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thesis entitled

ETHNIC PREJUDICE AND RACIAL IDEOLOGY IN THE IMMIGRATION ARTICLES OF KENNETH L. ROBERTS

presented by

Gary Frank Hoffman

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

M.A. degree in Journalism

Robert V. Hudson

Major professor

Date 2/16/79

O-7639

ETHNIC PREJUDICE AND RACIAL IDEOLOGY IN THE IMMIGRATION ARTICLES OF KENNETH L. ROBERTS

By

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A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

School of Journalism

1979

ABSTRACT

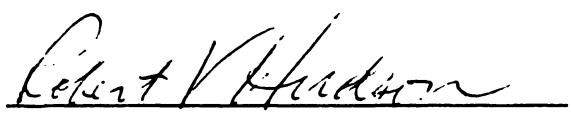
ETHNIC PREJUDICE AND RACIAL IDEOLOGY IN THE IMMIGRATION ARTICLES OF KENNETH L. ROBERTS

By

Gary Hoffman

This thesis is an analysis of the articles of Kenneth L. Roberts on European immigration in the Saturday Evening Post, primarily between 1920 and 1924. It suggests that the probable sources of Roberts' negative view of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were his personal prejudices and the supposedly scientific doctrines of the early twentieth century that proclaimed the moral and intellectual superiority of northern European peoples. This thesis also examines how Roberts used racial arguments in his articles in an effort to influence the U.S. Congress to pass a discriminatory immigration law. The major sources for this study are the Saturday Evening Post articles, Roberts' memoirs, and unpublished manuscripts among his personal papers.

Accepted by the faculty of the School of Journalism, College of Communication Arts and Sciences, Michigan State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree.



Director of Thesis

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express his appreciation to Dr. Robert Hudson for his invaluable advice during the research, organization, and writing of this thesis.

Others also provided important assistance. Dr. Maurice Cullen provided early guidance; Dr. Stanley Soffin also aided this writer during the intermediate stages of research and writing; and Dr. Mary Gardner gave this writer an early interest in national and cultural biases in international reporting.

Finally, gratitude is also expressed to my wife, Marilyn, and my young son, Michael, for their love and patience during this work.

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INTRODUCTION

The views of Kenneth L. Roberts on race and immigration were the distilled hatreds and prejudices of his times. During the early 1920s, his articles in the Saturday Evening Post exhibited the narrow nationalistic biases of the post-World War I era as he scrutinized certain ethnic groups. Roberts attacked immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, arguing that they were biologically inferior, unsuited to American citizenship. The sources of these arguments were his own consistently pro-American and anti-foreign biases and some of the prevailing scientific theories on superior and inferior races. His subjective opinions were supported by the apparently objective pronouncements of racial theorists. These influences subverted what was conceived as an independent journalistic inquiry and made it a naive vehicle for racial propaganda.

The years 1919 through 1924 were years of heightened nationalistic sentiment, a hangover from wartime passions and fears.[1] American political leaders,

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[1]John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955), p. 233.

educators and spokesmen for various interest groups were concerned about immigration, probably because immigrants were a major, highly visible foreign element in America. Many Americans unjustly associated immigrants with the radicalism of 1919, when, in fact, immigrants were largely conservative, wary of social change.[1] The anti-immigrant sentiment culminated in two restrictive laws, one in 1921 and another in 1924. The stricter 1924 law drastically reduced immigration from southern and eastern Europe.

The articles of Kenneth L. Roberts illustrate anti-foreign prejudices. These sentiments were pervasive, coloring his thoughts and observations. He demonstrated chauvinism in his writings before the first immigration article, and throughout his articles on immigration continued to disparage most foreign peoples and customs, while praising Americans and their way of life. His sentiments were not merely opinions; they were deeply entrenched attitudes.

His xenophobia, or fear of foreigners, was apparently unconscious. He prided himself on his journalistic honesty and he railed against propagandists in all their forms. He was a firm believer in the time-honored dictum that a reporter should not get too close to his sources.[2]

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[1]Higham, Strangers, p. 232.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, I Wanted to Write (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1949), p. 144.

He admired writers who investigated things for themselves instead of relying on the evidence of others.[1] His succession of articles on immigration was initially conceived as journalistic inquiry. George Horace Lorimer, editor of the Saturday Evening Post, used the words "actual investigation" during the planning of Roberts' first trip through Europe to examine and report on the immigrants. Lorimer evidently had some awareness of Roberts' extreme hostility toward foreign peoples; he had to warn him not to unnecessarily antagonize foreign countries with his articles.[2]

Roberts added substance to his findings about the undesirable characteristics of Jews, Slavs and Italians by citing the opinions of experts on immigration. He argued, in effect, that his opinions were not merely personal prejudices, since they were supported by others in different positions and professions. He relied heavily on the statements of consular officials who dealt with immigrants in Europe and who, he seemed to believe, had a particularly good opportunity to observe and to judge immigrants. He implied that his views were objective because they were corroborated by different people in different occupations and, sometimes, with different political views. Once, after reciting a litany of

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[1]Roberts, I Wanted to Write, p. 134.

[2]Ibid., p. 135.

complaints about Jews, he wrote: "Even the most liberal minded authorities state that they are highly undesirable as immigrants."[1]

Many of Roberts' assertions seemed to carry the weight of scientific truth. Eugenicists, or scientists in the field of human breeding, propounded theories of the superiority of the northern European peoples. Certain biological laws, according to Roberts and the eugenicists, governed the breeding of men as well as animals. Certain races were morally and intellectually superior. The word "race" was an elastic term, sometimes encompassing the populations of whole regions, such as northwestern or eastern Europe, and at other times specifying a particular, well-defined ethnic group, such as the Magyars of Hungary. Whatever the scope of the classification system, the common theme was that differences between the groups were biological.[2] A related theory was that there was an American race, the descendants of northern European peoples who could be contaminated by intermarriage and made extinct by competition with immigrants from southern and central Europe.[3]

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Goal of Central Europeans," Saturday Evening Post, 6 November 1920, p. 62.

[2]Jethro K. Lieberman, Are Americans Extinct? (New York: Walker and Company, 1968), p. 33.

[3]Ibid., p. 36.

Writers and organized interest groups, notably the Immigration Restriction League, were influential in promoting these ideas in the press and among legislators. In some cases, these people were simultaneously authorities on immigration and spokesmen for a well-defined racial viewpoint. The doctrine of Nordic supremacy and a host of other racial arguments during the early 1920s were merely extensions of the fears and class-consciousness of many wealthy educated Easterners. These influential gentlemen were threatened by immigration. Large numbers of immigrants foretold the end of a homogeneous Anglo-Saxon society, which these patrician Easterners had dominated for generations.[1]

Roberts' articles became propaganda for the restrictionists, although he probably never thought of himself as a propagandist. While the effects of propaganda by Roberts and the propagandists were similar, their intentions sometimes differed. Both Roberts and the league publicists wrote magazine articles advocating restriction of immigration, but journalism was not the profession of the restrictionists; magazine articles were just one more tool designed to bring about passage of the desired legislation. They also found that writing books and lobbying in Congress effectively promoted their

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[1]Barbara M. Solomon, Ancestors and Immigrants (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 83-102.

points of view.[1] On the other hand, Roberts was a journalist. He did not set out to publicize a particular set of racial beliefs. He arrived at these beliefs during an admittedly biased, but independent, investigation. A propagandist knows, or pretends to know, the truth; a journalist endeavors to discover it. The close correspondence of Roberts' arguments and those of the restrictionists suggests the writer's personal biases and professional weaknesses rather than his conscious adoption of the role of the restrictionists.

The Methodology

This study is based on primary sources, including Roberts' own articles on immigration and other subjects, his memoirs, and his private papers. These illustrate some of the apparent origins of Roberts' ethnic and racial prejudice and help to place his ideas within the contexts of their times and of his career.

As background, this thesis provides an examination of the social phenomenon of immigration. Federal figures on immigration illuminate the immigration situation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, highlighting the unprecedented numbers of immigrants and suggesting the inevitability of some conflict and friction

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[1]Mark Hughlin Haller, Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p. 132.

between Americans and immigrants. Roberts' reporting is then considered as a manifestation of this hostility.

This thesis examines Roberts' writings, primarily between the years 1920 and 1924. It analyzes his arguments against immigration and the relationship between his ideas and the ideas of racial theorists. This study also looks at a recurring theme, his steadfast nationalism, as it was exhibited before, during and after the most of the immigration articles. The primary sources for this examination include both published articles and unpublished manuscripts.

Roberts' immigration articles, his memoirs, and unpublished biographical manuscripts provide important clues to his sense of journalistic ethics. His professional attitudes, particularly during his formative period as a reporter for the Boston Post, are reflected in the memoirs and manuscripts. His later articles for the Saturday Evening Post reveal many of the same attitudes.

The works of scholars about immigrants and immigration during the early twentieth century help to illustrate the fundamental character of the immigration restriction movement, outlining its intellectual context and identifying its activists. In Ancestors and Immigrants, Barbara M. Solomon traced the roots of the Immigration Restriction League. Kenneth M. Ludmerer in Genetics in American Society and Jethro K. Lieberman in Are Americans Extinct? described the eugenics movement

and its offshoot, the movement to restrict immigration. They also describe in detail the major actions and strategies of the league. George M. Stephenson's A History of American Immigration, John H. Higham's Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1660-1925, and Maldwyn Allen Jones' American Immigration all provide insight on the postwar paranoia that seemed to increase ethnic prejudice and intolerance.[1] Higham's work, in particular, brings together the varied elements of this era and defines its spirit.

This study is in part built upon the findings of these scholars. It scrutinizes one element of the history of immigration and immigration restriction, the role of Kenneth L. Roberts. Although this paper is limited to one person, that person was possibly one of the more influential figures in the history of immigration restriction in the United States.

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[1]See John H. Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1660-1925 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955), pp. 280-350; Maldwyn Allen Jones, American Immigration (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 143-240; Jethro K. Lieberman, Are Americans Extinct? (New York: Walker and Company, 1968), passim; Kenneth E. Ludmerer, Genetics in American Society (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), pp. 100-83; Barbara M. Solomon, Ancestors and Immigrants (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), passim; and George M. Stephenson, A History of American Immigration (New York: Ginn and Company, 1926), pp. 317-532.

PART I

BACKGROUND

CHAPTER 1

THE IMMIGRANTS

The massive immigration of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century occurred as a result of conditions on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. The promise of freedom and prosperity beckoned Europeans, and the shortcomings of their lives in their homelands encouraged them to leave. The growth of industry and technology simultaneously made life in Europe less attractive and life in the United States appealing. Technology was the property of rich landowners in Europe; it was a competitive edge that put the tenant farmer and small landowner out of business. In America, the same industrial revolution, thriving in the robust economic atmosphere of the United States, provided jobs in American cities for immigrant labor. Moreover, technical innovations in transportation, particularly the steamship, made migration to the United States easier.

Friction between ethnic groups was probably inevitable during the social changes caused by immigration. The shipping companies, like other businesses of the

industrial era, became dynamic enterprises, aggressively seeking new markets.[1] Their desire for new business led them to the backwaters of central and southeast Europe, areas barely touched by the industrial revolution and separated from innovative western Europe by half a continent.[2] Technology had narrowed the distance between cultures by bringing Poles, Italians, Jews, Greeks and others thousands of miles and setting them down next to western Europeans. Technology had created an unsettled mix of different peoples with different languages and cultures on a scale unmatched in the history of the world. Millions of people were displaced; the magnitude of the movement of peoples during the barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire could be measured, by comparison, only in the tens or hundreds of thousands.[3] During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the less secure Americans saw the newcomers as a threat, but the real threat was sudden change. American pioneers had lived during a period of more or less gradual change; the later waves of immigration can be seen as a demographic upheaval.

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[1]Maldwyn Allen Jones, American Immigration (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 182-83.

[2]George M. Stephenson, A History of American Immigration, 1820-1924 (New York: Ginn and Company, 1926), p. 70.

[3]Encyclopedia Britannica, 1965 ed., s.v. "Vandals."

The influx of immigrants during the era of sailing ships was at an ideal level for gradual assimilation into the American culture and for gradual acceptance by native-born Americans of the newcomers' strange ways. Their numbers were small, and their cultures complemented the English-inspired ways of life. They lived near the bustle of Atlantic commerce, primarily in England, Germany, Holland, Ireland, and Scandinavia. Cumbersome wind-powered vessels brought them over, a few hundred or less at a time. Many were agricultural people and raised large families. Early America was populated as much by the fertility of its settlers as by the early waves of immigration.

There were vast differences between the numbers of immigrants before and after 1870. These differences suggest that after that year the experience of assimilation became a less pleasant experience for both immigrants and Americans because of the increasing influx of foreigners. The great majority of the 27 million immigrants between 1820 and mid-1920 came after 1870.[1] For instance, there was a total of about 152,000 immigrants who arrived in 1820, compared to about 2,812,000 in 1880.[2] Between 1820

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[1]U.S. Immigration Commission, Department of Labor, Abstracts of the Reports of the Immigration Commission (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), p. 23.

[2]Ibid., p. 57.

and 1883, 95 percent of the immigrants came from Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Between 1883 and mid-1910, 70 percent came from southern and eastern Europe.[1] Throughout the nineteenth century, Germans came to the United States in growing numbers. About 10,000 came in 1832, about 34,000 in 1845, and about 83,000 in 1865.[2] They outnumbered every other group until 1900, when Slavs, Polish Jews, and Italians began to predominate.[3] Some Americans would eventually argue that immigration before and after 1870 was qualitatively different. Certainly, there was a vast quantitative difference.

America after 1870 was different as well. Agricultural regions in the east were largely settled. Many immigrants, often disillusioned by their experience with farming in Europe, preferred city life anyway. Urban areas had the factories and the jobs and seemed to offer the fulfillment that had led many immigrants to come to the United States. The immigrants settled into ethnic neighborhoods, recreating the close communal life of the village in their homeland. Their clannishness may have seemed greater than earlier immigrant groups because they settled in ethnic enclaves. Some native Americans

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[1]U.S. Immigration Commission, Abstracts, p. 23.

[2]Ibid., p. 66.

[3]Ibid., p. 42.

perceived them as being different, even peculiar; such perceptions were probably tainted with prejudices. A few things seem obvious about the differences between the old and new immigration. The established groups primarily were Protestant and spoke Germanic tongues, although there were also considerable numbers of Irish Catholics. Newer arrivals were usually Catholics and spoke Romance or Slavic languages. But in the later waves of immigration, there were large numbers of Protestant and Catholic Germans and Yiddish-speaking Jews. One historian during the 1920s, George M. Stephenson, said that German immigrants were favored by Americans for their "sturdy character, law-abiding instincts, habits of industry, painstaking zeal, honesty and intelligence. . . ."[1] Numerous leaders, scholars, and writers generalized about the qualities of the various ethnic groups during the early twentieth century. Some explained these traits by citing the racial inheritance of immigrants rather than their cultures, religions, and institutions.

A generalization that can be made about the "newer" immigrants is that they tended to be politically, socially, and economically oppressed in their homelands. In the countries where a dominant nationality ruled a subject nationality, members of the subject nationality were more likely to come to the United States. Thus,

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[1]Stephenson, A History of American Immigration, p. 51.

Poles outnumbered Russians, Irishmen outnumbered Englishmen, Slovaks outnumbered Magyars.[1] The same trend holds true for religious minorities. Russian Jews outnumbered members of the Russian Orthodox Church, and nonconformists of the Scandinavian churches outnumbered adherents of the state churches.[2] Still another common denominator was poverty. The poor of Europe came to America in greater numbers than the rich; there is a cliché that the United States was populated by the lower classes of Europe.[3] German peasants were economically injured by the increasing use of technology by wealthy farmers, and production increased and crop prices fell according to the laws of supply and demand. Small farmers went bankrupt, and their land was bought by the wealthy. The decline of German agricultural prices during the 1880s was probably responsible for the record German immigration during those years.[4] The agricultural landlords of southern Italy and Sicily had not yet recruited technical

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[1]U.S. Immigration Commission, Abstracts, passim.

[2]William K. Laiger, Political and Social Upheaval, 1832-1852 (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 131.

[3]Oscar Handlin, Immigration as a Factor in American History (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959), p. 2.

[4]Laiger, Political and Social Upheaval, 1832-1852, p. 35.

innovation as their ally, but their economic warfare against tenant farmers was nonetheless effective.

When these immigrants came to the United States, it was their poverty, their strangeness of appearance, and their peculiar languages that caught the attention of Americans. The sheer size of the immigration may have made the immigrants seem even more threatening. Concentrated in the cities, the millions of newly arrived Americans occupied entire neighborhoods and, thus, were highly visible to native Americans. These people often looked upon the immigrants with some hostility and argued that the gates had been open too wide. They did not want the immigrants to continue coming in the numbers of the previous decades and they began their efforts to stop, or at least slow, the influx.

CHAPTER 2

THE RESTRICTIONISTS

Some Americans saw the differences between themselves and the immigrants as evidence of their own superiority. Borrowing some of the prevailing scientific theories, they believed that they found incontestable evidence of the racial inferiority of the immigrants. A well-organized group, the Immigration Restriction League, sought to convince the American people and their representatives in government that immigration from southern and eastern Europe should be stopped. These viewpoints eventually appeared in popular magazines, such as the Saturday Evening Post.

There were negative reactions toward immigration among native-born Americans even before many southern and central Europeans came to the United States. During the mid-nineteenth century, immigration restriction, without necessarily a racial component, was a recurring political movement. Then Dr. Samuel C. Busey wrote that the foreigner

> is totally unacquainted with our language and has been reared under institutions hostile to personal liberty, to free institutions and to a Republican

> government; hence, it is foreigners that are so prone to congregate together, to organize themselves into clubs, societies and even communities, occupying entire sections of a county.[1]

Sentiments such as these were not based on racial or biological grounds. Busey was describing fair-skilled Swedes, Irishmen, and Germans.

Xenophobia was the prevailing symptom of social insecurity when the Immigration Restriction League was formed by a group of young and wealthy men, members of the Harvard University class of 1889. They had been taught by professors steeped in the racial philosophies of Teutonic historians and in the belief that Anglo-Saxon dominance in the United States was threatened.[2] As the immigrant population grew, the league and other groups attempted to convince Americans of the immigration danger. The league became a professional lobby and helped to mobilize support for legislation requiring a literacy test for immigrants in 1902. College professors formed one strong and enduring base of support.[3] Eugenics, or the science of human breeding, originated in England in

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[1]Samuel C. Busey, Immigration: Its Evils and Consequences (New York: DeWitt and Davenport, 1856; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), p. 39.

[2]Jethro K. Lieberman, Are Americans Extinct? (New York: Walker and Company, 1968), p. 33.

[3]Barbara M. Solomon, Ancestors and Immigrants (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 123.

1901 and reinforced the growing body of racial doctrines by emphasizing the importance of heredity. The eugenicists and the league were partly responsible for the congressional passage of literacy requirements in 1913, but they were vetoed by the president. The measure finally passed in 1917, overriding another presidential veto. Restrictionists frankly admitted that the law would decrease the new immigration by about 25 percent.[1]

The original activists campaigned for stricter immigration laws for three decades. They included Prescott F. Hall, Robert DeC. Ward, and Charles Warren, all of the Harvard class of 1889. These lobbyists eventually became close advisers to members of the House of Representatives. One of the strangest figures in the movement was Harry H. Laughlin. He was probably the major source of information on race and heredity for the House during the 1920s. The son of a minister, he was born in Iowa in 1880. Before coming to the Station of Experimental Evolution at Cold Harbor Springs in New York, he was a high school principal and college teacher. He began his investigation of human heredity in 1910 and later drafted a bill for the House requiring the sterilization of criminals, the feeble-minded, and epileptics.

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[1]Robert A. Divine, American Immigration Policy, 1924-1952 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 4.

The ironic aspect was that Laughlin himself was an epileptic. He married but remained childless.[1]

These well-bred militants made some unexpected partnerships. The American Federation of Labor had painful memories of unemployment and wished to preserve jobs for Americans. They therefore threw their wholehearted support to the cause. Also, philanthropists were either active in or cooperated with the league. "Especially in Boston, philanthropy easily fused with restriction because proper New Englanders administered and controlled most social projects,"[2] Barbara M. Solomon wrote. The philanthropists were apparently concerned about the poverty and living conditions of immigrants. Wealthy Bostonians could ease the plight of the immigrants with charity, but the overcrowding and squalor would continue if large numbers of their countrymen continued to come to America. Restriction was one more solution to poverty problems of American cities.[3]

There were theoreticians as well as lobbyists, and scholars as well as publicists, who sometimes knowingly and other times unwittingly abetted the cause of

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[1]Mark Hughlin Haller, Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p. 132.

[2]Solomon, Ancestors and Immigrants, p. 136.

[3]Ibid.

immigration restriction. The pre-eminent theorist was William Z. Ripley, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor who published The Races of Europe in 1899. Relying on skull classifications and other physical traits defined by anthropologists, he divided Europeans into three classes. The Teutons were the fair races of northern Europe, the Alpines were the sturdy peasants of central Europe, and the Mediterraneans were the darker people of southern Europe and the Near East.[1] Unlike some later thinkers, Ripley believed that race and heredity were only two of a number of determinants of the cultural and moral traits of individuals and groups; he believed that environment also played a key role.[2] He did warn, however, that intermarriage between the older immigrant groups and the immigrants would contaminate the American people. He provided the excuse, buttressed by an apparently scientific argument, for Americans to distrust, and sometimes despise, their new neighbors.

Other scholars and writers echoed the arguments of Ripley. One of the more influential writers was Madison Grant, a wealthy New Yorker who published The Passing of the Great Race in 1916. This book purported to be a history of the world, retold in a racial framework. He

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[1]William Z. Ripley, The Races of Europe (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), pp. 103-30.

[2]Lieberman, Are Americans Extinct?, p. 34.

wrote of virile Nordics conquering effete and dying civilizations and leading them to greater glories. His account gave no credit to the founders of the first civilizations, the populations of which were not the supposedly Nordic variety.[1]

The racial theories borrowed heavily from the prevailing biological theories of the time, such as the conclusions of Darwin and Mendel.[2] It was the smattering of science that gave credibility to the theorists' pronouncements. Science and technology had begun to revolutionize society, and people respected them. The greatest influence was Mendelian biology, the science of the inheritance of traits and characteristics. Grant and other restrictionists believed that the best peoples supposedly belonged to a Nordic subspecies, which could be destroyed in biological and economic competition with mongrel races. Adapting his ideas to Mendelian language, Grant wrote that "the cross between a white man and a Negro is a Negro, and a cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew."[3]

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[1]Madison Grant, The Passing of the Great Race (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), passim.

[2]Haller, Eugenics, p. 56.

[3]Grant, Passing, p. 18.

Borrowing from Darwin, Grant described the fitter Nordic races dominating the weaker races throughout history.[1] But the real meaning of Darwinism tended to undermine the racial doctrines of Grant and others. If the fairer skinned Americans were really more fit, then what had they to fear from the immigrants? In reality, Grant and others feared competition, and the Darwinist corollary, extinction. Their oft-stated fear was that the foreign-born would outnumber the Americans with their fertility. They believed that peoples who failed to reproduce as quickly as lower races in their midst would be committing race suicide.[2] The proportion of old stock Americans in the population would dwindle. Many would intermarry with other races. Homo Americanus would eventually become extinct.

In Europe, Scandinavians and Germans were considered the best races. In America, the honor fell to the Anglo-Saxons. "In the city of New York, and elsewhere in the United States," Grant declared, "there is a native American aristocracy resting on layer after layer of the immigrants of lower races."[3] Who were these beleaguered aristocrats? They were men of inherited wealth, once

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[1]Grant, Passing, passim.

[2]Lieberman, Are Americans Extinct?, p. 36.

[3]Grant, Passing, p. 5.

part of the cultivated mercantile class of the nineteenth century and the nearest American equivalent of nobility. Solomon aptly describes them as a class verging upon extinction, eclipsed by Carnegies, Rockefellers, and Fords. Their families were a touch too genteel to enter the rough and tumble world of large-scale industry.[1] Their inherited wealth would offer them less and less security and prominence in a period of rapid economic growth. Their wish was to protect the country from change and return it to the old values. Better a static and tranquil society than an industrial juggernaut, powered by the muscle of immigrant labor. The crusade against immigration became the last refuge of frightened gentlemen.

Most of these people were not scientists; they were propagandists for Nordic philosophy. Madison Grant's Passing of the Great Race was a popularization, containing the findings of extremist geneticists and little of his own contributions.[2] Moderate geneticists shunned the discussion of human breeding.[3] Yet publicists for Nordic philosophy, such as Grant and Lothrop Stoddard, passed themselves off as experts, testifying at conventions set

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[1]Solomon, Ancestors and Immigrants, pp. 83-102.

[2]Haller, Eugenics, p. 151.

[3]Ibid., p. 167.

up for the sole purpose of publicizing their views on race.[1] They realized the importance of public opinion in their crusade.

According to Maldwyn Allen Jones, an historian of the immigration restriction movement, organized restrictionists had little success in popularizing their views until World War I. There was anti-immigrant sentiment before World War I, but it lacked a racial component. In addition, anti-foreign feelings were generally at a low ebb between 1898 and 1917 because these were prosperous times with enough work for both foreigners and Americans.[2] During this period, restrictionists and other writers wrote anti-immigrant magazine articles, but there was little widespread appreciation of their views. "One should beware of exaggerating the racial content of early twentieth century nativism," Jones wrote. "As yet the new racial ideology remained the exclusive property of a handful of intellectuals, and outside the South and Far West, popular nativism was hardly touched by race thinking."[3]

Jones attributed an increase of nativist sentiment to World War I and its accompanying nationalist anxieties.

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[1]Haller, Eugenics, p. 156.

[2]Jones, Immigration, p. 261.

[3]Ibid., p. 268.

Eugenicists found the war years and their aftermath a propitious time to publicize their racial ideologies. People previously who had been indiscriminantly anti-foreign "came to concentrate their fire upon immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, whose bizarre appearance offered a tempting target for nativist attack."[1] The doctrine of Nordic superiority became respectable enough for national leaders to expound them. For example, Vice President Calvin Coolidge wrote in a Good Housekeeping article:

> There are racial considerations too grave to be brushed aside for sentimental reasons. Biological laws tell us that certain divergent peoples will not mix or blend. The Nordics propagate themselves successfully. With other races, the outcome shows deterioration on both sides.[2]

The bias of Coolidge's statement was obvious. Perhaps it was less obvious that Coolidge had little grasp of what the eugenicists of the time were saying. It strangely suggests that non-Nordics have difficulty reproducing. In reality, racial thinkers feared the fertility of the immigrants. Despite Coolidge's poor understanding of the prevailing theories, his article shows how contemporary opinions on immigration were impregnated with racial ideology.

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[1]Jones, Immigration, pp. 256-57.

[2]Calvin Coolidge, "Whose Country Is This?" Good Housekeeping, February 1921, p. 14.

Popular magazines, such as Collier's and the Saturday Evening Post, may have helped promote these racial ideas. George Creel, who wrote on immigration and other subjects for Collier's, stated:

> The overwhelming majority of immigrants for the last twenty years has proved to be so much slag in the melting pot. Opposed at every point to the American or Nordic stock, both in tradition and ideals, these new peoples do not enter into solution, but coagulate in alien masses, clinging tenaciously to their language, their traditions, their customs, and their institutions.[1]

Kenneth L. Roberts investigated the immigration situation for the Saturday Evening Post. Historian Jones wrote that Roberts' articles were an important vehicle for the ideas of eugenicists. Said Jones: "Especially influential in popularizing the doctrine of Nordic superiority was a series of articles in 1922 in the Saturday Evening Post by the novelist Kenneth Roberts, who warned that a mixture of Nordic with Alpine and Mediterranean stocks would produce a worthless race of hybrids."[2]

The publication of Nordic philosophy in the Saturday Evening Post was one measure of the success of the restrictionists in gaining respectability. The Saturday Evening Post was well known and popular. Roberts had a high regard for his journalistic integrity; he would

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[1]George Creel, "Melting Pot or Dumping Ground," Collier's, May 6, 1922, p. 7.

[2]Jones, American Immigration, pp. 275-76.

not have written something in which he did not believe. His investigation of the immigration question was planned without any overt suggestion of racial prejudices. But Roberts was susceptible to the subtle influence of race feeling and adopted the views of the restrictionists.

PART II

KENNETH L. ROBERTS

CHAPTER 3

THE EARLY YEARS

Roberts apparently did not see himself as a spokesman for immigration restriction or any other political cause during the years before the immigration articles. He was a reporter and free-lance writer and often wrote humorous essays, stories, and verse. His professional background was unlike the backgrounds of the more prominent restrictionists who devoted their energies to their cause. Roberts' own burning desire was to become a successful author of serious fiction.

Roberts' roots may have been the source of a certain small town conservatism in his writing. Roberts was born in Kennebunk, Maine, in 1885, and was reared in Kennebunk and in Boston. His earlier years in Maine evidently made a great impression upon him.[1] He moved back to Maine as an adult, and in his books and articles, he was never a Bostonian; he was a militant Down Easter.

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, Untitled autobiographical manuscript, Kenneth L. Roberts Papers, U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Roberts credited his talent for writing to his early religious training, not his college education. He once wrote that he learned much about writing when he was forced to read the Bible during childhood.[1] He was apparently doubting the value of his college education when he maintained that serious students were actually wasting their time. They "often burned the midnight oil . . . and answered puzzling questions that they will have forgotten within three years of graduation."[2]

During his college years, 1904 to 1908, Roberts exhibited his penchant for travel and for writing. He began to write for the campus humor magazine, the Cornell University Widow, during his freshman year. During the following summer, he went on a low-budget tour of Europe. He saw England, France, Switzerland, Italy, and Germany on $300 and a cattle-boat pass. Through a carefully executed political maneuver, he became the editor of the Widow during his sophomore year. He defeated upperclassmen for this position by persuading all the underclassmen to vote for him as a bloc.[3]

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[1]Roberts, autobiographical manuscript.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "The Filibusters," Saturday Evening Post, 12 May 1923, p. 6.

[3]Roberts, autobiographical manuscript.

After graduation, Roberts returned to Boston, where he first found work as a clerk for a company that manufactured leather goods, and later, in 1910, took a job as a reporter for the Boston Post. He worked hard, rising each day at 10 A.M. and often staying up until 2 or 3 A.M. the next day. He hoped that by beginning his day before the other reporters started work, he would get the best assignments. He enjoyed covering exciting events such as murder trials, fires, and Harvard-Yale boat races but despised promotional stories about banquets and businesses.[1] He apparently believed that the duty of a reporter was to get past promotional puffery and propaganda. As he described it, reporting was "learning to ask questions about things that interested me until I understood them and got at the truth about them."[2]

His commitment to honesty and journalistic ethics once jeopardized his job as a reporter. He turned down an assignment, suggested by the advertising department and passed on by his editors, to do a story on an actress appearing at a local theater. The story was to be an incentive for the owner of the theater to advertise in the Boston Post. Roberts wrote in his memoirs: "Somewhat

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, I Wanted to Write (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1949), p. 39.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, Radio script, Kenneth L. Roberts Papers, U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

to my surprise, and to the business manager's annoyance, I refused the assignment on the grounds that this was a press agent's work, that press agents too often had to misrepresent their wares, and that I didn't want to be a press agent."[1]

During his years as a reporter, Roberts was driven by his desire to become a successful writer of serious fiction. He would eventually achieve this goal in the 1930s with the success of a series of novels about colonial and revolutionary America. When he heard the swish of the eraser on a newsroom blackboard during his Boston newspaper days, he was troubled by the fact that his writings would be forgotten as easily as those chalk jottings. His creations would be thrown away each day with the newspaper.[2]

After two years of reporting, Roberts got an opportunity to contribute humorous verse and essays to the humor page of the newspaper. Soon he was sending some of his work to humor magazines, including Life, Puck, and Punch. In 1915, he quit his job to embark on the uncertain career of writing humorous pieces full time on a freelance basis. The writing was agony. "I found

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[1]Roberts, I Wanted to Write, p. 19.

[2]Ibid., p. 34.

myself writing 12,000 words a week," he later wrote. "Two years of it made me so nervous that I would bark like a dog whenever anyone said boo."[1]

In 1917, while other Americans were enlisting in the armed services to fight Germans, Roberts joined the Army with a literary purpose in mind. He became an intelligence officer, believing that his experience in gathering military information would help him collect information for a book.[2] Just before he left for Siberia as part of the Allied effort to prevent the spread of Bolshevism to the Orient, he met with George Horace Lorimer, the editor of the Saturday Evening Post, and discussed the possibility of an article on American military efforts in that part of the world. Lorimer told him to write something on the "social, economic and political situation" in Siberia and the Far East, words used so often in instructions to Lorimer's writers that they had become a cliché among regular contributors.[3] But those words gave Roberts the feeling that Lorimer thought the story was important.[4]

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[1]Roberts, autobiographical manuscript.

[2]Roberts, I Wanted to Write, p. 129.

[3]John Tebbel, George Horace Lorimer and the Saturday Evening Post (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1948), p. 89.

[4]Roberts, I Wanted to Write, p. 132.

Roberts found his experience in the military disappointing. Instead of acquainting him with the techniques of investigation, his military intelligence work merely introduced him to red tape and petty military regulations. These rules almost prevented him from publishing his work while he was in the service, for special permission was required before submission of a manuscript to a magazine. Roberts sometimes ignored the rules and had some humorous pieces published under a pen name. He also postponed publication of some magazine articles until after his discharge in 1919.

Although military service had not invested Roberts with the elusive knowledge of how to do research for a novel, it did provide him with interesting settings and experiences for nonfiction writing. He wrote a prophetic story about the aggressive and arrogant behavior of Japanese troops in the Far East, but Lorimer rejected it on the grounds that it might offend the State Department. Yet Lorimer evidently saw something in Roberts and his work. In early 1919, he accepted one article on the Philippines and another on the Bolsheviks, which was based on Roberts' experience in Siberia.

These articles on the Far East were a prelude to Roberts' assignment as a European correspondent and to a turning point in Roberts' professional life. During the early part of his career, Roberts had followed a course

charted by his muse, from reporter to poet to intelligence officer. He was certain he wanted to write, but uncertain of his genre and subject matter. Roberts' professional life was fundamentally different from the professional lives of the restrictionists; Roberts had no mission. The restrictionists were evangelists; and Roberts, during his investigation of immigration, would eventually become one of their converts.

CHAPTER 4

THE ASSIGNMENT

In the autumn of 1919, George Horace Lorimer planned an investigative series on immigration and European conditions. He apparently envisioned a series of articles that not only told what was going on in post-World War I Europe but also told how these circumstances would affect Americans. His instructions for the series generally outlined American concerns and interests, and his selection of Roberts as the reporter seemed to assure that the investigation would have a strong pro-American bias. Roberts had displayed a vigorous nationalism in his articles on the Far East.

Roberts' faith in the fundamental goodness of the American people and nation was apparently unshakeable. His professional distaste for overt propaganda was apparently accompanied by a susceptibility to the more subtle influences of his patriotic feeling. In "Random Notes of an Americansky," Roberts complained that Russian soldiers did not salute their American allies, and Japanese soldiers liked to nudge Americans off the

sidewalks of Vladivostok, taking advantage of the good nature of the American personality. Roberts wrote:

> The American soldier is essentially peaceable. He gives other people most of the sidewalk without a thought; and when the occasion seems to require it, he lets other people have it all . . . so when three or four Japanese soldiers came up the street abreast and pushed a doughboy into the gutter, he didn't resent it.
>
> At first, he didn't. Eventually a change occurred. A doughboy can be crowded so far and no farther. There came a day when three Japanese doughboys essayed to push a soldier into the gutter. There was a slight disturbance, a confused noise and a cloud of dust. When the dust cleared away, three little brown men were sitting in the middle of the road, wondering whether they had been hit by an automobile or a street car, and the doughboy was proceeding calmly down the road occupying his customary modest portion of the sidewalk.[1]

Roberts showed nationalistic sentiment on other occasions. In "Bringing Chaos Out of Order," an article about the Philippines, he wrote:

> . . . the United States has made this fairyland out of a boiling pot of corruption. When an American sees what his countrymen have done in the Philippines--how order has been brought out of chaos and peace out of turbulence and cleanliness out of filth and health out of a pest hole and plenty out of destitution and happiness out of misery and beauty out of squalor in twenty years' time--when an American sees all this he holds his head higher, and has still another reason for thanking God that he is an American.[2]

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Random Notes of an Americansky," Saturday Evening Post, 17 May 1919, p. 4.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Bringing Chaos Out of Order," Saturday Evening Post, 12 July 1919, p. 17.

In his descriptions of the inhabitants of the Orient, Roberts displayed the animosity that he would later focus on immigrants from Europe. He said a Korean beard

> . . . consisted of seventeen to twenty-five long, unhappy-looking hairs. If a Korean ever desired to get rid of his beard, it would hardly pay him to shave. It would be much easier for him to shut the hairs in a door and jump backward.[1]

He found nothing good about the Tagalogs of the Philippines. He thought they were "illiterate, extremely superstitious, impractical, illogical, uninquisitive, unresourceful; they would gamble away their last pennies in cock-fighting. They were improvident."[2] Roberts used this depiction of the Tagalogs to support his belief that the Philippines would not be ready for independence in the foreseeable future.

After the articles on the Far East were published, Lorimer apparently decided that Roberts would be right for the immigration series. Roberts was contemplating a spy novel based on his army experiences when he received an unexpected letter from Lorimer inviting him to Philadelphia. Anxious to do more work for the Saturday Evening Post, Roberts took a train from Kennebunk, carrying a gift for Lorimer (six partridges he shot while hunting), and a

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[1]Roberts, "Americansky," p. 131.

[2]Roberts, "Bringing Chaos," p. 36.

satirical article on golf. Such enthusiasm was understandable. John Tebbel, Lorimer's biographer, stated that Lorimer was an editor "upon whom thousands of writers, both famous and unknown, looked to as a god to whose Olympus every creator of prose aspired."[1] Roberts was bringing an offering.

Lorimer persuaded Roberts to take on the series. He came to the point indirectly, first dissuading Roberts from attempting to write a spy novel and then asking him if he would like to become a roving correspondent in Europe for his magazine. Roberts tried to control his excitement. The most that he had hoped for was to be allowed to submit articles from time to time and thereby provide himself with a steady income. "You know anything about immigration?" Lorimer asked him. When Roberts said no, the editor told him to find out about it. Lorimer had not always been concerned about immigration. A 1910 Saturday Evening Post editorial stated: "The dream that the United States will presently become a nation of foreigners is no nearer realization than it was when a small shipload of English pilgrims constituted the 'native' stock."[2] But in 1919, Lorimer apparently had some doubts

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[1]John Tebbel, George Horace Lorimer and the Saturday Evening Post (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1948), p. 1.

[2]Saturday Evening Post, 15 January 1910, p. 18.

about the advisability of further immigration. Such doubts were common after World War I; a sense of heightened nationalism, a hangover from the war years, led people to regard immigrants as radical foreigners, not as potential American citizens.[1]

A letter, dated October 31, 1919, included other instructions about the investigation of immigration. The editor wanted Roberts to determine the numbers of aliens coming to this country and their nationalities. Lorimer mentioned other concerns in the letter, but Roberts understood that the study of immigrants and immigration was the primary reason for the tour of Europe; it was this purpose that Roberts heralded in an early article. "What our immigration will be during the next few years is problematical, and it is partly for the purpose of delving into this hazy problem that I am wandering through the highways and by-ways of Europe,"[2] he wrote.

Lorimer also wanted Roberts to investigate the general political and social conditions of Europe. The writer was told to note the ebb and flow of the Bolshevik tide, the climate for American business investment, and

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[1]John Higham, Strangers in the Land; Patterns of American Nativism, 1660-1925 (New Brunswick, N.Y.: Rutgers University Press, 1955), pp. 280-316.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Rising Irish Tide," Saturday Evening Post, 14 February 1920, p. 4.

the economic plight of individual Europeans.[1] All these issues touched on the various roles of the United States after World War I. Financially strong and prosperous, America was the pre-eminent capitalist power of the world, an asylum for the oppressed, and a benefactor for bankrupt and war-torn nations. Lorimer apparently wanted to know how the United States would fare in its new position of international leadership.

Concerned about the tone of the articles, Lorimer asked Roberts to include "light and illustrative anecdotes" and that he look at things in "a big broad spirit." These instructions suggest that Lorimer, at least initially, did not intend the articles to become attacks on ethnic groups. Lorimer wrote: "I don't want to do anything in this series unnecessarily to offend the sensibilities or to promote unnecessary antagonisms between the United States and European countries."[2]

Roberts was to have considerable autonomy once he was in Europe. "In a sense," Lorimer wrote, "you have a roving commission as to the way the articles shape up, and their number depends entirely on what you find from actual investigation."[3] Lorimer apparently had no pre-conceived notions about the content of these articles.

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[1]Tebbel, George Horace Lorimer, p. 90.

[2]Ibid., p. 91.

[3]Ibid.

When Roberts accepted the assignment of reporting from Europe, he joined an unofficial Saturday Evening Post staff, which included such established writers as Sam Blythe, Garet Garret, George Patullo, and Will Irwin. All articles were bought on a free-lance basis, although a writer favored by Lorimer could expect to contribute articles on a regular basis. This approach had some disadvantages, for Cosmopolitan lured some regular contributors from Lorimer, giving them "liberal contracts and increased paychecks," Roberts recalled in his memoirs.[1] He remained loyal, and Lorimer substantially increased his paycheck throughout Roberts' investigation of the immigration issue.

The circumstances of Roberts' hiring suggest that Lorimer did not conceive the series as an attempt to publicize specific racial doctrines. By all indications, Lorimer wanted a fresh look at the immigration issue. He turned to a writer who claimed no knowledge of the subject of immigration and gave him considerable freedom to investigate it as he saw fit. Yet Lorimer was probably aware that Roberts was an intensely nationalistic writer who would look at European immigrants from an American point of view; the editor had felt obliged to warn the writer about offending foreign countries. It was Roberts' nationalism that would eventually lead him

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[1]Roberts, I Wanted to Write, p. 162.

to conclude that the American race was better than the races of southern and eastern Europe.

CHAPTER 5

THE INVESTIGATION

In the articles on immigration, Roberts revealed prejudices about numerous ethnic groups and a naive view of the differences between Americans and foreigners. These articles, like those he wrote about his experiences in the Orient, portrayed Americans as basically intelligent and good and certain ethnic groups as inferior in moral character and intellect. While some businessmen were proposing economic barriers against cheap foreign goods, Roberts suggested ethnic barriers against low quality human material. His specific views about immigrant groups were rooted in a generally pro-American view of the world. He distrusted foreign political ideologies, which he called "a great mass of foolish and half-baked theories," as much as he distrusted some foreign peoples.[1] His ethnic prejudices were an extension of his chauvinism.

Roberts supported his viewpoints with facts and opinions gathered during two tours of Europe, one between

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Ambush of Italy," Saturday Evening Post, 25 August 1923, p. 6.

December 1919 and June 1920, and another between November 1920 and June 1921. He toured England, Ireland, France, Germany, Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Italy, and the Balkans, gathering material during the day and writing during the evening. He rode trains or hitched rides with American relief workers, who were helping to feed Europeans, and with State Department officials. Some of the time he traveled with his wife, Anna, who worked as his typist.

Roberts showed his distaste for immigrants of the later waves of immigration in his first article before he even visited their source, southern and eastern Europe. He wrote: "Of recent years, the contents of the melting pot have stood badly in need of straining, in order that the refuse might be removed and deposited in the customary receptacles for such things."[1] The immigrants were suspect because they did not readily adopt American behavior and habits, such as reading English-language newspapers.[2] These viewpoints suggest that Roberts was prejudiced at the outset and that the thrust of his conclusions was set in advance.

He sought out emigrants and potential emigrants throughout Europe, particularly at the ports of embarkation. He characterized emigrants at Danzig as "undersized,

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[1]Roberts, "Rising Irish Tide," Saturday Evening Post, 14 February 1920, p. 4.

[2]Ibid.

peculiar and alien peoples." He sent back descriptions of Poles and Jews being cleansed of lice with diluted doses of hydrochloric acid, and he warned, quite correctly, that lice could bring typhus into the United States.[1] Some of the descriptions, however, were unnecessarily ruthless. "Many of the women have bathed so seldom that their skins are almost battleship grey in color,"[2] he wrote, uncharitably of people still covered with the dust of their migrations from their homes to the ports. He also visited the Discount Bank of Warsaw and saw masses of people trying to collect money sent from friends and relatives in America. The money was often used to book steamship passage to the United States.[3] At ports and at banks, thousands of people gathered in an effort to make their way to the United States.

That Roberts' view of ethnic groups seems to have been distorted by his personal prejudices is suggested in one of his notebooks. He sometimes used the words "chink" and "wop" to describe Chinese and Italians.[4] He never

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Ports of Embarkation," Saturday Evening Post, 7 May 1921, p. 12.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "The Existence of an Emergency," Saturday Evening Post, 30 April 1921, p. 90.

[3]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Poland for Patriotism," Saturday Evening Post, 17 April 1920, p. 13.

[4]Kenneth L. Roberts, Notebook, Kenneth L. Roberts Papers, U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

used these epithets in his articles, but he openly evoked the images of such uncomplimentary ethnic stereotyping. He implied that Italians and Slavs were not too bright, and Jews were crafty and scheming. "The great mass of Italian immigrants will never be anything except but stolid manual laborers,"[1] he wrote. Describing Slavs, he wrote:

> Now all the Slav races have certain peculiarities that are apt to make them particularly dangerous members of large industrial communities. They are easily influenced [and] they will not acknowledge each others' equality. . . .[2]

Some of his comments about Jews were so rancorous that he apparently hesitated to publish them in the Saturday Evening Post. But these sentiments were not too offensive to publish in his book, Why Europe Leaves Home, a compendium of his articles, with slight revisions. In one article, he wrote:

> The Jew is either a usurer, a peddler, or liquor dealer or a small shopkeeper. Even the most liberal-minded authorities agree that they are highly undesirable as immigrants.[3]

In his book, he wrote:

> Even the most liberal-minded authorities on immigration state that the Jews of Poland are human parasites, living on one another and on their

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Guests from Italy," Saturday Evening Post, 21 August 1920, p. 137.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "The Goal of Central Europeans," Saturday Evening Post, 6 November 1920, p. 62.

[3]Ibid.

> neighbors of other races by means that are too often underhanded, that they continue to exist in the same way after coming to America, and that they are basically undesirable as immigrants.[1]

Roberts' most important piece on immigration during 1921, "The Existence of an Emergency," was a tirade against Jews in an early draft. He wrote:

> A steady stream of Hebrew refugees is also pouring into Poland from Russia, driven on by the panics to which the Hebrews so frequently fall victim. . . . They were purely parasites . . . mostly small shopkeepers . . . who live in the city by underhanded means.[2]

Bribery was "getting things in the Jewish manner."[3] More than three-quarters of the original draft dealt with the undesirability of Jews, yet only one reference to Jews was made in the published article.[4] These sentiments, whether or not they were deemed suitable for publication, are an indication of Roberts' personal biases.

Roberts was inconsistent. He admitted that he could look at immigrants individually and find good qualities but found nothing good about them when he generalized about them as a group. Roberts wrote:

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, Why Europe Leaves Home (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Co., 1920), p. 68.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "The Existence of an Emergency," Kenneth L. Roberts Papers, U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Kenneth L. Roberts, "The Existence of an Emergency," Saturday Evening Post, 30 April 1921, p. 89.

> Even the most backward, illiterate, thick-headed immigrants have their excellent points. Practically all of them viewed individually were hard-working, well-meaning, likeable persons. One who lives among them sympathizes with them and longs to better their lot. Taken in mass, however, and viewed from an American standpoint, it is no more possible to make Americans out of them than to make a race horse out of a pug dog.[1]

Roberts' generalizations were semantic short cuts. In one sentence or a mere phrase, he sought to categorize a heterogeneous ethnic group, a rich mosaic of varying talents and personalities. Roberts even went so far as to judge most European immigrants in this sweeping statement. He wrote:

> The emigrants who are passing through the Northern European ports of embarkation are, as far as the great majority are concerned, the weakest and the poorest material of Europe. They are the defeated, the incompetent and the unsuccessful--the very lowest layer of European society.[2]

One of the sources of his prejudices may have been his provincial view of Americans as altruists and immigrants as self-centered, unethical scoundrels. To Roberts, the typical American had an inbred sense of fairness. He was, as Roberts described him in "Random Notes of an Americansky," the stalwart fellow who took up his share of the sidewalk and no more. Most immigrants, on the other hand, were only interested in themselves. Roberts suggested this in his first article on immigration,

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[1]Roberts, "Goal of Central Europeans," p. 61.

[2]Ibid.

almost before his investigation had begun. "The people of Europe have just one reason to emigrate to America," he wrote. "They want more money."[1] As he continued his investigation, he repeatedly characterized Americans and immigrants in this fashion, interpreting what he saw to fit his pre-existing attitude.

Roberts attributed the nationalistic upheaval in Europe after World War I, which broke up the old Prussian, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian empires, to the fundamental selfishness of the nationalities. He documented how various new nations vied for each others' territory and took advantage of weak neighboring states.[2] Slavs, as a group, enjoyed seizing "every opportunity to ruthlessly crush the people over whom they have a temporary advantage."[3] Roberts wondered how these nationalities could ever be assimilated in America if they had remained unassimilated for centuries in Europe despite the domination of various peoples.[4]

Roberts found evidence of American good will in Europe, just as he had found it in the Far East. The

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[1]Roberts, "Rising Irish Tide," p. 61.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Balkan Jottings," Saturday Evening Post, 11 February 1922, p. 16.

[3]Roberts, "Goal of Central Europeans," p. 68.

[4]Ibid., p. 62.

difference between Americans and the people of central Europe, according to Roberts, was in their sense of fair play. He called his countrymen "the only disinterested, impartial people to be found in that large and troubled stretch of territory."[1] Roberts often cited the relief efforts of Americans as demonstrations of American altruism.

Immigrants, by contrast, were greedy. According to Roberts, they coveted the American dollar the way their leaders lusted for territorial conquest. Roberts clung to his belief that the major motivations for immigration were crassly material goals, not political or religious freedom.[2] He noted that immigrants often returned to their homelands with thousands of dollars in American money, an indication that they had little love for their adopted country.[3] "Here in Italy you can't earn any money," Roberts quoted an Italian as saying. "Everybody up in the hill towns just sits around and does nothing."[4]

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Poland for Patriotism," Saturday Evening Post, 17 April 1920, p. 10.

[2]Roberts, "The Existence of an Emergency," p. 93.

[3]Roberts, "Guests from Italy," p. 137.

[4]Ibid., p. 143.

Roberts emphasized the material acquisitiveness and territorial ambitions of Europeans but exhibited little interest in their sources: the widespread poverty and, until the end of World War I, the wholesale repression of the nationalistic aspirations of ethnic groups. He looked at these ethnic groups in his narrowly nationalistic manner and explained this greed born of deprivation as an inherent trait of these peoples. Since immigrants possessed such undesirable characteristics, he concluded they made poor Americans.

CHAPTER 6

THE EVIDENCE

Roberts supported his arguments by citing the testimony of federal government authorities and the prevailing scientific theories on race and immigration. Government sources confirmed that a large number of immigrants were expected to come to the United States and that their moral and intellectual qualities were generally poor. Consular officials in Europe provided Roberts with opinions that were quoted and paraphrased in his articles. Roberts also substantiated his views with the tenets of early twentieth century racial theory. He accepted the comments of both government officials and eugenicists as the opinions of experts.

Government officials and documents provided information on the quality and quantity of European immigration. For instance, Dr. Dana Durand, an American economist advising the Polish government on food problems, told Roberts that the Polish government was encouraging the emigration of about one million citizens.[1] Poles and

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, "The Existence of an Emergency," Saturday Evening Post, 30 April 1921, p. 4.

Polish Jews, like other peoples of southern and central Europe, were not the best candidates for American citizenship, according to one study. Roberts wrote that this conclusion

> . . . has been corroborated in every detail by the Army mental tests carried out on 1,700,000 officers and men during the war. These mental tests prove scientifically that the average mentality of the new immigration from central and southern Europe--of practically all our recent immigration, that is to say--has been very low.[1]

Roberts defended the accuracy of the Army test, saying that it was unbiased because it was nonverbal. It was fair to foreigners, he maintained, because it did not require a knowledge of the English language.[2]

Consular officials in Europe who were charged with handling the administrative details of immigration repeatedly told Roberts of their distaste for immigrants from southern and central Europe, but many of these officials were reluctant to voice their feelings publicly. Roberts wrote in his memoirs that many consular officials in Europe sent him letters that praised his articles, but they could not take a position on immigration because diplomats cannot always be frank on such sensitive

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Canada Bars the Gates," Saturday Evening Post, 12 August 1922, p. 100.

[2]Ibid., p. 101.

international matters as immigration.[1] He did, however, publicize the consensus of consular opinion and occasionally quoted officials without identifying them. A young American official told Roberts, "when I think that these people are going to have a voice in the future of that country, it makes me see red."[2] Roberts wrote that the opinions of this unnamed official were the

> condensed opinion of every American consular official, every diplomatic representative, and every American official and relief worker and businessman who has had an opportunity of observing conditions in Europe during the past year and whose racial and business affiliations do not make him hold contrary views.[3]

George E. Anderson, consul general at Rotterdam, was perhaps more outspoken than some of his colleagues. Roberts asked if he could quote him. "You sure can," replied Anderson, "if anything I say can help to convince the people in America that the continuation of the present immigration is a very bad thing for the American people."[4]

American officials in Europe cooperated with Roberts by letting him read visa applications of

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, I Wanted to Write (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1949), p. 143.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Ports of Embarkation," Saturday Evening Post, 7 May 1921, p. 12.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Roberts, "Existence of an Emergency," p. 94.

immigrants. Roberts noted with disbelief that each immigrant claimed to be joining an aunt, an uncle, or a spouse in America and recounted with delighted triumph how one woman, who had never been to the United States, wrote on her application that she was joining her American-born children.[1]

State Department officials often made their beliefs known through official reports and through formal testimony before Congressional committees, and Congressmen with restrictionist views made the opinions available to the press. One report cited by Roberts stated that "Ninety-five percent of those desirous of leaving Poland are of the very lowest classes."[2] Consular officials were equally frank when they appeared before Congress. Roberts wrote:

> Testimony was presented before the House Immigration Committee and Senate Immigration Committee, which showed conclusively that the bulk of European immigration was of low-grade. This testimony came from American consuls, diplomatic representatives and trained observers in every part of Europe.[3]

Senator Albert Johnson, the chairman of the House Immigration Committee, apparently had a shrewd awareness of the propaganda value of these reports in advancing the

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Almost Sunny Italy," Saturday Evening Post, 7 May 1921, p. 143.

[2]Roberts, "Existence of an Emergency," p. 94.

[3]Roberts, "Canada Bars the Gates," p. 100.

cause of immigration restriction. On one occasion, Johnson secured a report from a pronounced anti-Semite in the State Department. It paraphrased comments by American consuls overseas on the dangers of Jewish immigration. Johnson submitted it to the Senate Immigration Committee where it was made part of the formal record of committee business.[1] The report was mentioned in the New York Times in April 1921.[2] More than one year later, Roberts summarized its contents for Saturday Evening Post readers:

> As a matter of fact, . . . every American consul in Europe, before whom every European immigrant must pass, states specifically and unequivocably that we are getting the riffraff, the incompetent and the parasites of Europe by immigration.[3]

Consular officials may have been prejudiced against immigrants precisely because their work in Europe required dealing with unkempt immigrants day after day. Immigrants were an irritant in the professional lives of the diplomatic corps. One career diplomat later wrote:

> Our offices became frantically busy with such matters as approving thousands of visas for immigrants, issuing a large volume of American passports, making out consular invoices, and preparing

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[1]John Higham, Strangers in the Land; Patterns of American Nativism, 1660-1925 (New Brunswick, N.Y.: Rutgers University Press, 1955), p. 309.

[2]New York Times, 21 April 1921, Sec. 1, p. 2.

[3]Roberts, "Canada Bars the Gates," p. 100.

> economic reports which we had to type ourselves because the State Department could not afford to provide us with sufficient clerical help.[1]

Similar complaints were apparently communicated to Roberts when he was doing research for his immigration articles. "As things are going at present," he wrote, "American consulates are being forced by circumstances over which they have no control to neglect the State Department work and to devote all their energies to the immigrants."[2]

Roberts employed the prevailing scientific theories on race as well as the opinions of consular officials to substantiate his arguments against immigration. He demonstrated his faith in a grim distortion of science. There was almost a mythological element in his writing as he described the Nordic character of the American race. He wrote that the Nordics were the master race,

> . . . the tall, blond adventurous people from the northern countries of Europe . . . they possess to a marked degree the ability to govern themselves and to govern others; and from their ranks have always been recruited the world's voluntary explorers, pioneers, soldiers, sailors and adventurers. The early migrants to every new country have invariably been Nordics.[3]

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[1]Robert Murphy, Diplomat Among Warriors (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1964), pp. 5-6.

[2]Roberts, "Ports of Embarkation," p. 72.

[3]Ibid.

The danger was that this strain of Nordic thoroughbreds would somehow become contaminated through intermarriage or relegated to minority status by a fast-growing immigrant population. Roberts outlined the concept of biological competition and expressed the fear that the Nordics in America would become extinct:

> One of the oldest stories in history is the repeated influx of Alpine and Mediterranean peoples into Nordic peoples, and the resultant and almost invariable breeding out of the Nordics by the Alpines and the Mediterraneans.[1]

This was all inspired by the proponents of racial ideology who preceded Roberts. Roberts' observations on biological competition were suggested by Edwin A. Ross in 1911. Ross wrote that "a people who fail to reproduce as quickly as the lower races in their midst are committing race suicide."[2] Roberts also echoed William Z. Ripley, the preeminent theoretician who wrote The Races of Europe and divided Europeans and their descendants into three racial groups: Teutons, Alpines, and Mediterraneans.[3] Roberts wrote:

> The Alpines are the stocky, slow, dark, round-skulled folk who inhabit most of Central Europe and whose chief representatives are the large part

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[1]Roberts, "Ports of Embarkation," p. 72.

[2]Jethro K. Lieberman, Are Americans Extinct? (New York: Walker and Company, 1968), p. 36.

[3]William Z. Ripley, The Races of Europe (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), pp. 103-30.

> of the different Slav peoples. The Mediterraneans are the small, swarthy, black-haired, long-skulled peoples who form the bulk of the population in Southern Italy, Greece, Spain and the north coast of Africa.[1]

Roberts used the same terms as Ripley to describe the different races, except that he used the word "Nordic" instead of "Teuton." He also referred to skull proportions, which were the basis of Ripley's classifications. Roberts did not say where he obtained this information, and this may have been an indication that he thought that the findings of science were facts that required no attribution.

Madison Grant was probably a direct influence on Roberts' views. In "Ports of Embarkation," Roberts supported Ripley's theories by arguing that Nordics had demonstrated their superiority throughout history, just as Madison Grant had argued in The Passing of the Great Race. In fact, Roberts' summary of Ripley's theories echoed a one-page summary of the same ideas near the end of Grant's book. Roberts wrote of "the ability of Nordics to govern themselves and others," while Grant wrote that Nordics were a "race of rulers, organizers and aristocrats."[2] Roberts' words at one point are a feeble paraphrase of Grant's original statement. Roberts wrote that

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[1]Ripley, Races, p. 72.

[2]Madison Grant, The Passing of the Great Race (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 198.

Nordics were "the world's voluntary explorers, pioneers, soldiers, sailors and adventurers." Grant wrote that the "Nordics are, all over the world, a race of soldiers, sailors, adventurers, and explorers."[1]

Roberts implied that America could not survive the influx of Europeans. America's strength was in its blood. He wrote that "race purity is the prime essential for the well-being of the America of Washington and Franklin and Jefferson and Lincoln."[2] Similar thoughts were mentioned in "The Existence of an Emergency," "Goal of Central Europeans," and "Plain Remarks on Immigration for Plain Americans."[3] Roberts believed that repeating these racial concepts performed a useful function. He said that such statements

> . . . have been frequently repeated; but repetition is necessary because of the peculiar success of the unrestricted immigrationists in making America believe that all pre-war immigration was the same.[4]

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[1]Grant, Passing of the Great Race, p. 198.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Shutting the Sea Gates," Saturday Evening Post, 28 January 1922, p. 151.

[3]Kenneth L. Roberts, "The Existence of an Emergency," Saturday Evening Post, 30 April 1921, p. 3; Kenneth L. Roberts, "Goal of Central Europeans," Saturday Evening Post, 6 November 1920, pp. 12-13; Kenneth L. Roberts, "Plain Remarks on Immigration for Plain Americans," Saturday Evening Post, 12 February 1921, pp. 21-22.

[4]Roberts, "Existence of an Emergency," p. 4.

Roberts was acknowledging his role as an advocate and his mission of persuading Americans of the dangers of undesirable immigration. He had raised the banner of the popular authorities on immigration and the spokesmen for the cause of restriction.

The racial doctrines appeared to have had an element of common sense despite their origins in science. They were quite closely related to the practice of animal breeding. Since many Americans were farmers or had recently left the farm, these concepts of human breeding may have struck a familiar chord. Roberts used the word "breed" as a metaphor to describe different races. For example, he stated:

> Starting around 1880, the immigrants who swarmed into the United States were an entirely different breed from the people who had discovered the country, colonized it, made its laws and developed it.[1]

He also wrote:

> So far as I am able to gather from the letters which frequently reach me on this subject, no mention should be made of racial differences because all people are equal in the eyes of St. Peter. This is probably true. Here on earth, however, there are certain biological laws which govern the crossing of different breeds, whether the breeds be dogs or horses or men.[2]

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[1]Roberts, "Existence of an Emergency," p. 3.

[2]Roberts, "Shutting the Sea Gates," p. 151.

These arguments might have helped persuade Americans that foreigners in their midst radically differed from descendants of the old stock.

These seemingly objective views of experts on immigration, the people who dealt regularly with immigrants in Europe or formulated theories about them in America, coincided with Roberts' pre-existing notions. This body of anti-immigrant opinion rested on a foundation of Roberts' chauvinistic attitudes, which contributed to a pattern of prejudice in Roberts' writings. This pattern became particularly illogical during his coverage of immigration legislation in Washington, where he decried the influence of interest groups and yet failed to recognize the restrictionists as some of the most active lobbyists.

CHAPTER 7

POLICY-MAKING

Between June 1921 and June 1924, Roberts was based in Washington, D.C., and covered Congressional debate and proposals on immigration for the Saturday Evening Post. He attacked political leaders for their failure to pass a strict immigration law, claiming they were representing vocal, militant minorities rather than the interests of most Americans. Congress, according to Roberts, was jeopardizing the future of the United States by continuing to admit tens of thousands of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe each year.[1]

A temporary law, passed in June 1921, allowed about 350,000 immigrants a year into the country, primarily from southern and central Europe. It set quotas restricting European immigration to 3 percent of the foreign-born in the United States in 1910, the year of the latest available census. These restrictions did not

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Slow Poison," Saturday Evening Post, 2 February 1924, p. 58.

change the general ethnic composition of immigration.[1] Although Roberts appreciated its provisions for reducing the general levels of immigration, he apparently would have preferred a law that drastically limited the number of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, as some of the prevailing scientific theories had recommended. The 1921 law "is an unscientific law," Roberts wrote, "but it cuts down the numbers, and therefore it is good."[2]

During the summer of 1921, Lorimer assigned Roberts to the Saturday Evening Post staff in Washington to report on the progress of immigration bills through Congress. Although Roberts frequently wrote on subjects not related to immigration and sometimes traveled to other parts of the country on his assignments, he never neglected the subject of immigration for long. Roberts seemed to be staging a journalistic siege, determined not to give up until certain ethnic groups were barred from entering the United States. In his memoirs, he said that as much as he "disliked the tumult, the turmoil, the waste, constant telephone ringing and political

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[1]Robert K. Murray, The Harding Era (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 395.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Shutting the Sea Gates," Saturday Evening Post, 28 January 1922, p. 11.

ineffectuality of Washington," he "felt obliged to stay there until something was done about immigration."[1]

The House Immigration Committee, the source of most important immigration proposals during the early 1920s, became part of his beat. He got along well with legislators and administrators closely involved with immigration policymaking. W. W. Husband, the commissioner general of immigration, immediately took an immediate liking to Roberts. "The office of the commissioner general of immigration stood open to me when the rotund and cheery W. W. Husband discovered that I came from Maine," Roberts wrote. "He was a Vermonter, and Vermonters usually are favorably disposed to State of Mainers because residents of those two states often presented a united front to the misguided other 46."[2] Roberts was in constant touch with the committee. A former legislative clerk recalled that Roberts stayed at the committee offices for days at a time.[3]

The committee faced the task of formulating a new law involving an extremely controversial issue.

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, I Wanted to Write (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1949), p. 151.

[2]Ibid., p. 144.

[3]John Higham, Strangers in the Land; Patterns of American Nativism, 1660-1925 (New Brunswick, N.Y.: Rutgers University Press, 1955), p. 313.

Numerous groups had reservations about the 1921 law. Some businessmen wanted the federal government to adjust the quotas to allow more immigrants into the United States to work in their factories. The 1921 law, according to these businessmen, failed to consider that many immigrants lived in the United States for only a few years and then returned to their homelands.[1] Spokesmen for various ethnic groups defended the alleged right of their former countrymen to come to the United States from Europe.[2] Labor leaders allied themselves with the restrictionists, arguing that industrialists wanted to keep wages down by creating a huge pool of cheap labor. Frank Morrison, secretary of the American Federation of Labor, attacked U.S. Steel executives for demanding more workers: "What they want to see is three men for every job, as in 1914, when the packing houses, for instance, had several hundred men idle at each gate as a silent warning to the men who asked higher wages that the men ready to take their jobs were at hand."[3]

Roberts recognized that many groups had a vested interest in the immigration question and he apparently

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[1] New York Times, 2 June 1923, Sec. 1, p. 6.

[2] Mark Hughlin Haller, Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p. 148.

[3] New York Times, 20 April 1923, Sec. 1, p. 18.

believed that Congress was more interested in listening to organized interest groups rather than defending the welfare of Americans in general. He reported that

> Washington is as full of these organized minorities as it is of wealthy widows; and they work constantly at the task of bulldozing and terrorizing members of both Houses of Congress into supporting measures which should never be supported.[1]

Roberts claimed that the Senate Immigration Committee in 1923 represented the wishes of the pro-immigration forces. "By some singular chance," he wrote sarcastically, "most of those who testified before the Senate committee were filled with a burning desire to break down existing immigration restructions."[2] Roberts singled out Senator Le Baron Colt, chairman of the Senate Immigration Committee, as a particular obstacle and accused some senators of lobbying against immigration restriction among House members.[3]

Roberts wrote that Congressmen devoted most of their energies to turning the immigration issue to their political advantage. Some of the senators and representatives had pet schemes designed to bring them individual

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, "The Tribulations of the Senate," Saturday Evening Post, 16 September 1922, p. 66.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Lest We Forget," Saturday Evening Post, 1 May 1923, p. 3.

[3]Ibid., p. 158.

renown.[1] In Roberts' view, the typical representative used the House floor "as a garden in which to plant the little acorns which shall later grow into re-election oaks."[2] The entire Senate, according to Roberts, ingratiated itself with pressure groups and its own electorates by supporting a popular, but unwise, measure to let homeless and orphaned Armenian children into the United States. He wrote:

> When dug out from the commas and language in which it is entangled, this bill will be seen to be a political move to secure the good will of the powerful organizations that were seeking the admission of Armenian refugees. It will also be seen to be a bill whose passage into law would have helped to discredit and to break down the existing immigration law. The Senate passed the bill by unanimous consent and sent it over to the House for consideration. There were a great many votes in it.[3]

The highly organized and vocal Immigration Restriction League, however, escaped Roberts' wrath. The league was a classic example of an interest group, but Roberts did not see it as such. The House Immigration Committee itself provided an example of the inroads that zealous lobbyists can achieve; Dr. Harry H. Laughlin, a league activist, was on the committee staff as a eugenics

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[1]Roberts, "Slow Poison," p. 58.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "The Troubles of the House," Saturday Evening Post, 3 June 1922, pp. 6-7.

[3]Roberts, "Lest We Forget," p. 4.

expert.[1] Testimony before the House Immigration Committee, largely elicited from league members and supporters, was characterized by Roberts as "reliable, genuine and honest." He believed that the committee "toiled faithfully and conscientiously" during a large part of the deliberations on immigration.[2]

Roberts apparently believed that the Immigration Restriction League represented the interests of the majority of Americans. Roberts claimed that restriction of immigration from south and central Europe had become a popular cause and that legislators were ignoring their constituents in not passing new legislation. In 1923, he wrote:

> The people who don't understand legislative procedure, but who do understand that the country needs protection from undesirable aliens, want less talk, more action, more congressional teamwork, and the comprehensive, scientific and permanent immigration law they were promised over two years ago.[3]

A year later, he wrote:

> The American people are thoroughly weary of such impotence and delay in a matter that so profoundly affects the future of their children.[4]

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[1]Haller, Eugenics, p. 132.

[2]Roberts, "Lest We Forget," p. 3.

[3]Ibid., p. 10.

[4]Roberts, "Slow Poison," p. 58.

He maintained that Americans had largely adopted the racial beliefs of the restrictions and implied that these concepts were indisputable facts:

> Unless lawmakers and public speakers are really quite silly, they know that some people make better citizens than others. They know that people from certain sections of Europe are hopelessly inferior in physique, manner of thought, and ability to people from other sections of Europe.[1]

It was not clear, however, that the American people and their representatives were ready to exclude certain nationalities with a blatantly discriminatory law. Congress apparently preferred a law that would bar some European nationalities without the appearance of doing so. During 1922, the restrictionists in the House drafted a new quota law that substituted the census of 1890 for that of 1910.[2] This change was intended to alter the ethnic composition of immigration from Europe. The total members of immigrants in a given year from a particular nationality could not exceed 2 percent of the foreign-born from that nation who were in the United States in 1890. Since America was still overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon in 1890, the House Immigration Committee believed that the law would recreate the racial mix of the golden era of Nordic predominance.

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[1]Roberts, "Slow Poison," p. 8.

[2]Higham, Strangers, p. 315.

The bill was merely a superficial concession to ethnic groups. Their pride intact, immigrants were not going to be specifically excluded or publicly judged. "That much tribute, at least, America's democratic creed demanded," John Higham wrote. "Only a minority went the whole way of racism with Madison Grant, explicitly repudiating democratic and Christian values in the interests of Nordic philosophy."[1]

Lorimer appreciated the cleverness of this indirect approach, calling it a "cagey idea" and suggesting it to Roberts as a possible topic for an editorial.[2] Recognizing it as another concession to interest groups, Roberts wrote:

> The undesirables admittedly came from Southern and Eastern Europe, but the countries couldn't be named, because such naming, according to the anti-restriction propagandists, was contrary to the ideals of the founders of America.[3]

Roberts did, however, acknowledge the effectiveness of the plan.[4] The bill, signed by President Calvin Coolidge in June 1924, drastically reduced immigration from southern

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[1]Higham, Strangers, p. 319.

[2]John Tebbel, George Horace Lorimer and the Saturday Evening Post (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1948), p. 94.

[3]Roberts, "Slow Poison," p. 9.

[4]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Mexicans or Ruin," Saturday Evening Post, 18 February 1928, p. 18.

and eastern Europe. The annual total for European immigration during fiscal year 1924-1925 was 164,667, less than half the 1923-1924 total of 357,802. The number of Italian immigrants dropped 90 percent, while British and Irish immigration dropped only 19 percent.[1]

Roberts apparently believed that his articles had an important effect on the legislative process by alerting Americans to the dangers of immigration and by applying pressure on policy-makers. In his memoirs, he wrote that he described "conditions until an awakened America came to the support of senators and representatives and gave them courage to act."[2] As federal commissioner of immigration, Husband attributed passage of the 1924 law primarily to the articles written by Roberts.[3]

Such an influence was possible because of the stature of the Saturday Evening Post. With a weekly circulation of more than two million, it was touted during the 1920s as the largest weekly magazine in the world.

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[1]George M. Stephenson, A History of American Immigration (New York: Ginn and Company, 1926), p. 174.

[2]Roberts, I Wanted to Write, p. 144.

[3]James F. Wood, Magazines in the United States; Their Social and Economic Influence (New York: Ronald Press, 1949), p. 155.

"It was seen and read everywhere," historian James P. Wood wrote years later. "People came to know it as they knew their own names; its influence was pervasive and immeasureable."[1]

This influence was used to promote the doctrine of Nordic superiority and the legislative goals of the restrictionists. Roberts apparently believed that this doctrine was indisputable, and he argued that anyone who did not subscribe to it was distorting the facts and representing special interests. But Americans, or at least their representatives, were probably expressing some doubts about Nordic superiority when they failed to support a blatantly discriminatory law. Their doubts would become more clear as the nation recovered from the contagious nationalism of the post-war years and as the climate of opinion changed.

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[1]Wood, Magazines in the United States, p. 150.

CHAPTER 8

THE AFTERMATH

After the passage of the 1924 law, Roberts continued to exhibit his chauvinistic and racial attitudes, although nationalistic sentiment in the United States was declining and suspicion of the eugenics movement was increasing. In 1925, he wrote an article that decried the popularity of foreign artists and musicians in the United States, and in 1927, he began investigating immigration from Mexico. His three-part series on Mexico, published in 1928, reflected a philosophy similar to that in articles between 1920 and 1924. Moreover, the series portrayed Mexicans as an even greater racial threat than Europeans.

After the victory of the immigration restrictionists, Roberts wanted to begin writing serious fiction; but he lacked the requisite financial independence. Lorimer made it clear that Roberts, as a novelist, would get little support from the Saturday Evening Post. The editor said that Roberts' fiction would undoubtedly be too long for publication in his magazine. Discouraged, Roberts stayed with journalism.

Between 1924 and mid-1928, Roberts wrote on a variety of subjects as a roving correspondent in the United States for the magazine. Some of the major pieces were about the Mormon Church, major American colleges, the growing population of California, and the risks of land speculation in Florida.[1] Roberts maintained his interest in Europe and was particularly irked by the performance of Richard Washburn Child, a former ambassador, as the European correspondent for the magazine. Roberts and his friend, Sam Blythe, who was his predecessor in Washington for the Saturday Evening Post, concluded that Lorimer had a weakness for specialists, that is, businessmen or government officials, as contributors. Roberts and Blythe thought he should employ professional writers to improve coverage of European affairs.[2]

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[1]See Kenneth L. Roberts, "California Change," Saturday Evening Post, 14 March 1925, p. 16; Kenneth L. Roberts, "California Diversions," Saturday Evening Post, 18 September 1926, p. 13; Kenneth L. Roberts, "California Ray," Saturday Evening Post, 4 September 1926, p. 8; Kenneth L. Roberts, "Flaming Alumni," Saturday Evening Post, 15 December 1928, p. 6; Kenneth L. Roberts, "Florida Fever," Saturday Evening Post, 5 December 1925, p. 6; Kenneth L. Roberts, "Florida Fireworks," Saturday Evening Post, 23 January 1926, p. 12; Kenneth L. Roberts, "Harvard: Fair and Cooler," Saturday Evening Post, 9 February 1929, p. 16; Kenneth L. Roberts, "Mormons and What Not," Saturday Evening Post, 5 June 1926, p. 20; "Smoldering Illini," Saturday Evening Post, 12 January 1929, p. 12.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, I Wanted to Write (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1949), p. 171.

Roberts showed some of his distaste for Europeans in his article, "The New Immigration." He complained that European artists and musicians were exploiting the American hunger for the culture of Europe and came to the United States because they coveted the American dollar. Roberts wrote:

> There is no way of discovering how many European artists are engaged in wrenching a comfortable living from commercial and inartistic America at the present time. The figures of the Commissioner General of Immigration fail to reveal the true state of affairs, because many European artists who have come to America in the past ten years to pry as much currency as possible out of the country have found the prying so delightfully easy and so soothing to their artistic temperaments that they have carelessly neglected to return to their native lands, where the prying requires infinite pains and exertion.[1]

These artists and musicians, according to Roberts, disdained the wealthy Americans who acted as their patrons. "Few of them are grateful for their good fortune," he wrote. "They accept money from their hosts, and then circulate tales of their crudities and follies behind their backs."[2] He compared the greedy artists with their lower-class countrymen:

> For a great many years the proletariat of Europe had recognized America as the source of material welfare, and had strained itself severely to get to America and pry out all of the material welfare in sight before anybody else could get at it . . .

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, "The New Immigration," Saturday Evening Post, 24 October 1925, p. 76.

[2]Ibid., p. 78.

> It is only within the past few years that the highbrows of Europe have discovered that America is the land of single-track romance; the land of easy-mark society and starry-eyed suckers; and best of all, the land of lightly held dollars.[1]

Roberts, who had disdained the rabble of Europe, held a similar dislike for many cultured Europeans. Prejudice against foreigners again seemed to be a common theme in his immigration articles.

Roberts and the restrictionists continued to fear the contamination of the American race through immigration, even though Europeans found it more difficult to enter the United States. The restrictive legislation of 1924, as a gesture of good will to neighboring countries in the Western hemisphere, did not apply to their citizens. Government officials did not want to damage relations with Latin American countries. A friend of Roberts at the State Department tried to steer him away from investigating immigration from Mexico and maintained that his articles would offend Latin Americans. "I was unable to agree with him," Roberts wrote later, "since I was strongly of the opinion that our Department of State had already done everything possible to harm our relations with Latin America."[2]

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[1]Roberts, "The New Immigration," p. 47.

[2]Roberts, I Wanted to Write, p. 182.

Roberts visited the American Southwest to gather information on immigration, and his conclusions about Mexicans were similar to his findings about European immigrants, except that Mexicans were even less desirable than immigrants from southern and central Europe. He wrote:

> Various opinions are held in regard to the qualities of Mexican peons as immigrants, but there is little argument concerning their desirability by comparison with the immigrants from Europe who have been shut out of the United States, in large part, by a quota law.[1]

His rationale hinged on the doctrine of Nordic superiority. One source of the Mexicans' inferiority was their Indian blood; some Indian tribes, Roberts wrote,

> . . . are fierce and aggressive, like the Yaquis. Others are as low on the human scale as the Digger Indians of California, and seem only a little removed, mentally and physically, from dumb brutes.[2]

Their genetic inferiority was supposedly compounded by racial mixture. Some prevailing theories on racial biology held that half-breeds were even less desirable than inferior races of pure blood; in a Mexican context, this meant that the majority of the population, the Mestizos, were racially inferior to Mexican Indians. Roberts wrote: "The Mestizos of any country are generally

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[1]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Mexicans or Ruin," Saturday Evening Post, 18 February 1928, p. 18.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Wet and Other Mexicans," Saturday Evening Post, 4 February 1928, p. 11.

regarded by biologists, social workers and employers of labor as being undesirable additions to the population of any other country."[1] The high birthrate of the Mexicans and the large numbers of illegal immigrants seemed to magnify the problem of immigration from Mexico.[2]

These arguments were increasingly out of place during the prosperous and more secure years of the late 1920s. Restrictionists in the House of Representatives continued to press for tighter immigration laws, barring Latin Americans, but there was little enthusiasm for their measures. "Surely this amounted to a modest program compared with all the achievements of the early twenties," John Higham wrote. "Nevertheless, through the rest of the decade, it all remained undone. . . ."[3] Americans had become apathetic about the nationalistic pronouncements of patriotic and eugenics groups.[4] "Interest in eugenics declined steadily," Higham wrote, "and the movement shrank to the status of a dedicated but ineffectual cult."[5] Moderate geneticists hastened the decline of

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[1]Roberts, "Wet and Other Mexicans," p. 11.

[2]Kenneth L. Roberts, "The Docile Mexican," Saturday Evening Post, 10 March 1928, p. 165.

[3]John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1660-1925 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955), p. 325.

[4]Ibid., p. 326.

[5]Ibid., p. 327.

eugenics by repudiating its findings as out of date and misleading.[1] Roberts was clinging to arguments that were losing their claim to validity and their capacity to incite passions.

At about the time Roberts was investigating Mexican immigration, he decided to end his regular work for Lorimer and devote his time to a series of historical novels based on the exploits of his ancestors, tales of privateers and soldiers he first heard of as a child in Maine. Although Lorimer was initially reluctant to publish Roberts' fiction, he consented to publish Lively Lady in edited, serial form in 1930.[2] During the next few years, both through the serialization of his writing in the Post and through sales of his books, Roberts gradually built up a mass of loyal readers. The stories were filled with action, abundant color and minute detail about daily life in early America. His crowning work was Northwest Passage, selected by the Book of the Month Club in July 1937.[3]

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[1]Kenneth M. Ludmerer, Genetics and American Society (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), p. 125.

[2]Roberts, I Wanted to Write, p. 420.

[3]See Kenneth L. Roberts, Lively Lady (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1931), and Kenneth L. Roberts, Northwest Passage (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1937).

Roberts' decision to leave reporting for a career as a novelist was perhaps one more symptom of the decline of nationalistic feeling after 1924. Roberts evidently retained his racial beliefs but felt less personally committed to his crusade. While he had kept his vow to continue reporting from Washington until European immigration was curtailed, he apparently made no similar vow about stopping Mexican immigration, even though he regarded Mexicans as an even greater racial threat. He soon devoted his energy to his novels. Such a lapse of zeal on the immigration question was common during the mid-1920s. "Actually the important change was not an outspoken offensive against the premises or results of the new nationalism," Higham wrote. "The idea remained while the energy drained away."[1] Roberts' description of Mexicans and their racial inheritance seems to have been a vestige of his earlier work. He was merely repeating ideas formed during the unsettled war years and their aftermath.

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[1]Higham, Strangers, p. 326.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Roberts publicized uncomplimentary descriptions of immigrants in his Saturday Evening Post articles because apparently trustworthy evidence suggested that immigrants from central and southeastern Europe were inferior. Important and respected people in various fields maintained that there were significant differences between Americans and certain ethnic groups. His own observations seemed to confirm this. Roberts evidently was unaware of the narrow prejudices that lay at the root of his own conclusions and those of the eugenicists. He portrayed these racial theories as indisputable facts to the readers of the Saturday Evening Post and thereby may have helped to effect the passage of a discriminatory immigration law in 1924.

The nationalistic climate after World War I gave the immigration question a sense of urgency. Politicians, writers, scholars, government officials and others took a second look at newcomers from Europe and began to worry about the ultimate effect of this influx of foreigners

on American life. Lorimer was sufficiently moved by the spirit of the times to reconsider his complacent, pre-war attitude toward immigration. He envisioned an investigation of the character and the motives of European immigrants and commissioned a strongly nationalistic writer to undertake it. Lorimer evidently recognized Roberts' pro-American and anti-foreign biases; he felt obliged to warn Roberts at the start of the series not to write anything that would needlessly antagonize foreign countries.

Roberts' prejudices consistently colored his observations. His impressions of foreigners were usually negative. He even announced his distaste for immigrants before he visited the major sources of immigration in Europe. Such xenophobia appeared again in 1925 and in 1928, after most of his immigration articles had been published. The consistency of this attitude suggests that Roberts was unable to view foreign peoples as he viewed Americans.

Roberts considered himself an honest reporter and apparently did not believe that he was unfairly maligning the Italians, Slavs, and Jews of Europe. He adhered to professional ethics that he formed during his newspaper days in Boston. The goal of reporting was the truth; he had no patience for propaganda. His oft-stated belief was that the inferiority of certain groups from

southern and eastern Europe was a fact. According to Roberts, those who tried to deny this truth were propagandists.

Roberts supported his views about European immigrants with the opinions of people he considered to be experts on the subject of immigration. Consular officials and other Americans confirmed his belief that certain ethnic groups were undesirable. Roberts also relied on the findings of pseudo-scientific eugenicists, sometimes borrowing their very words and phrases. The thrust of these beliefs was that some immigrant groups were forever incapable of becoming true Americans. Lorimer and the Saturday Evening Post took this position editorially in 1921.

> A change of scenery, of air, of job cannot change the fundamental facts of heredity. . . . The trouble with our Americanization program is that a large part of our immigrants can never become Americans. They will always be Americanski--near Americans with un-American ideas and ideals.[1]

The biases of these hereditarian attitudes were, in part, rooted in the intolerant public climate and the lingering provincialism of a nation suddenly thrust into world affairs. Higham wrote that this era exhibited "the defensive nationalism of an age undergoing disillusion."[2]

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[1] Saturday Evening Post, 14 May 1921, p. 21.

[2] John Higham, Strangers in the Land; Patterns of American Nativism, 1660-1925 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955), p. 271.

The climate of opinion encouraged the extremist eugenicists; the moderates tended to remain silent. "Though the research of the war years showed many of the eugenicists' claims to be in error," historian Kenneth M. Ludmerer wrote, "until the mid-1920s, no geneticist of note, and only Franz Boas of the leading anthropologists, openly repudiated the views of the eugenicists."[1] Ludmerer also wrote that zealots assumed the leadership of the eugenics movement. "Strong in political sentiment, lacking in scientific interest, racially and culturally prejudiced, these men found in the movement a scientific sanctuary," he wrote. "They constituted a vocal prominent group whose influence exceeded its numbers; after the war, they became the movement's major spokesmen."[2] It was the views of such militants that found their way into the Saturday Evening Post.

Roberts and Lorimer evidently intended to influence policymaking on immigration by publishing the views of the eugenicists and by calling for a scientific immigration law. Particularly during 1922 and 1923, Roberts repeatedly maintained that Congress was ignoring the findings of science and the will of the people by not curtailing immigration. A magazine with the prestige and popularity

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[1]Kenneth M. Ludmerer, Genetics and American Society (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), p. 25.

[2]Ibid., p. 84.

of the Saturday Evening Post could conceivably have caused Congressmen some embarrassment in this way. It is also likely that the magazine helped to legitimize, in a limited way, the extreme racial beliefs of the eugenicists and thereby paved the way for the immigration restriction law of 1924.

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