

IMMIGRANTS VIA POPULAR CULTURE:
A STUDY OF THE PORTRAYAL OF VARIOUS
IMMIGRANT CULTURES IN VAUDEVILLE

HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors Committee of
Texas State University-San Marcos
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements

For Graduation in the Honors College

By

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San Marcos, Texas
May 2012

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ABSTRACT

The comedic ethnic stereotypes, most commonly that of Italian, Jewish and Irish immigrants, presented in both mainstream and ethnic vaudeville houses from 1870 to 1920 functioned in two important ways. The new immigrant cultures used their vaudeville to explore the ways in which their culture may be adapted to ease their own assimilation, and provided a nexus around which a strong ethnic community could develop. On mainstream stages, ethnic portrayals provided a means of control for popular sentiment by re-characterizing the immigrants in harmless ways. When each immigrant culture achieved an internally recognized assimilation and the mainstream stereotype had drifted too far from reality, each group moved to regain control of their representation.

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INTRODUCTION

Between 1890 and 1920, the United States experienced one of its most dramatic population changes as the new immigrants flooded its shores. Prior, the vast majority of voluntary American immigrants were of northwestern European descent, sharing, in many cases, the values, religion, language and appearance of the existing population. Beginning in 1880, the trend shifted as emigrants from southern and Eastern Europe began to immigrate in large numbers, bringing new languages, religions and cultural practices with them, which were vastly different from those of the earlier settlers.

It is a fortunate coincidence that this influx occurred during the reign of vaudeville, a theatrical form composed of short, topical scenes interspersed with other variety acts. In the mid-19th century, theatre underwent increasing class polarization as a national discussion of “high” and “low” art evolved, led by the cultural elite with firm ties to Great Britain. The developing middle class, unable to afford the admission and dress code of the “highbrow” opera houses but wanting to distance themselves from the questionable morality and raucousness of the lower class theatre, demanded a middle ground. Vaudevillian pioneers carved for themselves a niche by providing entertainment reflecting the social mores of the middle class, with ticket prices in easy reach for the working class. As such, vaudeville provides a unique gauge of popular sentiment about and for immigrants during the period, through the lens of comedic portrayal.

The wealth of extant vaudeville scripts alongside documents created by the Immigration Commission organized in 1907 in response to new immigration provide excellent contrasting material to examine the differences between actual immigration trends and popular depictions on vaudeville stages. By analyzing the immigrant portrayal in the content of extant scripts, this paper seeks to determine popular sentiment toward the immigrant groups most frequently targeted on the vaudeville stage and its relation to each groups' internal depictions of themselves.

That "highbrow" art was predominantly identified as European in character is important in the ways in which certain cultures were depicted. Each of the immigrant groups most often represented on vaudeville stages (Irish, Italian, and Eastern Jewish) were clearly European, so the depiction of those characters, despite domestic sentiment, were influenced by the perceived value of their cultural and artistic heritage. The rise of ethnic humor as a popular comedic format demonstrates a cultural anxiety related to the influx of immigrants. The creation of the benign stereotype, particularly in contrast to more malignant stereotypes, demonstrates cultural bias and assumptions of potential for assimilation based on historic prejudices.

The comedic ethnic stereotypes presented in both mainstream and ethnic vaudeville houses functioned in two important ways. The new immigrant cultures used their vaudeville to explore the ways in which their culture could be adapted to ease their own assimilation, and provided a nexus around which a strong ethnic community could develop. On mainstream stages, ethnic portrayals provided a means of control for popular sentiment by re-characterizing the immigrants in harmless ways. When each

immigrant culture achieved an internally recognized assimilation and the mainstream stereotype had drifted too far from reality, each group moved to regain control of their representation.

This document will examine popular American sentiment towards the shift in immigrant points of origin, the rise of vaudeville as middle and working class theatre, and the three ethnic groups most often portrayed in the vaudeville scripts located at the Library of Congress and several intact vaudeville circulars – Italians, Jews and Irish -- in relation to internal cultural stereotypes. Additionally, the circumstances that drove each cultures' migration will be examined, alongside native prejudice and other factors, to determine other influences on the depictions.

CHAPTER ONE: VAUDEVILLE

There is a cheerful frivolity in vaudeville which makes it appeal to more people of widely divergent interests than does any other form of entertainment. It represents the almost universal longing for laughter, for melody, for color, for action, for wonder-provoking things. It exacts no intellectual activity on the part of those who gather to enjoy it; in its essence, it is an enemy to responsibility, to worries, to all the little ills of life. It is joyously, frankly absurd, from the broad, elemental nonsense of the funmakers to the marvelous acrobatic feats of performers who conceive immensely difficult things for the pleasure of doing them. Vaudeville brings home to us the fact that we are children of a larger growth, and this is one of the finest things about it.¹

That theatre is a source of amusement and diversion is the source of its polarization, and the United States has been divided over it since its founding. For the Puritans, Quakers and Presbyterians in Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania, theatrical productions represented a moral depravity they were hoping to escape. In the developing urban centers, theatre provided the wealthy a link to imported European culture. As colonial and British tensions mounted, theatre-going became generally associated with pro-British attitudes, and it was banned by the Continental Congress during the war.²

Despite the best efforts of the religious, performance appealed to the largely oral culture of early America. By the turn of the 19th century, the theatres in urban areas had become firmly established as a multi-class public forum, complete with well-

¹ Harlley Davis, "In Vaudeville," *Everybody's Magazine* 13, August 1905, 231-40.

² Heather S. Nathans, *Early American Theatre from the Revolution to Thomas Jefferson: Into the Hands of the People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 37.

orchestrated public disturbances and the opportunity for the elite to don the mantle of the unruly lower class. Performances provided an opportunity for all strata of society to join in a lighthearted and affected expression of the “mob rule” that had characterized the origins of the American and French Revolutions.³ Bills of fare would include everything from melodramatic adaptations of Shakespeare to trained animal acts.

Theatrical seating, by its nature, divided theatrical patrons. Private box seats were naturally more expensive than the pit seats, which were naturally more expensive than the seats on the balcony (gallery). After the American Revolution, unpatriotic or aristocratic behavior was increasingly condemned by popular audiences, and the naturally hierarchal seating tended to prompt demonstrations of this displeasure. When Washington Irving was “saluted aside [his] head with a rotten pippen,” and stood to shake a cane at the gallery gods⁴ who threw it, a man behind him restrained him and warned that it would only bring down further wrath. He was advised, for his safety and the safety of those around him, to “sit down quietly and bend your back to it.”⁵

By 1830, theatres were beginning to distinguish themselves according to class. In New York, the Park Theatre had become the preferred location of the well to do, while the Bowery and Chatham were left to the poorer classes. This was also reflected in the type of performances at each establishment. The more rowdy theatres expected

³ Peter P. Reed, *Rogue Performances: Staging the Underclasses in Early American Theatre Culture* (New York, NY.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 8-11.

⁴ A term of the period associated with the patrons in the least expensive but typically most numerous seats. Their responses to the productions were the most vocal, and they were the most likely to utilize projectiles to demonstrate their displeasure. As such, patrons of the gallery had significant control over the outcome of any particular performance.

⁵ Lawrence W Levine, *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), under “729,” Amazon Kindle edition.

more athletic and melodramatic portrayals of their heroes, and off-stage, their favored actors tended to express a fervent patriotism. In the more refined theatres, actors were largely European (frequently British), and utilized a more restrained acting style.⁶

The Astor Place Riot in 1848 demonstrated how closely theatre reflected the divisions in class and the gravity of patriotic sentiment. The Astor Opera House was designed to appeal to the upper class, which had grown weary of the rowdy underclass take-over of its theatre spaces. The design of the building replaced the traditional benches with upholstered seats, available only by subscription, and limited general admission to a few seats isolated from the gentry by a balcony. The ticket prices were raised, a dress code was put into place, and the entertainment catered to the upper class, which increasingly preferred European entertainers.

The source of the riot was a feud between two Shakespearean actors, Englishman William Macready and American Edwin Forrest. Forrest had developed a reputation for profound patriotism, and was a favorite among the fervently pro-American gallery gods. Macready, by contrast, was a very cerebral performer and was affiliated with America's wealthy. Macready's description of Forrest's audience as "vulgar," "coarse," "underbred" and "ignorant" did not earn him admirers from America's working class.⁷ In 1846, Forrest attended Macready's production of Hamlet in

⁶ Ibid, Location "699-706"

⁷ Ibid, Location 791.

Edinburgh, where Forrest hissed Macready's performance.⁸ In a letter to the London *Times* a few days later, Forrest justified his behavior: "As well-timed and hearty applause is the just need of an actor who deserves well, so also is hissing a salutary and wholesome corrective of the abuses of the stage; and it was against one of these abuses that dissent was expressed."⁹

In 1848, the Astor Opera House hired Macready to star in *Macbeth*, while Forrest had been hired to perform the same role at the Broadway Theatre on the same evening. Forrest's supporters showed up en masse on opening night to disrupt Macready's performance. They succeeded by pelting the actor with armfuls of rotten vegetables and seating material they had ripped from the new theatre. Appalled, many of New York's wealthy published an appeal to Macready for an encore in a local paper. He eventually agreed.¹⁰

According to court documents, "this letter had a very different effect from what its signers had anticipated, and greatly intensified the opposition. It was regarded as a challenge ... by a few representing the wealthier classes, to the less prominent part of the community."¹¹ Pamphlets were immediately distributed encouraging people to come out in protest of the performance, and rumors that officers and crews of British vessels in the harbor intended to rally to Macready's physical defense fueled the notion

⁸ According to Levine, it was the inclusion of a handkerchief and pirouettes in Macready's portrayal of Hamlet that so offended Forrest. He referred to it as his "fancy dance," and a "desecration of the scene." Location 798.

⁹ Ibid, Location 802.

¹⁰ These well-to-do included authors Herman Melville and Washington Irving, Nigel Cliff. *The Shakespeare Riots: Revenge, Drama and Death in Nineteenth-Century America*, New York: Random House, 2007, 196-199.

¹¹ *Astor Place Riot Case: The People vs. Edward Z.C. Judson et. al.* (Court of Common Pleas for the City and County of New York, September 1849), 5.

that the situation would likely get out of hand.¹² The mayor requested the performance be cancelled, and when the Astor Opera House management refused, he decided to station both a strong police force outside the theatre and to muster uniformed militia in case of a riot.

A riot they received. The military fired three volleys upon the mob amid dares from the assembled to fire on American citizens to protect one British actor. Between twenty and thirty were killed (a number of whom were bystanders) and hundreds were wounded.

The subsequent trial of the rioters produced the following, which demonstrated a new attitude and standard for audience-goers:

The privilege of an audience at a theatre to give spontaneous expression to the feelings of approbation or disapprobation which the representation inspires, is of immemorial usage; but it does not employ a right to create a tumult in the theatre, to throw missiles at the actors, to destroy property, or the right of a few to give or to continue the expression of their disapprobation in such a manner as to prevent the majority present from the witnessing the performance if they desire to do so.¹³

Theatre had effectively been segregated – the Opera Houses were the domain of the upper class, which looked to Europe for their entertainment and expected audience members to adhere to a certain etiquette. The theatres in the Bowery provided the

¹² Clearly, the subsequent riot had little to do with the actors and their supporters. They represented the continued contempt on the part of the British regarding American sovereignty and its citizens, the working class perception that many of the upper class were too ready to look to England for entertainment, an affront to “American ideals,” and the growing class struggle. All of these elements are outside the scope of this paper.

¹³ *Astor Place Riot Case: The People vs. Edward Z.C. Judson et. al.* (Court of Common Pleas for the City and County of New York, September 1849), 3.

entertainment for the working class, where audiences were permitted a certain amount of interaction.

The segregation of the upper class theatres coincided with the stratification of the performances. Shakespeare, opera, symphonies, and other artistic forms were imbued with a level of sanctity they had not previously held, and moved to performance venues of increasing opulence and exclusivity. As more and more immigrants arrived that didn't speak English, the emphasis on oratory went into decline. Performances that relied on the physical provided a new expression of egalitarianism – Americans new and old were able to appreciate the performance without language hindering their appreciation of the show.¹⁴ With the increased ticket prices of the “highbrow” theatres, a void remained for respectable entertainment for the growing middle class. In short order, the “lowbrow” theatres separated into the vaudeville houses and the Burlesques (which had a reputation for being as rowdy as most theatres had been three decades earlier).

Vaudeville had long been a term describing short, light-hearted skits interspersed with song. By the time Tony Pastor opened his Opera House on Bowery Street in 1865, audiences had been indoctrinated to P.T. Barnum's museum of curiosity's motto of “Fun without Vulgarity.” Pastor followed suit, promising “all the latest gems of Opera, Comedy, Farce and Minstrelsy, unalloyed by an indelicate act or

¹⁴ Interestingly, the throwing of projectiles and other major disruptions does not continue in working class theatres after the division of high and lowbrow houses, outside of the burlesques.

expression,” creating a theatre that bridged the gap between the truly rowdy Burlesque performance and the high-brow performances for the elite.¹⁵

In Boston, Benjamin Franklin Keith and Edward Franklin Albee opened their Bijou Theatre in 1885.¹⁶ In the first decade of the 1900s, the partners formed the United Bookings Office, which developed a near monopoly on touring vaudeville acts. The following notice was routinely pinned on their stages:

Notice to Performers: Don't say "slob" or "son of [a] gun" or "holy Gee" on the stage unless you want to be cancelled peremptorily. ... Lack of talent will be less open to censure than would an insult to a patron... for if you are guilty of uttering anything sacrilegious or even suggestive, you will immediately be closed and will never again be allowed in a theatre where Mr. Keith is in authority.¹⁷

The central office eventually developed a list of seventy three elements that would not be tolerated on the Keith-Albee circuit. Performers who found themselves toeing the line of decency found a blue envelope included with their paychecks which detailed elements and dialogue of their performances that must be struck before the next performance or forfeit their contracts. The message was clear: vaudeville was a place for respectable audiences.

¹⁵ It should be clarified that the upper class were not territorial about their new "highbrow" culture. Shakespeare, for example, was now too sacred for modification, familiarity with his work was still a requirement for all cultured persons. Performance, along with reading and other cultural experiences, required intellectual stimulation to be a valid use of time. Robert M. Lewis, *From Travelling Show to Vaudeville: Theatrical Spectacle in America, 1830 – 1910*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, 315.

¹⁶ The naming of the theatre was a clear indicator of the proprietors' intention of attracting an upper middle class clientele.

¹⁷ Andrew L. Erdman. *Blue Vaudeville: Sex, Morals and the Mass Marketing of Amusement, 1895-1915*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2004, 2-3.

CHAPTER TWO: U.S. IMMIGRATION 1840-1920

The German crop failures (beginning in 1840,) the Irish Potato Famine (beginning in 1845,) and a series of failed political uprisings (1848) triggered the first recorded rise in United States immigration.¹⁸ In response to a tripling of immigrants between 1840 and 1850, the Know Nothings, which began as a nativist secret society, expanded to the American Party in 1854 and won a number of political seats. A division over the issue of slavery that destroyed the party shortly thereafter prevented it from further political success.¹⁹ The Homestead Act of 1862, which granted 160 acres of Midwest farmland to any settler, prompted another wave of predominantly Irish and German immigration, which had reduced significantly during the Civil War. The Franco-Prussian War in 1870 prompted another German emigration. At the same time, Irish immigration began to taper off just as immigration from southern and Eastern Europe began to increase.

By the late 1880s, the notion of the “new immigrant” was cause for concern across the country. The Immigration Act of 1882 imposed a \$.50 tax on all new

¹⁸ The number of immigrants during this period was still comparatively low. Immigration in 1840 totaled 80,126, or .4% of the US Population, rising to 308,323 or 1.3% of the US Population, in 1850. German and Irish immigrants made up 86 and 78 percent of these immigrants in 1840 and 1850, respectively, with the majority of the remaining immigrants coming from England and France. By contrast, Italy contributed 37 immigrants in 1840 and 431 in 1850. Immigrant data prior to this time is estimated, since ships were not required to maintain a manifest of passengers or submit them for governmental record upon arrival, so it is also possible that immigration numbers prior to this date were as high or higher, but predominantly included immigrant groups who were easily assimilated into the general public. The US Census did not include questions on place of birth until 1850. All statistics are derived from examination of the statistics provided by the Immigration Commission’s report of 1910, combined with Census Data from 1910-1920. This data is provided in the appendix.

¹⁹ Humphrey Joseph Desmond, *The Know-Nothing Party: A Sketch*. Washington: The New Century Press, 1904, 121.

immigrants, and the Alien Contract Labor Law of 1885 prevented American companies, such as the railroads, from importing contract laborers from foreign countries. The year 1888 represented an anomaly for immigration in that decade (838,131 European immigrants, double the number in the preceding and following years, and a number that would not be reached again until 1903), and did not reflect so large a shift in immigrant character. However, for the first time, it included measurable numbers of southern and eastern Europeans.

By the 1890s, Congress took an active hand in European immigrant restriction. The Immigration Act of 1891 excluded any immigrant who fit the following description: “All idiots, insane persons, paupers or persons likely to become a public charge, persons suffering from a loathsome or dangerous contagious disease, persons who have been convicted of a felony or other infamous crime or misdemeanor involving moral turpitude.”²⁰ Ports around the world were manned by medical committees that inspected immigrants for physical and mental fitness, a process that was repeated at American ports. Steamship companies, aggressively marketed immigration in certain countries to increase the sale of their tickets, and became responsible for the return transport of any immigrant who failed to meet the criteria once arriving in America. These early attempts at immigration control coincide with some of the first vaudeville scripts that deal with immigrants, demonstrating that popular sentiment had achieved a level that could not be ignored in popular cultural expressions.

²⁰ *Immigration Act, U.S. Statutes at Large* 26 (1891): 1084.

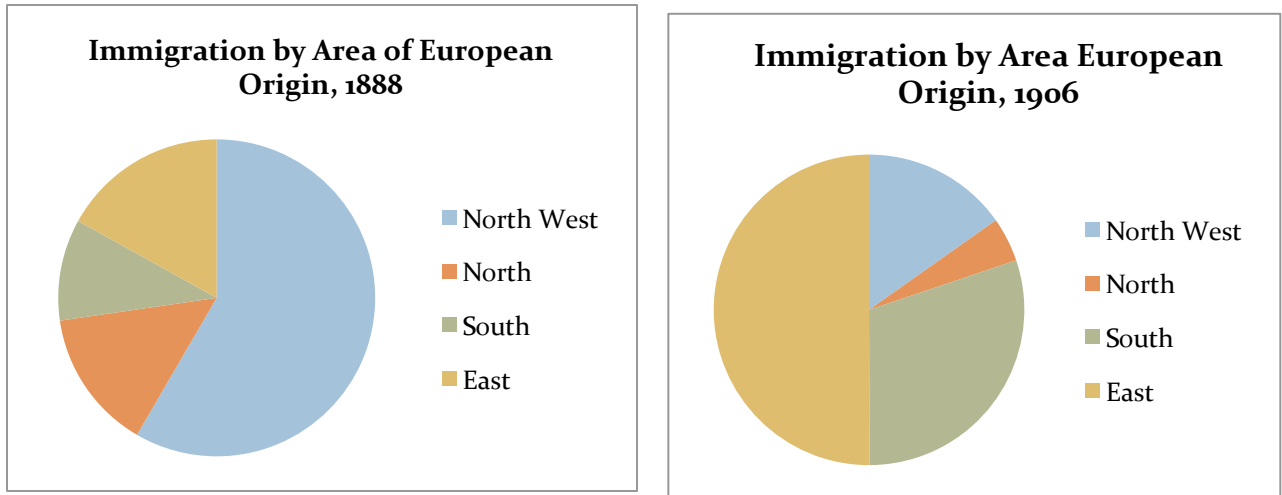


FIGURE 1: “NORTHWEST” FIGURES INCLUDE FRANCE, ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND IRELAND. “NORTH” FIGURES INCLUDE NORWAY AND SWEDEN. “SOUTH” FIGURES INCLUDE ITALY AND GREECE. “EAST” FIGURES INCLUDE AUSTRIA-HUNGARY, POLAND, RUSSIA AND ROMANIA. DATA DERIVED FROM IMMIGRATION COMMISSION REPORT AND CENSUS DATA (SEE APPENDIX)

The 1900 assassination of King Umberto I of Italy by Gaetano Bresci, an Italian immigrant and anarchist, in response to the massacre of demonstrators protesting high bread prices, contributed a new reason for “native” Americans to be distrustful of immigrants.²¹ This act inspired the assassination of President McKinley by anarchist and first generation Polish-American Leon Czolgosz in 1901, who had been actively seeking the attention of nationally touring Russian immigrant and anarchist Emma Goldman.²² In 1903, Congress passed a law excluding the immigration of anarchists. The pervasive feeling was that immigrants were not only saturating the country with foreign languages and cultures, but that they were also importing dangerous ideas alongside criminals and paupers that would tax American resources.

²¹ Bresci, born in Tuscany, immigrated to New Jersey where he worked as a weaver and contributed to *La Question Sociale*, the Italian-language anarchist newspaper there. He had lived in the United States for six years when he read of the massacre, and he called in the loan he had made to the paper and used the money to travel back to Italy for the assassination.

²² Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 103-4.

By 1906, annual European immigration surpassed one million persons, and its makeup had completed the shift to immigrants of southern and eastern European origins. In 1907, a Congressional immigration commission (known generally as the Dillingham Commission) was created as a response to nativist pressure and the increase of new immigrant groups. The four-year study produced a forty-one volume report, which included an overview of immigration between 1820 and 1910. This data, combined with census information from 1911-1920, provides the following overview of major immigrant groups:

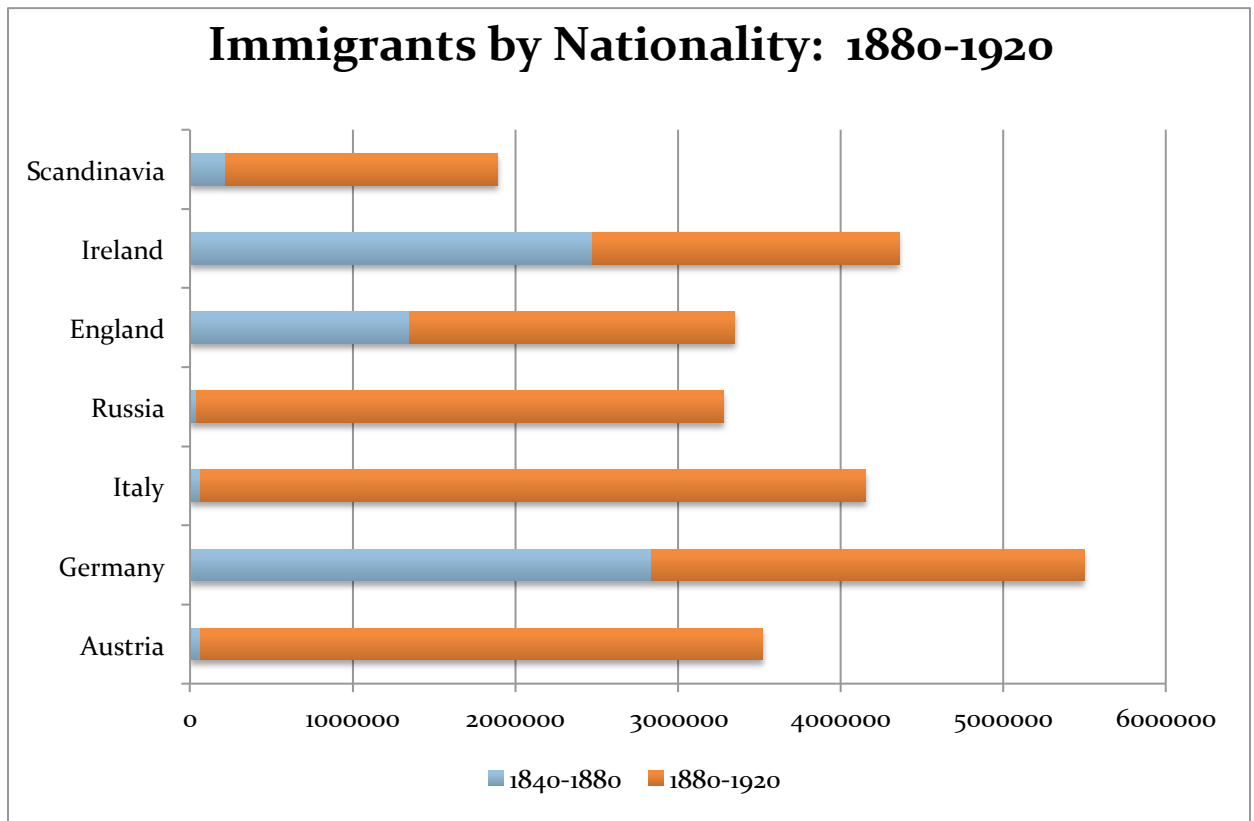


FIGURE 2: IMMIGRANTS BY NATIONALITY: 1880-1920²³

²³ Data derived from the Immigration Commission Report of 1910 and Census Data. Data from Russia includes the Jewish diaspora. See appendix.

If raw numbers were a case for comedic representation, Polish, Russian Orthodox Jews, Slavs, and Italians would have been the immigrant groups most often depicted on vaudevillian stages. While ethnic stereotypes of Italians and Jews are well represented, the curious abundance of Irish stereotypes demonstrates that volume and recent time of arrival were not the only requirements for depiction. Other immigrant groups, while represented, are targeted primarily for their accents (particularly the Germans) or are mentioned in passing.²⁴ It is no surprise that one of the immigrant groups most often depicted were the Italians, as they sent over four million immigrants in forty short years – a number it took the Irish twice as long to achieve.

²⁴ While only one German (frequently called “Dutch”) sketch exists in the Vaudeville sketches housed at the Library of Congress, it appears that the bulk of these sketches were part of the East Coast circuit. More “Dutch” sketches appear in the circulars of the period, so it is presumed the German settlement patterns (predominantly throughout the Midwest) made the popularity of these sketches regionally dependent. The same is likely true for the (even fewer) Scandinavian related sketches.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ITALIANS

The introduction of the trans-Atlantic telegraph cable in 1858 made the world a much smaller place. News which took weeks to travel across oceans could now be transmitted in minutes. As immigration increased, the exchange of information impacted the timing of immigration and the way new immigrants were perceived.²⁵



New Year's presents suggested for our newly arrived Italian immigrants. *Leslie's Weekly*, January 18, 1873. (Culver Pictures)

Prior to the *Risorgimento*²⁶ and Unification, Italy was a collection of separate nation-states, each with its own cultural identity and dialect. Since the end of the Napoleonic wars, various secret revolutionary societies including the *Carbonari* (literally, the coal burners, a group of middle class individuals) sought a unified Italian peninsula.

After the fall of Napoleon, the Congress of Vienna utilized buffer states to protect against an aggressive France. Among them was the Kingdom of Piedmont in Northern Italy, which was granted Nice and Savoy from France and the former republic

²⁵ For example, immigration slowed to a trickle during the American Civil War.

²⁶ "*Risorgimento*" translates to resurgence, and is used to describe the development of Italian peninsular nationalism and the various political and social insurrections leading to the unification.

of Genoa. The remainder of the Italian peninsula was under the influence (directly or indirectly) of Austria. Lombardy and Venetia were under direct Austrian rule, and both ancient kingdoms were subjected to heavy taxes. The small kingdoms in central Italy were presided over by relatives of the Austrian Emperor Francis I, ensuring that Parma, Modena, Massa, Carrara and Tuscany were reliant on Austria to preserve their dynastic legitimacy. The Papal States (consisting of Romagna, Umbria, the Marches, and the Patrimony of Saint Peter) were ruled by the Pope, who allowed Austria to garrison troops in Ferrara. In the south, the Kingdom of Naples (or the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies), was ensured Austrian support in exchange for the supply of wartime troops.²⁷

In the fifty years that followed, the Italian peninsula roiled with revolts. Outside of Sicily, most peasants were completely uninterested in the reform movements, and focused instead on coaxing enough crops from the marginal Italian land to stave off starvation as the population increased. Unsuccessful revolts were led by the *Carbonari* and Young Italy,²⁸ among other secret societies.

It was not until the 1850s, when Count Camillo Benso di Cavour was appointed Prime Minister of Piedmont, that real steps towards a united peninsula were made. He had spent his youth touring Europe, and was eager to energize the northern Italian economy through industrialization and liberal economic theory. By the end of the decade, roads, railroads and ports were modernized, the military was strengthened, and education and literacy were improved.

²⁷ Tim Chapman, *The Risorgimento* (Tirril: Humanities-Ebooks, 2008), 251-91, Amazon Kindle edition.

²⁸ *La Giovine Italia*, or Young Italy, was founded in 1831 by Giuseppe Mazzini with the goal of creating a united Italian republic by instigating revolts both in Italian-held states and Italian lands occupied by the Austrian Empire.

In Sicily, a populist revolt had been successfully led by a charismatic young soldier named Garibaldi and his *i Mille* (The Thousand), about one thousand volunteers dressed in red shirts. Once he had secured Sicily, he crossed the Straits of Messina, making his intention to take Naples and Rome clear. Naples' unpopular King quickly granted a constitution and fled, though the Neapolitan Army engaged Garibaldi in a pitched battle settled only by the arrival of a Piedmontese army, which had conquered much of the Papal territory on its march south. The formal declaration of the Kingdom of Italy occurred on 17 March 1861, and included the entire Italian peninsula except for Venetia (controlled by the Austrians) and portions of the Papal States surrounding Rome. The Papal State lands that had been conquered included Romagna and the Marches, and these lands were auctioned off. However, the peasant farmers in dire need of more fertile farmland hadn't the means to acquire them. Venetia was acquired as a result of the Austro-Prussian War, and the Papal States were seized when the French troops garrisoned there to protect the Pope were needed to fight the Franco-Prussian War. The peninsula had been united, but only after thirty years of revolt.

Italy had long been divided into northern and southern halves, and Cavour's work to modernize northern Italian economies did not affect the primarily agricultural south. Poverty and illiteracy rates remained high in the south, and the drafting of the new Italian constitution heavily favored the North, ensuring that the rural farmers saw no real improvement in their condition, though they were now subjected to higher taxes and conscription into the *carabinieri*²⁹, a paramilitary force organized in part to enforce

²⁹ Not to be confused with the Carbonari, the revolutionary secret society.

the new requirements.³⁰ These impositions, compounded by overpopulation, disease and the food shortages and poverty that typically follow a protracted war, prompted a large number of southern Italians to immigrate to the United States in search of better conditions.

At the height of Italian immigration, the Dillinger Commission produced a report entitled the *Dictionary of Races or Peoples* which assigned value to different peoples as immigrants. The bulk of the report analyzed physical, linguistic and religious characteristics of a people, and rarely discussed a race's personality traits. For the Italians, however, they made an exception:

An Italian sociologist, Niceforo, has pointed out that these two ethnic groups [Northern and Southern Italians] differ as radically in psychic character as they do in physical. He describes the South Italian as excitable, impulsive, highly imaginative, impracticable; as an individualist having little adaptability into highly organized society. The North Italian, on the other hand, is pictured as cool, deliberate, patient, practical and as capable of great progress in the political and social organization of modern civilization.³¹

It may be significant that the bulk of Italian immigrants were composed of the largely rural, unskilled workers of the south, which greatly alarmed the authors of the *Dictionary*. They were fairly confident that continued immigration from Southern Italy would overwhelm the American population with criminals and paupers: "Niceforo shows from Italian statistics that all crimes, and especially violent crimes, are several times more numerous among the South than the North Italians."³²

³⁰ Jonathan Sperber, *Europe: 1850-1914*. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, 2009, 95.

³¹ Immigration Commission. *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*. Reports of the Immigration Commission, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911, 82.

³² *Ibid*, 83.

The document also distinguishes, to some extent, between Italians, Sicilians and Corsicans (who are French in citizenship but culturally and linguistically kin to Italians). Sicilians and Corsicans also earned “psychic descriptions,” with Sicilians portrayed as “vivid in imagination, affable and benevolent, but excitable, superstitious and revengeful,”³³ and Corsicans portrayed as “independent and vengeful.”³⁴ The *Mafia*, a product of Sicily, and the *Camorra*, a product of Campania, were blamed for much of the crime where Italian immigrants settled, but the Italian “determination not to testify in court against an enemy, but to insist on settling their wrongs after the manner of the vendetta” made prosecution of these crimes difficult.³⁵

The character of Italian immigration was also unique. Where previous immigrant groups (Irish, German and English) arrived in family units, an average of 78% of Italian immigrants were males intending to return to Italy once a certain amount of money was earned.³⁶ As a result, many of these new immigrants settled in urban-industrial areas where unskilled labor was in continual demand. North East urban centers were especially popular, as they typically also served as port cities.

Despite the official assertions that Southern Italians were instigators of violent crime, the mainstream vaudeville stage Italian is portrayed as generally genial unless their honor is offended, ignorant and unsophisticated, and an avid seeker of an easygoing lifestyle. He is generally male, heavily mustachioed, quick with a song, and

³³ Ibid, 127.

³⁴ Ibid, 41.

³⁵ Ibid, 83.

³⁶ Senate Committee on Immigration, *Emigration Conditions in Europe*, 61st Cong., 2d sess., 1911, S. Doc. 748, 139.

generally either unemployed or working as a fruit seller or an organ grinder. In "As Tony Tells It," the fictitious character of Tony Bragadello explains his reason for immigrating:

I leav-a da Italy 'cause I hear much-a bount United States America. Everybody say to me: "Tony, dat some country – great! It is a *free* country – everything free in United States America." I tell-a you I'm much obliged to come to place where I getta everything for nothing.³⁷

While the portrayal of the Italian immigrant as a wide-eyed, illiterate bumpkin could easily be construed as insulting, it was not dissimilar to a portrayal already embraced by the Italian-Americans. Italian-Americans, like many other immigrant groups, developed a strong ethnic theatre that was considered essential to their pocket communities. The performances were nearly always in their native tongue, and dealt directly with the daily themes with which the immigrants struggled. Italian theatres had been in operation in San Francisco since 1850, and less formal performance opportunities surrounded the *societ i filodrammatiche*, later evolving from coffee shop performances to the more familiar *spettacolo variato* or *caf  concerto*. Whether these performances were done well was immaterial: "the public was starved for the sound its own tongue and would suffer anything as long as it was done in Italian."³⁸

As the number of immigrants increased, so did the talent of the performers. Among the most famous was Neapolitan Eduardo Migliaccio's character of *Farfariello*,

³⁷ Harry Lee Newton, "As Tony Tells It," *Vaudeville Monologues* (1917), 85.

³⁸ A quotation from Antonietta Pisanelli Alessandro, the matriarch of the West Coast Italian theatre. Maxine Seller. "Antonietta Pisanelli Alessandro and the Italian Theatre of San Fransisco: Entertainment, Education and Americanization." *Educational Theatre Journal*, 1976: 206-219.

the new Italian immigrant.³⁹ Included in his material was a combining of Italian, English and dialects (predominantly Neapolitan), as demonstrated by the following:

The other *evening* I was in an American bar where the patrons were American, the whiskey was American, the beer was American, and *the work gang loafers* were all American. Only I was not American, and they all *turned* to me and asked “Hello, Spaghetti, are you on the American side?” “No, no! I’m an Italian Man! You black hand! You like this country? I like my country! I like Italy!”

At this point the first fight started. He says “Hooray for America!” I: “Hooray for Italy!” Another fight. Says: “Hooray for America!” I: “Hooray for Italy!” Another fight and another fight, until I was *finally knocked out*. I *woke up laying* on the sidewalk, with a *policeman* next to me who was saying: “Get off your bum!” I, *still dizzy* shouted: “America’s no good! Hooray for Italy!”

Then, the next morning my friend George said “What’s a matter last night?” and I said “I don’t speak English!” “No? Ten Dollars!” And that swine wasn’t joking, because he took ten pieces!⁴⁰

To highlight the lingual complexity of the dialogue, Americanized Italian words are underlined in both the translation and the original, and the Neapolitan words are

³⁹ Migliaccio immigrated to the United States in 1897. Many of his performances are available on audio recording online, such as those on the Library of Congress’ National Jukebox:

<http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/artists/detail/id/1248/>.

⁴⁰ *Ne sera dentro na barra americana dove il patrone era americano, lo visco era americano, la birra era americana, ce steva na ghenga de loffari tutti americani: solo io non ero americano; quando a tutto nu mumento me mettono mmezzo e me dicettono: Alò spaghetti; iu mericano men? No! no! mi Italy men! lu blacco enze. No, no! lu laico chistu contri. No, no! Mi laico mio contry! Mi laico Italy!*

A questa punto me *chiavaieno* lo primo fait! “Dice: Orré for America!” lo *tuosto*: Orré for Italy! Un ato fait. “Dice: Orré for America!” Orré for Italy! N’ato fait e n’ato fait, fino a che me *facetteno addurmentare*... Quando me *scietaie*, me *trovaie* ncoppa lu marciapiedi cu nu *pulizio* vicino che diceva; Ghiroppe bomma! lo ancora *stunato alluccaie*: America nun gudde! Orré for Italy!

Quando fu la mattina, lu giorge mi dicette: Wazzo maro laste naite? lo risponette: No tocche nglese! “No? Tenne dollari.” E quello porco dello giorge nun scherzava, perché le diece pezze se le pigliaie!...

italicized. The inclusion of the Neapolitan dialect demonstrates that the bulk of the audiences must have been Southern Italians. The dialogue itself implies a very physical recounting of the story. One can almost picture Farfariello's acrobatic self-harm as he demonstrates the blows of the Americans in the bar, and the continued national pride nods to the temporary nature of the Italian immigrant. The inclusion of the "Black Hand," an informal extortion racket based in Naples, as an insult against an American is also telling. The Black Hand had its origins in 18th century Naples, and was popular among the most illiterate and unskilled as a means of financial survival. Their illiteracy was highlighted by the fact that extortion letters to their intended victims, threatening bodily harm, kidnapping or arson, were composed of threatening pictures or symbols to ensure their intentions were clear, alongside an amount and a drop off point. 90% of Italian Immigrants were reportedly threatened by the Black Hand at the height of its power in America (1900-1920). Used against an American, it implies that American workers (typically from northwestern Europe) were on a par with the most unskilled Italians.

Farfariello, and his contemporary, *Nofrio* (portrayed by Giovanni DeRosalia), satirized the inappropriate bravado within the Italian stereotype while depicting the immigrant as a half-wit with awkward reactions to American mores. Embedded in each of their performances were traditional Italian plotlines and story construction:

TERESA – (*pretending to want to reignite the argument*) - No, my husband isn't afraid of anyone! Nofriu, let them see what you're made of.

NOFRIO – What must I do?

TERESA – Draw your weapon!

NOFRIO – (*unwillingly*) We draw! (*he takes the fork out of his pocket*).

NINO – (*stepping back, pulls the spoon out of the paper*) Draw your weapon, swine!

NOFRIO – (*seeing the tablespoon*) What are we going to do, set a table?

NINO – How did my knife turn into a tablespoon?

TERESA – Your wife switched it so you wouldn't be compromised. Your wife and I have settled our differences and we've become friends!

NOFRIO – (*contento*) No kidding? So we don't have to fight anymore?

NINO – Now that our wives have made peace, we have make peace too!

NOFRIO – Then I can get off my horse?

NINO – Dismount!

...

DON TOTO – Teresina, you see that I've returned?

FILOMENA – Here's the ugly person that was the cause of our quarrel!

NOFRIO – Don Totò? Why?

FILOMENA – Because, this morning he called your wife: My dear!

NOFRIO – And you sir, risked saying "my dear" to my wife? (*imitating the same appearance that Nino made to him*) Get on your horse, sir!

DON TOTO – To go where?

NOFRIO – We have to go have a fight with a spoon and a fork!

DON TOTO – But I...

NOFRIO – I'm telling you: get on your horse, sir.

DON TOTO – I don't have a horse!

NOFRIO – Then sir, go hire a little donkey!

DON TOTO – But you can see that I'm an old man!

NOFRIO – Then, sir, get into a carriage!

TERESA – Nofriu, let him go, don't you see that he's trembling all over?

NOFRIO – (*showing off*) - Blood of the prison! Nobody stop me! Draw, you swine! (*he draws the fork*)

DON TOTO – (*flees terrorized*) Holy souls of Purgatory!

NOFRIO – *(laughs)* He's as courageous as I am! Enough already!⁴¹

The character of *Nofrio* was a Sicilian immigrant, and the situations into which he became entangled were usually the result of external machinations. This scene, like many others using the traditional plot devices of the Italian theatre, includes a central conflict of mistaken identity and misinformation. Here, *Nofrio* is forced to fight a friend after their wives engage in a fight. The wives make amends, but won't admit their mistake to their husbands so allow them to come to blows, just switching their weapons for something innocuous (cutlery).

In this scene, we also see a number of traditional *Commedia dell'Arte* characters – *Nofrio* easily represents an *Arlecchino*, Don Toto is easily *Pantelone*, and the women represent *Columbina*, the clever female servant. The use of the “Don” honorific is particularly interesting here, as Italians only use the honorific with nobility or in jest of someone who puts on airs. The fact that the actor and playwright are Sicilian is notable in that Sicilian peasantry perpetrated the most violence against nobility throughout the Italian Wars for Unification. The scene of provincial miscommunication, resolved amicably and then successfully turned against foppish and geriatric nobility recalls the struggle for popular Sicilian governance and promotes nationalist sentiment.

The comedic portrayal of regional and class-based archetypes had been central to the performing arts culture of Italy since the development of *Commedia dell'Arte* in

⁴¹ Giovanni De Rosalia, “Nofrio Si Deve Tirare/Nofrio Backs Down.” New York: Casa Editrice Biblioteca Siciliana, 1919. Sicilian script available online: <http://www.accardiweb.com/nofrio/tirare.htm>, translation available online: <http://www.dieli.net/SicilyPage/SicilianTheatre/tirare.html>.

the mid sixteenth century.⁴² The Commedia dell'Arte was a performance style with origins in the streets and *piazzas* of Italy that relied heavily on masked archetypes and standard plot devices. That the performers travelled throughout Europe and performed in the out of doors demanded broad physicality and reliance on societal assumptions in place of heavy dialogue, as the environment and language barriers rendered it useless. Commedia performers found great fame in a France under the rule of Louis XIV, and the performance elements greatly influenced European performance for two hundred years.⁴³ Many of these archetypes and performance tropes are visible in both mainstream vaudeville and the Italian-American vaudeville.

Nofrio and *Farfariello* both resemble one of Commedia's earliest characters, *zanni*, a half-witted immigrant from drought stricken northern Italy who came to the city in search of work and was utterly out of his element.⁴⁴ *Farfariello's* bravado resembles Commedia's *Capitano*, who was based on the *condotieri*, the mercenary soldiers that tormented the Italian countryside during the Italian Wars. The success and longevity of these performance archetypes relied on the relationship of the audience to their real-life representations. For example, during periods of prolonged peace, *Capitano* is a less effective role to include in a performance. During times of great wealth disparity, the inclusion of the wealthy miser *Pantalone* is sure to win over a crowd. That the

⁴² For information on early Commedia companies, see *Commedia dell'Arte: A Handbook For Troupes* by Olly Crick and John Rudlin. A relatively thorough study on archetypal origins can be found in *The Italian Comedy* by Pierre Duscharte. Other excellent research has been conducted by members of *I Sebastiani* in Boston, Massachusetts, some of which is available on their website. Collected archives of performance material are available at the website of Scuola Addestramento Teatrale – www.incommedia.org.

⁴³ Current scholarship traces Commedia's lineage to more recent comedic performances, including comedic family cartoons like the Simpsons or Family Guy.

⁴⁴ This character evolved into the only slightly more sophisticated Arlecchino, who many now know by his French name, Harlequin. Both characters are of the lowest laboring class, are eternally hungry, and generally confused by directives given him by those in charge.

archetype of the immigrant and the military oppressor were utilized Italian-American performances indicates that both would have been relevant to the audience.

Further investigation into these Commedia stock characters reveals that Italians had long established their own internal stereotyping that had not been eradicated by the recent peninsular unity. Per tradition, Northern Italy gives the Commedia *Arlecchino*, who is from Bergamo, and is known for his agility and luck; the *Dottore*, the insufferable, over-educated know it all from Bologna; and the extraordinarily wealthy merchant *Pantalone* from Venice. Aside from a handful of variants of the major archetypes, Southern Italy only provides *Pulcinella*, who represents the working class of Naples and is known for being conveniently dim-witted or crafty (like his northern counterpart, Arlecchino), with a penchant for violence and a love of song. These divisions clearly represent the long-standing cultural divides within Italy itself – northern Italy is stereotyped for its learning, wealth, and luck, and the south is characterized by its lazy but aggressive working class. The Italian Americans, predominantly hailing from southern Italy, would have accepted *Pulcinella* as their representative on a comedic stage. In mainstream vaudeville, the Italian stereotype was a slightly modified version of *Pulcinella* that echoed what Italian-Americans were doing on their own stages.

This depiction appears counter to the evident sentiment towards Italian Immigrants at the time. The assassination of police chief David C. Hennessy in 1890, the subsequent lynching of eleven Italian-Americans (six of whom had been tried and acquitted of the murder), and the resulting concern of a naval retaliation by Italy acted as a rally for anti-Italian sentiment.

A review of Italian-related headlines from the New York Times from 1850 to 1914 indicates that the Italian immigrants offered no shortage of shocking news material. An article from May 1893 bears inflammatory headlines: “Mafia’s Code in New-York! Italians who avenge their own grievances in blood! Contempt for processes of law! Assassination a favorite penalty for real or fancied wrong! Methods condemned by Italians!” The text of the article indicates an infiltration of convicted Sicilian and Neapolitan *Mafiosi* detained at Ellis Island, but the separation between them and the rest of the Italian Immigrant population is not made clear: “Recent crimes which illustrate the lawlessness and vindictive impulses of many immigrants from southern Italy – Sicilian and Neapolitan practices compared – natives of other Italian provinces peaceful and industrious as a rule – Jailbirds detained.”⁴⁵

A series of other articles indicates that Italian enclaves in New York were frequent places of news-worthy and violent crime, including the deaths of three people within twelve hours on one city block (the stabbing of an Irishman in broad daylight over his truck bumping an ice cream cart, a vendetta shooting, and a lovers’ spat), a number of articles relating to bombings (a popular means of assassination by Italian anarchists), and several that discuss the overcrowding in Italian districts and their “disgusting habits and homes.”⁴⁶

The immediate question, then, is if the media was eager to portray Italians as potentially dangerous, why were they portrayed on the stage as harmless goofballs? It could be presumed that, with such inflammatory headlines and terrible events taking

⁴⁵ Mafia's Code in New York, *New York Times*, May 16, 1893.

⁴⁶ The Italian Problem, *New York Times*, July 4, 1888.

place, audiences would reject the representation of the benign Italian as inaccurate. The fact was, the influx of Italians happened in a comparatively short time, with over four million Italians arriving in forty short years, predominantly centered along the East Coast. While concerns regarding Italian-American violence were making headlines in New York and New Orleans, vaudeville circuits were decidedly more national, and material needed to appeal to all classes across the country. The adage “will it play in Peoria?” ensured that regional ethnic concerns did not make their way into the nationally touring repertoire. Newspaper headlines, however inflammatory, are excellent at selling newspapers, but do not necessarily represent a collective hysteria. Italy’s later participation alongside the United States during World War I also played a role in quelling any widespread anti-Italian fervor.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE JEWS

While there were significantly fewer Jewish immigrants during the period under consideration, the causes behind their immigration and the communities they developed were unique enough to make an impact on the United States populace.⁴⁷

The assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881 by a group of extremist social revolutionaries known as *Narodnaya Volya* allowed an opportunity for anti-Semitic sentiment and reforms to sweep Russia. Anti-Semitic circles



FIGURE 3: A ROSH HASHANAH GREETING CARD, HEBREW PUBLISHING COMPANY, 1900-1920, OFFSET COLOR LITHOGRAPH POSTCARD.

joined with revolutionaries in blaming the assassination of Czar Alexander on Jewish groups, prompting a series of violent attacks on the Jewish population, known as the Pogroms.⁴⁸ The first pogrom occurred in April 1881 in the town of Kirovograd in the Ukraine, and spread over the next month. The murders of Jewish individuals or families became a regular occurrence. No attempt was made on the part of the government to intervene until the following year, when a new Minister of the Interior circulated a

⁴⁷ It is estimated that 2.2 million Jews immigrated to the United States between 1880 and 1920.

⁴⁸ Pogrom is Russian for an attack, combined with looting, murder and rape of one portion of a population by another. Jews weren't the only victims of Russian Pogroms – previous attacks had been carried out against the Tatars and Armenians, along with a number of previous pogroms against the Jews.

missive threatening regional governors with administrative action for the loss of control of the citizenry.⁴⁹

Another response to the widespread attacks were the May Laws, initially enacted in 1882, which created increasing restrictions on Jewish commerce, internal migration, and education, including restrictions on settlements, purchase of property, and voting rights. In the spring of 1891, most Jews were deported from Moscow, prompting international concern. In President Benjamin Harrison's Annual Message to Congress in December of that year, he criticized the "Harsh measures now being forced against Hebrews in Russia," forcing "great numbers of these unfortunate people" to emigrate.⁵⁰

As the revolutionary struggle in Russia intensified, monarchists used anti-Jewish sentiment freely as a tool to divert popular malcontent. As a result, the press published increasingly inflammatory material and prompted some of the most violent of the pogroms, leading to savage murders and the mutilations of the dead and wounded. Jewish youth responded by forming self-defense organizations. Frequently, revolutionary activity was blamed on the Jews, prompting new pogroms with increasing violence.

In 1905, when the Czar published a manifesto promising civil liberties and the establishment of the Duma (parliament), the celebrants included liberals, Jews and

⁴⁹ Yehuda Slutsky, "Pogroms," Jewish Virtual Library, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0016_0_15895.html (accessed February 24, 2012).

⁵⁰ Ann Healy, "Tsarist Anti-Semitism and Russian-American Relations," *Slavic Review* 42, no. 3 (Autumn, 1983): 408-25.

intelligentsia eager for a more open government.⁵¹ Others responded with pogroms in 657 cities and villages, including Odessa (which left 300 Jews dead and thousands wounded) and Yekaterinoslav (which saw 120 Jews murdered). Since these pogroms were inspired by government insiders, police provided support against the Jewish self-defense organizations.

The third wave of pogroms was prompted by members of both armies during fighting in Ukraine during the Russian Civil War (1917-1922). These pogroms were unspeakably violent, with massacres in Proskurov on February 15, 1919 claiming the lives of 1,700 Jews in a matter of hours, and 600 more murdered the following day in a neighboring village. That none of the perpetrators were punished cemented the notion that the spilling of Jewish blood was not only tolerated, but encouraged. This was cemented in the fall of 1919, when the White Army, under General A.I. Denikin, took on the slogan "Strike at the Jews and Save Russia."⁵²

In the light of the horrific violence against the Jewish people in and around Russia, it is no surprise that Jewish migration increased during this period. The international outrage expressed at each wave of attacks nurtured a tolerance that may not have otherwise been extended. On June 27, 1906, President Roosevelt signed a joint resolution of Congress that passed without discussion, reading: "Resolved, that the people of the United States are horrified by the reports of the massacre of the Hebrews in Russia on account of their race and religion, and that those bereaved

⁵¹ Something that would have occurred much earlier had Czar Alexander II not been assassinated – he was scheduled to reveal his plan for the Duma two days after his murder.

⁵² Ibid.

thereby have the hearty sympathy of the people of this country.”⁵³ Despite America’s rising concern for the increase in eastern European immigrants, this situation was significantly different. The Russian Jews were refugees with congressional and presidential support.

A number of internally organized Jewish relief societies sprang up on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, the Hebrew Sheltering Aid and Immigrant Society assisted new Jewish immigrants in procuring shelter, dispersing to areas other than port cities, and finding employment, along with ensuring that any Russian Jewish immigrant found unfit based on new immigrant standards was not deported back to Russia. In the Midwest, the Jewish Alliance of America provided coursework in English and American civics, along with providing for an organized method of dispersal, for both new immigrants and existing Jewish enclaves. The United Hebrew Charities paid out \$321,311⁵⁴ to its poor in the fiscal year of 1891, nearly half of which was spent by the Russian Refugees Committee.⁵⁵

This sort of organized charity was not new to the international Jewish community. Their long period of persecution had required the Jewish people to become a self-sustaining community. While great differences existed (both linguistically, culturally, and to some extent even religiously) between “western” and “eastern” Jews,

⁵³ President Acts On Russia, *New York Times*, June 28, 1906.

⁵⁴ \$7,695,800, adjusted for inflation.

⁵⁵ Lee Frankel, “Jewish Charities,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science: Problems in Charities and Corrections* 21, no. 3 (May 1903): 47-64.

synagogues and their leadership were usually tasked with coordinating for their congregants' physical as well as spiritual well-beings.

Enclaves of Jewish settlement occurred in many of America's largest cities, with New York City as the largest. The increasing restrictions of Hebrew settlement in Russia, Poland and the Pale of Settlement⁵⁶ created a population of Jewish people who had been increasingly forced into urban living, and many of these immigrants chose to settle in the urban ports. For them, the proximity of other Jews had been an issue of survival and protection, and this need for Jewish community was transplanted along with them. This tendency was noted in the previously mentioned *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*, drafted for the Immigration Commission: "As is well known, Jewish immigrants settle almost entirely in the cities. New York City has the largest Jewish population of any city in the world, now estimated by some at about 1,000,000 or nearly ¼ of the total population."⁵⁷

Some Jewish holidays are traditionally celebrated through music, dance and theatrics. The celebration of *Purim*⁵⁸ includes the performing of the *Purimshpil*, masked satire performed outside of the synagogue, and aren't limited to the *Purim* story from the Book of Esther. Like many of the social inversions celebrated throughout the ages,

⁵⁶ The Pale of Settlement was a region of permissible Jewish settlement in the Russian Empire, established in principle by Empress Catherine II in 1790 and codified in 1804 and 1835. Jews were prohibited from living in some cities even within the Pale, and their travel was heavily restricted. John Klier, "Pale of Settlement," Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Pale_of_Settlement (accessed April 27, 2012).

⁵⁷ *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*, 75.

⁵⁸ Purim celebrates an event from the Book of Esther, during which young Esther marries the King of Persia, Ahashuerus. His prime minister, Haman, plots to kill off all the Jews in the kingdom, and his plot is foiled by Esther and her cousin, a Jewish sage named Mordechai. As the celebration evolved, Mordechai became a standard clown role despite his status as a Jewish prophet.

Purim encourages merriment and pranks. These plays are frequently derivatives of Old Testament stories, similar to the Christian Mystery Plays. By the middle ages, the *Purimshpil* had begun to interweave secular farces into their performances.⁵⁹

While Hebrew has long been the written language of the Jews, it was generally restricted to worship and study. The development of Yiddish, which is a fusion of German dialects with Hebrew, Slavic and Aramaic written with Hebrew letters, allowed for a common secular Jewish language.

Professionally, Jews tended to refrain from theatrical performance, preferring itinerant minstrelsy that, over the years, began to incorporate some dialogue and props. Credit for the transition to a developed, independent theatrical style is given to Abraham Goldfaden (1840-1908), an accomplished popular composer, who developed full-fledged musicals that toured throughout southwestern Russia.⁶⁰ While every memoir written about the time presents a different account of Goldfaden's early molding of distinctly Yiddish Theatre, it is generally accepted that he began as a popular lyricist and songwriter, and that he united with a popular singer, Israel Grodner, and began scripting plays that focused on the evolving Yiddish community.

His early attempts at higher dramas were soundly rejected by audiences, and Goldfaden decided to begin at his audience's level and elevate it. The bulk of his material was derived from existing stories – adapting successful French or German

⁵⁹ Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars: a World History of Yiddish Theater* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 6.

⁶⁰ Edna Nahshon, "The Golden Epoch of Yiddish Theatre in America: A Brief Historical Overview," Jewish Theatre.com, http://www.jewish-theatre.com/visitor/article_display.aspx?articleID=837 (accessed February 24, 2012).

melodramas to Yiddish sensibilities or reviving old Yiddish folktales. Many of his plays revolved around lampooning folk superstitions and out of date customs, such as forced marriages, all told with a heavy comedic hand.⁶¹ The plays were interspersed with musical numbers, comedic sketches, and dance numbers, creating an ethnic vaudeville with its own uniquely modern Yiddish attitude.

When the May Laws were passed, the constraints placed on Russian Jews rendered it nearly impossible for their community to support a theatre community. Yiddish Theatre was banned in 1883 by the Czar, and the actors found themselves following their countrymen, establishing rich theatrical communities in London's Whitechapel and in New York City's Lower East Side.⁶² In New York, ticket prices could be as high as a half week's wages for a woman working in a garment industry sweatshop. The comfort of escapist spectacle set in their native country, addressing the issues of the faithful and the immigrant, in lighthearted, often self-deprecating ways was considered a necessity to many. For the next fifty years, New York was home to a vibrant and competitive Yiddish theatre scene. By 1916, New York City had twenty two Yiddish theatres, which performed one long theatrical piece, and two Yiddish vaudeville houses, which included variety acts interspersed with topical sketches.⁶³

⁶¹ Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars: a World History of Yiddish Theater* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 43-50.

⁶² Some Yiddish actors continued to perform, though they called their performances "German Theatre," and spoke in *Daytshmerish*, a bastard Yiddish-German. Other troupes made due performing in railroad stations, since those were typically not within any defined jurisdiction. (Sandrow, 57-58)

⁶³ Ilene Schneider, *Talk Dirty Yiddish: Beyond Drek: the Curses, Slang, and Street Lingo You Need to Know When You Speak Yiddish* (Avon, Mass.: Adams Media, 2008), 164.

In some cases, such as in “The Green Millionaire,” an entire afternoon prayer service was written into the play. The scripts reveal a Jewish culture torn between the memory of poverty, war and powerlessness associated with the Russian Pogroms and concern for the increasing crime, immorality and the increasing liberality of the younger generations, in particular their willingness to engage romantically with Gentiles. While these elements portend a rather heavy-handed and depressing afternoon at the theatre, they were woven skillfully with clever juxtapositions of Yiddish, English and “Yinglish” word play and a liberal dose of wry humor.

By the late 1870s, popular American theatre had included the “Jew Comic” as a new comedic phenomenon. *The Phoenix*, a comic musical melodrama produced in 1875, featured a comic-relief character named Moses Solomons, who stole the show as it toured for the next couple of years. Representations of Jewish male characters on American stages changed from that of devious crooks to a more bedraggled, oft victimized character with only subtle reminders of the moral turpitude to which they had once been ascribed.⁶⁴

On the vaudeville stages of New York, the latter depiction of the Jewish male is represented, with a more benign relationship to money than previous iterations. In “Hard Luck Levi,” a Jewish fellow discusses a number of ways he has tried to increase his financial luck, among them lying about his wedding anniversary in hopes of getting better gifts: “We’ve been married twenty-two years, but we call it twenty-five, because

⁶⁴ Erdman Harley, “M.B. Curtis and the Making of the American Stage Jew,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 15, no. 1 (Fall, 1995): 28-45.

we thought we'd get nicer presents. But the only one who sent us something was Jakey Goldstein – he sent some silver-coated liver pills.”⁶⁵

In another monologue, “Get Rich Quick Goldstein” discusses managing his daughter’s dowry:

“Sammy proposed to my Minnie because he thought he vos going to get five thousand dollars. And I vould have given it too, if he vould have been villing to take a dollar down und fifty cents a veek. But Sammy said “Nothing doing.” ... Then his brother Yankel “buttoned” in. He said to me, “If you say another, I push your nose around so far that you sneeze in your own ear.”⁶⁶

Within the same monologue, Goldstein is able to distance himself from another immigrant group that was depicted frequently in vaudeville: “Dere’s an Irishman lives right next to me vot’s got red hair. Vell, his hair is so red dot I think if he should efer git it cut, he vould bleed to death. He’s got a red nose, too, aldoogh he swears he don’t drink nodding. I guess his nose is like my gas meter. It registers more than it consumes.” In this bit of dialogue, a hierarchy is implied. Although the bulk of Jewish immigrants are more recent arrivals than the Irish, and their culture, religion and language are vastly different from that of the settled Protestants, they are still considered to be more desirable citizens than the Irish.

The Jewish efforts to disperse throughout the United States were also utilized for comedic fodder:

COHEN – Der day you left New York I bet you vas blue.

⁶⁵ James Madison, “Hard Luck Levi: A Hebrew Monologue.,” *Madison's Budget* 14, 1914, 10-12.

⁶⁶ James Madison, “Get=rich=quick Goldstein: A Hebrew Monologue.,” *Madison's Budget* 14, 1914, 9-10.

LEVI – No, I was gree; I didn't efen know how to use a cash register.
COHEN – Didn't know how to use a cash register?
LEVI – No, but I soon got my hand in.⁶⁷

These Jewish stereotypes mirror internal portrayals of the Jewish people, and were frequently performed by Jews on mainstream stages. Sigmund Freud, analyzing Jewish humor, determined that their jokes demonstrated a profound skepticism towards establishments and a heavy dose of self-criticism.⁶⁸ As this humor evolved, it turned into a humor of sly revenge, and in Jewish stage shows on popular stages, there could be found a number of subtle digs against the establishment. Notable among them is the selection of Margaret Dumont as the WASP straight woman to the ruffled, unscrupulous Groucho Marx. "That remark covers a lot of territory," Marx informed the pious and eternally pursed-lipped Dumont, "As a matter of fact, you cover a lot of territory. Is there any truth to the fact that they're going to tear you down and put up an office building?"⁶⁹ Their 1933 film, *Duck Soup*, was an anarchistic political farce that Benito Mussolini found so personally insulting he banned it in Italy.⁷⁰

The Jewish people, having imported a strong performance culture, utilized the popularity of vaudeville to present a Yiddish theatre that assisted new immigrants with speedy acclamation. By giving voice to social concerns in a comedic forum and incorporating American customs alongside their own, Jews in urban American enclaves

⁶⁷ James Madison, "Cohen & Levi in New York: An Original Talking Act for Two Hebrew Comedians," *Madison's Budget* 14, 1914, 22-24.

⁶⁸ Joseph Boskin and Joseph Dorinson, "Ethnic Humor: Subversion and Survival," in "American Humor," special issue, *American Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 81-97.

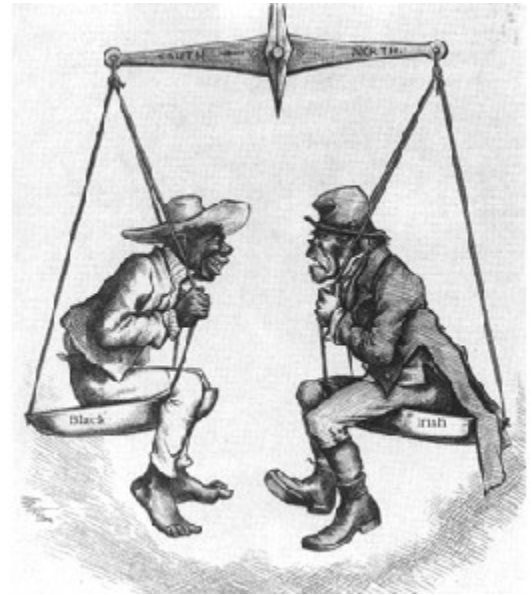
⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Tim Dirks. "Duck Soup." American Movie Classics Film Site. <http://www.filmsite.org/duck.html> (Accessed 26 April 2012).

assuaged the trauma of their recent exile and the cultural shock of their new environment. Meanwhile, on the mainstream vaudeville stages, Americans recognized the sly wit of the Jewish people by creating an archetype that was resilient, clever, and shrewd, and not unlike that of the Jews' own internal representations.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE IRISH

The inclusion of the Irish as a target ethnicity was unique in that the Irish were not a recent immigrant group, and their depiction in vaudeville and elsewhere was not benign. While the Irish immigrated in large numbers throughout the 19th Century, by the 1880s, Irish immigration was barely more than a trickle, and the Germans had long surpassed them by over one million persons (more if you include the fact the many of the immigrating Austrians were of German origin). However Germans, if they show up in vaudeville sketches at all, are portrayed as methodical, slightly dim-witted workers, and disappeared almost entirely from the stage at the start of World War I.⁷¹



The Irish shared physical, linguistic and cultural traits with most Americans, and had been settling American soil since the early 1700s. Unlike Italians and Jews, the Irish were no longer “new” immigrants struggling to assimilate. By vaudeville’s epoch, Ulster

⁷¹ The only vaudeville script in the Library of Congress dealing with German Immigrants is *The Frankfurter Man*. Germans included in the various *Budgets* are typically the straight men, with their careful, methodical ways foiling Jewish attempts to scam him or providing the may pole around which the Irish caper.

had contributed four U.S. Presidents and one Vice President,⁷² and the immigrants spurred by the Potato Famine had produced three or four generations on American soil, giving Irish-Americans ample time to develop respectable trades and “Americanize.”

Ireland has long been plagued with deep religious division. In the 1790s, the Orange Order was founded in Ireland to support Protestant William of Orange and to actively promote the suppression of Irish Catholics. For nearly a century, the organization achieved this by various means, including exclusion from government and outright violence and murder.⁷³ Forty-three Orange Order lodges were established in the United States, and they were influential in the Know-Nothing movement. The violence in Ireland emigrated with the Irish Catholics as many Irish-American Protestants (self-described as either Orangemen, Scots-Irish, or Ulstermen) sought to continue Catholic oppression on American soil – the Orange Riots in 1870 and 1871 began when the Orangemen parade commemorating the Battle of the Boyne went through Hell’s Kitchen, where parade members taunted the new Irish Catholic immigrants living in those slums.

The distinction between northern Protestant and Southern Catholic Irish likely contributes to the continued belittling of the Irish in vaudeville and other popular media.⁷⁴ Ireland has long been divided along religious lines, and this sentiment was clearly stowed aboard as Englishmen colonized American soil, where Northern Irish

⁷² Andrew Jackson, James Monroe, James Knox Polk, John C. Calhoun and James Buchanan were all of Ulster Protestant stock.

⁷³ Early Orangemen tactics included raiding Catholic masses and opening fire on the congregants, killing the priest and several of the assembled, “Murder in Ireland,” *Boston Commercial Gazette*, 7 October 1816.

⁷⁴ Comic strips of the time period also included a number of arguably unflattering Irish characters, including the Happy Hooligan, The Yellow Kid and Jiggs.

(Protestant Ulstermen) were given the name Scots-Irish to distinguish them from their Roman Catholic counterparts. According to early pamphlets from the Know Nothings, it was the fact that many of the new Irish immigrants were Catholic that made them unsuitable Americans. In *Startling Facts for Native Americans called "Know-Nothings,"* the author attributes the flux of Irish immigrants not to widespread famine, but to an elaborate popish design to overthrow republican ideals by inundating American shores with Catholics.⁷⁵ "And shall we, the descendants of the pilgrims, who fled from tyranny and opposition; who planted the Protestant religion in the wilds of America; who watered it with their tears, and invoked the blessing of God with their most ardent prayers; shall we stand still and quietly submit to this worst of all bondage? Forbid it, gracious Heaven!"⁷⁶

While the Know-Nothings had long since dissolved by vaudeville's beginnings in 1870, the vaudevillian scripts and political cartoons of the era demonstrate that ill sentiment toward Irish Catholics remained. Vaudeville paints a picture of the Irish as habitually drunk, with a tendency towards domestic violence, thievery and brawling. If Irish are depicted in positions of authority (predominantly as police officers), they are generally corrupt, incompetent, drunk, or some combination of the three. A typical example of Irish portrayal in vaudeville is from a sketch entitled "A Morning's Hearing,"

⁷⁵ Surprisingly, the Know-Nothing pamphlet rarely mentions the Irish, aside from describing locations of Irish persecution and other incidental statements. The French were more frequently mentioned (as blood-sucking Jesuits, p. 86), as were Italians. This indicates that Nativist sentiment was more predominantly based on religion than country of origin, which may contribute to the later selection of targeted ethnicities in vaudeville.

⁷⁶ *Startling Facts for Native Americans called "Know-Nothings," or a vivid presentation of the Dangers to American Liberty, to be Apperhended [sic] from Foreign Influence.* New York: 128 Nassau Street, Opposite Nassau Bank, 1855, 68.

during which a magistrate hears three cases – a professor caught body snatching for teaching material for his anatomy students, a young bowery girl caught shoplifting, and a sixty five year old Irish widow.

MAGISTRATE – Officer Drake, what is the charge against the pr- the party before me, sir.

OFFICER DRAKE – ‘Sault an’ battery, your honor.

MRS. BLANK – Och, make it salt an’ bother, yez shpalpeen [sic].⁷⁷

....

MRS. BLANK – Barney Flinn, if this divil wasn’t here, Oi’d take yez and do to yez what I used to do when yez was a bie, and me name’s not Mary Ann Blank...

MAGISTRATE – Mary Ann Blank (*writing*), you seem to be among the affluence [sic] of strong drink, me thinks. (*to Drake*) Officer Drake, did the persons informing against Mary Ann Blank say they would appear today against her?

OFFICER DRAKE – No, your honor; and to tell the truth, I don’t think they could appear if they wanted, for she treated them very un-neighborly.

MAGISTRATE – Do you hear that, Mrs. Blank?

MRS. BLANK – I do; an’ oi tell yez, it was divil’s own toime I had a-lickin’ them all.⁷⁸

The text goes on to describe the fact that the widow beat up six men with a pump handle, and then later got into yet another fight which blackened her eye. Her reasoning was that she was a widow who had to look after herself.

In “Sam Todd of Yale,” Molly serves as a nurse for a sanitarium, putting her squarely in one of the most highly trained female professions. However, she’s an Irish woman.

MOLLY (*handkerchief still to eye*) – I was at Hoolihan’s wake last night and drank too much tea and I’m far from being well

⁷⁷ It’s presumed they meant “spalpeen,” a derivative of the Irish Gaelic spailpín, generally meaning “rascal.”

⁷⁸ Paul Hyde Woodsworth. "A Morning's Hearing: A one act comedy." Library of Congress: Rare Book and Special Collections Division, 1896, 9.

– (*shows black eye*). Shure [sic] it's not my fault. My Denny was flirting with that new arrival from Tipperary. To get square, I purred up to the Cop on our block – He's an old admirer of mine. The Cop was so delighted he filled me with more tea – I think it was mixed tea – Denny got mad, put my eye in mourning, licked the copper – got pinched and it's ten dollars or ten days for Denny."⁷⁹

The only purpose for Molly to be Irish, drinking or fighting is to set up the notion that she needs money (to allow her to be swayed later into letting a rich woman use one of the electric baths without the doctor's consent). In the early decades of the twentieth century, there were a number of suitable non-ethnically oriented reasons for an individual to be desperate enough to take a bribe to facilitate the plot point, and the inclusion of the drinking and fighting was unnecessary to the advancement of the story. Her accomplishment as a nurse is negated by her Irishness, and gives a quick reason why a woman in a better-paying profession would be apt to take a bribe.

Another sketch revolves around a daughter conspiring to sober up her Irish father, since he spends his days too drunk to actually give his consent to her pending marriage:

McGUIRE (*singing*) - I'm not as stubborn as a horse / I'm gentle as can be, / You have to drive a horse to drink, / but you DON'T have to drive me. (*he enters as he sings the last line*)

JENNY (*sadly*) - Oh, father, are you DRUNK again?

McGUIRE: Not agin, Jinny, not agin, (*hic*). No man could do this twice. (*Staggers*)

JENNY (*Goes to him, petting him*): Oh, daddy, when are you going to stop drinking?

⁷⁹ Harry Lacy. "Sam Todd of Yale: a comedy in one act." Library of Congress: Rare Book and Special Collections Division, 1898, 3.

McGUIRE: Whin they stop makin' it me child, (*hic*) whin they stop makin' it... (*Tries to look at Danny with one eye*) Jinny, who are these two young min, begorra, they look like twins.⁸⁰

The rest of the script includes McGuire chasing off Danny, the suitor, with threats of violence, forgetting Jenny's birthday and then confiscating Danny's birthday present to her to sell for liquor, and his presumably alcohol related death. At his wake, they discuss his epitaph, and settle on "here lies the body of Jerry McGuire, He drank enough booze to extinguish a fire, We've loaded his grave with ale, beer and stout, for the fire he's gone to is hard to put out."⁸¹ In the last few lines, it's revealed that it's all been a dream, and McGuire decides to give up drinking and become a better father. Drunkenness has been turned to a moral purpose, and poor Irish Jenny and her inescapably drunk Irish father are used an example of those whose lives would be improved when the 18th Amendment was passed banning the sale of alcohol five years after this script was written.

A deviation from the drunkard stereotype is the lower class social misfit, thrown into sharp contrast with someone from the upper class (one cemented in the widely circulated comic strip, *Bringing up Father*, which remained in circulation until 2000). In "An Undesirable Neighbor," an Irish flower salesman is paid a visit by a wealthy young widow come to purchase a flower arrangement for her departed husband's grave. Dooley is completely unable to understand her highbrow speech, accidentally destroys her hat by mistaking the imitation flowers for real ones, and manages to repeatedly sit

⁸⁰ Junie McCree. "His Last Drink: a comedy Irish playlet, with a moral." Library of Congress: Rare Book and Special Collections Division, 1914, 5.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 14.

on her hat pins. When the destruction of the hat is discovered, the nearly amorous scene takes a decided turn:

SALLY (*Grabbing him with pronounced force and giving him a vigorous shaking*) – Funny, is it? It strikes you as being a huge joke, does it? (*Shakes him more violently than before.*) Why you little monkey-faced monstrosity, I'll shake you to pieces.

DOOLEY – Why don't you shake somebody your size?

SALLY (*Same bus.*) – Don't you say size to me, you insignificant little puppet. (*Throws him upon the stage and after a funny fall Dennis winds up at her feet in a thoroughly subdued condition.*)⁸²

In this sketch, the stereotype of the Irish as drunk or violent is not present. In fact, the character of Dennis Dooley, essentially a loveable working class goofball, would be entirely without ethnic markers if it weren't for the author's note on the first page: "As Irish dialects differ so perceptibly I have spelled all words correctly, leaving the performer to use his own intonations in the character of Dennis Dooley." Why, in 1900, did it matter whether or not the working fellow was Irish? Other than the prescribed accent, there seems to be no purpose for Dooley to be Irish, unless his illiteracy and emasculation by the middle class female drew a more favorable response from audiences.

The treatment and stereotype of Irish-Americans were surprising enough to merit an entire chapter in a travel diary of an Oxford-educated Englishman. He describes Irish-Americans as being considered in the same social caste as African-Americans, relegated to the hardest of all work. He also noted that the attributes with which the Irish-Americans were imbued were markedly different from what the English

⁸² Hall, William D. "An undesirable neighbor: a laughable effusion in one act." Library of Congress: Rare Book and Special Collections Division, 1900, 16-17.

presume of their Irish neighbors. “Whenever Irish-Americans will discuss with you the evil repute of their people,” he says, “it is to drinking they generally attribute it. Whether they really drink more than the Americans, they express some doubt, and with reason; but they say they have the name of doing so. And it is to this vice that Mr. Maguire attributes the frequency of crime among them – a frequency which is the more startling when one considers how the same race in Ireland ... is remarkable for its freedom from crime.”⁸³

A notable difference between Irish American depictions and those of the Jewish and Italian immigrants is the lack of a strong Irish theatre culture prior to immigration. Though the Irish bardic tradition is celebrated, 18th and 19th century playwrights and performers moved to London to develop their careers, thus contributing to British theatre instead of developing a unique performance voice of their own. As the Irish immigrated, it is clear that many of their cultural amusements took root on American soil (with particular emphasis on music and sporting). The historic hardships and struggles suffered by the Irish were predominantly conveyed through the medium of music and poetry, rather than through satirical performance as in the traditions of the Jews and Italians.

By the turn of the century, most Irish-Americans had been thoroughly integrated into American society. For decades, they had fought African Americans and Nativists to claim urban communities for themselves. As new immigrants arrived to compete for resources, casual labor positions and inexpensive housing in particular, the urban Irish

⁸³ John White. *Sketches from America*. London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1870.

responded with increasing territoriality and demonstrations of masculine bravado.⁸⁴ The Irish had participated in the democratic process, found leadership positions in labor unions and provided the bulk of police and fire services in the communities in which they lived. On the East Coast, few examples existed of Irish Catholics who had risen to great respectability, and individuals of any regional power were known to be corrupt. That many of vaudeville's most beloved depictions of Irish alcoholism and belligerence were written and performed by Irish actors demonstrates that they had, to some extent, embraced the stereotype.⁸⁵

That the Irish had been cultural participants in the theatrical riots of the mid-19th century is important. The fervor with which the laboring class (increasingly composed of Irish) embraced the idea of America as a land that rewarded self-improvement and rugged individualism with class mobility was at odds with the fact that second and third generation Irish Americans had not, by and large, achieved the American dream. This discordance needed to be rectified in one of two ways: either the American promise of class mobility was a sham, or the Irish must be culturally deficient in some way. Vaudeville's depiction of the Irish provided reinforcement of the latter: as long as their culture was beleaguered with the stereotype of drunkenness, violence and corruption, the rest of the nation was released of any complicity in their inability to ascend.

⁸⁴ James R Barrett and David R Roediger, "The Irish and the 'Americanization' of the 'New Immigrants' in the Streets and in the Churches of the Urban United States, 1900-1930," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 3-33.

⁸⁵ Among these are monologist J. W. Kelly, the comedic duo of Harrigan and Hart, and many more. As Trav S.D., author of *No Applause, Just Throw Money: The Book that Made Vaudeville Famous*, said; "the 19th Century Irish in America faced a stark choice: do a jig or dig a ditch."

CONCLUSION

In 1913, members of the Chicago Anti-Stage Jew Ridicule Committee began a survey of Jewish comics who performed in the area and began a letter campaign to ban offensive performances from the stage. Later that year, the Chicago Record-Herald published the following item under their "Gossip of the Stage" column:

Unless they promise to be very circumspect in word, deed and make-up all comic roustabouts whose stock in trade is gibes at the Jewish race will part company with the management of the Majestic Theatre at the expiration of their present contracts. Lyman P. Glover, manager of the theatre, says he does not intend to be bothered with these performers anymore.⁸⁶

The Irish eliminated unfavorable stage depictions of themselves in a manner more traditional on American stages. In 1907, the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the United Irish Societies of New York determined the Russell Brothers' "Irish Servant Girls" disrespectful to Irish women. For nearly three weeks, each time the Russell Brothers attempted to perform their skit, a legion of Irishmen appeared to shout down the comics and pelt them with vegetables, stones, bricks and theatre seats. The Russell Brothers never performed on the vaudeville main stage again.⁸⁷

The ways in which vaudeville depicted the Italians, Jews and Irish were dramatically different. That each ethnicity was as responsible for the shaping of their stage portrayal as they were in removing those representations from the stage is

⁸⁶ Distler, Paul Antonie. "Exit the Racial Comics." *Educational Theatre Journal, Special American Theatre Issue*, Oct. 1966: 247-254, 250.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 251. A day by day account of the Russell Brothers' torment by these Irish societies is available in the *New York Telegraph*, January 22, 1907 through February 13, 1907.

indicative of their assimilation. As the benign stereotypes were popularly accepted, resistance towards their real-life counterparts (no matter how inaccurate the portrayal) was minimized. As the New Immigrants produced second and third generations, their accents and other cultural idiosyncrasies were abandoned, removing the topicality of the exaggerated ethnic portrayal.

The popularity of the ethnic stereotype on American stages was directly tied to the public anxiety regarding the changing face of American society. For humor to be successful, it relies on reflecting, distorting, and pacifying the fears of its audience. As it became clear that the new immigrant had assimilated, their children had Americanized, and their numbers dwindled, the threat had been neutralized both on and off the stage.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ These trends continued into early film. See *Humor and Social Change in 20th Century America*, by Joseph Poskin.

APPENDIX: IMMIGRATION DATA⁸⁹

	1840	1841	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849
Scandinavia	55	195	553	1,748	1,311	928	1,916	1,307	903	3,473
Ireland	39,430	37,772	51,342	19,670	33,490	44,821	51,752	105,536	112,934	159,398
England	2,613	53,870	21,967	8,430	14,350	19,199	22,033	23,157	34,811	54,860
Russia	-	174	28	6	13	1	248	5	1	44
Italy	37	179	100	117	141	137	151	164	241	209
Germany	29,704	15,291	20,370	14,441	20,731	34,355	57,561	74,281	58,465	60,235
Austria	2	106	44	135	165	541	43	-	-	-
	Revolutions									
	Crop Failures									
	Potato Famine									

	1850	1851	1852	1853	1854	1855	1856	1857	1858	1859
Scandinavia	1,569	2,424	4,103	3,364	3,531	821	1,157	1,712	2,430	1,091
Ireland	159,398	159,398	159,398	159,398	101,606	49,627	54,349	54,361	26,873	35,216
England	50,843	51,276	39,958	37,354	57,831	46,396	43,532	57,710	28,640	25,831
Russia	31	1	2	3	2	13	9	25	246	91
Italy	431	447	351	555	1,263	1,052	1,365	1,007	1,240	932
Germany	78,896	72,482	145,918	141,946	215,009	71,918	71,028	91,781	45,310	41,784
Austria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Crop Failures									
	Potato Famine									
	Know-Nothing Party									

	1860	1861	1862	1863	1864	1865	1866	1867	1868	1869
Scandinavia	298	616	892	1,627	2,249	6,109	12,633	7,055	11,166	16,068
Ireland	48,637	23,797	23,351	55,916	63,523	81,486	63,344	51,795	43,619	68,370
England	29,127	19,214	24,103	66,177	52,800	26,907	12,690	46,226	12,135	54,376
Russia	65	34	79	77	256	183	287	205	141	343
Italy	1,019	811	566	547	600	942	1,382	1,624	891	1,489
Germany	54,491	31,661	27,529	33,162	57,276	83,424	115,892	133,426	55,831	131,042
Austria	-	51	111	85	230	422	93	692	192	1,499
	American Civil War									
	Homestead Act									

⁸⁹ Data from 1840-1907 are derived from the Immigration Commission report, published in 1908. Data from 1908-1921 are derived from Census material.

	1870	1871	1872	1873	1874	1875	1876	1877	1878	1879
Scandinavia	13,216	9,418	11,421	16,247	16,096	11,566	10,776	9,579	10,149	18,346
Ireland	73,513	65,557	53,024	55,706	53,707	37,957	19,575	14,569	15,932	20,013
England	85,421	74,838	71,824	87,382	61,356	47,456	58,967	23,300	21,907	29,412
Russia	907	673	1,018	1,634	4,073	7,997	4,775	6,599	3,048	4,453
Italy	2,891	2,816	4,190	8,757	7,666	3,631	3,015	3,195	4,344	5,791
Germany	118,225	82,554	141,109	149,671	87,291	47,769	31,937	29,298	29,313	34,602
Austria	4,425	4,887	4,410	7,112	8,850	7,658	6,276	5,396	5,150	5,963
	Franco-Prussian War									

	1880	1881	1882	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889
Scandinavia	59,081	72,465	93,708	61,675	43,526	14,604	40,510	59,105	72,962	48,805
Ireland	71,603	72,342	76,432	81,486	63,344	51,795	49,619	68,370	73,513	65,557
England	72,100	80,349	101,335	75,035	65,240	56,573	61,953	91,693	107,057	86,816
Russia	5,014	5,041	16,918	9,909	12,689	17,158	17,800	30,766	33,487	33,916
Italy	12,354	15,401	32,159	31,792	16,510	13,642	21,315	47,622	51,558	25,307
Germany	84,638	210,485	250,630	194,786	179,676	124,443	84,403	106,865	109,717	99,538
Austria	17,267	27,935	29,150	27,625	36,571	27,309	28,680	40,264	45,811	34,174
	Warsaw, Kiev and Odessa Pogroms									
	Immigration Acts Passed (.50 tax on all immigrants, 1882: Alien Contract Labor Law, 1885)									

	1890	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899
Scandinavia	41,002	49,448	56,170	51,225	27,397	22,941	30,032	19,004	17,336	19,502
Ireland	53,024	55,706	51,383	43,578	30,231	46,304	40,262	28,421	25,158	-
England	69,084	66,195	41,486	34,146	21,519	27,231	22,984	11,882	11,675	45,123
Russia	35,598	47,426	81,511	4,230	39,278	35,907	51,435	25,816	29,828	60,982
Italy	52,003	76,055	61,631	72,145	42,977	35,427	68,060	59,431	58,613	77,419
Germany	92,427	113,554	119,168	78,756	53,989	32,173	31,885	22,533	17,111	17,479
Austria	56,199	71,042	76,937	57,420	38,638	33,401	65,103	33,031	39,797	62,491
	Klondike Gold Rush									
	Immigration Act: Those Convicted of "misdemeanors of moral turpitude" excluded									
	Spanish-American War									

	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909
Scandinavia	28,225	35,579	48,378	70,489	51,571	51,655	45,040	42,722	25,221	28,101
Ireland	35,730	30,561	29,138	35,310	36,142	52,945	34,995	34,530	30,556	25,033
England	10,715	14,284	16,135	32,362	49,881	81,686	65,357	76,377	60,537	45,209
Russia	90,787	85,257	107,347	136,093	145,141	184,897	215,665	258,943	156,711	120,460
Italy	100,135	135,996	178,375	230,622	193,296	221,479	273,120	285,731	128,503	183,218
Germany	18,507	21,651	28,304	40,086	46,380	40,574	37,564	37,807	32,309	25,540
Austria	114,847	113,390	171,989	206,011	177,156	275,693	265,138	338,452	168,509	170,191
	McKinley Shot by anarchist									
	Anarchist Exclusion Act									
	Dillingham Commission (Immigration Commission)									
	Pogroms									
	Irish-Jewish Riot in New York City									

	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
Scandinavia	41,283	42,285	27,554	58,056	29,391	33,685	27,837	13,771	6,506	5,590
Ireland	29,855	29,112	25,879	27,876	24,688	14,569	8,639	5,406	331	474
England	66,821	73,384	57,148	74,548	48,729	32,836	20,116	10,735	2,516	6,797
Russia	186,792	158,721	162,395	291,040	255,660	26,961	7,842	12,716	4,242	1,403
Italy	215,537	182,882	157,134	222,260	283,738	49,688	33,665	34,596	5,250	1,884
Germany	31,283	32,061	27,788	34,329	35,734	7,795	2,877	1,857	447	52
Austria	258,737	-	-	254,825	-	19,255	3,191	-	-	-
	Pogroms									
	World War I									
	Immigration Act of 1917 includes literacy requirements									

	1920	1921
Scandinavia	13,444	22,854
Ireland	9,691	28,435
England	38,471	51,142
Russia	1,751	10,193
Italy	95,145	222,260
Germany	1,001	6,803
Austria	-	-
	Pogroms	
	Emergency Quota Act	

	1840s	1850s	1860s	1870s	Total
Scandinavia	12,389	22,202	58,713	126,814	220,118
Ireland	656,145	959,624	523,838	409,553	2,549,160
England	255,290	439,371	343,755	561,863	1,600,279
Russia	520	423	1,670	35,177	37,790
Italy	1,476	8,643	9,871	46,296	66,286
Germany	385,434	976,072	723,734	751,769	2,837,009
Austria	1,036	-	3,375	60,127	64,538
	1,312,290	2,406,335	1,664,956	1,991,599	7,375,180

	1880s	1890s	1900s	1910s	1920-1921	Total
Scandinavia	566,441	334,057	426,981	285,958	36,298	1,649,735
Ireland	674,061	374,067	344,940	166,829	38,126	1,598,023
England	798,151	351,325	452,543	393,630	89,613	2,085,262
Russia	182,698	412,011	1,501,301	1,107,772	11,944	3,215,726
Italy	267,660	603,761	1,930,475	1,186,634	317,405	4,305,935
Germany	1,445,181	579,075	328,722	174,223	7,804	2,535,005
Austria	314,786	534,059	2,001,376	536,008	-	3,386,229
	4,248,978	3,188,355	6,986,338	3,851,054	501,190	18,775,915

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