

Opposition to Foreigners

Although there were many who were anxious to foster widespread immigration to the United States, there were others with unfavorable attitudes toward the alien. Native Americanism, the Know Nothing Party, the American Protective Association and other movements spread throughout the nation. Charges and countercharges were frequently made, particularly during election years.

Opposition to foreigners was made evident in a number of ways. Some advocated greater restrictions on them so fewer would find it possible to emigrate to the United States. Others wished to repeal naturalization laws and otherwise keep the foreign born as second class citizens. Still others seemed to enjoy making derogatory remarks in the press and elsewhere in order to show how undesirable many of the newcomers to America were.

American nativism was becoming ever more evident during the period from approximately 1840 until the outbreak of the Civil War. Iowa newspapers were quick to take sides. National incidents involving nativism were recounted and editorials supported one side or the other.

The Dubuque *Iowa News* of August 11, 1840, told of 250 Whigs in Illinois petitioning for the repeal of naturalization laws. These Whigs, who were supporters of William Henry Harrison for President, argued that further admission of foreigners to political rights exercised by native Americans would be destructive of republican institutions in the United States.

The editor commented on this by saying he could not imagine how "intelligent foreigners, who have come to this country with the intention of becoming citizens" could support a party, namely the Whigs, which had always opposed their interests. Not only would the Whigs deprive them of all political rights, but send them out of the country, the editor wrote. "We wish them to tell us how much less prosperous Dubuque and Galena are in consequence of the participation of foreigners in the political rights of native Americans than they would have been had this not been the case."

The editorial in the *Iowa News* for August 25, 1840, made a still stronger case for the foreign born:

Would it be wise or politic to reject those who have fled from the old world, and have sacrificed friend, and country, and home . . . to become American citizens, merely because they were born under a foreign sky? . . . We are almost ashamed of our country when we see associations called "Native American" spring up in many parts of the United States, whose object is to prevent the emi-

gration of foreigners to our shores, by repealing the existing laws for their naturalization. . . . Naturalized foreigners are almost without exception the supporters of pure democratic principles; they are found in most cases arrayed on the side of the people, and opposed to all infractions of the Constitution. . . . The naturalized citizen . . . when governed by correct motives, is scarcely ever wrong.

Since the foreign born constituted a strong element in Dubuque, it is not surprising that the *Iowa News* continued its editorials on behalf of the foreigner, pointing out that "this nation was originally formed by settlements made by Europeans." Upon reaching the shores of America they were imbued with sentiments of liberty and the principles of republicanism.

Since that time "millions have immigrated to our country and have found the asylum they so fondly expected," the Dubuque editor declared. Because of the naturalization laws of the United States, the oppressed European "who sighed for freedom in his native land" found himself "redeemed, regenerated and disenthralled" after a few years. The first time he approached the ballot box to vote was the "noblest and most happy moment in his life." Therefore, any attempts to repeal the naturalization laws should be thwarted.

The nativists argued that the naturalization laws should be repealed because European countries were ridding themselves of paupers by sending them to the United States. The *Iowa News*

agreed that paupers had arrived in this country at various times and in considerable numbers. It also agreed that they "have become chargeable to the parishes where they landed, but we may venture to assert that not one in a hundred of the immigrants who arrive annually at our shores are of this description."

The Dubuque editor thought that the paupers would still come even if the laws were repealed. The great majority who sought asylum were those "who flee in disgust and horror from the tyrannical governments of their native lands." The *Iowa News* concluded:

They constitute the fresh streams and rivulets which are constantly pouring themselves into the stagnating pool of our republicanism. . . . The experience of man has conclusively shown that republican governments cannot long exist without a renovation of their citizens by admixture with foreigners who have experienced the evils attended upon other forms of Government.

About this same time the *Burlington Gazette* raised its voice against nativism. On February 13, 1841, the *Gazette* declared that the people in the Territory of Iowa were indignant and horrified at the efforts of officials "seeking to destroy the influence and restrict the privileges of the poor foreigners who, throwing off the tyranny of the old world, have sought the enjoyment of freedom among the people of this Union." The *Gazette* looked upon the formation of Native American

Associations "as unjust to the foreigner and disgraceful to the country."

Such sentiments did not deter some Iowans from attacking the foreign born. Opposition to foreign immigration to Iowa appeared at least five years before statehood was achieved. Thus, in 1841 the Burlington *Hawk-Eye and Iowa Patriot* urged all parties to unite "in diminishing the growing foreign influence — the assimilation of foreign feelings — foreign policy — foreign principles — foreign habits — foreign character . . . or our separate character as Americans will be lost sight of — our Constitution will become a mere rope of sand. . . ."

In July, 1841, the same editor thought it was strange that some people could approve of Hibernian, Scotch and British Associations but "rise up and offer condemnation" when a Native American Association is proposed.

We have no objection when foreigners have once become attached to our institutions . . . and have complied with the requirements of our naturalization laws, that they should enjoy all the rights and immunities of citizens; but if there be any preference, it should most certainly be awarded to those whose ancestors fought and bled for the liberties of their native country. As long as they keep free from political broils, we go it strong for native American Associations.

Native Americanism is "our birth right," the Burlington *Hawk-Eye* declared. "We glory in

it." The editor charged that those who did not wish to suppress the "immense influx of foreigners continually landing on our shores" only wanted to swell the numbers in their political party and "secure their votes on the day of election."

A contrary view to this narrow and bigoted doctrine was expressed by the *Burlington Gazette*, which branded nativism's doctrines of intolerance unworthy of the "enlightened age in which we live." The *Hawk-Eye and Iowa Patriot* angrily retorted that the *Gazette* seemed to be proud of belonging to a "foreign party," claiming that "the mean, dastardly clap trap demagoguery, put in requisition by the *Gazette* to gain a few votes in the foreign ranks is too contemptible for serious notice."

In the midst of this controversy the Democrats met in convention at Iowa City on June 7, 1841. Among the resolutions passed was one favoring the retention of the naturalization laws, without which "a large portion of the human family" would be cut off "from rights which the charter of our liberties declare are granted to all."

In 1846 the *Burlington Gazette* made a strong appeal to Iowans to oppose a proposed union of Whigs and nativists:

We ask, the particular attention of *that worthy part of our community* in Iowa who are made up of *emigrants* and the *descendants* of emigrants to this country, to this maneuver. If the Whigs can come into power, they will not

hesitate to deprive your brother who may not yet have come over to this country, of the possibility of obtaining the rights of citizenship; they will not hesitate to draw the lines between you and your descendants on the one part, and those whom they style native born on the other. They think that because you and your father were so unfortunate as not to have been born on the soil of freedom, that therefore you are unworthy of freedom.

Prior to the presidential campaign of 1848 it was understood that members of the Whig party in Iowa were compiling lists of naturalized voters. It was the intention of the Whig election judges, according to the *Burlington Gazette*, to let no naturalized citizen vote unless he had his papers with him. "We hope every voter will be prepared to stand the test; to be forewarned is to be forearmed." It should be noted that the Whigs won the election in 1848 and that the Iowa vote was: Lewis Cass (Democrat) 12,093; Zachary Taylor (Whig) 11,144; Martin Van Buren (Free Soil) 1,126.

Within a few years the Know Nothing Party was formed from the nativist elements throughout the United States. The movement spread into Iowa where the ranks were split on the question of the foreign born. In the election of 1854 the Know Nothings were among those opposing the Democrats. Made up chiefly of persons from the old Whig party, they campaigned for greater restrictions on conferring citizenship on aliens and their entire exclusion from office. That year they helped

to elect James W. Grimes as Governor and a majority in the Iowa House of Representatives.

The Council Bluffs *Semi-Weekly Bugle* bitterly opposed Know Nothingism. In April, 1855, the editor predicted Know Nothings had reached their zenith in Iowa.

No political organization can long hold together, that does not possess soundness, and Know Nothingness is utterly rotten and corrupt. Before the next August election in this State, it will stink in the nostrils of all right thinking men, and will be execrated and despised by its own deluded followers.

On what principle of reason the Irishman, the Hungarian, the German, the Swiss, or alien of any land should be denied citizenship rights after learning about American institutions we cannot conceive. The United States had been sought by many as a "refuge from tyranny and oppression."

Farmers were urged to come to Council Bluffs for a few days to become better acquainted with the maneuvers of the Know Nothing party. The readers of the *Bugle* were told to reflect on the fact that "in one of the most prosperous and flourishing States in the entire confederacy" there was a political party "whose principles are so base that the members dare not avow them, and are ashamed to own their membership."

From week to week in 1855 the *Bugle* continued its campaign against Know Nothingism. In August the editor asked:

Who can refrain from laughing to see the ludicrous

contortions made in the gasping struggles of expiring Know Nothingism? . . . How it rants, charges, squirms, groans, and tears!

The *Bugle's* predictions were far from being correct, as the Democrats lost heavily in seeking Federal, state, and local offices in Iowa. By 1859 the Democratic Party in Iowa was attempting to associate Know Nothings with the Republican Party.

In Massachusetts the Republican Party had passed legislation which deprived foreign-born citizens of the right of suffrage for two years after being naturalized. In Iowa the Democrats were claiming that the Republicans could not win without the vote of the foreign born and so had repudiated the Massachusetts groups. However, "the 'Thick-headed Dutch,' as he (James W. Grimes) used to call the Funks, Schrams, Kriechbaums and Bargers of Burlington, can see thro' them."

To emphasize the dislike of the Republicans for foreign citizens and to influence voters in favor of the Democrats, the Council Bluffs *Bugle* reprinted a purported speech by John Wilson, an 1856 Republican elector in Massachusetts.

In the heart of the foreigner beats not a single noble throb of patriotism. He is so brutal and degraded that he has no sympathy for anything but cabbage and lager beer, potatoes and buttermilk or some other kind of outlandish dish, fit only for the hogs of the street or pen. . . . Look at the Dutchman smoking his pipe, and if you can see a ray of intelligence in that dirty, idiotic looking face of his,

show it to me. . . . *These Foreigners . . . , they have no more right to vote than the Brutes of the Field, and Have not half the sense of a good Newfoundland dog.*

The stigma of the Know Nothings was still present in elections as late as 1868. The Davenport *Democrat* and the Burlington *Argus*, as well as other papers, were endeavoring to influence the "foreign element of the voting class" by charging that Schuyler Colfax, candidate for the Vice Presidency, was still a Know-Nothing.

The American Protective Association was created in 1887 and continued for about twenty-five years. This organization, which was anti-Catholic, anti-foreign born if they were Catholics, and anti-Irish in nature, was founded by Henry F. Bowers, himself the son of a German immigrant, of Clinton, Iowa.

In 1898 attempts were again being made to restrict immigration. According to a news item from Dubuque in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, the editor of the *Katholischer Westen* and the *Luxemburger Gazette* in Dubuque County had started a crusade against the anti-emigrant bill then in Congress. He had written David Henderson, one of the Iowa Congressmen, asking whether or not he was aware that pressure for the restrictions came largely from a foreign element in the United States and especially from the laboring class. He, therefore, was urging all Germans in Dubuque to join him in protesting vigorously.

The *Gazette* of Cedar Rapids added that, according to the provisions of the bill, "the father of Abraham Lincoln could not have been imported. He could neither read nor write, but there were beneficial things he could do."

At the same time there were others in Iowa petitioning for stronger restrictions. Among others, persons from Council Bluffs, Clinton, and Sioux City made known their wishes to their Congressmen. In successive Congresses, when proposed restrictive immigration legislation was being considered, there were usually a number of petitions from groups in Iowa urging its adoption.

World War I brought a number of manifestations of disapproval of foreigners in Iowa. In 1917 the General Assembly passed an act authorizing the Governor to require the registration of all aliens within Iowa. Every occupant of a private residence or manager of a hotel or rooming house was required to notify the public officials within twenty-four hours of the presence of any subject or citizen of a foreign country, who had registered as a guest.

The widespread antipathy to foreign cultures, as exemplified by foreign language newspapers, led to the passage in 1919 of an act prohibiting the publication of official municipal and other governmental notices and proceedings in any newspapers that were not printed entirely in English. The same year other legislations required that

English should be used in teaching all subjects in Iowa public and private schools.

Another bill was introduced to exclude aliens from employment in public schools and state educational institutions. Amended during consideration to apply only to those whose native land had been at war with the United States or her allied powers from 1914 to 1918, the bill failed in the House by one vote.