Americanization of Polish and Italian Immigrants in Middletown

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History 334

Spring 1980

From Peter Baldwin
4/84
Introduction

The Americanization movement of the early twentieth century, America's great attempt to stir the melting pot, was diverse, both in motivation and implementation. According to John Higham, in his *Strangers in the Land*, it began as a crusade of social workers, concerned with alleviating the plight of immigrants in large cities. The social settlements did not use the term "Americanization," but they "undertook the first practical efforts towards social integration of the new immigrant nationalities with the older America."¹ Their efforts were in the spirit of progressivism, aimed at reforming the society that engendered the alienation and intolerable living conditions of many of the recent immigrants.

A parallel trend saw the immigrants as a potential threat to American society. Organizations such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Sons of the American Revolution and the Colonial Dames of America "embarked on programs of patriotic education designed to indoctrinate the adult foreigner with loyalty to America."² The North American Civic League was formed in 1908 by businessmen "chiefly concerned with protecting the status quo from the menace of the ignorant incendiary foreigner, without resorting to restriction"³ of immigration.

The beginning of World War One made Americanization a nationwide movement, and strengthened its conservative wing. Nationalism rather than reform became its primary motivating sentiment, and the concept of "100 per cent Americanism" came to the fore. One hundred per cent Americanizers "set about to stampede immigrants
into citizenship, into adoption of the English language, and into an unquestioning reverence for existing American institutions. They bade them abandon entirely their Old World loyalties, customs and memories." This kind of approach persisted throughout the war, motivated primarily by fears of disloyalty, especially among the German population. After the war and during the Red Scare, it shifted its emphasis to anti-Bolshevism and opposition to labor unionism.

The liberal front of the movement also took a nationalistic turn during the war from its earlier reformism, but it still retained a belief in "immigrant gifts." Liberal Americanizers called on America to "enlarge its national character by accepting contributions" from other cultures. One of the last forms taken by liberal Americanization was the movement as "a panacea for all the nation's ills." Men flushed with enthusiasm for systematic inculcation of patriotism talked more and more in 1919-1920 about the 'Americanization of America', rejoicing that the campaign was broadening into one that would 'fortify the American Government through implanting and fostering a higher ideality in the individual citizen, whatever his birth.'

With the end of the Red Scare, says Higham, Americanization died out as a movement, leaving behind it public evening schools, which continued to teach English and civics to the foreigner. It also left behind the efforts to induce aliens to become citizens, the other main theme of Americanization work in the twenties.
This essay is primarily a survey of Americanization efforts in Middletown until the late twenties. By studying the actions, the rhetoric, whenever possible, and the ethnic and economic backgrounds of those interested in Americanization, I have tried to define the general character of Americanization in Middletown, loosely in terms of Higham's analysis of the national movement.

Americanization never seems to have been an overriding concern in Middletown, despite the city's large foreign population. Efforts by Americanizers were confined for the most part to moderate attempts to induce foreigners to learn English and become citizens. The movement did not go beyond this for several reasons. The attitude of Middletown's native population as a whole toward immigrants was consistent with the outlook of Connecticut natives as pictured by Bruce Fraser in Yankees at War, that is, one of disinterest. The two largest ethnic communities, the Italian and the Polish, were well-established and strong by the early part of the century, and would not have been vulnerable to strong-arm attempts to sterilize their cultures. Besides, some of the impetus toward Americanization was provided by these ethnic communities themselves. The Italians, for example, were interested early on in politics, which was one reason to seek citizenship.

The institutions and agencies I have looked at are the ones that seem to have played the leading roles in Americanization. The Connecticut State Council of Defense was instrumental in stimulating interest in Americanization, and its approach and rhetoric provide a general comparison for the movement in Middletown. Since education was such a large part of Middletown's Americani-
zation efforts, the response of the Board of Education of the City School District is central to any account of the movement. Of the voluntary organizations that might have been interested in assimilation work, I was able to find information only about the YWCA, which did indeed carry on some Americanization activities. The two major ethnic groups were studied briefly in an attempt to define their attitudes toward Americanization. No similar study was done of the native population, but I have attempted to infer native attitudes from the information as a whole.
Connecticut was late in joining the Americanization movement, according to Fraser. Before the First World War, there was little concern in Connecticut about immigrants, and no organization or agency working on a large scale for their assimilation. Organizations that led the movement nationwide, such as the North American Civic League for Immigrants, the National Security League and the American Defense Society, found almost no interest or support for their activities in Connecticut. Connecticut chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Sons of the American Revolution were also relatively inactive. The Connecticut DAR had a difficult time convincing its local chapters to undertake educational work among the immigrants, while Connecticut's SAR was slow to follow the national society's lead, and did not even include the education of immigrants on its list of priorities until 1915.7

In 1916, the office of Governor Holcomb summed up the attitude that apparently prevailed in Connecticut toward the immigrant:

Already both in our factories and on our farms the difficulty of securing unskilled labor is being more and more felt, and both manufacturers and farmers feel that unless there is a resumption of immigration (brought to a stop at that time by the war), they will be brought face to face with a famine of unskilled labor, within the next twelve months.

While, of course, the Americanization of such a vast body of immigrants constitutes a great problem, at the same time the history of immigration with us has been that inevitably the new influx presses in below the older generation and crowds it up. It was so with the Irish invasion, the German invasion, perhaps to a lesser degree with the Italian invasion, and probably will prove to be so with the Slavic invasion if that were succeeded by another race. 8

A general distaste for the immigrant was combined with the idea that assimilation would take place without too much effort on the part of Americans. More important is the sense that immigration
was an economic necessity that must be tolerated, and even encouraged. Immigrant labor was especially important during the war, when the flood of contracts made it "utterly indispensable."

The rather complacent attitude toward the immigrant ended, however, once the U.S. entered the war. The Connecticut State Council of Defense, created by Governor Holcomb in late April of 1917 to coordinate war activities at home, included Americanization as one of its functions. At first, the work was entrusted to the Women's Division of the Council, but by August of 1918, there was an entire department devoted to Americanization.

The Department of Americanization provided a uniform statewide strategy and supervised local Americanization committees carrying out this strategy. It included an appeal to four elements in the communities: schools, factories, chambers of commerce and voluntary organizations.

The school systems were to institute night schools, if they did not already have them, and encourage the attendance of foreigners at classes in English and civics. At the elementary and high school levels, they were to make sure that respect for America and her institutions was fostered by a positive presentation of such subjects as American history and civics. The schools were also to teach the origins of the war, and the reasons for American participation.

Factories that employed the foreign-born were asked to encourage them to learn English and become citizens. This was to be done through persuasion by the foremen and through economic incentives. Bonuses were to be given to employees who learned English and became citizens, as well as preference in hiring and
promotion. Pay envelope slips were provided by the department for distribution among foreign employees with messages, in various languages, such as the following:

Attention, foreign-born employees. Industries prefer to employ persons who can speak the English language. Persons unable to speak English are the first to be discharged. Preference in promotion is given to persons able to speak English. Learn to speak, read and write English at the evening school nearest your home. Enroll at once. No charge.

The Department asked voluntary organizations to help with Americanization in their communities by canvassing foreign neighborhoods to enlist students for night classes, distributing handbills, and other such activities. The local Americanization Committees were to help coordinate other activities that voluntary organizations cared to undertake. Local chambers of commerce were asked to lend prestige and financial support.

The Connecticut Americanizer, published monthly by the Department "to stir the melting pot," contained information and propaganda about Americanization. According to Herbert Janick, it was engaged after the war in keeping council members informed about Bolshevik agitation around the state.10 The Department also cut out multilingual editions of leaflets with patriotic messages: "How to Become an American Citizen," "My Ideals of Citizenship," and "Information for Citizens and Aliens," for example.

The "gospel of Americanism," as spread by the Americanization Department had an edge of compulsion to it. Forms to be used by canvassers contained agreements for aliens to sign: "I agree to attend night school regularly until I learn
the English language," and canvassers were instructed to make
sure that those who signed up did attend. Multilingual posters
sent for distribution to town War Bureaus instructed the foreign-
born in some-official tones to report to the local police depart-
ment for information about night schools and Americanization.
Handbills were given out that read:

Attention, learn English. Your employer wants you to learn
English. Prevent accidents by learning to read safety signs
in English. Better positions and wages come more frequently
to those who can use the English language. Talk English at
home. Associate with English-speaking people. Study about
the U.S.—its government, institutions and people. Attend
the public evening school nearest your home.

The Department, at least rhetorically, demanded a strong
cultural commitment on the part of the immigrant.

Americanization is more than teaching an immigrant the
English language. It is the reconstitution of his civic
consciousness. It is an adjustment of all his attitudes
of mind, of his ideas, habits of thinking, traditions,
customs and ideals to American standards. It is the
elimination of all in him that is anti-American and the
preservation and stimulation of all that is capable of
becoming American. It is the appropriation of every
element which can contribute to the upbuilding of a
greater Americanization (sic?) civilization. 12

Yet the Department did not have a completely conservative,
one-sided attitude. It also stressed the efforts that had to
be made by the native-born—to "develop a finer appreciation
...for the art, literature, music, enterprising inventiveness,
labor, commercial ability and particular genius of the foreign-
born" and to "lead in the interpretation and exemplification
of American ideals before he can require the foreign-born to
live up to those ideals and standards." 13 Director H. W. Meerton
had an idealistic vision of Americanization similar to the one
that Wigham describes, which made Americanization out to be a
panacea. In a memo to a co-worker he wrote, "Americanization is not a narrow motive for nationalism, it does not stand for Prussianism or United-States-ization, it stands for the ideals of the new world rather than the ideas of any particular country. America is a new world."¹⁴

This statement reflected his personal convictions better than the hard-line statements that were endorsed by the Department, which were more in keeping with the strident wartime rhetoric of the Council and which were intended to rouse the public to action.

Yet such sentiments apparently did not sit well with Connecticut leaders. In part because of that memo the Department became a target for charges of Bolshevism, accusations which helped cause the defeat of legislation that would have established the Americanization Department as an independent state bureau. Instead, it closed its doors in April of 1919 and Americanization work was taken over by the State Board of Education, with a drastically reduced budget.

This action reflects the only peripheral interest which Americanization generated in Connecticut. It assumed its greatest importance not as an undertaking for its own sake, but as a side-light to the war. And if it is true, as the Hartford Times speculated in early April of 1919, that the Department was discontinued for political reasons, then we must conclude that Americanization work was even less of a concern to Connecticut leaders than everyday political spoils.

Americanization acquired greater emphasis in Middletown than it had been given before, because of the exertation of the Council of Defense and the Americanization Department. A
War Bureau was organized in December, 1917, to carry out the policies of the Council of Defense. One of its committees was devoted to Americanization. It constituted itself as an Americanization Bureau directly under the Americanization Department when the War Bureau closed at the end of the war.

The Americanization Bureau was chaired by Frank A. Coles, Middletown's mayor in 1914 and 1915, and vice-president and general manager of the Coles Company, which sold grain for feed. He was also a member of the Middletown City School District Board of Education until his death in 1925. Four other members of the fourteen-person bureau worked in education: Robert Fife, professor of German at Wesleyan University; Edward B. Sellew, school superintendent and the principal of Middletown High School; Frances T. Kejko, a Latin teacher at the high school, active and well-known in the community; and Miss Carolina Marino, also a high school teacher. Five of the committee members, including Coles, were professionals or involved in business or finance.

George Burnham, member of the Board of School Visitors, was an attorney and a former president of the Middletown Chamber of Commerce; the current president in 1918, Richard E. Bunce, partner at Bunce's Department Store, was also a member. Arthur L. Allin, member of the Board of Education, was Treasurer of the Middletown Savings Bank, and Joseph Kerfin was listed as a "capitalist," with interests in the Rockfall Woolen Company, a large employer of immigrants, and the Kirby Manufacturing Company. Other members were Reverend Max Soltycek, the pastor of St. Mary's Parish—Middletown's Polish church; Henry Hansen, Republican registrar.
of voters; Charles A. Anderson, chief of police; Daniel J. McCarthy, postmaster; Mrs. J. W. Nicolson, member of the Middletown Women's Committee and wife of a dean of Wesleyan; and Mrs. T. H. Russell, another member of the Women's Committee, whose husband was on the school board and president of the Russell Manufacturing Company, probably the largest single employer in Middletown of immigrant labor. Five bureau members were of foreign stock: Max Soltysiek was Polish and Frances Kejako was the daughter of a Polish immigrant; Caroline Marino was Italian; Daniel J. McCarthy was Irish and Henry Hanson was Swedish.

The inclusion of representatives from each of the main ethnic groups indicates that Americanization was not conceived as a coercive or one-sided affair. The balance between educational and commercial interests, which overlapped in many cases, shows that the main current of Americanization in Middletown was educational, and that fear of the radical potential of immigrant labor was not the most important consideration.

That the bureau's activities were small-scale and moderate is shown by the negligible impression it left on the memories of residents. No one that I spoke to could remember the bureau, nor any campaign to promote citizenship and English classes. The extent of the bureau's activities seems to have been two mass meetings held to encourage attendance at night school by the Italians and the Poles. If they undertook other efforts suggested by the Americanization Department, such as house-to-house canvassing in immigrant neighborhoods or distributing handbills, there is no record of them.

The two meetings were held on February 16, 1919 at the town
hall. An estimated 600 polish immigrants gathered in the afternoon to hear Reverend Soltysek and two other speakers. Forty-two of those attending signed up for night school on the spot. Later that evening a much smaller meeting was held, at which about fifty Italians were urged to attend night school. Six already were attending, and one enrolled at the meeting.

There were several immigrant-related functions organized around this time which were handled by agencies other than the Americanization Bureau. An Italian Rally was held in February of 1918 under the auspices of Mrs. C. S. Wedsworth of the Women's Division. It featured music and two Italian speakers, and attracted about 300 Italian men, and a handful of women and girls. Ten dollars in thrift stamps were sold by Mrs. Fife, but the account of the meeting made no mention of night school.

In October of 1917, the Department of Americanization submitted a request to the Town Committees in Connecticut for a list of the names of influential naturalized citizens. Middletown responded with a list of four names: Reverend Soltysek, Leo B. Santangelu, Henry Hanson, and James J. O'Neill. "This last man," added a note, "is connected with an Irish society of several hundred young men, the next, one of our registrars, and the other carries the Italian vote in his pocket."

May 24, 1918 the third-anniversary of Italy's entry into the war, was designated Italy-America Day, and the celebration was largely planned and executed by the Italian community. The St. Sebastian's Band led a parade of the members of the local and of city officials to town hall, where Italian speakers pledged con-
continued support for the war effort and allegiance to the country they had adopted. 15

The rally illustrates the cosmopolitan type of Americanization that was typical of Middletown. Immigrant culture was respected, and even celebrated. There were no attempts made to force the immigrant to renounce his heritage, no "100 per cent Americanism."

By Board of Education estimates, as many as twenty-five "races" were represented in Middletown. A considerable number of Irish, Germans and Swedes had immigrated in the middle and late 1800's. But these communities had to some extent already been assimilated, so the cultures that Americanizers in Middletown were most conscious of were Italian and Polish.

The Italian community has been Middletown's largest ethnic community since the years immediately following the First World War. Though there had been some Italians in Middletown before the turn of the century, immigration in large numbers did not begin until 1898, when a dozen or so Italians from Melilli, Sicily arrived. Henceforth, the vast majority of the Italian immigrants in Middletown came from Melilli. The years 1919 through 1922 saw the largest numbers of immigrants from Melilli. Restrictions on immigration took effect in 1922, after which it slowed to "a rather small but constant rate" 16 throughout the twenties. As early as 1918, the population of Italians in Middletown was estimated at 3,500, out of a population of about 13,000.

Italian attitudes toward citizenship apparently underwent a change fairly early in the century, from what they had been at first. Sebastian Ledella, who in 1906 joined his parents in the U.S. at the age of thirteen, believes that the first gener-
He is echoed in this belief by Walter Sangree, author of *Mel Hybleum*, a study of the Melillesi in Middletown: "At first (the immigrants) were not interested in becoming citizens for the most part, but simply in making their fortunes and returning to Melilli." 18 The Sons of Italy Mutual Aid Society disputes this view. In a short history of the society written in 1972 for its seventieth anniversary, it claims that the promotion of citizenship was one of the priorities of the founders. One of the functions of the organization was "to better acquaint its membership with the local ways of government and the basic principles of citizenship...Permanent citizenship was considered essential and demonstrative of intent to remain." 19

Since the Sons of Italy was one of the major social centers of the Italian community in its early days, its views on citizenship were probably influential. And if a significant number of Italians did seek citizenship of their own accord in the first ten years or so of the community, then we have a possible explanation of why Americanization in Middletown occurred on such a moderate scale.

Whatever their initial attitudes, there is evidence that Italians in Middletown were interested in becoming citizens fairly early on. In 1913, Sebastiaan LaBella began teaching Americanization classes to Italians at the Y.M.A on Main Street. The classes were designed specifically to assist people who wanted American citizenship. They were in Italian, and consisted of facts and principles that one needed to know in order to pass the final
examination at the Naturalization Court. LaBelle taught these classes for forty-six years, at the YMCA, the Sons of Italy, and the Garibaldi Society (Middletown's other mutual aid society.)

In promoting naturalization classes and citizenship, the mutual aid societies were playing a partly contradictory role in the assimilation process. On the one hand, they promoted solidarity and self-sufficiency in the Italian community, thereby helping to preserve the culture and language of the old country. At the same time, they were urging compliance with one of the two main goals of native Americanizers.

There were reasons other than to placate old-line Americans that Italians in Middletown sought citizenship. Paradoxically, the 1922 restrictions helped increase interest in citizenship on the part of the immigrants, since "they had to become citizens in order for their immediate relatives to be able to come over."20

A more fundamental reason has to do with Middletown's size relative to the Italian population. Social historians have noticed a difference in attitudes toward citizenship between immigrant communities in large cities and those in towns. In smaller municipalities, where there seemed to be a possibility that the immigrants might eventually take an active or leading role in community affairs, immigrants tended to be favorably disposed towards citizenship. As a pre-requisite for political activity, citizenship was necessary for immigrant groups that wanted to have political influence in the community.

Middletown after the war was a perfect instance of a town in which there was great potential for Italians to acquire significant political power. Although at that time the city government was
still largely in the hands of native New Englanders, their numbers were dwindling relative to the burgeoning immigrant population. 1920 Census figures cited by the Board of Education's Americanization Director in his 1922 report showed that only 30 per cent of Middletown's population of 13,636 was of native stock, and that a full 26.9 per cent was foreign born. As far as sheer numbers, the political potential was quite obvious.

Some of that potential had been realized by the Italian community before 1920. An Italian-Republican Club was organized in Middletown prior to the war. At least one Italian politician had already acquired considerable influence. The leading Italian politician was Leo B. Santangelo, from Milazzo, Sicily, one of the Italians already in Middletown when the Melillesi arrived. He was a successful businessman, active in the Republican party, and even chairman of the Republican town committee at one time. Most of the Italian voters before the war were Republicans, but as the Melillesi began to enter politics, the balance shifted. Gerardo Roccabriore, an immigrant from Melilli and a Democrat, was elected to the Common Council in 1917, the first Italian to serve on the council. "It is significant," wrote the Hartford Daily Times, that Mr. Roccabriore was elected on the democratic ticket. Some years since most of the Italian voters were members of the republican party. Within two years, however, there has been a decided swing to the democratic fold. An Italian Democratic club was started in 1924. Still, this trend did not prevent Leo B. Santangelo from being elected mayor as a Republican in 1936, becoming the first Italian to serve in that office.
His election was symbolic of the Italians having become a major force in Middletown politics, which in turn was a sign that there were a great number of Italian voters, and therefore citizens, in Middletown.

Even before they had political power, Middletown's Italians had a source of strength in their unusual homogeneity and solidarity. As was common for immigrant groups in cities, they lived together in a section of the city; the "Italian quarter" was bounded on the east and west by the Connecticut River and Main Street, and on the north and south by Campbell Avenue and Court Street. But unlike most immigrant groups, "they almost all came from the same town, which gave them a strong cohesiveness." This cohesiveness no doubt made the adjustment to America easier, and also made the preservation of language and culture easier than it might have been for a more fragmented community.

This maintenance of ethnic culture, although clearly a hindrance to the melting pot, was perfectly consistent with the character of Americanization in Middletown. As has been noted before, ethnic communities were often encouraged to display their cultural "traits." To doubt this can be in part attributed to the moderate convictions of the native Americanizers. But it is probably true that these convictions about Americanization were influenced by the extreme difficulty they would have faced in trying to impose any stronger brand of Americanization on a community as tightly knit and self-sufficient as the Italian.

The lack of an Italian Catholic church until 1928 may have been a mitigating factor to the cohesiveness of the Melillesi.
St. John's did not provide the unifying force that St. Sebastian's did when it was built. The generally cold reception they received at the Irish Catholic church even induced some of the Italians to join the Italian Protestant Mission, formed in 1906 under interdenominational auspices, and then in 1908 taken over by the Methodist Episcopal Church.

One of the activities of the mission was the Americanization of its members. They received a "guide for the Italian immigrant" printed up by the Y.M.C.A. "It gave facts about American geography, our form of government, elections, citizenship and voting rights, and other helpful information," along with such exhortations as, "Be a good and faithful Christian. Acquire a U.S. Citizenship as soon as possible." Never larger than 300 people, the mission was disbanded in 1927. 26

St. Sebastian's Church was constructed in 1926, helped by donated labor and material, and by the annual contributions made during the Festival of St. Sebastian. Previously, these contributions had been sent to Melilli, for the maintenance of Melilli's Santo Sebastiano Church. The construction of a church in Middletown, at the same time as it served to unify and insulate the Italian community, was also a sign of the commitment that the Italians had made to remain in their adopted country.

The Poles, who arrived in Middletown a few years before the Italians, were Middletown's second-largest ethnic group. Unlike the Italians, they had no particular common origin, yet they were perceived as an even more cohesive group. In part, this can be attributed to their strong Catholicism, which made the church the
center of Polish community life.

St. Mary's parish was organized in 1903 and the church was built in 1905. It exerted early on a strong centripetal pull on the Polish population. A number of organizations connected with the church were formed as well. St. Kazimierz Society, organized in 1902, was instrumental in establishing the parish. The Rosary Society (1910) was a religious organization for Polish women. The Polish Knights were founded in 1922 to help the church financially and to assist in traditional Polish church celebrations.

Complementing the strong religious feeling was an equally strong sentiment of national pride, and a firm commitment to the continuation of Polish language and culture. St. Mary's School, begun in 1912, united the two sentiments, giving religious instruction along with instruction in Polish subjects. For the first several years, the six-hour day was split into four hours of teaching in Polish, then two hours in English. The vast majority of the Polish children attended St. Mary's, at least until the fourth grade, when tuition was required.

There were other organizations not specifically connected with the church, such as the Polish Falcons (1913), the Falconettes (1923) and the Girl Scouts, formed with the aid of Frances Nejako in 1929.4

A Middletown branch of the statewide Polish-American Citizens' Club met for the first time in 1923.5 It was composed of Polish small businessmen in the Republican party. They encouraged Poles to become voters, and assisted in the taking out of the papers necessary for citizenship. The minutes of the meetings in the first few years also show a repeated theme: the necessity
of establishing permanent allegiance to the United States. Yet they did not renounce their Polish heritage; the business of the club was conducted in Polish for many years, and in 1926 they sent donations to Poland to help in its fight for freedom. The club had the approval of the church, and Reverend Soltyseck used to announce the meeting times in church.

As parish pastor, Soltyseck was perhaps the most influential individual in the Polish community. He came to Middletown in 1918, replacing the first pastor, Reverend Rusial. By all accounts, Reverend Soltyseck was an authoritative, domineering figure, who "alienated his parishioners by his gruff and often harsh attitude."28 He was a very strict Catholic, among other things preaching denunciation for physically entering a synagogue or a Protestant place of worship. He is also remembered for his extreme insistence on the preservation of Polish culture.

"Despite the importance he attached to Polish culture, he was also involved in Americanization work. Clearly, his support of Americanization extended to advocacy of U.S. citizenship and of learning English, but he did not go as far as advocating adoption of American culture."

As with the Italians, Americanization among the Poles did not include attempts to force abandonment of Old World culture. Reverend Soltyseck's presence on the Americanization Bureau shows that native Americanizers were willing to allow for the perpetuation of European culture, since this was unmistakably Soltyseck's position. Again, the moderate character of Americanization can be attributed either to the strength of the Polish community, to the convictions
of the native Americanizers, or to some combination of both. This latter is the most likely solution; it is clear that the Polish community was strong, both numerically and in terms of unity. At the same time, there is little enough rhetoric in Middletown about Americanization in any form, and certainly no strident 100 per cent rhetoric. If there were a significant amount of extreme Americanization sentiment, it would be reasonable to expect at least some rhetoric, if not actual implementation, and the absence of either indicates that such sentiment probably did not exist.

The general native response to the immigrant was detachment. Native Americans and immigrants had little to do with each other in Middletown, each group keeping mainly to itself. There was little active antagonism, but some prejudice. One native American woman recalled her family buying a house and then moving again as soon as possible upon finding that the local grammar school, Johnson School, was mostly Italian. The Middletown Press of February 13, 1919, carried a short ethnic joke with the word "dago" in it.

There was also the sense that the immigrant population was increasing at a great rate, and that eventually the immigrants would take over. Reporting the Italy-America Day celebrations, the Press commented, "The fact that Middletown's Italian population is growing exceedingly rapidly was brought home to the spectators who witnessed the parade." Annual reports from the Board of Education were full of statistics about the growing immigrant populations.
Yet the immigrant was never considered an active threat in any way. Dr. George Craig, in an article presented to the Middletown Conversational Club in 1911, spoke of "the great stream of aliens coming to us from every land under the sun" and referred to them as "a most desirable citizenship."

Many of them seem possessed of a passion for land-ownership and it is everywhere argued that nothing will do more to bring them along toward sound views of their responsibilities in citizenship than the ownership of some little property which they may have as a home. 29

The common association of immigrants with radicalism and labor agitation was not made in Middletown. E. K. Hubbard, prominent Middletown businessmen and president of the Connecticut Association of Manufacturers claimed in 1924 that "so-called radical and communistic groups do not exist within the state. We have no 'Red' problem." Since the Connecticut labor force was largely composed of immigrants, this comment reflected part of his attitude toward them. Speaking specifically of immigrants in Connecticut, he claimed that they were assimilable, as "evidenced by their desire to become citizens, and further, by the fact that they take an active interest in governmental affairs." 30

Both statements could have been applied to Middletown as much as to the entire state. Labor in Middletown was extremely quiescent. Despite low wages and difficult working conditions, in the years between 1914 and 1930 there were only twenty-one strikes in the city. Of these, only two were successful, seventeen failed and three were ended by compromise. 31

There was one significant exception to the rule of labor passivity in Middletown. In June of 1912, the Italian workers of the Russell Manufacturing Company walked off the job, demanding
reduced hours, higher wages and company recognition of the Worker's Industrial Union #203 of the Industrial Workers of the World. Despite the efforts of the strikers and of IWW orators, the Polish, Irish and American workers could not be persuaded to join the strike, and the factories stayed in operation. The only results of the strike were injuries sustained on both sides in a clash on the fourth day. It is possible that this unmitigated failure was enough to discourage any further attempts to unionize until the thirties.

A side effect of the strike of 1912 is that the Italians became disenchanted with Wesleyan students, many of whom had been deputized to keep order on the day violence broke out, and stopped attending the Americanization classes being held at the Wesleyan YMCA. Classes "to educate the Italians and to ground them in the principles of our government...had been maintained for some time at the Wesleyan YMCA." 32

The year that Wesleyan's "Y" began to have trouble with attendance was the same year the Main Street YMCA first offered a class for immigrants. Industrial Education was "especially intended for foreigners who (could) not read or speak the English language." Classes were to be held "in the leading factories where large numbers of foreigners are employed...during the noon hour twice each week." 33 The classes are not mentioned again in the YMCA publications, so it is not known how successful they were. In 1915 the YMCA started a night school and in 1919, was teaching "classes in English, Americanization and Physics." 34

Education was not the only approach that the "Y" in Middletown took to Americanization. The general secretary recommended in 1919 that "aided facilities be provided at the
The earliest possible moment to afford recreation to the foreign boys.\textsuperscript{35} In 1925 the Liberty Athletic Club Italian Boys had a basketball team which used the courts at the Y. A Kosciusko club was formed in the Boys' Division in 1929, for the "boys of Polish extraction who (had) recently become members."\textsuperscript{36}

An Americanization committee of ten members, four of whom were Italian, was formed by the Y in 1921. This urgent concern with Americanization probably did not last too long, though, since the committee is not listed in subsequent years.

An Italo-American club was organized in 1923 so that "Italians and Americans of Middletown might become better acquainted and cooperate with each other for mutual good."\textsuperscript{37} The Club met at least six times, including a social gathering featuring Italian music that drew about 200 to Fisk Hall. However, the club does not seem to have survived past 1924.

The school system did the bulk of the Americanization work that was done in Middletown. Middletown's City School District started a night school in November of 1910, in order to serve "the needs of an increasingly important class of individuals, the youth of our city."\textsuperscript{38} It warrant in its second year "the best teaching we have ever had and advertising and urging more than ever before."\textsuperscript{39} Despite this effort, attendance in the second year was poor, and the Board considered petitioning the State Board of Education for an exemption from the state law requiring towns with more than 10,000 people to have night schools. The following year, attendance increased—an average of fifty-two students per session, from the previous year's average of
thirty-five—and the evening school was kept.

For the first few years, the Poles were the largest single nationality attending the night school, despite the greater number of Italians in the city. From 1917 to 1926, the years when the Board of Education was most concerned with Americanization, Italians made up the majority of the students.

1917 was the year that Edward B. Sellew replaced William Wheatley as school superintendent and principal of Middletown High School. In his first annual report to the Board of Education, he discussed Americanization and the night school. Despite having run for eighty-nine nights in the winter of 1917-1918 and having enrolled seventy students (actual attendance was probably considerably lower), the night school was considered "not a satisfactory institution.

For another year there (had to) be plans that (would) include, not only offering the education but...some means of securing attendance...The need is...to put before the person of foreign birth, American institutions and ideals...This is a matter for community action, if it is to be widespread in scope and successful in result. 40

The report of the following year was even more emphatic.

"One thing the war has disclosed better than anything else is the need for some definite program of Americanization." 41 The evening school that session was moved from Central School to the high school, and classes were held in beginning and advanced English and citizenship, "and candidates for second papers were given specific instructions." 42 There was a large increase in the enrollment and attendance over the previous year. 293 people enrolled, and the average attendance over eighty-three nights was seventy-four. Furthermore, attendance increased from the
first half of the session to the second. This is attributed to
the "high quality of instruction," and to the teachers, who were
"active and persistent in looking after those who failed to at-
tend," and to "personal solicitation of individuals and addresses
at fraternity meetings." A factor that contributed to attendance,
but also makes it difficult to interpret attendance figures, was
the addition in this and subsequent years of night school courses
not connected with Americanization. Courses such as bookkeeping,
typing and stenography were offered by the night schools, and
attendance figures are sometimes given without reference to sub-
ject taught or ethnic background of the pupils.

Despite the occasional ambiguity of the statistics, it is
safe to say that Americanization activities by the Board of Edu-
cation peaked in 1921. The annual report covering that year lists
five teachers for the Americanization section of the evening
school, one more than in the years immediately preceding or fol-
lowing. There is also a report from Louis O. Brümer, who
served for that year only as Americanization Director in Middletown.

The short-lived function of the director was to "interest
foreign speaking people in attending the schools and making use
of other agencies of Americanization." He was to report to the
superintendent, although his salary was paid by the State Board
of Education.

The Americanization classes in the night schools that year
enrolled 159 students, and the average attendance was calculated
to be 57.4. In his report, the director also listed other Ameri-
canization activities in Middletown: citizenship classes at the
YMCA, assistance by the office of the director for foreigners in filing for citizenship, and three "Italian nights" held at the YMCA.

Bruemmer's short tenure may have been planned, as there is no mention in his report of plans for the following year. It is also possible that the office of the director was discontinued because of politics. Bruemmer felt compelled in his report to write:

"Our aim is not to make many voters but more upright citizens. Americanization represents idealism for both the foreign born and native born. It is devotion to duty, sacrifice, patriotism, sincerity and honesty of purpose. In educating the foreign born adults we try to impress upon them their duty toward the general welfare of the country, rather than toward the interest of political factions." 45

If the director's office was not engaged in political activities, then at least some people thought it was.

Community interest in the evening school declined after this year. In the following years, the attendance went down, and the number of teachers was cut, along with the rest of the night school budget. By 1928, attendance averaged thirty-two for seventy-five nights and Swedes predominated. There was a brief resurgence of interest in Americanization work on the part of the Board of Education in the early thirties, and at one point an "attendance goal of 150 every night" 46 was proposed. But there was not the same urgency in the appeal, made in conjunction with other adult education proposals, and the immigrant communities did not respond.

Restriction of immigration is one possible reason for the decline in interest in the evening schools. The restrictions were cited to explain "falling off" in attendance in the session of 1924-1925. Another possibility is that by the mid-
twenties, Italians and Poles were sufficiently established so that they did not feel compelled to placate the native Americanizers. One thing that is certain is that Americanization lost the air of urgency that had surrounded it when it had been thought of as an integral part of the war effort.

The other part of the school system's Americanization mission was in the ordinary schools. School officials in Middletown were ever aware of the increasing number of children from "non-English speaking families" particularly during the late teens and early twenties. The annual reports gave statistics about ethnic background annually from 1917 to 1929, showing that the percentage of pupils from immigrant families to have increased from 37.1% in 1919 to 57.9% in 1929.

Little was actually done by the school system to Americanize the students. It was felt that they would learn English and American ideals from the regular curriculum and from association with the other students. The belief was that "the schools (would) pretty well take care of the future" without much tinkering. The institution of kindergartens for the children of immigrants was one of the few concrete measures taken.

Mostly the schools set standards of behavior in informal ways. Sellers said, referring to the war years, "A pupil who did not have a pretty correct attitude toward 'Our Country' soon learned that he was not one of the community." In a later report he wrote that the percentage of foreign students showed "how important it is that these young persons of foreign extraction be impressed and molded by the ideas and ideals that we like to call American." Americanization in the schools consisted largely of reinforce-
ment of American values, rather than of any specific programs.

Education was the most important component of Americanization in Middletown, from the native perspective. A look at Selley's rhetoric would give a better idea of that perspective, since Selley played such a central role, and, more importantly, since virtually no other statements about Americanization from native Americanizers are available. Selley's ideals are similar to H. H. Sheaton's of the Americanization Department: there is a hard edge to what he says (the necessity of finding ways to secure attendance), but the core is soft. Elsewhere, he reveals ambivalence towards the whole concept of Americanization:

Americanization is an unfortunate term, as no one like to have conditions of thought and living forced on them, and a stranger in any country would be suspicious of such an enforcement. 49

He did not believe in a one-sided approach to Americanization, but was more inclined to look at it as Sheaton did, as something the entire community must take part in.

Selley's rhetoric is consistent with the general tone of Americanization in Middletown, which, as has been said before, was moderate. This is the only thing that can be said for certain. The reason it was moderate is probably a combination of factors suggested earlier: the strength of the immigrant communities, the compatibility of their interests with the aims of Americanizers, the large gap between the native and the immigrant communities, the necessary economic function of the immigrants and their basic inoffensiveness.
Appendix

The survey of Americanization activities here is very incomplete. A more thorough survey, which might yield conclusions different from mine, would include research into the activities of the American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution, both of which almost certainly played some role in Americanization.

My assessment of the attitude of most of the natives of Middletown is based on little evidence. Reading a lot of Presses might give a better picture.

I would also check more closely into the politics of the time, as well as try to determine the role of the Irish, who apparently had some influence during the Americanization period. Some research into the relations between the Italians and the Poles would be helpful, too.
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