CATHOLIC-AMERICANS: THE MEXICANS, ITALIANS, AND SLOVENIANS OF PUEBLO, COLORADO FORM A NEW ETHNO-RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

by

MICHAEL JOHN BOTELO

B.S., Colorado State University – Pueblo, 1998

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

History

2013
This thesis for the Master of Arts degree by

Michael John Botello

has been approved for the

Department of History

by

Christopher Agee, Chair

William E. Wagner

Ryan Crewe

October 24, 2013
Botello, Michael John (M.A., History)

Catholic-Americans: The Mexicans, Italians, and Slovenians of Pueblo, Colorado form a New Ethno-Religious Identity

Thesis directed by Assistant Professor Christopher Agee.

ABSTRACT

Roman Catholic immigrants to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries faced multiple issues as they attempted to acculturate into their new nation. Distrusted by Protestant-Americans for both their religion and their ethnicity, they were further burdened by the biases of their own church leadership. The Catholic leadership in the United States, comprised of earlier-arrived ethnic groups like Irish and Germans, found the Catholicism of the new arrivals from Europe and Mexico to be inferior to the American style. American bishops dismissed the rural-based spirituality of the immigrants, with its reliance on community festivals and home-based religion, as “superstition” and initially looked to transform the faith of the immigrants to more closely align with the stoic, officious model of the U.S. church. Over time, however, the bishops, with guidance from the Vatican, began to sanction the formation of separate “ethnic” parishes where the immigrants could worship in their native languages, thereby both keeping them in the church and facilitating their adjustment to becoming “Americans.”

Additionally, immigrants to the western frontier helped transform the Catholicism of the region, since the U.S. church had only preceded their arrival by a few decades. Catholicism had been a major presence in the region for centuries due to Spanish exploration and settlement, but American oversight of the area had only been in place since 1848. Thus, the Catholic immigrants were able to establish roots alongside the
American church and leave their imprint on frontier Catholicism. As the city of Pueblo, Colorado industrialized in the 1870s and 1880s large numbers of immigrant laborers were drawn to the city’s steelworks and smelters. Pueblo’s position on the borderlands established its reputation as a multicultural melting pot, and the Pueblo church ultimately incorporated many of the religious practices of the immigrants while at the same time facilitating their acculturation to American society through its schools, orphanages, and social-service organizations. The story of Pueblo’s Catholic immigrants and their formation of a new ethnic identity is a microcosm of the American immigrant experience.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Christopher Agee
DEDICATION

To my mother, Geri R. Madrid, for teaching me to keep the faith through her living example, and to the memory of my grandmother, Mary G. Ortega (1913-2002) for imparting strength to her family through prayer and guidance. *Siempre quiero tu bendición.*
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many professors, archivists, librarians, research staff, local historians, and other staff and volunteers who helped me navigate the difficult road leading up to writing a Graduate Thesis. In the History Department at the University of Colorado – Denver, Dr. Carl Pletsch fostered my academic interest by challenging me into using cognitive skills that hadn’t been utilized in over a decade since my undergraduate years. He also served as my Minor Advisor (Intellectual History) and showed me that I was indeed capable of graduate-level work. Much thanks to Dr. Chris Agee for serving as both my Major Advisor (U.S. History) and as Chair of my Thesis Committee. His guidance on research techniques and reading lists was invaluable. Thank you to Dr. Greg Whitesides for serving on my Comprehensive Exam Committee and for the enlightening graduate student discussions about book reviews and U.S. foreign policy. Thanks also to Professors William Wagner and Ryan Crewe for serving on the Thesis Committee for a graduate student they hardly knew, and to Dr. Pamela Laird for her guidance through the grad-school process.

Many thanks to Tim Hawkins, Archivist, and his staff at the Colorado Fuel and Iron Archives and the Bessemer Historical Society’s Steelworks Museum of Industry and Culture. Beverly Allen, University Archivist and Records Manager at Colorado State University-Pueblo, was extremely helpful with facilitating my access to the Archuleta and Bacino collections of the Southern Colorado Ethnic Heritage and Diversity Archives. Paul Guarnere, Chancellor, Paula Juinta, and Joyce Rivera-Maes were very gracious in allowing me unsupervised access to the Diocesan Archives of the Diocese of Pueblo. On the local historian level, the volunteers that keep the Gornick Slovenian Library &
Museum at St. Mary’s Church open and accessible to the public through a love for their ethnicity, their church, their neighborhood, and their city were a great resource: Bob Blazich, the Genealogy Director; Bernice Krasovec, and Lou Skoff all possess more facts and knowledge about Pueblo than I will ever learn. Their kindness and interest in my project were a great confidence-booster. Running into John Kogovsek, Chairman of the Board of the Western Slavonic Association, on my first visit to St. Mary’s was fortuitous indeed, as he provided me with informative material on mutual-aid and fraternal organizations. Likewise, chatting with George Williams and John Korber at the Pueblo County Historical Society / Southeastern Colorado Heritage Center & Museum pointed me back on track when my research had veered off on a tangent. Lastly, Charlene Garcia Simms, Genealogy and Special Collections Librarian at the Rawlings Public Library, and other Rawlings staff, especially Maria Tucker, were instrumental in helping me navigate the voluminous John Korber Collection, which had just recently been given to the library by Mr. Korber and hadn’t even been completely catalogued yet! Additionally, the many librarians, paid staff, work-study students, and volunteers at the Rawlings Public Library, Lamb Library, and CSU-Pueblo Library in Pueblo; the Kraemer Family Library at UCCS in Colorado Springs; and the Denver Public Library and Auraria Library in Denver were all instrumental in helping me formulate a well-rounded secondary source reading list. This thesis project would not have been completed without all of the aforementioned individuals, who deserve my unending gratitude.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER**

I. **INTRODUCTION** .................................................................1

II. **CATHOLIC IN AMERICA** ....................................................12

   Colonial and Nineteenth-Century Anti-Catholicism ....................13

   The Church and Immigration / Immigrants and the Church ...........16

   The Church and Americanization ...........................................20

   The Ethnic National Parishes ..............................................21

   The Church and Education ................................................27

   The Mainstreaming of the American Church ............................34

III. **THE FRONTIER CHURCH: CATHOLICISM IN THE WEST** ........36

   Spanish and Mexican Roots ...............................................37

   The Colorado Church .......................................................40

   The Frontier as an Idea (and an Ideal) ................................43

   Folk Religion ........................................................................47

   Immigrants in the Frontier Church .......................................52

   The Pueblo Church Takes Shape .........................................56

IV. **THE PITTSBURG OF THE WEST** .......................................62

   A *pueblo* on the Borderland .............................................63

   Turning Pueblo into the “Pittsburg of the West” .................66

   The Immigrants Build a New Pueblo ......................................69

   The 1920s: Floods, Nativism, and the Klan ..........................74

   The CF&I Sociological Department and Corporate Paternalism ....77
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The Prince family of Pueblo, Colorado, was the embodiment of the American dream. Heirs to a proud Slovenian immigrant family, several generations had continued in the familial entrepreneurial tradition by operating the Prince Pharmacy, becoming successful through hard work and remaining loyal to the Catholic faith of their forefathers. In September 2009 Joseph Godec, nephew of Dorothy Prince and executor of her will, traveled to Italy to fulfill one of his late aunt’s wishes. Meeting with Pope Benedict XVI, Mr. Godec delivered a check for one million dollars to the church, punctuating the sacredness of his mission with these words: “Your Holiness, please accept this expression of gratitude from an American Catholic family who thank our Heavenly Father for the gift of faith and you, our Holy Father, for nurturing that gift.”

His use of the descriptive phrase American Catholic to describe his family, rather than Slovenian-American Catholic, Slovenian-American, or even Slovenian Catholic illustrates to what extent “Americanization” and societal mainstreaming has occurred among many descendents of Catholic ethnic immigrant groups in the United States at the start of the twenty-first century. As Roman Catholic immigrants to the United States of America, their ancestors often began life in their new adopted land as minorities twice over: ethnically, their racial pedigree was examined by the Anglo-Saxon establishment and found wanting, while religiously they belonged to a church mocked, reviled, and feared by the suspicious Protestant power structure. Proving their loyalty to the new country, an absolute requirement for the upward social mobility that could give their children a better life, was a long and tenuous process, coinciding with changing societal
views on definitions of race and ethnicity and highlighted by their fight for acceptance by an often-reluctant American Catholic church hierarchy.¹

Starting in the American colonial period and continuing through the mid-nineteenth century, earlier groups of Catholic immigrants like Germans, Irish, French-Canadians, and even Anglo Catholics had been ostracized by mistrustful American Protestants, who themselves had witnessed religious wars in the Old World. These first American Catholics eventually established a fledgling U.S. diocese, headquartered in Baltimore in the Catholic colony of Maryland, and comprised the Episcopal structure of a church which, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, would struggle with the “problem” of increased immigration from Catholic lands in southern and eastern Europe as well as from Latin America. The American church hierarchy initially did not know what to make of these new immigrant brothers in the faith. Many of the newcomers practiced a “folk” Catholicism rooted in rural peasant society that the U.S. church dismissed as superstition. Additionally, immigrants from lands with a strong anticlerical strain, like Mexico and the recently-united Italy, practiced a home-based Catholicism that did not place great importance on regular attendance at Mass or on paying tithes, two benchmarks that the American church held as marks of a “good” Catholic.

Despite these difficulties with their new church leadership, ethnic Catholic immigrants nevertheless stayed loyal to the faith, since Catholicism was so ingrained with their respective cultures that to abandon the church would have been akin to denying their own families. In the 1880s and 1890s, while the U.S. church leadership struggled with their immigrant problem – to the extent that Pope Leo XIII weighed in on what was
known as the *Americanism* crisis – the immigrants themselves were forging a new ethno-religious identity, incorporating their “old-world” Catholicism into the American diocesan infrastructure. They attended Mass in the basements of American parishes, then later petitioned their bishops to allow for national or “ethnic” parishes of their own where they could worship with their fellow countrymen; they formed mutual aid organizations and fraternal societies for insurance protections; and they transplanted popular devotions to the village saints and Mary the Mother of God from the old homeland to the new, illustrating what historian Robert Orsi calls “the sensuous, graphic, and complicated piety of the people.” These immigrants, he believes, had “their own ways, authentic and profound, of being Catholic.”

The western American frontier – which had been the northern frontier under Mexico – presented formidable challenges to the church. Geographically vast and sparsely populated, especially under Mexico and Spain before, the area comprising the modern-day U.S. southwest necessitated an enormous expenditure of resources – money, materials, and manpower – to evangelize the Indians and establish missions, which would eventually evolve into parishes, dioceses, and archdioceses. Church leadership, preoccupied pre-1848 with the spiritual care of the Mexican metropolitan core and post-1848 with the American east and Midwest, tended to treat the people on the frontier as an afterthought, sending priests – whether idealistic young ones or indifferent and often borderline-apostate ones – in too few numbers to adequately cover the immense territory. This inattention, lack of support, and chronic shortage of clergy among the mission churches (whether under Spain, Mexico, or the United States) caused the almost-exclusively *Hispano* residents of northern New Mexico to rely on lay religious groups...
like the *Fraternidad de Nuestro Padre Jesús de Nazareno* (Fraternal Brotherhood of Our Father Jesus of Nazareth), commonly known as the *Penitentes* or “Penitent Brotherhood.”

In far-flung isolated areas of northern New Mexico and southern Colorado that might only see an ordained priest every few years, the *Penitentes* conducted religious services, provided mutual aid protections for members’ families, and strengthened the bonds between the people and the faith by staying respectful of the official Church. *Penitente* prayer leaders would not administer sacraments, leaving the prerogative to the occasional visiting priest to baptize the villages’ babies, hear confessions, give communion, sanctify marriages, and pray Requiem Masses for the village dead – some of whom had been buried months or years before, initially sent off with a *Penitente* funeral and prayer service. The *Penitentes* and other confraternities (or *cofradias* as they are known among Hispanic Catholics), by providing spiritual service work were part of a social foundation – later complemented by national benevolent societies – that “gave vital support to Catholic efforts in a region where vast distances and insufficient clergy strained existing financial resources.”³

Under U.S. jurisdiction, the frontier represented a chance for “redemption” and a fresh start to people in the east. The industrializing of the western economy functioned as a tremendous pull-factor, drawing large numbers of immigrants from Europe, Asia, and Mexico. *Hispanos*, though culturally distinct from the immigrants from Mexico, were nevertheless grouped together with them by Anglo society as “Mexican.” The *Hispanos* were, according to geographer Richard Nostrand, “an indigenous people who evolved from the oldest and largest of the Spanish colonial subcultures…their ancestors came earlier and, with exceptions, more directly from Spain to the Borderlands.” Certain
archaic Iberian cultural forms that do not exist elsewhere in the borderlands, he maintains, “remain peculiar to them.” Speaking a distinct seventeenth-century dialect of Castilian Spanish and eating a particular diet of foods native to their region were two cultural markers that differentiated them from immigrants from Mexico proper, but one characteristic they shared was their Roman Catholicism. As the city of Pueblo, Colorado rapidly industrialized in the 1870s and 1880s its steel mills, smelters, and factories drew large numbers of Hispanics from northern New Mexico and southern Colorado as well as immigrants from Mexico. The occasional intra-ethnic conflict between the two groups mirrored the conflict among Pueblo’s Italian immigrant groups, where intense regionalism from the old country carried over to Colorado’s front-range, with self-identification as Calabrese or Siciliano trumping identification as “Italian.” Among these Italian groups, as with the Mexican groups, Roman Catholicism remained the most reliable hope for cultural unity.⁴

As the twentieth century progressed Pueblo’s Catholic immigrant groups followed the assimilation and acculturation patterns of immigrants nationwide. Children of immigrants, raised in the United States and educated in American schools (whether public or parochial) grew up learning English as a main language and worshipping in “American” parishes, as the ethnic parishes of their immigrant parents slowly morphed into American churches where English was spoken. Additionally, the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 drastically curtailed immigration from southern and eastern Europe, stopping the influx of new immigrants with cultural ties to lands in Italy and Slovenia. The proximity of Mexico to Colorado, and continued Mexican immigration and Hispanic migration, however, slowed the pace of “Americanization” for the Mexican
groups. The use of the Spanish language, for example, remained strong (especially among immigrants directly from Mexico), while spoken Italian and Slovenian often died out with the older generations. Colorado followed the national trend towards urbanization, and by 1930 more of the state’s population was found in urban areas rather than rural, and the American Hispanic population followed suit, albeit a few decades behind. In 1940 Hispanics were only 15% urban and 85% rural, but these proportions had reversed by the early 1950s. For the Hispanics, exclusively rural before industrialization created job opportunities in polyglot cities like Pueblo and Denver, the exposure to larger society did, over time, increase their level of acculturation until they were closer to Italian and Slovene-Americans, intermarrying with other ethnic groups and becoming primarily English-speaking, much like European ethnics.5

One major difference between the acculturation of “Mexican” (Mexican and Hispano) peoples and those of Italian and Slovenian descent, however, centered around the issue of “whiteness.” While late 1800s and early 1900s racialist pseudo-science had maintained that southern-and eastern-European racial stock was inferior to the northern Aryan, Teutonic, and Anglo-Saxon “races,” Italians and Slovenes eventually “acquired” whiteness over the course of the twentieth century, first by losing their languages in favor of English, then by serving in the armed forces in two world wars – often fighting soldiers from their former homelands – and as their church became mainstreamed into the American religious landscape. For Mexican-Americans, initially classified by the U.S. government as “white” in the nineteenth century, the continued immigration from Mexico, the persistence and strength of the Spanish language, and the use of undocumented Mexican laborers as an economic underclass were some of the things that
caused them to lose their “whiteness.” This in turn contributed to further friction between Mexican immigrants and Hispanics by mid-century, as Hispanics strove for middle-class American respectability by both distancing themselves from “Mexicans” and claiming identification as white “Spanish-Americans.” They resented being identified as “Mexican,” and came to identify the term in the pejorative sense as synonymous with “dirty” or “low-class.” “Spanish-American,” on the other hand, connoted a white, European-American immigrant experience similar to other European ethnics who were now fully-fledged white Americans. In sum, Pueblo’s Italians and Slovenes “acquired” their whiteness, Hispanics fought to reclaim theirs, while Mexicans lost theirs further.

Pueblo’s position as a borderlands city makes it an ideal setting for a study of immigrant ethnic identity formation; its status as a frontier city allows for a look at life in the American west; and its blue-collar, industrial heritage (nineteenth-century businessmen touted it as “the Pittsburg of the West”) offers up an opportunity for telling a story of Catholicism – viewed at the time as a foreign, laborer-class church – and its role in spiritually attending to the needs of disparate groups of people. The Arkansas River, which bisects the city, functioned as an international boundary line from the 1819 Adams-Onís Treaty between Spain and the United States through the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the Mexican-American War. Fort El Pueblo, founded in 1842 on the north (U.S.) side of the Arkansas, was a cultural melting-pot, with Anglo trappers and frontiersmen interacting with Hispano ranchers, Mexican soldiers, and American Indian traders. The town and later city of Pueblo continued in this multicultural vein, reflected in the present-day in the city’s official seal (worn on the
uniforms of the Pueblo police) that bears the inscription “under five flags,” representing “the five territories and countries which have held dominion over the Pueblo area during the past two centuries.” The flags of France, Mexico, Texas, Spain, and the United States of America are depicted on the seal.\footnote{6}

While many different ethnic groups of Catholic immigrants made Pueblo their home, and often had experiences paralleling those of the groups looked at here (like attending the ethnic national parishes and practicing second-generation bilingualism), groups like the Irish or the Germans assimilated into mainstream “white” society faster and to a greater extent than the Mexicans, Italians, and Slovenians, primarily due to their earlier arrival in the United States. In addition, the three groups looked at here have maintained strong ethnically-based fraternal societies, social clubs, genealogical groups, historical organizations, and other cultural markers unto the present day. Additionally, family-owned Mexican and Italian restaurants and markets dot the Pueblo landscape, carrying on family recipes over generations, and the Slovenian delicacy \textit{potica} is a yearly Christmas tradition for Puebloans of all races. Mexicans and Italians both hailed from countries with strong anticlerical streaks in their governments, and both were derided by the American church for their rural, “peasant” lifestyles, their practice of a “folk” Catholicism, and their reliance on spiritual healers and lay prayer leaders. Mexicans and Slovenes both arrived from lands affected by conquest, as the Mexican-American War made \textit{Hispanos} American citizens while Mexicans south of the Rio Grande remained citizens of a now-shrunken Mexico. Slovenians, meanwhile, lived first as subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then later as part of the culturally heterogeneous country of Yugoslavia until the end of the Cold War. The Italians and the Slovenes shared a
common transatlantic migration from Europe, and as “Latin” and “Slavic” peoples respectively they were viewed as racially inferior by northern Europeans. Above all, however, these three groups were Roman Catholics, and Catholicism was so ingrained into Mexican / Hispano, Italian, and Slovenian culture that an overview of their ethnic identity formation cannot place religion on the margin and still be taken seriously.

For purposes of this study, the term Mexican is used to describe primarily Spanish-speaking immigrants and migrants who trace their lineage to either New Mexico or the present country of Mexico, and the colonies of New Mexico and New Spain before that. In other words, I use “Mexican” in the aggregate to describe people who, whatever their racial makeup, have surnames rooted in the Iberian peninsula and who today would identify themselves in a variety of ways: Mexican, Mexicano, Mexican-American, Nuevomexicano, Hispanic, Latino, and Chicano among others. When I reference the distinct Hispano subculture of New Mexico and Colorado, I will use that word (Hispano) to differentiate them from those who came directly from the country of Mexico, whom I continue to call “Mexican.” I use “Italian” to describe people who, though they might have self-identified as Calabrese, Abruzzese, Siciliano, or others, came from lands either on the Italian peninsula or the islands of Sicily or Sardinia and who spoke the Italian language or a regional dialect thereof. I use “Slovenian” or “Slovene” to refer to people from Carniola, Dalmatia, and other lands claimed by ethnic Slovenses, who spoke the Slovenian language, and did not claim to be Slovakian, Austrian, Croatian, Serbian, or any other nationality or ethnicity, although in the nineteenth century the U.S. government often counted them as “Austrians,” “Yugo-Slavs,” or “Jugo-Slavs.” I use ethnically or racially derogatory terms like pocho, surumato, dago, wop, bohunk, or
bojon (a term that Pueblo Slovenes incidentally view with affection) unedited when used either as part of a primary source document or when quoting a secondary source in order to retain historical scope and perspective.

This brief study of ethnic identity formation among three Catholic immigrant groups in Pueblo, Colorado is a story that touches on a variety of historical topics: the shifting and malleable definitions of terms like race and ethnicity, the entrenchment of religion with culture, religious and ethnic xenophobia, Americanization and acculturation, and the link between economics and assimilation into mainstream society. It also blends different historical disciplines – religious history, social history, Western history, racial and ethnic history, industrial labor relations, and cultural history. Compounding the difficulty of this task, the immigrants studied here usually spoke little or no English and were often illiterate, making thorough historical research on them scattershot at times. Historian Thomas Andrews, writing about immigrant mineworkers in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Colorado, touches on this, and his description of the problem also fits for the groups looked at here. These Colorado immigrants, he argues,

usually left little trace in the historical record. Few could write in any language, and almost no writings by them survive. Government and company officials proved anxious to control, categorize, and tally the migrations. Yet the records and statistics that officials produced offer only snapshots of much larger and ever-changing tableaux – snapshots compromised by their limited temporal and geographic scope.7

Despite these obstacles, an overview of the story of ethnicity and religion in a western industrial city can offer lessons on what immigrants wanted from the United States, what the United States expected from them, how their church helped them become Americanized citizens, how they themselves reshaped American Catholicism, and how
the creation of a new ethno-religious identity helped to shape the country and church of the present day.

The formation of this new “Catholic-American” identity among Mexicans, Italians, and Slovenians in Pueblo, Colorado in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was influenced by a number of factors, including the aforementioned meanings of terms like ethnicity and race, which changed over time. Additionally, the idea of what it meant to be American varied, with the definition typically set by the dominant ethnic groups and religions. Other factors included the suspicions of their religion by American Protestants, skepticism of their commitment to the faith by the U.S. Catholic leadership, their place in the western frontier industrial economy, and the influence of American education and mass culture upon their children. Conversely, the immigrants themselves transformed the city of Pueblo and the Catholic Church in Colorado by utilizing institutions like the ethnic parishes as both links to their cultural homelands and as avenues of assimilation. It is an important story, and my hope is to do it a small degree of justice.
CHAPTER II
CATHOLIC IN AMERICA

One of the perennial problems which has confronted the Catholic Church in the United States is its relationship to mainstream American culture, a culture which has generally been hostile to Catholicism and suspicious of foreigners. As an immigrant, working-class church, the Catholic Church often found itself outside of, and in conflict with, that mainstream. Catholics were under constant pressure to prove the compatibility between their American citizenship and their Catholic faith.

-Jeffrey M. Burns

Pueblo’s Catholic immigrants, although they did not know it at the time, were part of the late-nineteenth century Americanism crisis that confronted the U.S. Catholic Church. Bishops favoring rapid assimilation desired that the immigrants be instructed in English; be taught proper middle-class standards of decorum, dress, diet, and hygiene; and adapt themselves to the officious, hierarchical, tithes-paying model of Catholicism that marked the American church. Other U.S. bishops, however, favored a gradual pace of acculturation, one that allowed for separate “ethnic” parishes and at least tolerance of “folk” immigrant practices like festivals, use of sacramentals (scapulars, medals, rosaries, and holy water), home altars, and faith-based healers. This, they felt, would allow the immigrants to grow into their American citizenship at their own speed, lessening potential psychological trauma by allowing them to hold on to at least one familiar aspect of life – their religion. Doing this, the bishops believed, would prevent “leakage,” or losses in church membership due to either defections to one of the Protestant faiths or to people leaving organized religion altogether. These supporters of gradual assimilation also reasoned that immigrant children, born or raised in the United States, would grow up with an ingrained primary loyalty to America and be stirred into the great American
melting pot. For the bishops who advocated fast Americanization and pushed for the immigrants to prove their “American-ness” to a skeptical Protestant society, the lessons from the recent history of Catholic immigration remained at the forefront of their minds. The anti-Catholic sentiment prevalent in early American history had continued into the nineteenth century, as Irish immigrants escaping famine flocked to the U.S., and a generation later the church again faced another “immigrant problem.” For a church struggling to establish itself as a respectable and accepted American institution, thousands of new immigrant members made that goal all the more difficult, especially since American society had been openly antagonistic to it since before the country’s founding.

Colonial and Nineteenth-Century Anti-Catholicism

The Protestants who first established British colonies on the eastern coast of North America viewed the vast, untamed wilderness before them as a new Garden of Eden – a place to establish God’s pure Kingdom on Earth and start anew, far away from Europe’s benighted sinfulness. Though denominations may have differed from each other in doctrinal matters, they shared many common beliefs, like the sufficiency of scripture as a guide to salvation, the priesthood of all believers, and salvation through God’s grace acquired through faith alone. Additionally, as Frank Lambert argues, “they shared something else: an abiding hatred of the Catholic Church. They vilified Catholics as ‘Papists’ and ‘Romanists’ and castigated the Catholic Church as the ‘whore of Babylon.’” Any Catholic immigration, no matter how small in number, was viewed as a harbinger of a potential invasion, and in the years before American independence the media of the era – almanacs, tracts, sermons, and periodicals – slandered Catholicism.
Public school primers instructed children to “abhor that arrant Whore of Rome and all her Blasphemies,” while “Pope Night” festivals depicting the Devil conspiring with Catholics and fireside games like “Break the Pope’s Neck (sic)” were typical fare. As David Bennett maintains, it was “the specter of an alien religion, penetrating and poisoning the New World garden” that made anti-Catholicism “a recurring theme in early American history.”

These suspicions and fears of a Catholic takeover continued into the nineteenth century. In 1835 Lyman Beecher published a tract called *A Plea for the West* in which he outlined the “dangers to freedom and true Christianity” if Roman Catholicism were to increase its already substantial influence in the expanding American frontier. Protestants supported the publication of such scandal-mongering books as *Six Months in a Convent* (1835), Maria Monk’s *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery in Montreal* (1836) (a best-seller that sold more than 300,000 copies), and Beecher’s *The Papal Conspiracy Exposed*. These and other popular salacious works “found a ready market among Protestants who were certain that more went on behind convent walls than prayer and meditation.” In Philadelphia, Samuel B. Smith, a former speaker for the New York Protestant Association who claimed to be an ex-“Popish priest,” offered up the *Downfall of Babylon, or the Triumph of Truth over Popery*, and in New York a Reverend Brownlee issued the influential *American Protestant Vindicator and Defender of Civil and Religious Liberty against the Inroads of Popery*. Samuel F.B. Morse, famed inventor of the telegraph, fanned nativist and anti-Catholic feeling through a series of articles published under the name “Brutus” in which he “spun a conspiracy theory of a Vatican plot to take control of the United States by encouraging Catholic immigration and then
mobilizing Catholic voters.” Although anti-Catholic sentiment had arrived in North America with the first Protestant settlers in the seventeenth century, the nominal number of Catholics “posed little direct threat to Protestant hegemony.” The arrival of large numbers of Catholics in the 1800s began to change that, and after more than a million Catholic immigrants – mainly from Ireland – arrived in the U.S. by mid-century, they constituted a large enough presence, though still only about 5 percent of the population, to spark a nativist reaction “by religionists and nonreligionists alike.” The Catholic population was concentrated in cities, and it was from the cities that the nativism flowed. Fueled by resentment to Irish immigration, a fraternal-political association, the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner, formed in 1849 to resist the tide of Catholic immigration. It would reorganize in 1852 as the American Party (or “Know Nothings”) and briefly influence American politics. Protestant critics charged that Catholic attitudes and behaviors, shaped by the Vatican, guaranteed that “good Catholics could not be good republicans” and the editor of the Cleveland Express opined that “Roman Catholics, whose consciences are enslaved…regard the King of Rome – the Pope – as the depository of all authority.” With such inherent loyalties, it was believed, Catholics would never be dutiful American citizens.10

Where in 1807 the United States had 70,000 Roman Catholics, by 1840 their numbers had swelled to over 660,000, stoking the social anxiety that facilitated the rise of groups like the Know-Nothings. In 1854 the Know-Nothing Party elected seventy-five members to the United States House of Representatives and had over one million members. It also elected eight governors, the mayors of Boston, Chicago, and
Philadelphia, and thousands of lesser officials throughout the country. Their fast rise astounded many Americans and led Abraham Lincoln to observe that:

Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that all men are created equal. We now practically read it all men are created equal except Negroes. When the Know Nothings get control, it will read all men are created equal, except Negroes, and foreigners and Catholics.

As Mark Noll points out, however, the influence of the Know Nothings “quickly declined in the rapid political changes that led to the Civil War” and they eventually disappeared from the scene. In the second half of the century, the new wave of Catholic immigrants were ridiculed (much like the earlier groups) for their culture and standard of living, which were presented as affronts to the emerging Progressive middle-class ideal. Linda Gordon argues that “both as creed and as institution, Catholicism was to the (Protestant) elite a benighted system, a pernicious influence toward dependency, alcoholism, and shiftlessness – a logic that fit, of course, with the hegemonic elite understanding that poverty grew from moral failings.” Likewise, Lary May posits that “Catholic or Eastern and Southern Europeans who wanted to rise had to shed many of their traditions, which the dominant group portrayed as vice-ridden and decadent.” These were the burdens of history and biases that ethnic Catholics faced when they set foot upon American soil.11

**The Church and Immigration / Immigrants and the Church**

For their part, Catholic immigrants never saw themselves as disloyal to America. Even though they fought to preserve their culture, they – along with native proponents of “cultural pluralism” – felt that their contributions would enrich American society by maintaining their cultural identities. The American church, wanting to keep these Catholic newcomers in the fold, attempted to assist the immigrants with locating housing
and employment, but their efforts lacked cohesiveness at the macro level. Groups like the American Federation of Catholic Societies, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and the Catholic Church Extension Society attempted to direct Catholic immigrant care, but “they lacked the necessary machinery to coordinate efforts in an efficient way.” It was at the local level, with work carried out in individual dioceses, where the most effective efforts at providing social aid were found. The church had good reason to pay attention, as it had grown exponentially throughout the nineteenth century, and the new influx of ethnic Catholics swelled their numbers even more. In 1808 there had been one Catholic diocese for the entire United States, but by 1855 there were forty-one; in 1808 there were only sixty-eight priests nationwide, but by 1855 there were 1,704; in 1808 there were 80 churches in the U.S., but by 1855 there were 1,824. Anna Carroll, an advisor to the Lincoln cabinet and former Know-Nothing, asserted that “Rome has put her paw upon America’s great shoulder and is clawing at her vitality.”

While these xenophobic sentiments were not morally justifiable, they were grounded in actual demographic change. In 1776 Roman Catholics had comprised 1.8% of the population and were the 6th-largest American denomination, but by 1850 they had grown to 13.9% and represented the 3rd-largest denomination. In 1789, when the Pope confirmed the first bishop for the United States, there were 35,000 Catholics nationwide, with roughly 60% of them in the Catholic haven of Maryland. By 1830 there were over 300,000 Catholics, and by 1860 there were 3,100,000 in a U.S. population of 31,500,000. Shortly after the Civil War the Roman Catholic Church surpassed the Methodists to become the largest Christian denomination, and by 1870 there were approximately 3,500,000 Catholics in a population nearing 40 million. Throughout the nineteenth
century more than twenty-eight different ethnic groups called themselves Catholic, and by 1910 the U.S. Church was caring for over 15 million souls. Jay Dolan argues that among these disparate groups “no easy generalizations can adequately describe the community, because it was so diverse. Ethnic diversity was its most obvious feature, with six major groups – Irish, Germans, Italians, Polish, French Canadians, and Mexican Americans – accounting for at least 75 percent of the population by 1920.” Overall, the United States attracted 33.6 million immigrants (of all faiths) between 1820 and 1920, and in roughly the same period the Catholic population increased from an estimated 318,000 to close to 18 million. The number of priests went from 232 to 21,019, and the number of churches from 230 to 16,181. With such massive numbers, the church focused on increasing its capacity, and the “brick-and-mortar” phase of American Catholicism picked up momentum after World War I, when “new churches, schools, hospitals, and convents took their place in the cities’ skylines.” This focus on basic infrastructure tamped down any political activism or advocacy for social justice, as Jeffrey Burns believes that “in the pre-Vatican II era, the prevailing model of the Church in the United States insisted that the Church’s primary goal was the preservation of the immigrants’ faith and the salvation of souls, not the transformation of society.”

The church and its immigrants could not totally ignore social issues, however. Progressive-era reformers, with their reliance on “expertise” and the state to impose Protestant middle-class morals on the American public, found much fault with the values of ethnic Catholics. The 1920s social movement of Prohibition “targeted immigrant Catholics as roadblocks to the restoration of a Protestant middle-class culture.” Prohibitionists, in their desire to maintain a society free of the evils of alcohol, divided
society into “wets” and “drys,” and, because of their cultural traditions the vast majority of Catholic immigrants opposed Prohibition and were thus labeled “wets,” which only served to reinforce their outsider status. Catholic temperance groups did occasionally spring up, however, and although their efforts were ultimately unsuccessful Roy Rosenzweig argues that the Catholic temperance movement “actually incorporated a variety of motives: a search for middle-class respectability, an interest in a stable and settled ethnic community, and a desire for social change.” Social work could start at the grassroots or be guided by the church. *The Denver Catholic Register*, reporting on the consecration of Pueblo’s first Bishop, the Most Rev. Joseph Clement Willging, in its February 26, 1942 issue, analyzed the demographics of the recently-created Diocese of Pueblo, stating that in the new diocese “there are considerable racial or language groups, the largest being the Spanish-speaking. Colorado altogether has 40,000 to 50,000 Spanish-speaking people, who represent its greatest missionary problem.” Part of the new bishop’s plan for this problem involved nurturing “cradle Catholics,” those babies born to Catholic parents. *The Pueblo Chieftain* reported in 1947 that “the Most Rev. Joseph C. Willging, D.D., bishop of the diocese of Pueblo, is installing a pre-natal and post-natal clinic for Spanish-speaking mothers, only, of Pueblo.” The bishop’s actions reflected the church’s commitment to the poor, and priests often appealed directly to immigrants. Rev. John C. Birch of San Antonio, speaking at a 1946 conference, told “Spanish-Americans” point-blank: “If any of you have for social or economic reasons abandoned your own, remember there is no reason to deny your Spanish heritage. It is a proud one. Your culture, brought to these shores by heroic men, is centuries older than the Anglo culture.” Ever since the consecration of its first bishop in eighteenth-century
Maryland, the Catholic Church in America had adapted to changing societal conditions and demographic shifts. Different waves of immigration, combined with malleable definitions of race and ethnicity and other variables (like place of residence) facilitated rates of assimilation for each group. Mark Noll asserts that

During the nineteenth century, assimilation of European religious groups operated at a variable pace depending upon whether the size of the migrating group was large or small, whether immigrants moved into cities or the more isolated Midwestern plains, whether or not a continuing supply of immigrants kept alive the European language, and if the surrounding population of Americans welcomed or rejected the newcomers…Each of the major strands of Catholic immigration… contained multiple patterns of ethnic identification and American assimilation.

This would be exhibited, as it was in countless other locales, in Pueblo among the city’s Mexicans, Italians, and Slovenes.¹⁴

The Church and Americanization

For the Catholic organizations that existed to help immigrants settle in to life in their new homeland, part of that mission involved dealing with the question of assimilation. The Knights of Columbus, although predominantly an Irish organization, espoused a Catholic (rather than an Irish) identity and “explicitly sought to assimilate more recent Catholic immigrants into that Catholic-American identity.” Liberal American bishops, who pushed for a rapid pace of assimilation that included English-immersion instruction and who favored the U.S. Church’s emphasis on democracy and egalitarianism (“Americanism”) were stymied by the Vatican’s pronouncements favoring the position of conservative bishops, who advocated instructing immigrants in their native languages. In 1895 Pope Leo XII addressed American Catholics in an encyclical, Longinqua Oceani, that congratulated them for what had been accomplished in the New
World for the faith, but cautioned against making American church-state relations the standard for all places. Four years later he expounded further in another encyclical, *Testem Benevolentiae*, in which the Pope attacked the idea that church teaching could be altered in order to accommodate to special local conditions. *Testem Benevolentiae* had primarily condemned liberal French Catholics’ *Americanisme* in advocating a rapprochement with political liberalism, but conservative American bishops hailed it as a victory for their position that “Catholic immigrants should be taught in their native tongues to prevent ‘leakage.’” With this papal blessing, the American church allowed the granting of ethnic or “national” parish churches, which became “the primary means used by the Church to assimilate and protect immigrants.” A separate parish for each immigrant group allowed them “to adapt to American culture at their own pace, thereby enabling them to preserve the more positive aspects of their culture, especially the Catholic faith.” As European immigration tapered off by the interwar period national parishes began to fall out of favor, but they nonetheless played an indispensable role in acculturating the ethnic immigrants. Carol Jensen reports that Catholic immigrants were “found in parishes scattered throughout the Intermountain West, but more prominently, more permanently, and more formally in the Pueblo Diocese and the Denver Archdiocese.”

**The Ethnic National Parishes**

Ethnic parishes had roots in the early nineteenth century, with the first large waves of German and Irish immigration. In large eastern cities like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, German and Irish Catholics were not willing to worship in the same church, “even though they might have lived in the same area of the city.” Each group
wanted to pray in their own language and according to their particular Old World traditions. Later in the nineteenth century, the national parish emerged as the most pragmatic response to this problem, and Jay Dolan argues that “it became the principal institution the immigrants established in their attempt to preserve the religious life of the old country.” Silvano Tomasi asserts that ethnic parishes became “the most relevant institutional organization supporting the immigrants in their encounter with the surrounding groups and the dominant society,” and he believes that the ethnic parish church should be viewed “both as an instrument of power for the immigrant group and as a subsystem in the stratification of the larger society.” Social solidarity was how the parishes derived their power. Most American bishops initially encouraged the formation of “annex” congregations – where immigrant groups held services in an existing American parish church – but many native Catholics felt that the development of separate, distinct foreign-language parishes might cause jurisdictional disputes and perhaps even challenge the bishops’ authority. Some ethnic parishes, therefore, followed a grassroots path to existence, with immigrant groups building a church, sometimes without official church sanction. The parish would usually be quickly accepted by the local Ordinary as a legitimate Catholic parish, however. Mark Noll writes that these parishes were constructed, with or without the active support of the hierarchy, where religious and social nurture eased the traumas of migration. The organization of parishes, and of ecclesiastical thinking, around ethnic differences proved to be an unusually helpful way of maintaining the centrality of the church for uprooted populations. Dolan concurs, calling national parishes “social institutions that strengthened the social fabric of the community by nurturing families as well as faith and by promoting
education as well as Sunday Mass.”

In the Colorado Diocese, of the three national foreign-language parishes designated as such in 1900, two were German and one was Polish. The Polish parish at Globeville in Denver faced a separatist movement by Slovenian and Croatian parishioners who wanted their own church. By 1920 they had succeeded, when Holy Rosary was built one block from another parish, St. Joseph’s, where it functioned for at least a decade as a Slovenian parish before losing that designation. Similarly, St. Mary’s in Pueblo was designated as a Slovenian parish through 1943. Established in 1891 for a combined congregation of Slovenians, Germans, and Slovaks, St. Mary’s was classified as a German parish from 1895 until 1901, at which time St. Boniface was built specifically for Germans. In 1900 Colorado Bishop Nicholas C. Matz had deemed it necessary to build a separate church for Pueblo’s German families. Dedicated to St. Boniface, the Apostle of Germany, the church was placed under the care of the Benedictine Fathers. Built near Santa Fe Avenue and Sixth Street on a hill overlooking the business section of the city, the parish existed until 1922, when “there was no longer sufficient need for a German national parish” and the area was absorbed by the English-speaking St. Leander’s parish. In Durango, Colorado, meanwhile, a second parish, Sacred Heart, was opened by the Theatine Fathers in 1906 for Italians and Mexicans who complained that they had been slighted at St. Columba’s, which had been founded in 1882. Additionally, three Colorado parishes that served Italian Catholics bore the name of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and in both Denver and Pueblo the Mount Carmel parishes were staffed by Jesuit priests.
Pueblo, with its multitude of ethnic groups, perfectly fit the national parish model. After the formation of the Pueblo Diocese in 1941, the new see city was described as “once a sort of miniature and informal United Nations.” An 1890 edition of the *Pueblo Daily Chieftain* gave a contemporary history of the previous ten years:

> The gradual development of the city brought an increase of foreign Catholics who, owing to their language and other circumstances, felt as if they were debarred from the churches where the English speaking Catholics gathered. They were mainly Mexicans and Italians. It was thought necessary to attend to their particular wants, and the Rev. Father Gentile, S.J., allowed for a chapel to be constructed for their benefit, he, himself, furnishing the necessary funds. The chapel was built in August, 1884, on ten lots purchased by the same father in 1882, on Summit and Second Streets, and was dedicated to St. Joseph.

In March 1899 the Apostolic Delegate to the United States, Archbishop Sebastian Martinelli, wrote to Bishop Matz about complaints he received from Italians in Pueblo that they were being spiritually neglected. The church that was built as a result was Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and the blessing ceremony on October 20, 1901 was “attended by all the Italian societies in full uniform and by representatives of other nationality groups as well.” Mt. Carmel soon acquired jurisdiction over Pueblo’s Mexicans and *Hispanos* as well: in 1884 the Jesuits of St. Patrick’s Church had built the aforementioned St. Joseph’s Chapel to “serve the Spanish Americans in the area,” but after Mt. Carmel’s consecration the city’s Spanish-speaking people began attending the new church – mainly due to Mt. Carmel’s more convenient location in proximity to the Mexican settlements – and St. Joseph’s Chapel quickly fell into disuse and was demolished. Into the 1940s Mt. Carmel was still described as “a national parish for those of Italian descent and Spanish-speaking people.” In 1891, meanwhile, Bishop Matz had asked the Rev. Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B., of St. Vincent’s Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania to come to Pueblo
and establish a parish for all “the middle-European elements of the city,” mostly the Slovenes, Germans, and Slovaks who were living in the Grove neighborhood on the Arkansas River’s north bank. An abandoned broom factory was purchased, converted into a church, and St. Mary’s parish was born. Father Cyril Zupan (described as Pastor of “Austrians and Slavonians”) noted the multiethnic makeup of the original St. Mary’s on the cover page of the 1894 Baptismal Record:

Three principal nationalities, Germans, Slovaks, Krainers, and also Croatians, held a meeting today concerning a new structure for church and school purpose. The members present of different nationalities expressed themselves to be perfectly satisfied to stay together, enjoy equal rights, and take upon themselves equal obligations in erecting and keeping this structure. This building will be common to said nationalities although they may have afterwards churches of their own.

Just as the Germans eventually split off with the building of St. Boniface, Pueblo’s Slovaks, after functioning as an autonomous group within St. Mary’s built their own church, St. Anthony’s, across the street from St. Mary’s at 225 Clark Street in the Grove, in 1911. St. Anthony’s closed in the 1990s as the number of registered parishioners fell off. The ethnic Catholics of Pueblo, while faithful to their culture and church, nevertheless also strove to prove their patriotism and “Americanness.” Upon the entrance of the United States into World War I in 1917, the Germans, Slovenes, and Slovaks of Pueblo were openly insulted and abused due to their homelands fighting on the belligerent side of the war. Father Zupan, O.S.B., who was the “ideal pastor for these various national groups” because of his mastery of the German and Slavic languages, stood on the steps of the Pueblo courthouse and pledged his support and the support of his parishioners for the American war effort.¹⁸
As the twentieth century progressed, ethnic parishes were “officially” phased out, but their influence continued to be felt. Canon 216 of the New Code of Canon Law in 1918 forbade the formation of any new national parishes, and in the 1920s and 30s American Catholic leaders began to push the idea that national parishes should gradually be eliminated. The reality at the grassroots, however, was that ethnic parishes were still active and vibrant. Jay Dolan reports that nationwide well into the 1920s “the immigrant church was very much alive, and Catholicism continued to be a religion rooted in diverse ethnic traditions.” By 1930, for example, first- and second-generation immigrants made up almost two-thirds of Chicago’s population, and more than half of the city’s population still belonged to national parishes. In the West, it was during this period that the number of ethnic parishes reached its zenith. In 1930 the *Catholic Directory* listed eleven national foreign-language parishes for the Denver Diocese (which still included Pueblo). In the 1940s, as industrialization and urbanization changed the demographics of the region, many ethnic parishes did in fact begin to lose their enclosed neighborhood character and, instead, became gathering places for members of a particular ethnic group now spread throughout a growing urban area. By 1944, in fact, all of the national foreign language parishes in the newly-created Pueblo diocese had lost that specific designation. In the case of Pueblo’s Mt. Carmel, however, the church continued as a *de facto* ethnic parish. A 2011 *Pueblo Chieftain* retrospective on the parish reported:

> Although Italians dominated, the congregation from the beginning reflected the ethnic makeup of neighboring settlements – Goat Hill, Peppersauce Bottoms, Bessemer, and the Grove, the area that’s still home to the church at 421 Clark St. There were plenty of Slavics and Hispanics in the pew alongside their Italian brethren…there was a friendly rivalry between the Italian-based Society of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and the *Congregación de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*. Both groups organized huge festivals, community meals
and other events to raise money for the church.

The immigrants’ religious Americanization did hit occasional bumps in the road: sometimes Pueblo’s English-speaking Catholics complained to the diocese that immigrant men were often forgiven for sins without proper penance, stemming from a linguistic misunderstanding when they confessed in rudimentary English and the priest did not understand what they were saying. Others believed that members of ethnic parishes “weren’t part of the diocese because they were allowed to eat meat on Fridays.” In actuality, immigrants were oftentimes given the Friday dispensation because of the hard physical labor they did, or because of the Bulla Cruciata, a quirky side note of Papal history that will be looked at in a later chapter of this study. Still, the overall legacy of Pueblo’s ethnic parishes and ethnic parishes nationwide was a positive one. They fostered a feeling of place and community that helped with the psychological toll of immigration, while at the same time they facilitated a gradual assimilation into American culture without totally forsaking the immigrants’ native cultural markers. In fact, the cultural contributions of ethnic Catholics enriched American culture, transforming it into something new. As the children of immigrants reached school age, the church’s support of parochial education and its contentious relationship with public schools comprised another large piece of the weaving of a national American fabric.19

**The Church and Education**

Since they played such a large role in the lives of immigrant children, schools attracted the attentions of a number of interested parties. For the church, the *parochial* school system was an effective way to strengthen the immigrants’ faith and prevent “leakage;” for the U.S. government, *public* schools were the best way to foster American
loyalty, teach English, and impart progressive, Protestant middle-class mores; while for nativist anti-Catholic groups – principally the resurrected Ku Klux Klan – the parochial educational system was part of the Pope’s “master plan” to turn the United States into a Catholic puppet regime. Though their methods differed, both parochial and public education was seen as the clearest path to assimilation into American society. The church-supported school system was part of a broader Catholic social services network that aimed to address the needs of the poor and reflect the church’s commitment to the overlooked of society. The backbones of this system were the dedicated nuns who “cared for the sick in hospitals, sheltered orphans, provided for the elderly, established settlement houses in cities, and operated many other institutions of social assistance.” Above all, however, the nuns were teachers: by 1900, there were over 3,800 Catholic parochial schools in the United States and another 663 academies for girls, “almost all of which were staffed by nuns.” Not all immigrant groups were committed to constructing and financially supporting parochial schools and utilizing them for their children’s education, however. Italian immigrants, perhaps reflecting the anticlericalism of their homeland, “could not understand why they should construct their own schools or send their children to parochial schools when a state-supported public school was readily available.” Additionally, since the Italian government had subsidized a public educational system, immigrants from Italy had a predisposition towards state-supported schools, and they “made little use of the parochial school upon coming to America.” In Pueblo Italian immigrants, often out of necessity, sent their children to parochial school alongside other ethnic Catholic immigrant children.20
The Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, who had run St. Mary’s Hospital since 1882, established Pueblo’s first parochial schools. A grade school was erected at St. Patrick’s parish in 1885 at a cost of $10,000, with the high school following in 1887, and the schools “drew from the very beginning an attendance of 130 pupils.” Built in 1882 at the corner of San Pedro and Guadalajara (now Routt and Michigan) in South Pueblo, St. Patrick’s, Pueblo’s second Catholic church, was served by Jesuit priests until 1925, with the Rev. G. Massa, S.J., serving as “the pastor for Italians and Mexicans.” By 1899 five Sisters of Charity were teaching 160 pupils at St. Pat’s, and by 1921 there were 296 grade schoolers and 67 high schoolers. Tuition was $5 a year for children of St. Patrick’s parish families and $1 per month for non-parishioners. The Sisters of Charity were among a number of religious who were active in Pueblo at the time. Sisters from St. Mary’s Academy in Denver had founded the Loretto Academy in 1875, the Franciscan order ran Sacred Heart Orphanage, and the Benedictine Order ran St. Mary’s Church and School. The city even briefly boasted a Catholic college to complement its parochial grade and high schools. Bishop Matz, writing to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda in January, 1903, felt that a college should be provided for the Catholic boys of Pueblo. In his letter the bishop wrote that “this city of 50,000 inhabitants is an industrial center where a day college for higher education is much needed.” Dedicated on October 18, 1903, the college, named “St. Leander’s Priory and Day School for Boys,” never grew its enrollment to match anticipated numbers, and closed in 1926, replaced by Holy Cross Abbey in nearby Cañon City. Catholic institutions sought to instill American middle-class values, but on their own (Catholic) terms. In the 1920s, the Holy Family Nursery and Girl’s Protectory had a stated purpose of safeguarding “children and girls exposed to
serious spiritual dangers.” Without institutions of this type, “many children would be roaming the streets in want of everything and, most likely, would be learning lessons of crime.” Preventing “leakage” was also important, as children “housed in non-Catholic institutions would lose that faith which is the only treasure they have inherited from their parents.” 21

In the 1920s a resurgent KKK believed that Rome was anxious to subvert the public school system in order to turn it into a vehicle for Catholic propaganda. Since the schools were essential to the creation of a “loyal and intelligent citizenry,” they were conspicuous targets, and Catholics were thought to seek a “Romanizing” of the students by placing “Papists” on school boards and employing them as teachers. In the event of their success, “there would be a string of beads around every Protestant child’s neck and a Roman Catholic catechism in its hand. ‘Hail Mary, Mother of God,’ would be on every child’s lips, and the idolatrous worship of dead saints a part of the daily program.” Even after the Klan’s brand of nativism waned in influence, there was still the need for Catholic students to “prove” their commitment to learning American values – whether they were enrolled in parochial or public schools – and for Catholic schools to prove their commitment to teaching those same American values. In August 1916, after the secular Denver newspapers published comments criticizing Catholic schools as undemocratic, Father Hugh L. McMenamin, Rector of Denver’s Immaculate Conception Cathedral, wrote a letter that was printed in both the Rocky Mountain News and the Denver Catholic Register. In it, he defended the parochial school as a model of democratic ideal: “Nations cannot survive without laws; there is no true liberty without restraint.” He wrote, “men cannot be a law unto themselves…we must hold fast to religion. And so it
happens that the Catholic school system is the greatest safeguard that American liberty has.” In 1949, after the *Pueblo Star Journal and Chieftain* published an editorial favoring the restriction of federal funds to students of public schools, Father John C. O’Sullivan, the Diocesan Superintendent of Schools, wrote a letter to newspaper publisher Frank S. Hoag that touched on the democratic theme in defense of Catholic schools, much like Father McMenamin’s letter of 1916 had:

It is only in private schools that the tenets of religion and morality can be taught, and the preservation of religion and morality is our contribution to the stability of our democratic form of government against the encroachments of totalitarianism…Catholic youth face all the responsibilities of citizenship. Their parents are taxpayers…the leaders of our Church spring from the families of the working class and know its problems. 

In Pueblo, Catholic high school education evolved from the parish level to a larger centralized school as the city grew. Bishop Matz, speaking at a school dedication in Grand Junction, Colorado, in 1916, spoke of the educational progress that had been made, particularly in the southern half of the state. Pueblo, which was the state’s second-largest city, had seven Catholic schools with an enrollment of nearly fifteen hundred. The bishop mentioned that, although there had been discussion of a central Catholic high school in Pueblo, he felt that it would not materialize, since the southern Colorado city, like Denver, was spread out over a large territory, making it almost impossible to select a location that would be convenient to all parts of the city. Nevertheless, the idea did eventually come to fruition, aided in part by the development of automobile culture and refinement of the public transportation system, which reduced distance as a barrier to education, and Catholic schools grew citywide. By the 1944-1945 school year, the city’s seven Catholic elementary schools (Sacred Heart, St. Anthony’s, St. Francis Xavier, St.
Leander, St. Mary’s, St. Patrick, Sacred Heart Orphanage) had a combined enrollment of 1,085. As new parishes were founded in burgeoning areas of the city and county, a parochial school was usually part of the plant design, like in 1948 when Father Charles A. Murray, S.J., pastor of Mount Carmel parish, converted surplus buildings purchased from the War Assets Administration into a new school plant at St. Joseph’s mission (later St. Joseph parish) in Blende, east of the city proper. Between 1942 and 1952, parochial school enrollment in the new Diocese of Pueblo increased eighty-nine percent, from 3,226 to 6,130, of which 2,302 were in the city of Pueblo alone.  

In the 1940s the diocese kicked off a pledge drive for a new building for Pueblo Catholic High School. The Most Rev. Joseph C. Willging, first Bishop of Pueblo, published a letter in the April 3, 1944 edition of the Pueblo Catholic High School student paper, The Tatler, that excoriated public education and Catholics who might favor state-run education. The bishop wrote:

Any Catholic who does not give active support to our High School proves the lack of proper Catholic education in the mission and spirit of the Church, and should not claim the title of Catholic…When will we have our new Pueblo Catholic High building? Just as soon as the Catholic population of Pueblo is converted to the realization of the imperative need of an adequate and modern school property, and is made more conscious of the supreme advantages of religious higher educations, and becomes less satisfied with the glamor (sic) of godless and paganistic education.

The fundraising effort ultimately proved successful, and the new Pueblo Catholic High was dedicated on May 3, 1951 in a ceremony attended by the Most Reverend Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, D.D., Apostolic Delegate to the United States. Speaking at the dedication, the Most Rev. Hubert M. Newell, Coadjutor Bishop of Cheyenne and former superintendent of schools for the State of Colorado, yet again tied in Catholic education to American democracy. In Catholic schools, he argued, “the Catholic child is taught that
his love for his country is second only to his love for his God.” Patriotism was a virtue grounded in faith that “commands us all to be upright, cooperative citizens, willing not only to enjoy the privileges of government, but also to protect its interests from unjust aggressors even with our lives.” Just like Catholic immigrants needed to prove their American loyalty, their church constantly strove to prove its own *bona fides* and show that the tenets of the faith were compatible with American egalitarianism and democracy.24

Even though the new Pueblo Catholic High building was touted as a good barometer of the strength of Catholic education, demographic changes and other societal forces were starting to signal the end of widespread Catholic education by the later twentieth century, resulting in a drastic reduction in the number of Catholic schools available to parents. At the time of the 1951 dedication ceremony, 90% of the city’s high school–aged Catholic students attended one of the two public high schools, Central and Centennial, and this trend continued into the next two decades, until the Most Rev. Charles Buswell, second Bishop of Pueblo, closed all the Catholic schools in the city in 1971 due to declining enrollment and lack of financial sustainability. Thomas Noel has identified four factors in the decline of the number of Catholic schools statewide in the 1960s and 70s. First, there was a drastic decline in the number of nuns (the lifeblood of parochial education) as fewer women joined religious orders in the post-Vatican II church. Secondly, the number of children per Catholic family declined, as Catholics adapted more closely to a suburban, nuclear-family model. Fewer Catholic children equated to fewer potential Catholic school students. Additionally, as ethnic Catholics became better integrated into the mainstream culture they developed a greater acceptance
of public schools. Finally, the cost of education soared, making public school a financially attractive choice for working families. Despite its decline in influence, the Catholic educational system played a major role in acculturating Catholic immigrants and their children into American society and furthering the pace of the mainstream’s acceptance of the Roman Catholic Church as a viable religious institution, rather than one to be repelled. By teaching its students that one could be both a good Catholic and a good American, the parochial school ultimately helped educate the American culture at large.25

The Mainstreaming of the American Church

The experience of what it has meant to be Catholic in America has changed with shifting social norms and cultural characteristics, but perhaps the largest factor in Catholic acceptance by the mainstream was simply the large numbers of Catholics moving to and living in the United States. By 1908 enough Catholics had called the U.S. home that in June of that year Pope St. Pius X issued the Apostolic Constitution Sapienti Congilio, which removed the American church from “missionary” status and placed it on equal footing with the European churches. By World War I there were over 16,000,000 Catholics in the United States, and Richard Linkh argues that Catholicism was already “becoming recognized as an ineluctable component of American life,” as it “had indeed reached maturity.” By the 1960s the American church counted nearly 40,000,000 members, and the property holdings of major dioceses reached astronomical figures. The gradual assimilation of Catholic immigrant groups had “occurred almost unnoticced” with the church “suffering no outstanding losses.” Between 1940 and 1997 the number of American Catholics grew 188%, so that by 1998 the 62,000,000 adherents comprised a
larger group than the total population of either the United Kingdom or France. While anti-Catholic views are still periodically expressed in certain evangelical churches, the open, public exhibition of xenophobic anti-Catholicism prevalent in the past has disappeared. The “Pope-Day” celebrations and “Whore of Babylon” talk are no more.26

For Pueblo’s ethnic Catholics, their assimilation paralleled the growth of the church itself in the area. That is to say, although Catholicism was well-established regionally, due to its roots under Spanish and Mexican rule, the American Church in the West preceded the influx of Catholic immigrants by a mere few decades. Unlike in the eastern United States, where cities were relatively long-established and the Catholic Church had already formed parishes and clearly-defined Episcopal jurisdictions, in the West the church grew in tandem with the fledgling towns. Despite Catholicism being the ancient faith in the area, it (the American church) functioned as a true frontier, missionary church, and it underwent its growing pains alongside the ethnic immigrants themselves, taking on the multicultural characteristics of its worshippers in the process.
CHAPTER III

THE FRONTIER CHURCH: CATHOLICISM IN THE WEST

Frederick Jackson Turner argued that the frontier transformed Americans. My investigation of one institution suggests the contrary: the wilder and more remote the frontier, the more some people – especially women – hungered for churches like those they had known “back home.”...the striking thing is not how the frontier affected the early Church, but how quickly Westerners installed the old traditions.

-Thomas J. Noel²⁷

Pueblo’s Catholic immigrants of the late 1800s and early 1900s belonged to a church that had established a foothold in the region centuries before and had remained the major cultural constant for the area’s few residents under Spanish and Mexican rule. But it was also a church that, under American jurisdiction, grew into maturity alongside the fledgling American frontier towns. Consequently, the Catholic Church in the West was able to more quickly adapt to changing demographic patterns and effectively incorporate the new immigrants into the American church. To be sure, there was strife between a “native” U.S. church hierarchy from the East – mainly French or Irish-American – and the ethnic immigrant newcomers after the church leadership attempted to impose an austere American model of Catholicism in Colorado and New Mexico. The immigrants were ultimately able to assert their place in the church, however. Through organization and collaboration, and aided by decisions from the Vatican, Catholic immigrants succeeded in building ethnic parishes where they could practice their native faith within their own culture, while at the same time they participated in American society as workers in the U.S. economy, interacting with different cultures on a daily basis in factories, steel mills, smelters, warehouses, railroads, and mines. Immigrant children, influenced by American mass culture, brought the English language and an American
outlook home to their parents, and slowly over the years the faith of Catholic immigrants morphed into a more “Americanized” form, as English overtook the immigrant tongues in even the most isolated ethnic parishes, and public education overtook parochial schools. This transformation of an old model of faith – or the creation of a new model – was not entirely one-sided, however. Rather, it was a give-and-take between the U.S. church and the ethnic Catholic immigrants, as many Old World practices (devotions to regional saints, festivals, processions, etc.) found their way into American Catholicism and remain entrenched in Pueblo’s parishes to the present day, illustrating the immigrant contribution to the American religious and cultural landscape.

**Spanish and Mexican Roots**

Roman Catholicism was the first Christian faith to touch the shores of the New World, making landfall with Columbus in the late fifteenth century. Spanish and Portuguese explorers carried their Catholicism with them in their expeditions throughout the two American continents, and in the sixteenth century Spain established the administrative structures for the governance of her colonies. Likewise, Rome established vicariates and dioceses to administer to the needs of New World Catholics, and as Spanish explorations pushed northward into the area of present-day New Mexico the church struggled to expend its resources in order to cover vast new areas of settlement. By the time the English pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, the Spanish had planted eleven churches in New Mexico. Fray Domingo de Anza, a Franciscan friar, is believed to have established the first mission in present-day Colorado as part of the 1706 Juan de Ulibarri expedition. Ulibarri officially claimed what is now Colorado for King Phillip V, and de Anza founded a mission at *El Quartelejo*, an Apache village thought to have been
near the junction of Horse Creek and the Arkansas River, fifty miles east of the present site of the city of Pueblo. From the Ulibarri expedition until the 1803 Louisiana Purchase all the land south of the Arkansas River and west of the Rocky Mountains was considered part of the Spanish possessions, under the name of “New Mexico.” American explorers made incursions into the region, and on November 15, 1806, Army lieutenant Zebulon Montgomery Pike, upon catching sight of the Rocky Mountains, wrote:

   At two o’clock in the afternoon, I thought I could distinguish a mountain to our right, which appeared like a small cloud; when our party arrived on the hill they with some accord gave three cheers to the Mexican mountains.

Throughout the Spanish colonial period and on through Mexican independence, Episcopal oversight of the northern frontier presented a challenge for the church. According to David Weber, the church failed to fully extend itself to the far north “because of weakened leadership.” No bishops lived on the frontier under either Spain or Mexico, and they presided over Texas and New Mexico from distant cities. New Mexico, in fact, fell under the Diocese of Durango, one thousand miles south of Santa Fe. At the time of Mexico’s independence from Spain in 1821 the church hierarchy of the region consisted largely of Spaniards, and throughout the 1820s the leadership was decimated after the archbishop of Mexico loyally returned to Spain and other bishops followed his example. Compounding the problem, many elderly bishops died in office, and by mid-1829 not a single bishop served in all of Mexico. For over a decade the Vatican refused to appoint new bishops to fill these vacancies, in part because the Pope sought to restore Mexico to Spain, and in fact he would not recognize Mexican independence until 1836.28
At the more intimate local level, priests for the frontier communities were similarly hard to come by. Spanish and Mexican priests tended to avoid the isolation, hardship, danger, and low salaries of the northern periphery in favor of the more comfortable urban parishes of the Mexican core. In the early 1800s, for example, over 1,000 priests served the single Mexican city of Puebla while fewer than eighty priests worked the northernmost provinces of Texas, New Mexico, and California, causing one Mexican historian to editorialize: “and then they ask why we lost these territories.” Some of the priests who served on the frontier took full advantage of the absence of bishops and the lack of Episcopal supervision: foreigners traveling through New Spain and Mexico frequently described frontier priests as “debauched, hypocritical men, given to drink, gambling, and women, who fathered illegitimate children and indulged themselves in other worldly ways.” After the ceding of the area to the United States after the Mexican-American War, New Mexico’s first bishop Jean Baptiste Lamy arrived in 1851 and lifted the veil on bad clerical behavior, defrocking several priests who refused to change conduct that the bishop regarded as scandalous. Still, many of the early missionaries to the area acted out of genuine devotion to God, enduring hardships in an unforgiving desert landscape. Author Willa Cather, whose novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop* offers up a fictionalized account of Bishop Lamy’s experiences, wrote of the early frontier clergy:

A European could scarcely imagine such hardships…Those early missionaries threw themselves naked upon the hard heart of a country that was calculated to try the endurance of giants. They thirsted in its deserts, starved among its rocks, climbed up and down its terrible canyons on stone-bruised feet, broke long fasts by unclean and repugnant food. Surely these endured Hunger, Thirst, Cold, Nakedness, of a kind beyond any conception St. Paul and his brethren could have had. Whatever the early Christians suffered, it all happened in that safe
little Mediterranean world, amid the old manners, the old landmarks. If they endured martyrdom, they died among their brethren, their relics were piously preserved, their names lived in the mouths of holy men.  

After the American government took possession of the southwest, the Vatican reorganized the territory for U.S. jurisdiction. In need of clergy for the vast new region, American bishops turned to Europe – France in particular – for priests, and in New Mexico both French and Italian clergy ministered to the *nuevomexicanos*. The 1850 appointment of Frenchman Jean B. Lamy as Vicar Apostolic was indicative of an eastern-based hierarchy’s desire to impose a “French Gothic Catholicism” among the Mexican people. In 1853 the New Mexico Vicariate (covering New Mexico and Arizona) was made a diocese, and Father Lamy consecrated as its first bishop. French missionary priests arriving in Santa Fe in 1851 had been “appalled at the state of decline in which they found Church affairs,” reflecting their ignorance of the spiritual neglect the region had suffered under Spanish and Mexican governance. These newly arrived priests often shared a “disregard for culturally integrated religious traditions,” and while the U.S. government established civil control over the southwest, the American church tried to “Americanize” what had been Mexican parishes in a realigned administrative structure.  

**The Colorado Church**  

The town of San Luis became the first permanent settlement in what is now Colorado in 1851. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the 1848 peace agreement that ended the Mexican-American War, had ensured that the new U.S. citizens of the area could keep their own land, their culture, and their Catholicism, but after the 1858 discovery of gold near the confluence of Cherry Creek and the South Platte River (the site of present-day Denver) approximately 50,000 Americans “threatened to overwhelm
the culture of these earlier Coloradans.” To minister to the Catholics among these newcomers, Archbishop Lamy selected the frail-looking Frenchman Joseph Projectus Machebeuf, who was assigned to a new parish in 1860 that comprised all of present-day Colorado and Utah. After having served first at Albuquerque (1853-1858) and then Santa Fe (1858-1860) Father Machebeuf eventually logged over 100,000 miles on his missionary travels throughout what is now New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah, traveling in a wagon outfitted with a square canvas top so he could sleep inside. His carriage had a half-curtain in front that could be let down in case of storms and a tailgate that could be lowered and used as an altar. On an October 1860 journey from Santa Fe to the new town of Denver, Father Machebeuf, accompanied by Father Jean Baptiste Raverdy, stopped at Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Conejos, built in 1857, which became the first permanent Catholic Church in Colorado.31

Machebeuf’s 1860 trip was “long and tedious.” He and Raverdy crossed the high mountains over Taos, then over the Sangre de Cristo range, coming down to the Green Horn, St. Charles, and Pueblo. In what is today East Pueblo they “found several Mexican families” and stayed in Pueblo two days, offering Mass, hearing confessions and baptizing a few children. A 1906 Denver Catholic Register retrospective on this historic 1860 sojourn reinforces the Catholic establishment’s nineteenth-century view of Mexicans:

Father Machebeuf and Father Raverdy came to Pueblo on their way to minister to the Catholics of the Pikes Peak regions. Coming down the Greenhorn mountains, they reached the Arkansas River where Pueblo now stands. They found here a few dilapidated adobe houses, inhabited by Mexicans, who were between civilization and barbarism.
Upon arriving in Denver, while Father Machebeuf built a church (St. Mary’s) Father Raverdy headed back south on horseback, carrying with him vestments and sacred utensils, for “he had heard on his journey to Denver from the Mexicans in Pueblo that there were many Catholics, Indian and Mexican, in that portion of the country.” By 1867 Archbishop Lamy realized that Colorado was growing too large for his jurisdiction, and on his recommendation Colorado and Utah were turned into one Vicariate Apostolic in 1868, with Father Machebeuf appointed as Vicar. Utah would be separated from Colorado in February 1871 and given over to the jurisdiction of the archbishop of San Francisco, California. Colorado’s population boomed in the last four decades of the nineteenth century, growing from 34,277 in 1860 to 39,864 in 1870, to 194,327 in 1880, to 412,198 by 1890. Recognizing this growth, on August 16, 1887 Pope Leo XIII elevated the Vicariate of Colorado to the Diocese of Denver, with Bishop Machebeuf as its head.32

The town of Pueblo similarly boomed in the 1870s and 80s. Emerging at first as “a trading fort and center for Spanish, French, and American mountain men” the 1870s arrival of the railroad and the establishment of a steelworks enabled Pueblo to quickly urbanize, and the town’s Catholics requested parish status from Bishop Machebeuf. In 1872, he assigned Father Charles M. Pinto, S.J. to be Pueblo’s first resident priest, and a year later the town’s first parish church, St. Ignatius, was completed. The contributions of nuns to the Colorado church, although mentioned in an earlier chapter, cannot be overlooked. Sisters opened hospitals, schools, and orphanages, and lent an air of feminine discipline to raw frontier towns “filled with hardened miners, ranchers, sodbusters, and railroad workers,” and over thirty different orders of nuns worked in
Colorado after the 1860s. The church played a vital role in tempering Colorado’s unrefined frontier culture somewhat. Thomas Noel credits it with introducing and sustaining the fine arts, fostering music, art, and architecture, and “bringing classical liberal arts, culture, and morals to remote frontier outposts.” At the time of Bishop Machebeuf’s death in 1889, the Denver diocese included eight parish churches in Denver – including an ethnic German parish, St. Elizabeth’s, at Curtis and 11th Streets – two parishes in the Pueblo area (St. Ignatius in Pueblo and St. Patrick’s in South Pueblo), and one Pueblo chapel, St. Joseph’s, that was listed as “for Mexicans, attended by Jesuit fathers.”

**The Frontier as an Idea (and an Ideal)**

“Three centuries ago,” Denver Archbishop J. Francis Stafford wrote in the late 1980s, “Hispanic Catholic priests were singing their praises to God in the untamed, uncharted Colorado wilderness.” By the late nineteenth century, that same wilderness, now in American possession, was transformed in the eastern Protestant-American mind into a land of incredible opportunity for economic success, social mobility, and a fresh start. In his 1934 *American Memoir, Saturday Review* editor Henry Seidel Canby wrote that

In contrast to the Catholic laborer who “never went West and came back with fine clothes,” the Protestant saw the economy as a place to exercise “pioneer training in self-dependence, his sense of room at the top, and his certainty that work can get him there”…Belief in the potential for mobility in the class order and in a frontier of expanding opportunities in the cities or in the West held the Protestant culture together.

The ideal of the western frontier was always a mix of fact and fiction. There was, of course, money to be made out west, but it necessitated the right mix of demographic, cultural, and economic markers – usually one of the accepted “white” ethnicities, a
Protestant faith, male gender, and access to venture capital. For the Roman Catholic, Jew, immigrant, African-American, Asian-American, Native American, Hispanic, or member of a “non-white” European ethnic group the West offered work opportunities but usually on a blue-collar, manual-labor level. Alan Trachtenberg calls the images and emotions conjured by the word West an “invention of cultural myth.” Its land and minerals served economic and ideological purposes, merging, he maintains, into a single complex image of the west – that of “a temporal site of the route from past to future, and the spatial site for revitalizing national energies.” Part myth and part economic entity, the West proved indispensable to the formation of a cultural mission to fill the frontier emptiness with civilization, by means of political and economic incorporation. Myth and exploitation went hand in hand.34

The very immensity of the region, however, created “awesome obstacles to the civilizing tendencies of humankind.” Frontier Catholics sought visible faith communities where they could fulfill their religious duties and celebrate important events in their lives, and the harsh climate of Colorado and New Mexico often affected their religious outlook. Writing to Commonweal, Willa Cather reflected on the diverse geography of New Mexico’s rugged terrain and its relation to the Hispanics’ Catholicism, asserting that “in lonely, sombre villages in the mountains the church decorations were sombre, the martyrdoms bloodier, the grief of the Virgin more agonized, the figure of Death more terrifying. In warm, gentle valleys everything about the churches was milder.” Along with the physical environment, economics played a part in shaping religious life. The boom and bust cycle of mining delayed stabilization of the population and, as Carol Jensen asserts, “contributed to a sort of economic colonialism from which the region is
only recently emerging.” Consequently, Catholic parish life in the west has generally retained a rural missionary character, which was only reinforced by ethnic immigrants who brought along a rural ethos from the old country, despite the fact that many national religious customs eventually succumbed to Americanization. Before World War I, Jensen reports, Catholics of recent European extraction were widely dispersed in the region, but the “only major urban concentrations were in Denver and Pueblo, Colorado, where, after some initial conflicts among themselves, they were gradually assimilated into the great American melting pot.”

As it grew in numbers, the Colorado church established schools, hospitals, orphanages, and newspapers to keep the faithful engaged beyond the doors of their parish church. The first Catholic newspaper in the state, the Colorado Catholic, started in November 1884, and on August 11, 1905 Bishop Nicholas C. Matz, second bishop of Colorado, sanctioned the first issue of the Denver Catholic Register, the official diocesan newspaper. Bishop Machebeuf had brought the Benedictines, the Franciscans, and the Jesuits into the diocese, while Bishop Matz added the Dominicans in 1889, the Redemptorists in 1894, the Servites in 1898, the Theatines in 1906, and the Vincentians in 1907. All of the various religious orders contributed to the success of the Catholic Church in Colorado through their hard work and dedication to their vows, and by Bishop Matz’s death in 1917 there were 113,000 Catholics in the state, served by 179 priests. Fifty years later, at Archbishop Urban Vehr’s retirement the state was home to 376,832 Catholics. Despite its growth, at midcentury the Colorado church still struggled with including its largest ethnic group, the Mexicans, among its clergy. Pueblo Monsignor Patrick Stauter, in his memoir of Bishop Joseph Willging’s years as the head of the
Pueblo diocese, writes of the 1962 death of 102 year-old Father Joseph Samuel Garcia. Father Garcia, Stauter reports, “had the doubtful (and shameful for the Church) distinction” of being the only native diocesan priest of Spanish-speaking background to work in Colorado between his own ordination in 1887 and the 1957 ordination of the Rev. Joseph Montoya.36

Pueblo’s position in a borderlands region provided the setting for an interesting tangential topic that involved the intersection of Catholic practice, church administration, ethnic relations, nineteenth-century diplomacy, and medieval European history (!) – the topic of the Bulla Cruciata. The 1818 Adams-Onis treaty between Spain and the United States had established the Arkansas River as the boundary line between Spanish territory and American claims. The land south of the river belonged to Spain – and after 1821 to Mexico – and, besides any political ramifications, the treaty “had one important effect upon the subsequent legislation of the church in Colorado”: Spain’s possessions worldwide fell under the special privilege of eating meat on Fridays with a Papal blessing. Pope Innocent III, in office from 1198 to 1216, granted the Bulla Cruciata (“Bull of the Crusades”) to “one of the Spanish rulers long before Aragon and Castile were united into what became the country we now call Spain.” In gratitude for Spanish forces aiding the Pope in the Crusades, Innocent bestowed the privilege of eating meat on abstinence days, and the boon was extended “not only to the Spaniards as they then existed but also was to extend in perpetuum to any future territories they would occupy.”

As a 1940 Pueblo Star Journal & Sunday Chieftain article explained it:

It happens that Pueblo straddles the old borderline. Pueblo’s South Side being within the old Spanish territory its Catholic inhabitants are to this day affected by the Bull of the Crusades…Altho (sic) the territory south of the Arkansas no longer is a Spanish possession, the church edict has
not been changed, and some 13,000 Catholics on Pueblo’s South Side may eat meat during every day of the year…while the remainder of the 21,000 local Catholics living on the North Side must abide by fasting and abstinence rules.

According to Msgr. Stauter, “Both Hispanics and Gringoes used the privilege willy-nilly since time immemorial and many an ordained or consecrated Gringo over the years had purposely put himself on the south side of the Arkansas River in order to eat steak or roast beef or chicken on Friday.” Priests who also served as parochial school basketball or football coaches often purposely scheduled Friday night games in southern Colorado towns like Walsenburg, Trinidad, Alamosa, and La Junta so that they and their teams could have cheeseburgers afterwards, saving northern road games against the Denver schools for other days. Stauter remembers that, after the creation of the Diocese of Pueblo, Bishop Willging sought to have the privilege revoked. The bishop made ethnicity an issue in his rationale, telling the Monsignor that “I have written to Rome to have the Bulla Cruciata repealed…I’m going to get it thrown out. I don’t see why the Hispanics cannot get in line with the rest of the church, with us Germans, Italians, and Irish.” The bishop was ultimately successful with his request, and Pope Pius XII allowed the repeal, closing an odd but interesting chapter in intra-church and inter-ethnic relations.

37

Folk Religion

Pueblo’s ethnic Catholic immigrants, especially the Mexicans and the Italians, struggled, as did immigrants nationwide, against an American Catholic hierarchy that often misunderstood their cultural religiosity and looked down on their rural faith practices as superstition. Mexicans and Italians kept holy certain feast days, some determined by the universal church and others by national traditions. They held filial and
other social relationships sacred, like the Mexican *compadrazgo*, a system of “co-parents,” extended family, and *vecinos* (neighbors) predicated on serving as godparents to one another’s children. Actions that harmed these relationships or impeded fulfilling their commitments to their heavenly intercessors – the saints – were considered sinful. While the priests admired this code, they disliked the Mexicans’ neglect to regularly confess their sins and receive communion, and across the southwest a strong Hispanic tradition of home altars (*altarcitos*) and home chapels (*oratorios*) continued into the twentieth century. Usually built by the mothers in the family, *altarcitos* and *oratorios* were part of the omnipresence of religious symbols in the home, or what Gilberto Hinojosa argues was “part of the transferral of culture and religious values from one generation to another, for which generally mothers were primarily responsible.” The style of Catholicism that developed in the Mexican-American home stressed sacramentals – holy water, candles, rosaries, scapulars, medals, relics, and devotions like novenas and triduums. George Sanchez argues that this home-based Catholicism was spurred in part by the inability of the church to provide enough priests or a Spanish liturgy. Mark Noll describes Hispanic Catholicism as existing on two levels, and quotes theologian Justo L. Gonzalez, who asserted that “from its very beginning Spanish American Roman Catholicism has been torn between a hierarchical church which has generally represented and stood by the powerful, and a more popular church, formed by the masses and led by pastors who have ministered at the very edge of disobedience.”

In Willa Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, a conversation between Father Vaillant (a character based on Colorado’s first bishop, Joseph Machebeuf) and Bishop Latour (a character based on New Mexico bishop Jean Lamy) highlights the
bipolar division of Catholicism. In seeking the bishop’s permission to travel to far-flung areas of the diocese to minister to Mexicans and Indians, Father Vaillant tells the bishop of the native inhabitants of the region:

They are full of devotion and faith, and it has nothing to feed upon but the most mistaken superstitions. They remember their prayers all wrong. They cannot read, and since there is no one to instruct them, how can they get it right? They are like seeds, full of germination but with no moisture. A mere contact is enough to make them a living part of the Church. The more I work with the Mexicans, the more I believe it was people like them our Saviour bore in mind when He said, *Unless ye become as little children*…The Faith, in that wild frontier, is like a buried treasure; they guard it, but they do not know how to use it to their soul’s salvation. A word, a prayer, a service, is all that is needed to set free those souls in bondage.

The church did not understand the Hispanic spirituality that focused on the home and on community festivals more than on official ecclesiastical activities. A common expression among Hispanics has been “*soy católico a mi manera*” (I am a Catholic in my own way), or as one Mexican immigrant explained, “I am a Catholic and pray in my house, but I hardly ever go to church.” Religion for Mexicans had a public sphere – elaborate outdoor neighborhood religious feasts with music, processions, and rich symbolism – and a home-based private sphere where “the mother of the family was the high priest of this domestic religion.” Regular attendance at Sunday Mass, the American priests’ ideal of good Catholic behavior, was not part of this tradition.39

The church also initially spoke out against the cultural reliance on spiritual healers – the *curanderos* or, more commonly, *curanderas*, since the majority of folk medicine practitioners were women. Although priests preached against the *curanderas*, the Mexican people nonetheless continued to avail themselves of healers and folk medicine. With the urbanization of the *Hispano* population in the twentieth century, the *curandera*
tradition moved to the cities. Hinojosa argues that the church “could not set out to eradicate them altogether without destroying the popular religiosity that inspired them, a spirituality the Church itself promoted in order to animate the faith.” For their part, the *curanderas* never overtly attempted to turn the people away from Catholicism. If anything, they strengthened the people’s bond to the faith, incorporating Catholic prayers to Christ, the saints, or Mary into their folk remedies, which utilized herbs and plants adapted from Native American traditions. Still, the antagonisms between priest and *curandera* remained. Rudolfo Anaya’s novel *Bless Me, Ultima*, set in 1940s New Mexico, centers around young Antonio’s quest to reconcile his Catholic faith with the powers of Ultima, a *curandera* who lives with his family. Traveling with Ultima to cure a man who has been *embrujado* (bewitched by an evil curse), Antonio learns firsthand of the tension between Catholicism and folk medicine:

> “Will he live?” I asked her while she covered him with fresh sheets. “They let him go too long,” she said, “it will be a difficult battle –“ “But why didn’t they call you sooner?” I asked. “The church would not allow your grandfather to let me use my powers. The church was afraid that –” She did not finish, but I knew what she would have said. The priest at El Puerto did not want the people to place much faith in the powers of *la curandera*. He wanted the mercy and faith of the church to be the villagers’ only guiding light. Would the magic of Ultima be stronger than all the powers of the saints and the Holy Mother Church? I wondered.

Antonio, much like the Mexican / *Hispano* people at large, eventually merges the two systems, learning that the belief in folk medicine can be reconciled and coexist with the Catholic faith. Similarly, in the Italian immigrant community people likewise gave respect to older women who possessed knowledge of folk remedies. Robert Orsi, writing on New York’s Italian Harlem, states that many older women in the neighborhood had skill in healing with traditional cures and “knowledge of southern Italian magical rituals,
in particular rituals of protection against the evil eye.” As late as the 1940s men and women sought out local healers to cure them of a variety of ailments and for protection against curses.  

The Italian religious sensibility, much like that of Mexicans and Hispanics, had two tracks, with one based in the home. The world of the sacred was not only encountered inside a church building, it was also encountered and celebrated through family life, hospitality, friendship, and “in the daily trials of the people.” The religion of the Italians was not the same as the official religion of the church, as Jay Dolan reports that “Italian popular religion was a complex system of magical practices inherited from a pre-Christian past and sustained throughout centuries of coexistence with Christianity.” This duality of religion – one popular and one official – explained the religious behavior of Italian immigrants. Like the Mexicans, the Italians were “described as a people for whom religion was all-pervasive, but at the same time their lukewarm attitude toward attendance at Mass and their anticlericalism shocked their coreligionists.” Reliance on popular religious activities and symbolism functioned as markers of cultural cohesion and solidarity. Sicilian immigrants to Pueblo, for example, introduced a tradition that carries on to the present day – the Saint Joseph Day Table. Several centuries ago, a severe famine in Sicily had ravaged the land, and the peasant farmers appealed to St. Joseph by filling an altar with a precious resource – food. On March 19 (St. Joseph’s Day) Italian-American families fill home altars with a variety of foods – oftentimes foods with no meat since March 19th usually falls during Lent – and petition Saint Joseph for help for such things as illness, economic hardship, and the safe return of loved ones from war. Families “also give altars to show their gratitude for the health and prosperity that may
have blessed their homes.” Families also open their homes to their less fortunate neighbors, who are welcome to partake of the food. In the 1940s, *The Southern Colorado Register* (the official diocesan newspaper of the Pueblo diocese) would list the addresses of families who had made St. Joseph tables. 41

**Immigrants in the Frontier Church**

As Bishop Machebeuf struggled to build Colorado’s pioneer parishes, interethnic rivalries made his task all the more difficult. He authorized the state’s first national parish, St. Elizabeth’s (German) parish, in Denver in 1878, while other Denver parishes usually accommodated “a jumble of ethnic groups.” Priests steered different ethnic groups towards their own Masses at a certain hour, or reserved the church basement for a particular nationality, and church sacraments were often administered by ethnic or language group. An 1883 *Pueblo Daily Chieftain* story on the bishop’s pastoral visit to Pueblo noted that “At 3 p.m. he administered Confirmation in St. Ignatius’ church to 35 Spanish-speaking people. The bishop was then called to baptize a Mexican child, and he responded without a murmur.” Cultural biases that stereotyped Mexicans as unwilling to learn English and as lacking discipline and training kept the church from recruiting Hispanic priests, and Msgr. Patrick Stauter asserts that a lot of the time in the Catholic church in Colorado “the Spanish-speaking were given the same brand of treatment that was handed out to the Negro in the southern states.” Consequently, he believed that if the church lost Spanish-speaking members, it was “because regretfully we have earned such a reward.” Italian priests failed to migrate to America in large numbers, although Bishop Giovanni Batista Scalabrini founded an apostolic college in Piacenza, Italy, to train Italian priests to work with Italians abroad. In Pueblo, by the early 1900s the Grove
neighborhood had “its famous arrangement of three Catholic churches within three blocks” – St. Mary’s (Slovenian / Croatian), St. Anthony’s (Slovakian), and Mt. Carmel (Italian / Mexican). In the city’s “American” parishes, meanwhile, immigrants were reminded of their place: Stauter reports on a St. Patrick’s priest, Father Higgins, chastising Italian worshippers for taking up pew space that he felt belonged to legitimate St. Pat’s parishioners. “In these pews today I see a number of people who should not be here,” Stauter remembers Rev. Higgins saying, “This parish is for Irish parishioners. You Dagos belong down in Mt. Carmel. That is your parish.” In fact, Mt. Carmel was described as “the Italian church of this county and every Catholic Italian of the county is a member of this parish.” National parishes like Mt. Carmel often functioned as centers of culture, with the priest acting as “culterization agent,” representing his flock in legal and civil matters.42

In a 1945 Denver Catholic Register report on the 50th anniversary of Pueblo’s St. Mary’s, the paper reported that “the fact that three churches within three blocks are possible in a city of seven churches has seemed strange enough to rate mention in Ripley’s “Believe It or Not” feature.” The Register also reported on the eventual assimilation of the city’s multiple ethnic groups:

It has been estimated that the pedestrian walking the streets of the “little Pittsburgh” can distinguish at least 16 separate languages spoken by the inhabitants. This number does not include any of the dialects or ramifications of the mother tongues. With the passing of the years the caldron has simmered down so that linguistic difficulties are less prominent and nationalistic lines less marked. The present war has proved that the people are Americans, regardless of their mother tongues.

Salt Creek, a Mexican settlement east of the city, had been the site of the Sagrada Familia chapel built in the 1890s, but by 1923 the congregation had outgrown the tiny
chapel and a new mission church dedicated to the Sacred Heart was built. Priests from Mt. Carmel served the mission, but by the 1940s it had itself become too small. The Sacred Heart mission was then replaced by a larger building which eventually became St. Joseph’s Parish. A commemorative history put out by the St. Joseph parishioners in the year 2000 noted that the first students of the parish’s school were “mostly Hispanic, Italian, and Slovenian.” In the mid-1940s Mt. Carmel priest Charles J. Murray, S.J., had conducted a meeting of “the Spanish-speaking Catholics of Pueblo” to discuss the question of a Mexican church. Father Murray explained that many Mexicans would regard a church built in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe “almost as a native shrine wherein the religious customs, the national traditions, and the general spirit and religious feeling of the Spanish-speaking people might find a happier expression.” The good father also realized, though, that many would view it as “a definite step towards further segregation.”

Many Mexicans belonged to Mt. Carmel, which began life in 1899 when Archbishop Sebastian Martinelli wrote to Bishop Matz to inform him of a complaint by the Italian people in Pueblo that they were being spiritually neglected. At the October 1901 blessing of the new church, “all the Italian societies were present in full uniform as well as the Austrian Societies headed by their banners,” and the first confirmation class in Mt. Carmel was held on June 5, 1904, with Bishop Matz administering the sacrament. The fundraising efforts to get the church built in the first place had played up the respectability in American eyes that Pueblo’s Italians would receive. An editorial in the Italian-language newspaper *L’Unione* explained:

The erection of a church in our midst will have a dual purpose, i.e. to awaken in your hearts the principles of that faith which sucked the milk
of our mothers (che succhiammo col latte delle nostre madri) and at the same time suppress all those differences of parties, which weaken the moral forces and make us less than the American people...(The erection of the church) will give you a new and higher social prestige among the American people, who admire your faith and loyalty to your principles… (remember the way) with which you were treated on the day of Confirmation in the church of the Germans, a fact well known. (colla quale foste trattati il giorno della cresima nella chiesa dei Tedeschi, fatto a tutti ben noto)…The first step has already been given, your generosity and perseverance will crown the enterprise. (il primo passo è stato già dato, la vostra generosità e constanza coroneranno l’impresa)

Pioneer Pueblo priest Charles M. Pinto, S.J., writing from El Paso, Texas, to “Representatives of the Italian Catholic Church in Pueblo, Colo,” wrote that he was “deeply moved to see signs of fine spiritual progress in your group there in Pueblo – your little Italian chapel (la capella Italiana).” He also pointed out that “Catholics of other nationalities are found there, too.” Mexican parishioners, who remembered the Italian priests speaking slowly in Spanish at the 10:00 a.m. masses for the Mexican community, utilized Mt. Carmel for both religious and patriotic festivals. They celebrated September 16th (Mexico’s Independence Day) with solemn high mass in the church and the singing of the Mexican national anthem by the church’s Spanish choir, and often celebrated the December 12th feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe by listening to the priest deliver a sermon touting the Virgin as “a sign of protection, of hope, and of victory for the Mexican people.”

While Catholic immigrant groups made great strides in building their ethnic parishes and keeping their culture intact, the 1910s and 20s witnessed a ratcheting-up of nativist sentiment. In the San Luis Valley town of Alamosa Mexican children continued to be segregated from white children in public school, and “in several towns throughout Colorado it was impossible for a Catholic girl to obtain a teaching position.”
1920s a resurgent Ku Klux Klan had added Roman Catholics, immigrants, and Jews to African-Americans on their enemies list. In publications like The Fiery Cross, The Kourier, The American Standard, Dawn, and The Imperial Night-Hawk the Klan assaulted these groups, maintaining that “Jesus was a Protestant” since He had “split with the priests” of the time. Colorado’s Black and Jewish residents were mostly concentrated in Denver, but the state’s 125,000 Roman Catholics resided in all areas. The Klan told willing listeners that Catholics followed a “paganistic creed with its worship of the Virgin Mary, dead saints, images, bones, and other relics.” If the Catholics gained control of Protestant America, the Klan believed, they would end the separation of church and state, ban the Bible, and destroy the freedoms of press, speech, and religion. The Klan’s message in Pueblo found a willing audience in part because of the multiethnic roots of the city’s Catholics.45

The Pueblo Church Takes Shape

The Pueblo parish, established in June 1872, comprised the counties of Pueblo, Fremont, Bent, and parts of Las Animas. The city’s first priest, Father Charles M. Pinto, S.J., arrived by train to find himself nulla domus, nullum sacellum, nulla pecunia (“without house, without chapel, without funds”). Pueblo’s first Catholic church building, dedicated to St. Ignatius of Loyola, was erected on the corner of West and Thirteenth Streets, but initially average attendance at Sunday Mass was not more than thirty people. Reflecting the city’s multiethnic population, the first recorded baptism performed by the Italian Father Pinto was for a Mexican child, Anastacia Aragon, daughter of Pabritio and Incarnata Aragon. In 1875, Father Pinto was succeeded by another Italian Jesuit, Rev. Francis N. Gubitori, but the Italian priests rubbed some of the
“native” American Catholics the wrong way. By 1887 St. Ignatius was transferred from the care of the Jesuits to Bishop Machebeuf in part because there “were complaints from the parish over the lack of English speaking skills of several of the Jesuits.” The fledgling Pueblo church established a hospital and orphanage in reflection of its commitment to social work. The Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati opened St. Mary’s Hospital in a boarding house in the Grove in 1881, which was moved to a brick building on the corner of Grant and Quincy fifteen months later. Sacred Heart Orphanage, opened by the Wheaton (Illinois) Franciscan Sisters in 1903 (with the help of donations and publicity from Captain John J. Lambert, editor of the *Pueblo Chieftain*), cared for Catholic children and had an average yearly occupancy of between 150 and 160, even though capacity was only 135. Pueblo’s Protestant orphans were cared for by the McClelland Home, while African-American children found refuge at the Lincoln Home. Just as religion and ethnicity segregated the city’s orphan children, Roselawn Cemetery organized their blocks so that even death did not cause an intermingling of disparate groups. Protestant graves were to the left of the main entrance, while Catholic graves were on the right, as were the graves of Pueblo’s Jewish community. In the late 1940s, after Bishop Willging had a conflict with Roselawn’s governing board, the new Valhalla Cemetery west of town (the present-day Imperial Memorial Gardens) was touted as a new Catholic cemetery. On November 5, 1948 the bishop celebrated an outdoor Mass in the Resurrection section of Valhalla, blessing a marble statue of the glorified Christ.46

By 1941 Colorado had grown to the extent that Pope Pius XII split the Denver diocese, which encompassed the entire state, into two dioceses. Pueblo was chosen as the Episcopal seat of the newly-created Diocese of Pueblo, covering thirty southern Colorado
counties, while Denver was elevated to an archdiocese, covering thirty-three northern Colorado counties. Reporting on the new southern diocese, *The Denver Catholic Register* wrote:

> The new Diocese of Pueblo contains territory rich in the romantic background of the Southwest...Southern Colorado first was visited by the Spanish conquistadores, who had priests in their parties. Thus, the new diocese can lay claim to priority in the celebration of Mass and other Catholic practices...When Father Machebeuf first visited Pueblo, it was an organized town. The only Catholics he found were Mexicans, for whom he offered mass.

Of the 78,000 Catholics in the new diocese, approximately 35,000 (44%) were “of Mexican or Spanish blood.” Catholics comprised one-fifth of the total population of 360,000 in the area covered by the diocese. Eighty-four priests (40 diocesan and 44 religious) administered the new diocese’s 39 churches, 14 parochial schools, and 79 missions and chapels. The Denver archdiocese’s 77,000 Catholics were guided by 219 priests (122 diocesan and 97 religious), or more than 2 ½ times more priests than the Pueblo diocese, despite having 1,000 less Catholics. By 1950, the Pueblo diocese’s 78,000 original Catholics had grown to just under 90,000. For a few years after the Pueblo diocese’s establishment the *Denver Catholic Register* contained one full page dedicated to news and events of southern Colorado, but in 1945 Pueblo Bishop Willging eventually authorized the creation of the *Southern Colorado Register*, the Pueblo diocese’s official newspaper.⁴⁷

The Pueblo church confronted ethnic and religious discrimination against its members in areas like the city’s housing market. In the early 1940s Father Charles J. Murray, S.J., Pastor of Mt. Carmel Parish, sought to help his parishioners purchase their homes. Since the earliest years of Pueblo’s industrialization, Italian and Mexican
laborers had settled into ethnic neighborhoods like Goat Hill (or Smelter Hill), Peppersauce Bottoms, and Salt Creek, building homes on land to which they legally had a tenuous claim at best. As quasi-legal squatters, the immigrant homeowners often fell behind on their property tax payments. As Msgr. Patrick Stauter explained, “Cunning gringos and maybe others who were not gringos acquired titles to these lands by watching the lists of delinquent tax payers published in the newspapers.” The new owners would then send the “squatters” a monthly bill for rent due on the land. Without clear titles, the squatters had no recourse except to pay the demanded amount or face eviction. Since “that root of all evil, moneda, was badly needed,” Father Murray conceived the idea of the Mount Carmel Credit Union, which started in December 1942. The credit union had assets of 333 members with $53,000, of which $43,000 was loaned out the first year. The squatters “were given dignity of ownership and peace of mind by agreeing to repay the credit union for their clear titles.” A 1950 story on the credit union reported on its success:

Sponsored by the Catholic Church, the movement already has made it possible for more than 300 Mexican families to buy their own homes and thus emerge from a near-feudal system under which they have existed for more than half a century.

When a black Cuban psychiatrist wanted to borrow some money in order to purchase a home in Pueblo, “he found himself frozen out by the banking and real estate powers of the city.” He turned instead to Father Murray’s credit union, was given a loan, and acquired the dwelling, “bankers et.al notwithstanding.” Mt. Carmel Credit Union’s assets had grown to $94,245 by 1950 - $90,712 of which was out on loans – and it had helped 400 families own their homes. By 1952 it had 1,296 members and $252,734, which grew in five years to 4,249 members and $1,866,229 in 1957.48
After the Pueblo church became a diocese, it continued its outreach to the Hispanic community. The *Santo Niño Well Baby* clinic was established in 1948 in Blende / Salt Creek in a building that later became part of St. Joseph parish. Hispanic mothers could bring their infants in for medical care provided by nurses from the county health department. In 1946 the diocese had purchased the Tabor Lutheran Church building on the corner of Jefferson and Routt for use “as a social center for work among the *Hispanos*.” A second center was established in Salt Creek, with Father Murray involved in both projects. A May 1950 issue of the *Southern Colorado Register* reported that “the Catholic Youth Center in Pueblo held a two-day meeting to discuss problems peculiar to the Spanish-speaking.” Meanwhile, parochial education in the new diocese continued to be strong. There were 4,707 students in diocesan schools in 1945, and by 1956 the student count had grown to just shy of 6,000 (5,931). Pueblo’s Catholic schools could also boast of a Congressional Medal of Honor winner among their alumni, as Marine Lt. Raymond G. “Jerry” Murphy – a 1947 Pueblo Catholic High graduate – was awarded the Medal in 1953. Murphy was one of four Puebloans who ultimately earned the Medal of Honor, leading to the city’s adoption of the moniker “Home of Heroes” as the official Pueblo motto.49

The Catholic Church in the American West functioned as a true frontier church, growing in tandem with the new towns that sprung up seemingly overnight. Because of its Spanish and Mexican roots in the area, Roman Catholicism was the first Christian faith to penetrate this vast geographic region. After the territory was acquired by the United States, however, the established church hierarchy in the east began the process of recruiting clergy to travel westward and “Americanize” frontier Catholicism, creating
tension between “old” Catholic practices and “new” Catholic protocols and between eastern and western outlooks. Disdainful of but eventually acquiescent to the “folk” religious practices of the Hispano and Mexican inhabitants of the West, the American hierarchy effectively kept the “Mexicans” and other ethnic Catholic immigrant groups in the fold. By sanctioning the formation of national parishes and allowing culturally specific celebrations and religious devotions, the church facilitated assimilation, and the immigrants themselves ultimately asserted control over their own ethnic identity formation, incorporating their Catholic faith into their new American citizenship. The church in the West succeeded in keeping its members by incorporating an older Mexican and Spanish Catholicism into a new American infrastructure, and against the backdrop of an industrial, multiethnic frontier city like Pueblo, the process was all the more striking. Spurred by the economics of industrial growth and development in the western land of opportunity, Pueblo’s labor force was comprised of a multitude of languages, races, and creeds, and the “Pittsburg of the West” proved to be the ideal environment for the forging of a new American identity.
CHAPTER IV

THE PITTSBURG OF THE WEST

Situated at the foot of the great passes, through the continental range of the Rocky Mountains, at the western terminus of the Missouri Pacific Railway, lies the City of Pueblo, Colorado, now familiarly styled the “Pittsburg of the West.” The geographical location of Pueblo makes it the natural gateway from the East to the Pacific Coast, for nowhere between Wyoming on the north and New Mexico on the south, for a distance of nearly six hundred miles, is there such a natural passageway through the Rocky Mountains…It has been said that if a wall were built around the Arkansas Valley of Colorado her people could live without any assistance from the outside world, and would in a few years be the richest on earth, that they could absolutely revel in luxury on the products of their land and factories.

-from “Pueblo, Colorado, the Natural Gateway to Colorado,” a 1903 abstract of a 24-page booklet entitled “Pueblo, Colorado, The Pittsburg of the West” released by the Missouri Pacific Railway

Pueblo continues into the present day as a multicultural, multiethnic, almost “minority-majority” city, with Hispanics comprising 49.8% of the city’s population. Its founding in the mid-nineteenth century in a borderlands region, on a river that had functioned as an international boundary line just a few years before, set the tone for the city’s tradition as a meeting place for disparate groups. This tradition, strengthened by the rapid industrialization of the 1870s, contributed to the formation of new ethnic identities among the city’s multicultural populace. Catholic ethnic groups in the United States, already saddled with “non-white” racial characteristics, often encountered religious discrimination from the Protestant power elite. But unlike towns where an established, culturally homogeneous population suddenly absorbed large numbers of “foreign” groups, Pueblo’s location on the frontier ensured that all of the different cultures, languages, and religions comprising its population put down roots at roughly the same time. In the nineteenth century, eastern business interests, by touting Pueblo as the
“Pittsburg of the West,” attracted capital and labor to Colorado’s front range in large numbers. The city’s industrial centers, teeming with workers, provided an ideal environment for an intermingling of ideas and attitudes, and exposure to different cultures. Corporations like the Colorado Fuel & Iron (CF&I), under the guise of corporate paternalism, established internal sociological departments that strove to make American citizens out of its immigrant work force. Pueblo’s borderlands heritage and industrial tradition ensured that place was as equally important as time in playing a part in ethnic identity formation.

**A pueblo on the Borderland**

The area where present-day Pueblo sits, along with southern Colorado in general, shares a common culture with northern New Mexico, as both were explored by the Spanish before they were part of the United States. After crossing the *Rio Grande de San Francisco* (the Arkansas River) about fifteen miles from the site of present-day Pueblo on his 1706 expedition, Juan de Ulibarri described the newly-encountered land thusly:

> The plain on our side is a strand of a long league of level land and extremely fertile as is shown by the many plums, cherries, and wild grapes which there are on it…It bathes the best and broadest valley discovered in New Spain.

After the establishment of a Spanish colony in New Mexico, Anglo traders and trappers, while building trade routes with New Spain, encountered a different culture, “literally in a different world.” There was a different race that spoke a different language, with strange and fascinating customs. Even the climate was new – “high, dry, cool and healthful.” The Pueblo area, due to historical events like the Louisiana Purchase, the Adams-Onís Treaty, Mexico’s independence from Spain, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, has been claimed by a number of national and territorial governments, landing
under the flags of Spain, France, Mexico, New Mexico, Louisiana, Kansas, and even Texas at one time or another. Before that, nine different Indian tribes – the Aztecs, Toltecs, Kiowas, Comanches, Navajos, Utes, Apaches, Arapahoes, and Cheyennes – had claimed it at various times. Fort Pueblo, built on the American side of the Arkansas River in 1842, took advantage of both the American and Mexican markets, and was no stranger to functioning as a multicultural, multiethnic meeting place.51

Fort Pueblo’s founding, in fact, had been spurred by mulatto trader James P. Beckwourth, who had at one time been a war chief of the Crow Indians. Writing in his autobiography of the October 1842 construction of the fort, Beckwourth reported, “We all united our labors, and constructed an adobe fort 60 yards square. By the following spring we had grown into quite a little settlement, and we gave it the name of Pueblo.” In July, 1843, Lieutenant John C. Fremont, on his second expedition, came down Fountain Creek to the Arkansas and described the settlement as “a ‘pueblo’ (as the Mexicans call their civilized Indian villages) where a number of mountaineers who have married Spanish women in the Valley of Taos had collected together.” They were principally Americans, Fremont reported, “and treated us with all the rude hospitality their situation admitted.” Still, American visitors were often unimpressed with both the Spartan conditions and the ethnically “inferior” Mexican inhabitants. Francis Parkman, an 1846 visitor to El Pueblo, wrote:

It was a wretched species of fort, of most primitive construction, being nothing more than a large square enclosure, surrounded by a wall of adobe, miserably cracked and dilapidated…Two or three squalid Mexicans, with their broad hats, and their vile faces overgrown with hair, were lounging about the bank of the river in front of it. They disappeared as they saw us approach.
Fort Pueblo would survive a Christmas 1854 attack by Ute Indians, and by the time of Father Machebeuf’s visit in 1860 buildings were being erected and streets mapped out. Pueblo became the seat of the newly-created Pueblo County when the 1861-1862 Territorial Legislature formed Colorado’s original seventeen counties. Pueblo County included everything from Fremont County eastward to the Kansas line and from El Paso County south to New Mexico. Pueblo’s first newspaper, *The Colorado Chieftain*, began publication on June 1, 1868, becoming a daily four years later and changing its name to *The Pueblo Chieftain*, ultimately surviving to the present day as Colorado’s oldest newspaper after Denver’s *Rocky Mountain News* folded in 2009. The town of Pueblo was officially incorporated on March 22, 1870.52

After the Civil War, as America’s industrial vanguard turned its energies westward, General William Jackson Palmer, who built the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, established a new town south of the Arkansas River and placed the railroad station there so his company could sell building lots. The town, South Pueblo, was incorporated on October 27, 1873 and included streets named after Mexican cities and other Spanish names. Between Pueblo and South Pueblo a third town – Central Pueblo – was incorporated on June 21, 1882, and three months later a fourth town, Bessemer, was organized to the south of South Pueblo and incorporated. An act of the State General Assembly combined Pueblo, South Pueblo, and Central Pueblo into the City of Pueblo on April 10, 1886, and Bessemer merged into the city in 1894. Palmer believed that his plan for industrialization would energize the West and “restore virtue to an American nation sullied by political corruption, capitalist excess, and immigration.” In a letter that Thomas Andrews argues was “suffused by the mid-nineteenth century reformers’
characteristic blend of republicanism, white supremacy, and Protestant perfectionism,” Palmer bragged that the new western industrial elites would “filter the foreign swarms and prepare them by a gradual process for coming to the inner temple of Americanism out in Colorado, where Republican institutions will be maintained in pristine purity.” A newly-industrialized Pueblo seemed to fit perfectly into this vision, since “many of the displaced and the optimistic looked westward for refuge or redemption.”

**Turning Pueblo into the “Pittsburg of the West”**

Pueblo’s geographic position at the base of the Rocky Mountains, the nearby lime deposits, ready access to water (the Arkansas River and Fountain Creek) in an arid land, and its relative proximity to the capital city of Denver made it an ideal stop for railroad lines and a natural fit for industrial growth. The city’s economy boomed in the 1870s, first as a result of the smelting of metals like gold, silver, copper, and lead mined near the headwaters of the Arkansas and sustained by an integrated iron and steel industry that exploited nearby coal, iron ore, and limestone. The city transformed from an agricultural trading center to an example of frontier industrialization. In 1878 the firm of Mather and Geist selected Pueblo for a new location for a smelter, since coal, limestone, iron ore, lead, and silver and gold ores were in abundance in the surrounding mountains and it was a downhill pull from all directions to Pueblo. General Palmer and Dr. William Bell decided to build a steelworks at South Pueblo to provide a steady supply of rails for the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, and on January 23, 1880, three subsidiary companies merged into the Colorado Coal and Iron Company. The first blast furnace, christened “Betsy” in honor of the Superintendent’s young daughter, was “blown in” on September 5, 1881, and the steelworks were put into operation by April 12, 1882, as the first steel
rails produced west of the Mississippi were rolled. The 1892 merger of Colorado Coal and Iron with John C. Osgood’s Colorado Fuel Company created the largest industrial corporation in the western United States, Colorado Fuel & Iron (CF&I). The new company established Pueblo’s reputation as the “Pittsburg of the west” and continues to operate into the present day, albeit after undergoing multiple ownership and name changes in its first thirteen decades. CF&I’s sheer size upon its creation can convey some sense of its imprint on Colorado history: it possessed over $13 million in authorized capital, had 7,050 employees, owned in excess of 77,000 acres of farming, town-building, grazing, iron-mining, and oil-bearing land, owned an additional 71,837 acres of coal land containing an estimated four hundred million tons of fuel, operated fourteen coal mines, and had a share in fuel and steel markets that sprawled from Kansas to the Pacific and from Canada to Mexico.\(^\text{54}\)

Pueblo’s industrialization was a boon to the city’s infrastructure. An electric street railway system was in operation by 1889, a few years ahead of such cities as San Francisco, Chicago, and New Orleans. By 1894, the Philadelphia Smelting and Refining Company (controlled by Meyer Guggenheim and sons) had its works in Pueblo, with general offices in Denver. The Eilers Smelter was built in 1887, and the United States Zinc Co. smelter was located in Blende, east of the city proper. Many smelting jobs were held by Italian immigrants, Pueblo’s first large European ethnic immigrant group, and the numerous smelters and steelworks attracted large numbers of immigrant labor, both from Europe and Mexico, joined by \textit{Hispano} migration from New Mexico. Pueblo’s industries functioned as an economic “pull” factor for immigration over the next fifty years, dramatically altering the demographics of northern New Mexico villages. Geographer
Richard Nostrand reports that, for example, by 1956, of the twenty-six permanent families that had been present in the village of El Cerrito, NM, in 1940, four-fifths of them had moved to Pueblo. This fit into a general pattern regarding Mexican Americans. Whereas earlier land had been the basis of the economy, after the 1848 American conquest “the Mexican people began to lose control over their land…Dispossessed of their land and displaced from their traditional pastoral economy, most Mexican Americans were forced into the unskilled labor market of the new, expanding American economy.” The common manifestation of this phenomenon, especially for Hispanics, was to move to cities like Pueblo (and Denver) for work.55

Most of the early immigrants were men, who worked to save enough money to either send for their families or worked until they had enough money to quit and go back home. Between 1908 and 1923 close to sixty percent of all Italians who came to the United States eventually returned home. In 1908 alone, returnees outnumbered immigrants by almost two to one. For those who stayed or those who finally set down roots on their second or third trip, their positions in the industrial market economy created an opportunity to partake of American institutions like banks. Word-of-mouth or the good word of a fellow countryman could often overcome ethnic resistance to entrusting their meager earnings to an “American” bank. The Thatcher brothers’ First National Bank of Pueblo, for example, benefitted from the recommendations of “a leading businessman” from “a Southern European country,” who deposited his compatriots’ savings into the Bank during the Panic of 1893, and later delivered “a rather scorching denunciation” to his immigrant brethren for their lack of faith in the bank. As the city’s immigrants became more familiarized with American institutions, the
beginnings of their ethnic identity formation were in place. The Christmas 1919 edition of *The Denver Catholic Register* claimed, “All the scenic wonders of the Colorado Rockies are easily within reach of Pueblo” and considered the city “the industrial and commercial center of that region between the Missouri River and the Pacific Coast.” The city and its industry functioned as a facilitator for the “Americanizing” of its immigrants.56

**The Immigrants Build a New Pueblo**

The 1870 Census listed Pueblo’s foreign-born residents as hailing from Ireland, Canada, Prussia, England, Bavaria, Mexico, Switzerland, Poland, Hesse, Baden, France, Wurtenburg, Hanover, Russia, Darnstadt, Austria, Bohemia, Denmark, Sweden, Nova Scotia, and Saxony. The route that many immigrants followed from Europe to Pueblo took them primarily through the ports of entry at New Orleans and Galveston. The city’s rapid industrialization in the 1870s drew large numbers of laborers from the newly-unified Italy and ethnic Slovenes from the Austrian Empire. According to Joanne Dodds, an estimated ninety percent of the young men from the Italian village of Lucca Sicula, for example, ended up in Pueblo, represented today by prominent family names like Bacino, Cardinale, Genova, Musso, Pagano, and Parlapiano. Slovenes from Carniola, Slovenia, Styria, Dalmatia, and Croatia immigrated to the eastern United States, where many continued on westward, lured by agents from the Pueblo Board of Trade advertising jobs. Ignac (Jim) Pugelj (Pugel) was a typical case: entering the country through Ellis Island at 19 years of age, he was living in Cleveland when his priest informed him about available jobs at Pueblo’s smelters and steelworks. Pugelj left Cleveland in 1906, arriving in Pueblo after a four-day train journey. As Pueblo’s Slovenian colony grew in the 1880s
and 90s, Slovenian-language newspapers like *Mir* (Peace), *Koloradske-Novice* (Colorado News), *Slovenski Narod* (Slovenian Nation), and *Glas Svobode* (Voice of Freedom) kept Slovene immigrants connected to both their new homeland and the old countries, and by 1891 approximately three hundred Slovenians were living in Pueblo.\(^{57}\)

Slovenians, along with some other Slavic groups, were called *Bojons*. There are two possible explanations for the term’s origin. Many Slovene men were named John and upon arrival in Pueblo many dressed in their finest clothes to apply for work at the smelters or the steelworks. The name John and the bow tie were combined to describe the men as *Bojons*. A more plausible theory holds that traveling to Paris by train on the first leg of the long journey to the United States, Slovenians overheard Parisians remarking, “*Quels beaux gens*” or “what handsome people.” When questioned about their nationality upon arriving at Ellis Island, instead of declaring themselves to be subjects of the hated emperor Franz Joseph they instead called themselves “*beaux gens,*” transliterated by immigration officials to *Bojons*. Unlike most ethnic or racially-specific slang monikers, *Bojon* is not usually considered offensive by the people the term describes. Pueblo’s Slovenes, in fact, use the term with affection, and the Slovenian neighborhood around the Eilers Smelter / St. Mary’s parish grounds was unofficially christened *Bojon town*. By 1910 Pueblo’s Slovene population stood at 1,414 immigrants, making up 5.3% of Pueblo’s population of 45,444. In the Slovenian neighborhoods, “you could hear the sounds of different accordions playing Slovenian songs,” illustrating what Robert Orsi calls the immigrant love of place, a “sensuous love, and intense sensitivity to the sounds, smells, and tastes of the neighborhood.”\(^{58}\)
By 1920 immigrants accounted for seventeen percent of the city’s population, with an additional seventeen percent in the second-generation. Many settled in heavily eastern-European Bessemer, just west of the CF&I steelworks, the Grove district near the Arkansas River, and Smelter hill or “Goat Hill” east of downtown. The houses on Goat Hill, primitive by American standards, were described as having “no plaster. All wooden walls. And outside toilets.” Pueblo’s two largest ethnic groups, the Mexicans and the Italians, lived in Salt Creek east of town or on Goat Hill and “occupied the society’s lowest rungs.” The Italian and Mexican settlement on the twelve acres “extending south from Ash Street to the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway, west to Summit Street and east to the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad tracks” was dubbed “Mexico.” During Prohibition, the immigrants’ isolation and interdependence were viewed by native-born Puebloans to be self-imposed barriers to assimilation, and a Pueblo grand jury reported that “ninety percent of the bootleggers and gamblers are foreign born.” Commissioner of Public Safety George J. Stumpf stated that “our greatest handicap…(in fighting crime) is our great foreign population, as most of the lawbreakers are aliens, principally Italians.” Wine-making and alcohol consumption, an ingrained part of the immigrants’ culture, did not fit in with the Protestant, Progressive ethos of the temperance movement. Rites-of-life-passage ceremonies like baptisms, marriages, and funerals also continued in Pueblo much as they had in the old country. A typical Catholic funeral, for example, started with the procession from the home, where the deceased had been lying in state, to the church for Mass. After the funeral Mass the deceased was taken to the cemetery for the final blessing and burial in a hand-dug grave (the digging having been done by family, friends, and neighbors).59
Between 1900 and 1920 over three million Italians emigrated to the United States, with about one-third coming from agricultural jobs (such as farming and shepherding), another third were unskilled laborers employed in the construction industry, and the remaining group consisted of skilled workers like masons, carpenters, and tailors. While some of Pueblo’s Italians purchased land on the fertile St. Charles Mesa in eastern Pueblo County for farming, and Italian-American families like the Mussos, Mauros, DiSantis, and DiTomases still farm the land today, the majority of the city’s Italian immigrants found work in the smelters, steelworks, and factories. In the 1870 Census no Italians were listed in Pueblo County, and the 1880 Census only recorded five. By 1885, however, the city’s Italian population had grown to 140, and by 1900 there were 761. The unpublished memoirs of Antonio DiSipio (1909-1967), transcribed by his daughter Pauline, illustrate the immigrant experience. Migrating from the village of Civitella Messer Raimondo, province of Chieti, region of Abruzzi, DiSipio wrote that:

When my Papa left Philadelphia, after he became an American citizen, he came here to Pueblo to work at the steel mill…He chose Pueblo because he had a lot of family (famiglia) and friends (paisani). There were Catholic Godparents, Godchildren, and Baptism and Confirmation Sponsors.

Much like the history of bojon, the mythologies surrounding the origin of the derisive Italian-American descriptors wop and dago are largely speculative. Wop is believed to stand for “without papers,” a reference to the times when immigrants were not required to have passports but could simply enter the United States. Dago was “reflective of the types of menial jobs the Italian immigrants held.” Italian coal miners believed that dago referred to the before-sunrise-to-after-sunset schedules they worked. The day had gone, thus “day-gos.” The long, arduous journey over land and ocean was sometimes cost-
prohibitive, preventing the first American-born Italian generation from making the trip to visit far-flung family back home, further loosening the link to Italy and facilitating their Americanization. A second-generation Pueblo Italian, listening to her Italian-born father speak of his twenty-five day ocean sojourn, told him, “Let’s go back to Italy!” Her father replied to the request: “When I can drive my car to get there, we’ll go!”

Pueblo’s Italian community, in addition to building Mt. Carmel Church, were the driving force in creating a monument to a source of ethnic pride that brought together Siciliano, Calabrese, Abruzzese, and others under an umbrella of Italian nationalist sentiment – Christopher Columbus. Pueblo Italian-American Hector Chiariglione had been elected president of the Columbian Federation in 1896, and the group’s 1911 national convention was held in Pueblo. The Pueblo Columbus monument, the first of its kind west of the Mississippi River, was unveiled on Abriendo Avenue on Thursday, October 12, 1905. The parade that accompanied the unveiling was an example of multiethnic cooperation, with Italian organizations like the Fedelta Italiana Society of Pueblo joined by Mexican fraternals like La Unione Mexicana and the Benevolent Mexican Society of Pueblo, who were celebrating the Italian Columbus’s sailing under a Spanish flag. State Senator Casimero Barela, a Hispano from Trinidad whose family traced their presence in the area back to the days of New Spain, spoke to the assembled crowd about Spain’s role in the Columbus voyages, and his words “were received with tremendous cheers from the Spaniards and Mexicans who were present.” Governor Adams, who asked the crowd if they wanted him to speak in English, Spanish, or Italian, concluded the ceremony with the observation that “we stand today, not representing Spain, not representing Italy, but as Americans.” The efforts of the Columbus movement
came to fruition in 1907, when Colorado became the first state in the nation to make Columbus Day a state holiday.\textsuperscript{61}

**The 1920s: Floods, Nativism, and the Klan**

What Ralph Taylor called “Pueblo’s greatest disaster” struck on June 3, 1921, when the Arkansas River overran its banks after heavy rainfall and flooded the lowlands of downtown and the Grove. The water reached a depth of 20 feet, 4 inches in some places, causing over 100 deaths (though other estimates range upwards of 1,000) and over $20 million in property damage. Aside from the damage in the Grove, the floodwaters also covered other immigrant neighborhoods like Peppersauce Bottoms and Little Italy. Many bridges were washed out, railroad tracks were torn and twisted, over 700 homes were destroyed, and dead animals rotted in the mud-filled streets. Matjaz Klemencic writes that “the stench of death, both animal and human, was intermingled with the smell of burning tar, wood, and other flammable materials caused by natural gas fires.” Pueblo soon became the “town of a thousand smells,” and Colorado Governor Oliver H. Shoup proclaimed martial law in the city on June 5\textsuperscript{th}. Searchers found over 400 animals that had drowned along the St. Charles Mesa in eastern Pueblo County. Many Slovenian homes in the Grove were destroyed, and enough Slovene families decided to relocate to the mesas above the river, in Bessemer just north of the CF&I steelworks, to give birth to “Bojon town.” The frame building that served as St. Mary’s school was carried away in the floodwaters. Still, the spirits of Pueblo’s Slovenian Catholics were unbowed. In a September 1, 1921 letter to the editor of *The Denver Catholic Register*, a Charles M. Bozich wrote: “Let it be known to the other Catholics that though the Pueblo Catholics’ churches have suffered so much damage, the hearts of the members are not
broken.” The new lots on the Eilers smelter land in Bessemer that were purchased for the new St. Mary’s were “one of the most beautiful spots in the Slovenian colony,” Bozich maintained.62

The rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan and the surge in anti-immigrant sentiment nationwide in the 1910s and 20s made its way to southern Colorado, and Pueblo’s Catholic immigrants were targeted twice over, both for their racial pedigree and for their religion. According to Robert Goldberg, the Klan had secretly arrived in 1922 and “found Pueblo’s Protestants ready for organizing.” Pueblo’s population in 1920 was 43,050, and the city’s 1,395 African-Americans comprised just 3.2 percent of the population, with the 100 Jews in the city making up an even smaller portion. Pueblo’s ethnic Catholics, therefore, were the group that bore the brunt of the Pueblo Klan’s attacks, like when Klansmen attacked Fathers Cyril Zupan of St. Mary’s Church in Pueblo and Alojz Milnar of St. Joseph’s Church in Leadville. The Klan spread a rumor that the pope had ordered the construction of the Holy Cross Abbey in Cañon City to be his summer residence and a base from which to infiltrate Protestant America. One-third of the city was Roman Catholic, however, and members of “respectable” white ethnicities (like the Irish, French Canadians, Germans, and English) were part of that Catholic third. The Klan’s strategy, therefore, in rousing up and recruiting new members “was the coupling of certain elements in the foreign-born community to the breakdown of law and order.” Between 1922 and 1926, ten men were killed in the Italian neighborhoods, casualties of a war between two “blackhand” factions, and in 1923 the blackhand battles spread to Bessemer when two Italian homes were bombed. Members of the city’s corrupt prohibition squad also received death threats signed with the blackhand symbol.
Rampant and overt bootlegging, unsolved murders, and crime-ridden “roadhouses” out in the county eroded the respectable community’s confidence in the police, and the Klan presented itself as an instrument of justice, able to succeed where law enforcement had failed.  

During 1923 the Pueblo Klan gathered strength and proudly displayed it. In May more than 1,000 uniformed Klansmen burned a forty-foot cross, illuminating Pueblo’s north side. In June the Pueblo Klavern hosted a meeting of Denver, Aguilar, La Junta, and other Colorado Klansmen, and an estimated 3,200 KKK members assembled in a field north of the city. During the winter Klansmen were compelled to meet in the International Order of Odd Fellows Building at Seventh Street and Grand Avenue, and the Pueblo Klan burned six crosses around the city on Christmas Day. Pueblo’s KKK operated with the open sanction of the city’s Protestant clergy, among them the Reverend T.C. Collister of the Northern Avenue Methodist Church and the Reverend George Lowe of the Eastside Baptist Church, who served as the local Klavern’s “Exalted Cyclops.” The Klan’s nativism was sometimes more anti-Catholic than anti-immigrant per se, like when Trinidad Klansmen raised $100 for that city’s Italian Presbyterian church. In the 1925 Pueblo Municipal election, the Klan won control of the city government by electing two Klansmen to the city commission, and the group presented a positive public-relations face to the people, distributing Christmas food baskets to hundreds of needy Pueblo families. By the late 1920s, however, the Pueblo Klan suffered a rapid decline, as its main reason for existing – the city’s crime problems – had been brought under control, ironically enough due in part to Klansmen who had been elected to office on law-and-order platforms. In October 1926 Chief of Police J. Arthur Grady proclaimed the end of
the city’s reign of lawlessness, and Klansmen left their organization, either fulfilled by its successes or bored by its inactivity. Goldberg writes that the Pueblo Klan, “unable to make the transition from crime fighter to ordinary fraternal lodge, disappeared from the city.” The 1930 City Directory, however, still listed a small KKK organization, the “Ku Klux Klan No. 5.”

**The CF&I Sociological Department and Corporate Paternalism**

As the largest employer in Pueblo’s industrial era, the Colorado Fuel & Iron steelworks attracted thousands of immigrant laborers, where the workers were exposed daily to a number of different cultures, languages, and religions. Thus, the CF&I played a major role in the Americanization of Pueblo’s immigrant groups and provided an environment for the forging of new ethnic identities. Early on, however, there is scant evidence that the CF&I or any other of southern Colorado’s major industrial firms spent money in the 1870s or 80s on things like schools, churches, workmen’s clubs, or other focal points of corporate paternalism that would characterize Progressive-era corporate welfare and social work by the early 1900s. American businesses, as manifestations of the Protestant work ethic, self-sacrifice, ingenuity, and Yankee “know-how,” were overtly antagonistic to the newly-arrived hordes of (mostly Catholic) immigrants who entered the United States between the 1880s and 1920s. White-collar occupations were seen as a path to upward mobility, but prerequisites like a solid foundation in the English language and literacy meant that for most immigrants, even the ones that had been white-collar or skilled in the old country, the only option was blue-collar manual labor. The desire for upward mobility caused many immigrants to strive to educate themselves in English, and Olivier Zunz asserts that securing skilled labor work “meant even further
assimilation, for the rules were set entirely by and for native white workers.” To Progressive reformers, immigrant life on “the streets” was not conducive to successful American citizenship, and heterogeneous ethnic neighborhoods exacerbated the problem by facilitating the lifestyle of “lower” citizenship. The solution was paternalistic corporate practices like building schools where immigrant children would be taught proper American virtues. For CF&I, building “company towns” around its many mining camps fit in perfectly with this concept, allowing for children to be reared “in spaces of domestic order and restraint” and growing into dutiful Americans.  

In 1901 CF&I established an internal Sociological Department, under the direction of Dr. Richard Corwin, to coordinate its paternalist goals. Dr. Corwin and other welfare capitalists believed that projects like company towns could, as Thomas Andrews writes, “serve as a beacon of enlightened modernity” and turn disgruntled immigrants into better citizens more content with their work. CF&I’s sociological staff, like their counterparts back east, investigated every aspect of the immigrant lifestyle and found it inferior to the middle-class American way of life. Henry Ford’s sociology investigators, for example, did not hide their feelings of condescension toward the blue-collar workforce. One of the investigators, George Brown, reminisced that the assembly-line workers lived like “hillbillies”:

A lot of them used to use their bath tubs for coal bins. A lot of them didn’t know what a bathtub was, a lot of the foreign element from Europe. Those investigators taught those foreigners an awful lot. They, what you’d call, Americanized them.

CF&I’s sociologists professionally analyzed the disparate culture groups and reported their findings in *Camp and Plant*, the company’s newspaper. A 1903 article on the “Mexico” settlement reported that “the clannishness of these people [Mexicans], however
– their unwillingness either to be interfered with or to interfere with, or to inquire into the doings of others not of their own race – made Mexico an ideal place for rogues.” When Italians moved into “Mexico” in the early 1890s they “built in between, above, and below the adobes of the Mexicans” since, according to the CF&I experts, they were “accustomed to the crowded Italian cities and towns.” The Italians were described as mostly “peaceable, hard-working smelter laborers, but with enough criminals among them to give the district a bad name around police headquarters.” Another large Mexican area, Salt Creek, was described as “a hodge-podge settlement of about 2,500 Spanish-speaking people” living in terrain that was “mostly cactus, sage, brush, shale and gravel. There is no street lighting, no police protection, no playgrounds.” Still, the company often made concessions to its workforce’s multiple languages in order to facilitate better communication: John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s open letter to CF&I employees about his upcoming October 1915 Colorado visit was printed in English, Spanish, Italian, and Slovenian in The CF&I Industrial Bulletin, the successor to Camp and Plant, as was President Wilson’s 1917 address to the nation upon entering World War I. By World War II, Hispanics had become the employee majority, and the CF&I Blast, the successor to the Industrial Bulletin, contained articles written in Spanish.66

The company sociologists, with their Progressive reliance on their role as “expert,” attempted to explain the perceived lack of initiative among the Mexicans. A 1903 article traces the roots of the problem back to the Moorish conquest of southern Spain, where the fatalism of the people was as noticeable as the fatalism found “among the Arabs and all Orientals.” This was one reason, the author (who went by the byline “El Cinico” (The Cynic)) maintained, why “the Mexican is calm under fortune or
misfortune, and says “Es la voluntad de Dios” (It is the will of God), if anything occurs to disturb his routine of living.” The writer intermixes “compliments” among the analysis, reporting that “Americans might learn a lesson from these simple people in the method of treating their parents” because of the Mexican respect for their elders. Still, he argues that “they live in the present, and they believe that God will take care of the future. For this reason we call them shiftless.” The pseudo-scientific racialism of the period is on full display in the author’s explanation of the difference between “northern” and “southern” peoples:

An American does not like the tortillas of the Mexican, nor does the Mexican like the ammonia and alum bread of the American. In French, Spanish, Italian, and the other Latin tongues the equivalent of the word “steak” is not known, nor is the word “pie” translatable…Living among the Mexicans is what we may call primitive, the adobe oven serving for our modern stoves and ranges…It must also be remembered that a Northern people is more energetic than a Southern race, and that the master minds who have established the great enterprises on the former American desert were not fatalists and have not worn the shackles of the patriarchal system, but have felt, as a heritage from their Teutonic ancestors, that they were individual thinking beings.

Half-hearted compliments were extended to other racial groups as well. A 1902 article on company-town life, which called the “half-breed” Mexican “more peaceable than many of his white neighbors,” praised the Japanese laborers for their hygiene standards. Reporting on how many Japanese notified their superintendents that they would leave unless they were furnished with baths, the author proclaimed, “It would be a great blessing if some of our so-called Christians in cities could come as near being next to Godliness as the so-called heathen from across the Pacific, in the camps.”

The CF&I sociologists made it very clear that their mission was to Americanize the immigrants. A 1902 Camp and Plant article explained that the steelworks employed
“between sixteen and seventeen thousand employees, representing, all told, probably an aggregate of seventy or eighty thousand souls.” Not every employee was a foreigner, of course, but the workforce included “Italians, Austrians, Mexicans, Indians, Japanese, Bohemians, Poles, Russians, Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Dutch, German and French, and many more. It has been estimated that twenty-seven different languages, to say nothing of dialects…are spoken by our employees.” Compounding the problem of trying to transform this tower of Babel into a cohesive team was the fact that “Mexicans will associate with Mexicans, Italians with Italians, English-speaking with English-speaking, but usually any attempt at admixture of races comes to grief…racial differences are even manifested at times by people of different dialects.” Northern and Southern Italians were held up as an example of inter-ethnic struggles, as convalescing Italian patients at the company hospital often hurled “at each other canes and crutches and other instruments of war.” On the whole, however, the sociologists maintained that “our people are remarkably peaceable and law-abiding,” with their major flaw “undoubtedly being drunkenness.” CF&I collaborated with organizations like the YMCA to conduct English classes and other Americanization programs that drew the immigrants “out of their segregated seclusion.” The sociologists also put energy into the company-sponsored kindergartens as an effective acculturation force. The company experts wrote:

Taking the child at from three to six years, before it has had time to develop ugly habits and a cramped character, and while it is still susceptible to every touch of influence, the kindergarten endeavors to start the child’s life aright, to give its development towards a strong, refined, shapely character a momentum which will carry it safely over obstacles that may be placed in its way by environment and the life of its people…There is an interesting exchange of languages. English-speaking children usually learn the language of the most numerous foreign type, usually Italian or Mexican, while the foreigners acquire English.
The sociological department also took notice of a Catholic kindergarten in the Grove, conducted by Father Gabriel Massa, attended “by Italian and Mexican children almost exclusively.” CF&I was the major economic force in Pueblo for decades, and the company’s sociological department kept meticulous records of the ethnic groups in the workforce. Their studies, in turn, gave the English-speaking employees a glimpse (however biased) of the new cultures setting down roots in Pueblo.68

**The Immigrants Find Their Voice**

Pueblo’s ethnic Catholics established native-language media like newspapers and radio programs that kept their compatriots informed about news and events back home, but also served as a bridge to Americanization by providing U.S. and local news. On Sunday, August 28, 1949 the first radio broadcast of the *Slovenian Hour* took place on Pueblo’s AM station KGHF 1350, and in the early 1950s an Italian program on KDZA called *Music from Italy* aired on Sundays, with Ciro DiMeglio playing Italian records and speaking in Italian. A November 1950 *Pueblo Chieftain* article reported on three new candidates for a vacancy on City Council: John Butkovich (a Slovene), Joseph Occhiatto (an Italian), and Manuel Diaz (a Mexican) – a sign that the immigrants groups were attempting to assert their place in the political system. The “Anglo” Protestant citizens were still uncomfortable, however, with large numbers of ethnics living in their midst, even if only temporarily. An April 1945 *Pueblo Star-Journal* article on the War Manpower Commission’s plans to quarter several hundred Mexican nationals – imported because of wartime labor shortages – at the Colorado State Fairgrounds reported on the bitter opposition to the plan by neighborhood residents. Five petitions were being circulated against the commission’s plan, and the article stated that the signature rate
among Protestants was “almost 100 percent.” Still, Pueblo’s Catholic immigrants left their mark on the town and played a large part in creating the culture of the present-day city. A 1906 Denver Catholic Register article on Pueblo maintained:

Pueblo is a Catholic city, because to support these churches (the ethnic parishes) there must be people, and out of a population, say of 70,000 people, we may assume that half of them are Catholics...she has many other institutions that cities much larger do not possess. There are her parochial schools, her orphan asylum, and academies and college, and who will say that Pueblo is not becoming a great city? Great cities, as well as great things, are not built in a minute. It takes time, and those who have faith in the progress of Pueblo are working with mighty endeavors to make this beautiful southern city worthy of a prominent place on the map.

The ethnic Catholics who made Pueblo their home were certainly part of the efforts to make the city worthy of that “prominent place on the map.”

Monsignor Patrick Stauter, upon hearing of his pastoral assignment to Pueblo, reflected that the railroaders he had worked with before entering the seminary did not hold the city in great esteem. Additionally, priests who were transferred from Denver to Pueblo “always received the news with the same sadness of a prisoner hearing his sentence before the bar.” Nevertheless, when he left Pueblo 17 years later Stauter was “thankful that the Steel City had been so good to me and its Catholic people at least were as fine as anyone could expect to work with anywhere.” The city’s Catholics, comprised of a large number of immigrants, reflected the working-class ethos of their church, their ethnic groups, and their neighborhoods. Life in the immigrant sectors of the city centered around family, neighbors, friends, co-workers, and mutual aid. Pueblo’s Catholic immigrants lived through many of the same tensions experienced by immigrants in the East, but the frontier Catholicism they found in the West, built on a more ancient faith, gave the region a distinct character. Against the backdrop of the city’s industrialization
and the paternalism of the CF&I, Pueblo’s ethnic Catholics made a life for themselves in the new country. Reflecting the various tensions of the time (Catholic – Protestant, “old” Catholic – “new” Catholic, East – West, and even inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic strife), the immigrants in the city joined longer-established citizens in pursuing the American dream.70
CHAPTER V

THE CATHOLIC IMMIGRANTS OF PUEBLO

Self-styled in the late nineteenth century as the “Pittsburg of the West” for its industry and christened “little Chicago” in the 1920s for its ethnic immigrant (mostly Italian) organized crime, Pueblo grew into its role as a multiethnic melting pot. Its Catholic immigrants had battled against crude stereotypes and both racial and religious discrimination from an established American culture. Their experiences were certainly not unique, since these issues and culture-clashes occurred in regions all over the country, but the Pueblo experience was exacerbated by the city’s position in the West, where housing and other resources were scarce. As immigrant groups struggled to establish living quarters, they settled near their compatriots, creating ethnic enclaves within larger neighborhoods, and some entrepreneurs among their numbers opened small grocery stores, providing native foods that reminded the immigrants of back home. Stores, newspapers, music, radio, schools, churches, fraternal clubs, mutual-aid societies, and other social organizations were ways that immigrant groups asserted a semblance of control over their lives and established a place for themselves in the evolving American society.

Inter-Ethnic Strife

For immigrant and migrant groups striving to Americanize and gain acceptance into the larger American society, the quickest perceived way to achieve this began with claiming a “white” ethnic identity and differentiating themselves from “non-white” groups. For Hispanics this meant convincing the dominant culture of their identity as “Spanish-Americans,” thereby bypassing (or ignoring altogether) the entire mestizaje
process in Mexico that created a new ethnicity that melded Spanish and indigenous characteristics. *Nuevomexicanos*, many of whom ultimately migrated to Pueblo for work, had been American citizens since 1848 and thus had an advantage over workers from Mexico, since they were not immigrants. Euro-American society viewed Mexicans as a mongrelized “half-breed” race, and *Hispanos* resented being lumped in with people from Mexico, so they instead stressed a direct lineage from Spain straight through to New Mexico, somehow unencumbered by any Mexican or Indian blood. *Hispano* parents hoped for light-skinned children that could “pass” as white, and lighter skin was held up as a beauty ideal while darker skin became synonymous with ugliness or impurity. There was also a socioeconomic aspect to these racial and class lines. Gilberto Hinojosa asserts:

> Frontier society was fragmented by rank, class, and race…Relative status could be identified by racial designations, by titles (such as *don* or *doña*), by official position, and by place of residence…the *ricos* (rich) sometimes baptized members of the lower classes, be they *pobres* (poor) or racially distinct, forming *padrino-madrina* (godparent) and *compadrazgo* (co-parent) relationships with friends and neighbors and their children. Intermarriage across class and racial/ethnic lines extended important familial ties that blunted prejudice and assisted social mobility. Indeed, these processes served as vehicles for racial “passing” so that mulattoes and mestizos could become “Spaniards.”

Through mixed marriages an Indian could be transformed into a Spaniard in as little as two generations. *Hispanos* shifted their identity to “Spanish-Americans” “in order to fare better in an Anglo-American world.” As Colorado became more industrialized, *Hispanos* from New Mexico and southern Colorado migrated to work in the mining areas around Walsenburg, the Pueblo steelworks and smelters, and the sugar-beet and agricultural industries in the Denver-Greeley area. Second-and-third generation *Hispanos* (second-and-third generation after the migration to Colorado’s front range) followed the
experience of the European ethnics by losing their language and their cultural ties to the “homeland” (New Mexico), rapidly assimilating and becoming primarily English-speaking. Writing in the 1970s, Arthur L. Campa believed that “the young generation of *Hispanos*…have become so acculturated to Anglo-American life that they know virtually nothing of Hispanic lore. The Spanish language, if used at all, has become the language of the hearth.” Professor Rodolfo Garcia, observing the “Mexican-American” students in the Spanish classes at CU-Boulder in the 1970s, noted that “only 15 or 20 percent are completely fluent in the regional (Spanish) dialect. Those who are completely fluent are either from Pueblo, which is in Southern Colorado near New Mexico, or from rural areas.” It was the continued immigration from Mexico that would ensure that Spanish would continue to be spoken in the region and would not effectively disappear, like Italian and Slovenian did.  

The large numbers of Mexican immigrants to Pueblo in the twentieth century “increased the Mexican, Spanish-speaking presence significantly and thus intensified the Mexican nature” of the region. *Hispano* – Mexican strife had roots in the nineteenth century when, according to Richard Nostrand, Anglo men were generally kind in their feelings toward *Hispano* women, whom they called “Spanish,” but almost universally viewed the men with contempt and referred to them as “Mexicans.” During the Mexican-American war, for example, U.S. soldiers described the residents of New Mexico (who were still Mexican citizens) as “indolent, degenerate, undependable, dishonest, impoverished, and addicted to gambling and other vices.” The “Chicano Power” movement of the 1960s, with its embracing of the indigenous heritage of the *mestizo* Mexican culture and its love for everything represented by darker skin (“Brown Pride”),
caused a renewed dialogue about whiteness, skin tone, ethnic identity, and assimilation with middle-class American mores. To the Chicano activists, *Hispanos* who strove for acceptance as white “Spanish-Americans” were the worst kind of traitors to their race, and ethnic identification as Spanish connoted a “pretense of superiority” that offended the more radical Mexican-American element. Chicanos (as many Mexican Americans now preferred to be known) declared that the *Hispano’s* claim to Spanishness was “a contrived fantasy heritage and a myth.” Chicanos sought to politically unite all Spanish-speaking people in the borderlands as members of “La Raza” – one people and one culture. Unity, political or otherwise, was often difficult (if not impossible) to achieve, however, especially since Americanized Hispanics sneered at Mexican immigrants as *mojados* (“wetbacks”). Nostrand writes:

> In Colorado, for example, “old Mexico Mexicans” referred to *Hispanos* as *pochos*, which meant Mexicans who were “Americanized” (more literally, Mexicans who were bleached or faded because of their proximity to whites). To “protect” their heritage, old Mexico Mexicans in places like Pueblo founded Honorific Commissions to promote the speaking of Spanish, the celebration of Mexican holidays like the Sixteenth of September, and the fostering of patriotic feeling for the “madre patria.” *Hispanos*, on the other hand, called the Mexicans *surumatos*, which meant people from the south – and was understood to carry a degree of opprobrium. *Hispanos* claimed superiority over Mexicans on the grounds of better language, education, cleanliness, culture, and citizenship.

By 1980 Puebloans identifying as *Hispano* numbered 17,947 (or 15.5% of Pueblo’s population of 116,095) while those identifying as Mexican numbered 19,656 (or 16.9%). The almost-equal number showed the importance of the distinctions between two options of self-identifying one’s ethnicity, but most non-Hispanics never bothered to subdivide the group or differentiate between *Hispano* and Mexican. To Pueblo’s Hispanics, however, the difference was of utmost importance. Both sides seemed to agree that they
were culturally different from one another, mainly acknowledging language differences as the prime example. *Cuarto de dormir* (Hispano Spanish) rather than *recámara* (Mexican Spanish) for “bedroom,” for example, or *cabello* instead of *pelo* for “hair,” *medias* rather than *calcetines* for “socks,” and *calzones* rather than *pantalones* for “trousers.”

Stark cultural differences were found among other ethnic groups as well. Among the Italians, for example, Jay Dolan writes that Sicilians, Calabrians, and Romans were “three types of people as diverse as Germans, French, and Irish.” Like the Hispano – Mexican divide, the Italians were divided along “race,” skin-tone, and geographic lines. Around 1880 northern Italian immigrants to the U.S. were increasingly outnumbered by their southern *connazionali* (compatriots), who by most accounts of the time “were poorer, less educated, less skilled, and darker in complexion.” Such beliefs were bolstered by the emergence of racialist pseudo-science in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as anthropologists like Cesare Lombroso explained that the people of the *mezzogiorno* (southern Italy) were racially distinct from and hopelessly inferior to their northern *connazionali*. Whereas northern Italians descended from superior Aryan stock, southerners were primarily of “inferior African blood.” Robert Orsi, writing about New York’s Italian Harlem, maintains that a spirit of regionalism, or *campanilismo*, prevailed, with hostilities, especially between Neapolitans and Sicilians, “particularly fierce.” Thomas Andrews argues that immigrants carried their prejudices of race, nationality, ethnicity, and region with them as they moved west. The “Welsh and Scots despised the Irish, the French bore a grudge against the Germans, and the Germans claimed superiority over the Poles, who could not forgive the Austrians, who despised
African Americans, who distrusted Yankees, who saw *Hispanos* as dirty, lazy, and primitive.” Immigrant workers fragmented themselves into insular communities, and, at least in the first generation, were “incapable of unifying across racial, ethnic, and territorial boundaries.” Antonio DiSipio, Pueblo Italian immigrant, wrote in his memoirs of the regional divisions that were still of utmost importance to his parents. While dating his future wife, “Delia” Passanante, in the 1930s, DiSipio recalled that:

> The Passanante family is Sicilian. I am not sure that my Abruzzese family approves of our courtship. In fact, there are some young Pueblo women whose people are from Abruzzi in Italy. Papa Angelo and Mama Concetta feel that an Abruzzese woman is more suited to me.

Inter-marriage and Americanization would lessen and ultimately eradicate such regional rivalries, creating a unified ethnic identity of “Italian.”

Cooperation and coexistence among ethnic Catholic groups was usually centered around the parish church. In the 1870s Father Salvatore Persone, S.J., made the rounds of the *plazas* (villages) in the San Luis Valley from Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in Conejos, the oldest Catholic Church in Colorado. Known as *el Salvador de Conejos*, he preserved traditions like First Communions, Corpus Christi processions, veneration of the Blessed Sacrament, Christmas festivals with *luminarias* (torches or small bonfires that lined the walkway to the church), and the elaborate ceremonial displays of the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Known for treating rich and poor alike, Father Persone was loved by the *Hispanos* of the Valley for being “Italian in his birth and Mexican in his heart.” In Pueblo Catholic immigrants often built homes and settled in areas close to work, which usually meant the smelters or the CF&I steelworks, and the newly-formed neighborhoods quickly took on the character of its residents. Elm Street, one of the
larger streets in Bessemer, was heavily Italian, and Pauline DiSipio describes a typical
Sunday in the neighborhood during the 1920s in her self-published oral histories:

Everyone went to church on Sunday morning (‘going to Mount Carmel Church was a MUST!’) from seven in the morning until twelve Noon. Everyone ate their Sunday dinner at 12:00 Noon, and it was always spaghetti!...after dinner, the neighborhood guys would get a broken-down kitchen chair or bench and go to the middle of the block and play BOCCE...(They would) argue, half in English and half in Italian. Jack Biondolillo would come out with his saxophone, and Charlie Luppino would be playing his accordion, and everyone would sing and drink wine! The middle of the 800 block of Elm Street was where it was all happening.

A local resident remembered that “there was a variety of ethnic groups in the Old Neighborhood. We all got along!” As the second generation grew up alongside other ethnic groups intermarriages began to occur, creating many “cousins (who) are half Slovenian and half Italian.” Neighborhoods like Bessemer and the Grove were mini-melting pots, and even though ethnic groups were still often segregated into different Masses within the parish, the immigrants helped each other out when times were tough. After the 1921 flood caused St. Mary’s Parish to move away from the Grove, Slovenian children whose families remained in the Grove and couldn’t make the trip up Santa Fe Hill to the new school in “Bojon Town” were able to attend St. Anthony’s Slovak school.74

**Mutual Aid**

Pueblo’s immigrants, like most newcomers to the United States, formed and relied on mutual aid societies, fraternal organizations, and social clubs to fill in the gaps of their new societal structure. These entities functioned as pseudo-networking groups, bankers, insurance agents, unemployment officers, funeral planners, labor unions, legal advisors, childcare providers, arbitrators, small-claims courts, civil-rights advocates, and
even matchmaking / marriage brokers among other roles. Eventually, their roles shifted to agents of Americanization and, as the second-and-third generations came of age, sources of ethnic pride, both in identifications with the old country and with the new status of dutiful and patriotic Americans. A 1908 Slovenian mutual aid organization resolution stated that its main goal was “to foster love for the Slavic race and especially toward our beloved country, America, and to encourage all members who are not citizens to become naturalized and to assume full responsibilities of good citizens.” For Mexican immigrants and Hispanic migrants the mutualistas (mutual aid societies) and ligas protectivas (protective associations) were important pieces in the struggle against exploitation and discrimination, the fight for better schools, and “the right to retain Mexican culture.” Mutualistas like the Alianza Hispana Americana, which had a large lodge in Pueblo, provided sick and death benefits and unemployment insurance, celebrated patriotic holidays like the Sixteenth of September and Cinco de Mayo, provided a community forum, and strengthened familial ties to Catholicism with devotions like the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Mexican tradition also placed importance on the cofradas (religious confraternities), voluntary organizations of laypeople who stressed a strong sense of Catholic identity. Cofradias had roots in medieval Spain before being transported to the New World, and Jay Dolan traces the reliance on the cofradia to the decades of neglect by the Mexican church toward the people living in the northern frontier, where many mission churches “were in a state of near collapse” and the number of priests was frightfully inadequate. When Bishop Lamy arrived in New Mexico in 1851, in fact, he found that only twelve priests were expected to serve an estimated 68,000 Catholics scattered across an area as large as France.
Because of this, the people became accustomed to celebrating a home-based religion that kept the Catholic faith a central part of their lives.75

Like the Mexicans, the Italians also closely tied together religion and mutual aid, with many Italian organizations proudly bearing the name of a saint or functioning as an adjunct parish, and two sodalities (Catholic clubs) existed at Mt. Carmel parish, “one for the Spanish young people and one for the Italians.” By 1930 Pueblo had eight Italian societies – the Societa Cristoforo Colombo, Societa Fedelta Italiana, Societa Indipendente Siciliana (whose book of bylaws stated that it was “Incorporata in April del 1904 in Pueblo, Colorado, Stati Uniti D’America”), Societa Protetiva Beneficenza, Societa San Giuseppe, Societa Femminile Nuova Italia, Societa Principessa Iolanda, and the Societa Agricoltori Italiani. Italian lodges were also often named after Italian national heroes like Christopher Columbus, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Dante Alighieri, Guglielmo Marconi, and Vittorio Emmanuele. Pueblo’s first lodge, in fact, was the Cristoforo Colombo Lodge No. 1309, incorporated on October 20, 1894. Mutual aid societies like the Societa Indipendente Siciliana had admission fees and dues amounts based on age groupings ($1.00 for 18-30 year-olds, up to $5.00 for 45-50 year-olds). A sick member who could not work was to receive $5.00 a week up to six months, after which the benefit was reduced to $2.50 weekly for an additional six months. At a member’s death a “decent” funeral was held for $50.00 plus $5.00 for a wreath of flowers. One organization, the Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA), is still alive in Pueblo, sponsoring and promoting a major in Italian at Colorado State University – Pueblo, supporting a “sister city” program with Bergamo, Italy, and working to strengthen the “close ties between our homeland and Italian Americans.” Some Slovene
immigrants were so proud of their membership in a fraternal organization that the organization’s name was etched into their tombstones alongside their own name, dates of birth and death, and religious iconography. By the 1930s at least eleven different Slovenian mutual aid and fraternal organizations were active in Pueblo, with some operating bilingually and others already switching to English as their official language, and Slovenian groups held national conventions in Pueblo in 1912, 1921, 1933, 1945, and 1961. Pueblo’s Slovenes belonged to such groups as the Kranjsko slovenska katoliska jednota or “KSKJ” (Grand Carniolan Slovenian Catholic Union); Slovenska narodna podpora jednota or “SNPJ” (Slovene National Benefit Society); Jugoslovanska katoliska jednota or “JSKS” (Yugoslav Catholic Union – which had split from KSKJ at the 1908 national convention held in Pueblo); Zapadna Slovanska Zueza or “ZSZ” (Western Slavonic Association, founded in Denver in 1908); and Slovenska zenska zueza (Slovenian Women’s Union). Mutual aid, along with churches, clubs, kinship networks, saloons, and the ethnic neighborhood itself, allowed immigrants, Roy Rosenzweig argues, to carry on a certain mode of life and “express values, beliefs, and traditions significantly different from those proscribed by the dominant industrial elite.”

The Penitentes Strengthen the Bond of Catholicism with Culture

The spiritual neglect of New Mexico and shortage of priests under both Spain and Mexico contributed to the rise of a lay brotherhood (hermanidad) called the Fraternidad de Nuestro Padre Jesus de Nazareno (Fraternal Brotherhood of Our Father Jesus of Nazareth) commonly known as the Penitent Brotherhood or the Penitentes, that operated as part religious cofradia and part mutualista. Although their exact origins remain a subject of dispute and conjecture, they functioned as an ersatz clergy, leading prayer
services in their windowless chapels (moradas) and performing penitential ceremonies and passion plays during Holy Week. Started in the mountain villages of northern New Mexico and spread to southern Colorado with Hispano migration, the Penitentes continue in a reduced form into the present day, as aging Hermanos still perform their Holy Week duties assisted by a small number of younger novices, and a Penitente morada (chapel) sits in eastern Pueblo County, outside of the small community of Avondale. Because of their secrecy and often-fanatical adherence to Middle Ages-era Catholic ideas of penance, self-flagellation, and mortification of the flesh, the Penitentes have been misunderstood, misinterpreted, and “the subject of fascination and morbid curiosity” by non-Mexicans, Protestant Americans, and the institutional church itself. The Penitentes developed their own liturgy and ceremonies, incorporating severe corporal punishments such as whipping one’s own shoulders and back to atone for their sins. They had achieved sufficient notoriety that by the time of Mexican Bishop Jose Antonio de Zubiria of Durango’s 1833 Episcopal visit to the northern reaches of New Mexico he outlawed them as an unauthorized group that violated Catholic doctrine. The bishop suggested that instead of being known as brothers of penance the Penitentes should be known as “brothers of butchery.” His 1833 pastoral letter did acknowledge the conditions that had fostered the growth of the brotherhood in the first place: neglectful priests who set poor examples in their own lives, who failed to baptize infants, who misused sacraments like confession, and who said Mass with “filthy chalices, dirty altar clothes, and shabby or improper vestments.” Before (Anglo) American settlement in New Mexico the Penitentes conducted their processions openly for everyone to witness, but after “the Anglos
condemned the Mexicans for their self-whippings” Ralph Taylor asserts, the Brothers withdrew to their moradas.77

Rather than operating as a heretical offshoot of the church, the Penitentes instead strengthened the link between its members and orthodox Roman Catholicism, as brothers constantly carried cuadernos (notebooks) filled with hand-written alabados and amorosos (prayers and hymns). Ruben Archuleta, the Hispano former Chief of Police of the Pueblo Police Department, comes from a proud Penitente heritage and writes that membership consisted of Hispanic Catholic men who were an integral part of their community and church. Regulation #1 of the induction ritual stated, “No individual can be admitted in this Brotherhood who does not acknowledge the Apostolic Roman Catholic religion.” Novices were also required to respond in the affirmative to the statement that “it is necessary as a faithful Christian Catholic that you believe all that our Mother, the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church believes and teaches.” Archuleta reports that most of the tension between the brotherhood and the church was at the level of the bishops. At the local level, meanwhile:

The parish priest didn’t appear to have any problems working with the Hermanidad because the Hermanos actually made life easier for them. When a fellow brother died, the Hermanos would help the church by assisting with funeral arrangements and praying at the wake and burial service. As time went on, the relationship between the Brotherhood and the Church improved dramatically.

Many clergy believed that without the constancy of this cofradia Catholic parish life in the southwest might have been lost to neglect or to aggressive Protestant evangelization. Carol Jensen writes that “not all elements of Hispanic folk religion were condemned.” Since devotion to village saints and Mary “had popular appeal among many ethnic groups and had some doctrinal foundation, church officials permitted related customs.”78
The Penitentes performed many tasks of a mutual-aid society, and in the 1920s many brothers in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico formed a coalition with the Sociedad Protección Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos (Mutual Protection Society of United Workers) in order to support and help its members “both economically and morally.” Nonetheless, rumor and innuendo – spurred on by the group’s inherent secrecy – continued to feed the public’s fascination with the Penitentes. An 1892 article in The Santa Fe Daily New Mexican excoriated Penitente rituals as “cruel and criminal often ending in self-destruction and murder.” Similarly, a 1903 Camp and Plant study at the CF&I written by “El Cinico” described “chapels both in New Mexico and Southern Colorado where may be seen the blood on the rafters, as the thongs struck them, wet with the blood of the enthused penitents.” El Cinico goes on to describe the Good Friday reenactment of the Crucifixion, where a brother would voluntarily hang on a cross from twelve noon to three o’clock, after which the victim “is then taken to the chapel and either revives after weeks of sickness or dies, in which case he receives a distinguished burial.” Still, the article’s writer refused to pass judgment on the Penitentes, contrasting their ceremonies with Indian ghost dancers and Methodist “jumpers.” “We therefore cannot condemn as cruel,” he concluded, “what is a spiritual solace to the participants who practice such rites.” A 1941 article on the group in the Texas-based Frontier Times asserted that “a fatality at a crucifixion is almost unheard of.” The author, writing under the pseudonym “Purple Sage,” reported, “During my stay in New Mexico I found that the Penitentes form the most powerful body in the country. A power which is not recognized, but which, by its hidden strengths, exercises far-reaching control of the inhabitants.” The Penitent brotherhood, by functioning half in the secular world and half
in the religious more closely tied together Hispanic notions of culture and religion, and strengthened the Mexican people’s bond to Roman Catholicism. A 1942 Denver Catholic Register article acknowledged, “Wherever a morada is located, a non-Catholic sect has been unable to make even a beginning.”

**Relations with the U.S. Church**

Catholicism was so ingrained with Mexican culture that conversion to any Protestant faith was a drastic step, and Gilberto Hinojosa argues that, even for lax Catholics or those who harbored anticlerical sentiments, rejection of the Catholic faith “implied a rejection of heritage, culture, and even family.” Painting, sculpture, poetry, theater, music, and even Mexican cuisine had developed and flourished in the shadow of the church. Those who openly left it risked shunning or condemnation by family and friends, and Mexican Catholicity remained strong, despite often-overtly hostile treatment by the Anglo church. Some American clergy, unable to understand the Mexicans’ anticlericalism (which had its roots in Mexico’s hierarchical society) called the Mexican people a massa damnata, a people without hope of redemption. Throughout the American West, Mexican Catholics were made to feel unwelcome or inferior. “Mexican only” signs attached to the last few pews of a church were a common sight in California, while in Denver Helen Quezada LaRoe recalled that Mexicans were “allowed” to use the basement of St. Leo’s, the Anglo-American parish, for Mass. After the building of Denver’s St. Cajetan’s parish, the new church “quickly became the center of barrio life.” Mexican-American spirituality, drawing from Spanish and Indian roots and influenced by the treatment afforded them in U.S. parishes, developed thusly, as explained by Hinojosa:

A kind heavenly Father, together with a loving Mother, maintained the prescribed order of the community and watched over their children on earth.
The trials and tribulations of life, including the exploitation that the people faced daily, were shared with the suffering Son, who through his death had made up for the failings of the children of God and had gained the Father’s love and forgiveness for them. The day and week of Christ’s suffering and death were, thus, the most holy of all celebrations. The santos, those revered holy men and women who had preceded the faithful and who took special interest in God’s people, interceding for them, merited special commemoration as well.

Certain Indian religious ideas – gods sacrificing themselves for men, the need to do penance, the stoic acceptance of suffering, the futility of earthly pleasures – were reflected in Catholic doctrine, and Mary the Mother of God became “the central figure in Mexican-American spirituality” after her apparition in 1531 to an Indian named Juan Diego in the hills near Mexico City. Appearing as a dark-skinned young Indian woman in native dress, and speaking in the Aztec language of Nahuatl, Mary’s message offered comfort to the oppressed and exploited native population a mere ten years after the fall of the Aztec empire to Cortés and the Spaniards: “I am thy merciful mother…I shall listen to your sorrows, and free you from all your misery, grief, and anguish.” Jeffrey Burns writes that this apparition, Our Lady of Guadalupe, instilled “a sense of personal dignity in the face of the affronts of the Spanish colonizers. She was not only a religious figure but a national figure who gave birth to the Mexican faith and people.” Enrique Krauze argues that she became the symbol of the mestizo union between Spanish and Indian, as “the color of the Indian found a refuge in the dark skin and soft smile of that image, creating a Virgin for themselves, a Mexican Virgin.”

Bishop Lamy had written in 1851 that “the Mexicans entertain the greatest respect for their religion, though I am afraid a great number of them have lost sight of its practice.” Similarly, in Death Comes for the Archbishop Father Martinez, the powerful and borderline-apostate priest of the Taos parish, warns Bishop Latour that “If you try to
introduce European civilization here and change our old ways, to interfere with the secret
dances of the Indians, let us say, or abolish the bloody rites of the *Penitentes*, I foretell an
early death for you.” Despite early American misunderstandings of Mexican spirituality
and racial biases against the Mexican Catholics, the tie between Catholicism and culture
never wavered, and throughout the twentieth century Mexican-Americans found their
place in the church hierarchy, as more Hispanic men and women entered seminaries and
convents. In 1945 a Bishop’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking was set up, and in
1969 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops set up an office for Hispanic
vocations. In 1970 Patricio Flores, a former migrant worker, was appointed auxiliary
bishop of San Antonio, becoming the first Hispanic to be named a bishop in the United
States. Ten years later, a New Mexico *Hispano*, the Rev. Arthur Tafoya, was appointed
by Pope John Paul II to be the third bishop of Pueblo, and by 1990 there were two
Hispanic archbishops, nineteen bishops, approximately 1,600 priests, and 2,000 nuns
nationwide. Mexican-American Catholics had asserted their presence in the U.S.
church.81

The Italian-American Catholic experience mirrored that of Mexican-Americans in
many ways. Father Salvatore Cianci, an immigrant priest, regretted that his countrymen
were afflicted with a “religious indifference.” Italians, he believed, were religious as
children and as old people, but not during their vital years, tending to regard religion as
“nothing more than a halo which glorifies our cradle to disappear after first communion
and be conjured back again at our last moments to hover over our coffin.” The Italian
celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, much like the Mexican feast of
Our Lady of Guadalupe, seemed foreign and bizarre to Americans. Richard Linkh writes that:

Colored lanterns strung across the streets, the sound of marching bands, the smell of grilled sausage and fried green peppers filling the air, the sight of women marching barefoot pinning dollar bills on the robes of the Madonna—all this could hardly be considered a religious occasion by an American clergy used to a solemn and dignified ritual.

Italy, like Mexico, harbored anticlerical roots at the village level, due to the clergy historically linking up with the power structure in society (the nobility and the wealthier class), and these sentiments were transplanted to America by the immigrants. In 1908 an Italian named Giuseppe Alio killed Father Leo Heinrich of Denver, and five months later Alio went to the scaffold in Colorado State Penitentiary calling down maledictions on the priesthood. During the 1890s over 700,000 Italians arrived in the United States, with another 2 million coming during the next decade, and to the American clergy the major problem with these new immigrants was that too many of them arrived with scant religious instruction and little interest in more than a nominal attachment to the church. In 1917 a Father B.J. Reilly wrote to Cardinal Farley in New York that when the Italians are told “that they are about the worst Catholics that ever came to this country they don’t resent it or deny it.” Indeed, the Italians made clear distinctions between religion and church, and often viewed the Church with critical cynicism. Robert Orsi asserts that the American Catholic Church’s cultural distaste for the Italian immigrants amounted to “an existential rejection of their whole value system.” Much like Mexicans, Italians were portrayed as fatalistic and suffocated by their belief in a predetermined universe, with the belief in the evil eye held up as an example of the popular fear that what happened in one’s life could be the result of a curse. The Italian immigrants would oftentimes not
acknowledge or anticipate good things, lest they tempt fate to punish them for such evident undeserved contentment. Fatalistic thinking among immigrant groups was diagnosed by Progressive-era experts as resulting from, among other causes, the psychosocial consequences of colonialism.

Still, the Catholic Church remained the main constant in the immigrants’ lives. Antonio DiSipio’s unpublished memoirs, collected by his daughter Pauline, offer a glimpse at early-twentieth century life in Pueblo’s immigrant neighborhoods. Antonio’s parents eschew a public school located “on the block down from where I live,” instead sending him to St. Mary’s School “where a nun will teach me.” St. Mary’s was a Slovenian parish, therefore Antonio noted:

There aren’t very many Italian kids in my school, but there are many Yugoslavians and Slovenians. They are Slavic kids living in the U.S.A., just like I am an Italian kid living in the U.S.A. Papa Angelo tells me that the Adriatic Sea connects Italy and Yugoslavia…Each month our parents have to pay fifty cents so that we can go to our Catholic St. Mary School.

He also noted his parent’s insistence on assimilating the children into American culture, writing that “Mama and Papa talked in Italian mostly, but they wanted my sisters and me to learn English.” Young Antonio, an Italian-American, would learn to speak, read, and write English in a Catholic school attached to an ethnic parish that still primarily spoke Slovenian, a fact that spotlights the church’s role as both preserver of immigrant faith and culture and Americanization agent. By striking the right middle ground between self-imposed immigrant isolationism on the one hand and total assimilation and loss of culture on the other, the church effectively held onto its ethnic immigrant worshippers. Ethnic parishes allowed people to keep their ties to God similar to those they knew in the old country, while parochial schools helped to facilitate the next generation’s acculturation to
the dominant society’s language. The church, in effect, took the lead in fostering an environment for the development of a new ethnic identity.83

The Ethnic Catholic Immigrants Become Catholic Americans

Complementing (and sometimes supplementing) the church’s influence on Americanization were other shared immigrant experiences, like intra-ethnic membership in a fraternal organization, interethnic membership in a labor union, and shared sacrifice in the military. Participation in these activities, where all members strove to achieve a common goal, often broke down ethnic, racial, or language barriers and instilled a new source of pride. Groups like the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) were by the 1920s dedicating themselves to developing “within the members of our race the best, purest, and most perfect type of a true and loyal citizen of the United States of America.” Wartime military service also acted as a catalyst for Americanization, as immigrants enlisted or were drafted into the armed forces in both World Wars, instilling (or reinforcing) a sense of duty and patriotism for the United States. Italian and Slovenian-Americans often fought against their ethnic compatriots who were on the belligerent side, thus displaying loyalty to the U.S., while during World War II Mexican-Americans garnered more Medals of Honor than any other group. Classified as “whites,” Hispanic soldiers served in integrated units, and organized the American GI Forum after the war to secure their rights. Unlike Italians and Slovenians, who gained their “whiteness” over time (although Thomas Guglielmo argues that Italians were always accepted as “white”), Mexican-American “whiteness” fluctuated among different eras and regions, separate from the internal Mexican / Chicano – Hispano divide over “Spanish” identity. Linda Gordon and Mae Ngai both believe that the U.S. conquest of
Mexico and “the consequent supremacy of Anglos” shaped anti-Mexican discrimination, and Ngai further argues that, while the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had given Mexican-Americans de jure U.S. citizenship, the legal racialization of their national origin made them de facto “permanently foreign and unassimilable to the nation” in the eyes of Anglo society. Mexican-Americans, she contends, functioned – much like Asian-Americans – as “alien citizens,” or people who had formal U.S. citizenship but who “remained alien in the eyes of the nation.” Or, as William Deverell put it, despite their legally-defined citizenship, Mexicans “were not Americans, even though they were.”

For purposes of naturalization, the U.S. government had deemed Mexican-Americans to be “white,” but the Census Bureau enumerated them as a separate race in 1930, using an imprecise definition of the Mexican “race” as “persons who were born in Mexico and are not definitely white, Negro, Indian, Chinese, or Japanese” (emphasis added). Since categories like race and ethnicity were varying, fluid, and easily changed, Gordon argues that the U.S. courts were able to adjudicate whiteness “as nearly as explicitly” as South African courts did during Apartheid. Increased immigration from Mexico in the early twentieth century (half-a-million immigrants in the 1920s alone) caused Mexicans to become targets of intense Americanization campaigns. Their children were learning English in school, working in the U.S. economy, serving in the military, and worshipping in an increasingly Americanized church – some of the factors that allowed earlier waves of Hispano migrants and Mexican immigrants to follow an acculturation trajectory similar to that of European immigrants. By the late twentieth century, cultural demographers were noting that Mexican-Americans were increasingly converging with the larger society in areas like higher educational attainment, increased
occupational similarity, decreased fertility, and the rise of English in the home. Later arrivals from Mexico and their families, however, continued to live in a similar pattern to the immigrants of 1880, 1900, or 1920, with limited English, little interaction with the dominant society, and saddled with a legally-questionable citizenship status, often functioning as an economic underclass in manual-labor or service-sector jobs. The proximity of Mexico to the U.S. and a continued American demand for low-wage labor almost guarantees that immigration from Mexico will continue, with the newer arrivals lagging behind the longer-established groups.85

For Italian-Americans, Thomas Guglielmo believes that whiteness was never in doubt, since the courts, the Census Bureau, newspapers, unions, employers, realtors, and politicians all accepted Italians as white, and he asserts that whiteness was the most important resource that Italians possessed. Others like Robert Orsi focus on factors like mass culture when studying immigrant assimilation. Orsi maintains that the immigrant generation compared their Italian values to the American values of their children, and felt that the younger generation was forsaking family and faith in order to chase a materialistic “American dream.” When parents wanted to criticize their children they accused them of being American, while from the children’s perspective they (they children) felt constrained by their families’ quaint old-world values. The younger generation was shaped by “what they saw and heard in the streets, in the movies, and in school.” Orsi also asserts that the church tolerated Italian cultural practices in order to keep the immigrants from defecting to Protestantism and “as a transitional stage in their progress toward a more American Catholicism and only under the careful supervision of the clergy.” Even as Italian parents often admonished their children for acting
“American,” ultimately it was acceptance for their children as “Americans” that immigrant parents wished for. Silvano Tomasi maintains that both the ethnic parish and Italian-language press, which could have served as main carriers of ethnicity, instead were means of assimilation. Nicholas Russo believes that national parishes, by maintaining ethnic solidarity, prevented widespread social disorganization and at the same time served as a bridge between the old world and the new.  

Immigrant groups like the Italians faced a paradox when it came to Americanizing. On the one hand, they wanted a better life for their children, and they realized that that meant speaking English and adopting a more American value system, but at the same time they felt that becoming “too American” too rapidly meant possibly losing their cultural values. Immigrants often changed their names, whether by choice to better “fit in” or as a result of immigration officials with little experience in transliterating foreign names, and this added to the disorienting psychological trauma of immigration, where displaced populations felt shaken loose from their moorings. Pueblo Slovenian-American Jim Pugel, for example, had been born Ignac Pugelj in Carniola. The first American-born generation, along with those who had immigrated with their families at a very young age, developed a growing cultural divide with their parents. More attracted to mainstream mass culture, the younger generation forged a new ethnic working-class culture that was incubated in the factories, mills, and mines of industrial America. Roy Rosenzweig argues that social and economic forces like the development of mass-production and mass marketing techniques that helped to create a middle class shaped ethnic working-class culture. The second-and-third generations socialized more outside of their ethnic group – able to communicate in the same language thanks to the American
educational system – and intermarried at a much greater rate. Pueblo’s ethnic Slovenes, for example, married outside their ethnicity over 50% of the time among the second generation, creating Antonio DiSipio’s aforementioned half-Italian, half-Slovenian cousins. After the newly-created middle class began to move to other parts of Pueblo, most still initially traveled back to their ethnic parishes on Sunday mornings for Mass, but eventually even that stopped as more families chose to attend the newer “American” parishes in their new neighborhoods rather than make the trek across town. A 1948 Pueblo Star-Journal article noted that:

The Slovenian people, many of them now in their third generation in this country, have become thoroughly Americanized as the Rev. Fr. Cyril hoped. They served with distinction in two World Wars…Their homes are among the best kept, pride of ownership being one of the outstanding characteristics of the people. Most of them now live in Bessemer and Minnequa Heights. Many of the younger generation have intermarried with other racial groups, to help complete the “melting pot” process which is America.

The Slovenians, like Pueblo’s other immigrant groups, had left their mark on the melting-pot and taken their place as Catholic Americans.87

By mid-century, Pueblo’s Italians, Slovenes, Hispanics, and longer-established Mexicans were well on the way to forging a new identity as American Catholics. The more recent arrivals from Mexico lagged behind in the process, while Pueblo’s relative proximity to Mexico and continued immigration from that country kept the Spanish language alive in the city. Pueblo’s Italian and Slovenian-language radio programs and newspapers are now a distant memory, but the city still has Spanish-language radio stations and print media. Some parish churches in the city – Mt. Carmel among them – have heavily Spanish-speaking congregations, and offer Spanish Masses at certain hours, a practice that hearkens back to the days of the national ethnic parishes. Overall,
however, the three ethnic groups examined in this study were able to assert their place in the new American economy and culture, transforming the city and the Roman Catholic Church in the process. The children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the immigrant generation are living testaments to their successes, and it is these descendents, through their participation in ethnic-pride organizations and bequests to their churches, that will carry on the legacy of the Catholic-Americans.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

The story of Pueblo, Colorado’s Mexicans, Italians, and Slovenians is a micro
textured version of the struggles that were waged by immigrants to the United States in the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Immigrants who were Roman Catholics began
their new lives in America doubly disadvantaged, and exacerbating the problem was the
fact that their own fellow Catholics and their American clergy mistrusted them and
questioned the validity of their faith. American Catholicism had struggled to gain
acceptance – or at least toleration – from the Protestant majority, and the arrival of
millions of new Catholics in the late 1800s and early 1900s complicated the situation.
Once the Vatican weighed in on the Americanization issue in the 1890s, however, the
U.S. church was shrewdly able to hold on to the overwhelming majority of the immigrant
newcomers. Ethnic parishes allowed for a more gradual assimilation process, and the
Catholic immigrants utilized them to remain Catholic while simultaneously becoming
American.

The American church in the West grew alongside the immigrants, since – unlike
in the east – the U.S. church leadership was itself relatively new to the region. Roman
Catholicism had been planted in the southwest centuries earlier by the Spanish, but in the
switch from Mexican to American jurisdiction after 1848 the church needed to reorganize
its Episcopal structure. Antagonisms between the newly-arrived clergy and the Hispanic
Catholics already living here carried over into the twentieth century with the arrival of the
ethnic European Catholics. Very few immigrants ultimately left the church, however,
since Catholicism was such a large part of Mexican, Italian, and Slovene culture. Even

109
among immigrants who harbored anticlerical sentiments or distrusted the official church, the Catholic faith remained strong. Despite the often-hostile treatment they received at the hands of their priests and bishops, the immigrants stayed loyal to the church, and the remarkable thing is that the American church lost so few of the millions who arrived. Even though certain ethnic groups might not have attended Mass regularly or paid tithes, at the end of the day most immigrants would not have hesitated to claim their Catholic identity.

Pueblo’s industrialization drew immigrants from Europe and Mexico, and migrants from New Mexico, and the newcomers interacted with each other daily in the city’s steelworks, smelters, factories, and warehouses. Initially, the immigrants lived segregated in neighborhood enclaves and worshipped in ethnic parishes, but the workday brought them into contact with other cultures, languages, and religions. Regionalism was strong, and Italian immigrants often battled with compatriots from different areas of Italy, while immigrants from Mexico likewise fought with their fellow Spanish-speakers, the Hispanos from New Mexico, over issues of whiteness and social acceptance. Immigrant children, meanwhile, were learning English and a more American outlook in school – whether the school was public or parochial. The next generations married outside of their own ethnic group more often, and lost their bond with their parents’ native tongues. Even the longer-established Mexicans and Hispanos adopted English as their main language over time. The more recent Mexican immigrants are the ones that have kept the Spanish language alive.

Pueblo’s ethnic Catholics used their memberships in mutual-aid societies and fraternal clubs to help further their transformation into patriotic Americans. Additionally,
religious confraternities like the *Hispano Penitentes* kept the tie to the Catholic faith strong. Mexicans and *Hispanos* were alternatively “white,” “half-breed,” “Spanish-American,” or “Chicano;” Italians started out as *Calabrese, Siciliano,* and *Romano;* and Slovenes were Austro-Hungarians, Jugo-slavs, and “Slavonians,” but over time they all became *Americans,* and at every stage of the process they were always Roman Catholic. No matter what challenges they faced or adversity they overcame, their religion was always the omnipresent identifier in their lives. The Pueblo of today stands as a testament to their efforts, as the city’s Catholics have asserted their place in civic leadership, political office, community organizations, and philanthropic ventures. Likewise, the ethnic immigrants transformed the Catholic Church in America overall and in Pueblo, specifically. Every summer, many of the city’s parish churches hold festivals that draw Puebloans of all races, ethnicities, and religions – festivals of the type that the 1880s U.S. church had dismissed as rural superstition – but that are now a Pueblo tradition. While not as well-known as the story of immigrants in New York, Chicago, or even Denver, the experiences of the Catholic immigrants in Pueblo, Colorado (an industrial borderlands city on the western frontier) offer up yet another example of how the United States became the country it is today. It is my sincere hope that their story has enlightened the reader even half as much as it did me to research and write it. Their journey to becoming Catholic-Americans deserves to be heard.
NOTES


18 *The Southern Colorado Register*, October 9, 1959 – special edition commemorating the installation of the Most. Rev. Charles Buswell as second Bishop of Pueblo – 40, 41, 45; also *The Denver Catholic Register*, Thursday, May 18, 1944, 14; and *The Pueblo Daily Chieftain*, Wednesday, April 30, 1890, 10 (Folder # PCCLD – VT – P – 1719 – 01 /
Rawlings Library Special Collections); and St. Mary’s Parish booklet – “Silver Anniversary of the Church as the People of God under Patronage of Saint Mary Help of Christians,” May 27, 1979 (Folder # PCCLD – VT – P – 1738 – 01 / Rawlings Library Special Collections).

19 Linkh, American Catholicism and European Immigrants, 128; see also Dolan, In Search of an American Catholicism, 128, 133; Jensen, “Deserts, Diversity, and Self-Determination,” in The American Catholic Parish, 223; and The Pueblo Chieftain, Monday, February 28, 2011, 5A (Folder # PCCLD – VT – P – 1725 – 01 / Rawlings Library Special Collections).

20 Noll, A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada, 352; also Linkh, American Catholicism and European Immigrants, 114.


23 Jones, The History of Catholic Education in the State of Colorado, 214, 480, 482.

24 The Tatler (Pueblo Catholic High School student newspaper), April 3, 1944; see also Jones, The History of Catholic Education in the State of Colorado, 487, 491-492, 507, 509.

25 Jones, The History of Catholic Education in the State of Colorado, 487; see also Noel, Colorado Catholicism ,191-192.

26 Linkh, American Catholicism and European Immigrants, 133, 195; see also Noll, The Old Religion in a New World, 177, 283.

27 Noel, Colorado Catholicism, vii.

28 Noel, Colorado Catholicism, 1, 2; see also David J. Weber, The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 69, 70; Pike quoted in Jones, The History of Catholic Education in the State of Colorado, 33-34, 527.


31 Noel, Colorado Catholicism 4-5, 8-9, 10-11.

32 O’Ryan and Malone, History of the Catholic Church in Colorado, 39, 43, 57; see also The Denver Catholic Register, Vol. I No. 48, Friday, July 6, 1906; and Noel, Colorado Catholicism, 12, 20, 21, 41.

33 Noel, Colorado Catholicism, 32, 33, 44, 151; also O’Ryan and Malone, History of the Catholic Church in Colorado, 69, 75.

34 Noel, Colorado Catholicism, xi; see also May, Screening Out the Past, 4; and Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 17.

35 Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop, xiv; see also Jensen, “Deserts, Diversity, and Self-Determination,” in The American Catholic Parish, 141, 199.

36 Noel, Colorado Catholicism, 79, 81, 85, 139; see also Msgr. Patrick C. Stauter, The Willging Years: Seventeen Years with the First Catholic Bishop of Pueblo (Chicago: Adams Press, 1986), 210-211.


39 Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop, 206-207; see also Noll, A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada, 489-490; Dolan, In Search of an American Catholicism, 142-143; and Dolan, The American Catholic Experience, 371.

40 Hinojosa, “Mexican-American Faith Communities in Texas and the Southwest,” in Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965, 94; Rudolfo Anaya, Bless Me,

41 Orsi, The Madonna of 115th Street, 226; see also Dolan, The American Catholic Experience, 173; Dodds, They All Came to Pueblo, 197; The Southern Colorado Register, Vol. I, No. 38, Friday, 03/29/1946, 1; and Joanne West Dodds, The Order Sons of Italy in America, Southern Colorado Lodge No. 2738: Celebrates the 100th Anniversary of Pueblo’s Columbus Monument and Our Italian-American Heritage (Pueblo, CO: My Friend the Printer, Inc., 2005), 11.

42 Noel, Colorado Catholicism, 36-37; see also Stauter, The Willging Years, 7, 13, 19; Dodds, They All Came to Pueblo, 105; Jones, The History of Catholic Education in the State of Colorado, 117; Linkh, American Catholicism and European Immigrants, 92-93; The Pueblo Chieftain, Friday, January 1, 1915, 30, and February 4, 1994 (Rawlings Special Collection: Folder # PCCLD – VT – P – 1732 – 01); The Southern Colorado Register, October 9, 1959, 25; and The Denver Catholic Register, Vol. I No. 48, Friday, July 6, 1906.

43 O’Ryan and Malone, History of the Catholic Church in Colorado, 103; The Denver Catholic Register, Thursday, March 22, 1945, 14; Thursday, June 21, 1945, 12; Thursday, April 8, 1943, 8; and Thursday, June 17, 1943; see also booklet – “St. Joseph Parish, Pueblo, Colorado: The History, The People, The Traditions – In Celebration of St. Joseph’s Day March 19, 2000,” put together by the CREW Youth Group (Diocese of Pueblo Archives); also The Pueblo Chieftain, July 21, 1945; and typewritten “History of Mount Carmel Parish, 1900-1945,” author unknown, from May 17, 1945, 6, which also includes an advertisement for an October 1915 “benefit ball” held per la ricostrozione della Chiesa de Monte Carmelo (Rawlings Special Collection, Folder # PCCLD – VT – P – 1725 – 01).

44 Typewritten “History of Mount Carmel Parish, 1900-1945,” author unknown, from May 17, 1945, 1 (Rawlings Special Collection, Folder # PCCLD – VT – P – 1725 – 01); L’Unione, July 13, 1900 (13 Luglio 1900); see also Dodds, The Order Sons of Italy, 4; Pauline Annette DiSipio, Echoes of Elm Street: An Italian Heritage (self-published by author, 1996), 175, accessed at Gornick Slovenian Library; The Pueblo Chieftain, September 14, 1946; The Denver Catholic Register, Vol. XV No. 21, December 18, 1919, 3; 1920 Mount Carmel Yearbook, and typed letter from Father Carlo M. Pinto, S.J., both from the Rawlings Special Collection (Folder # PCCLD – VT – P – 1725 – 01).

45 Jones, The History of Catholic Education in the State of Colorado, 204; also Bennett, The Party of Fear, 214-215; and Goldberg, Hooded Empire, 8.

46 Dodds, They All Came to Pueblo, 37-38, 61, 86, 134; see also booklet “St. Joseph Parish, Pueblo, Colorado: The History, The People, The Traditions,”; O’Ryan and Malone, History of the Catholic Church in Colorado, 98, 99-100; Sacred Heart Parish Church Directory, October 20, 1872 (Rawlings Special Collection, Folder # PCCLD –


49 Stauter, *The Willging Years*, 173, 224, 229, 240, 259, 286, 305-306; see also *The Southern Colorado Register*, October 9, 1959, 30.

50 *Camp and Plant* Vol. III No. 20, Saturday, May 23, 1903, 466.


52 Taylor, *Colorado: South of the Border* 360-362, 363-364, 376, 378; also *Camp and Plant* Vol. V No. 16, Saturday, April 30, 1904, 379; The Christmas 1919 issue of *The Denver Catholic Register* describes the 1854 El Pueblo massacre thusly: “A passing band of Utes were invited to participate in the revelry (for Christmas Day). Fired by the white man’s ‘tarantula juice,’ the drunken savages massacred the inmates…Seventeen men lost their lives as a result of this spree,” 88.


Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16; see also “A Century in Pueblo 1871-1971,” 26; and *The Denver Catholic Register*, Christmas 1919 edition, 88; Pauline DiSipio’s unpublished, transcribed memoirs of her father, Pueblo Italian immigrant Antonio DiSipio, *Home at Last: My Story* (accessed at Gornick Slovenian Library) reports that Antonio, like many immigrants, moved back home, living in Italy for 15 years (1920-1935). Antonio believed that, since it was “a hard life for my family in Italy,” he “must make some money in America to help.” Soon, he writes, “I will be leaving for America. I will be with Papa Angelo (Antonio’s father) and start working where he works…at the steel mill in Pueblo. I will be earning more money than I am making now,” 15.

Dodds, *They All Came to Pueblo*, 42-43, 44-45, 46, 51, 52, 53, 126. Dodds reports that, of the 125 different newspapers that have been published in Pueblo County, twenty-six have been foreign-language papers, among them eight in Italian, five in Spanish, and four in Slovenian; see also Klemencic and Pugelj, *Jim Pugel and Other Slovenian Pioneers of Pueblo, Colorado*, 29-30, 36-37.


*Camp and Plant*, Vol. IV No. 10, Saturday, September 19, 1903, 221-223; and Vol. I No.12, Saturday, March 1, 1902, 178, 182.

*Camp and Plant*, Vol. III No. 8, Saturday, August 23, 1902, 185, 186; also Vol. II No. 9, Saturday, August 30, 1902, 202, 203; and *The Pueblo Star-Journal and Sunday Chieftain*, Sunday, March 1, 1964, 8D.


76 Joanne West Dodds, *They All Came to Pueblo: A Social History*, 122-123; see also Matjaz Klemencic and Karl Pugelj, *Jim Pugel and Other Slovenian Pioneers of Pueblo, Colorado*, 26-27, 38, 84-85; Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 208-209; Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, 27; *The Pueblo Star-Journal*, April 14, 1947, April 5, 1948, March 21, 1948, and February 16, 1949; and Kathy Bacino Collection – Colorado State University-Pueblo archives (Box #1); “WSA Fraternal Life,” 10, 18, 42; and “The Order Sons of Italy in America, Southern Colorado Lodge No. 2738,” Intro, 2, 30.


79 Archuleta, *Land of the Penitentes, Land of Tradition*, 3, 72, 76-77; *Camp and Plant* Vol. III No. 20, Saturday, May 23, 1903, 462-464; *Frontier Times* Vol. 19 No. 2, November 1941, 73, 75 (part of the Archuleta Collection – CSU-Pueblo archives (Box #8); *The Denver Catholic Register* Vol. XXXVII No. 27, Thursday, February 26, 1942, 11; *Pueblo Star-Journal*, April 1, 1946.


REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES


2. *L’Unione* articles (Rare Book Collection), *Penitente* articles (Ruben Archuleta Collection), and Italian Fraternal Society information (Kathy Bacino Collection) were accessed at the Southern Colorado Ethnic Heritage and Diversity Archives and Special Collections at Colorado State University - Pueblo, Pueblo, Colorado.

3. *The Denver Catholic Register* and *The Southern Colorado Register* articles, unpublished parish histories, and parishioner correspondence were accessed at the Diocesan Archives of the Diocese of Pueblo, Pueblo, Colorado.

4. Unpublished and self-published memoirs, parish scrapbooks, and Slovenian Fraternal Society information was accessed at the Gornick Slovenian Library & Museum Archives at St. Mary’s Parish, Pueblo, Colorado.

5. *Pueblo Chieftain* and *Pueblo Star-Journal* articles (John Korber Collection), local neighborhood histories, and books released by the Order Sons of Italy and the Pueblo Police Department were accessed at the Western History Archives and Special Collections of the Rawlings Public Library, Pueblo, Colorado.

SECONDARY SOURCES


