

PETER ROBERTS AND THE YMCA AMERICANIZATION PROGRAM 1907- WORLD WAR I

BY PAUL MCBRIDE*

FEW PEOPLE react receptively to the prospect of dramatic change in their society. Change augurs insecurity and uncertainty as well as unwelcome alteration in accepted living patterns. Such was the threat which the arrival of large numbers of immigrants posed for established Americans during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Whipped into near hysteria by dire warnings of race suicide, reports of sinister Popish or Jewish plots to take over America, and theories of Anglo-Saxon superiority, many Americans, conservative and progressive alike, angrily demanded immigration restriction or selective deportation to maintain social stability. Even those willing to accommodate the newcomers, however, agreed that the nation's institutions and values were under assault. Consequently they embarked upon elaborate programs designed to neutralize the effects of the immigrants' presence—that is to Americanize them. Americanization, properly administered, would help immigrants adopt the life style, habits, and values necessary to prosper in industrial America. At the same time, it would erase those ethnic characteristics which the dominant Anglo-Saxon middle class found offensive or dangerous.

This study will examine the role of perhaps the most extensively-based Americanizing agency operating in the progressive era—the Young Men's Christian Association. The YMCA sponsored programs for immigrants in virtually every city and reached out to construction sites, factories, night schools, lumber camps, and even prisons to help in the Americanization process. Inexplicably, even historians of the association have ignored its significant contribution to the process of

* The author is Associate Professor of History at Ithaca College.

the making of Americans.¹ Those who made that contribution, however, found that they had to meet the needs not only of the immigrants, but the business interests who supported the YMCA and an influential group of "Y" leaders to whom immigrants were very threatening indeed.

The Young Men's Christian Association responded rather belatedly yet with great enthusiasm to the impact of immigration in the United States. Not until February, 1907, a quarter century after the settlement house movement began, did the YMCA organize an Immigration Division entrusted with developing a comprehensive program for immigrants. Taking full advantage of its international organization, the "Y" sent workers into the European embarkation ports to pass out pamphlets, offer help, and proselytize among the would-be immigrants on behalf of Evangelical Protestantism in general and the YMCA in particular. It sent uniformed volunteers aboard the passenger boats to help ease the burden of passage. It stationed YMCA representatives at Ellis Island to cushion the chaos of final inspection. At all debarkation ports and in virtually every city in the United States the "Y" established multi-faceted programs for immigrants which included recreational and religious services, medical aid, legal, and banking advice as well as "improvement" courses in English, citizenship, naturalization procedures, municipal law, sanitation, and "specially adapted literature."²

Among the first members of the Immigration Division was Dr. Peter Roberts, himself an English immigrant. Roberts received his doctorate in divinity from Yale University in 1886 and for the next twenty-one years held pastorates in Scranton, Olyphant, and Mahanoy City, Pennsylvania. Shaken by the devastation of the great coal strikes of 1900 and 1902, Roberts wrote two excellent studies of the anthracite

1. The standard study of the YMCA, C. Howard Hopkins, *The History of the YMCA in North America* (New York, 1951) virtually ignores the immigration work. Other major studies of the YMCA likewise ignore the subject, such as Clifford M. Drury, *San Francisco YMCA: One Hundred Years by the Golden Gate, 1853-1953* (Glendale, California, 1963); George S. Eddy, *A Century with Youth* (New York, 1944); Owen Pence, *The YMCA and Social Need: A Study of Institutional Adaptation* (New York, 1946); and William B. Whiteside, *The Boston YMCA and The Community Need—A Century's Evolution, 1851-1951* (New York, 1951). Edward George Hartmann, in *The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant* (New York, 1948) gives some attention to the activities of the YMCA and the North American Civic League for Immigrants.

2. "Report of the Conference of Denominational Representatives," (Philadelphia, 16 February 1907, p. 2. This report is in the Industrial Immigration Work Box 1909-1930, YMCA Historical Library, New York City (hereafter cited as Immigration Box, YMCAHL).

industry and the immigrants who worked in it. The first, *The Anthracite Coal Industry*, examined the economic impact of the industry on the region and its peoples. The second, *Anthracite Coal Communities*, published three years later in 1904, sympathetically portrayed the "social and moral life" of the immigrant workers.

Anthracite Coal Communities was particularly significant because it revealed a sympathy and understanding of Slavic immigrants well ahead of its time. Not until 1910, six years *after* Roberts' study, did Emily Greene Balch publish her famous *Our Slavic Fellow Citizens*. Roberts described the Slavs as hard working, courageous, and loyal. He condemned mine operators and local businessmen who overworked, underpaid, and defrauded them and their children. He decried the debilitating effect of shoddy and unsanitary housing upon Slavic family life. In short, he understood, as many about him did not, that the Slav miners were more victims of deplorable endemic conditions than their cause. A recent scholar of the Slavic coal community has correctly described Roberts as "the best informed student of anthracite society."³

During the strike of 1902 Roberts worked closely with the many agencies which sought to help the coal miners and their families—particularly with the Anthracite Committee of the YMCA. Three years after publication of his second book he gave up his pastorate at Mahanoy City to become Special Secretary for Immigration Affairs for the YMCA. As immigration secretary, Roberts soon developed a wide-ranging educational program for immigrants including a sequence of courses in English, civics, and history. He wrote all of his own textbooks, even a songbook for immigrants, and distributed them throughout the country billed as "The Roberts Method" for teaching foreigners. He traveled from coast to coast visiting corporations, school boards, church groups, and even prisons, demonstrating the Roberts Method, emphasizing its adaptability to business needs,

3. *The Anthracite Coal Industry* (New York, 1901); *Anthracite Coal Communities* (New York, 1904). Recent assessment was by Victor R. Greene in *The Slavic Community on Strike* (Notre Dame, 1968), pp. 157–158. While he served as Immigration Secretary, Roberts published two books on Immigration, *Immigrant Races in North America* (New York, 1910); and *The New Immigration* (New York, 1912). "Biographical Data Sheet" provided to the author by Virginia Downes, Head Librarian, YMCAHL. Also, Gerd Korman, *Industrialization Immigrants and Americanizers* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1967), pp. 141–143. Edith Terry Bremer "Development of Private Social Work with the Foreign Born," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 257 (March 1949): 140, and "Foreign Community and Immigration Work of the National Young Women's Christian Association" *The Immigrant in America Review*, 1 (January 1916): 73–82.

and enhancing his reputation. One of his most impressive demonstrations involved bringing immigrants in off the street who could neither speak nor understand English and having them master the first lesson within an hour or so.⁴

Roberts divided his basic English lessons into three series: domestic, industrial, and commercial. In each series he built his lessons around the practical, everyday experiences of the immigrant. For example, the first lesson of the domestic series, which he used to demonstrate his method, was centered around waking up in the morning. With each sentence, Roberts would act out the action involved, practically undressing himself to the tittering delight of all watching. Other topics included preparing breakfast, the use of table utensils, and going to bed. The industrial and commercial series included lessons in going to work, looking for a job, quitting a job, writing a letter, sending money home, and many other experiences common to most immigrants. His acting was rather "hammy" to the delight of his pupils, and within a short while he had trained hundreds of volunteer YMCA teachers in his method.⁵

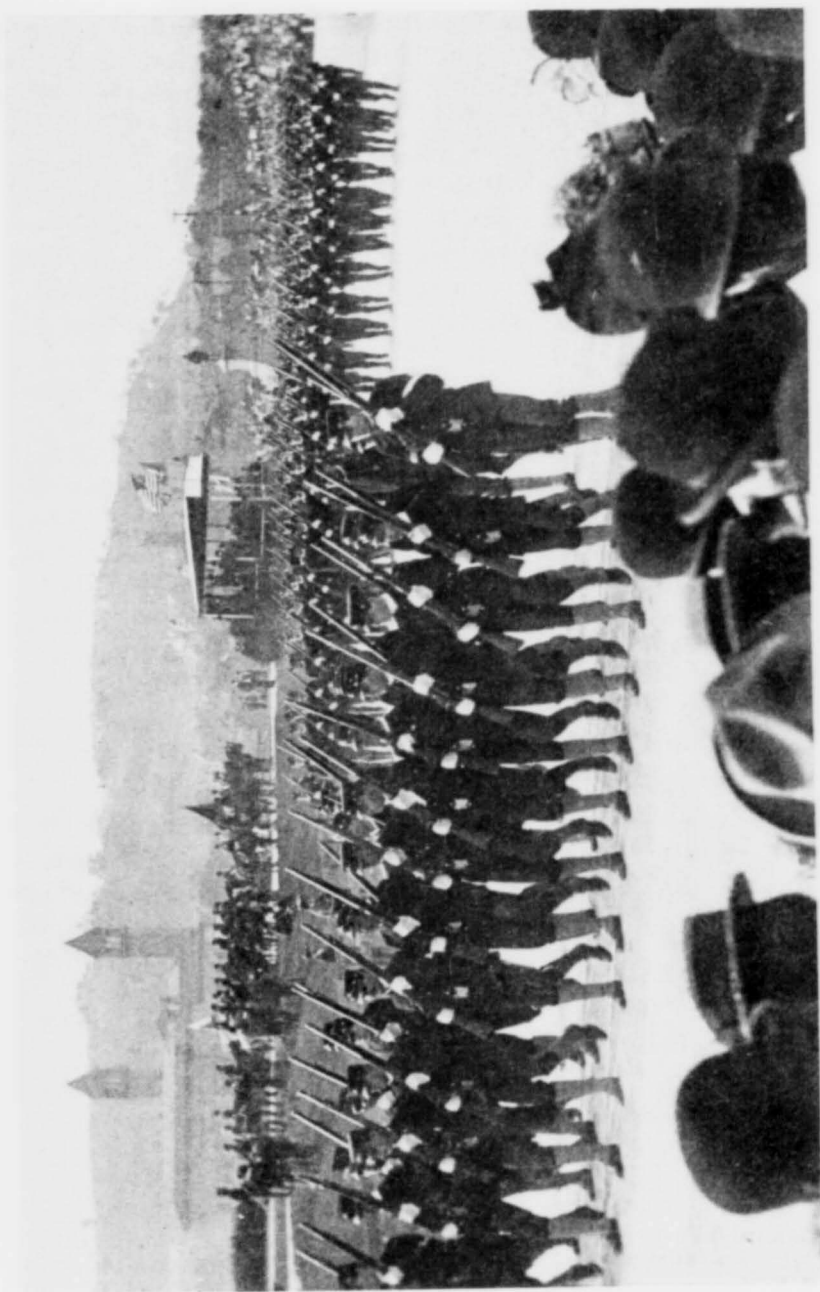
A man of incessant activity and inexhaustible energy, Roberts not only developed and revised his program and texts, he also promoted them with vigor. Copyrighting his system in 1908, he sold his method to numerous public and private schools. In November 1908 alone, he traveled and lectured through Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio, holding institutes and seminars. In January and February 1909 Roberts enrolled over 1,600 immigrants in his English program and in March, he opened eight centers for teaching English in New York City alone.⁶ In April 1910, he introduced his system at Sing Sing and Western Penitentiary in Pennsylvania. By June 1910 enrollment had doubled in a year to 9,000 immigrants. By May 1911 that figure had jumped to 12,000 and one month later to 13,000.⁷

4. Peter Roberts, "The Roberts Method of Teaching English to Foreigners," *Bulletin No. 3, Illinois Miners and Mechanics Institute* (Urbana, Illinois, 1914), pp. 37-40; also Peter Roberts, "The YMCA Teaching Foreign Speaking Men," *The Immigrants in America Review*, 1 (June 1915): 18-23; and "The YMCA Among the Immigrants," *Survey*, 29 (15 February 1913): 697-700. See also Edward A. Halsey, "Our Brothers the Immigrants," *The World Today*, 19 (December 1910): 1375-1381.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40. Roberts explained his technique in two interesting and detailed teaching manuals: *English for Coming Americans, Teacher's Aids* (New York, 1912) and *English for Coming Canadians, Teacher's Manual* (New York, 1912.)

6. "Industrial Committee Reports," Immigration Box YMCAHL, December 1908; February, March, and April 1909.

7. *Ibid.*, February 1910; May and June 1911.



PETER ROBERTS

Courtesy of the YMCA Historical Library, New York City

Most of Roberts' promotional effort was geared toward industry, which in part explains his increasing value to the Association. He offered to set up a program for industry to teach English to foreign workers during the noon hour and to tailor his "message" to the desires of industry. Thus, by late 1910, Scranton, Pittsburgh, and Wilmerding, Pennsylvania as well as Cleveland and Chicago had full time immigration secretaries paid by local business to teach foreigners. Boston, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and Duluth followed shortly afterward. In November 1911 lumber interests hired YMCA English teachers to serve foreign speaking lumberjacks in Maine. And in early 1914 the Ford Motor Company hired the YMCA to inaugurate an English program among its 15,000 workers, 85% of whom were foreign born. Ford paid the "entire salary" of the association secretary.⁸

The primary purpose of the English programs was to inculcate habits of safety among the foreign workers. Obviously, industry had difficulty with those workers who could not understand English because they could not easily follow directions, were harder to train, and presented an added safety hazard. But most industries allowed Roberts to use the programs he developed only if he altered their contents to fit industry's particular needs, that is, to teach safety habits applicable to their job.

The United States Steel Company, for example, established a Roberts Method program in 1913. A typical lesson in the tailor-made Roberts English went like this:

LESSON II

Start work	I go to the Mill to start work.
Clock House	First I go to the Clock House.
Card rack	I take my number card from the CARD RACK.
Go	I go to the CLOCK.
Put	I put my CARD in the CLOCK.
Ring	I RING the CLOCK.
Shows	The clock shows the TIME I START WORK.
Sign	I see A SIGN ON THE CLOCK HOUSE.
Safety rules	It reads I MUST KNOW THE SAFETY RULES.

8. Ibid., October 1910, November 1911, April 1914, and February 1915.

Think	I think of the LITTLE RULE BOOK.
Was given	It was given at the Employment Office.
Must read	I MUST READ THE RULE BOOK.
Safety rules	I WANT TO KNOW ALL OF THE SAFETY RULES.
Do not want	I do not want to get hurt.
Be careful	I will be careful not to hurt the other men.
Leave	I leave the CLOCK HOUSE for my work.
Roadway	I GO BY THE ROADWAY.
Not run across	I DO NOT RUN ACROSS THE RAILROAD YARDS.
Might be struck	I MIGHT BE STRUCK BY A TRAIN OF CARS
Look both ways	When I cross a railroad track I look both ways.
Train coming	I see if there is a train coming.
Is clear	THE WAY IS CLEAR—THERE IS NOTHING COMING ON THE TRACK.
Cross	I cross the track on the roadway.
Arrive	I arrive at my place of work.
Must not climb	I must not climb over the MACHINERY.
Go by	I GO BY THE PASSAGEWAYS THERE.
Use the stairs	I USE THE STAIRS WHICH ARE OVER THE MACHINERY. ⁹

In like manner, when the YMCA began teaching English to foreign workers of International Harvester in 1911, the main thrust of the program was to make them efficient and obedient. One of the lessons was designed to inculcate the habits of punctuality, orderliness, and discipline:

I hear the whistle. I must hurry.
 I hear the five minute whistle.
 It is time to go into the shop.
 I take my check for the gate board and hang it on the department board.

9. United States Steel Corporation, "Lessons for Teaching Foreigners English by the Roberts Method in Use by the YMCA Teachers in Our Mill Districts," *Bulletin No. 4* (November 1913), p. 8, Immigration Box, YMCAHL. An excellent example of the enthusiasm generated within the industrial leadership by the Roberts Method can be found in G. W. Tupper, "The Efficiency of Mill Operatives," pamphlet found in the Immigration Box, YMCAHL.

I change my clothes and get ready to work.
 The starting whistle blows.
 I eat my lunch.
 It is forbidden to eat until then.
 The whistle blows at five minutes of starting time.
 I get ready to go to work.
 I work until the whistle blows to quit.
 I leave my place nice and clean.
 I put all my clothes in my locker.
 I go home.¹⁰

Other lessons given under industry's auspices covered efficiency in various jobs, safety rules for machinery, and what to do in case of injury or accident. U.S. Steel presented a lesson which emphasized the importance of obtaining company treatment in case of injury. To a similar lesson, International Harvester added the warning:

No benefits will be paid if you are hurt while scuffling [*sic*] or fooling.
 No benefits will be paid if you are hurt or get sick as the result of having been drinking.¹¹

Thus the Roberts English program, industrial style, centered around one aspect only of immigrant life, the job. The YMCA, although equipped with a much broader program, was practically helpless to combat the narrower business approach. The English program, however well-intentioned, was molded and controlled by the business benefactors who paid for the teachers, provided the facilities, and donated to the association. Never was the adage more appropriate, "He who pays the piper calls the tune."

Although the beginning English program, because of the wide sponsorship of industry, became largely subverted to industrial ends, Roberts never lost sight of the secondary goal of helping immigrants to deal with the everyday problems which arose in American urban life. He designed the commercial series, for example, to help combat the everyday exploitation to which immigrants fell victim. The lesson on "taking a train" explained to the foreigner that the policeman was the best guide when directions were needed and that he

10. *Harvester World*, 3 (March 1912): 31 quoted in Korman, *Immigrants and Americanizers*, pp. 144-45.

11. U.S. Steel, *Bulletin No. 4*, p. 8. Korman, *Immigrants and Americanizers*, p. 16.

must take care to keep the receipt for his baggage. The lesson on "pay day" instructed the immigrant how to correct errors in the pay envelope, and how much coal, rent, and groceries should cost. Other lessons involved tips on buying clothes, mailing letters, sending money to the folks back home, depositing money in the bank, and buying a lot or home. All of this advice concerned incidents that all immigrants faced at one time or another and was both well-intentioned and practical.¹²

But there was another message, more subtle perhaps, in the Roberts English program. Roberts wanted to provide lessons which would help immigrants to think, act, dress, and adopt the life style of middle class Americans. To be sure, Roberts' brand of assimilation could scarcely be characterized as militantly nationalistic. In fact, his method was almost subliminal. In 1912 Roberts wrote, "I believe in the immigrant. He has in him the making of an American, provided a sympathetic hand guides him and smooths the path. . . ." Concerning immigrant dress and life style he maintained that the subtle suggestion in English lessons of such terms as "piano," "parlor," "a clean house," and "collar and tie" would tend to raise the immigrant's standard of living by acquainting him with middle class life style.¹³

Roberts' "soft" approach to Americanization was based on his belief that immigrants would reflect the standards of the society which they experienced. Thus, if through education, they were exposed to "the right ideas, right moral values, right political concepts, and examples of justice, purity, liberty, and freedom,"¹⁴ they would themselves absorb these values. To Roberts, the YMCA provided the proper environment and the Roberts Method the right cultural influence.

Roberts had vehicles other than his beginning English course to convey his version of Americanism. In his advanced English, he used extensive readings, carefully chosen in cooperation with such impeccably patriotic sources as the Daughters of American Revolution and the North American Civic League for Immigrants. A literature committee of the NACL supervised the selection of all of Roberts' readings.¹⁵

12. All of these lessons were printed on drill cards found in several boxes of Roberts method materials at YMCAHL.

13. Roberts, *The New Immigration*, p. vii and "The Roberts Method. . . ." *Bulletin No. 3*, p. 41.

14. Peter Roberts, "The Ethnic Factors in Immigrants to North America," *ibid.*, p. 28.

15. Korman, *Immigrants and Americanizers*, p. 142. "Industrial Committee Reports," April 1907.

Some of the advanced English readings were designed to emphasize the benevolence of American industry and the sky-is-the-limit concept of opportunity in America. Two stories in the advanced course, for example, told of a delighted immigrant who worked for a kind-hearted boss at the U.S. Steel Corporation. "Boss Brown treats his men right, and he expects his men to treat him right," the lesson read. The story also told of a poor immigrant who lost his job because he "thought he could get good money and loaf on the job."¹⁶

Other lessons in the advanced English courses drummed home the idea that immigrants had entered the land of rags-to-riches. One such lesson, for example, explained that immigrants had prospered marvelously in the United States because they were "willing to work hard, to obey the laws of the land." Of course, the United States welcomed all immigrants of "good moral character" and provided them with "greater freedom, more happiness, and larger chances of success" than ever they had in Europe. In return for these blessings, the lesson advised that the immigrant show his gratitude "by giving what is best in him to the country."¹⁷

In his textbook *Civics for Coming Americans*, Roberts explained to the immigrant the workings of the two party system, voting procedures, the primary system, and the basics of American history. Here too he took the opportunity to reinforce political orthodoxy and to attack that menace to all goodness and honesty, the political boss. Written in question and answer format, the textbook defined political bosses as, "master politicians who are corrupt, tyrannical, and unscrupulous." Acknowledging that the bosses were shrewd and farsighted, *Civics for Coming Americans* nevertheless warned that "invariably such men win office for private and selfish interests, and the people's business is neglected." The book described the political machine as the bosses' "clansmen" who run the party in their own interests and who come to power because of the indifference of the voters. It predicted that the machine would be ruined only when the voters were "alert, intelligent, and demand good men in office."¹⁸

Whether subtle or not, Roberts' prescription for Americanization was far less harsh than that advocated by a powerful group of militant nationalists in the YMCA leadership. Led by many of the

16. Peter Roberts, *English Reading Lessons* (New York, 1917), pp. 14-16.

17. Peter Roberts, *English for Coming Americans, Advanced Course, First Reader* (New York, 1918), 14th edition, p. 78.

18. Peter Roberts, *Civics for Coming Americans* (New York, 1917), p. 100.

old guard association secretaries, particularly the Boston group, these ardent Americanizers saw immigrants primarily as a threat to the values and institutions of their social group. To them, the goal of the YMCA education effort was to root out radicalism of any kind except an uncritical love of country.

The militant Boston group was led by George W. Mehaffey, general secretary of the Boston YMCA, Arthur Stoddard Johnson, its president, and D. Chauncey Brewer, chairman of the literature committee, which screened Roberts' selections. In 1907, these three founded the North American Civil League for Immigrants under the auspices of the Boston YMCA. Several months later they made the NACL a separate entity, but maintained the closest cooperation with the YMCA.¹⁹ In the words of one of its founders, the NACL was "a patriotic organization" established to aid the immigrant "to greater industrial efficiency, to better comprehension of the rights and privileges of American citizenship, to make him a loyal,

19. William B. Whiteside, *The Boston YMCA and the Community Need—A Century's Evolution 1851-1951* (New York, 1951), pp. 153-54. Also "Conference on Work With Immigrants," Boston, 10 December 1909, p. 3, Immigration Box, YMCAHL (hereafter cited as "Boston Immigration Conference"). Also "Industrial Committee Reports," annual summary report, 1908. D. Chauncey Brewer, "A Patriotic Movement for the Assimilation of Immigrants", *Editorial Review*, 3 (August 1910): 786-800. See also, North American Civic League for Immigrants, *Annual Report*, 1910-1911, p. 9. Officers and members of the League were: D. Chauncey Brewer, lawyer and civic leader, and active in the Boston Chamber of Commerce, president; Bernard J. Rothwell, industrialist and president of the Boston Chamber of Commerce, vice-president; Francis B. Sears, treasurer. Board of Managers: Nathan L. Amster; Jacob P. Bates; Lucius Tuttle, president of the Boston & Maine Railroad; Samuel B. Capen, officer and director of Torrey, Brighton, & Capen Co.; Edward H. Haskell, president of the Haskell-Dawes Machine Co. and the American Rotary Power Co.; Richard C. Humphreys; Arthur S. Johnson, president of the Boston YMCA; the Rt. Rev. William Lawrence; William E. Murdock; Bernard J. Rothwell; the Most Rev. William H. O'Connell; William T. Rich; and the officers of the league, all of Boston. Non-Boston members included: Frank A. Vanderlip, president of the National City Bank of New York City; Thomas M. Mulry; Jacob A. Riis; Felix Warburg, prominent banker and philanthropist; and Robert Watchorn of New York City; James Cardinal Gibbons; Charles England, president of the Baltimore Chamber of Commerce; and Jacob H. Hollander, economist and financier advisor, of Baltimore; Clinton R. Woodruff, lawyer and member of the Pennsylvania legislature; and William R. Tucker, secretary of the Philadelphia National Board of Trade, of Philadelphia. Later members included E. J. Buffington, president of the Illinois Steel Company; L. Wilbur Messer, general secretary of the Chicago YMCA; George E. Roberts; and John F. Smulsky, immigrant banker, president of the Northwestern Trust and Savings Bank, and vice-president of the Chicago Chamber of Commerce, of Chicago; Charles H. Pugh, financier; and John Wanamaker, prominent merchant of Philadelphia. Cited in Hartmann, *The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant*, pp. 38-39ff.

patriotic citizen, and to give him a clean appreciation of Christian manhood.”²⁰

In reality, however, the NACL was contemptuous of the immigrant and fearful of his threat to American institutions. One pamphlet the NACL distributed complained that the “tide [of immigrants] is increasing . . . we have reached the saturation point.” Another warned that “our institutions are imperiled by the influx of great numbers of people—speaking different languages: unacquainted with domestic theories of government and whose sympathies are alienated by those who prey upon them.”²¹

NACL president, D. Chauncey Brewer, openly expressed the contempt and condescension with which his organization approached the immigrant. Addressing the Boston YMCA membership in 1909, Brewer supported the general YMCA goal of creating “centers of healthful influence for young men.” But he objected vigorously to opening YMCA doors to the dregs of Europe. “If they are marched in directly to our homelike buildings,” Brewer thundered, “they would not only soil and disfigure them, but they would, . . . pollute the physical and the moral atmosphere.” He advocated the establishment of segregated rooms for immigrants in their own communities where they could be used “without embarrassing the central administration in its larger work.” The distasteful alternative would have been to set aside special areas of the established “Y’s” equipped with “information bureaus adapted to the use of the peasants.” To Brewer, such a solution was unacceptable because YMCA work “must be limited to the reception and ennobling of men who have become neat and respectable in their person and attire.” The YMCA, Brewer warned, must not be allowed to lose its “proper ethical and religious” perspective by cluttering itself with special programs for “the raw product” from Europe. He believed most immigrants to be beneath the reach of the “Y’s” helping hand. They were “raw crass things,” he hissed, “their eyes are dull—physically they are fit, but mentally and spiritually asleep.” Brewer concluded his address with the ominous warning that the American people faced “the greatest crisis that a free people was ever called upon to meet.” He called the YMCA membership to its “patriotic duty . . . immigrants

20. “Boston Immigration Conference,” p. 3.

21. North American Civic League for Immigrants, Pamphlets (*circa* 1909), Immigration Box, YMCAHL. The Boston YMCA cooperated with the Rhode Island Associations in publishing and distributing pamphlets of a similar alarmist nature. One concluded, “Patriotism calls us to immediate action in every industrial community towards assimilating these new Americans to Rhode Island.”

upon immigrants upon immigrants are to be directed, taught, succored, led to a just appreciation of our institutions.”²²

But whatever its intentions to teach and succor, the NACL harassed and harangued the immigrant much more. Frightened into believing that its most hysterical fears about the immigrant were well founded, the NACL responded to IWW activity in Massachusetts by arming itself for Armageddon against radicalism. The NACL report of 1913–1914 suggested the extent to which anti-radicalism had gripped the organization. In Cambridge, NACL secretaries combated “foreigners under radical influence.” At Waterburg, the league, by its “constructive work,” forced the IWW to leave. At Lynn, the league moved to calm disorders in a shoe factory, and at Peabody, NACL agents “engaged in constructive work” to counteract “threatening conditions.” Local industry quickly came to view the NACL as the troubleshooting, de-radicalizing arm of the YMCA.²³

To Brewer and the NACL, the mirror image of anti-radicalism was unquestioning patriotism. Thus, while the league busied itself combatting socialists, IWW spokesmen, and other assorted radicals, it also developed a reservoir of literature designed to promote an emotional love of country. One handout entitled “I Am An American” consisted of two paragraphs. The first, “The Native American,” the second, “The Naturalized American.” The latter concluded in these stirring words:

The history of my ancestors is a trail of blood to the palace gate of the czar. But then the dream came—the dream of America. In the light of Liberty’s torch the atom of dust became a man and the straw in the wind became a woman for the first time. “See,” said my father, pointing to the flag that fluttered near, “that flag of stars and stripes is yours; it is the emblem of the promised land. It means the hope of humanity. Live for it; die for it.” Under the open sky of my new country I swore to do so, and every drop of blood in me will keep that vow. I am proud of my future. I am an American.²⁴

22. “Boston Immigration Conference,” pp. 4–5.

23. North American Civic League for Immigrants, *Annual Report 1913–1914* (Boston, 1914), pp. 4–6. Business response cited, p. 14. Other sketches of the League appear in Korman, *Immigrants and Americanizers*, pp. 148–149, and Hartmann, *The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant*, pp. 90–97, and chapter 2.

24. Pamphlet, Immigration Box, YMCAHL.

Other league pamphlets were considerably more elaborate than "I Am An American." One continued for eighteen pages and contained four "messages" driving home such themes as the importance of communicating in English, the necessity for staunch loyalty to the new nation, and the lessons of the life of Abraham Lincoln. One message on the history of the United States told how freedom conquered tyranny in the American revolution, how opportunity was unbound for those who, like the pioneers, were "industrious, frugal, honest, and brave," and how the immigrant could "easily understand" how noble men might differently interpret the Constitution and therefore wage civil war.²⁵

Thus, the NACL tried to convince the immigrant that in this land of unlimited opportunity, freedom, and justice, prosperity could be his were he only to think, act, and live like an American. In the process, of course, he should give his undivided allegiance to his new flag and join the battle against those who did not. Clearly, the strident tones of Americanization, NACL style, constituted an important force within the general structure of the YMCA immigration program. NACL and YMCA leadership cross-fertilized each other and in fact were often indistinguishable.

The influence of the militant nationalists was readily apparent in the Roberts advanced English course. The readings included numerous selections on historical, patriotic themes, particularly civil war or revolutionary settings. There were also many excerpts from emotional sources such as the following from Newell Dwight Hillis:

If possible, their patriotism is more intense than that of the native-born Americans. The reason is very simple. "They know the pit from whence they were digged." Liberty is very sweet to men who have been in a dungeon. It is hunger that makes bread so good to the taste. After the long darkness of oppression, the light of liberty is good to the eyes. Did any of you hear that Italian citizen when he told us why he came to this new land? "Why? Do you ask me, why did I come to your country? Was it that your skies were bluer than Naples? Your cathedrals grander? Your statues more beautiful? Your art more precious? Oh, no! One night, sleeping in my Italian home, I saw a vision and in my dreams, I beheld Liberty, God's dear child, come down to the sands of your seashore. Standing there, she stood with her beautiful face looking eastward toward my land,

25. North American Civic League for Immigrants, *Messages for New Comers to the United States* (Boston, n.d.), Immigration Box, YMCAHL.

and stretching out her white arms, she whispered: 'Venite! Venite! Come, come my dear children.' Obedient to Liberty's command, lo, all these Italians are here." Those of you who heard that apostrophe know that eloquence is not yet dead. Nor can it die so long as these people cherish such unbounded enthusiasm toward the republic that already they call it "My Country."²⁶

The militant patriots considerably influenced not only the Roberts method, but the entire effort of the Immigration Department toward immigrants. The department distributed a wide variety of literature and pamphlets reminiscent of the onslaught of the NACL. Some of the titles tell much of their emphasis: "Winners in American Democracy," "Americanization Through Christian Leadership," "Americanization YMCA," and "The Immigrant Guide." This last pamphlet urged the immigrant to "live respectable and clean . . . don't gamble . . . and avoid all persons with unclean lips. . . ." Another repeated the theme of how easily foreigners could rise to the top in America.²⁷

The immigrant gatherings put on by the YMCA also reflected the militant nationalism of the NACL influence. Whether simple English classes, health clinics, or outdoor celebrations, the immigrant programs were dominated by a sense of patriotism. At an English class in New York City, the entire classroom wall was draped with an American flag. A picture of a "Patriotic Health Talk" put on by the Chicago YMCA, showed a meeting hall filled with young boys surrounded by American flags every thirty feet or so. Another English class was pictured in a large auditorium where the entire stage was draped with a huge American flag, approximately thirty feet by ten feet. At still another large YMCA hall, several foreign men and women stood before a stage dominated by three huge flags and a giant picture of George Washington. The immigrant attending YMCA rallies or classes could scarcely escape the message that he was expected to worship American heroes and cement American loyalties.²⁸

26. Peter Roberts, *English for Coming Americans, Second Reader* (New York, 1912), p. 158. See also "Immigrant Blood in National Leaders," 161-162, "What is Patriotism," pp. 177-178, and "What is Americanization," pp. 183-184.

27. "Winners in American Democracy". These and many other pamphlets were found in the Immigration Box, YMCAHL.

28. Pictures and postcards in Immigration Box. See also "Industrial Service, New York City," *The Intercollegian*, 32 (June 1910): 254-256.

Whatever differences Roberts might have had with the militant nationalists were overshadowed by the coming of World War I. The Immigration Department reported that it was "promoting preparedness by helping hundreds of coming Americans to get the Christian idea of Americanism along with their citizenship papers." His new task was to convince the immigrants that they should not merely be Americans, but that they should fight. In some army camps, the YMCA conducted over 200 indoctrination classes in order to "help them [the immigrants] to understand why they are in the service and to reconcile them to it." The Industrial Department also went to work for the government as a troubleshooter in labor-management flare-ups. By 1918, in fact, the Association was sure enough of its reputation that it bargained rather roughly with the government. One committee report asserted, "It is understood that no commitment will be made [to help the government as a labor troubleshooter] until the financial resources are definitely assured."²⁹

The YMCA reacted to the war in two ways. First, it redoubled its efforts to Americanize the foreigner.³⁰ More dramatically, the YMCA organized an intensified propaganda barrage to solidify its hold on the loyalty of immigrant soldiers. Peter Roberts wrote a new text for use in the cantonment areas. The selections in his indoctrination reader equalled in unabashed chauvinism anything the Committee on Public Information ever put out. The chapter headings read like a D.A.R. rally: "Democracy or Despotism—Which?," "The Eyes of the World Are On You," "The Message of the Flag," "The Fourth of July," "The Friends of Freedom," "Our War," "All Classes Respond," "A Mother in Camp." One article, "War on Women," rhetorically asked the immigrant, "You are not willing to do your bit to stop the Kaiser from murdering women and children?" Incongruously, almost comically interspersed between each selection were instructions to the teacher: "Read the lesson carefully again and let the pupils classify the pronouns in it. . . . Take the second paragraph and let the pupils point out the verbs and state which pass on the action to an object."³¹ Roberts never lost sight of his Roberts Method to teaching English.

29. "Industrial Committee Reports," March, October, and November, 1917, and March 1918.

30. See for example, the pamphlet "Don't Be A Slacker" (New York, 1917), which urges YMCA workers to intensify their assault on "the unassimilated foreign element in our population," Immigration Box, YMCAHL.

31. Peter Roberts, *English Reader for Use in Cantonment Areas* (New York, 1917), pp. 46-47 and *passim*.

The war did not force the YMCA to inaugurate an Americanization program characterized by emotional patriotism. Rather, the militant nationalism which had been an important ingredient in the immigration program from the beginning came to full maturity during the war. The YMCA became a part of this militant cultural onslaught in two ways. First, since the Association was so dependent upon local industry, its industrial educational program became industry's tool. To businessmen, immigrants were employees. Industrialists demanded training in which the careful inculcation of values and habits would transform a largely pre-industrial people into useful and responsive workers in the industrial system. The YMCA program, so far as local industry altered it, became a partner in this attempt at cultural metamorphosis. Second, the YMCA immigration program was profoundly influenced—perhaps “controlled” is not too strong a term—by the militant nationalists who saw the immigrant not as a worker, but as a threat. Unless these patriotic Americans could transform the immigrant into a docile, non-radical, middle-class, enthusiastically patriotic American, they would not accept him.

In balance, this analysis of the YMCA may be harsh. Focusing as it does on the limitations of the immigration programs, on the restrictions of business paternalism, and on the influence of the militant patriots, it may not do justice to what the YMCA did accomplish. Thousands of immigrants, after all, did learn rudimentary English through the Roberts method. There is no way to discover how many immigrant lives and limbs were saved in industry by virtue of the worker's ability to react to a warning in time, or to understand instructions properly for new and hazardous machinery. Nor were all of the values and habits undesirable which the cultural assault attempted to inculcate in the foreigners. The method was often harsh and even crude. Sadly, many in the YMCA leadership failed to see the worth and dignity of the immigrants as they were. However, there seems no reason to believe that in these failings YMCA workers were any different from their more famous and much better-studied fellows in the settlement and charities movements. Nor did the immigrants react to them any differently. Some immigrants, such as the Jewish prodigy who described a YMCA Americanization class as “humiliating tripe,” were indignant at the more strident aspects of the YMCA programs. But probably the vast majority of the common immigrants agreed with the appreciation expressed by the following immigrant adult in a letter to his YMCA teacher:

My Dir School [teacher]

I am waitring letter. I am student. I laik thet naith [night] school wery moch. I keep the wery strong a [nd] wont [want] work wery hart a biciem [and become] wais [wise] boy. Letter to ticher.

Felix³²

More than any other single person, Peter Roberts, an immigrant from Mahanoy City, had created the YMCA program for foreigners. He had to defer to the wishes of his business benefactors and allow input of militant nationalists within the YMCA structure. Nonetheless, Roberts' pervasive influence on the Y's educational system was indelible. Through his texts, songbooks, and hundreds of classroom presentations, Roberts emigrated from Eastern Pennsylvania into the consciousness and values of thousands of newcomers to industrial America.

32. Norbert Wiener, *Ex Prodigy: My Childhood and Youth* (New York, 1953), pp. 266–267. Letter from Felix contained in pamphlet published by the Chicago YMCA (1911), Immigration Box, YMCAHL. Several interesting immigrant letters of petition for night school English classes are reprinted in “Night Schools for Americanizing Immigrants,” *The Immigrants in America Review*, 2 (April 1916): 35–37. Five fascinating letters from Polish immigrants concerning many aspects of their life in America are in W. I. Thomas, “Five Polish Peasant Letters,” *ibid.* pp. 58–63.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR TEACHERS (CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO GODLINESS)

Slates should be cleaned with a sponge or damp cloth, and not in the usual way, that of spitting on them and rubbing out with the hand.

[South-Western Normal School at California, Pa. *Normal Review*,
October 1885.]

. . . suggestions . . . at a recent meeting of practice teachers . . .

5. Do not sharpen pencils on the floor.

[South-Western Normal School at California, Pa. *Normal Review*,
February 1886.]

CONTRIBUTED BY SCHUYLER C. MARSHALL, CALIFORNIA STATE
COLLEGE.