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Article Summary: Luebke's essay lists major works of Czech-American history and outlines topics still available for scholarly exploration. He provides examples of works on other ethnic groups that use new concepts and methods.

Cataloging Information:

Scholarly Works on Czech-Americans Cited:

Tomáš Čapek, *Czechs in America*, 1920

Kenneth Miller, *Czecho-Slovaks in America*, 1922

Rose Rosicky, *A History of the Czechs (Bohemians) in Nebraska*, 1929

M Mark Stolarik, *Growing Up on the South Side:*

Three Generations of Slovaks in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1880-1976, 1985

Josef J Barton, *Peasants and Strangers:*

Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950, 1975

June G Alexander, *The Immigrant Church and Community:*

Pittsburgh's Slovak Catholics and Lutherans, 1880-1915, 1987

Photographs / Images: fig 94: Vladislavský sál in the Hradčany, Prague; fig 95: Rose Rosicky; fig 96: US map showing the principal Czech communities in 1910; fig 97: Czechs protesting the 1968 takeover in the Václavské náměstí, Prague; fig 98: Sena Herman and Olie Duras in Wilber, 1910

Czech-American Immigration: Some Historiographical Observations

By Frederick C. Luebke

Czech migration to the United States is a field that offers rich opportunities for productive research to professional scholars and amateurs alike. During the waning decades of the authoritarian, multi-national Habsburg Monarchy, the Czechs sent approximately a third of a million emigrants to the United States (figs. 69, 94, 96). De-

Professor Josef Opatrný explains elsewhere in this issue. He identifies legacies of the Habsburg regime: the complex of languages, the competition of ethnic and national identities, and how these variables have complicated archival research. Furthermore, in the several decades following World War II, the Communist regime in Czecho-

World War, there was a considerable interest in Czech immigration history, both on the national and state or local levels. Tomáš Čapek published his pioneering study, *Čechy in America*, in 1920 (fig. 67). Two years later a survey, *Czecho-Slovaks in America*, by Kenneth Miller, a sociologist, treated the background of Czech and Slovak immigrants in Europe and their experiences in the United States. In Nebraska Rose Rosicky produced her state-based study of Czech settlement (fig. 95).² A variety of other books and articles, most of them treating limited aspects of Czech immigration, were published during the interwar period, but gradu-



Fig.94. The Vladislavský sál in the Hradčany, Prague, where Ferdinand of Austria, first Habsburg King of Bohemia, began his consolidation of power over the Czech estates during the St. Bartholomew Diet of 1547. (D. Murphy, NSHS)

spite this impressive number, neither their emigration from Europe nor their settlement in the United States has received scholarly attention comparable to that given many other ethnic groups either in Austria-Hungary or elsewhere in Europe.¹

There are several explanations for this lack of research, both in the Czech Republic and in the United States, as

slovakia effectively discouraged communication among Czechoslovak and American scholars, historians, and social scientists. This was not merely the consequence of the siege mentality that gripped the government: Communist dogma teaches that common people are united by their opposition to capitalist oppression, not by the development of any sense of ethnicity and patriotism, which would be counterproductive to Communist goals (fig. 97).

When Czechoslovakia emerged from the wreckage wrought by the First



Fig.95. Rose Rosicky, historian of Czech-Nebraska. (NSHS C998-138)

ally, as the first generation of immigrants aged and as economic depression stimulated the consideration of socioeconomic rather than ethnocultural questions, interest in Czech immigration flagged.

The tone of books and articles pub-

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lished in the 1920s and 1930s (as one should expect of work produced in that time) tended to be strongly filiopietistic. Their authors emphasized both the many contributions of individual immigrants to American economic, social, and cultural development, and the maintenance of immigrant language and culture. Factual in character and descriptive of separate ethnic group experience, these studies usually stressed the role of ethnic leaders and institutions, but they rarely explored the relationship between the elite and ordinary people. The intricacies of internal ethnic group structures or the relationships of ethnic societies to other immigrant groups or to American society generally were not explored.³

During the 1940s and 1950s, historians generally ignored the immigrant experience, although there were several important books published on American immigrant history then—the works of Oscar Handlin immediately spring to mind.⁴ The emphasis in those years, the era of Senator Joseph McCarthy, was on the ways in which Americans were alike, not on how they differed. Scholarly work that focused on immigrant experiences was usually conceptualized in terms of assimilation: the process by which the differences that mark an immigrant culture are gradually attenuated over time until the ethnic group is virtually indistinguishable from the rest of society (fig. 81).

Sociologists especially were interested in assimilation. Among the many books and articles they produced, none was more influential than Milton Gordon's *Assimilation in American Life* (1964). Although this book was in some respects the climax of a scholarly trend and was studied by many immigration historians, it appeared just as the Black Revolution of the 1960s introduced a new emphasis on pluralism in American society.⁵ The anxiety and sense of urgency produced by the race riots of that decade stimulated



Fig.96. *Map of the United States showing the principal Czech communities in 1910. Adapted from Tomáš Čapek, The Čechs (Bohemians) in America, (1920).*

Americans to reassess the place of all racial and ethnic minority groups in our society and to use the political process to achieve goals that hitherto had been denied them. At the same time, there was a resurgence of vitality in immigration history that paralleled in some respects the new interest in African-American history.⁶

Since then the majority of American historians interested in immigration studies have shifted their conceptual foundations from an assimilationist to a pluralist point of view, arguing that the genius of American society rests in its multicultural diversity, not in its unity.⁷ This is not to suggest that the assimilationist interpretation has disappeared, but rather that the emphasis on pluralism has stimulated an enormous number of scholarly books and articles in the field of immigration history. Moreover, this body of scholarly literature has employed a remarkable array of new concepts and methods useful for the study of ethnic groups in American history.

This, I believe, is an important point for the study of Czech-American history. It seems apparent that, because scholarly discourse between Eastern bloc countries and the West was inhibited by ideological hostilities for several decades, Czech scholars found it difficult to keep up with the conceptual

and methodological advances made in immigration studies by American, Canadian, Swedish, Danish, German, Dutch, Italian, and other historians. At the same time, few American historians with training in the historiography of immigration could read Czech, much less train themselves to make use of Czech sources, many of which were not available to them.

The result is that to this day American historians of immigration know little about the detailed pattern of emigration from Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia, compared to other western and northern European countries.⁸ The large pattern is clear, of course, but to my knowledge no one has studied Czech emigration in the way historians have studied the phenomenon in various western and northern European countries.

An outstanding example of such work is Robert Ostergren's study of Swedish migration.⁹ His book, *A Community Transplanted*, is a model for historians who wish to integrate systematic comparisons in time, space, and culture into their studies. By delving into the rich resources of local history, Ostergren (a cultural geographer) has described in wonderful detail what life was like, socially and economically, in one Swedish province at the time of the nineteenth-century

emigration. He connects religious variables to social discontent; he explores attitudes toward land ownership, inheritance patterns, marriage, family, and fertility; and then he shows how these variables were related to emigration.

The list of other works published in the last two decades that probe the history of European emigration is truly impressive. I recommend Jon Gjerde's analysis of Norwegian emigration from Balestrand, Kristian Hvidt's history of emigration from Denmark, Walter Kamphoefner's study of German exodus from Westfalia, Robert Swierenga on the Dutch, Bernard Bailyn and David Hackett Fischer on the English, Dino Cinel and Donna Gabaccia on the Italians, and Kerby Miller on the Irish. These and other historians have immersed themselves in European sources and have discovered a variety of new ways to solve the kinds of research problems that have heretofore inhibited the study of Czech migration.¹⁰

Is it possible to apply the concepts and methods used by Professor Ostergren to the history of Czech emigration? Do the sources permit such research? I encourage students of Czech emigration to find out, to adapt new conceptual schemes to the unique character of Czech sources, and to test the methods used by these historians. Bohemia and Moravia, of course, are not Sweden. The sources for the study of Czech emigration are vastly complicated by the interplay of language and ethnicity in Austrian governance. But by taking advantage of the exemplary scholarship of Ostergren, Gjerde, and other scholars, historians of Czech emigration may ask new questions of the past and that may lead to the discovery of new sources that can be used in new ways appropriate to the peculiarities of Czech history. New questions and new sources will in turn lead to a richer understanding of the past.

The same approach may be used for the study of Czech immigrants and



Fig.97. Czechs protest the 1968 Soviet takeover in the Václavské náměstí in Prague. (Courtesy Czech Heritage Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Archives & Special Collections; NSHS C998.1-569)

their communities in the United States.¹¹ I offer just a few examples of recent scholarship: In the field of urban history, I recommend John Bodnar's general history of immigrants in urban America, Kathleen Conzen's

study of immigrants in Milwaukee, and Stanley Nadel's history of Germans in New York City (fig. 75).¹² Students of the Czech immigrant experience will be attracted to Mark Stolarik's study of three generations of Slovaks in Bethle-

hem, Pennsylvania.¹³ Josef Barton's study of Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in Cleveland is an excellent example of a multi-ethnic, comparative approach.¹⁴ In the history of immigrant agriculture, Aidan McQuillan's comparative study of Swedes, French-Canadians, and German-Russian Mennonites in Kansas is an example of superb scholarship, and Terry Jordan's older study of German farmers in Texas continues to be useful.¹⁵ Several outstanding books have been produced in the history of immigrant women, but in my estimation Hasia Diner's history of Irish-American women in the nineteenth century is a revelation (fig. 98).¹⁶ The study of the ethnic family received classic treatment by Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, whose analysis of Italian immigrant families in Buffalo documents the relative ease with which they made the transition from the Old World to the New.¹⁷ In church history, Jay Dolan's comparative study of German and Irish Catholic parishes in New York City remains a model of scholarship after twenty years, but Czech historians will be especially interested in June Alexander's comparative study of Slovak Catholic and Lutheran parishes in Pittsburgh.¹⁸ Many books have been published in the field of ethnic politics, most of them in the 1970s, but none to my knowledge have explored the parameters of Czech-American political behavior.¹⁹ Still other studies explore the role of immigrants in education, labor, literature, and other fields.²⁰

Much needs to be done also in the publication of primary documents: There is no systematic study of Czech-American letters comparable to what Wolfgang Helbich and Walter Kamp-hoefner have done for the Germans or Frederick Hale for the Danes.²¹ Czech-American history would also be advanced if someone could assemble materials comparable to Hartmut Keil and John Jentz's documentary history



Fig.98. Sena Herman (right) and Olie Duras in Wilber, Nebraska, about 1910. Herman owned a millinery shop there from 1906 to 1940. (NSHS K90-6)

of working-class Germans in Chicago.²²

This list of model studies could be extended well beyond the few books cited here. Suffice it to note that scholars working in the field of Czech-American history need to acquaint themselves with the concepts and methods that have been developed in migration studies in recent decades in the United States and elsewhere, discover what is useful in them for the study of Czech immigrants, and then to expand our collective knowledge of this most fascinating field of history.

Notes

¹ See the excellent essay on the Czechs in the United States by Karen Freeze in Stephan Thernstrom, ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), 261-72. See also Vera Laska, *The Czechs in America, 1633-1977: A Chronology and Fact Book* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, 1978), and Esther Jeřábek, *Czechs and Slovaks in North America: A Bibliography* (New York: Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences in America; Chicago: Czechoslovak National Council of America: 1976).

² Tomáš Čapek, *The Čechs (Bohemians) in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1920); Kenneth D. Miller, *Czecho-Slovaks in America* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1922); Rose Rosicky, *A History of the Czechs (Bohemians) in Nebraska* (Omaha: Czech Historical Society of Nebraska, 1929).

³ Some dissertations produced during this period belie this generalization. Robert I. Kutak's *The Story of a Bohemian-American Village* (Louisville, Ky.: The Standard Printing Co., 1933, reprinted New York: Arno Press, 1970), written as a dissertation in sociology at Columbia University, treats Milligan, Nebraska. Another illuminating example, also done at Columbia University, is by a geographer, Russell W. Lynch, "Czech Farmers in Oklahoma," *Department of Geography Bulletin* (Oklahoma A & M University) 39 (June 1942): 1-119.

⁴ Of Oscar Handlin's many books, the most important in this field are his *Boston's Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941) and *The Uprooted* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951).

⁵ Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

⁶ This interest was manifested in the formation of the Immigration History Society in 1965. The publications of this organization, *Immigration History Newsletter* (1969 to the present) and *Journal of American Ethnic History* (1981 to the present), have greatly stimulated scholarship in immigration studies. Another important product of this period is the exceptionally useful *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, cited above.

⁷ This important topic is introduced by John Higham, "Current Trends in the Study of Ethnicity in the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 2 (Fall 1982): 5-15; but see also Olivier Zunz, "American History and the Changing Meaning of Assimilation," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 4 (Spring 1985): 53-72. I have discussed the large pattern of American immigration historiography at greater length in my essay, "Turnerism, Social History, and the Historiography of European Ethnic Groups in the United States," in Frederick C. Luebke, *Germans in the New World* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 138-56.

⁸ One of the most illuminating studies to appear in English on this topic is an extended article by Johann Chmelar, "The Austrian Emigration, 1900-1914," *Perspectives in American History* 7 (1973): 275-380, which places Czech emigration in context with that from other parts of the Habsburg Empire.

⁹ Robert C. Ostergren, *A Community Transplanted: The Trans-Atlantic Experience of a Swedish Immigrant Settlement in the Upper Middle West, 1835-1915* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

¹⁰ Jon Gjerde, *From Peasants to Farmers: The Immigration from Balestrand, Norway, to the Upper Middle West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Kristian Hvidt, *Flight to America: The Social Background of 300,000 Danish Emigrants* (New York: Academic Press, 1975); Walter D. Kamphoefner, *The Westfalians: From Germany to Missouri* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); Robert Swierenga, ed., *The Dutch in America: Immigration, Settlement, and Cultural Change* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1985); Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986); David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); Donna Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); and Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

¹¹ One of the most useful recent books on Czech-American history is Clinton Machann and James W. Mendl, *Krásná Amerika: A Study of the Texas Czechs, 1851-1939* (Austin, Tex.: Eakin Press, 1983). Robert L. Skrabanek, *We're Czechs* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1988) is essentially a memoir of family life, but it offers many insights into the Czech-American community and its relationships to the rest of society. Two excellent contributions on Czech-Americans appear in Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *Ethnicity on the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980): Bruce Garver, "Czech-American Freethinkers on the Great Plains," 147-69, and Josef J. Barton, "Land, Labor, and Community in Nueces: Czech Farmers and Mexican Laborers in South Texas, 1880-1930," 190-209.

¹² John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Kathleen N. Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836-1860: Accommodation and Community in a Frontier City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976); Stanley Nadel, *Little Germany: Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in New York City, 1845-80* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

¹³ M. Mark Stolarik, *Growing Up on the South Side: Three Generations of Slovaks in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1880-1976* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1985). See also his *Immigration and Urbanization: The Slovak Experience* (New York: AMS Press, 1989).

¹⁴ Josef J. Barton, *Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975); see also John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982). A spate of books on ethnicity and mobility in American cities have been produced. Among them are Dean Esslinger, *Immigrants and the City: Ethnicity and Mobility in a Nineteenth-Century Midwestern Community* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1975), which treats South Bend, Indiana, and Howard Chudacoff, *Mobile Americans: Residential and Social Mobility in Omaha, 1880-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), which includes the ethnic dimension. Perhaps the most sophisticated study of immigrants in an urban setting is Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

¹⁵ D. Aidan McQuillan, *Prevailing over Time: Ethnic Adjustment on the Kansas Prairies, 1875-1925* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990); Terry G. Jordan, *German Seed in Texas Soil: Immigrant Farmers in 19th Century Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969).

¹⁶ Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

¹⁷ Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977).

¹⁸ Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1975); June G. Alexander, *The Immigrant Church and Community: Pittsburgh's Slovak Catholics and Lutherans, 1880-1915* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987).

¹⁹ The role of Czechs and Slovaks in American political history has been surveyed by Vera Laska in Joseph S. Roucek and Bernard Eisenberg, eds., *America's Ethnic Politics* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982), 133-54. For more sophisticated analyses of ethnic political behavior see Paul

Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York: Free Press, 1970); Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971); and Richard Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971). My own *Immigrants and Politics: The Germans of Nebraska, 1880-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969) is a modest contribution to this field; parts of its methodology are now outdated.

²⁰ Czech historians will be interested in John Bodnar's essay, "Materialism and Morality: Slavic Americans and Education," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* (1976), and his "Schooling and the Slavic American Family," in Bernard Weiss, ed., *American Education and the European Immigrant: 1840-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982). Bodnar's *Immigration and Industrialization: Ethnicity in an American Milltown* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), features Slovak immigrants and is an important study in immigrant labor history. As an example of comparative methodology in the history of immigrant education, see Joel Perlmann, *Ethnic Differences: Schooling and Social Structure among Irish, Italians, Jews, and Blacks in an American City, 1880-1935* (1988). An outstanding example of the use of immigrant literature as a source for ethnic history in America, see Dorothy Skardal, *The Divided Heart: Scandinavian Immigrant Experience through Literary Sources* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974).

²¹ Walter D. Kamphoefner, Wolfgang Helbig, and Ulrike Sommer, eds., *News from the Land of Freedom: German Immigrants Write Home* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); Frederick Hale, ed., *Danes in North America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984).

²² Hartmut Keil and John B. Jentz, eds., *German Workers in Chicago: A Documentary History of Working-Class Culture from 1850 to World War I* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).