence, for the Greek laborers have not lived up to the standards that the average workingman of this country demands and which has helped so largely to make the United States the most prosperous country in the world.

It is not to be wondered that our native workingmen fear the arrival of such competitors as these.

Herded together in lodging houses and living cheaply, these Greeks are a menace to the American laboring man--just as Japs, Italians, and other similar laborers are.

If this foreign element can secure a foothold, it will provide such competition as to threaten to lower the American laborer's standard of living.

There is even a broader objection to raise against this foreign element.

If these people came here to make their homes and to find liberty, we could expect ultimately to raise them to the standard upon which our laboring men dwell.

But the bigger part of these Greeks, Japs, Italians, and others of like type DO NOT COME HERE TO MAKE HOMES, NOR DO THEY COME HERE TO LIVE IN A LAND OF LIBERTY.⁴¹

The Daily News concluded that the South Omaha riot was caused by the presence of cheap immigrant labor, and predicted that similar outbreaks would occur until the government found some way to restrict the flood of undesirable immigrants.⁴²

Thus ended the anti-Greek riot. Although the people of Omaha did not approve of the use of violence, more than ever they were convinced that something must be about the immigrant problem. Very little tolerance survived the riot. The response of Omaha to immigrants in February, 1909,

⁴¹Daily News, February 23, 1909.

⁴²ibid.

defined the city's attitude toward ethnic groups for the next two decades. During the rest of 1909 there was no spectacular outbreak of nativism, but a strong and growing anti-immigrant sentiment prevailed. Within a week after the Omaha riot trouble with immigrant laborers broke out in Uehling, Nebraska. The World-Herald reported that three men were shot when a Greek or an Italian fired a shotgun into a crowd. Excitement was high in the town while a posse of armed citizens surrounded the boxcar where the assailant had sought refuge among his countrymen.⁴³ Authorities arrested the assailant without further incident, but hostility toward immigrants increased.

During the summer of 1909 conditions did not improve. In August Omaha read about a "pitched battle" between troops and strikers at McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, in which eleven persons lost their lives.⁴⁴ As usual most of the strikers were foreigners. One month later trouble again erupted at McKees Rocks when three thousand foreign workers refused to go to work at the Pressed Steel Car Company there.⁴⁵

The most serious strike of 1909 occurred at Omaha. On September 18, six hundred workers struck against the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company. Immediately the company imported strikebreakers, and sporadic violence broke out. Foreigners were implicated on both sides of the conflict. The World-Herald noted that many of the strikebreakers were foreign born, and at the same time pointed out that the angry mobs which attacked

⁴³World-Herald, February 28, 1909.

⁴⁴Bee, August 24, 1909; August 25, 1909.

⁴⁵World-Herald, September 16, 1909.

the strikebreakers also contained a large number of immigrants.⁴⁶ The riots of September, 1909 were as extensive as those of February. Mobs of up to three thousand strikers and union sympathizers attempted to obstruct the operation of the street railway and to eliminate the effectiveness of the strikebreakers.⁴⁷ The union lost the strike, but as in February the immigrant suffered also. The foreigner was blamed for the lawlessness of the rioters, and because immigrants were used as strikebreakers he was considered responsible for the failure of the strike. In both cases hostility against ethnic groups increased.

By the year 1909 hostility toward the immigrant was deeply entrenched in Omaha. The confidence which existed at the turn of the century had disappeared, and with it tolerance toward foreigners. The contrast between the city in 1898 and 1909 appeared vividly in the differences in the visits of two presidents of the United States to Omaha. When McKinley came to Omaha in 1898 he found a city in the height of its glory. Omaha was host to a successful international exposition and was experiencing a revival of economic prosperity. In 1898 the city felt it could afford to be hospitable to its minorities. When Taft arrived eleven years later he found a different city. Omaha had been torn by two major riots in less than a year; its economic prospects were questionable. Hostility had replaced tolerance. Whereas in 1898 the immigrant had enjoyed acceptance in a prosperous and confident city, in 1909 he became the scapegoat for the troubles that plagued Omaha. According to historian John Higham this hostility remained undiminished

⁴⁶ Ibid., September 24, 1909; September 25, 1909.

⁴⁷ Ibid., September 23, 1909; Daily News, September 22, 1909.

until Congress enacted a satisfactory plan to restrict immigration from eastern and southern Europe in the 1920's.

From 1892-1910 Omaha passed through several stages in the development of its attitude toward ethnic groups. During the depression of the 1890's the city demanded immigration restriction to combat cheap foreign labor and alien radicalism. From the end of the depression until approximately 1905, and with the exception of the weeks following the assassination of McKinley, Omaha adopted a tolerant attitude toward ethnic groups. During this period the city enjoyed prosperity and was relatively immune from labor radicalism. After 1905 this confidence began to dissipate, and nativism increased until it exploded in the riot of February, 1909.

Thus the response to ethnic groups in Omaha confirmed Higham's theory of American nativism. As long as confidence prevailed the city maintained a friendly attitude toward its minority groups. Once, however, this confidence was shaken, whether by an economic or a social crisis, the city lashed out at its immigrant population. The immigrant in Omaha led a precarious existence. While the city prospered he was safe from abuse; when prosperity was replaced by frustration he became a scapegoat. In this light the response to ethnic groups in Omaha also corresponded to what Gurdon W. Allport referred to as the "scapegoat theory." According to Allport when a group, such as the city of Omaha, is faced with overwhelming frustrations, it "may beget out-group hostility, via the displacement of aggression."⁴⁸ Allport further asserted that scapegoating assumes three stages: frustration generates aggression; aggression becomes displaced upon relatively defenseless

⁴⁸Gurdon W. Allport, The Nature of Prejudice (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1954), p. 329.

goats; this displaced hostility is then rationalized and justified by blaming, projecting, and stereotyping.⁴⁹

Within this general framework hostility toward ethnic groups was the response to economic and social frustrations in Omaha. Immigrant groups met the requirements established by Allport for scapegoats. They were both numerical and psychological minorities in Omaha. Allport noted that psychological minorities may be only mildly disparaged and discriminated against, or they may become scapegoats.⁵⁰ In Omaha ethnic groups experienced both responses. During periods of prosperity and confidence there was little or no anti-immigrant feeling. Immigrants either were accepted or they were ignored, but there was no overt hostility against them. When frustrations increased in Omaha, the resulting aggressions were transferred to the minority groups which then became the scapegoats for the city.

Essentially, this was the response to ethnic groups in Omaha from 1892 to 1910. Whenever prospects in the city were bright, the minority groups shared in the prosperity. But, when conditions were reversed, the immigrants became the target for the frustrations of the majority. As such the situation in Omaha corresponded to historian John Higham's thesis regarding nativism in America and sociologist Gurdon Allport's scapegoat theory.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 331.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 236.

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SOCIAL RESPONSE TO ETHNIC GROUPS IN
OMAHA, NEBRASKA: 1892-1910

by

CARY DeCORDOVA WINTZ

B. A., Rice University, 1965

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During the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century the presence of ethnic minorities became a serious problem for the native population of Omaha, Nebraska. During that period the toleration which previously had defined the attitude toward immigrants gave way to nativism. As economic and social unrest grew during the depression of the 1890's, the immigrant found himself receiving most of the blame for America's difficulties. In Omaha the press reflected the new position of minorities in the popular mind. The immigrant was charged with undermining prosperity and with threatening the very basis of American democracy-- law and order. The labor violence of 1892-1894 convinced many that alien radicalism and anarchy posed a far more serious threat than the depression. Within this framework nativism and anti-Catholicism replaced tolerance in Omaha.

As prosperity returned and as labor radicalism became less prominent the attitude toward ethnic groups in Omaha softened. In 1898 Omaha was at the height of her glory and could well accept her minority groups. Not only had prosperity returned to the city, but Omaha also hosted the Trans-Mississippi Exposition that year. This, combined with the brief but successful war with Spain, created an atmosphere of confidence in the city which led to tolerance. Whereas ethnic groups became the scapegoat for the city in times of frustration, during periods of confidence minority groups benefited.

This tolerance continued into the first years of the twentieth century. The assassination of President McKinley by a man identified as a Polish anarchist led to a brief outbreak of nativism, but did not seriously disrupt the confidence of the period. In 1904, however, tolerance

began to wane. Sporadic labor trouble that year threatened the city, and the alien strikebreakers brought into the city created a legacy of hostility. The economic recession which followed the Panic of 1907 gave impetus to the growing nativism. In February, 1909 the city released its frustrations on the Greek immigrants, and drove them from the city in a bloody riot.

Thus, throughout the period 1892-1910 the attitude toward ethnic groups in Omaha fluctuated according to whether the city enjoyed a state of confidence or not. When the city experienced prosperity and was certain of a bright future, there was little hostility toward minority groups. During this time immigrants were either welcomed to the city, or at worst ignored. On the other hand, when there was a depression or when labor radicalism seemed to threaten America with civil war, the city transferred its frustrations and aggressions to its ethnic minorities. During these times ethnic groups became the scapegoat for the problems of society.

