Strangers in the Land

PATTERNS OF AMERICAN NATIVISM
1860-1925

JOHN HIGHAM

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PRESS
New Brunswick and London

Chapter Two

The Age of Confidence

> [She] gathers the chosen of her seed
> From the hunted of every crown and creed.
>
> * * *
>
> Fused in her candid light,
> To one strong race all races here unite.
> —Bayard Taylor, "Centennial Ode"

Faugh a Ballagh! The Gaelic cry rang out through dense fog and gunsmoke as a wave of Union troops surged up the heights behind ruined Fredericksburg. In their midst floated a green flag bearing the golden harp of Ireland. For fifteen minutes Confederate cannon and muskets poured down volley after volley from impregnable positions a few paces away. At the end of the carnage two-thirds of General Thomas Meagher's Irish Brigade were left crumpled on the field.[1]

About the same time, a little band of dispirited men came together in New York City for the last recorded meeting of the Grand Executive Committee of the Order of United Americans. The largest of the nonpolitical nativistic associations, the O.U.A. had spread through sixteen states in the early 1850's, trumpeting a message of hatred and fear of immigrants and Catholics. Now a demoralized remnant could no longer pay its bills or secure a quorum at consolidated meetings.

One ended in glory while the other expired in neglect, but the death of Irishmen at the Battle of Fredericksburg and the death of the O.U.A. on the home front were connected and symptomatic. All over the country foreign-born Americans flocked to the colors.

Five hundred thousand of them served in the Union armies alone, often organized in their own companies, regiments, and even divisions. Everywhere the anti-foreign movement of prewar years melted away. The very heart of Know-Nothingism, the American party, vanished in 1860, its last surviving strength passing into the Constitutional Union party which stood for nothing but the preservation of the nation. The Sons of America, once mighty in Pennsylvania, succumbed when the war began. A mere fragment of the Order of United American Mechanics remained in existence.[2] The war completed the ruin of organized nativism by absorbing xenophobes and immigrants in a common cause. Now the foreigner had a new prestige; he was a comrade-at-arms. The clash that alienated sections reconciled their component nationalities.

While quieting old anxieties, the war raised new ones; but in only two special instances did these concern foreign groups. The fearful draft riots that rocked New York for four days in 1863 arose principally from the discontents of the city's Irish working class. The convulsion was widely interpreted as a disloyal Irish conspiracy inspired by Confederate agents. Out of the horror that the rioting produced, came an effort to revive the Know-Nothing movement, but it passed swiftly and without consequence.[3] Altogether, the nativistic repercussions of the event were slight in comparison to the provocation.

Suspicions of disloyalty also touched the Jews during the war years. Too small a group to contribute noticeably to the armed forces, they had only recently won prominence in America as retail merchants and clothing manufacturers. At a time when war profiteering was rife and traders of all sorts were swarming through Union lines to smuggle and speculate in southern cotton, the Jews were often singled out for exploiting the war effort. In 1862 General U. S. Grant curtly ordered every Jew expelled from his military jurisdiction—an act that may stand as the principal nativistic incident of the war years.[4] Three weeks later, on instructions from Lincoln, the order was revoked.

These ripples of distrust were slight compared to the storm of hatred which lashed anti-war groups of native background. The great fear of an internal menace in the North concerned homespun Copperheads. Mob attacks on anti-war newspapers and even an occasional lynching of a suspected secessionist replaced the nativis-

tic riots of the 1850's. One patriotic citizen of Illinois described her Copperhead neighbors as "worse then the meanest thing a person can think of . . . Threatening what they will Do with Women Murdering Them if They can get a Chance . . . Oh they are to lowlife to let walk on gods Green Earth." [5] While nativism withered, nationalism flourished.

In addition to the psychological bonds of a common enmity, the war forged between American ethnic groups the ties of a common economic need. Foreign-born civilians served the Union cause behind the lines in as important a way as foreign-born soldiers at the front. From the depopulated farms and straining factories of the North came clamorous demands for immigrant labor. In 1864 Congress revived an eighteenth century technique for stimulating the flow of fresh European manpower. A contract labor law authorized employers to pay the passage and bind the services of prospective migrants.[6]

Postwar America Beckons

The statute did not long outlive the war that produced it, but the population hunger behind it grew more imperious than ever in the following years. The immigrant might not have retained his wartime laurels for long if his peacetime services had not loomed so large. As it was, the Civil War inaugurated an era of immense industrial, agricultural, and geographical expansion, in which the hundreds of thousands of annual arrivals from across the Atlantic seemed a national blessing. For two decades after Appomattox the summons to enrichment and opportunity smothered any serious nativist challenge. As the Civil War drew to a close, the Chicago *Tribune* sounded a jubilant keynote for the era ahead: "Europe will open her gates like a conquered city. Her people will come forth to us subdued by admiration of our glory and envy of our perfect peace. On to the Rocky Mountains and still over to the Pacific our mighty populations will spread. . . . Our thirty millions will be tripled in thirty years." [7] If the country did not quite live up to the *Tribune's* grandiose statistics, for twenty of those thirty years it echoed the paper's confident welcome.

Transatlantic migration was resumed in force when the war ended, and the throngs who came found the way prepared and a place awaiting them. Better transportation greatly shortened and tempered the rigors of the Atlantic crossing; for in the 1860's steamships replaced the old sailing vessels as carriers of human cargo.[8] Once arrived, immigrants usually moved into a pattern of settlement created by earlier compatriots. In 1860 the proportion of foreign-born to the total population of the United States was already about what it would remain through 1920, and most of the immigrants were concentrated in urban areas. Indeed, the twenty-five principal cities had a higher percentage of foreign-born residents in 1860 than they have had since.[9]

Nor did very notable changes occur, until the 1880's, in the nationalities involved or in their regional distribution. German immigration held the leading position it had attained in the late fifties, and it continued to pour chiefly into the Middle West, drawing increasing numbers of Bohemians and a scattering of Poles in its wake. British immigration (English, Scotch, and Welsh) rose to second place among the transatlantic currents. As skilled craftsmen, farmers, miners, and white-collar workers, the British diffused themselves more evenly throughout the country than any other group. Irish immigrants, although now less numerous than Germans or British, still came in large numbers. Now, as before the Civil War, Irishmen concentrated in the northeastern states. There they did most of the common labor and found increasing opportunities as industrial workers, though mining attracted many to the Far West.[10] Two other groups also sprang into prominence in the war and postwar years. Scandinavians, having established themselves in the prairies of the upper Mississippi Valley two decades before, began to migrate in great numbers in the 1860's. Unlike other nationalities, they avoided the cities for the most part, spreading instead westward across the plains. Meanwhile French Canadians, pulled southward by the Civil War, flocked to the mill towns of New England to compete with the Irish.[11] Thus, by 1865, each nationality was vaguely familiar in the region that received it, and each had familiar tasks.

The fact that an earlier generation had cleared the paths they trod undoubtedly eased the immigrants' reception, but the basic condition of their popularity was the appetite for material growth and achievement that dominated postwar America. With only marginal dissent, the "Gilded Age" that Mark Twain satirized and

adored, the "Chromo Civilization" that E. L. Godkin criticized and defended, gave itself over to avid dreams of wealth. The headlong growth of business made the city, the machine, and the capitalist the controlling forces in American culture. The expansion of the railroad system, particularly, quickened the whole economy, opening up vast natural resources and creating a national market capable of absorbing them. The very real economic exploits of the age underwrote its booster spirit. There seemed no end to what the country could produce with men enough to do the work and to buy the results. The immigrants served both ways. And business leaders, marveling that population growth kept pace with economic opportunities, saw in the flow of immigration the workings of one of the grand laws of nature.[12]

Many businessmen, unwilling to leave matters entirely in the hands of a beneficent fate, actively expedited the immigrant traffic. Here the railroads played a key role, as they did throughout the economy. Railroads that pushed boldly into the empty West had a wilderness to settle. They needed immigrants not just for construction but to buy the great railroad land grants and to insure future revenues. Following the example set by the Illinois Central in the 1850's, the Burlington, the Northern Pacific, and other lines sent agents to blanket northern Europe with alluring propaganda. Other real estate interests sometimes organized similar campaigns. "*The real estate owners*," said the head of a group of speculators planning to advertise in Europe, "*are the parties who make money out of immigrants immediately on their arrival*." [13]

Nearly everyone who had something to sell or something to produce hoped to make money out of immigrants. Merchants looked to immigration for a growing supply of customers, and organized in various localities to attract it. In the early eighties, the Immigration Association of California, formed by members of the San Francisco Board of Trade, established hundreds of contacts with agents in Europe.[14] Mining enterprises from Pennsylvania to the Rockies were chiefly dependent on foreign-born labor; manufacturing was only somewhat less so. By 1870 about one out of every three employees in manufacturing and mechanical industries was an immigrant—a proportion which remained constant until the 1920's.[15] New England factory owners actively recruited labor in French Canada, and others may have done the same in Europe. Even in 1882, when immigration reached its highest point in the nineteenth century, the *Commercial and Financial Chronicle* greeted it as a foundation for unparalleled business expansion.[16]

The general public shared the businessman's inclination to evaluate the newcomers in tangibly economic terms. There were elaborate calculations (how characteristic of the Gilded Age!) putting a price tag on immigrants in order to fix their per capita contribution to national wealth. Statisticians of the United States Treasury Department settled upon $800 as the average monetary value of an immigrant. Amateur mathematicians showed less restraint. One valued immigrants at $1,000 apiece on the ground that each was worth twice as much as an ante-bellum slave. Andrew Carnegie raised the estimate to $1,500.[17] In a generation of exuberant materialism and expansive confidence, the figure of the immigrant seemed truly touched with gold.

The federal government smiled on the transatlantic influx and for a time toyed with schemes to assist it. The Republican party in 1868 and 1872 promised to continue to encourage immigration, as it had done during the Civil War, but after the repeal of the contract labor law in 1868 the customary *laissez faire* policy again prevailed.[18] In 1874 Congress nearly abandoned its traditional opposition to special privileges for immigrant groups when it appeared that thousands of Mennonites might go to Canada instead of the United States unless a great block of public lands was set aside for them. Some Congressmen objected to offering any group "a separate right to compact themselves as an exclusive community," whereupon three western states held out the enticement of exemption from militia service. (Most of the Mennonites came.) [19] Thus, in the end, official promotion of immigration was left to the states.

The demand for immigrants was most widespread and intense outside the densely populated states of the Northeast; in the West and South, virtually every state appointed agents or boards of immigration to lure new settlers from overseas. Michigan began the practice in 1845. By the end of the Civil War the northwestern states were competing with each other for Europeans to people their vacant lands and develop their economies. Then the South joined in, hoping to divert part of the current in its direction in

order to restore shattered commonwealths and replace emancipated Negroes. In the 1860's and 1870's, at least twenty-five out of the thirty-eight states took official action to promote immigration. South Carolina, in its desperation, added the inducement of a five-year tax exemption on all real estate bought by immigrants.[20]

Although economic incentives obviously fired the national lust for population, they alone do not explain it. If opportunities for immediate profit had formed a sufficient basis for a receptive attitude toward foreign groups, the long, searing depression of 1873-1877 would surely have killed such sympathies and desires. Actually, the campaign to stimulate European immigration slackened during the depression without by any means dying out. Hard times contributed powerfully to an exclusionist movement against the Chinese but did not substantially affect the status of the European. Two other conditions sustained the reign of confidence when the economy sagged. Of utmost significance was the survival in public opinion of a general, undaunted indifference to America's accumulating social problems. This complacent mood contrasted sharply with the spirit of ferment, unrest, and reform in the Know-Nothing era. Then the slavery crisis had brought to a head a multitude of discontents and dissatisfactions with the status quo. Reformers balked in their purposes had turned upon Catholics and foreigners as the "real" obstacles to progress; frightened conservatives had found in alien influence the "true" explanation of social discord.[21] Now, however, there was no domestic cleavage deep enough to produce comparable anxieties and no nation-wide agitation to awaken the sleeping conscience of society. Untroubled by doubts of the success of their own institutions, Americans saw little reason to fear the influence of foreigners upon them. Confidence in the country's economic vitality extended, by and large, to its whole social order.

Certainly there was much in American life to justify uneasiness: corruption, peculation, undisciplined wealth, rural blight, and urban squalor on perhaps an unprecedented scale. But the only organized, sustained protest—that of farmers in conflict with the railroads—failed to shake the general public or to touch on problems related to immigration. This was a day when complacency ruled college and pulpit, when labor remained largely unorganized and politicians largely undisturbed. An occasional exception may help

to prove the rule. At the end of the 1860's, the extortions of the Tweed Ring in New York City, supported to a considerable degree by Irish votes, aroused an outraged middle-class opposition. In the process, leading civic reformers struck a good many nativistic blows at "the rule of the uncultivated Irish Catholics." For a time the crusading cartoonist, Thomas Nast, flayed the Catholic Church, the Irish, and Tweed with equal fury.[22] After the Boss's ouster, however, reform subsided. It was sporadic throughout the period, and in general New Yorkers seemed to accept the increasing power of the Irish in municipal politics with apathy.[23]

If indifference to domestic problems saved the foreign-born from some lines of attack, indifference to international problems saved them from others. Conflict between nations is, of course, a fruitful source of nativism when an internal minority is somehow connected with the hostile power. The first great wave of American nativism, in 1798, grew in large measure out of the internalization of an undeclared war with France; for much of the immigrant population on that occasion appeared pro-French.

In the period after the Civil War, however, the United States probably felt more secure from interference by European powers than it did at any other time. Isolation was a fact more than a theory. "Surrounded as we are, by two mighty oceans," said an ardent nationalist, "our Republic can never fall, as others have, by a foreign foe." [24] Comforted by knowledge of its military security, the country tolerated Irish Fenian activities which would certainly have provoked a good deal of tension in other contexts. With impunity, Americans indulged their own Anglophobia and allowed Irish-Americans to do the same in more violent ways. For five years the Fenians, without arousing significant resentment, attacked Canada from American territory, organized revolts in Ireland, and tried to incite war with Britain.[25] Untroubled by dangerous adversaries abroad, the United States could work out its own group relations in isolated safety.

Cosmopolitan Traditions

There was nothing new about the positive response of postwar America to European-born minorities. The conditions of the period —economic opportunity, social stability, and international security

—did not create but merely sustained and perpetuated a set of broadly tolerant attitudes. Over the centuries, America had developed a fluid, variegated culture by incorporating alien peoples into its midst, and the experience had fixed in American thought a faith in the nation's capacity for assimilation. This faith, carrying with it a sense of the foreigner's essential identification with American life, expressed itself in a type of nationalism that had long offset and outweighed the defensive spirit of nativism. A cosmopolitan and democratic ideal of nationality made assimilation plausible to Americans, and the immediate situation made it possible.

"E pluribus unum" expressed the essence of America's cosmopolitan faith—a conviction that this new land would bring unity out of diversity as a matter of course. Intellectually, this conviction was rooted in Christian and democratic values. Along with the parochialisms, the fanaticisms, and the xenophobias that Christianity has nourished, it has had another, perhaps more important, side. The ancient Christian doctrine of the brotherhood of man proclaimed the ultimate similarities between all peoples and their capacity for dwelling together in unity. The democratic values enshrined in the Declaration of Independence postulated an equal opportunity for all to share in the fullness of American life. Both Christian universalism and democratic equalitarianism had withstood the nativist ferment of the ante-bellum period. Both had vitalized George W. Julian's fiery condemnation: "Know Nothingism . . . tramples down the doctrine of human brotherhood. It judges men by the accidents of their condition, instead of striving to find a common lot for all, with a common access to the blessings of life." [26]

The twin ideals of a common humanity and of equal rights continued in the 1870's and 1880's to foster faith in assimilation. Temporarily the tasks of postwar reconstruction even widened assimilationist ideals; for the Radical Republicans' effort to redeem the southern Negro, to draw him within the pale of the state, and to weld the two races into a homogeneous nationality discouraged emphasis on basic human differences. To James Russell Lowell, for example, just and equal treatment of black men meant simply an enlargement of the Christian mission which the United States had long performed in bringing together the peoples of all nations in a common manhood. And Elisha Mulford, philosopher of Reconstruction, argued that the nation "is inclusive of the whole people. . . . There is no difference of wealth, or race, or physical condition, that can be made the ground of exclusion from it." [27]

Out of such assumptions, Americans fashioned an image of themselves as an inclusive nationality, at once diverse and homogeneous, ever improving as it assimilated many types of men into a unified, superior people. According to this long and widely respected view, the Americans derived some of their very distinctiveness as a nationality from the process of amalgamation. "We are the Romans of the modern world," boasted Oliver Wendell Holmes, "the great assimilating people." [28] The boast went back at least to the Revolutionary period, when the founders of the American nation needed to distinguish their own national character from that of the mother country. The French observer Crèvecoeur phrased the classic definition: the American is a "new man," risen out of a blend of a half-dozen lesser peoples. No exclusive group could possibly combine the many excellences which America received from its varied origins.

In short, American nationality was emerging from a melting pot that functioned automatically. Few in the nineteenth century used the metaphor, but many shared the idea. De Witt Clinton, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Walt Whitman all glorified the fusion, through immigration, of a mixed and still developing people. Herman Melville gave this cosmopolitan belief its noblest expression: "We are the heirs of all time, and with all nations we divide our inheritance. On this Western Hemisphere all tribes and peoples are forming into one federated whole; and there is a future which shall see the estranged children of Adam restored as to the old hearthstone in [an American] Eden. . . . The seed is sown, and the harvest must come." [29]

By mid-century, the concept of a mixed, assimilating nationality acquired a vaguely "racial" import: a mixed race has physical and moral qualities superior to one inbred, and in the United States the best intermingling has occurred. Thereafter, a host of intellectuals endorsed the nationally invigorating results of racial mixture. The most popular preacher of the day, Henry Ward Beecher, considered the cultural and religious peculiarities of the immigrants inconvenient but also inconsequential in comparison with their enrichment of American blood.[30]

Support came also from new philosophical and scientific enthusiasms. English scientists, including Darwin himself, offered a compelling explanation for the success of the American melting pot, maintaining that migration functions as a process of natural selection, bringing the most energetic men from all parts of Europe to the New World. Herbert Spencer, the great philosopher of evolution, provided direct confirmation. In a celebrated interview in 1882 he predicted from "biological truths" that immigration and intermixture would produce here a finer, more adaptable type of man than the world had yet known.[31]

Spencer's principal opponent, William T. Harris, reasoned from cultural rather than naturalistic grounds to the same conclusion. Hegelian dialectic led him to believe that a new synthesis of nationalities was forming in America, with universal toleration and sympathies. The process, he thought, was farthest advanced in the most cosmopolitan region, the Mississippi Valley. Ultimately, Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier hypothesis would restate the notion in physiographical terms: "In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics."[32] In one way or another, the age of confidence resounded with assertions that America's "cosmopolitan character in the future is assured, [and] the peaceful blending of many nationalities has resulted in the 'survival of the fittest.'"[33]

Together with this ideal of nationality, the Americans embraced a similarly cosmopolitan interpretation of their national mission. One doctrine complemented the other. Patriots who rejoiced in the strength of a universal heritage expected their nation to perform a universal service. Like the theory of nationality, the concept of a national mission fused Christian with democratic values in the heat of the American Revolution. In revolting from British authority, the colonists looked upon their bid for freedom as service to a world-wide cause. They were realizing—so they thought—the free, rational life of which Europe dreamed but which Europe denied. To fulfill their cosmopolitan task it behooved them to provide for others a haven from Europe's oppressions. Thus Americans could enlist in the cause of general human liberty without actively intervening anywhere.

Tom Paine's *Common Sense* struck the keynote in urging a

declaration of independence. Not England, but all of Europe is America's parent, he said, for the New World has sheltered freedom-loving refugees from many countries. Since oppression is triumphing elsewhere, America must prepare an asylum for mankind.[34] Thereafter, the idea of America's mission to provide a home for the oppressed became a cliché and an incantation. Like the theory of mixed nationality, it affirmed the superiority of the United States over Europe and the patriotic significance of a liberal immigration policy.

During the third quarter of the nineteenth century American sympathies for European revolutionists perceptibly diminished, but the theme of refuge from oppression still had a general appeal. An English visitor in 1866, gazing on New York's rickety immigrant depot, commented, "Every true republican has in his heart the notion that his country is pointed out by God as a refuge for the distressed of all the nations." Even the struggling xenophobic society, the United American Mechanics, felt compelled to acknowledge that it did not "forget that our land should be an asylum for the oppressed." Nor did the business interests that profited from immigration fail to refer to America's role in succoring the oppressed.[35]

But it was among the victims of oppression that the dream of an American refuge struck real fire. Significantly, a Jewish-American poet aroused by Russian pogroms to a consciousness of America's mission put the asylum theory more eloquently than anyone else. When Emma Lazarus wrote in aid of a fund-raising campaign for the Statue of Liberty, the old ideal flashed through the condescending humanitarianism of her phrases:

> 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![36]

The Ethnocentric Residue

Yet the condescension was there too, along with the cosmopolitanism. Emma Lazarus' image of the immigrants as "tempest-tost"

and yearning to breathe free reflected one aspect of the spirit of her age; her picture of them as wretched refuse mirrored another. And the two were not incompatible. They dwelt together in poetry and in public opinion. From one point of view the immigrants symbolized the force of freedom pulling men through a golden door. From another they looked poor and huddled and unattractive. The two judgments could coexist because they were of a very different order from one another. The former image—positive and attractive—referred to the immigrant's impact on the nation. In terms of his relation to national strength and survival, the immigrant appeared a blessing rather than a danger. The second, negative view referred to direct personal and social relations with the immigrant. The distinction is crucially important. It reminds us that unfavorable reactions to the personal and cultural traits of European peoples are not in themselves nativistic. They become so only when integrated with a hostile and fearful nationalism.

In 1884, near the close of the period, a magazine writer made the point very well and in doing so summed up both aspects of his generation's response to the immigrants. "No one," he said, "now accuses any large or influential portion of the foreign element of a set purpose to spread ideas subversive of our political institutions. Such tendencies and ideas as are most deprecated in the foreigners of the United States relate to manners, to mere habits of life and social practices." [37] In other words, the prevailing conditions and the dominant national ideals of the postwar era militated against nativism without dislodging a sense of superiority. An ethnocentrism that applied largely to "mere habits of life," that raised no question of the newcomer's patriotism or his ultimate assimilation, could survive side by side with a generally tolerant and receptive outlook.

Yet we cannot afford to ignore the simpler ethnocentric judgments that persist beneath the ebb and flow of nativism. Although those judgments often exist where nativism does not, they provide the cultural subsoil in which it grows. And, to complicate matters still more, we must recognize that the ethnocentric attitudes displayed toward different outside groups have their own great range of intensity.

In the absence of other disturbing factors, Americans rated lowest the nationalities most conspicuously remote in culture and race.

No variety of anti-European sentiment has ever approached the violent extremes to which anti-Chinese agitation went in the 1870's and 1880's. Lynchings, boycotts, and mass expulsions still harassed the Chinese after the federal government yielded to the clamor for their exclusion in 1882. At a time when the Chinese question had virtually disappeared as a political issue, a labor union could still refer to that patient people as "more slavish and brutish than the beasts that roam the fields. They are groveling worms." [38] Americans have never maintained that every European endangers American civilization; attacks have centered on the "scum" or "dregs" of Europe, thereby allowing for at least some implicit exceptions. But opponents of Oriental folk have tended to reject them one and all.

At the opposite end of the cultural spectrum, as Americans saw it, were the peoples of Britain and the Anglo-Canadians. These met so ready an acceptance that contemporary observers scarcely noticed their coming. Despite a persistent American hostility toward the English government and aristocracy, despite also the British immigrants' tendency to remain loyal subjects of the Queen, they did not really seem foreigners at all. A sense of cultural identity exempted them from Anglophobia, and even recurrent international tensions between the two countries never disturbed the British immigrants' status.[39]

The Germans fared nearly but not quite so well. They insisted belligerently on their right to amusements that shocked the censorious—to card-playing, to beer gardens, to Sunday frolics; and when the temperance issue revived in the seventies the Chicago *Tribune* thought enforcement of a Sunday-closing law necessary to prevent "the German conquest" of the city. Then, too, the great German quarters of midwestern cities, full of saloons, foreign signboards, and German-language schools, seemed disturbingly self-contained. On the other hand, the Germans had a reputation for thrifty, honest, industrious, and orderly living.[40] As for their recreational gusto, an increasingly urban world was pulling more and more Americans in the same direction. Indeed, the German example popularized beer-drinking and helped to relax America's Sunday habits. In testifying to easy assimilation, an observer remarked in 1883, "The German notion that it is a good thing to have a good time has found a lodgment in the American mind." [41]

Distrust of Irish and Jews went deeper. As the pillars of an alien faith, the Irish attracted a good measure of any anti-Catholic sentiment that might be in the air; an Irishman's loyalty to his priest was too firm for anxious Protestants to rest easily. And along with religious distrust went a social criticism. Americans pictured the Irish as rowdy ne'er-do-wells, impulsive, quarrelsome, drunken, and threadbare.[42] Childhood conflicts gave these attitudes deep and early roots in many minds, for middle-class boys growing up in the American town of the late nineteenth century battled incessantly with roughneck Irish gangs from the other side of the tracks. "No relations except combat," Henry Seidel Canby recalls, "were possible or thought of between our gangs and the 'micks.' . . . They were still the alien, and had to be shown their place." [43] If this sense of social distance related partly to the unruly behavior of the Irish, it also pertained to their lowly economic status. In middle-class American eyes, the Irish were inferior not only because they were rowdies but also because they were poor. Impoverished Irish immigrants still squatted in tumble-down, one-room shanties on the fringes of the cities. Indignant property-owners in the vicinity continually petitioned against this "low and squalid class of people, who . . . keep . . . the surroundings in a filthy and disgusting condition." [44]

The Irish stereotype, however, could not help but soften as more and more Irishmen rose out of the ranks of unskilled labor and merged in speech and manner with the older population. By the early eighties, they were generally well regarded. It was almost a proverb to say that a good workman does as much as an Irishman; and even the harshest critics of the Irish looked forward confidently to their assimilation.[45]

The Jews, on the other hand, lost in reputation as they gained in social and economic status. Alone among European immigrant groups, the Jews during this period met a distrust that spread along with their increasing assimilation. The nativistic criticism of Jewish loyalty that had risen during the Civil War vanished as soon as the war ended, but in its place there emerged during the 1870's a far more tenacious pattern of social discrimination.

Smallest of the prominent immigrant groups, American Jewry was largely a by-product of immigration from Germany. At first, native folk had difficulty in differentiating Jews from Germans,[46] but with the dispersion of Jewish peddlers and shopkeepers throughout the country, the European tradition of the Jew as Shylock came to life. To a segment of American opinion, the Jews seemed clothed in greed and deceit. It was this conception that had exposed them to the charge of disloyal profiteering during the war. Thereafter the persistent Shylock image acquired a significant new dimension. It broadened during the Gilded Age into an indictment of Jewish manners for vulgarity and ostentation. The Jew, it now appeared, was not only mercenary and unscrupulous but also clamorously self-assertive—a tasteless barbarian rudely elbowing into genteel company.[47] In line with this impression, society began to exclude Jews from areas of intimate social intercourse, the most celebrated of the initial proscriptions being at eastern summer resorts. Despite public shock and indignation when the leading hotel at Saratoga Springs refused to admit the eminent banker Joseph Seligman in 1877, many smaller establishments soon adopted the same policy.

Friendly observers conceded a grain of truth in the new indictment. By the 1870's many German Jews were prospering mightily, and a fair share of them had risen to affluence too rapidly to acquire the discipline of culture.[48] Equally pertinent, however, was the pervasive vulgarity and the general social climbing that were upsetting the stability and simplicity of American society on a grand scale. In an age of parvenus the Jew provided a symbol of the parvenu spirit. Anti-Semitic discriminations subjected him to a discipline that native Americans could not so easily impose on themselves.

Despite their unusual social mobility, the Jews shared significantly in a common immigrant experience. Like the Irish and Germans, they faced criticism applied to "mere habits of life." No one in the age of confidence denounced them as subversive or expressed doubts of their ultimate assimilation. German bons vivants, Irish roughnecks, and Jewish vulgarians might seem discomforting; but the overriding assumptions of the immigrant's economic value and of the American's mixed nationality held anxious speculation firmly in check. In short, there was no pressing sense of the foreigner as a distinctively *national* menace. That could develop only with a loss of faith in the process of assimilation. In the postwar decades, nationalism was complacent and cosmopolitan.

The Nativist Heritage

Nevertheless, beneath the surface of the age of confidence, the traditions of American nativism persisted. Instead of being liquidated, anti-foreign fears were simply contained. In a partial and stunted form each of the nativist themes maintained a peripheral place in American thought. Each of them, in fact, found some new or continuing area of sensitivity where it could fasten and feed.

After the Civil War religious forces never recovered the commanding influence which they had exerted throughout the culture of earlier decades. The Protestant crusade against Rome never again dominated nativist thought as completely as it had in mid-century. But anti-Catholicism was far from dead, and in the 1870's it flared up in several northern states. In contrast to the Know-Nothing movement, the much milder agitation of the seventies was due primarily to Catholic demands for state aid. Although conflicts over public education had arisen between Catholic and non-Catholic groups before the Civil War, the Church had not been strong enough to press its traditional claims on a broad front. Now, however, it comprised a majority or near-majority of the church-going population in some cities. Also, it was probably emboldened by the relaxed and tranquil state of public opinion. About 1869, therefore, Catholics in many parts of the Northeast and Midwest opened a campaign to eliminate the Protestant tinge that Bible-reading gave to the public schools, to secure for their own parochial schools a share of the funds that the states were providing for education, and to get for Catholic charitable institutions public subsidies comparable to those traditionally awarded to Protestant charities. At first, the pressure brought some success in each respect; the Democratic administration in New York proved especially complaisant.[49] But Protestants soon counterattacked, with the result that separation of church and state actually increased.

The controversy spilled over into politics in the mid-seventies, when the Republicans desperately needed a new issue to replace their now discredited Reconstruction policies and to distract the public from the scandals of the Grant régime. Running for governor of Ohio in 1875, Rutherford B. Hayes worked fiercely to smear the Democrats as subservient to Catholic designs. President

Grant struck a similar campaign note at a veterans' reunion that fall by hinting darkly that unless the public schools were kept free from sectarian influence the nation might face a new civil war between the forces of patriotism and intelligence on the one side and superstition and ignorance on the other.[50] One Democratic Senator wryly commented that the Republican matadors were looking for another beast to slay now that Jeff Davis and the "bloody shirt" were losing their popular appeal. "The Pope, the old Pope of Rome, is to be the great bull that we are all to attack." [51]

In a few areas, notably New Jersey and Ohio, the Republicans reaped some advantage from the religious question in the 1875 elections, but the attempt to inflate it into a major national issue failed miserably. Grant's annual message to Congress in December stressed the importance of a constitutional amendment forbidding the appropriation of public funds for denominational schools. The public received the idea with considerable apathy, however, and the Democratic House of Representatives moved to take the partisan sting out of it by passing a watered-down version almost unanimously.[52] During the election of 1876 occasional Republican charges that the "Romish Church" was using the Democratic party to overthrow the American public school system made little impression. By then Catholic leaders had recognized the dangers of a militant course and had desisted from it.[53]

Inevitably a measure of Protestant nationalism accompanied this anti-Catholic revival. Attacks on the Catholic Church as a foreign despotism reappeared; the suspicion circulated that the priests were trying to subordinate the United States to Rome; there was even some murmuring over immigration. But by and large the controversy swirled around concrete institutional issues, involving relatively little talk of a papal conspiracy to subvert the nation. Above all, anti-Catholics dealt gently with the immigrants. Blame fell instead on the clergy. One foe of Rome contended that the Irish would assimilate if the priests did not keep them separate. Another thought that the priesthood drove the Irish into reluctant hostility to public education. Another acknowledged the innocence of Catholic laymen and held the hierarchy alone disloyal. The anti-Romanist editor of *Harper's Weekly* praised America's role as a refuge for the oppressed and its ability to assimilate all comers.[54]