

## SWEDISH ETHNICITY IN AMERICA

Ulf Beijbom

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Swedish immigrants in North America seem to fulfill most criteria for an ethnic group. They spoke the same language, were genetically relatively homogeneous, had more or less the same Protestant religion and the same social and cultural norms formed by the Swedish elementary school. They had never experienced the strong ethnic and political tensions which disturbed the harmony of so many continental European nations. As Nathan Glazier and Daniel Moynihan have pointed out, it is however also possible to say that the very same Swedish-American »subnation« consisted of segments of separate dialects, differences between state-church Lutherans, revivalists and »freethinkers,« urban and rural people, intellectuals and proletarians, etc. It is also worthwhile to question whether the many Swedish-speakers from Finland belonged to the Swedish-American immigrant group or constituted their own ethnic identity.

Ethnic consciousness and immigrant enclaves in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America were promoted by group migration, a relatively even sex distribution among the immigrants and their arrival in »fresh,« untouched immigration areas where a national group easily could develop its ethnic qualities. Exactly these prerequisites were at hand when the Swedes in the early 1850's started to settle the prairie land southeast of the Rock River's influx into the Mississippi in northern Illinois, or in the St. Croix River Valley of Minnesota. In these two cradles of rural Swedish-America the Swedes right from the start constituted the first major European immigrant group. The early immigration was dominated by families arriving in large parties from the same parishes and provinces in the old country. With few exceptions they were agrarians who had come to improve their situation in their old trade. Therefore their emigration became an exodus without return. This typical farm migration created the classic Swedish regions in the American Middle West, in Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Illinois, etc. Here the popular image of the Swedish immigrant was formed.

The criteria that established rural Swedish-America were also present in the cities, which after the Civil War became America's strongest immigration magnets. In 1910, when the number of Swedish immigrants in the U.S. reached its peak, 665,000, no less than 61 % lived in urban areas, which means that, contrary to the popular image, the Swedes belonged to America's most urbanized immigration groups. Already in the 1850's and 1860's, so-called Swede Towns grew up in Chicago, Rockford, Ill., Minneapolis, and other cities. By far most important was Chicago's Swede Town where one out of ten Swedish immigrants lived from the end of the 1880's.

Migration traditions also focused on cities. People from the mining areas of Bergslagen preferred to emigrate to industrial centers like Worcester, Mass. People from the sawmill districts of Norrland often went to Duluth, Minn., or Tacoma, Wash. Recruitment areas for the emigration to Chicago can also be singled out if we study the church records of the oldest Swedish Chicago colony. As in the homestead areas, the immigrants to a city often arrived in family-centered groups, which had departed from the same parishes. It was therefore natural to try to find housing as close to one another as possible. This strengthened ethnic consciousness and created enclaves dominated by people from the same province and parish. The Swede Town became a strong national core, which generated new immigration by neighbors and friends of the pioneers. In spite of the foreign and unhealthy city milieu where only a Stockholmer could feel at home, the ethnic pull constantly drew new immigrants from agrarian Sweden. Our best example of the vital Swedish ethnicity in urban America is Chicago, where, due to the concentration of countrymen and the central location of an expanding labor market, many Swedish-American organizations and newspapers established their headquarters making Chicago »the capital of Swedish-America.«<sup>1</sup>

When the melting pot theories were most highlighted, the city used to be regarded as an ideal locality for the immigrants' assimilation into American society. The most conspicuous way of assimilation is intermarriage. In the case of the Swedes in Chicago intermarriage was uncommon (6-10 % of married Swedish men) during the formative decades of the enclave, 1850-1880. The most important explanation for this is the huge immigration of Swedish females making the sex ratio of the colony almost even and creating an ideal situation for homogeneous marriages. Chicago's attraction for young girls is explained by its labor market where the demand for domestics, seamstresses, and other female occupations was constantly high. Such practical phenomena explain much of the ethnic stability in Chicago's Swede Town in the midst of »America's melting pot par preference.« It also makes it easier to understand how language, traditions and other ethnic fundamentals could be preserved, and why Chicago's Swede Town became the leading Swedish center in the U.S. The woman as an important force behind ethnicity can also be studied in less dramatic localities than Chicago. Under all circumstances, Swedish-American literature and other sources give ample evidence of the importance of the woman and the family for maintaining ethnicity among immigrants. The impression of ethnic persistence is also underlined by the study of the 1910 census report, according to which 72 % of 753,000 children of Swedish immigrants had both parents born in Sweden.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ulf Beijbom, Swedes in Chicago. *A Demographic and Social Study of the 1846-1880 Immigration*. Växjö 1971, 11 f., Sture Lindmark, *Swedish America, 1914-1932. Studies in Ethnicity with Emphasis on Illinois and Minnesota*. Uppsala 1971, pp. 28, 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Reports of The Immigration Commission*. Vol 1. Reprint edition by Arno Press, Inc., New York

Organizations are crucial for establishing formal ethnicity on a higher level than the family and the workshop floor. Without organizations it is hard to imagine a network between thousands of ethnic cells scattered over an immense immigration area. Although the first ethnic organization was a secular club founded in 1836 in New York, the churches became the earliest and strongest generators of organized ethnicity among Swedish immigrants in the U.S. Congregations were founded very soon after the coming of the first immigrant groups, and after some years the different denominations formed their own national conferences, or synods, which united Swedish immigrants from coast to coast. From the 1850's, Lutheran congregations were established all over the Swedish immigration area. In 1860, they came together in the Augustana Synod, which, during its existence (to 1963) developed an impressive scope of religious, educational, cultural, and social activities, all labeled »Swedish Lutheran,« and open to interested countrymen (approximately 20 % of the Swedes belonged to the Augustana Synod).<sup>3</sup>

The secular societies and clubs were naturally rivals of the churches. The clubs were, however, long regarded as organizations for educated, well-to-do, white-collar city immigrants, and they were with few exceptions active in the city milieu. In the 1880s, the club program became more democratic and open to common blue-collar men. Instrumental for this development was the insurance program initiated by nation-wide societies like the Order of Svithiod, the Order of Vikings, and the Order of Vasa. These organizations had local chapters in almost every corner of Swedish-America. Their ethnic ambitions were as a whole as high as the Augustana congregations and were often even stronger in the areas of language and folklore. In spite of this, the clubs and others had difficulties recruiting the mass of immigrants. At the end of the Swedish immigration epoch ca. 7 % of the immigrants and their children seem to have belonged to a non-religious organization. At the same time ca. 25 % of the Swedes belonged to a Swedish congregation.<sup>4</sup>

The competition between religions and secular organizations was especially visible in the Swedish-American press, which became the scene of a constant intellectual struggle between church and club people. The debate focused on ethnic issues such as the future of the Swedish language, for or against Swedish schools, and the attitudes about Sweden and America. In most cases the conservative preservation

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1970, pp. 821-838, Ulf Beijbom, *Swedes in Chicago*, pp. 119-121, Hans Norman, »Swedes in North America«. In Harald Runblom-Hans Norman, *From Sweden to America. A History of the Migration*. Uppsala 1976, pp. 228-290, particularly pp. 279-282, Robert E. Park, *Race and Culture*. Free Press Paperback 1964.

<sup>3</sup> Ulf Beijbom, »Emigrantkyrkan som sociokulturell organisation«. In *Kyrkohistorisk årskrift* 1972, pp. 173-187, Sture Lindmark, *Swedish America*, pp. 28, 304-312, Edward R. Kantowicz, »Polish Chicago: Survival Through Solidarity«. In Melvin G. Holli, Peter d'A Jones (editors), *The Ethnic Frontier. Essays in the History of group Survival in Chicago and the Midwest*. Grand Rapids, Mich., 1977, pp. 179-209, particularly 189 f.

<sup>4</sup> Ulf Beijbom, *Swedes in Chicago*, pp. 300 f., Ulf Beijbom, »Föreningslivet och svenskamerikanerna«. In *Utvandringen och Svensk-Amerika*. Göteborg 1986, pp. 138-164.

ideas were heralded by the church people and especially the Augustana group and its newspaper *Hemlandet*, while more Americanized views were voiced by the secular opinion moulders in the »liberal« press. The importance of ethnic leaders in articulating opinions and selling them to their countrymen – e.g. Johan Enander and T. N. Hasselquist – is reflected in the Swedish-American press.

For the majority of the Swedish immigrants the mother tongue stood out as the only possible means of communication. In Minneapolis and St. Paul, for instance, 17 % of the Swedes still used their native language after three decades in the U.S. (1921). In 1910, when Swedish-America »culminated,« 60 % of the Swedish immigrants and their children held on to their language as to only 39 % in 1930, when the immigration epoch was at its end. Marcus Lee Hansen's famous formula according to which the children of immigrants departed from the immigrant language may be reflected in the shrinking percentage between these two years. Both religious and secular organizations regarded the native language as the umbilical cord to the homeland culture. This was reflected in the impressive production of Swedish-language newspapers, magazines, and books, which culminated in 1915 after which the hyper-Americanism of World War I got the upper hand and threatened the position of immigrant literature. The press stands out as an especially powerful instrument of ethnicity, and the prominent ethnic leaders were therefore often journalists, or at least men of the written word.<sup>5</sup> A filiopietistic literature was produced by authors and opinion moulders like Johan Enander and C. F. Peterson. Swedish-American filiopietism got its flavor both from Swedish history (New Sweden 1638-1655) and Lutheranism (Gustavus Adolphus, the protector of Lutheranism in Europe of the 17th century.) Parallel with its function as the medium of intellectual self-appreciation, the press also had the more practical role of informing about the situation in Sweden, as well as in the different parts of »Swedish-America.« The press became a link between the different immigrant enclaves in America, as well as between America and Sweden. But the press also had an assimilation-promoting function, giving the readers important information about America, its institutions and the American way of life. The final result of all these bridges to American culture became the reader's desire to, as much as possible, identify him- or herself with »our adopted country,« and to combine this Americanism with the best in the Swedish heritage.<sup>6</sup>

The practical side of ethnicity as reflected in everyday life is also discussed. Especially during the strained pioneer years it was necessary for countrymen to keep together and support one another. This was also the case during periods of disaster and stress, for instance, during the cholera epidemics of the 1850's, the »famine immigration« of impoverished Swedes 1869-1871, the time after the Chicago fire in

<sup>5</sup> Sture Lindmark, *Swedish America*, pp. 104-109, 191-218. Ulf Beijbom, *Swedish in Chicago*, pp. 315-335, Ulf Beijbom, »The Swedish Press«. In Sally M. Miller, *The Ethnic Press in the United States*. Greenwood Press 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Ulf Beijbom, »Clio i Svesk-Amerika«. In Lars-Göran Tedebrand (editor), *Historieforskning på nya vägar. Studier tillägnade Sten Carlsson*. Lund 1977, pp. 17-35.

1871 or the depression years of 1893 and 1929-1933. Practical ethnicity also flourished when the group felt itself threatened by other ethnics (the Italians in Chicago's Swede Town) or the hyper-Americanism during World War I.<sup>7</sup>

The most striking difference is the male dominated immigration in Australia. Most of the Swedes who landed there arrived as individuals (especially many sailors jumped ships) and often had no intention of remaining in a country they found too strange and forbidding. It is therefore almost impossible to find any Swedish settlement areas in Australia. Immigration mostly went to the big cities where the Swedes became isolated loners with few chances to congregate in their own churches, clubs or enclaves. Even the possibilities of cultivating grassroot contacts with countrymen were small. Organized ethnicity only sporadically appeared in the cities and then often in cooperation with other Scandinavians.

Ethnic persistence was especially weakened by the fact that the female element was extremely small (before 1921 only one out of ten Swedish immigrants in Australia was a woman.) The abnormal shortage of Swedish women made ethnic marriages almost impossible. Intermarriage became the rule when a Swedish Australian married, but to a large extent he preferred to remain a bachelor (58 out of 100 Swedish men in New South Wales were unmarried in 1891.) If this alienated person married, his partner in most cases originated from the British Isles, which meant that British cultural orientation easily took over. To men of low education it became impossible to keep up the native language or native customs. The smoothest way was to become Anglicized as quickly as possible. Assimilation tendencies were strengthened by the immigrant's low social status and the official ignorance of non-British ethnicity. Unlike the situation in America the Swedes in Australia seem to have had little desire to persuade relatives and friends to come out after them. The letters sent home from Australia more often warned against emigration rather than depicting the country in the rosy colors of the typical »American letter.« Little »ethnic pull« is revealed when we study the source material on Swedish emigration to Australia. The observations from Australia strengthened the impression that ethnic consciousness and cooperation are a must for friction-free immigration.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ulf Beijbom, *Swedes in Chicago*, pp. 79-84, 245, Sture Lindmark, *Swedish America*, pp. 162-190, 240-243, 304-320.

<sup>8</sup> Ulf Beijbom, »Swedish Ethnicity in Australia 1851-1930«. In Mark Garner-John S. Martin, *Australia: The Scandinavian Chapter 1788-1988*. Melbourne 1991.

## POVZETEK

## ŠVEDI V AMERIKI

Ulf Beijbom

Zdi se, da švedski izseljenci v Severni Ameriki izpolnjujejo večino kriterijev, ki določajo etnično skupino. Govorili so isti jezik, genetično so bili relativno homogeni, bili so več ali manj iste protestantske vere in se držali istih družbenih in kulturnih norm kot jim jih je oblikovala švedska osnovna šola. Nikoli niso doživljali močnih etničnih in političnih napetosti, kakršne so vznemirjale mnoge narode kontinentalne Evrope. Kot sta ugotavljala Nathan Glazier in Daniel Moynihan, je bil ta švedsko-ameriški »podnarod« skupek različnih dialektov, razlik znotraj državne Luteranske cerkve, preroditeljev in »svobodomislecev«, urbanih in podeželskih ljudi, intelektualcev, proletarcev itd.

Narodno zavest in nastajanje priseljskih enklav so v Ameriki v 19. stoletju pospeševale skupinske migracije, njihova relativno enakovredna zastopanost po spolu, in naselitev na »svežih«, nedotaknjenih priseljskih področjih, kjer je skupina zlahka razvila svoje etnične značilnosti. Natančno takšni predpogoji so bili dani Švedom, ki so se v začetku leta 1850 začeli naseljevati v preriji jugovzhodno od pritoka Rock Riverja v Missisipi v Severnem Illinoisu in v dolini reke St. Croix v Minnesoti. Med prvimi priseljenci so prevladovalе družine, ki so v velikem številu prihajale iz istih župnij in pokrajin matične domovine. Z nekaj izjemami so bili to poljedelci, ki so v Ameriko šli z namenom izboljšati svoj položaj. Tako je njihovo izseljevanje postalo eksodus brez povratkov. To tipično kmečko preseljevanje je ustvarilo klasične švedske regije na ameriškem Srednjem Zahodu, v Minnesoti, Iowi, Nebraski, Illinoisu itn. Tam se je izoblikovala splošna podoba švedskega priseljenca.

Kriteriji, ki so utrdili ruralno švedsko Ameriko, so bili prisotni tudi v mestih, ki so po Civilni Vojni postala najmočnejši ameriški priseljski magnet. V letu 1910, ko je število švedskih priseljencev v Ameriko doseglo vrhunec, 665.000 ljudi, je celih 61 % živelo v urbanih predelih, kar pomeni, da so Švede, v nasprotju s splošnim prepričanjem, bili najbolj urbanizirana ameriška priseljska populacija.

Organizacije so odločilne za utrjevanje formalne narodnostne pripadnosti na nivoju, višjem od družinskega in delovnega. Cerkve so bile prvi in najmočnejši generatorji organizirane narodne pripadnosti med švedskimi priseljenci v ZDA. Kmalu po prihodu prvih priseljskih skupin so ustanovili kongregacije in po nekaj letih so različne veroizpovedi ustanovile svoje lastne narodne konference ali sinode, ki so združevale švedske priseljence od obale do obale.

Posvetna združenja in društva so seveda bili tekmeči cerkvenim. Kakorkoli, društva so bila dolgo smatrana kot organizacije za izobražene, uspešne, uradnike, mestne priseljence, ki so bili, razen redkih izjem, aktivno udeleženi v mestnem miljeju. V 1880-ih so programi društev postali bolj demokratični in s tem odprti tudi za navadne

delavce. K takemu razvoju je pripomogel zavarovalni program, ki so ga vpeljale družbe širom države.

Tekmovalnost med cerkvenimi in posvetnimi organizacijami je postala še posebej opazna v švedsko-ameriškem tisku, ki je postal prizorišče nenehne intelektualne bitke med cerkvenimi in posvetnimi predstavniki. Debate so bile osredotočene na etnična vprašanja, na primer na prihodnost švedskega jezika, za in proti švedskim šolam, in na stališča do Švedske in Amerike.

Za večino švedskih priseljencev je bil materin jezik edino možno sredstvo komunikacije. V letu 1910, ko je »švedska Amerika« dosegla svoj vrh, je 60% švedskih priseljencev in njihovih otrok govorilo le švedščino, v letu 1930, ko se je končala priseljenška epoha, pa le 39 %.

Obdelana je tudi praktična stran narodnostne pripadnosti, kakor se je odražala v vsakdanjem življenju. Posebej v težkih prvih letih je bilo njuno, da so priseljenci podpirali drug drugega v obdobjih nesreč in nadlog, kot na primer v času epidemije kolere v letu 1850, v času »druginjske imigracije« obubožanih Švedov v letih 1869-1871, v času po čikaškem požaru leta 1871 ali v času depresije v letih 1893 in 1929-1933. Občutek pripadnosti je zlasti bil močan, kadar se je skupina čutila ogroženo od ostali etničnih skupin (Italijani v čikaškem Švedskem mestu) ali od hiperamerikanizacije med drugo svetovno vojno.