

A Study of Three Norwegian American Newspapers in
Northwestern Minnesota: Ethnic Identity and the Motivations
behind Political Debate 1890 – 1894

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the political experience of Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota between 1890 and 1894. More specifically, it explores the relative importance of ethnic identity in the public political debate in three politically divergent Norwegian-language newspapers. This study argues that specific cultural, economic, political and social developments in northwestern Minnesota can explain the development and public expression of a hybrid ethnic identity specific to that region. A variety of perceptions of this identity distinctively characterized the political discourse in the press at the time. Many Norwegian Americans, conditioned by experiences both in Norway and America, exploited politically what they recognized as usable parts of their common ethnic heritage to express their political dissatisfaction and expectations, to enhance feelings of ethnic unity, to rally political support, and to besmirch enemies. This thesis demonstrate that perceptions of ethnic identity, although not the most central topic of political debate, played a significant role in the public political discourse in northwestern Minnesota between 1890 and 1894.

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Chapter One – Introduction

The history of Norwegian Americans is multifaceted and complex. Whether focusing on social, economic, political or cultural conditions in Norway and America, the transatlantic crossing, or factors influencing the processes of migration, scholars studying Norwegian Americans share a common purpose. Using different approaches and source material, representing a variety of perspectives and research areas, they all seek to paint truthful pictures of this ethnic group's struggle for a better life. This study focuses on the relentlessly energetic and at times volatile political interaction between Norwegian Americans and American society in northwestern Minnesota during the early 1890s.

The Scope of Place and Time

More specifically, this research project aims to analyze and discuss the relative importance of ethnic identity for political debate in three politically divergent Norwegian American newspapers in northwestern Minnesota from 1890 to around 1894. During these years, the region was characterized by significant political movements of reform through which many Norwegian Americans enthusiastically protested against the economic, political and social status quo. The movement of agrarian dissent among Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota gathered momentum around 1890, and diminished significantly after 1894.¹ The period in question is short but gives valuable insight into the political experience of Norwegian Americans. During this span of around five years, they were involved in all layers of politics in northwestern Minnesota, most importantly in the Republican Party, the Farmers' Alliance movement, and the People's Party, but also in the Prohibitionist and Democratic Parties. Several Norwegian-language newspapers from the period reflect these developments. The public political debate which has been analyzed primarily centers on events and issues within Minnesota. As a consequence, this study for the most part maintains a single-state focus. Minnesota may be said to have experienced unique political development in the 1890's, clearly distinguishable from that of its neighboring states. The political historian Lowell Soike has, through analysis of Norwegian American voting behavior in certain areas of Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin, demonstrated that each state had by 1890 in fact acquired its own "(...) distinctive pattern of political orientation, a framework for raising and resolving issues."² Unique political cultures had developed as a result of significant variations in social structures, economic circumstances, ethnic divisions, and historical experiences relating to party arrangements.³ Expanding the source material of this study by including newspapers

from other states, for example areas in North Dakota where socioeconomic circumstances and political developments may be compared to those of northwestern Minnesota, would facilitate a more complete understanding of the relative importance of ethnic identity in the Norwegian American public political discourse at the time. However, the boundaries of this study have not allowed for a wider focus. As long as one, when necessary, includes a discussion of political development and discourse across state lines, a single-state focus can be fruitful and rewarding since it gives insight that otherwise might have been lost.

The Expression of and Construction of a Perceived Ethnic Identity

Before introducing the source material and considering methodological challenges, a closer discussion of terminology, context, and research history is necessary. Several historians have through studies of the relation between ethnicity and politics demonstrated the potential fruitfulness of an ethnocultural approach to history.⁴ The main focus of this study is on the politically significant aspects of the dynamic ethnic identity which was formed and maintained by Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota during the early 1890s as these were revealed through political debate in the Norwegian-language press in the region at the time. Analyzing the origins of, the discussions about, and the editorial exploitations of the major political ideas and issues which characterized the Norwegian-language political discourse in the press at the time may, first, increase the understanding of the extent to which feelings of ethnic identity among Norwegian Americans can have stimulated political debate and, second, provide interesting perspectives on how perceptions and constructions of ethnic identity were utilized politically in the press by editors, readers, and politicians.

Ethnic identity is here understood as a flexible set of descent-based attributes which to varying degrees and depending upon external variables were acknowledged and perceived as important for group membership and recognition among most Norwegian Americans.⁵ The group exploited several of these allegedly descent-based attributes actively to distinguish themselves as different from other immigrant groups and to preserve their cultural heritage, but also at times to prove their Americanness.⁶ This study does not question the proposition that some of these generally perceived traits may be said to have constituted a general Norwegian American ethnic identity. Instead of discussing common denominators for a majority of Norwegian immigrants in America, attention is focused on how local circumstances in northwestern Minnesota, most importantly economic conditions, political

developments, and variations in the composition of Norwegian American immigrant communities, resulted in the construction of a hybrid ethnic identity specific to the region.⁷

Hybrid ethnic identity is here understood as a sub-division within the more general ethnic identity. Due to its dynamic relation to a variety of internal influences (for example differing religious and cultural predispositions among the immigrants) and external influences (for example economic hardship in the area of settlement), the hybrid identity had come to encompass a different content. Members of the sub-group still recognized many aspects of the general ethnic identity, but some attributes of identification were emphasized differently, filled with new content, or to some degree disregarded.⁸ The formation of this hybrid ethnic identity was a natural result of the fact that Norwegian migrants had left their home country at different times and had faced and were facing differing challenges and realities when settling down and interacting with American society.⁹ The specific content of this identity in northwestern Minnesota is addressed below when contextualizing the region. Arguably, making a distinction between regional identities is useful when discussing the relative impact of ethnic identity in a certain area. One should never forget to ask, as Samuel P. Hays has expressed it, “(...) what particular people, at what particular time, in what particular place thought and acted in what particular way”¹⁰ Special emphasis is placed on how perceptions of the hybrid Norwegian American identity in northwestern Minnesota were shaped by, expressed through, and utilized politically in the Norwegian-language press there.

One must question where a line should be drawn between attributes which in fact may be defined as *ethnic*, and attributes which may not. Implementing this analytical distinction is challenging, not least because both Norwegian Americans themselves and other groups at the time seem to have had conflicting opinions about which political attitudes and values were typical for Norwegian Americans in the region. A scholar should always strive to describe what he studies as precisely as possible. However, the ambiguity and vagueness which typified perceptions of ethnic identities at the time does not invite rigid categorization. Norwegian American ethnic identity was elusive. The political historian Jørn Brøndal has demonstrated that many political leaders at the time preferred to express ethnic identity in unclear terms because broad and indefinite appeals to nationality often defused disagreements within the ethnic group.¹¹ Thus, instead of focusing on clear-cut attitudes and values that had the potential to alienate certain groups of voters, the editors and politicians often centered on the general and vague. Another development, which from a historian’s perspective makes it

difficult to define what was typically Norwegian American, was the gradual process of the group's and individuals' integration into American society. The complexity of the situation may explain why some historians have found it challenging to describe the relative political importance of *ethnicity* among Norwegian Americans. The historian Lowell J. Soike, for example, in his study of voting behavior in Norwegian American settlements across the Midwest, emphasizes how "(...) ethnic, religious and socioeconomic influences merged, mingled, and became entwined together to shape events."¹² Instead of treating these forces as independent from one another, he suggests that historians may learn more about the past by accepting their complex relationship. A short excerpt from an article in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* may be instructive for appreciating the potential fruitfulness of understanding ethnic identity as subjective rather than objective, constructed rather than pre-defined, and flexible rather than solid. The editor prints this article to inform his readers about the results of the People's Party convention in the late summer of 1894. The article applauds Norwegian American Senator E. E. Lommen's candidacy on the Populist ticket.

The nomination suits him not just because of his personal merits, but because he is perceived as a representative for the Norwegian race, a race which never (?) lets itself be suppressed, which always has loved freedom and justice, and which always has been ready to fight for these values. They are the backbone of the People's Party in Minnesota. Had it not been for the courage with which they broke free from their old party, the Populists in this state would never have risen to protest now. The way in which they in 1892 supported their candidate for Governor against one of their own countrymen, ascended them to a heroic level of devotion, of principle, and of superiority instead of petty bigotry. They are a great race, and we are proud to have one of them so close to the first man on our ticket.¹³

Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Norwegian to English have been done by the author of this study. From a political historian's point of view the specific values expressed as typically Norwegian American in the excerpt above were most importantly due to socioeconomic circumstances and similar immigrant experiences, unquestionably shared by several other immigrant groups in northwestern Minnesota. One should be careful to describe them as *ethnic*.¹⁴ This does not change the fact, however, that many people, Norwegian Americans as well as other ethnic groups, expressed and perceived them as characteristically Norwegian American at the time.¹⁵ The excerpt above is probably written by a supporter of the People's Party, most likely a man of some education, to flatter fellow dissenters and rally support from potential Norwegian American voters. Based on other articles, editorials, and letters to the editor from the same period, it is reasonable to assume that the writer does not look on himself as a Norwegian American. If he did, he would have used "us" instead of "them" in his concluding sentence. Yet his observations exemplify the political situation of the time, in which Norwegian-language newspapers quite often were used as an arena to

actively construct and shape ideas of ethnic identity. This arena was mostly used by Norwegian Americans. However, as the excerpt exemplifies, “outsiders” could also contribute. The extent to which the differing notions about ethnic identity expressed through the press mirror the actual feelings of identity among Norwegian Americans at the time is addressed later. Although this study primarily discusses *perceptions* of ethnic identity, it is still important to bear in mind the difference between what may be described as typically Norwegian American, and what may be described as typically American.

From a comparative perspective, this study explores the dynamic construction and expression of the ethnic identity of one immigrant group among many. As such, it is likely that some similarities exist between developments which are described here, and developments in other foreign-language newspapers and in the local English-language press. Based on this reality, one may rightly question the extent to which some of the attributes which different political leaders, editors, and readers perceived or wanted voters to perceive as defining for Norwegian American ethnic identity actually were unique for this ethnic group. At the same time, the study addresses developments which are very definite in the sense that they took place in a specific area, in three specific Norwegian-language newspapers, and over a relatively short period of time. As long as one is aware that the attributes which constituted the ethnic identity in question were not necessarily unique, one should not disregard the fact that most of the people at the time actually perceived them to be so. The use of the term *ethnicity* may be problematic, but exploiting the concept is nevertheless necessary to sufficiently analyze and discuss the many nuances which characterized the complex relationship between perceptions of Norwegian American identity and discourse in the press, and to determine the relative importance of this identity as a motivator for political debate at the time.

Contextualizing Northwestern Minnesota

Most scholars accept the basic proposition that the political experiences of Norwegian Americans were, to varying degrees, influenced by their Norwegian heritage, most importantly “(...) a religious pietism that tended to place them solidly within the ranks of the Republican Party.”¹⁶ Lutheran Norwegian American settlements all over the Mid-West usually rejected Democratic Party candidates because they were perceived to be representatives for the Catholic ethnic groups and the “party of Popery.” Northwestern Minnesota is one of a few areas where this tendency was challenged.¹⁷ Several scholars, using differing methodological and theoretical approaches, have tried to explain what by some has

been described as an abnormal tilt among Norwegian American farmers in northwestern parts of the state towards the political left: being more politically active and favoring political movements of dissent more readily than other immigrant groups, for example the Swedish Americans, they created a special political legacy.¹⁸ In fact, the historians assert, the political experience of Norwegian Americans in this region was, mainly due to economic circumstances, distinctively different from that of Norwegian immigrants in other areas of the state.¹⁹ Whereas many economically distressed Norwegian American communities in the northwest readily joined the Populist insurgency of the early 1890s, most of the longer established, more deeply integrated, agriculturally more diversified, and financially stable Norwegian settlements in central and southern Minnesota remained loyal to the Republican Party.²⁰

This has led several scholars to propose that economic circumstances in areas characterized by a quite recent influx of Norwegian immigrants provoked a political climate of reform, where experiences, memories, and attitudes from Norway frequently re-surfaced and became politically significant.²¹ More specifically, the most important attitudinal tendencies which seem to have radicalized the political experience of many Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota were, first, a proud tradition of land ownership and self-sufficiency which invited agrarianism and a suspicion toward urban areas; second, a set of remembered class antagonisms which infused many immigrants with opposition against officialdom, the centralization of power, an enmity toward moneyed authority; and third, vibrant tensions between groups who after years of passive religious apathy in Norway expressed anticlerical sentiments and groups who had experienced religious revival either in their home country or in America.²² Several of these elements are reflected in the perceptions of ethnic identity which were expressed through the public discourse at the time, both among Norwegian American rural laborers in their attempts to express themselves politically in letters to the editor, and among the political elite, politicians as well as editors, in their attempts to rally political support.

At the same time a different yet complementary story of Norwegian American political involvement unfolded. The populace of Norwegian descent in the area was far from homogeneous.²³ Many Norwegians Americans, both first and second generation, had moved to the northwestern region from previously established settlements in the south and east.²⁴ These Norwegian Americans had a different background than the more recent arrivals from

Norway. Most importantly, instead of having experienced potentially radicalizing developments in the old country and in America, they had been influenced by years of allegiance to the Republican Party from the Civil War onwards, and had grown more accustomed to the social, political, cultural and economic differences between America and Norway. This may partly explain why a substantial percentage of Norwegian Americans in the area remained loyal to the Republican Party, even in years of great economic distress. From a different perspective it is in this regard also important to emphasize the common feelings of allegiance to Norwegian American politicians, especially after the Republican Party nominated Knute Nelson as their candidate for the position as Minnesota's governor in the 1892 and 1894 elections.

What it at this point is important to appreciate is that diversity rather than cohesion characterized the Norwegian American political experience in northwestern Minnesota. As is discussed in greater detail throughout the next chapter, variations in the immigrants' backgrounds from Norway and experiences in America at times significantly influenced their perceptions of ethnic identity. This identity was actively constructed to define the group's position in American society. The Norwegian heritage was for this purpose a fruitful source of inspiration. At the same time it was inevitable that Norwegian Americans to varying degrees, based on background and local conditions, were influenced by the unrelenting processes of integration which has affected all immigrant groups in America.

Historiographical Debate

It is precisely the political complexity and diversity within the ethnic group that makes Norwegian American political history an interesting topic and inspires academic debate: Norwegian immigrants were simultaneously conservative and progressive, skeptical to forfeiting social and religious traditions yet in some areas open for political movements of change. As noted, one result of the academic quest for understanding has been a fruitful debate about the relative importance of differing factors which may explain voting behavior and party affiliation among Norwegian Americans. Several studies of the relation between Norwegian American ethnicity and politics contain analyses of newspapers where one aims to identify a convergence of values between Populist and Progressive movements of dissent in the Midwest, on the one hand, and Norwegian Americans ethnic attributes on the other.²⁵ Scholars have identified a number of connections between the attitudes Norwegian immigrants carried with them from the old country and their political experience of dissent in

several areas of the Midwest. While earlier historians of this relationship tend to emphasize the political impact of similarities between national values and movements of dissent, more recent studies suggest that they should not be exaggerated.²⁶ This scholarly debate, to which the most important and interesting contributors have been political historians Jon Wefald, Carl H. Chrislock, Lowell J. Soike, Jørn Brøndal, and Odd S. Lovoll, has in many ways been more implicit than explicit. The following paragraphs aim to give nothing more than a rough overview of the discussion, but they still provide an informative framework for appreciating how this study positions itself in the debate and contributes to the existing body of knowledge about the Norwegian American political experience in America.

Jon Wefald, through his slender book *A Voice of Protest: Norwegians in American Politics, 1890-1917*, presents several interesting perspectives on the importance of Norwegian Americans' cultural heritage. He argues that ethnicity in the form of social, cultural and political traditions from the old country significantly influenced the immigrant group's political behavior around the turn of the century. The clarity and energy of Wefald's argument is stronger than his evidence. Norwegian Americans were according to him "(...) unrelentingly progressive, frequently radical, (...) their politics (...) uniformly left of center, varying from progressive and radical Republicanism to Populism and socialism."²⁷ According to Wefald, the explanation for this collective reform-mindedness is found in a distinctive Norwegian folk culture. Discrediting the influences of local or macro-socioeconomic conditions, he argues that the pivotal factor producing a politics of protest was the Norwegian's old-country heritage. It "(...) turned on the spirit of social cohesion and communalism. It stressed the notions of economic self-sufficiency and co-operation. And it included compassion for the have-nots and a concern for the common good. The Norwegian rural culture disavowed both the laissez-faire spirit and social Darwinism. It contradicted the success myth and deplored industrial-capitalistic exploitation of the genuine producers. This led finally to a common goal for the Norwegians: the goal of a co-operative commonwealth."²⁸ Wefald repeatedly emphasizes the differences between typical Norwegian American values, and the values which allegedly characterized American society at the time. This study appreciates the importance of culturally infused values for political discussion among Norwegian Americans in the press. However, it also acknowledges that variety rather than uniformity characterized the Norwegian American political experience in Minnesota towards the end of the 19th century, and that caution should be applied both when using newspapers as source material and when trying to describe something as vague and elusive as

perceptions of ethnic predispositions and ethnically infused value systems. Additionally, one may question the wisdom of not recognizing the importance of socioeconomic explanations for political development in a period so dramatically characterized by class animosities and economic depression.

Contrasting Wefald's image of a cohesive ethnic bloc of Norwegian American radical voters, Lowell J. Soike in his book *Norwegian Americans and the Politics of Dissent, 1880-1924*, argues that diversity rather than cohesion characterized Norwegian American voting patterns in the Midwest at the time. He agrees that ethnic predispositions to some extent may have influenced the political inclinations of Norwegian Americans in certain areas, but only in combination with socioeconomic and religious influences. Most importantly, the national heritage seems to have encompassed inherited and shared class experiences as farmers. These were characterized by a "(...) peasant class consciousness, a dislike of government officialdom, and a suspicion of towns and cities."²⁹ Soike rejects Wefald's assumption of – and argument for – a uniform pattern of ethnically infused values which influenced voters across the Midwest. Instead, he emphasizes how political experiences and attitudes varied according to where Norwegian Americans lived, when they came, and what livelihood they chose.³⁰ Additionally, he identifies anti-Catholicism as the only constant political influence to affect Norwegian Americans across the Midwest irrespective of other factors, in that they generally seem to have rejected Democratic candidates (except in northwestern Minnesota, where Norwegian townships defied the pattern and voted for Democrats on the joint Populist/Democrat tickets).³¹ When describing the northwestern areas of Minnesota, Soike argues that economic distress and a lack of fidelity to the Republican Party due to recent settlement made many Norwegian Americans forfeit parts of their cultural heritage. Most importantly they willingly voted for the Democratic Party. Thus elements of class struggle in certain areas to some extent overshadowed the political influence of religious circumstances. This study does not contest his assumption that ethnic predispositions among Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota at best were unpredictable determinants for political action.³² Their impact on perceptions of and constructions of ethnic identity in the press, however, was still significant.³³ This research project has been informed by relevant statistical material in Soike's study. To some extent this analysis has sought to complement his findings by providing a more nuanced discussion of the relative importance of perceptions of ethnic identity as expressed through the Norwegian-language press in the region.

Both Odd S. Lovoll and Carl H Chrislock support Soike's arguments for diversity rather than ethnic bloc cohesion, and emphasize the relevance of economic circumstances when explaining voting behavior among Norwegian Americans across the wheat belt. They suggest through different studies that the predominately Populist and Progressive political orientation of Norwegians in some areas of the Midwest should be understood in a wider perspective.³⁴ Most importantly, they bring some healthy breathing-space into the discussion by highlighting that Norwegian Americans were not the only immigrant group to work for political change.³⁵ This implies that many Norwegian Americans joined movements of dissent for some of the same reasons as did other ethnic groups. From a primarily socioeconomic perspective one may thus question the relative political importance of ethnicity in a wider context characterized by violent class struggle and economic depression. Additionally, they demonstrate how the conservative Republican tradition exemplified by Knute Nelson at times quite forcefully counterbalanced Norwegian American support for movements of reform. Still, both Chrislock and Lovoll acknowledge that the heritage some immigrant groups brought to America did, to a certain degree, influence political development.³⁶

Jørn Brøndal, focusing on conditions in Wisconsin, asserts that the secular nature of Progressivism in the long run seems to have defused the ethnic elements which at times characterized the Norwegian American political experience in some areas of the Mid-West.³⁷ In the early 1890s, however, this process of secularization of the political scene had not yet gained momentum. The focus in his study on ethnic leadership rather than voting behavior among the grassroots invites a different yet complementary perspective on the relative importance of ethnicity: The vibrant old style politics which characterized the period suited Norwegian Americans quite well due to its focus on labels such as party, nationality, locality and personality.³⁸ Norwegian American communities in Wisconsin, as in Minnesota, were typified by several strong ethnic institutions which, to varying extents, were used by politicians to connect with the grassroots. These connections were often used to rally ethnic support. Brøndal emphasizes the vagueness of these ethnic appeals, and asserts that "(...) in day-to-day practical politics, *the values* purportedly associated with being Norwegian-, Swedish-, Danish-, or simply Scandinavian-American mattered less than the *connections* opened up by communication with the leaders of ethnic institutions and their networks of grassroots supporters."³⁹ Brøndal acknowledges that ethnic groups at the *local* level may have tended to "(...) coalesce around certain systems of cultural values imported from the old home and adapted to and reexpressed in the new environment, although over time those

values hardly remained fixed.”⁴⁰ However, his analysis of letters to the editor of the Scandinavian American newspaper *Skandinaven* and the Swedish-language newspaper *Hemlandet* indicates that the relative importance of ethnic identity for political debate and action should not be exaggerated, most importantly due to the ambiguity and vagueness which characterized its expression in the press.⁴¹

Brøndal’s study of newspapers has been instructive for parts of the framework of analysis used in this study. Furthermore, several of his observations about the nature of Norwegian American ethnic identity in Wisconsin are also relevant for developments in northwestern Minnesota.⁴² Brøndal has sought to define the relative importance of ethnicity for political debate and action in two widely distributed Republican newspapers, with a particular focus on ethnic leadership. This study is different in several ways. First, the newspapers which have been analyzed express a variety of political affiliations, and their numbers of circulation are considerably lower than those of *Skandinaven* and *Hemlandet*. Second, the analysis is focused on a specific region and thus to a greater extent explores a local context. Finally, the discussion about the relative importance of ethnic identity has been informed equally by a bottom-up and by a top-down perspective. As already noted, one goal of this study has been to complement Soike’s study of Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota.⁴³ Rather than analyzing the relative importance of ethnicity for voting results, the focus is placed on the role of ethnic identity as motivation for the political discourse in the press. The works of Lovoll and Chrislock have inspired a more nuanced approach, both with regard to the importance of continued Republican support among many Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota, and with regard to potential similarities with experiences among other immigrant groups. The existing body of scholarly knowledge is thus in several ways used as a foundation for this study, and has significantly influenced the focus areas of analysis. A more detailed discussion of methodological challenges is found later in this chapter under the heading *Methodological Considerations*.

This study argues that differing perceptions of ethnic identity played an important role in the political debate in the Norwegian-language press in northwestern Minnesota during the early 1890s. The significance of ethnicity for election turnouts should not be exaggerated, but its presence in the public debate was still distinctive. On the one hand, from a bottom-up perspective, the political statements from ordinary farmers in the press illustrate how many Norwegian Americans perceived themselves as a distinct ethnic group different from other

ethnic groups in a political landscape characterized by social conflict, structural change, and ethnic labeling. Moreover, the statements demonstrate which ethnically infused values and issues were in fact discussed, illustrate how they were expressed, and quite often also indicate why. Several parallels may be drawn between political expressions from everyday farmers and the attitudinal predispositions they brought with them from Norway. On the other hand, from a top-down perspective, the articles and letters from the political elite exemplify more clearly how perceptions of ethnic identity were relative in the sense that they exploited politically what were recognized as usable parts of a common national heritage. Ideas, symbols and other tokens of ethnic identification were recontextualized to address contemporary political developments in America.

More than being a specific theme of discussion, expressions of ethnicity to a considerable degree suffused, in a more general way, the language through which farmers expressed their political frustration and hopes and through which political leaders and editors sought to enhance feelings of national unity, to rally political support, and to besmirch enemies. Several frequent perceptions of which attributes were in fact uniquely Norwegian American seem to have been of significance irrespective of political affiliation. Not surprisingly, many of these attributes mirror the attitudes, outlooks and memories which previous studies suggest had been imported from Norway. For example, many ordinary farmers voiced consistent disapproval of the connections between moneyed power and official authority. The political elite, regardless of political affiliation, seem to have utilized this suspicion by accusing political opponents of having close ties to the corrupting elements of society, and then consequently suggesting that Norwegian Americans as a group should follow their principles and conscience. Other perceptions of ethnic identity reflect how many Norwegian Americans had gradually become more integrated into American society. The extent to which these features from a political historian's perspective actually were exclusive for Norwegian Americans as an ethnic group varies.⁴⁴ Against the backdrop of regional economic, social and political turbulence, perhaps this fusion of old world memories and new world experiences explains why one may characterize the perceptions of ethnic identity among many Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota as specific to that region.

Source Material – Possibilities and Challenges

The selection of newspapers in this study has been informed by the political diversity which characterized Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota during the early 1890s. One

important goal has been to make the assortment of sources as representative as possible for the ethnic group in the area.⁴⁵ Finding relevant newspapers with differing political points of view was especially important because the attributes and principles which were thought to characterize – and which were expressed as typical for Norwegian American ethnic identity in the area – varied considerably from newspaper to newspaper, according to its political outlook. As a result one Republican, one Populist and one independent (Prohibitionist) newspaper have been analyzed. Due to the fact that Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota supported the Republican Party and the Populist movements to a much greater extent than the Democratic Party, unless the names of Democratic candidates appeared on fusion Populist tickets, no distinctively Democratic Norwegian American newspaper has been analyzed.⁴⁶ A more nuanced discussion on each newspaper and their relation to one another may be found in chapter two.

Representing the Republican stand, the newspaper *Nordvesten* (The Northwest) provides material for analyzing the rationale behind Norwegian American arguments for remaining loyal to the Republican Party. Due to its close party connection, consistent arguments, and vibrant political focus it is well suited for an analysis of how ethnicity was exploited by the political elite. This newspaper has been analyzed in every election year from 1890 to 1896. It unrelentingly advocated Republican ideals and candidates, and communicated more effectively through editorials and articles than through letters to the editor. The newspaper *Rodhuggeren* (The Grubber)⁴⁷ provides valuable insight into Norwegian American arguments for Populism. This newspaper has been analyzed from 1893 through 1894, and exemplifies better than any other publication the more radical aspects of Norwegian American political debate. As a contrast to *Nordvesten*, this newspaper contained a substantial number of readers' letters every week, and the editors allowed for relatively free discussion. This newspaper invites an analysis of the role of ethnic identity from both a bottom-up and a top-down perspective. Both the readers and the editors at times expressed quite explicit thoughts on the perceived and real importance of ethnicity for political developments. As an independent newspaper *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* (Fergus Falls Weekly Journal) occupies the middle ground between two extremes. It has been analyzed from 1890 to 1894, and alternated between supporting Populists, Republicans, Prohibitionists, and independent candidates. Although its editor at times exercised strict authority, he still allowed for relatively free political discussion among his readers. Like *Rodhuggeren*, *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* exemplifies the relative importance of ethnic identity for readers as well as for the political elite. Since all

these three newspapers were primarily circulated in northwestern Minnesota, they complement one another as sources, and cross-references among them are common.

The variety of genres and perspectives in the selected publications, ranging from political propaganda and rigid campaign advertisements manufactured by the editors and politicians on the one hand, to personal arguments between readers about specific economic, political, and social issues and ideas on the other, allows voices from differing social strata and political groups to be heard. At the same time the quite marked political distance between the newspapers in question facilitates a comparative and nuanced analysis of the relative import of ethnic identity for the political discourse at the time. It is true that newspapers in general tend to reflect the most powerful groups of a society and thereby *their* truths and realities.⁴⁸ Even when focusing solely on the letters and advertisements of a newspaper one could not claim the expressed opinions to be representative for the entire populace. However, despite the fact that the source material of this study to a great extent reflects the views of the political elite (the editors and politicians), and that their political arguments often are clouded by personal agendas, the voices of ordinary farmers are arguably better represented by these newspapers than by their larger competitors and other contemporary sources.⁴⁹ A more exhaustive discussion of similarities and differences between the newspapers may be found in the next chapter.

From a different perspective, the specific focus on *ethnic* newspapers in this study also poses certain challenges. Ideally the analysis should be supplemented by studies of a diversity of newspapers from other ethnic groups and the English-language press. This would have facilitated a deeper understanding of the relative importance and nature of Norwegian American political activity and debate, and enabled contrastive analysis. More specifically, investigating the political debates of the non-Norwegian language press would help reveal the extent to which Norwegian American perceptions of and utilizations of ethnic identity were divergent or unique. Also, a wider area of study would help maintain a broad perspective. The fact that Norwegian political developments in the early 1890s only represent a small fragment, though an important one, of Minnesota political history and the political history of Norwegian Americans in the Midwest is easily overshadowed by details and local developments when carrying out an in-depth study of Norwegian American Newspapers only. The scope of this study has unfortunately not allowed for contrastive analysis of a wider and more varied selection of newspapers as primary sources. Instead, secondary sources have

been used when necessary to complement and contextualize the primary source material. Most importantly, political historian Lowell J. Soike's *Norwegian Americans and the Politics of Dissent 1880-1924* contains useful statistical data and analysis of the extent to which Norwegian American political actions, debates, and voting patterns in northwestern Minnesota were different from those of other ethnic groups.⁵⁰

Methodological Considerations

Naturally, the methodological approaches different scholars have chosen when studying Norwegian American politics have influenced their findings. On the one hand, one may approach the field with a qualitative focus. Wefald, as an example, has based several of his conclusions on a selection of letters to the editors, articles and editorials in Norwegian American newspapers across the Midwest. His findings are interesting, but not always methodologically sound; in many of his arguments, he attributes the attitudes and perspectives of a relatively small number of Norwegian Americans, mostly members of the elite, to rank-and-file members of the group.⁵¹ Soike, on the other hand, analyzes and explores the Norwegian American experience of political dissent through the looking glass of a statistician. Although he to a certain extent investigates complimentary qualitative primary sources, for example some newspaper editorials and letters to the editor, his main focus rests on a statistical analysis of Norwegian Americans' voting behavior.⁵² Aware of the limitations his dependence on statistical material produces, Soike readily admits that "(...) One simply cannot easily distinguish whether members of an ethnic group voted solidly because of their clannish regard for the candidate, their shared Protestantism, their remembered agrarian class animosities, or for all of these and other reasons."⁵³

This statement reflects a fundamental insight: that a historian must humbly accept that he or she never will be able to recreate and understand exactly how and why things happened. At the same time, however, it is equally true that one may, using an appropriate methodological framework and having access to enough relevant source material, gain fruitful knowledge about specific historical developments. In this study a picture has been painted, as truthful as possible, of the relative importance of ethnic identity for the public political discourse among Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota from 1890 through 1894. Methodologically speaking, this study primarily maintains a qualitative focus. Although quantitative techniques have been used to pinpoint political realignments for each newspaper from year to year and to identify the most widely discussed political topics, the conclusions of this study are mostly

reached through a qualitative analysis of political statements. Much attention has been given to details when analyzing the complex dynamics of different influences on public perceptions and expressions of Norwegian American ethnic identity, and the use of telling examples from the source material is quite extensive. Given the presence of an academic framework which invites analytical discussion in light of relevant perspectives and angles, letting the men and women who experienced reality first hand speak for themselves is perhaps one of the most honest and pertinent ways in which a historian may present the past for such a project.

Norwegian American farmers, businessmen, politicians and editors in northwestern Minnesota were more than willing to publicly voice their opinions about political matters. The following analysis of the relative importance of ethnic identity in the Norwegian American political discourse is based on close to 3,500 political statements. Around 1,600 of these touch on specific political topics, while a little over 1800 express support for a specific political party.⁵⁴ *Political statement* is here understood as arguments for or against a specific issue or a political party. These statements have been found in letters to the editor, editorials, short proclamations, campaign lyrics, and political speeches. The relative representation of genres varies from newspaper to newspaper and from year to year. Whereas the number of letters to the editor remained low in *Nordvesten* from 1890 through 1894, for example, the number in both *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* from 1890 through 1894 and *Rodhuggeren* in 1894 was consistently higher, with between four and ten letters being printed every week.

One may also categorize the statements according to their content and purpose. Brøndal, in his study of *Skandinaven* and *Hemlandet*, makes a distinction between the expression of organizational matters, *connections*, on the one hand, and the expression of values and issues on the other.⁵⁵ Creating this analytic continuum, which is examined in greater detail below, has allowed Brøndal to trace changes in the make-up of letters from before to after the depression in the 1890s. The political statements this study focuses on are not analyzed in the same way, but Brøndal's categorization creates a meaningful framework through which the content of the statements in question may be described.

Organizational statements, on the one side of the continuum, tended to center on "(...) the relative strength of the political parties, on getting voters to the polls, on electing individual politicians to office, or on factional battles."⁵⁶ Many political statements in the newspapers this study focuses on fall into this category. Ranging in tone from neutral to strongly subjective, most of them may best be appreciated as attempts from the political elite to

mobilize political support from a broader constituency. The values and attitudes in these expressions remain indirect and vague. For example, organizational statements often only affirmed that a specific politician had in fact been born in Norway, or just mentioned his Norwegian-sounding name. The label or indirect reference functioned as an argument of support by itself. Although most commonly presented by the editors or local politicians, a significant number of these organizational statements were also expressed by everyday laborers. Many reform-oriented farmers had structured a network of alliances throughout northwestern Minnesota from around 1886 onwards, and this multitude of contacts actively informed each other about their meetings, their political agendas, and their resolutions through the pages of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*.⁵⁷ Reflecting the difference in organizational structure between the political parties at the time, these local alliances thus represent a quite distinct element in the political discourse.

On the other side of the continuum were political statements which explicitly expressed views concerning specific issues and values. These political statements were more common in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Rodhuggeren* than in *Nordvesten*. Since political statements in this category were only sometimes written to simultaneously boost political support for specific candidates and express values and attitudes, they are not as likely as the first category to have been written by politicians. The largest percentage of statements which combine expressions of organizational matters with expressions of values and attitudes originated from the editors of the newspapers, whereas ordinary farmers were more strongly represented in the statements which dealt explicitly with issues and values. Information about individual topics and groups of topics is found in Appendix: 1, while statistical data of the extent to which different political issues were discussed and the degree to which the divergent newspapers gave press coverage to different political parties is found in appendix 2.⁵⁸ Thus, most of the political material which was printed by the newspapers at the time may be categorized according to its purpose. The following paragraphs give an overview of the methodological techniques used in this study.

From a bottom-up perspective, focusing primarily on expressions from everyday farmers, a closer analysis of political statements expressing specific issues and values indicate the relative importance of ethnic identity in the political discourse. Several analytical approaches have been used. From one angle, one may investigate the extent to which individual topics were discussed. The number of arguments about one topic or group of topics signifies its

relative importance in the public discourse compared to other topics or groups of topics. For example, the individual topic of the *tariff* was the most extensively discussed issue from 1890 through 1892, before focus turned towards *currency* from around 1894 onwards. Both issues exemplify the clear-cut tendency of economic issues to dominate the public debate throughout the period in question.⁵⁹ The group of issues which indicates the relative statistical importance of ethnocultural matters never reached the same statistical representation.⁶⁰ From another angle, analysis of how and why perceptions of ethnic identity were expressed in different ways, for example in a variety of combinations with other topics and in a range of genres, gives a better understanding of their significance for political debate in the press. Norwegian American farmers actively used their national heritage as a resource for political communication. From a contextual angle, one may investigate the relative importance of ethnic identity for public debate through analysis of how well the rationales behind these political statements, socioeconomic and class-related as well as ethocultural, match the idea scholars have of certain Norwegian American attitudinal predispositions. Exploring the extent to which it is viable to match political attitudes and arguments in statements to certain ethnic predispositions, gives valuable knowledge about the indirect role of ethnic identity for motivating political debate. One important challenge is to get an impression of how internal latent inclinations may have mixed with external economic and political influences to shape political arguments in the press. From a bottom-up perspective, this methodological triangulation conditions the discussion in chapter three.

From a top-down perspective, both strictly organizational statements and statements addressing specific issues and values are interesting. As for the bottom-up analysis, several analytical approaches are used to identify the significance of ethnic identity as a motivation for political discussion. From one angle, statistical data has been gathered to illustrate how the leadership of the different newspapers changed their political focus from election to election. This creates the basis for further analysis of how, political orientation taken into consideration, the editors of the divergent newspapers constructed and expressed notions of ethnic identity to varying degrees and in different ways. For example, the Republican-backed *Nordvesten* expressed the meaning of “being Norwegian American” quite differently than did the Populist-oriented *Rodhuggeren* or the increasingly Prohibitionist-oriented *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*. Whereas *Nordvesten* tended to center on indirect and direct ethnic labeling, *Rodhuggeren* to a greater extent focused on the importance of specific issues and principles to rally support. *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, as an independent newspaper after 1891, promoted its

own principles by encouraging readers to vote for good and honest candidates (supposedly) irrespective of political affiliation (except if they were Democrats or discredited Populists).⁶¹ From a different angle, a closer analysis of the role perceptions of ethnic identity seem to have played in the public discussions about some specific political events exemplifies the practical consequences of the disparities mentioned above. The significance of the Norwegian American Republican tradition exemplified by Knute Nelson is addressed more closely in this context. These investigative methods constitute the basis of discussion in chapter four.

The bottom-up and top-down analyses are contextualized by referring to both the political experiences of other immigrant groups in northwestern Minnesota and the processes of Americanization. Investigating the extent to which the attributes perceived as characteristic for Norwegian American ethnic identity in fact corresponded to similar values and principles in society at large indicate the degree to which ethnic predispositions and perceptions of ethnic identity mixed with local circumstances to form a hybrid identity. The extent to which regional economic hardship and political developments may be said to have speeded up the process of Americanization by motivating political action among Norwegian Americans and other immigrant groups is also be addressed.

Structure

Chapter two discusses conditions in Norway and America which may have been of significance for how and why perceptions of ethnic identity were expressed in the public political discourse in northwestern Minnesota between 1890 and 1894. The diversity of experiences, memories and attitudes which characterized the Norwegian American populace in the region reflects, as has been noted earlier, a complex history of migration. Chapter two highlights the most important aspects of this history. Chapter three of this study presents a bottom-up analysis of the relative importance of ethnic identity in the political discourse from 1890 through 1894, as mentioned in the section about methodological approaches above. Discussing the relative importance of ethnic identity from a bottom-up perspective gives a valuable understanding of the role perceptions of ethnic identity played in the political expressions of ordinary farmers in the press. In chapter four, from a top-down perspective, attention is directed towards how the political elite exploited perceptions of ethnic identity in the public political discourse. Focus is divided between the differing analytical advances, before the findings of each are compared and contrasted at the end of the chapter. Chapter five concludes the study by discussing the significance of the findings from the previous chapters

in light of the scholarly debate about Norwegian American political experiences in Minnesota.

As noted, all the excerpts and examples from the Norwegian-language newspapers in the following chapters have been translated from Norwegian to English by the author of this paper.

Chapter Two – Norwegian Memories and the American Experience

This chapter aims to give an instructive overview of some central Norwegian and American experiences which may have influenced the cultural, economic, political, and social outlook of Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota during the early 1890s. Discussion centers on the relation between traditional and modern experiences both in Norway and in America and perceptions of ethnic identity. Most of the population of Norwegian descent in this region of the state had settled down during the late 1860s, the early 1870s, and the 1880s.⁶² The ethnic group was constituted by a mix of relatively recent immigrants from Norway, first-generation immigrants who had lived in America for several years already, and second generation Norwegian Americans who had either grown up in northwestern Minnesota, or had moved there from settlements in the east and south.⁶³ Both Norway and the United States experienced extensive social, economic, cultural and not least political change between different waves of emigration across the Atlantic from Norway to America. As a result, the immigrants' backgrounds from Norway and experiences after having arrived to America differed greatly from time to time.⁶⁴ This diversity challenges any historian who attempts to investigate the relative political significance of old-world memories, traditions, and attitudes for the political outlooks of Norwegian immigrants in the region. The first and most extensive section of this chapter aims to discuss the significance of old and new experiences in -and impulses from Norway for Norwegian Americans' perceptions of ethnic identity. An instructive overview of Norwegian history and the processes of international migration gives a deeper understanding of how similarities and disparities between emigrants who left Norway at different times may have influenced their self-assertion across the Atlantic. In the second section of the chapter, focus shifts from conditions in Norway to the significance of circumstances, events and immigrant experiences in America, with an emphasis on northwestern Minnesota. Finally, a discussion about how the background of the newspapers which have been studied and their editors may have influenced the ways in which perceptions of ethnic identity were expressed in the press opens the door to a more detailed bottom-up analysis of expressions of ethnic identity in chapter three.

Norwegian Influences – Common Denominators and Complex Diversity

While the political and cultural outlooks of new arrivals often had been influenced by recent experiences and developments in Norway, earlier immigrants to the U. S. and second-generation internal migrants had to a greater extent been influenced by experiences in America and by the variety of hybrid cultural identities which had been developed in their

Norwegian American settlements there. These immigrants had preserved much of their time-honored peasant culture from the old country.⁶⁵ Thus, their perceptions of ethnic identity were to some extent constituted by memories of several social structures, political conditions, and cultural traditions which by the 1870s and 1880s in Norway belonged to the past. At the same time, these memories and traditions were not maintained and cherished in a vacuum. The Norwegian American press brought news about developments in the old country, and even Norwegian immigrants who settled down in quite remote rural areas could stay updated about developments in Norway.⁶⁶

One must also consider the significance of the complex patterns of chain migration which characterized Norwegian American movement in America at the time. The term “chain migration” denotes how immigrants from a particular area or *bygd* (local community) in Norway often formed an enclaves in America, either at once or over time transplanting extensive parts of a local Norwegian community.⁶⁷ Such communities on the two continents were tied closely together. As fresh arrivals passed through well established Norwegian American settlements on their westward journey, often living for some time with relatives and friends, it is feasible to assume that a mutual influence took place.⁶⁸ Norwegian Americans were given news of recent developments in the old country and their *bygd*, while new arrivals were given an impression of how life could be organized in America. Moreover, when recent immigrants from Norway in the decades before 1890 headed to the northwestern parts of Minnesota, they often travelled in groups led by Norwegian Americans from older settlements.⁶⁹ Simultaneously, both recent arrivals and more experienced immigrants were impacted by circumstances and events in their new country. The cultural, political and social outlooks of most Norwegian Americans were thus constituted by an amalgamation of the old and the new, the past and the present, Norway and America.⁷⁰

The following discussion of the extent to which experiences from Norway may have influenced the cultural, social, and political self-assertion of Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota during the early 1890s acknowledges this complexity. At the same time, attention is directed more towards what members of this diverse population of Norwegian descent had in common than towards their internal differences, more towards the general than towards the specific. Both the works of other scholar and the source material of this study indicate that many Norwegian Americans in the region shared certain characteristics which may in fact be traced back to experiences in their old country.⁷¹ As is

discussed in chapter three and four, these features to varying degrees influenced the political public discourse, and several of them were used by farmers, editors and politicians to construct and express perceptions of ethnic identity. The most important of these common traits were a vibrant rural folk culture, a proud agricultural tradition of land ownership and self-sufficiency, a suspicion toward urban areas, an opposition towards officialdom and the centralization of power, an enmity toward moneyed authority, and religious tensions between low-church and high-church elements. Several of the common characteristics were conditioned by historical developments which took place long before emigration from Norway to America began. Without being too elaborate, the following paragraphs aim to give a nuanced picture of the most important of these.

Foreign Dominance of a Divided Country

Before emigration to America started in 1825, Danish and Swedish dominance had for centuries characterized the political history of Norway. From 1397 to 1814 the country was governed, primarily by Denmark, as the weaker part in an asymmetric union. Norway's peripheral geographic location left the county relatively unaffected by political, cultural and economic developments in continental Europe before the mid-1700s.⁷² Two significant exceptions to the tendency of cultural non-influence were the slow and erratic but ultimately successful spread of Lutheranism from the late 1530s onwards and the direct and indirect effects of the Danish King Fredrik III's decision to establish an absolute monarchy in 1660. The first influence over time fundamentally altered the religious perspectives of most Norwegians. Lutheranism became the only officially recognized religion, and the clergy came to form a key hierarchy as agents for the state.⁷³ The subsequent development of a state church characterized by impersonal religious services, Danish-language sermons, and socially inaccessible priests, would have consequences for religious developments in both Norway and in America throughout the 19th century.⁷⁴ The latter external influence created an ambiguous mentality of diligent though at times reluctant duty to the official representatives of the king.⁷⁵ As members of the intelligentsia, civil servants were normally secluded from the everyday life of ordinary farmers. The institutionalization and perseverance of social stratification, which would characterize Norwegian society well into the 19th century, infused many rural laborers with hostility towards officialdom.⁷⁶ Years of Danish social and cultural influence detached the intelligentsia in Norway's estate society from the people it governed.⁷⁷ As is discussed in greater detail later, this set the stage for future upheavals, first against the political -and then against the cultural bond with Denmark.

A short overview of some significant developments in Norway before and after 1814 is necessary to fully appreciate the historical backdrop of future events. Economically, the union with Denmark was not disadvantageous; if not overly interested in Norwegian culture and society, the Kings of Denmark at least appreciated the natural resources of their northern realm. Because of this, there existed from 1600 onwards a quite basic but still relatively efficient infrastructure which allowed for transportation of resources from inland areas to the coast.⁷⁸ In the latter half of the 18th century Norway experienced rapid commercial growth as the demand for traditional export articles like iron, lumber and fish increased due to wars on the continent. Foreign trade had always to some degree existed, but this growth was unprecedented.⁷⁹ Several small farmers were affected by these developments, but their social position did not change. Outside the quite extensively cultivated central eastern areas of Norway and districts with fertile soil around Jæren and Trondheim, farms tended to be undersized and scattered because arable land was sparse. Many provincial farmers were dependent on secondary occupations, like fishing, hunting and forestry, to make ends meet.⁸⁰ Notwithstanding a few rural rebellions after 1750, Norwegian small farmers in general did not wield much social power.⁸¹ The bourgeois, by contrast, increased their influence and prestige until the onset of the Napoleonic Wars, when Denmark-Norway was pushed into the conflict by British attacks on its fleet. Culturally and politically, towards the end of the 18th century influences from abroad more strongly impacted the Norwegian intelligentsia. Most importantly, the practical application of philosophical and political ideas of the Enlightenment through the French and American revolutions inspired the upper spheres of Norwegian society. To some extent, these ideas enabled men of power, civil servants as well as bourgeois, to impulsively exploit the power vacuum which came to characterize Norway during the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars.⁸²

The Resurrection of an Old Nation

Feelings which resembled national identity certainly existed in Norway prior to 1814.⁸³ Among the country's rural dwellers a diverse traditional folk culture had been maintained and developed relatively untouched by outside influences from the middle ages onwards. Although primarily cherished as expressions of local distinction rather than national character, the rural cultures were to play an important role for the reconstruction of national identity during the 19th century, first in Norway, and then in America.⁸⁴ Although the specific content of folk traditions varied from *bygd* to *bygd*, several common denominators were perceived as usable for invoking ethnic unity. Remnants of a Viking heritage, the common folklore, and

agrarian mores were to be brought forth as symbols of national pride. Among the intelligentsia, several powerful individuals had for years been preoccupied with dreams of an independent Norway.⁸⁵ Yet, these ideas were not turned into action until external influences provided an opportunity which invited both people who still harbored feelings of loyalty towards Denmark and people who argued for an independent Norway to join forces. In short, the victors of the Napoleonic War decided that Norway was to be detached from the union with Denmark, and that control of the country was to be given to Sweden as compensation for military efforts against Napoleon. Due to political initiatives from both Danish and Norwegian members of the intelligentsia during spring 1814, a constitutional assembly met in Eidsvoll at May 17, and adopted a new constitution for the country. Representatives from all layers of society were present, but the intelligentsia's official class dominated the meeting. They secured continued political influence for their group in both the legislative and executive branches of the new government. Yet the constitution was at the time one of the most radical in Europe, perhaps because it was written by relatively young men.⁸⁶ Despite dreams of an independent Norway, the country was pressed into a personal union with Sweden on November 4, 1814. Norway's situation was still dramatically altered. After more than four hundred years of Danish domination, the nation now possessed its own constitution and a government with separate branches through which the people, primarily members of the intelligentsia at first but as time went by also the lower spheres of society, could develop and express their own perceptions national identity.⁸⁷ The novel freedoms granted by the establishment of liberal constitutional rule would fundamentally alter political, social, cultural and economic developments in Norway during the century to come.

The new constitution invited political participation by the people, but the people did not initially respond. In the years after 1814 Norway was forcefully affected by a deep and long-lasting economic depression due to lost markets abroad. Hard times and the continuing struggle to survive probably made a greater impression on rural people than did the novel constitutional freedoms of their country. At the same time, what happened at the national stage was distant to most farmers due to geographical and cultural isolation, a lack of political experience, and the at the time unbridgeable gap between the different estates of society. They were not encouraged to participate in politics, and had no tradition political involvement. The Norwegian population was fragmented by high mountains, long valleys and deep fjords. As a result, communities outside the central eastern region and the important trade cities along the coast were often secluded, and had over centuries developed their own unique cultures. The

identities, interests, and experiences of the people here were thus more often conditioned by their attachment to – and place in – the local hierarchy of the *bygd* and the special cultural characteristics of the local area than by developments on the national stage.⁸⁸ Most rural dwellers were only directly touched by the larger national society through the local parish priest and the sheriff. Only from the 1830s onwards did the average Norwegian small farmer become a political actor and learned to exercise his rights.⁸⁹ The intelligentsia, on the other hand, continued its diligent struggle on the political stage in the years after 1814 to build an economically liberal yet socially conservative nation while protecting Norwegian rights against attempts made the Swedish king Karl Johan to increase his power.⁹⁰

Life in rural Norway during the 19th century was characterized both by the perseverance of old customs and traditions and by several significant new developments. Most important of these were the reconstruction of a predominately romantic agrarian national Norwegian identity in the 1840s and 50s, and the slow but steady cultural empowerment and politicization of farmers.⁹¹ Due to regional isolation, social stratification, and a lack of communications, cultural and political impulses from the national stage only slowly affected provincial parts of Norway. As a result, conservative agrarian traditions to a greater extent than modern impulses shaped the political, social, and cultural outlook and self assertion of most farmers who decided to leave for America during the first decades after 1830, when emigration became more widespread and regular. The significance of contemporary change for the mind-set of emigrants who left Norway increased throughout the century. As infrastructure improved and common people from the around 1850 onwards increasingly engaged in liberal and democratic organizations to protest against the status quo, ideas of cultural, political, and social change more easily penetrated many previously isolated rural communities.⁹² From the 1860s onwards, the start of a gradual transformation from estate society towards class society marked emigrants with new perspectives on their position in society and expectations of life. Simultaneously, after years of latent tensions, several counter-cultures forcefully challenged the political and cultural dominance of the upper classes. The backgrounds of emigrants who left the country were thus constituted by a mix of recent impulses on the one hand, and deep-seated traditions, cultural ideas, and social structures on the other. After a short overview of emigration history, the most significant of these old and new influences form the basis for a more nuanced discussion.

Emigration before and after the American Civil War

The maritime traditions which had characterized coastal life along the Norwegian shoreline for centuries before 1800 had led many sailors to the Swedish, Dutch and British colonies. Yet, because this migration was erratic and the precise number of emigrants is difficult to discern, historians usually agree that modern emigration from Norway to America may be said to have started when the sloop *Restauration* left Stavanger in 1825.⁹³ The annual rate of emigration from this year to 1865 seldom exceeded five thousand, and the number varied significantly from year to year. Regular immigration began from 1836, and most people who emigrated before the American Civil War left the country during the 1850s. The variation in annual migration numbers during this first period may be explained by a careful analysis of the interplay between domestic and international circumstances.⁹⁴ The steady flow of "America letters" and information about America which was printed in newspapers and books enabled individuals, groups, or even entire communities who considered leaving to make rational decisions about when to depart; although much of the information which gradually circulated perhaps was glorified, people who were interested could easily find quite accurate information about current economic possibilities across the Atlantic. For example, news about depression or war in America caused many farmers who were inclined to leave to postpone the date of departure.⁹⁵ "America fever" from the mid 1830s swept the southern coastal region and then spread northward along the coast and into the interior valleys. People from every amt in Norway left for America, but most emigrants were from the inner fjord districts in West Norway and the mountain valleys in East Norway.⁹⁶

The population growth in these particular regions had placed a heavy burden on local resources.⁹⁷ With no established traditions of internal migration or other options which could alleviate the population pressure, many farmers in these communities chose to leave for America in search of a better future and higher social status. The emigration from most of these *bygd* remained strong throughout much of the 19th century. Due to the influences of "America fever" and chain migration, among other factors, people who grew up in or lived in areas with a tradition of emigration found it easier to leave than those who did not.⁹⁸ Most small farmers and sons of independent farmers who left from these areas in the 1840s did have resources enough to both finance their journey and to establish themselves in America.⁹⁹ They facilitated the arrival of rural laborers of lower economic status, who came to constitute a significant percentage of emigrants during the next decade. More importantly, the immigrants from these regions influenced the content and direction of the different

Norwegian American communities they formed. Based on the mores and values from the *bygd* they had left behind, but also to varying degrees inspired by cultural and political developments in Norway prior to departure, these first migrants determined the character of the settlements which they established along the always expanding western frontier. For example, historian Odd S. Lovoll asserts that fact that they originated from “(...) tradition-bound districts where land gave status and security within the age-old peasant society (...) may explain why later generations retained a traditional lifestyle associated with the farm and rural existence to a much greater degree than did ethnic groups with whom it would be logical to make a comparison.”¹⁰⁰ As noted, Norwegians who left for America frequently passed through earlier established Norwegian American settlements on their way west. More often than not, new emigrants stopped in communities where they had relatives and friends, often from the same *bygd*. Upon departure they were frequently joined by several Norwegian American settlers who had sold their land at a profit to buy cheaper land along the frontier, where one believed new fertile soil could provide a better future.¹⁰¹ This continuous westward movement through creation of compact Norwegian American colonies spread over vast areas would also to characterize the settlement of Minnesota after the Civil War. Most Norwegian immigrants before the 1860s settled in Wisconsin, first in the south, and then in the western areas of the state.¹⁰²

After news of the Civil War and Indian uprisings in regions of Norwegian settlement reduced the stream of migration in the early 1860s, emigration numbers exploded from 1866 onwards. Three great waves characterized the period between 1865 and 1915. The first wave of the “great exodus” lasted until the Panic of 1873, with an average number of 13,862 emigrants leaving Norway every year.¹⁰³ Emigration numbers then again picked up dramatically during the 1880s before ebbing as the United States plunged into depression in the early 1890s. During this second wave, the average annual number soared to 18,900.¹⁰⁴ The number of emigrants who left Norway in the period between 1865 and 1890 far exceeded the numbers from before the Civil War. When explaining the causes of this increase one should primarily center on changing demographic conditions, especially the effects of the unusually high Norwegian birthrate between 1816 and 1825.¹⁰⁵ However, other circumstances must also be taken into consideration. First, potential migrant were informed about conditions in America through letters, newspapers, and ever more aggressive ticket advertisements. Second, much because of this communication, the flow of migrants was conditioned by developments across the Atlantic, for example the Homestead Act of 1862 and economic depressions. Third, faster

transportation and cheaper tickets as steam ships around 1870 replaced sail ships made travel more accessible. So did the growing number of prepaid tickets from relatives or friends. Finally, the rate of migration was influenced by developments and events in Norway, for example agricultural modernization, economic stagnation, and specific local circumstances.¹⁰⁶ The social background and gender composition of the emigrants who decided to leave Norway changed gradually throughout the century. Before the early 1870s, especially in the early years before 1865, the emigration has been characterized as a family migration.¹⁰⁷ Although there was a continuous surplus of men, especially in years of mass emigration, women and children were still well represented.¹⁰⁸ Throughout the 1870s and 80s a growing percentage of emigrants were men, more and more people left as individuals, and the average age of emigrants decreased.¹⁰⁹ As was the case for earlier periods of emigration, the movement was in these years still predominately a rural phenomenon. At the same time, from the 1880s onwards to around 1900, emigration from towns and cities increased significantly.¹¹⁰ Some members of the upper rungs of society chose to leave for America, but the vast majority of emigrants belonged to what at the time was called *almuen*, a term which encompassed cotters, craftsmen, common farmers, and other occupational groups of the “lower classes.”¹¹¹

The income and social status among members of this group differed greatly. The gap between rich and poor was most significant in agriculturally prosperous areas. Thus, while rural society in the eastern parts of Norway, which for ages had been characterized by an inflexible social hierarchy, had come to accommodate a large class of cotters and day-laborers, social stratification was not as striking in the less prosperous rural societies in other parts of the country.¹¹² The general economic condition of emigrants varied from year to year, depending on region of origin, economic periods of growth and stagnation, processes of industrialization and urbanization, the availability and price of tickets, and several other factors.¹¹³ Common for most emigrants was that they were used to manual labor, that they shared a rural background, and that they perceived migrating to America a better option than continuing life in Norway. From a generalizing perspective one may claim that this, more than variations in professional background and social status, defined their existence in America.¹¹⁴ Pervasive processes of modernization from the 1860s onwards had challenged the static fabric of life which for centuries had typified social structures in Norwegian society. Many agricultural workers were uprooted, and the prospects for increasing numbers of young people grew bleak. Even though many emigrants struggled economically, one should not interpret the

process of migration as a desperate escape from intolerable conditions in Norway. Whether to emigrate or not was a voluntary choice. Often, a decision was reached by individuals and groups after a serious assessment of advantages and disadvantages. Different feelings guided this process. While some people emphasized the promise of a brighter future, others felt bitterness at having to leave everything behind.¹¹⁵ People had many reasons for leaving, but one reason was nevertheless more significant than any other. That was the perceived gap in economic opportunity between Norway and America.¹¹⁶

Traditional Impulses and Modern Developments in Norway

As noted, most of the emigrants who settled down in northwestern Minnesota had left Norway in the 1870s and 80s. Many of their general characteristics, based on social background, gender composition, and cultural and political outlook, differed significantly from that of the minority of Norwegian Americans who accompanied them from older settlements or that which typified communities of Norwegian Americans to the south and east. This caused the populace of northwestern Minnesota to embody a multitude of traditions, backgrounds and perspectives.¹¹⁷ This diversity invites a nuanced discussion on which old traditions and new influences in Norway seem to have been most important for Norwegian Americans who contributed to political debate in the press during the early 1890s.

Several traditional dispositions characterized emigrants who left Norway throughout the 19th century, especially before but to some extent also after the 1860s. The time-honored bond between Norwegian farmers and the land they owned accounts for a number of important tendencies among Norwegians who settled down in America. Odd S. Lovoll and other historians have characterized the emigration as a conservative rural-to-rural movement, through which those who left intended to preserve their values, customs, and traditional way of life.¹¹⁸ This meant that most Norwegian emigrants tended to continue their rural existence in America instead of settling down in cities, and that much of the old agricultural peasant culture from the old country was preserved.¹¹⁹ In 1845, more than 80 percent of Norwegians based their living on agriculture, fishing, and forestry. Norwegian society was during the first decades of emigration still an estate society, and social mobility was extremely low because people were expected remain in the sphere of society into which they were born.¹²⁰

Norwegian farmers thus generally spent most of their lives in the *bygd* of their ancestors, where the social structure and cultural traditions of the particular area influenced their conceptual horizons and sense of belonging. This gradually changed as the processes of

modernization gained momentum after the 1860s.¹²¹ However, Norwegian Americans' rural connection did not seem to weaken. In 1900, only a little more than a quarter of Norwegian Americans resided in towns with more than 2 500 inhabitants.¹²² This was a lower percentage than any other immigrant group. Norwegian Americans' rural background from Norway and agricultural way of life in northwestern Minnesota significantly influenced their cultural and political contributions to the political discourse in the press. Most importantly, as is discussed in greater detail in chapter three, the rural traditions which were actively maintained in many Norwegian American settlements seem to have encompassed certain attitudinal predispositions which may be traced back to conditions in Norway. The most important of these were class-related antagonism towards officials, towns, and centralized power, and religious tensions between high church and low church elements.

Many Norwegian Americans publicly expressed animosity toward officials, centralization of power, and cities. When explaining why Norwegian Americans seem to have shared a dislike of and suspicion towards government officialdom, historians often accentuate the social stratification which characterized Norwegian society when they left the country.¹²³ The highest position in the social hierarchy was constituted by a Danish-oriented group of officials, merchant and landowners. Members of this relatively small but powerful stratum shared an urban upper class culture which was distinctively different from that of the middle and lower rungs of society. A traditional remnant of the pre-1814 union period, it was typified by Danish speech, sophisticated manners, and feelings of superiority.¹²⁴ This culture came to characterize the "conditioned classes," as the political and cultural elites in Norway were called, throughout the 19th century. While social stratification and cultural alienation caused growing suspicion towards and disapproval of officialdom among rural dwellers in Norway, especially from the 1860s onwards, the isolation which characterized communities in remote regions of the country made many common farmers distrustful of urban areas.¹²⁵ These were, after all, the centers of the political elite and their upper class traditions. Social, cultural and geographic distance thus infused many commoners with enmity towards cities and the centralization of power. As is discussed in greater detail later, similar attitudes often surfaced in the Norwegian American political public debate in northwestern Minnesota. At the same time, the religious aspects of the political discourse in the region were often characterized by anticlerical sentiments.¹²⁶ The centuries-long dominance of a Lutheran State Church had resulted in religious apathy among many Norwegian Americans, and emigrants who left Norway after 1865 were increasingly secular.¹²⁷ Throughout the 19th century, ever since Hans

Nielsen Hauge around 1800 had inspired opposition against the state church, movements of lay church activism had challenged the religious status quo. These often had political overtones of agrarian class feeling and anticlericalism, and drew most followers from the western and southern parts of the country.¹²⁸

New developments from around 1860 onwards changed the cultural, political, and social outlook of many emigrants. During the first decades of emigration, most common people silently had endured the reign of the “professional classes,” but now attitudes among the middle and lower classes in Norwegian society were changing. Lowell Soike asserts that “(...) while earlier arrivals were disinclined to trifle with the reverence a citizen should feel for constituted authority, later waves of immigrants after the Civil War were more politicized in agrarian feeling, more secularized, more overtly anticlerical in outlook, and less accepting of the religious and social status quo.”¹²⁹ Several different counter-cultures gained momentum as rural people started to question the position and culture of the high-church official clergy and the political elite.¹³⁰ Most important of these for the political debate in the press in northwestern Minnesota during the early 1890s were the movements of cultural radicalism, prohibitionism, pietism, and Grundtvigianism. The latter group protested against the knowledge-based Norwegian school system by emphasizing the importance practical work and free discussions, on the one hand, and contradicted pietism by expressing a down-to-earth and positive interpretation of Christianity on the other. Some of the editors and several of the more active letter writers of the discourse which has been studied here professed a strong belief in Grundtvigian principles. In Norway, at the same time as more and more Grundtvigian “free thinker” schools were established from 1864 onwards, ideas of pietism and Haugianism resurfaced, this time within the state church itself. The powers of internal church reform strongly influenced the state church during the next ten years, before reactionary forces from 1873 onwards stopped the religious “(...) modern profanation and all radical delusion.”¹³¹ These lively religious debates only inspired parts of the Norwegian populace, however, and did not turn the trend of growing secularization. While the doctrinaire direction of the state church at this time was unstable, the direction of another religiously inspired movement was not. Prohibitionism had become increasingly popular from the 1860 onwards, and during the 1880s temperance organizations entered the political stage. The fight against liquor was particularly strong in rural areas of the country. Prohibitionist movements were also popular among Norwegian Americans, and clear parallels may be drawn between

political engagement for “the cause” in Norway and temperance movements in northwestern Minnesota.¹³²

Cultural radicalism took several shapes in Norway, but they were all characterized by a strong emphasis of national identity.¹³³ The processes of nation building which after 1814 had been undertaken by the cultural and political elite had produced a solid framework through which new and more radical forms of cultural and political nationalism could expand. Political nationalism gained momentum around 1890 as the relation to Sweden grew tense. Farmers had during the previous decades become increasingly politicized, and the Norwegian political structures were in flux. Antagonisms against the power of both the Norwegian political elite and the Swedish King conditioned both growing political awareness and significant constitutional change.¹³⁴ Some of this animosity towards the union partner to the east also surfaced in the public discourse in northwestern Minnesota during the early 1890s, though in less antagonistic forms than back in the old country. Less subtle were Norwegian American expressions of cultural nationalism. In Norway this movement gained momentum from the 1840s onward, and was constituted by two branches. One was intellectual and academic in nature, through which Norwegian peasant culture and rural values were celebrated at a theoretical level by the cultural and political elite. The other was less lofty and more pragmatic. It focused on how country people themselves, without the help of the upper classes, could lift forth and venerate the best of both old rural traditions and modern developments.¹³⁵ The all-important feeling of “Norwegianness” was by both movements connected to folk dances and folk music, rural customs and traditions, and language and culture. Creating a new form of written Norwegian that reflected the dialects of rural people rather than the Danish-inspired language of the cultural and political elite, was an important part of the nationalistic fervor at the time.

Across the Atlantic, the two movements merged as Norwegian Americans strived to construct their own sense of national identity in a new and different reality. Many parallels may be still drawn between these developments in Norway and perceptions of ethnic identity in the public political discourse in northwestern Minnesota at the time. For example, parts of the Norwegian rural folk culture were during the first half of the 1890s utilized both by common farmers to express political opinions and by editors and politicians to rally political support. Several of the new cultural and political developments which characterized Norway towards

the close of the 19th century should thus be taken into account when investigating the role of ethnic identity in the Norwegian American political discourse in the press.

In Norway, the dissenting counter-cultures came to constitute the foundation of a new political left wing party, *Venstre*. In northwestern Minnesota, as is discussed in chapters three and four, the very same movements inspired several Norwegian Americans to argue against the status quo, to support movements of political dissent, and to modify their perceptions of ethnic identity. At the same time, many people of Norwegian descent seem to have been influenced more by conditions and experiences in America than by new impulses from Norway. The lack of cooperation and coherence among the different reform movements, for example, between prohibitionists, members of the Farmers Alliance, and radical supporters of the People's Party, reflected the lack of a clearly defined common enemy. Thus, when recontextualized in northwestern Minnesota, the Norwegian cultural heritage of dissent at times seems to have created internal conflicts just as often as political unity. The most important reasons for this may be identified by a closer analysis of conditions in America.

American Experiences – Developments in Northwestern Minnesota

What Norwegian immigrants experienced after having left their old country was often just as important for the development of a Norwegian American national identity as what they had experienced before departure. A closer discussion of the consequences of American experiences for the construction of and perceptions of ethnic identity among Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota is thus necessary to fully appreciate the relative significance of this identity in the public discourse. Focus centers on politically significant aspects of ethnic identity. One should bear in mind that ethnic awareness among Norwegian Americans at the time was conditioned by more than what is described here. For example, there existed a multitude of non-political ethnic organizations, and several Norwegian American individuals distinguished themselves in other arenas than the political.¹³⁶

By the early 1890s just a few adventurous farmers had seen more than fifteen summers on the prairies in northwestern Minnesota. These first pioneers had challenged contemporary wisdom and acquired lands along what in the 1860s and 70s composed America's western frontier. At that time, only farmers who got hold of and trusted recently acquired knowledge believed the tree-less prairie country to be of any real agricultural value. General Sibley, the first Governor of Minnesota, in 1860 exemplified this wide-spread skepticism towards the territory in question by asserting that "(...) it is fit only for the Indians and the Devil."¹³⁷ But



2.1. Paul Hjelm-Hansen

times were changing. In 1869 the current Governor, William R. Marshall, appointed Norwegian American journalist Paul Hjelm Hansen to explore and describe the areas in question. He worked for the immigrant department of Minnesota, and the goal of his mission was to encourage migration towards the Northwest.¹³⁸ Hansen's expedition may be understood as a reflection of the growing presence of governmental and business interest in directing the flow of immigrants to regions where geographical environment and climate matched the conditions in their country of origin.¹³⁹ At the same time

as American railway corporations, steam-ship companies and government agencies through agents and brochures targeted potential migrants in Norway, one also attempted to stimulate immigration through the press. Writing to Norwegian-language newspapers in Minneapolis and La Crosse, probably aware that his words would be reprinted in newspapers back in Norway, Hjelm-Hansen expressed high hopes for the future; "(...) Concerning the problem of settlement, it is not only my opinion but that of all who have seen this part of the country, that it presents so many advantages for Scandinavian farmers that immigrants are likely to steam in here within the next year, that this tract of land will in ten years be built up and under cultivation, and that it then will become one of the richest and most beautiful regions in America."¹⁴⁰ His predictions were quite accurate in the sense that the territory would be cultivated and yield substantial crops of wheat. However, Hjelm Hansen could not foresee what would happen when the conditions for farming changed. Due to rapid agricultural development, increasing economic unpredictability, and crop failures, his prerequisites for success were seriously challenged.¹⁴¹ These changes impacted in particular the northwestern region of Minnesota, where wheat production by single-crop farming often made farmers dependent on external influences. The economical consequences of harder times directly affected political developments in Minnesota.

Political Realignment

Norwegian Americans were traditionally loyal to the Republican Party for the first decades after the Civil War. Although the ethnic group's political affiliation in the earlier years of settlement was mixed, the GOP's focus on preserving the Union and its ideology favoring subsidized western development and freedom of slavery, as exemplified by their slogan "free land, free soil, and free men," appealed to many Norwegian immigrants.¹⁴² After all,

Norwegian Americans, most because of their agricultural background, often started and finished their new lives in America as farmers. Although other Norwegians chose different paths, for example working as lumberjacks in the northern pine-forests, or settling down as urban workers in the Twin Cities when occupational opportunities multiplied as a result of industrial growth, appreciating the fact that Norwegian Americans were among the most agriculturally inclined ethnic groups in the nation is essential when explaining their political affiliation. Religion also played a crucial role. As noted in the introduction, the Democratic Party's identification with Catholicism did not exactly help gain the Scandinavian vote.¹⁴³ Because of these and other factors, which is discussed below, until the end of the 1880s Norwegian Americans voted consistently for Republican candidates. However, in the early 1890s, their long-lasting attachment to the GOP in some regions of the state was about to come to an unexpected though only temporary end.

At its annual meeting in early March 1890 the Farmers' Alliance in Minnesota decided to form an independent political party. This movement of political change was primarily the result of a bottom-up reaction to several years of unsuccessful partisan and nonpartisan activity by state Alliance politicians, mostly within the ranks of the Republican Party.¹⁴⁴ The disillusionment with the old parties had now overcome the reluctance of the Farmer's Alliance to take independent political action.¹⁴⁵ Sidney M. Owen was nominated as the party's candidate for Governor. Several Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota ran for national, state and county offices. For example, Kittel Halvorson ran in the 5th district for the position as member of congress, Adolph Biermann ran for the position of state auditor, H. P. Bjorge, and S. H. Ongstad ran for positions as members of the state legislative, and Haldor E. Boen ran for the position of register of deeds in Otter Tail County.¹⁴⁶ The dissatisfaction with the economic and the political status quo on the one hand, and enthusiastic support for the Alliance ticket on the other, conditioned the public discourse in the reform-oriented Norwegian-language press in 1890. For example, as is discussed in greater detail later, *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* passionately supported the Farmers' Alliance. *Nordvesten*, as a contrast, voice opposition against political action outside the ranks of the Republican Party. The newspaper in many ways reflected the more traditional political outlook Norwegian Americans to the east and south. Extensive parts of the Norwegian American population in these areas remained loyal to the Republican Party.¹⁴⁷

The platform adopted by the new party was clearly farm-oriented. It voiced demands for laws to prevent railway and elevator discriminations, to provide for the taxation of mortgages, to lower steep interest rates, and to increase the volume of the currency.¹⁴⁸ These were issues which resonated well with increasing numbers of farmers in northwestern Minnesota. Norwegian Americans, other immigrant groups, and old-stock Americans in this region now faced different challenges than their predecessors. During the last decades, as noted, difficult agricultural adjustments and rapid developments in the Minnesota's social and economic structures had decreased profit for wheat farmers and created growing differences between rich and poor.¹⁴⁹ Economic difficulties thus provoked political reaction. At the same time, however, many Norwegians in the region found it difficult to break with their traditional Republican affiliation. Olaf O. Vinje, an enthusiastic contributor to the public discourse at the time, characterized this reluctance in a letter to the editor of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* by asserting that "(...) Tradition constitutes great authority. (...) One's habit is like a second nature, and when you have grown into its pattern it is not easy to break free."¹⁵⁰

The authority of tradition Vinje described was perhaps weaker in Norwegian American settlements in northwestern Minnesota than in other areas of the state. As already noted, scholars have theorized that the party preferences of immigrants were influenced by the problems and issues which characterized American society at the time they arrived.¹⁵¹ In a similar vein, as is discussed more extensively later, one may suggest that their perceptions of ethnic identity also varied from time to time, and from region to region. Norwegian immigrants who travelled westward to settle down in northwestern Minnesota in the 1870s and 1880s did not have the same experience of American Politics as did their more seasoned Norwegian American travel companions. Although few Norwegian Americans remained ignorant to the moral strength demonstrated by the Republican Party during the Civil War, they had not experienced the dark years first hand. The confrontation between the Democratic and the Republican parties had, according to Lowell J. Soike, changed from being a conflict between democracy versus aristocracy and Catholic versus Protestant, to being a conflict between different economic points of view.¹⁵² The political outlooks of recent arrivals were thus probably influenced more by contemporary debates about monopoly and currency inflation than by old tales of a war that belonged to the past. At the same time, the traditional close-knit nature of Norwegian settlements, the tendency of old immigrants to move west alongside recent arrivals, and the growing momentum of prohibitionism during the 1880s

secured continued loyalty to the Republican Party.¹⁵³ Many Norwegian immigrants took pride in voting for the Republican Party, and several Norwegian Americans sought to launch political careers as Republican candidates. Most important of these was the future Norwegian American governor of Minnesota, Knute Nelson, who started his calling to Minnesota state politics as a member of the House of Representatives in 1882.¹⁵⁴ Support for Republican candidates of Norwegian descent was generally strong inside the group, and Norwegian American allegiance to the Republican Party was after years of consistent support often taken for granted. As was to become apparent from 1890 onwards, however, the feelings of political fidelity to the Republican cause were not as strong in northwestern Minnesota as many Republican politicians liked to believe. From the perspective of an ethnocultural historian, one could claim that economic stimuli specific to that region had weakened the traditionally strong connection between ethnocultural issues and political affiliation.¹⁵⁵

Historians Millard L. Gieske and Steven J. Keillor in their biography of Knute Nelson describe the election results of 1890 as “(...) a powerful storm over Republicans’ heads.” The Norwegian American public debate that year suggests that the storm indeed was fierce, and that most of these “heads” in the course of the election campaign were quite ignorant of the fate which awaited them. In the course of spring and summer in 1890, the Republican Party consistently refused to cooperate with the Alliance movement, for example by arrogantly refusing the nomination of Republican politicians to the Alliance ticket.¹⁵⁶ This invoked anger among many farmers; John J Aune, a productive contributor to the public discourse at the time, asserted that “(...) such an insult and mockery of the farmer class will not be suffered.”¹⁵⁷ After the election, Republicans indeed had to pay a high price for their overconfidence. Other factors also influenced the loss of Republican voters in November, for example the passing of the exceedingly unpopular Mc Kinley tariff bill by the Harrison administration and problems with the public image of the incumbent state administration.¹⁵⁸ Norwegian American voters in northwestern Minnesota contributed strongly to the unexpected election results, interestingly to a significantly greater extent than their fellow countrymen in settlements to the south and the east.¹⁵⁹ Owen finished as expected third in the race for Governor, but gained an impressive 24 percent of the vote.¹⁶⁰ Adolph Bierman was elected state auditor, and Kittel Halvorson surprisingly won his race against the Republican Comstead in the 5th district.¹⁶¹ In total, the Alliance captured 32 House seats and 13 Senate seats, and the Republican Party lost four out of five seats in the congressional races.

The Republican supremacy that had been maintained and consolidated since the Civil War was now broken and unpredictable political realignment rather than stability would characterize voting patterns on the region during years to come.¹⁶²

The political history at national, state and county level between 1890 and 1894 is a tale of Republican attempts to reclaim political support from dissenting voters as Populists through fusion tickets with the Democratic Party strived to recreate the success of 1890. In northwestern Minnesota, Norwegian American activity within the movements of reform was increasingly characterized by internal strife due to opposition against what one believed to be “machine politics” and corruption within the national reform-oriented People’s Party that was launched in 1892, personal conflicts between political leaders, and because of disagreements between local prohibitionist movements and more secular reformers. As the Republican Party adapted its appeal to accommodate common farmers, growing numbers of Norwegian Americans found their way back into its fold. Politics in Minnesota would never be the same, but some of the party’s former supremacy was restored. Most important for this development were perhaps the GOP’s modification of its public image, its increasingly harsh criticism of alleged third party extremism, and the changing attitudes of the Republican leadership after 1890 toward ex-congressman Knute Nelson, from lukewarm if not outright antagonistic to flattering and friendly.¹⁶³ Nelson was, after much secrecy and intrigue, nominated as candidate for the position of Governor in both 1892 and 1894. He won both races, in part due to his Norwegian ancestry. This Republican push to reclaim voters on the one hand, and the skepticism among many Norwegian Americans toward the supposed political mechanization and corruption within parts of the reform movement as it was launched at the national stage on the other, constituted one significant aspect of the public discourse in the press during the 1892 and 1894 elections. At the same time, the political discussions reflected an unpredictable reality characterized by economic challenges, growing inequalities, and class struggle. Against the backdrop of economic hardship and political transformation, the Norwegian-language press at the time reflected both how the group’s political elite, Republicans as well as reformers, constructed and expressed ideas of ethnic identity to rally support among potential Norwegian American voters, and how common farmers of that national origin on the basis of Norwegian as well as American experiences expressed hopes and solutions for a better future.

Three Divergent Newspapers

During the 1890 election campaign both Republican and Alliance-based Norwegian-language newspapers vigorously supported the farmers' wish for reform. While *Nordvesten* argued that this should be done within the ranks of the Republican Party, *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* contended that political renewal was necessary for genuine reform to take place.¹⁶⁴ Thus the newspaper wholeheartedly backed the new Alliance Party. The political polarization between Norwegian American newspapers at the time was mirrored by their readers. For example, a letter writer who hides his identity behind the signature "An Alliance-man" emphasizes that *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* is the only Norwegian newspaper which supports the interests of the "classes of production."¹⁶⁵ As a reader of *Nordvesten* he expects this newspaper to join the farmers' cause, but apparently it has chosen to support "(...) the old decaying party" instead. He criticizes *Nordvesten*'s hostility towards the reform movement, and informs readers that the members of his local Farmers' Alliance have decided to stop subscribing to all newspapers that work against them. Several other local Farmer's Alliances, the reader asserts, have determined to do the same. Whether genuine or fabricated, the letter exemplifies how the competition between Norwegian-language newspapers sharpened during the summer of 1890. This polarization of the Norwegian American press would characterize the public discourse for several years to come. While *Nordvesten* remained loyal to the Republican Party, *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* after 1890 became an independent newspaper with prohibitionist inclinations. *Rodhuggeren* was launched in 1893 as an organ for the People's Party. The harsh competition between these newspapers was a natural result of the divergent political outlooks of their editors and owners.

The following paragraphs aim to discuss the most significant differences between the newspapers in question. To better understand why the construction of and expression of a perceived ethnic identity varied from newspaper to newspaper, the section includes an instructive overview of the development of each publication between 1890 and 1894, and the backgrounds of the different editors. Apart from being published in the Norwegian language and primarily circulated in northwestern Minnesota, *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, *Rodhuggeren*, and *Nordvesten* did not have much in common. One important exception was that they all shared a genuine enthusiasm for fierce political debate. This was not typical for Norwegian American newspapers in general. The three largest Norwegian-language newspapers at the time, popularly known as "the Big Three," were *Skandinaven*, *Decorah-Posten*, and *Minneapolis*



2.2. Anfin Solem

Tidende. While it is true that *Skandinaven* was consistently Republican and at times engaged actively in political debate, neither *Decorah-Posten* nor *Minneapolis Tidende* tended to voice strong political opinions.¹⁶⁶ The remarkable political passion of the newspapers which have been analyzed here may best be understood as a result of time and place. Lovoll asserts that “(...) The political winds that swept over the Midwest at the end of the nineteenth century ruined some newspapers, made others change their political course, and gave birth to new ones.”¹⁶⁷ *Nordvesten* experienced a dramatic loss of readers and was on the way

to ruin; *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* changed its political affiliation from year to year; and *Rodhuggeren* came into existence as a result of the political winds of change. Through a short introduction to the newspapers in question, their differences are discussed in greater detail.

In 1883 A. J. Underwood, the owner and publisher of *Fergus Falls Weekly Journal*, launched *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* as a Republican venture to reach Norwegian American voters in and around Otter Tail County.¹⁶⁸ The very next year Anfin Solem, a 34 years old farmer and teacher who during the three last years had been working for Underwood, bought the newspaper. Solem preferred to edit the weekly on his own, and steadily moved it into the Farmers’ Alliance camp. He had left Norway in 1879, and had thus not spent more than five years in the Promised Land before acquiring his own newspaper. In Norway, Solem had worked as a teacher in the northern parts of the country, before studying three years at the technical school in Trondheim.¹⁶⁹ His quite down-to earth occupational experience, especially his time spent as a farmer in Minnesota, may be one reason why he chose to support the Farmers’ Alliance cause. By 1890, the weekly vigorously supported the movement of reform, and several pages were each week dedicated to political discussion. Although the precise circulation numbers for the early 1890s are uncertain, *Norsk Amerikanernes Festschrift* published in 1914 asserts that *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* has had a “good circulation” and not a little political influence in its area of distribution. Most likely, the number of subscribers was around fifteen hundred.¹⁷⁰ As the People’s Party from 1892 succeeded the Farmers’ Alliance as the principal vehicle of political reform, Solem decided to support a variety of Alliance, People’s Party and Republican candidates. Gradually, he transformed *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*

into a politically independent newspaper. For Solem, the personal abilities of political candidates were more important than ideology.¹⁷¹



2.3. Torkel Oftelie

In 1893, based on the notion that the principles of Populism were underrepresented in the Norwegian-language press in the region, Ole Eriksson Hagen and Torkel Oftelie decided to start a new newspaper which they called *Rodhuggeren*, “The Grubber.” There existed newspapers which to varying degrees supported Populism, for example *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*. But Hagen was, according to *Norsk-Amerikansk Festskrift*, by nature an “unwavering radical,” and found the editorial agitation in these newspapers too mild.¹⁷² The fresh editor was a 41-year-old immigrant from Skjaak in Gudbrandsdalen who had spent most of his 13 years in

America working as a mason in Crookston. Described as courageous and reckless, he would “(...) not be afraid to champion what he believed to be a just cause, no matter the cost.”¹⁷³ Although these observations by Johannes B. Wist most likely mirror a desire to emphasize Hagen’s valuable but also intimidating personal features, they certainly seem to carry some truth. In fact, Hagen’s direct and often undisguised way of addressing issues made him a quite distinctive character in the Norwegian American press. In the first issue of *Rodhuggeren*, Hagen and co-editor Torkel Oftelie openly proclaimed that their newspaper would support the principles of the People’s Party. Hinting at the “treason” of other Norwegian American newspapers, *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*’s in particular, they explained that “(...) We will not use *Rodhuggeren* as political bait for Populists and then during election time with a kiss of Judas throw our readers into the mouth of Aristocracy and Greed.”¹⁷⁴ Unlike Solem in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, Hagen and Oftelie believed principles to be more important than men. Another important difference between the editors of the newspapers was their religious outlooks. Hagen was a Unitarian, Oftelie was a proclaimed freethinker, and Solem was Lutheran.¹⁷⁵ Whereas Solem warned his readers about the unconventional religious dispositions of the editors of *Rodhuggeren*, Hagen criticized *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* by claiming that every opinion about social issues in Solem’s newspaper had to mirror “(...) the wisdom of traditional Norwegian values and the Bible to be printed.”¹⁷⁶



2.4. Søren Listoe

Nordvesten, founded in St. Paul in 1881, was one of the newspapers which according to Johannes B. Whist in its time strongly influenced political developments in Minnesota.¹⁷⁷ The newspaper was edited by the Norwegian American Christian Brandt between 1881 and 1887, before the Dane Søren Listoe in 1888 replaced him. Listoe had for several years been a co-worker in *Nordvesten*. When Listoe in 1892 and 1893 served as American consul in Dusseldorf, Johannes B. Wist in his absence edited the newspaper.¹⁷⁸

Wist, who for extensive parts of the 1890s was involved with *Nordvesten*, was to become a household name in the Norwegian American press. He was the editor in chief of *Decorah-Posten* from 1901 onwards, and was also the editor of *Norsk Amerikansk Festskrift 1914*.

Nordvesten was in the hands of a quite different breed of men than were *Rodhuggeren* and *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*. Brandt's and Listoe's social and cultural background significantly contrasted with Solem's, Oftelie's and Hagen's. As is discussed in greater detail in chapters three and four, the editors' previous experiences influenced both the political outlooks of their ventures and the way in which and extent to which ethnic identity was expressed in their newspapers.¹⁷⁹ For example, Listoe had by 1890 for more than a decade benefited from Republican patronage.¹⁸⁰ His consistent support of the Republican Party was a natural consequence. Furthermore, *Nordvesten*'s editors heavily outweighed both Solem but especially Hagen with regard to education. Brandt, for example, had studied as a civil engineer in Germany, and Listoe had received a "solid Danish education."¹⁸¹ Their backgrounds may in part explain why their perceptions of ethnic identity seem to have been constituted more by theoretical knowledge than by practical experience. For example, *Nordvesten* sometimes drew upon ideas of Viking heritage and often called upon national allegiance to Norwegian American politicians. Listoe's Danish background must also be noted as a possible influence in this regard. Wist was in some ways an exception. He had worked for a couple of years as a teacher south of Trøndelag while studying for university on his spare time, and had held a position as news reporter before he traveled to America, where he got even more closely involved in the press.¹⁸² However, his editorship of *Nordvesten* was short, and he did not noticeably change the methods used by the newspaper to exploit feeling of ethnic identity. Listoe, who for most of the period this study has focused on was the editor

in chief for *Nordvesten*, was according to *Norsk Amerikansk Festskrift* a man of the “(...) old school; he was unwilling to experiment with ideas and reforms which had never been put to the test in real life, and used most of his spare time on literature.”¹⁸³ Hagen, by comparison, continued to work as a mason while editing *Rodhuggeren*. The editors of *Rodhuggeren* and *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* did not so often resort to intellectual exploitations of ethnic identity. As is discussed in greater detail throughout the next chapter, their approach was instead characterized by appeals to traditional Norwegian values, and more subtle connections between cultural and political developments in Norway and the movements of reform in America. More often than not, they let Norwegian American letter writers affirm the values and make the connections themselves.

While the exact circulation numbers for *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* remain uncertain, *Rodhuggeren* experienced substantial growth throughout 1894. The newspaper reached a circulation of more than two thousand in 1895, and almost doubled its number of subscribers before the end of 1896.¹⁸⁴ Several letters to the editor indicate that many Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota appreciated a more cohesive and unquestionably radical organ for political debate.¹⁸⁵ As early as January 1894, Olaf O. Vinje asked if Hagen could not, because of the high growth rate of his newspaper, consider publishing *Rodhuggeren* twice a week.¹⁸⁶ The development for *Nordvesten* was quite different. Timothy Tidelswift in a reader’s letter spring 1890 foreshadowed the coming of political turbulence “(...) it often is quiet before the storm, this one most likely coming heavily from the Northwest.”¹⁸⁷ *Nordvesten* had more than 7.500 subscribers around 1890, of which a noticeable percentage lived in the northern and western parts of the state.¹⁸⁸ Listoe and Wist, men of knowledge well prepared by years of political and press experience, should perhaps have taken better cover. The toll for remaining loyal to the Republican Party in enemy country turned out to be dramatically high. About a decade after Tidelswift’s warnings, in 1898, the circulation numbers for *Nordvesten* had fallen to around 2.250, and in 1899 the publisher expressed himself as dissatisfied with the registered numbers, but was unwilling to convey information that would warrant a higher rating.¹⁸⁹ Although the numbers speak for themselves, it is interesting to note that *Norsk Amerikansk Festskrift* also suggest a connection between area of distribution, persistent loyalty to the Republican Party, and decline; “(...) *Nordvesten* was not the only newspaper to suffer because of this quite sudden political realignment among such a large part of our fellow Norwegians in the West, but there is hardly

any doubt that it suffered more than any other newspapers because it to such a great extent was operating in the very districts that Populism specifically had chosen for conquest.”¹⁹⁰

Conclusion - A Complex Picture

The diversity which characterized Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota must be taken into consideration when discussing the relative importance of ethnic identity in the public political discourse at the time. This chapter has attempted to highlight the most significant aspects of a complex picture. Both old traditions and modern developments shaped the cultural, political and social outlook of Norwegian Americans who settled down in northwestern Minnesota. In general, due to a variety of influences in both Norway and in America, their perceptions of ethnic identity were perhaps more radical and secular than those of Norwegian Americans in the south and east. At the same time, Norwegian immigrants in the region also had much in common with fellow countrymen in older settlements. Traditional rural values, mores, and attitudes from Norway characterized the self-assertion of most Norwegian American farmers in America at the time, irrespective of time of arrival, region of origin, and area of settlement. The processes of chain migration and the presence of an active Norwegian-language press caused old and new influences, both American and Norwegian, to come together and to exercise a joint pressure on expressions of ethnic identity. The backgrounds and outlooks of both the immigrant population in general and the editors of the newspapers which have been studied must be taken into account when analyzing the construction of and expression of ethnic identity in the press. The individuals who presented the letters and articles in question wielded significant power, and their past and contemporary experiences to a significant extent seem to have determined how they utilized notions of ethnic identity in a political context. When analyzed with caution, the source material nevertheless tells a colorful if not always completely accurate (due to editorial control, lies and besmirching) story of political success and decline, gives insight into how one rationalized political affiliation through propaganda and debates, and enables one to reach tentative conclusions about the relative significance of ethnic identity as a motivation for Norwegian American political debate in northwestern Minnesota during the early 1890s.

Illustrations:

Picture 2:1: Paul Hjelm-Hansen: Wist, *Norsk Amerikansk Festskrift*, 1914.

Picture 2:2: Anfin Solem:

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=62197854>.

Picture 2: 3: Torkel Oftelie: <http://www.telelaget.com/lag/origin.htm>.

Picture 2:4 Søren Listoe: Wist, *Norsk Amerikansk Festskrift*, 1914.

Chapter Three – Ethnic Identity from a Bottom-up Perspective

This chapter focuses primarily on the analysis of political statements that express issues and values. Strictly organizational statements are analyzed more closely in chapter four. The bottom-up perspective entails a closer investigation of expressions of ethnic identity originating from the broad classes of Norwegian immigrants. As a result, the following analysis centers on statements from ordinary Norwegian American farmers rather than the political elite.¹⁹¹ Their perspectives are discussed later. The introductory section of this chapter provides an instructive overview of who produced the source material and how one presented it. Then a bottom-up perspective forms the basis for a closer discussion of what the collected statistical data may tell about the relative importance of ethnic identity as a motivation for the public political discourse in question. This analysis divides focus between letting the contributors to the debate in the press speak for themselves and analyzing the functions of and explanations for various expressions of ethnic identity from different exploratory angles. A later paragraph provides an overview of these. Finally, a concluding section highlights the most relevant findings of the preceding discussion, and sets the stage for the top-down analysis of chapter four.

Bearing in mind an understanding of ethnic identity as flexible rather than solid, constructed rather than pre-defined, and elusive rather than unambiguous, evidence suggests that Norwegian immigrant farmers' perceptions of what it meant to be Norwegian American, rooted in for example past experiences, attitudinal predispositions and contemporary ideas of national attachment, were of consequence for both the content and the form of the public political discourse in northwestern Minnesota at the time. Yet perceptions of ethnic identity were only one source of motivation among many. The political expressions of everyday Norwegian Americans gave the impression of being influenced by conditions, events and experiences in America to a much greater extent than by their Norwegian heritage. Perhaps one important reason for this was that the memories and attitudes many Norwegian immigrants who settled the region in the 1870s and 80s brought with them from Norway *combined* with regional conditions and political developments to enhance the processes of Americanization. Maybe this joint influence of the past and the contemporary may explain the subtle yet not insignificant role ethnic identity seems to have played as a motivation for political debate at the time.

The Source Material

The editor and his staff selected, created or possibly altered every published piece in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, *Nordvesten* and *Rodhuggeren*. On the one hand, this manipulation at times limited free political debate in some of the newspapers which have been studied, particularly in *Nordvesten*. Editorial control could be motivated by political, religious, or personal considerations, and it was not unusual that letters to the editor were rephrased or just ignored.¹⁹² On the other hand, many discussions in the reform-oriented newspapers were allowed to unfold with only limited editorial intervention. Indeed, in the issues of *Rodhuggeren* of September 1894, the lack of editorial control over heated discussions between political opponents, not least including attacks on Haldor Boen, a Populist candidate whom the editors of the newspaper if not all of its readers strongly supported, caused the editors to extend a public apology to their readers.

(...) There have (recently) been far too many personal attacks. But it is not always easy to know what is for the best. If we should have denied certain senders space, that would also have been wrong. One would have said that we had taken side in the discussion, and that would have been harmful not only for *Rodhuggeren*. We accepted every single attack against Boen, and against other candidates as far as space permitted. It was very uncomfortable for us to print personal assault which only few readers really cared about.¹⁹³

Notwithstanding the at times relatively unhampered discourse in *Rodhuggeren*, however, editorial influences did play an important role. When letters from political enemies were occasionally printed, the editors often responded directly to “correct” them.¹⁹⁴ Several newspapers representing the Republican Party, including *Nordvesten*, seem to have disagreed with the reform-inspired principle of free reader debate, and tended to prefer one-way communication.¹⁹⁵ The number of politically oriented letters to the editor from common Norwegian American readers was dramatically lower in *Nordvesten* than in the newspapers of reform. This allowed for stricter editorial control. For example, editor Søren Listoe informed his readers in September 1890 that he had received a letter from a reform-minded farmer which questioned the validity of a piece of information in the newspaper.¹⁹⁶ Without mentioning the name of the letter writer, the editor proceeded to rebuke the allegedly silly accusations, and to make a fool of the critic. The reader’s letter was most likely mentioned only because it could be used to poke fun at a reformer. Another explanation could be that the letter was invented by someone on the staff of the paper itself. At the time, fabrication of letters was not unusual.¹⁹⁷ Because of the low number of political statements by the broad class of Norwegian Americans readers in *Nordvesten*, the following bottom-up analysis is mainly constituted through examples from *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Rodhuggeren*.

Nordvesten has been used more extensively as a source in the top-down analysis in chapter four.

Unlike the participants in discussion in several other newspapers at the time, many contributors to the public discourse in *Nordvesten*, *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, and *Rodhuggeren* willingly disclosed their identities.¹⁹⁸ Because the editors of these newspapers explicitly stated that letter writers would have to disclose their names, at least to the editor and his staff if not to the readers, the majority of letters were signed with name, address, and date.¹⁹⁹ This editorial requirement of identification seems to have reflected a general attitude among the readers. Letters that were printed anonymously (presumably the editor knew the identity of the writer), were criticized heavily by other participants in the public debate. For example, John J. Aune in the summer of 1894 supported the condemnation of a certain letter writer who called himself “X.” “(...) I want to thank Mr. Vinje for bashing this X of the *Rodhugger*. These kinds of cowards, who do not want to sign their articles, should be hung [sic] at every telegraph pole all the way down to Washington as a warning to other vipers, who want to sneak forth.”²⁰⁰ While the identities of letter writers thus for the most part were revealed, a lot of newspaper material in a variety of genres, ranging from long articles to short notes, was never signed. In the following analysis, this material has been regarded as the expressions of the editors and their staff.

The social backgrounds of the individuals who expressed political statements vary from paper to paper. The content in *Nordvesten* was, as noted, dominated by the political elite. The political statements in this newspaper typically reflected the opinions and perspectives of local and state politicians, the editor and his staff, and other men of social, economic, political or religious influence. In the few cases where farmers and middle-class town-dwellers were allowed to express their political opinion, they uniformly tended to support the Republican Party.²⁰¹ *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Rodhuggeren*, on the other hand, actively encouraged people from the lower rungs of society to voice their political opinions.²⁰² The high literacy among Norwegian American immigrants made it possible for even poor farmers to participate in public debate.²⁰³ Determining the social position of many letter writers proved to be a challenge. In several cases it was impossible. In other cases, Norwegian American letter writers either implicitly or explicitly made identification of their social background possible. First, the most extensively discussed themes among ordinary farmers were a variety of agricultural matters, the weather, prospects for the harvest, local politics, and economic

hardship. When turning from local conditions to political and economic developments at state or national level, the broad classes of Norwegian Americans often resorted to trite and stereotypical arguments of class struggle and plutocracy.²⁰⁴ Politicians, editors, and farmers who participated in the Alliance movement at higher levels, often discussed these political and social challenges in a more systematic if not less biased way. Second, some farmers excused their contributions to public debate by referring to spelling mistakes or their low position in society. The remains of a deep-rooted peasant consciousness seem to have lived on among several Norwegian Americans. One letter to *Rodhuggeren* from a certain T. Olson, for example, typically begins with an apology; “(...) Mr. Editor, I hope you also will let a plain blunt man like me write a little in your newspaper.” Later in his letter, Olson once again excuses his contribution “(...) Forgive me for daring to speak of such things. I am only a common farmer and should perhaps not get involved. But I cannot [remain silent].”²⁰⁵

Rodhuggeren printed in February 1894 a letter in which Miss Ella Jacobson, age 12, observes that a lot of letters to the editor in Hagen’s newspaper seem to have been written by grown-up men. “(...) It puzzles me,” she writes, “that I have never seen any letters from women and children. Maybe they have no interest in politics?”²⁰⁶ The majority of letters to the editor were in fact written by adult men. Especially in *Nordvesten*, but also in the newspapers of reform, few women or children contributed to the public political debate. When they did, though, their opinions were treated with respect.²⁰⁷ For example, the editors of *Rodhuggeren* responded to Ella’s letter by stating that “(...) it is not too early for our young maids to tell the thoughtless world that they have a life and an honor to protect and that they are of equal importance and value as boys.”²⁰⁸ Several readers also responded to her questions.²⁰⁹ When women were mentioned in the political discourse it was most often in connection with their candidacy for the position of school superintendent.²¹⁰ In the years after 1890 women had been able to vote for and be nominated to this office, both in local school districts and at county level.²¹¹ Their political participation was encouraged by the political leadership of the reform movements as well as by reform-oriented farmers. B. T. Hagen, for example, wrote in the autumn of 1892 a spirited letter of support for the re-nominated People’s Party and Prohibitionist candidate for school superintendent of Grant County, Mrs. Sauby. He asserted that “(...) it is only to be expected that people with any sense of reason put an X behind her name on the ticket. Women should meet up in great numbers at election time to vote for school superintendents, for the only office that women may have, according to the contemporary point of view.”²¹² In general, then, the discourse which has been studied was dominated by men.

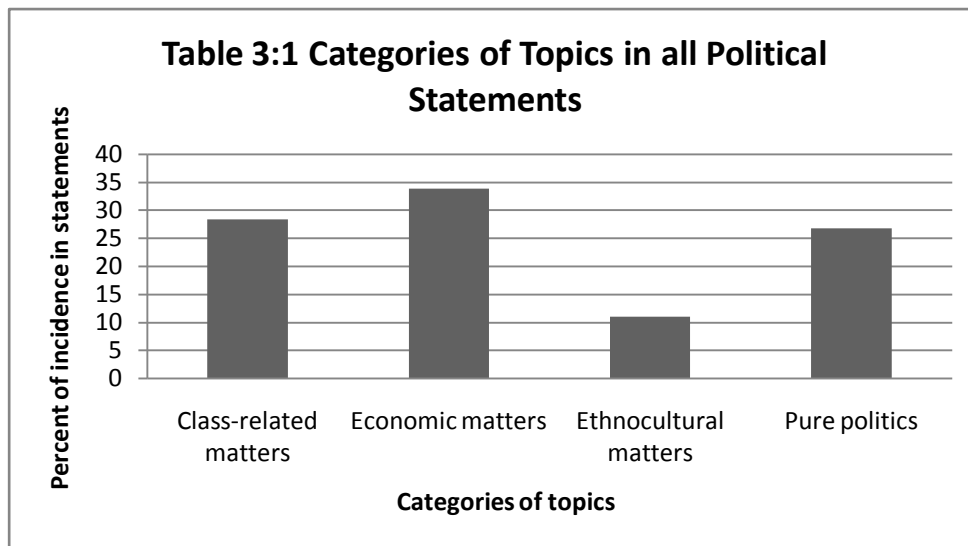
Jørn Brøndal found in his study that just over half of the letters to *Skandinaven* and *Hemlandet* actually dealt with politics.²¹³ The newspapers which have been analyzed here also presented much non-political content, *Nordvesten* to a greater extent than *Rodhuggeren* and *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*.²¹⁴ Many Norwegian Americans were not particularly interested in political developments, and preferred to read about other subjects. In late autumn 1890, in the last issue before the election, editor Listoe of *Nordvesten* announced that this campaign for his newspaper's part was over; "(...) our paper has recently contained quite a lot of political articles, but we have only fulfilled what we perceive to be our duty to the readers by supporting the candidates who, according to our convictions, best will serve the people. Hereafter, we will again strive to deliver a rich selection of news and more interesting material."²¹⁵ The more interesting material Listoe refers to consisted of local news; for example about robberies, accidents, and marriages; information about foreign affairs, for example about the wars in Asia, and cultural news from Scandinavia; and literature, for example extracts from novels, reviews of books, and poetry. *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and especially *Rodhuggeren* seem to have maintained a higher political profile than *Nordvesten* in the periods between elections. The non-political content of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* tended to center on religion and literature, whereas the editors of *Rodhuggeren* preferred to discuss anticlericalism, history, foreign affairs, agricultural techniques, and philosophical questions.²¹⁶ The relative amount of political and non-political information in the newspapers varied from month to month, depending on a range of factors. As indicated by Listoe's apologetic remarks above, a natural tendency was that the density of political content in a newspaper increased gradually through the summer of every election year, as conventions were organized and candidates nominated, before exploding in the months prior to the election, as politicians and editors struggled fiercely to rally support among the readers. All three newspapers thus dedicated significantly more space to political matters in the time prior to elections.

The Relative Importance of Ethnocultural Matters

The individual topics of the public discourse have for the most part been defined by what was actually debated in the newspapers at the time. Because this study addresses the *political* debate in the newspapers, statements about issues and values have only been registered when presented in a political context. Inspired by Brøndal's analysis of newspapers, groups of thematically connected individual topics have here been conflated into broader categories.²¹⁷ The categories used in this study are *class-related matters*, *economic matters*, *ethnocultural*

matters, and *pure politics*.²¹⁸ A closer discussion of which elements the individual topic within each category includes and how they differ from one another may be found in Appendix: 1.²¹⁹ The figure below illustrates the percent of incidence in political statements of the different categories in all three newspapers.

Figure 3:1: The percent of incidence of all registered statements depending on category



The category *ethnocultural matters* illustrates the extent to which ethnically infused issues and values were discussed in a political context. These expressions highlighted direct links between political developments in Norway and America, appealed to a shared Norwegian heritage, made a clear-cut connection between political and religious affiliation, or argued about whether or not candidates should be supported due to their national legacy and the inherent attributes connected with “being Norwegian American.”²²⁰ Only one in ten statements fall into this category. Many of these statements were expressed by the political elite, and they are analyzed in greater detail in chapter four. Several middle or lower class Norwegian Americans also expressed themselves about these topics, however, and it is their statements that form the basis for the following discussion. Focus rests primarily on statements which can illustrate the role of ethnic identity in the public discourse. As is discussed in greater detail below, Norwegian Americans more often than not combined these expressions of ethnic identity with other categories of topics. For example, at times readers used Norwegian political history as a lens through which they interpreted the contemporary struggle of farmers to increase their political power; they invoked memories or knowledge which most Norwegian Americans in the region shared to enhance class-related political arguments. Other

statements revolved around the connection between religion and politics, primarily focused on the Prohibitionist Party, or argued for or against the use of ethnic labeling, discussing what it meant to be Norwegian American in a political context. The following analysis contains specific examples of this.

An instructive overview of the following discussion is necessary. First, the statistical data and telling examples from the newspapers form the basis for an analysis of the relative importance of expressions of ethnic identity connected to the other categories of topics, namely *economic matters*, *class-related matters* and *pure politics*. Then, focus turns to what one may learn about the significance of ethnic identity for the public discourse in the region from political-religious expressions. After that, attention shifts to explicit discussions among readers about the political meaning of “being Norwegian American.” Finally, before some concluding paragraphs, a collection of letters to the editor in *Rodhuggeren* invites a closer analysis of the presence of more subtle and indirect expressions of ethnic identity in the public political discourse. Two divergent perspectives have informed the discussion about the relative significance of ethnic identity as a motivation for debate below. One angle highlights the implications of the statistical data and focuses on exemplifying both direct and more subtle expressions of ethnic identity in the discourse. The other centers on context, and establishes a link between the political debate in the press and developments in and influences from both Norway and America.

Economic Circumstances and Class Struggle

Statistically speaking, the category “ethnocultural matters” does not stand out as central for the political discourse in the press. Compared to the other categories of topics, ethnocultural matters only accounted for an average of eleven percent of what was discussed in a political context in the newspapers.²²¹ One important reason for this modest statistical representation can be traced to the regional economic difficulties which characterized northwestern Minnesota even prior to the depression of 1893. Brøndal found in his study of Wisconsin newspapers that ethnopolitical arguments marked pre-depression and post-depression letters to a greater extent than depression-era letters. In times of economic distress, he asserts, Norwegian Americans tended to focus on economic problems, with few reference to national attachments.²²² This may also have been the case in northwestern Minnesota.

The fact that more than one in three of the registered statements in the newspapers studied in this project revolved around *economic matters* indicates that economic difficulties in the

period indeed made a deep impression on Norwegian Americans in the region. Contributors to the public discourse were most interested in discussing the extent to which greedy trust and corporations made life difficult for agricultural laborers, whether or not the monetary system ought to be changed, and how a high tariff created inequality and economic hardship for common farmers in the region.²²³ This statistical representation of individual topics reflects the tough economic realities most rural laborers in northwestern Minnesota had to face. As single-crop wheat-growing farmers, they were often dependent on the railway corporations to transport their crops, dependent on external markets to get a fair price for their produce, and dependent on the banks to lend them money.²²⁴ Many Norwegian American farmers blamed these external forces of control for their hardship.²²⁵ In a letter to the editors of *Rodhuggeren* in December 1893, for example, Knut Huttetu asserts that “(...) there are many high trees in the political virgin forest, where you [*Rodhuggeren/The Grubber*] in time are going to work, which steal light and sustenance from other plants. The first one is the national bank system. The next one is the railway monopoly. Finally we have the horrendous trusts, their existence dependent on the tariff. Their roots run deep. Therefore, dig widely and thoroughly to remove from these roots the mold of prejudice and ignorance before you cut them.”²²⁶ Farmers in the region often experienced problems with their cash flow, and one often held the high tariff responsible for rising prices on household products and farm equipment. Ole Eriksson Hagen, the future editor of *Rodhuggeren* (at this time working as a mason in Crookston), asserted in May 1890 that the tariff “(...) creates an unnecessary tax of injustice for almost everything humans need. Everyone, from the baby in its cradle to the old, who is on the brink of death, is affected by this blood-sucking system.”²²⁷

The central statistical position of *economic matters* may primarily be explained by regional economic conditions at the time. Just like other rural immigrant groups and old-stock Americans in northwestern Minnesota, Norwegian Americans were profoundly influenced by the agricultural crisis which impacted the region at the time. One may speculate that the strong rural bond that characterized many Norwegian immigrants perhaps increased the extent to which economic matters were discussed in the Norwegian-language press. At the same time, it is feasible to assume that agricultural difficulties made a particularly deep impression on many immigrants, Norwegians as well as other immigrant groups, who had left their old countries with hopes of a more prosperous future in America. However, hardly any common farmers referred to national attachments when discussing economic challenges. The few times a connection was established between economic matters and conditions in the home country,

were in the views expressed by the editors or politicians. For example, references were sometimes made to economic policies in Norway in support of free coinage of silver.²²⁸ Perceptions of ethnic identity were thus seldom expressed in combination with discussions about economic matters.

More than one in four statements referred to *class-related matters*. The most widely discussed themes in this subject category were the vices of plutocracy, advice and complaints about agricultural matters, and the conditions of agricultural and industrial laborers.²²⁹ Norwegian Americans often characterized American society as class divided, and many common farmers seem to have been convinced that the upper classes were responsible for the suffering of the lower classes. A short look at some of the more popular names used in the newspapers of reform to characterize moneyed men of power may illustrate why. "Women of prostitution," "plutocrats," "snobs," "parasites on the body of society," "demo-rep-ish sugar government," "capitalistic lords," "monstrosity of an upper class," "an aristocracy of money, who in their thirst for power, greed, and gluttony seek their own kind," "gamblers," "vampires," "gold-bugs," and "humbug-makers" were but a few of the colorful labels used.¹ Although criticizing the "servants of Mammon" was popular, Norwegian Americans never neglected discussions about the situation of the majority of agricultural workers and industrial laborers. Not surprisingly, the hostility towards the upper classes and the conditions of the lower classes of society were often discussed in relation to one another.²³⁰ *Farmer matters* were understandably more widely debated than *Labor matters*, given Norwegian Americans' agricultural inclination. However, strikes and the situation of industrial laborers were discussed more widely in 1894, mostly due to the Pullman conflict.²³¹ This indicates a strong link between current circumstances and events on the one hand, and the extent to which specific subject categories were discussed on the other.

Thus, as with *economic matters*, the strong focus on *class-related matters* in the public discourse should primarily be appreciated as a consequence of regional economic hardship. However, the importance of specific political-organizational developments must also be considered. For example, evidence suggests that the Farmers' Alliance movement from 1886 onwards had increased ideological class awareness among farmers in northwestern

¹ "Prostitusjons kvinder," "plutokrater," "snobber," "snyltedyrr på samfunnslegemet," "demo-rep-ske sukkerregjerere," "kapitalistiske herrer," "monstrum av en overklasse," "et pengearistokrati der i herskelyst, griskhet og grådighet søger sin like," "spekulanter," "vampyrer," "goldbugs," and "humbugmakere" were but a few of the colorful labels used.

Minnesota.²³² Both politicians and farmers within this organization frequently used class rhetoric when addressing political problems.²³³ For example, Tollef O. Grønseth, the president of Rothlay Farmers' Alliance, asserted in October 1890 that "(...) Farmers and laborers should stand together like a wall to guard their interests (...) and prove, once and for all, that it is the will of the people and not the power of money which shall rule this country and this state."²³⁴ The mix of class ideology and local agricultural matters sometimes led to odd proclamations. Bear Park Farmer Alliance no. 626, for example, announced in January 1894 that it had tested the produce from the recently established production facility for twine at Stillwater state prison. The Alliance found it as good as any alternative, and unanimously passed a resolution which stated that "(...) we consider those who work against the use of this twine to be working in the interest of trusts and monopolies, or to be the indentured servants of the enemies of the Alliance."²³⁵

At the same time as the Farmers' Alliance movement may have enhanced class consciousness among some farmers in the region, many Norwegian Americans and members of other immigrant groups from Europe to varying degrees still harbored memories and attitudes shaped by the socially stratified societies they had left behind. As noted, the strong agricultural inclination which characterized many Norwegian Americans was certainly of some significance for what was discussed in the public political discourse at the time. In a similar vein, it is pertinent to ask what role the remembered class antagonisms which supposedly infused many immigrants with opposition against urban areas and moneyed authority seem to have played. Suspicion towards city-dwellers and shop-keepers, which surfaced regularly in the period which has been studied, may indicate that antagonism against urban areas remained strong among many Norwegian American farmers in the region.²³⁶ It is feasible to assume that some of the motivation behind these expressions of suspicion and distrust may have been rooted in past experiences from Norway. At the same time, conditions, developments and events in America strongly influenced what was discussed and how attitudes were expressed. Ebbe, for example, commenting on the right of city-dwellers to hunt on his land, informed readers in a letter to the editor of *Rodhuggeren* that

(...) Ebbe has pondered, till his head hurts, about possible explanations for justifications for this horrible hunt. If a farmer has one or more lakes on his land, does he not then own them as well as the land which surrounds them? I believe that the water on my farm is my property, and if I own it, it is mine. (...) Now these hunters come to my farm, circle the water, and shoot the ducks right in front of my nose, and behave like the property is theirs instead of mine. I wonder, what these gentlemen would think and say, about for example the farmer, if he came to the city, went into their shops, offices, and so forth, and started to involve himself in their matters as he saw fit. I almost think that these gentlemen in the city would send for the cops and put the lad in a hole, where neither the sun nor the moon shine.²³⁷

As discussed in the previous chapter, a large percentage of the Norwegian American populace in northwestern Minnesota had left Norway in a period characterized by social and political transformation. Protest movements against old and new hierarchical structures gained momentum, and many Norwegians joined forces against the status quo by creating a variety of political and non-political organizations. Thus, one may argue that Norwegian experiences at least to some extent account for the enthusiasm with which many Norwegian Americans agriculturalists joined the Farmers' Alliance movement.²³⁸ In other words, memories and attitudes from Norway seem to have inspired political engagement in America. Evidence suggests that a number of reform-oriented Norwegian Americans perceived the picture of an "awakening farmer" to be a significant symbol of ethnic identification. At times, explicit connections were made between this aspect of class struggle in America and the conditions of farmers in the old country. For example, one reader of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* in July 1890 commented on the differences between farmers' movements in northwestern Minnesota and the situation across the Atlantic.

(...) Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson said once, 'When the Norwegian farmer awakes, he awakes to reaction.' In other words, this means that when he (the farmer) awakens, he will, taking the current political establishment into consideration, find it necessary to take the power of government into his own hands. (...) However, the Norwegian farmer must, even though he is already awake, still wait some time before he can implement changes to improve his condition. There are many barricades and obstacles to tear down before he can reach his goal. (...) The situation is different for farmers in America. They are a free people of production in a free state, and the extent to which they will let themselves be bound and guided by professional politicians depends only on their own choices.²³⁹

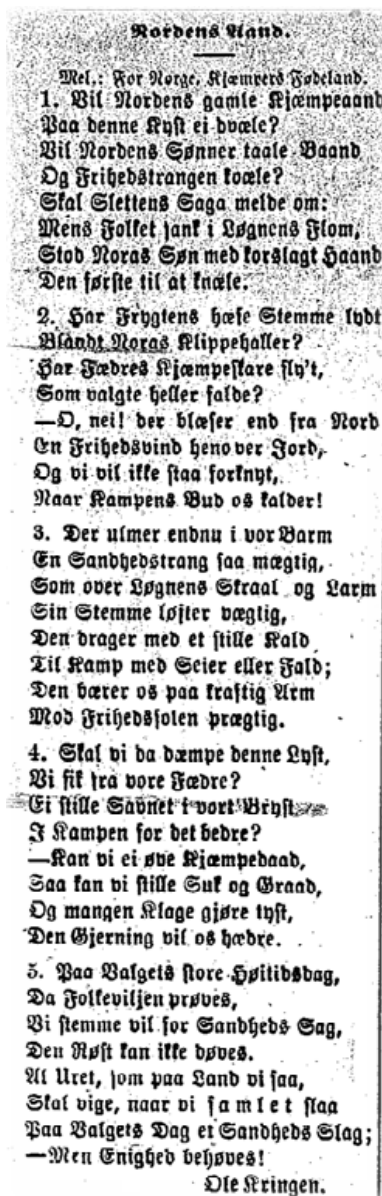
Because of this, in the view of the reader, Norwegian farmers should not be afraid to use political power to improve their conditions in America. In a similar vein, a variety of readers used different aspects of their Norwegian legacy to interpret and express their political experiences in America. Chr. Berg, for example, reporting from a Farmers' Alliance meeting, stated that the members left the gathering "(...) with an expectation and firmness, which, although in lesser scale, compared to that of our forefathers in Eidsvoll: 'United and faithful, till Dovre Falls.'"²⁴⁰ Class-related matters, then, were connected to perceptions of ethnic identity more often than economic matters. Yet, the large majority of statements within this subject category still primarily reflected conditions in America with no reference to national attachment at all.

Pure Politics

The category *pure politics*, within which Norwegian Americans identified what they believed to be wrong with the current political establishment and proposed how to change it, was debated almost as frequently as *class-related matters*. Often, the two subject categories were

discussed in relation to one another. Discussed most extensively were the supposed corruption of the present political system, the perceived failure of the old parties to deal with contemporary challenges, and the power of the people to improve their own situation through political reform.²⁴¹ Crooked politicians and power-hungry ringleaders allegedly cared only for the power of the wealthy and personal prestige. The Republican candidate for governor in 1890, for example, was according to one reader of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* a bank and railway millionaire. Because of this, “(...) although he sometimes seemingly steps down to help common people with smaller problems, when more important matters are at hand, he will inevitably protect the interests of the corporations.”²⁴² One reader in a letter to the editor underscored the lack of a quick solution to the problem when he two years later exclaimed “(...) Dear God! For how long are we going to let ourselves be used as tools of corporations, crooks, and political ring-leaders?”²⁴³ The positive welcome the recently established *Rodhuggeren* experienced from many Norwegian Americans in 1894 indicates that dissatisfaction with the current political regime indeed was deep-rooted.²⁴⁴ Olaf O. Vinje, for example, who for several years had contributed to the political discussions in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, put it this way “(...) Are you [Rodhuggeren] the man with no fear or fault. Are you *he*, who dares to fight for principles, despite a lack of followers? (...) Yes, if you are as good a man as you promise, then you are welcome, welcome indeed!”²⁴⁵

Norwegian Americans protested against this persistent political corruption in different ways. Perceptions of ethnic identity surfaced more often in combination with these protests than in combination with *economic matters* and *class-related matters*. Political campaign songs, for example “The spirit of the North” (Nordens Aand), written by Ole Kringen and published in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* in the autumn of 1890 and “Campaign March for the Norwegian American” (Campaigne Marsch for den Norske Amerikaner) written by P. Ydstie and published in *Rodhuggeren* August 1894, are examples of the genre through which national attachment was expressed most explicitly in a political context in the newspapers of reform.²⁴⁶ (The original lyrics of these songs are found below, and a translation is provided at the bottom of each page.) However, many Norwegian Americans also expressed their wish for political transformation in editorials and letters to the editor. According to Anfin Solem, for example, one Norwegian man in Fergus Falls had gone so far as to make the promise that he would not drink his homemade wine, before politics “got clean.” The editor commented “(...) Now just look out! Harald Haarfagre’s heirs have started to unite for Reform.”²⁴⁷



3:1 Nordens Aand

And political reform was indeed by many Norwegian Americans perceived as the only way through which their wish for clean government could be fulfilled.² For this to happen, the people would have to use their rightful democratic power and vote for trustworthy politicians. The question of which principles should be used to define an honest and reliable politician was discussed extensively and in great detail. One widespread and commonly accepted idea was that an agricultural background was a sign of honesty. The idea of voting common farmers into government to decrease corruption and to increase the political power of the lower classes of society was from time to time given a “Norwegian twist.” In October 1890 B. T. Hagen in a letter to editor Solem asserted that “(…) things have moved so far that one no longer can trust the established parties. The sooner we are able to create a new strong party, the better. Nothing will improve until we get legislators who know the conditions of common men. The farmers must find their seats in Parliament here, just like they do back in our old country.”²⁴⁸

This solution to the politically corrupted status quo seems to have resonated well with many Norwegian Americans in the movement of dissent. As is discussed in chapter four, the popularity of the idea of politicizing farmers was acknowledged and exploited by the political elite to rally

² 1) Will the old sprit of giants //not linger on this coast? //Will the sons of the North suffer bonds// and strangle their need for freedom? // Shall the saga of the plain tell: // While the people drowned in the flood of lies, Nora’s son stood with a wounded hand // [and was] the first to kneel. 2) Has the hoarse voice of fear ever been heard //among the Norwegian halls of cliffs? // Have the throngs of forefathers fled // who instead chose to fall? // -O, no! Still there blows from the North // a wind of freedom over the earth. // And we will not stand fearful // when the messenger of strife calls us [to action].3) There smolders still in our chests // a fundamental need for truth // which over the racket and clamor of lies // lets its mighty voice be heard. // It inspires [us] with a silent urge // to a fight of victory or defeat. // It carries us on [its] powerful arm // towards the grand sun of freedom.4) Should we then suppress this desire // [which] we acquired from our forefathers? // Or ignore the yearning in our chest // to struggle for what is better [?] // - Can we not make great things happen // to eradicate sighs and crying // and silence many complaints [?] // That action would bring us honor. 5) On the great election day // when the will of the people is tested // we will vote for the principle of freedom // [and] our voice cannot be muted. // All injustice [which] we perceive in the country // shall yield when we stand together. // On the day of the election is the battle of truth // - but unity is needed!

support for political candidates with agricultural backgrounds. Notwithstanding an at times volatile debate about the alleged trustworthiness or corruption of politicians both within the reform movement and between the Populist/Democratic camp and the Republican camp, most



3:2 Campaigne Marsch

Norwegian Americans seem to have shared a widespread wish for purer politics.³ B. T. Hagen, for example, asked fellow reform-oriented farmers in 1892 “(...) have we still not come far enough in the Age of Enlightenment to realize that we first and foremost must secure our own protection, and rid ourselves of party fanaticism, stupidity and lies? Let us reclaim our strength! Crush the old parties to atoms and spread them in the wind – our strong Minnesota wind.”²⁴⁹ One year later, a reader who signed his letter to the editor “Magne.” expressed the feelings of many when he wrote that a *Rodhugger* (Grubber) is exactly what people need; “(...) a force which cleans up the old debris and roots which make the political and social ground infertile. Let us hope this newspaper will dig deep enough to stop the growth of the wounds of cancer which have eaten their way into our society.”²⁵⁰

In a similar vein as the other subject categories, one may thus primarily interpret the statistical count for the category *pure politics* as a result of conditions in America. The fight against corruption and the wish for reform was not unique for Norwegian immigrants. At the same time, one should bear in mind that the Farmers’ Alliance’s idea of “cleansing politics” by

³ “Campaigne Marsch for den Norske Amerikaner,”: Norwegian man! You, who came here to the land of freedom // and transformed the forest and the mold of the prairie // by your work [so that] America can // send the lords of England a lot of Gold! // Will you continue to work and vote for those // who believe in mortgages, gold and protection [tariff]? // [For those] Who [have] put a mortgage all the homes // [spread] over wide plains where fellow countrymen now live? // Do you not see that your right to be // safe on your own land which you were the first to clear // is threatened by greedy vultures // who after financial gains have [acquired] a dangerous thirst?! // Protect your freedom before it is too late! - // If your children are to keep their rights to the land // which you cultivated – then you must // save the country while it still can be saved! // The tyrant of gold, who wants to hurt // you and your family, [he] you should defeat. // Use your vote - // In such a way that his power over the children of labor no longer can exist!

nominating common farmers for public offices was familiar to many Norwegian Americans. Back in Norway, the process of voting farmers into Parliament had by this time become quite normal. Remembered class-related antagonisms from the old country to some extent influenced the outlooks of several Norwegian American farmers who contributed to the public political discourse at the time. Attitudinal dispositions, for example hostility towards officialdom and centralization of power, were part of what motivated political debate. Many common readers voiced their protests against what was perceived as a corrupt and plutocratic social stratum of political power, not unlike the economically liberal political elite in Norway. However, the extent to which old country memories and attitudes in this regard may be said to have motivated political debate should not be exaggerated. Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota seem first and foremost to have been provoked by American experiences. The majority of statements within this category addressed political developments in Minnesota only, with no reference to Norway or Norwegian American ethnic identity.²⁵¹

Thus, even though a variety of expressions of national attachment which can be understood as reflections of ethnic identity surfaced in combination with the subject categories *economic matters*, *class-related matters*, and *pure politics*, nine in ten political statements indicated that the political discourse primarily was influenced by experiences and conditions in America. As noted, expressions of ethnic identity were often characterized by a recontextualization of usable aspects of a shared Norwegian past to address new (though to some extent similar) challenges in a different setting.

Political-Religious Expressions and Ethnic Identity

Some ordinary Norwegian Americans also concerned themselves with political-religious matters. Most expressions of religion in a political context revolved around the political implications of the temperance movement in general and the more extremist activity of the Prohibitionist Party in particular. These political-religious statements fall within the subject category *ethnocultural matters*, but do not reflect contemporary perceptions of ethnic identity as directly as the ethnically infused political expressions discussed above. Rather, they mirror a less elastic and perhaps more inherent aspect of what several Norwegian immigrants at the time perceived as typically Norwegian American. After all, as discussed in chapter two, most immigrants from Norway had been familiar with the ideas of temperance and prohibitionism long before they left the old country. The persistent maintenance of temperance and prohibitionist organizations in northwestern Minnesota and discussions in the press indicate

that “the cause” may have constituted an important element of ethnic identity for many religious Norwegian Americans in the region.²⁵² The following paragraphs only discuss the political-religious expressions which can most clearly be connected to perceptions of ethnic identity.²⁵³

Connections between religious and political affiliation surfaced in the political debate at the time, most frequently in the pages of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*. Compared to Brøndal’s findings in his analysis of the reader debate in *Skandinaven* and *Hemlandet*, the public discourse in northwestern Minnesota may be characterized as both more secular and more volatile than public debates to the east and south. Whereas the letters Brøndal has analyzed were often phrased in broad terms and seldom invited religious controversy, the opinions about religion voiced in the newspapers of this study frequently provoked fierce debate.²⁵⁴ Especially in *Rodhuggeren*, religious statements tended to revolve around quite unorthodox questions. In January and February 1894, for example, several readers joined in a discussion about whether or not hell actually existed. One contributor to the debate, S. G. Mogan, wrote “(...) I believe it was Agnostic [a letter writer] who declared that he had made an investigation into the matter, and concluded with absolute certainty that hell does not exist. A letter writer [Bjug to *Rodhuggeren*, January 23, 1894] questions how this examination has been put into effect, and seems to have a secret assumption, that there may exist dark corners which the ‘Argus eyes’ of Agnostic has not yet penetrated. It is generally accepted that negative results are not definite, even when they are obtained through thorough research. Indeed, Agnostic should not, as a representative for the ‘I-know-nothing-school’ so rigidly make the claim that hell does not exist.”²⁵⁵ The editors of the newspaper encouraged free religious discussion and expressed tolerance towards other religions. For example, they described a Brahmin who supposedly attended an exhibition in Chicago in 1894. A woman allegedly asked him if he was a Christian. The Brahmin answered “(...) A Christian! No not at all. Why would I be a Christian? I am a Brahmin. I could just as well ask you: ‘are you Brahmin?’ but I know, you could not be that, just as you would not have been a Christian if you were born in Turkey.”²⁵⁶ The unconventional religious outlook of the newspaper was at times reflected in comments from the readers. For example, one farmer wrote in September 1894 “(...) Thank you very much for your [*Rodhuggeren*’s] visits to Farmer-town; you are a welcome guest for all the people here, except for those who burn you.”²⁵⁷ The editor of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and especially editor Listoe of *Nordvesten* were more cautious, but their reader debates (primarily in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*) were at times still characterized by religious fervor. The

controversial religious and political outlooks of the editors of *Rodhuggeren* may partly explain the difference in religious-political style and content between the newspapers studied here, and both *Skandinaven* and *Hemlandet*. Additionally, the at times extreme political independence of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* provoked much hostile debate.²⁵⁸ From a broader perspective, one could also take into account the difference in background between the Norwegian American populace in northwestern Minnesota and Norwegian Americans in older settlements in Illinois and Wisconsin, where the newspapers Brøndal studied were most widely circulated. As discussed in the previous chapter, Norwegian immigrants who settled down in this more recently settled region tended to be more secular than Norwegian Americans in older settlements. One consequence of this may have been that people more easily turned to political organizations like the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party in times of crisis. At the same time, as is discussed below, evidence suggests that a number of Norwegian Americans in the region still remained skeptical to the People's Party due to the alleged connection between leading figures of the party and Catholicism.²⁵⁹

The most frequently discussed religious-political topic in all newspapers was temperance/prohibition.²⁶⁰ The Prohibitionist Party actively participated on the political stage in northwestern Minnesota in the 1890, 1892 and 1894 elections, and most of the statements of political-religious content revolved around this political movement. Because the political-religious debates in the three divergent newspapers were influenced to a high degree by the editors, a short look at their points of view is necessary. At the same time as *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* increasingly supported Prohibitionist candidates, *Rodhuggeren*, as an organ of the People's Party, kept the Prohibitionists at arm's length.²⁶¹ The most important reason for this seems to have been that several Prohibitionists allegedly flirted with the Republican Party in 1894.²⁶² Anfin Solem, as leader of a politically independent *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* after 1890, gave more space to letters to the editor and information in general about the Prohibitionist Party and the connection between religion and politics than did the other editors.²⁶³ Especially in the 1894 campaign, he allowed religion to play a greater role in the political discourse. Solem proclaimed in September that year that "(...) we often hear the claim that politics and Christianity do not belong together; but this is just a hollow assertion, with no evidence. The politics that distances itself from Christian morality is flawed and facilitates only its own demise."²⁶⁴

Allegedly, the Prohibitionist Party exemplified the perfect combination of religion and politics. The common mantra of the Alliance movement, that “the public office must seek the man,” not the other way around, was at times connected to the supposed “purity” of the Prohibitionist movement. H. B. Nelson, for example, voiced the opinion that instead of voting for the “unclean” People’s Party, one should vote for the Prohibitionist Party and in so doing for “complete reform.”²⁶⁵ As a contrast to Solem and *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, the editors and readers of *Rodhuggeren* were more interested in criticizing doctrine and religious narrow-mindedness than the connection between religion and politics, except when criticizing the Prohibitionist Party. Although at times touching upon religious-political matters, well established letter writers like Olaf O. Vinje, H. B. Brekke, Knut Huttetu and John J. Aune were most interested in discussing economic, political and social problems, and internal conflicts within the reform movement.²⁶⁶

Thus, except for several editorials written by Solem and some readers’ letters in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* in the campaigns of 1892 and 1894 and criticism of the Prohibitionist Party by editors and various readers in *Rodhuggeren*, these newspapers’ audience of farmers did not seem to have been preoccupied with debating religion in a political context. The quantitative statistical representation of religious-political content in the public political discourse, though qualitatively expressed in more extremist terms, was lower than that recorded for *Skandinaven* and *Hemlandet* in Brøndal’s analysis.²⁶⁷ At times, evidence of what may be considered more traditional Norwegian American anti-Catholic religious-political bias also surfaced.²⁶⁸ In a letter to the editor on *Rodhuggeren*, for example, one anonymous reader expressed concern about the Populist leader Donnelley’s connection with Catholicism. He informs readers that

(...) as far as mundane matters are concerned; it has been awfully dry here. With regards to the school meeting in District no. 14, I can inform that a proposition was discussed which suggested the school building should be open for any kind of enlightening political meetings. But the People’s Party were at once denied access; because, they said, those people shall never come there again, we have had enough of them, and now they include this Donnelley again, and he is Catholic, and then we will have Catholic War. But tell me, Mr. Editor, what is I. Donnelley? Is he Catholic, or what is he?²⁶⁹

The religious-political perceptions of Norwegian Americans who contributed to the public political discourse in northwestern Minnesota seem to have reflected the increased degree of secularization of more recent immigrants. At the same time, one should bear in mind that several Norwegian Americans in the region, especially through the pages of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, expressed a more traditional religious outlook. Religion constituted a fundamental

part of the lives of most Norwegian Americans in the area, and the local church was still arguably the most important place for social and religious events.²⁷⁰ However, when it came to *political* discussion, ordinary Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota were far more concerned with debating the economic challenges at hand than religion.

The Value of “Being Norwegian American”

Other expressions of ethnic identity more directly addressed the problem of establishing a link between ethnic background and certain attributes. For example, some everyday Norwegian Americans argued that attributes like honesty and reliability were common among politicians of Norwegian heritage. Other contributors to the public political discourse were more skeptical towards connecting nationality and politics. The expressions of ethnic allegiance to candidates of Norwegian American descent that emphasized their national background and the positive attributes associated with “being Norwegian American” constituted a quite significant part of the subject category *ethnocultural matters*. As with political-religious matters, these political statements were expressed more effectively and to a greater extent by the political elite than by ordinary readers. A closer discussion of this is found in chapter four. Yet, some everyday Norwegian Americans at times also touched upon the connection between ethnic background and personal attributes in a political context.

More often than not, these expressions were quite vague and did not recognize any specific personal abilities other than agricultural experience, honest work ethic, and professional skills. Frequently just “being Norwegian American” was considered to suffice as an argument for support.²⁷¹ A closer discussion of this is also found in chapter four. As Brøndal points out in his study, this general connection between national origin and vaguely defined attributes of honesty and professional reliability may have been so frequently invoked (compared to other attributes) because they very easily could be “(...) employed by any ethnic groups seeking self-assurance.”²⁷² For example, in the autumn of 1892 one reader of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* asserted that the Republican nomination of two young fellow Norwegians to county offices was “(...) not only a credit to our nationality, but also a credit for the political party that nominated them.”²⁷³ Supposedly, these exemplary Norwegian Americans had worked on their parents’ farms while studying to improve their knowledge, and they were skilled, honest, and hard-working professionals. Such expressions of ethnic pride were not frequently expressed by readers in the newspapers of reform at the time.²⁷⁴ Two weeks later, this statement was criticized in a letter to the editor from a writer who hides his identity behind the

signature “a voter.” Regardless of who actually composed the letter, it highlights how the question of ethnic allegiance to Norwegian American candidates may have been problematic for many people of Norwegian descent at the time. The writer asserts that

(...) One often complains about how nationality is mixed with politics. It is almost impossible for a Norwegian to become American, because he is perceived as a ‘Norwegian and foreigner,’ even if both [sic] his father, grandfather and grandmother were born in America, as long as he can speak Norwegian. But how can one expect things to be different, when people want to give one nationality with the good talents and praiseworthy abilities of a man who has been born and raised on American soil and never has seen a foreign country?²⁷⁵

The relatively modest statistical presence of ethnocultural matters in the table 3:1 should be understood as part of a more nuanced reality. Many Norwegian Americans at the time, farmers as well as politicians, were ambiguous about mixing nationality and politics. One important reason for this, as illustrated above, seems to have been the wish of Norwegian Americans to become accepted as Americans. Members of the ethnic group feared being perceived as an un-American threat to the principles of political freedom and independence.²⁷⁶ Although most Norwegian Americans proudly maintained their cultural heritage in everyday life, they seem to have appreciated that too much explicit political expression of national allegiance and patronage could damage the reputation of the entire ethnic group.²⁷⁷ After all, most Norwegian immigrants had to varying degrees integrated or were integrating into American society.

A letter called “Gud Job on Kaptol” printed in *Rodhuggeren* summer 1894 illustrates very well this fear of being perceived as an ethnic threat to American democracy. (An excerpt of the first half of the letter is found on the next page). It was allegedly written by the Democrat Professor Rasmus B. Anderson to *Madison Democrat*, under the fake signature of Ole Olson.²⁷⁸ The piece was introduced by Hagen and Oftelie as a “(...) besmirching product which shames and angers all Norwegians in America,” but was most likely a comedic satire, perhaps written by the editors themselves.²⁷⁹ Because most Norwegian Americans allegedly were fond of Professor Anderson, the editors asserted that reading this letter would be a serious disappointment for a lot of people. Yet, by reading it, one could also witness which principles were supposedly important for the old-school Norwegian American political leaders: “Gud Job on Kaptol” was apparently all that mattered. They declared that true men of the People’s Party could read “Andeson’s [sic] product of prostitution” with a clear conscience, because it only illustrated to what depth of pettiness the old political parties had sunk. Ethnic labeling and patronage was for many reform-oriented Norwegian Americans

GUD JOB ON KAPTOL.

That's What Ole Olson Wants.

And Also A 'Norvegan' For "Govner".

He Writes From Pleasant Springs All About It And Tells How Knute Nelson Sits "in Parlor vit Yim Hill in Sante Pal, Minsota."—Norvegans' Rights better than Yankees'.

Plesen Spring, Dane Konti, Viskonsen, Neited Stase av Nord Amerka, Juli Furst, 1894.—Mester Edtor: Der Sur!—Yu hav lots ov redurs in dis konti and ei wish yu vud spik to dem troyurpaper and say to dem that ol de Norvegans in dis stase vant Norvegan for govner dis time. Vad yu teak bout it, Mr. Edter.

In Minsota Knute Nilson be govner and Yim Hill run big ralrode Sante Pal to Crokton, an evry Norvegan in stase ov Minsota get gud yob on kaptol. Now de Norvegans in Viskonsen not want Ingllis or Yenke govner any more. Yu kno Profsor Anderson an Laif Erikson discover dis contry lang time befor Kolumbos and de Yankis and fort Yuli. Norvegans hav gud rite to dis contry, better rite dan de Yankis. Ol de Norvegans vant Norvegan govner dis time, eder Nels Hogen or Hans Varner. Ef Norvegan get to be govner ei em shure evry Norvegan in Viskonsen get gud yob on kaptol, an ve get gud times purty quic. Ei tenk yu better mak Nels Hogen goyner, Yon. A. Yonson lutnient govner, Hol Steinslan trasur, Mester Lun in Stoton sectary stase, put a Yerman on fer surans comisner, giv os Eirisman fer ralrode comisner and let de Yencis tak ol de rest.

3:3 Gud Job on Kapitoll

thus something which was perceived as characteristic for the political enemy. Whether this satirical letter was fabricated or not, it demonstrates how the political mood at the time discouraged too explicit expressions of ethnic support for Norwegian American political candidates. As is discussed in detail in chapter four, the editorial opposition towards using national background as an argument for political allegiance to candidates of Norwegian descent seems to have been stronger in *Rodhuggeren* and *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* than in *Nordvesten*.

A Folk-inspired Expression of Ethnic Identity

Although to some extent cherishing politicians of Norwegian descent based on what was perceived as typically Norwegian American attributes, both the editors and the readers of the newspapers of reform primarily used somewhat more subtle technique to bring into play their Norwegian heritage in a political context. As discussed above, this was sometimes achieved by connecting contemporary political events to experiences, history, and memories from Norway, for example through campaign songs and references to "the awakening farmer."

Rodhuggeren, which, of the three newspapers that have been analyzed, was the most unlikely to explicitly express perceptions of ethnic identity in a political context, at times preferred to use a different but no less interesting method. The newspaper staff and the readers developed a distinctive literary genre through which contemporary political developments were expressed in the language of "biblical" fairy-tales. A series of playful political commentaries, of which the most frequent were "From Filistertown," "From Politikhustown," and "Per i

sjumilsstøvle,“ used elements of Norwegian folk culture as a medium through which political developments during the 1894 election campaign were analyzed and discussed. The articles carried various signatures, for example “Methusalem,” “Ahasverus,” “Pædagog,” and “Truls.”²⁸⁰ With strong political and religious overtones, in a satirical language varying in style from that of the bible to that of traditional Norwegian fairy-tales, these writers commented on recent political and religious circumstances, events, and developments. In January 1894, for example, “Methusalem” presented the story of an old giant called “Mr. Producer”:

(...) I want to start with a description of “the bound Samson.” He also carries the more modern name Mr. Producer (The Farmer and the Worker), and it is by this name I want to refer to him in this short deliberation. This Mr. Producer was previously a powerful and influential person in the entire land of the Filisters. His power was so great, that all Filister-children trembled and quivered wherever he went, and his name was mentioned with respect in every corner of the land. But the Filisters soon started to fear that he would start to (...) take the power of government into his own hands, if they did not stop his acquisitions.²⁸¹

As time went by, the potent giant grew so powerful that the wizards of “Filisterland” decided to trick him into bondage. They beguiled him and complimented him to make sure he did not realize that they simultaneously spun an invisible net to chain him. This net was called laws. The wizards and their followers poked his eyes out, ripped the hair from his skull, and for a long, long time Mr. Producer was forced to work as a slave in “the mills of industry.” But he still harbored the memories of freedom in his heart. Then he started to think, and the more he pondered his situation the angrier he became. The wizards of the land tried to soothe his temper with medicine (tariff reform) and by giving him sweet pills (bonds), but this did not help much. Methusalem ends his introductory narrative as illustrated here.⁴

For hver Dag føler han Kænterne
mere og mere trykkende, og han ryster
dem sommetider, saa hele Møllen støter,
og Lyden naar til Filistertown's Palad-
ser, og Hersterne føler Frygt og Bæven i
deres Hjerter.

M e t h u s a l e m .

3:4 Fra Filistertown

The tale of Mr. Producer is only one example among many fictional pieces printed in the newspaper. Other stories related more closely to specific political events in Minnesota at the time. In October 1894, for example, “Korrespondent” elaborated on the latest developments in the mythological universe which had been created through the pages of

⁴ “(...) For every day [that passes by] he feels the chains increasingly oppressive. At times, he shakes them, so that the entire mill trembles, and the sound [of this] reaches the palaces of Filistertown, and the rulers feel fear and quiver in their hearts.”

Rodhuggeren in the first months of its existence and diligently maintained and expanded during the spring and summer.

(...) In those days when Grover, the fisherman, was Tsar in America, and Knute, the Vossing, was Republican heir to the throne of Minnesota, many strange things came to pass in Filistertown, Mr. Rodhugger! Ole Hoel was in this period Master Chef in the steam-kitchen of North Dakota, and H. A. Foss was the Great Mogul of Humbugmakers in the Rep-Prohibitionist wine-cellar, with headquarters in Moorhead. And Knute, the heir to the throne, set out for Moorhead in the early parts of the political year, controlling his steps towards the holy nest of the Great Mogul, where he was received with exquisite courtesousness befitting an Heir.²⁸²

As may be expected, context taken into consideration, Knute visited the “Great Mogul” H. A. Foss, the editor of the newspaper *Nye Nordmannen* (The New Norwegian), to buy his editorial influence. Agreements were made and goods were traded for political control. The contributors to the ever-evolving story thus used the narrative in various ways, for example to contemplate the general position of farmers in society or to besmirch political and personal enemies. Based on readers’ comments and the number of letters which were printed in this genre, the “biblical” fairy-tale style seems to have captivated many readers. For example, as noted, these stories were among the young Miss Ella Jacobson’s favorite pieces in the newspaper.²⁸³ This use of folk culture as a medium for political discussion may from one perspective be appreciated as an alternative and quite subtle way to express ethnic identity. One applied parts of a common Norwegian heritage in a new context to express political opinion. As the mood among Norwegian Americans in the region at the time evidently discouraged too explicit references to the political importance of ethnic background in the press, one found less overt ways through which the Norwegian heritage could be expressed and valued in a political context. From a different perspective, one should also consider the editors’ quite alternative background, a pronounced “Grundtvigian” outlook, and their wish to attract readers.²⁸⁴ Otelie and Hagen were unconventional editors in the sense that they were open-minded and printed much material that other editors may have refused to print. Chapter four contains a closer discussion of this.

Conclusion – Diversity and Recontextualisation

Expressions of ethnic identity in the public political discourse which has been analyzed seem to have reflected the diversity of experiences and outlooks which characterized the Norwegian American populace in northwestern Minnesota at the time. Evidence suggests that many Norwegian Americans to varying degrees had been integrated into American society, and that present circumstances in their new place of residence influenced their political self-assurance to a greater extent than past memories. Statistically speaking, national heritage was not a

central aspect of political discussion in the press. As earlier noted, only about one in ten recorded political statements in the newspapers that have been analyzed established a clear-cut connection between the immigrants' Norwegian legacy and contemporary political developments. The numbers reflect both the economic hardship of the period and the ambiguous feelings among editors as well as readers towards the exploitation of ethnic labeling and patronage in a political context. Regional economic hardship and contemporary political developments were what primarily provoked political engagement and discussion.

At the same time, evidence also suggests that parts of the motivation for political debate can be traced to memories, perceptions and attitudes either acquired in Norway or passed on to second generation Norwegian Americans in the new land. Focusing on context, it is feasible to assume that many Norwegian immigrants who contributed to the public political discourse were to some extent motivated by their general agricultural inclination and by what may be described as latent class antagonisms from the old country. Simultaneously, many Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota seem to have been more secularized than their fellow nationals towards the east and south, perhaps in part due to their recent arrival. It is challenging to reach precise conclusions about the degree to which these attitudinal predispositions influenced the public political debate. The statistical material does not capture all aspects of a complex reality. Focusing on more explicit expressions of ethnic identity in the press, evidence suggests that a number of common Norwegian Americans who contributed to the public political discourse at times drew upon various parts of a shared Norwegian heritage to convey information, describe feelings, and to influence other readers in a political context. When perceptions of ethnic identity surfaced, they were often used to enhance political statements.

Several Norwegian Americans in different ways, based on their personal background and self-assertion, exploited politically what they recognized as usable parts of their common national heritage. One recontextualized what was perceived as characteristically Norwegian or Norwegian American to address specific contemporary political developments. The methods used to accomplish this varied. Some readers used Norwegian history as a backdrop for expressing political ideas, for example by invoking Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's notion of the "awakening farmer." Others argued for or against the perception of Norwegian American politicians as particularly honest and reliable. Amateur poets composed campaign songs and poems with strong ethnic overtones, while editor Solem and several of his readers promoted

the combination of Lutheranism and politics by supporting the Prohibitionist Party. The editors and readers of *Rodhuggeren* drew upon folk culture to create a mythological universe of fairy-tales that reflected their political environment and experiences, while “Ole Olson” asserted that “evry Norwegan in stase ov Minsota get gud job on kaptol.”

Based on the findings of this chapter and in light of an appreciation of ethnic identity as flexible, constructed, and elusive, one may safely assert that both attitudinal predispositions rooted in the national backgrounds of Norwegian immigrant farmers and their more immediate perceptions of what it meant to be Norwegian American were of consequence for political debates in the newspapers which have been analyzed. The Norwegian heritage was used as a distinctive resource for political communication. At the same time, Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota had to varying degrees become Americanized, and most rural dwellers were seriously affected by economic challenges. The statistical data reflects a reality in which farmers in the region, irrespective of national background, joined forces to protest against the status quo to improve their social and economic position. People of Norwegian descent constituted a central part of this movement of reform. The politicization of Norwegian immigrant farmers and their subsequent integration into American society could partly explain why one preferred to express perceptions of ethnic identity subtly rather than explicitly in the press. Norwegian immigrants in northwestern Minnesota faced different economic and political challenges and choices than their fellow nationals in Norwegian American settlements to the east and south in the state. Perhaps because their lives to such a great extent were characterized by economic hardship, ideas of class struggle, and feelings of corruption and injustice, many people of Norwegian descent in the region were more interested in discussing how one could fight for a better future than in celebrating their national heritage, for example by praising Norwegian American governor, Knute Nelson.

However, one should not forget that many Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota chose to remain loyal to the Republican Party, and did in fact take great pride in Nelson’s election victory in 1892. It is in part to this attention now turns, through a closer discussion of what role ethnic identity played in the public political discourse from a top-down perspective.

Illustrations:

3:1) "Nordens Aand," Ole Kringen, in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 19, 1890.

2:2) "Campaigne Marsch for den Norske Amerikaner," P. Ydstie in *Rodhuggeren*, August 28, 1894.

3:3) "Gud Job On Kaptol," Ole Olson, (Allegedly R. B. Andersson), in "Skal man rope Hurra eller klede seg i Sek og Aske," Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, July 31, 1894.

3:4) "Fra Filistertown," Methusalem to *Rodhuggeren*, January 23, 1894.

Chapter 4 – Ethnic Identity from a Top-down Perspective

This chapter centers primarily on editorial expressions of ethnic identity. Both strictly organizational statements and statements projecting specific issues and values are relevant to analyze. The topic-related statements indicate how the composition of content in the three divergent newspapers changed from year to year, while the organizational statements signify differences and changes in their political outlooks. Interesting parts of the statistical data which has been derived from the source material is more applicable in the following discussion about the relative significance of ethnic identity as a motivation for public political expressions by the political elite than it was in the bottom-up perspective of the previous chapter. Due to different levels of editorial intervention in and construction of the political debate in the newspapers, this is especially true for the statistical material from *Nordvesten*.

The first section of this chapter discusses how and why changes in the political outlooks of the newspapers seem to have influenced the extent to which and the manner in which various perceptions of ethnic identity were expressed. Emphasis is primarily given to material from *Nordvesten* and *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*. As demonstrated in chapter three, explicit expressions of ethnic identity only accounted for a small percentage of what was discussed in the public political debate. A more nuanced analysis of how and why editors made use of these few but interesting ethnically infused expressions, ranging from subtle references to the agricultural background of Alliance politicians to undisguised use of ethnic appeals, may give further insight into the role perceptions of ethnic identity played in the discourse in the press at the time. Focus then shifts to a more nuanced analysis of the role perceptions of ethnic identity seem to have played from a top-down perspective in discussions of some particular events. More specifically, a closer look at how the three divergent newspapers in terms of ethnic references and expressions reacted to a political speech Knute Nelson held at Elbow Lake October 25, 1892, may shed light on how the political outlooks of the editors defined their style and content with regard to ethnic identity. Also, the incident offers an interesting glimpse into the everyday challenges politicians at the time had to face. Finally, a conclusion considers what the findings of the chapter from a wider perspective may tell about the relative significance of ethnic identity for political discussion in the press.

The extent to and manner in which perceptions of ethnic identity were communicated in a political context varied from newspaper to newspaper according to its political outlook. For example, while *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* primarily centered on vaguely ethnic agricultural-

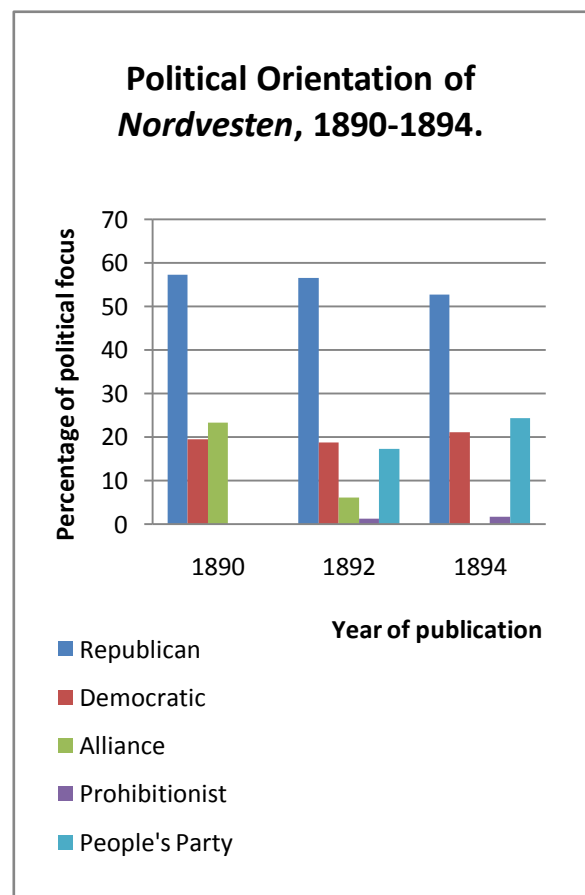
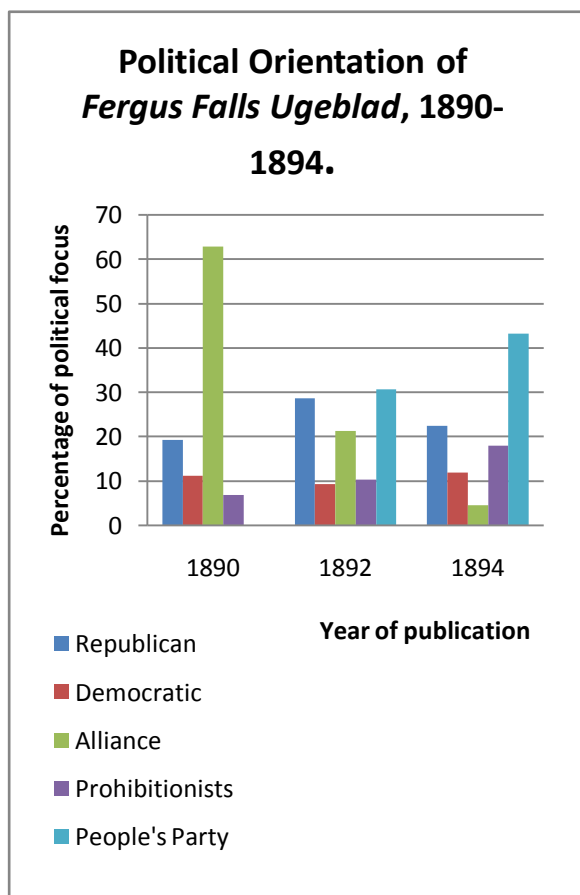
political links in 1890 and on faith-based religious-political connections in 1894, *Nordvesten* frequently appealed to ethnic patronage and national symbols. As is discussed below, the editors of all three newspapers seem to have been appreciative of the fact that too explicit use of direct ethnic appeals could alienate Norwegian American readers who were ambiguous towards mixing nationality and politics.²⁸⁵ Editors and politicians exploited a common Norwegian heritage in a similar way as Norwegian Americans from the middle and lower classes did, as demonstrated in chapter three. Both groups actively used perceptions of ethnic identity to address and understand contemporary political developments, and to manipulate readers. The dichotomy between wanting to be accepted as true Americans and the wish to both celebrate their national heritage and the temptation to use it as a resource for political influence may have weighed heavier on the editors than on ordinary Norwegian American farmers. Maybe this in part may explain why the number of explicit expressions of ethnic identity in general was low in the reform-oriented newspapers, and why this number in *Nordvesten* decreased between 1890 and 1894. Due to a context in which Norwegian Americans where expressions of national pride and allegiance had the potential to estrange persons of Norwegian descent from the society in which they lived and from the political movements of which they were active members, the editors in the public political discourse exercised caution when exploiting perceptions of ethnic identity as a resource for political communication.

Political Outlook and Perceptions of Ethnic Identity

As discussed previously, different cultural, political, and social characteristics of the editors' backgrounds to a significant extent seem to have determined the political orientation of their newspapers. A short recount of the most significant disparities is perhaps required. Søren Listoe of *Nordvesten* had for more than a decade been a part of the Republican Party organization. For example, he was the American consul in Dusseldorf in 1892-1893, and he had held the position as Register of the U.S Land Office at Fergus Falls in the early 1880s.²⁸⁶ Both of these positions were party appointments. His loyalty to the Republican Party ran deep, and the newspaper he edited was during the early 1890s an unwavering Republican organ.²⁸⁷ Anfin Solem in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, by contrast, had spent most of his time both in Norway and in America working as a farmer and teacher.²⁸⁸ In part because of this background, he increasingly supported the Farmers' Alliance movement prior to 1890.²⁸⁹ One consequence of this was that he wholeheartedly supported the farmer organizations' independent push for political power in the 1890 election. In 1892, Solem's skepticism

towards several individuals and some policies of the new People’s Party on the one hand, and his enthusiasm for the nomination of Knute Nelson on the other, partly explain why *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* established itself as an independent newspaper.²⁹⁰ Towards the 1894 election he increasingly embraced the principles of the Prohibitionist Party, and consolidated the politically autonomous outlook of his newspaper.²⁹¹ The statistical overview of the political orientation of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Nordvesten* from 1890 to 1894 reflects these developments. Statistics for *Rodhuggeren* are found in Appendix: 2 table 3:11.

Tables 3:9-3:10. The political orientation of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Nordvesten*, 1890-1894. The tables below illustrate the extent to which *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Nordvesten* presented information about the different political parties between 1890 and 1894. A more nuanced overview over the extent to which this coverage was slanted positively or negatively is found in Appendix: 2.



After a short deliberation on the most interesting tendencies exemplified in the tables above, their implications for expressions of ethnic identity in the press is discussed in greater detail. Several developments stand out as significant when interpreting the political orientation of

Fergus Falls Ugeblad. First, the press exposure of Alliance activities decreased dramatically during the four years that have been studied. In 1890 more than six in ten political statements revolved around the Alliance Party or the politically oriented organizational activities of local Farmers' Alliances in the region. In 1892 Solem's coverage of Alliance activities had decreased markedly to only around 20 percent. In 1894, less than 5 percent of the political material of the newspaper concerned the activities of the Farmers' Alliances.²⁹² Second, the newspaper's exposure of Republican Party matters increased from around 20 percent in 1890 to almost thirty percent in 1892. At the same time, the People's Party entered the political stage with coverage of a little more than 30 percent. Third, the Prohibitionist Party's publicity in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* increased steadily from around 7 percent in 1890 to around 18 percent in 1894. Not surprisingly, the political outlook of *Nordvesten* was far more stable. The coverage of Republican Party matters decreased slightly between 1890 and 1894, but still more than one in two political statements revolved around the GOP. Listoe's coverage of the Alliance Party dropped significantly from more than 20 percent in 1890 to none in 1894. The People's Party had replaced the Alliance as a politically significant enemy. The exposure of Democratic Party matters remained stable around 20 percent during the whole period. Whereas in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* all parties received both positive and negative exposure, in *Nordvesten* nearly every piece of news about the Republican Party was given a positive slant, while almost all the newspaper's coverage of political competitors was pitched negatively.²⁹³

The following paragraphs connect the most relevant of these developments to the extent and the manner in which perceptions of ethnic identity were expressed in the newspapers. Focus centers on how the editors' divergent backgrounds and political orientations influenced expressions of ethnic identity in the public political discourse. First, a closer look at the implications of Solem's focus on the Alliance Party in 1890 opens the way for a closer analysis of how editors may have exploited the central role agricultural-political connections evidently played for the political self-assertion of many Norwegian Americans in the region. Then, focus shifts to a discussion of the degree to which the noted increase in political focus on prohibitionism in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* between 1890 and 1894 may have had consequences for how perceptions ethnic identity were communicated in a political context. Finally, *Nordvesten*'s consistent political support of the Republican Party in general and Knute Nelson and other Norwegian American candidates in particular invites a nuanced analysis of the relative importance and developments over time of editorial appeals to ethnic identity in the form of national allegiance to political candidates of Norwegian descent.

Rural Connections – American and Norwegian influences

As discussed in chapter three, the Farmers' Alliance's notion of politicizing everyday farmers was familiar to many Norwegian Americans. Evidence of the extent to which this idea in 1890 saturated the pages of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* is not restricted to readers' letters alone. For example, as is illustrated below, in a regular weekly section of the newspaper covering the election campaign from August to October 1890 editor Solem forcefully promoted voting for several Alliance candidates by emphasizing their agricultural background.²⁹⁴ On the one hand, this may primarily be explained as a natural consequence of the fact that the Alliance movement was a farmer's movement, and that Norwegian Americans in general were an agriculturally inclined ethnic group. On the other hand, the detail with which the candidates' agricultural experiences were analyzed and presented may indicate that the editorial motivation for this exposure may have been more composite. Bearing in mind the importance of rural traditions and values for perceptions of ethnic identity among Norwegian Americans, these expressions can from one perspective be interpreted as subtle political appeals to the agricultural self-assertion of potential Norwegian American voters. However, in light of the fact that many Norwegian Americans as noted to varying degrees had integrated into American society, one may perhaps less ambiguously connect them to the American cultural traditions of independent yeoman farmers, pioneers, and frontiersmen. It should be noted that editor Solem did not solely focus on the agricultural proficiency and experiences of the Alliance candidates. He also emphasized other individual accomplishments, for example military service during the Civil War, education, previously held public offices, and personal history.²⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Solem's central interest in rural connections is noteworthy.

For instance, in September 1890 the editor informed his readers that Kittel Halvorson, after having fought for the Union in the Civil War, settled down in the complete wilderness of western Minnesota. Since then, he has "(...) lived on and farmed a normal homestead. He has for a long time had about 125 acres for production, own between 50 and 60 horned cattle, as well as a few horses, but personally he calls this small-scale farming."²⁹⁶ The Dutch American John B. Hompe, the editor declares, has a "(...) beautiful, well-maintained and well-constructed farm in a relatively good condition, and he participates in all the work on the farm."²⁹⁷ One pronounced reason why Solem accentuated the agricultural background of Alliance politicians was to exemplify how they were different from politicians in the old established parties.²⁹⁸ In fact, leaning heavily on the central assumption that farmers were the social class best qualified to accomplish political reform, he frequently emphasizes the

occupational background of the Alliance candidates: “(...) Go out and visit every one of these men now (the five farmers and one mason on the ticket), and you will find that five of them are covered with hayseed and the sixth is covered with the dust of chalk. (...) They are men who know what it means to ‘eat your food by the sweat of your brow.’”²⁹⁹ It was generally understood that politicians in the current corrupt political establishment were their antithesis.

At the same time as this emphasis on the rural connection of Alliance politicians may be appreciated as an editorial appeal to both Norwegian Americans’ political identification as farmers and their recognition of American frontier myths, its significance for the wider public political Norwegian-language discourse should not be exaggerated. If agricultural association was what uniformly was thought to determine support for political candidates among Norwegian Americans in the region at the time, Søren Listoe of *Nordvesten* would probably not have used the words below in his criticism of Alliance candidate for Congress, Kittel Halvorson:

(...) Kittel Halvorson [is] as known also a candidate for Congress, and while some Norwegians due to nationalist sentiments may be tempted to vote for Kittel, we tell you: do not! Halvorson is a good and skillful man on his farm, but he is not fit for Congress. (...) let us not send a man there who (...) will embarrass us [Norwegian Americans] in plain sight of the entire union.”³⁰⁰

The focus in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* on the rural background of Alliance politicians is perhaps best understood as an appeal to some aspects of ethnic identity among many. As to some extent noted in chapter three, and as is discussed in greater detail below, the manner in which the divergent editors used ethnic references to rally political support among Norwegian American voters varied greatly, both from newspaper to newspaper and from year to year. *Nordvesten*, for example, often appealed to ethnic sentiments. As noted, more explicit political references to a Norwegian heritage were also present in Solem’s newspaper *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*. He printed at times both letters and campaign lyrics with strong ethnic overtones. On occasion he addressed ethnic features of Norwegian American candidates in a political context himself. For example, he informed his readers in September of 1890 that the other day he had heard a man proclaim “(...) Kittel Halvorson must be a man of great ideas, because he was born at the roots of Gaustadfjeld [A range of wild and rugged mountains in Norway].”³⁰¹ The editor of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* thus in a subtle way seems to have appreciated the political importance of national origin. At the same time, *Nordvesten* did not, although in 1890 primarily making use of ethnic appeals to rally political support among Norwegian Americans, ignore the political importance of the agricultural orientation of most Norwegian American voters. Though editor Listoe weighed Halvorson and found him too

light for the position of congressman, he asserted that “(...) Governor Merriam has (...) always been a friend of farmers, and even though they would like to have Owen [The Alliance’s gubernational candidate] as Governor, they will much prefer Merriam [The Republican gubernational candidate] to Wilson [The Democratic gubernational candidate].”³⁰² Interesting in the sense that it may signify a shift in political focus from traditional old-party rhetoric to class-related argumentation, *Nordvesten* in 1892 and 1894 made perennial an appeal to disassociate the Republican Party from the social and economic elite. In 1892, for example, Listoe asserted in a report about the Republican convention that “The Scandinavians were strongly represented at the convention (...) and among these were there many [participants] who during the last years have been convinced Populists, but who now have returned to their old party. Indeed, they have realized that the Republican Party is the true people’s party.”³⁰³ Thus, both editors in their own way seem to have appreciated the fact that the political self-assertion of most Norwegian Americans in the region was agricultural in nature. It seems feasible to assume that this rural connection for many Norwegian immigrant farmers in the region was conditioned to a greater extent by past and current experiences in America than by memories and attitudes from Norway.

“Complete” Reform

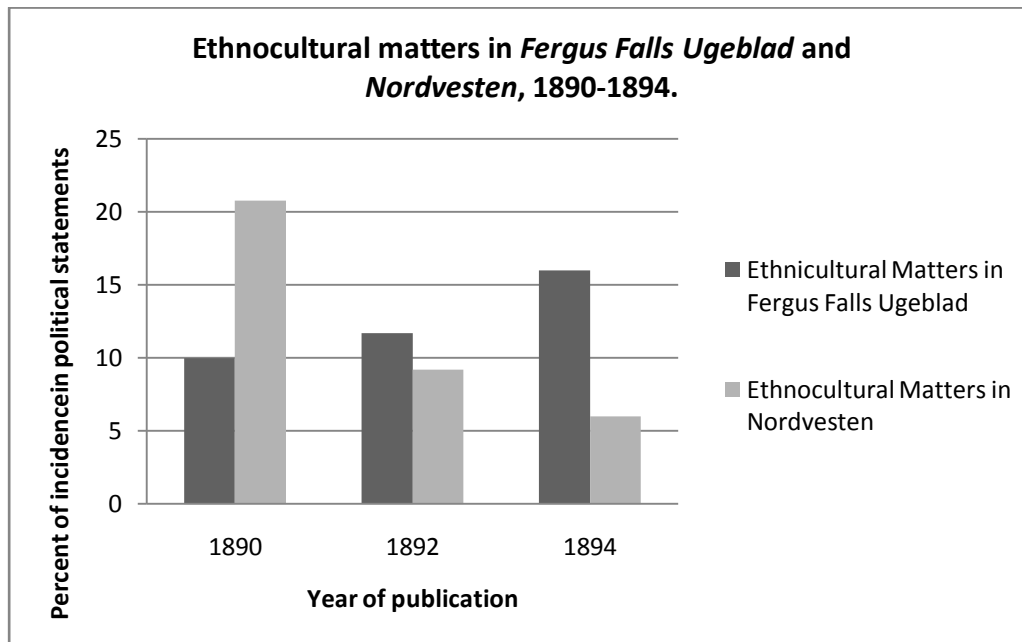
As noted, editor Solem after 1891 supported a variety of candidates from different political parties. Whereas the relatively subtle expressions of ethnic identity in his newspaper in 1890 tended to center on agricultural-political connections, in 1892 and 1894 they changed. The editor’s fundamental political ambition of cleansing politics of corruption remained untouched, but the means by which this goal should be reached changed distinctively. As discussed in chapter two, after the 1890 election *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* argued that one should vote for men rather than for principles. Two important consequences of this were that the newspaper especially in 1892 but also in 1894 to some extent voiced support for Knute Nelson while at the same time endorsing parts of the People’s Party ticket, and that the number and strength of arguments for political-religious amalgamation increased as Solem steadily moved his venture into support of the Prohibitionist Party camp.³⁰⁴ “Kodak,” a correspondent in *Rodhuggeren*, asserted bemusedly in 1894 that

(...) nothing is more hilarious in this election campaign than the buffoon-jumps of Solem. His soporific, old-fashioned grave-style tone does not befit all these wild, twisted jumps. But the leaps work like a comfortable variation. One does not any longer fall to sleep by reading his long articles.³⁰⁵

Several readers and the editors of *Nordvesten* and *Rodhuggeren* questioned Solem's true agenda, and Norwegian Americans in the region seem to have been quite confused about the nature of his political outlook.³⁰⁶ One important reason for this seems to have been Solem's decision to work against certain politicians within the reform-movement who did not live up to his ideals of pure reform. In 1892, for example, he supported neither Norwegian American Haldor Boen, the People's Party candidate who was elected congressman for the Seventh District in 1892, nor Ignatius Donnelly, who was the People's Party candidate for governor in Minnesota that year. Solem explained in October that Boen was "dishonest" and "motivated only by the prospect of personal gains," and, based on the allegation that Donnelly was a part of the established corrupt political system he asked his readers "(...) do we not have the right to deny throwing ourselves at the feet of such a master? Do we not have the right to refuse being delivered to the buyer, after having been sold by such a political trader? Did we not abandon the old parties precisely because we wanted to protest against machine politics and against serving as critter in a market?"³⁰⁷ When *Rodhuggeren* as noted in chapter three claimed that Solem's newspaper had betrayed the farmers' cause, this was a truth which should be modified. Even though voicing consistent criticism against certain elements within the People's Party, supporting Nelson over Donnelly in the 1892 election, and primarily backing Prohibitionist candidates in 1894, *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* still endorsed extensive parts of the People's Party ticket in both the 1892 and 1894 election campaigns.³⁰⁸

These developments may in part explain the extent to which ethnocultural matters were discussed in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, as reflected in the table below. While the direct use of ethnic labeling and patronage declined distinctly in *Nordvesten* between 1890 and 1894, and *Rodhuggeren* in 1894, as demonstrated earlier, exercised caution when infusing political arguments with ethnicity, Solem in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* increased his coverage of ethnocultural matters. Interestingly, while it is true that parallels can be drawn between expressions of ethnic identity in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and Norwegian American attitudinal predispositions, the expressions clearly indicate that many Norwegian immigrants also had adopted several traditionally American ideals, myths and memories as their own. Both when referring to the agricultural experiences of Alliance politicians in 1890, as noted above, and when advocating Prohibitionist candidates in 1892 and 1894, as is discussed in greater detail below, editor Solem's arguments reflect how Norwegian Americans slowly were integrating into American society.

Assorted information from Tables 3:2 and 3:3, Ethnocultural matters in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Nordvesten*.



When explaining why the presence of ethnocultural matters increased in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* between 1890 and 1894 one should consider that religion was a more central aspect of Prohibitionism than was ethnicity. In other words, members joined the movement not primarily due to national background, but due to religious or moral-ethical conviction. Thus, the movement drew members from a range of immigrant groups and old-stock Americans, and was accepted as a part of American society.³⁰⁹ In a similar way as the Farmers' Alliance, the movement may have attracted some Norwegian Americans because at the same time as they identified closely with its content, due to experiences in and memories from Norway, it could be used as a gateway into American society. As noted, many Norwegian Americans seem to have identified closely with American principles. Indeed, when Solem in 1894 expressed why he believed the Prohibitionist Party to be the best suited vehicle for “complete” political reform, his rhetoric echoed a fundamental idea of American democracy that many contemporary native-born Americans would have recognized, if they could have read Norwegian. The editor asserted that

(...) a convention of Prohibitionists is admittedly a little smaller than another party's convention, but the little which is there, is fresh and good. The delegates, who participate, participate only for the sake of the Cause and their love for it. (...) They are prepared to cover all inevitable expenses in relation to the convention and the election campaign themselves. (...) This is an excellent idea. The delegate is then completely independent man. He does not owe anything to anyone, and acts like a free man according to his principles.³¹⁰

The variations in the political orientation of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* over time did thus distinctively influence the extent to which ethnocultural matters were discussed, and the ways in which appeals to a perceived ethnic identity was expressed in a political context. Solem's expressions of support for the Alliance Party in 1890 and for the Prohibitionist Party in 1892 and 1894 may from one perspective be appreciated as an echo of how many Norwegian Americans in the region enthusiastically engaged in movements which facilitated integration into American society while at the same time allowing the ethnic group to value important aspects of their national heritage. Simultaneously, Solem's rhetorical use of American ideals indicates that the process of integration into American society for many of his readers was well underway. The subtle expressions of ethnically infused content in *Rodhuggeren* discussed in chapter three can also be understood as a reflection of this. It is feasible to assume that the editors of the reform-oriented newspapers to a greater extent than their readers reflected on the dichotomy between celebrating national attachment and being accepted as Americans. This may be one reason why Solem, Hagen and Otelie seldom explicitly celebrated the national background of Norwegian American candidates. The political organizations of reform which they supported were in general appreciated as American movements of protest, to which a variety of ethnic groups contributed. Because the ideals of these political movements so closely corresponded to several values (like agrarianism and prohibitionism) which many Norwegian Americans identified closely with, perhaps one did not see the need to risk alienation by openly appealing to ethnic patronage and national symbols to influence potential voters. As is discussed below, the editorship of the Republican organ *Nordvesten* may have made similar reflections, when between 1890 and 1894 directing the focus of their political debate from ethnic labeling and national patronage to celebration of Knute Nelson's Civil War experience and criticism of political corruption within the People's Party.

National Patronage and the Knute Nelson Tradition

Ethnicity in the form of allegiance to Norwegian American Republican political candidates due to their national background was more widespread and explicitly expressed in *Nordvesten* than it was in the newspapers of reform. In 1890, as reflected in the table above, more than one in five political statements revolved around *ethnocultural matters*. Whereas the content of this subject category in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* was composite, ranging from subtle references to the "awakening Norwegian American farmer," via ethnically infused campaign lyrics, to arguments for political-religious amalgamation, *ethnocultural matters* in *Nordvesten* for the

most part were constituted by references to the importance of ethnic patronage.³¹¹ The marked decrease in the extent to which *ethnocultural matters* were expressed in *Nordvesten* between 1890 and 1894 may reflect the growing skepticism towards explicitly connecting nationality and politics, discussed in chapter three.



4:1 Fredrik P. Brown

In 1890, Listoe in *Nordvesten* still quite frequently emphasized the national background of the few Scandinavian candidates among the Republican nominations in an explicit manner. For example, the editor emphasized enthusiastically the Norwegian background of Fredrik P. Brown, the only Norwegian American on the state ticket as the GOP's nominee for the position of State Secretary. Listoe informed his readers that Brown was as a typical Norwegian American and a source of pride for his countrymen. He pointed out that Brown's grandfather was in fact the well known Bishop Johan Nordahl Brun of Bergen, who among other lyrics wrote the song "For Norway, the Land of Giants."³¹² Although not having a characteristically

Norwegian name, Listoe portrayed Mr. Brown as a man his readers should trust with their votes, much, rhetorically speaking, because of his ethnic background. The editor wrote

(...) oh my God, has it come as far as this, that they [fellow Norwegian American voters], just like Americans, believe no one can be Scandinavian unless his name ends with 'son'? It pleases me to inform you that F. P. Brown, candidate for secretary of state, is Norwegian, and that Mr. Charles Holcomb, candidate for clerk of Supreme Court, is Swedish. Both are honest and competent representatives for their respective nationalities.³¹³

More specifically, Listoe proclaimed, Brown is "(...) devoted to his country of birth with life and soul, and has always participated actively in any movement, which could serve to promote the interests of Norwegians in Minnesota."³¹⁴ Because of this, *Nordvesten* expressed the hope that "(...) no fellow Norwegian on election day will refrain from voting for F. P. Brown."³¹⁵ The candidates' honesty, reliability, and long and quite successful career within the Republican Party were also perennially stressed.

Nordvesten thus in a similar way as the newspapers of reform emphasized certain personal attributes of a candidate and featured these qualities as typically Norwegian. At the same time, editor Listoe focused more explicitly on the importance of national attachment. This comparatively intense emphasis on ethnic patronage constituted a central aspect of the

political debate in the newspaper in 1890. Mr. Brown was not the only Norwegian American to be commemorated. Perhaps due to the lack of Norwegian candidates on the Minnesota ticket in 1890, considerable space was this year devoted to praise of Norwegian American Republican politicians both off the ticket, and in other states.³¹⁶ In 1892 and 1894, the political debate in the newspaper, as one would expect, centered on Knute Nelson's candidacy for governor.



4:2 Knute Nelson

As noted, the “little Norwegian” had for many years been a symbol of national pride and honor among most Norwegian Americans. Now, when he had been nominated for the most prestigious position of political power in Minnesota, it is not surprising that editor Listoe dedicated extensive parts of his newspaper to describe Nelson's background, personality, competence and potential. Statistically speaking, Knute Nelson was mentioned in around 35 percent of all political statements concerned with Republican matters in 1892.³¹⁷ The number was 27 percent in 1894. In 1892, Listoe typically asserted that “(...) we hope that his [Knute Nelson's] countrymen will rally under his banner, as they always

have done. We are looking forward to be able to welcome Knute Nelson as the first Norwegian-born governor in America on January 1, 1893.”³¹⁸ As illustrated, the extent to which *Nordvesten* focused on national attachment and ethnic patronage during these years decreased dramatically, from around 20 percent in 1890, via below 10 percent in 1892, to around 5 percent in 1894. One example of the reduction in ethnic references may be found in the newspaper's presentation of the re-nominated Mr. Brown in 1892. As a contrast to 1890, editor Listoe did not make many references to the importance of his national background, apart from introducing him as a “fellow national.”³¹⁹

The growing skepticism among many Norwegian Americans in the region towards mixing nationality and politics may in part explain the development illustrated above. The editorship of *Nordvesten* experienced as noted in chapter two a significant loss of readers in northwestern Minnesota between 1890 and 1894. It is feasible to assume that failing sales numbers may have informed Listoe's decision to modify the extent to which and manner in

which he used ethnically infused arguments in a political context. Another reason may have been the fact that Knute Nelson was perceived as such a strong symbol of ethnic pride and identification that the editor deemed it unnecessary to emphasize his national background. Also, one should consider the fact that Knute Nelson had accomplished much in America since he arrived as a 6 year old child in 1849. Positive experiences in his new place of residence, particularly his participation in the Civil War, provided an opportunity for editors to commemorate fellow Norwegian American Knute Nelson not only based on national background, but also based on his achievements in America. As discussed in chapter two, memories of the Civil War was important for the political self-assertion of many earlier Norwegian immigrants in Minnesota.³²⁰

In light of the growing skepticism among many Norwegian Americans in the region towards mixing nationality and politics too explicitly, maybe this in part explains why *Nordvesten* in its celebration of Knute Nelson increasingly tended to emphasize his American past more than his national background. For example, in the last issue before the election in 1892 Listoe informed readers that “(...) While Knute Nelson marched against the enemy in 1861, the chairman of the Democratic central committee, Lewis Baker, at that time the editor of the

newspaper *Register* in Wheeling, West Virginia, sat at home and besmirched the best men of this country, spoke derisively about the Union troopers, and asserted that the Civil War was a failure.”³²¹

Similar arguments were used in the 1894 election.³²² The political exploitation of Norwegian American politicians’ Civil War experiences was thus more explicit in *Nordvesten* than in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*. Editor Listoe’s interest in Knute Nelson’s participation the Civil War can from a wider perspective be appreciated as part



of the more general tendency among several immigrant groups in America to argue that, by participation in the Civil War, they had earned a right to be accepted as true Americans.³²³ At the same time, though, *Nordvesten* still at times printed articles filled with ethnic appeals. For example, editor Listoe proclaimed in October 1892 that “(...) Let us Scandinavians now in truth gather under one banner and make Knute Nelson governor of Minnesota. This time we have power in our own hands, if we only can stand together and not let liars confuse our Norwegian heads. (...) Scandinavians who despise Knute Nelson also despise their own home country, Norway. So, [you] Scandinavian, wake up to fight!”³²⁴

Not all Norwegian immigrants in northwestern Minnesota were as supportive of Knute Nelson’s political career as editor Listoe. Norwegian American contributors to the public political discourse in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Rodhuggeren* rarely expressed perceptions of ethnic identity when discussing him. Editor Solem of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* gave the impression of endorsing Knute Nelson in both the 1892 and 1894 elections, but he never resorted to the same degree of ethnic appeals as was presented in *Nordvesten*. The editors of *Rodhuggeren* expressed mostly disgust when discussing their governor, and warned the readers about the instrumental role Knute Nelson played as a political “ethnic magnet” for Norwegian Americans. For example, in October 1894 they asserted that “(...) little honor gains our nationality from a man who lets himself be used to the advantage of Moneyed Power to rouse his fellow countrymen into the greedy mouth of corporations.”³²⁵ Editors, politicians and readers in all the three divergent newspapers frequently claimed that political enemies were corrupt, dishonest, or at least vaguely connected to moneyed power. Most Norwegian Americans at the time appear to have communicated just as effectively *against* political enemies as *for* the political party they supported. Irrespective of political affiliation, most editors and letter writers seem to have centered their complaints on allegations of dishonesty and corruption. This may be appreciated as a natural result of the tendency among Norwegian Americans to applaud personal qualities like honesty and reliability when expressing political support, as discussed in chapter three.

Besmirching and Dirt-Throwing

As noted, editor Solem of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and readers of both *his* newspaper and *Rodhuggeren* quite often criticized the politician Haldor E. Boen. Lowell Soike demonstrates that one reason for this is traced primarily to personal animosities and internal fights for power within the reform movement.³²⁶ Interestingly, the reason why Norwegian Americans

supposedly should not vote for Mr. Boen was that he was unreliable, and that he allegedly did not live up to the principles he supported as a politician. The most hotly debated example of his supposed dishonesty in 1894 involved the acquisition of a free railway pass. Editor Solem in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* asserted in November 1894 that “(...) Boen and his organ [*Rodhuggeren*] are facing a pathetically peculiar situation after it became known that he uses a free railway pass even though the alleged reformer himself has introduced resolutions against the use of them.”³²⁷ Attacks like these, allegations that different candidates had forfeited the principles they supported and been corrupted by the temptation of money, were very frequently expressed. The temptation to throw dirt at opponents rather than creating a constructive political discussion seems to have been strong for many Norwegian Americans at the time, editors as well as readers. Olaf O. Vinje addressed this tendency in a letter to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* in when he asserted that “(...) instead of trying to carry out a fruitful debate, people now throw themselves at their antagonists with the greed of wild animals, manifesting the worst and most evil a fruitful brain can think of.”³²⁸ Solem was not the only editor to besmirch his political opponents. Both *Rodhuggeren* and *Nordvesten* contained a large number of political attacks. Most of the exposure in *Nordvesten* about the Populist movement and the Democratic Party between 1890 and 1894 carried a negative slant, while most of what was written in *Rodhuggeren* about the Republican Party was destructive in tone and content.³²⁹

In *Nordvesten*, the Democratic Party was frequently attacked more directly than the Alliance movement and the People’s Party, perhaps because the editor did not want to alienate potential reform-oriented Norwegian American voters. Editor Listoe in October 1890 asserted that “(...) we have strictly avoided any attempt at throwing dirt on the candidates of the opposition”³³⁰ Ironically, in the very same issue a letter was printed which demonstrated the opposite. A man signing his letter “Republikaner” tells his readers about a portrait that he would like to show them. He solemnly asks them to study it in great detail;

“(...) Wilson [the Democratic gubernational candidate] is, according to every wise man who knows his political history, the most corrupt, the most dangerous, and the most unscrupulous conspirator and servant of monopoly in the entire West. As a politician in this state, as a legislative member, a man of congress, he has always been the same; a deceitful, keen, eloquent demagogue and seducer. If the shadow sides of this man’s political saga were to be illuminated, as they are portrayed by his previous co-workers, no proper Democrat would vote for him, let alone a Republican. What do you think, dear reader, about this picture? It is a beautiful portrait, is it not? Would you vote for the Farmer Alliance candidate for governor, Owen, if you knew you by that choice helped a man like Thomas Wilson to gain the position of governor? I think I hear you say “No, I wouldn’t!”³³¹

The temptation to connect political adversaries and parties to corruption was evidently strong.³³² In *Nordvesten*, one frequently recurring argument in both the 1890 and 1892 election was that by voting for the Alliance ticket or the People's Party ticket, Norwegian American farmers would lend a hand to the 'corrupt Democrats.' In October 1892, for example, Listoe informed his readers that "(...) there are many men within the people's Party who are bulldogged by five or six corrupt 'leaders.' Much is at stake, and it would be unreasonable, if Populists in the next legislature would help the Democrats to power. (...) This trade-policy exemplifies clearly enough, how much these 'reformers' care about their 'principles.'"³³³

At times, other ethnic groups were criticized collectively for their allegedly apathetic political nature. For example, one correspondent from Minneapolis wrote in *Rodhuggeren* in July 1894 that "(...) the Swedes are supposedly the only working class group that vote for the Republican Party. As everyone knows, the Swedes are generally speaking a politically indifferent people. They have no newspapers except for spit-licking publications. Despite this, quite a number of them now join us. Indeed, politics exists currently not only in the newspapers, it is in the air."³³⁴ Listoe in *Nordvesten*, on the other hand, argued that distinctions between the Scandinavian-American sub-nationalities were almost non-existent. He asserted in September 1894 that both Norwegian and Swedish politicians in fact represented all Scandinavians in Minnesota, and that "(...) only rarely would a Swede let his party down because he does not want to vote for a Norwegian, and vice versa. In politics, one only talks about Scandinavians."³³⁵ As illustrated by previous quotes (for example page 86), Listoe used the terms "Scandinavian American" and "Norwegian American" as synonyms. Probably in part conditioned by factors like time of arrival and political affiliation, this underscores that Norwegian Americans understood the terms differently.

Besmirching of politicians was accompanied with slander about competing newspapers. *Rodhuggeren* reflected in January 1894 on the deeper meaning of a joke which circulated in the Norwegian-language press at the time. "(...) The man who wrote the letter [in which the joke was expressed] was perhaps more hilarious than he realized. *Nordvesten* in St. Paul, Jim Hills Scandinavian mouthpiece, asserted the other day that 'a political party, which had such a good and respectable organ as *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, needed a new one just as much as an elephant needs a box of snuff."³³⁶

Parallels

A parallel may be drawn between the tendency in *Nordvesten* to limit its use of arguments based on ethnic patronage and instead appeals to the American experiences of candidates, and the inclination of the newspapers of reform to position themselves within American movements of reform and to appeals to principles and values rather than to national attachment when rallying support. The inevitable blending between cultures in America evidently caused the political self-assertion of many Norwegian Americans to center on contemporary experiences in America, for example, on political developments and economic circumstances in the adopted country. Numerous Norwegian Americans seem to have shared a wish to be accepted as true Americans. At the same time, few Norwegian immigrants appear to have been willing to forfeit their entire cultural heritage to reach this goal. These at time conflicting desires seem to have influenced Norwegian immigrants who were interested in politics. They engaged both at the political stage, trying to create a better future through involvement in American political movements which featured (in part due to Norwegian American contributions) principles and values which correlated with attitudinal dispositions from Norway, and in the public political discourse in the press, trying to redefine old symbols of national identification to address challenges in American society.

The Norwegian American editors, politicians and several of the readers in the public political discourse in northwestern Minnesota between 1890 and 1894 seem to have reflected on the balance between the need for or temptation to use references to a national heritage and elements of a shared ethnic identity when communicating a political message, and the fear of being alienated from American society. In part due to the wish of many Norwegian immigrants to be accepted as Americans and the resulting identification with American society, for example, some Norwegian Americans expressed perceptions of ethnic identity which indicate a close attachment to American history and American principles. For example, one reader of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* in 1890 wrote “(...) Let us go back in time to 1776, when our forefathers risked both lives and goods for their cause. We have not yet been put to so great a threat. Indeed, we do not have to fight against English bayonets. Yet, be aware that we have to fight against English gold, and perhaps that is more dangerous than shining bayonets.”³³⁷ Thus, expressions of ethnic identity in the press were often characterized by dualism. While it is apparent that numerous Norwegian Americans still identified closely with Norwegian culture, history and mores, they had also come to acknowledge many of the ideals and traditions of their new place of residence.

“Real Norwegian Viking Blood” at Elbow Lake

A closer look at how the divergent newspapers responded to a political meeting with Knute Nelson at Elbow Lake, October 25, 1892, illustrates the various ways in which editors, readers and politicians in response to one specific incident drew upon perceptions of ethnic identity to interpret and report current political affairs according to their political loyalties. In addition, the example in an interesting way illustrates the practical challenges politicians at the time sometimes faced when trying to communicate with potential voters, and provides a valuable and interesting glimpse into everyday political interaction in the period. Reports from the event illustrate in an interesting way how the political and cultural distance between the Republican political elite and ordinary Norwegian American farmers in northwestern Minnesota could lead to violent confrontations. Knute Nelson, despite being Norwegian American, faced significant opposition from several of his countrymen. The incident may be interpreted as a reflection of regional political differences. Reports in *Nordvesten* from Nelson’s political meetings in the southern and eastern parts of Minnesota often mentioned that he received a warm welcome.³³⁸ The reports from his meeting in Elbow Lake, by contrast, focused on hostility and discord. The following description is based on a selection of editorials and letters to the editor in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, *Nordvesten*, and *Rodhuggeren*. Most facts have been cross-referenced with information printed in the *Pioneer Press*, as expressed by Millard Gieske and Steven Keillor in their biography of Knute Nelson.³³⁹

In October 1892 Knute Nelson toured the northwestern region of the Minnesota to get back some of the Norwegian voters who had gone into the Alliance two years earlier.³⁴⁰ He had come from the “safety of the Republican south” as Gieske and Keillor put it, to a more hostile political environment. The meeting attracted a large audience. Since there was a lack of room in the courthouse, a lot of people remained outside in the streets. Many carried torches, and the mood was reportedly exuberant; the crowd was too wound up to remain silent.³⁴¹ Due to noise from the crowd, most importantly several vigorous and evidently provocative cries of support for Lawler (the Democratic candidate for governor), Knute Nelson had to ask the Sheriff and his constables to restore order outside. More precisely, according to one source, he supposedly asked “(...) is no one brave enough to go outside and choke off these by Democratic whiskey-contaminated beasts?”³⁴² The problem was that people were no quieter inside the courthouse. Somebody had either deliberately or not, reports disagree about intentions here, stepped on a dog. The result was some serious whimpering and barking. This again awoke a baby, who started crying. Nelson, who just had started talking, allegedly

commented aloud that he “(...) found it difficult to hold a speech among barking dogs and crying babies.”³⁴³ This did not go down well with the audience. The baby’s mother allegedly took offence, started crying herself, and left the room.

The crowd remained impatient as Nelson went on to talk about the success of the protective tariff in America, and conditions back in Norway. He proclaimed, probably aiming at the restless members of the crowd, that if there were people here who did not want to listen to what he had to say, they could leave the courtroom, and if people were not happy with conditions here in America, they were free to go back to Norway where they had to survive on “(...) cheap porridge, sour milk and stale ale.”³⁴⁴ He then went on with some less than graceful jokes about reformers from Pomme de Terre. There were, to Nelson’s support, a noisy group of people from that township in the hall, whose motives for joining the meeting could be questioned. According to Listoe in *Nordvesten*, the Democrats and Populists in Grant County had plotted to attend the meeting only to cause trouble.³⁴⁵ A man in the audience threw an insult back at Nelson, saying they did not need his personal attacks. When Nelson responded, he directed his anger at the wrong person, Tobias Sauby, instead of the aggressor. This was probably because Sauby was one of the noisiest people in the hall, according to several sources.³⁴⁶ Nelson’s unclear attack created some confusion, and people started to ask provoking questions about the tariff. After having tried to answer politely, Nelson reacted with anger, and soon he was shouting “(...) shut up, you demagogues from Pomme de Terre.”³⁴⁷

What follows was described by B. T. Hagen in a letter to the editor of *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* as a “Polish Parliament.”³⁴⁸ Sauby allegedly rose to ironically protest against the “honor” of being called a demagogue, while a man from Elbow Lake who had asked the provoking question which preceded Nelson’s misguided response tried to explain to Nelson that he, as everyone could see, was from Elbow Lake, not Pomme de Terre. Both sides were now shouting, “(...) he was not from Pomme de Terre, I say!” and “(...) You shut up!”³⁴⁹ Nelson had by now been talking for about two hours, constantly interrupted by enemy elements in the crowd. In the end, according to Sauby (*Fergus Falls Ugeblad* also presented his explanation of what had happened), Knute Nelson clenched his fists and screamed “(...) I will fix him.” After having tried, unsuccessfully, to create order for some time, Nelson ran to the middle of the room and grabbed Sauby by his throat, asking him if he would please remain silent. Sauby, who had a young child on his lap, said yes. Republican fellow politician Reynolds

proclaimed “(...) don’t do that, Knute” got a grip on the Norwegian American and pulled him away.³⁵⁰ Nelson said to the aggressor, according to Sauby himself, that if a child had not been on his lap, he would have pulled him out on the floor.³⁵¹ Upon this, Sauby asked if someone could please hold his child, but he was halted by his wife who asked him to behave as long as she was there. *Nordvesten* emphasized that Sauby was a large man, almost twice as big as Nelson, and reported that Nelson “(...) grabbed him [Sauby] in the collar of his shirt, pressed him back in his seat, (...) and proclaimed that if he could not behave himself, he [Nelson] would, transport him through the window and out on the street.”³⁵²

After some time the situation eventually calmed down, and Nelson was allowed to finish his speech. Sauby never got an apology from Nelson. Later, he put out an arrest warrant for the politician. Nelson was arrested in Dalton, but was released after having paid \$200 in bonds, and the case was postponed until November 16. Editor Listoe in *Nordvesten* added some extra pieces of information about this process which were not mentioned in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*. According to him, after the meeting, Mr. Sauby was approached by some Democrats who allegedly saw this as a great opportunity to create political intrigue. They convinced the farmer to have Nelson arrested, and “(...) a fanatic People’s Party man who worked as justice of the peace in Grant County was willing to help and actually put into effect an arrest warrant against Knute Nelson.”³⁵³

Editorial opinion on the meeting varied according to the newspaper’s political point of view. In *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, neither the editor nor the readers connected the incident to perceptions of ethnic identity. Focus centered on presenting all the facts in a truthful way so that readers could make up their personal opinions. B. T. Hagen wrote that “(...) a lot of buzz and gossip have circulated in the newspapers and among people about Mr. Nelsons’ meeting here the 25 the other day. I write these lines to make sure everyone may attain some honest and truthful enlightenment about the situation, so that every one of you may judge personally who you think is to blame.”³⁵⁴ In a similar vein, editor Solem presented several eye-witness descriptions of what had happened, and maintained a neutral tone. When describing the circumstances around the arrest of Nelson, for example, he informed readers that “(...) Nelsons’ political opponents proclaim, that Nelson convinced the constable to allow him to post bond without going to court. His friends maintain that Thorvald Olsen was the one who settled the matter in this way.”³⁵⁵ The incident at Elbow Lake was characterized as nothing more than an “inconvenience.”

While *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* remained impartial, editor Listoe in *Nordvesten* under the heading “A brave gubernational candidate” introduces his article about the episode by asserting that “(...) Last Tuesday evening Knute Nelson had the chance to prove that real Nordic Viking blood runs in his veins.”³⁵⁶ Nelson only did what was right, and he allegedly gained many new followers as a result of how he conducted himself. Listoe writes that “(...) every honorable man, irrespective of political affiliation, agrees that Nelson deserves to be thanked and commemorated for his manly actions.”³⁵⁷ The contrast between how the incident is interpreted in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Nordvesten* reflects their political differences as discussed above. Not surprisingly, the latter newspaper uses ethnic appeals to spin the occurrence. The editor use parts of the Norwegian Viking heritage and the associated notion of a brave and manly hero to manipulate the flow of information. At the same time, Listoe manages to put the Democratic Party and the People’s Party in a bad light through his allegations of conspiracy and corruption both prior to and after the meeting. Editor Solem in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, on the other hand, remains true to his principle of honesty and political independence. The fact that Solem did not openly criticize Knute Nelson for his actions was typical for the political coverage of Nelson in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* at the time. His support for the Norwegian American gubernational candidate was seldom expressed openly.



4:4 Minnesota's Thor

The incident at Elbow Lake seems to have made a deep and long-lasting impression on many Norwegian Americans in the region at the time. Two years later, in August 1894, the editors in *Rodhuggeren* printed a poem by the amateur poet Jens Andersen called “Minnesota’s Thor.” (A translation is found at the bottom of the page.)⁵ The setting of the poem resembles the imaginary folk-inspired universe discussed in chapter three. The writer draws upon a Viking reference similar to the

⁵ “Minnesota’s Thor”: 1) Our Knute sat great and powerful in his seat // and never again thought about deceit and tricks. // Around [him] sat legislators who joyfully // lit a Cigar whenever his Excellency twittered. 2) Then, one of the ‘pillars of society’ stood forth // and sang: You are powerful, yeah, wise and great. // Even though small of composure one cannot // deny, that you are Minnesota’s Thor. 3) By Elbow Lake the strikes of your Mjølner [The mythological war-hammer of Thor] fell hard // they silenced every Populist. // Yeah, even every ‘Fido’ [(barking) dog] and every small baby // remembers with fear the last time they saw you.

one used by *Nordvesten* two years earlier, but the context and purpose is different. The poet invokes the notion of Thor smiting enemies with his war-hammer *Mjølner* to create an ironic picture of a physically small man who uses great force to scare dogs and babies. *Rodhuggeren* thus expressed perceptions of ethnic identity to comment on the incidence at Elbow Lake in the form of poetic political satire. This illustrates to how the editors in *Rodhuggeren* at times also expressed parts of a common Norwegian heritage. The editors did this in a very subtle way, and the few times they explicitly resorted to ethnic references in a political context, it was in the form of satire.

Conclusion – Dualisms

In a similar vein as ordinary Norwegian Americans, the political elite exploited what was considered usable parts of a common national heritage to communicate politically with the readers. The methods of this communication varied from newspaper to newspaper. To a significant extent the political loyalties of the divergent newspapers and the backgrounds of their editors seem to have influenced the extent to which and manner in which their newspapers drew upon a common Norwegian heritage, made use of ethnic labeling, and emphasized ethnic patronage. While *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* called attention to agricultural-political connections in 1890 and political-religious amalgamation in 1892 and 1894, *Nordvesten* preferred to center on ethnic labeling and national patronage. The editors of *Rodhuggeren* tended to use ethnic appeals only when expressing political satire. The careful editorial use of perceptions of ethnic identity in the reform-oriented newspapers and the decrease in the number of explicit expression of ethnic appeals in *Nordvesten* between 1890 and 1894 indicate that the editors of all three newspapers reflected on the dichotomy between exploiting a common Norwegian heritage for political influence and the wish among many Norwegian Americans in the region to be accepted as true Americans. At the same time, the fact that the editors often drew upon traditionally American ideals and traditions when rallying support reflect that the process of integration was well underway.

As argued in chapter three, it is possible that the processes of Americanization gained exceptional momentum due to regional economic hardship and the resulting political involvement among many persons of Norwegian descent. In the movements of dissent, principles, issues, and the quality of men were more important than national heritage. Ethnic labeling and calls for national patronage were by many perceived as characteristic for the old political establishment. The exploitation of these editorial techniques by *Nordvesten*

illustrates that their assumptions may have been correct. At the same time, the persistent though increasingly restricted use of ethnic appeals in *Nordvesten* calls attention to the fact that many Norwegian Americans in the region remained loyal to the Republican Party. So do also *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*'s subtle though meaningful endorsement of Knute Nelson in the 1892 and 1894 elections. The fact that *Knute Nelson* won both elections indicates that many Norwegian Americans believed Norwegian blood to count for more than principles of reform. Voting turnouts from the 1890s demonstrate that growing numbers of Norwegian Americans returned to the Republican fold after 1890.³⁵⁸

The frequent charges of corruption and unreliability against political opponents in all three newspapers signify that the editors and co-workers of the respective newspapers, individuals who may have possessed extensive knowledge about how to influence voters, shared common convictions about which specific arguments would resonate best with Norwegian American readers. Notwithstanding differences in how perceptions of ethnic identity were exploited, the editorship in all three newspapers frequently resorted to allegations of corruption, scheming and unreliability when describing political enemies. *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* drew attention to the lies of Haldor E. Boen and the unreliability of Ignatius Donnelley; *Nordvesten* charged the Democrats of corruption and carefully pointed out that Kittel Halvorson was a good farmer but not necessarily a good politician; and *Rodhuggeren* emphasized how Knute Nelson was connected to the old regime of "corrupted dollars."

From a top-down perspective, the role ethnic identity played in the public political debate at the time is perhaps best appreciated as that of a resource which the political elite, depending on their political orientation and past experiences, decided whether or not to exploit. The manner in which this source was used by the editors varied from subtle appeals to class-related or religious attitudes to outright calls for ethnic patronage. The divergent newspapers addressed different groups of Norwegian Americans. *Nordvesten*'s use of ethnic appeals and celebration of Knute Nelson's Civil War experience was most likely primarily targeted at Norwegian Americans who appreciated the traditional legacy of the Republican Party. Maybe Listoe's editorial methods received a more enthusiastic welcome in Norwegian American settlements in the southern and eastern parts of the state. His message seems not to have been consistently welcomed in northwestern Minnesota, where many Norwegian immigrants due to regional economic hardship, recent arrival, secular orientation, and class-related antagonisms had a different political frame of reference. Many reform-oriented Norwegian immigrants in

this region preferred instead to be inspired to political debate by the voice of dissidence which was mirrored in the words used by the editors of *Rodhuggeren* in early November 1894 when they proclaimed that “(...) [The People’s Party ticket] is the ticket of the people, the farmers’ and the workers’ ticket. It is the ticket of human rights against that of tyranny, moneyed power, and moneymen. It is the ticket of justice against that of injustice; - it is the ticket of protest against the corruption of dollars. Fellow nationals, Citizens, in the name of justice, in the name of the people and the country, vote for this ticket!”³⁵⁹

Illustrations:

4:1) ”Fredrik P. Brown,” *Nordvesten*, September 11, 1890.

4:2) “Knut Nelson,” *Nordvesten*, November 1, 1894.

4:3) “Defense of the Union,” Editorial in *Nordvesten*, November 1, 1894.

4:4) ”Minnesota’s Thor,” Jens Andersen to *Rodhuggeren*, August 21, 1894.

Chapter Five – Conclusion

This study has analyzed the relative significance of ethnic identity in the public political discourse among Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota during the first half of the 1890s. The introduction proposes that this study complements the works of scholars who appreciate the complex diversity which characterized the region at the time. Lowell J. Soike has argued that to describe the Norwegian American political experience in the Midwest as precisely as possible, historians should respect the strengths and weaknesses of different historiographical schools of interpretation.³⁶⁰ He asserts that neither a monocausal and simplistic economic interpretation nor an equally simplistic and monocausal cultural interpretation can alone adequately explain the political history of Norwegian Americans.³⁶¹ In other words, he suggests that scholars should recognize the composite variety of and interaction between different socioeconomic and cultural factors. This study has acknowledged the potential fruitfulness of maintaining such a nuanced perspective when analyzing intricate historical developments.

The Norwegian American political experience in northwestern Minnesota between 1890 and 1894 was indeed complex. The amalgamation in historical reality of divergent ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic influences complicates any attempt at determining the relative importance of each. The newspapers which have been studied here offer a glimpse at a biased but valuable portrait of reality as it was perceived and presented by some Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota at the time. Instead of analyzing one clearly defined area of a complex picture, this study has analyzed the presence of one particular tone of color: ethnic identity. In general, expressions of ethnic identity did not dominate the public political discourse. At times, Norwegian Americans presented ethnicity clearly and unmixed. More often, however, they combined ethnic expressions with “other elements” to augment “certain features” or to highlight “specific contrasts.” Above being a specific topic of discussion, divergent expressions of ethnicity in a distinctive way suffused the language through which Norwegian Americans voiced their political dissatisfaction and expectations, and through which they sought to enhance feelings of national unity, rally political support, and besmirch enemies. This analysis has demonstrated that expressions of ethnic identity were as diverse and composite as the Norwegian Americans who communicated them. The editors of the three divergent newspapers studied here sometimes appealed to and invoked different elements of a common Norwegian heritage. In this process, their backgrounds, current

political outlooks, and social positions conditioned various methods of communication through which some perceptions of ethnic identity were expressed more effectively than others. In a similar vein, ordinary Norwegian immigrants in light of both their individual experiences and personal understanding of what it meant to be Norwegian American at times used their common heritage and perceptions of ethnic identity to express themselves politically. These perceptions involved references to both Norwegian and American ideals, myths and attitudes. Their expressions seem to have been rooted in American experiences to a greater extent than in memories from Norway.

Compared to other topics of discussion, expressions of ethnic identity do not statistically appear to have been a central element of the political debate in the press. Both ordinary farmers and the political elite were primarily interested in discussing economic challenges, the corrupt political status quo, and how people could create a better future. This should first and foremost be appreciated as an immediate result of regional economic difficulties and contemporary political developments. Yet, one should also consider the significance of how memories and attitudes from Norway, time of arrival, and life in America had conditioned the political outlook and experience of the Norwegian American populace in the region. For example, when voicing their political opinion in the press, the more politicized, radicalized and secularized recent immigrant farmers from Norway seem to have been more inclined than older immigrants to focus their critical commentary on topics like the economy, class-struggle, and corruption. Thus, a variety of influences, old and new, cultural and economic, may explain why Norwegian Americans in the region seldom expressed perceptions of ethnic identity publicly in an unambiguous way. This picture of Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota reflects the works of other scholars. When describing the political self-assertion of Norwegian Americans in the area, as noted in the introduction, most historians of the topic have primarily centered on the significance of regional economic circumstances, the time of settlement, and contemporary political development. At the same time, they have demonstrated that factors such as religion and ethnicity also must be taken into consideration. This study has in greater detail analyzed one aspect of the political experience of Norwegian Americans. Ethnic identity was not the most significant topic of discussion or motivation for political discourse at the time, but was nevertheless a distinctive element of the public debate.

Often, the divergent newspapers gave the impression of reporting from different realities. On the one hand, *Nordvesten* consistently mirrored that of the political elite, in which voting for the Republican Party allegedly was the answer to every challenge. *Nordvesten*'s editor argued that the economic, political and social problems reformers so often complained about were exaggerated. On the other hand, *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Rodhuggeren* frequently reflected the reality seen by the middle and lower classes, in which economic hardship, plutocracy, and corruption were concrete problems which only could be solved through political reform. The disparity of viewpoint among the newspapers was primarily conditioned by editorial control: reality depends on through which eyes it is seen. Indeed, the editors of *Rodhuggeren* in October 1894 made the sarcastic promise that "(...) [Our newspaper] will commit itself to sign the Republican doctrine if anyone can send us a pair of glasses which are of such a quality that they enable us to see the great excess of money which [Republicans] (...) talk so much about these days."³⁶² This gap between realities underscores that ethnic identity, for Norwegian Americans who contributed to the political discourse, irrespective of political outlook, most frequently seems to have played the role of a valuable resource in a game where more important and substantial matters were at stake.

As noted, Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota joined the movements of reform in greater numbers than their fellow countrymen in the east and south.³⁶³ Economic hardship and the subsequent reform-oriented political involvement among many Norwegian Americans seem to have decreased the political influence of ethnicity in the region. Many contributors to the public debate associated political exploitation of ethnic labeling and patronage with the allegedly corrupt political establishment. As demonstrated, Norwegian Americans in the reform-oriented newspapers of this study at times expressed strong opposition against mixing nationality and politics, and seldom exploited perceptions of ethnic identity in an explicit way to rally political support. Editor Listoe in *Nordvesten* after 1890 to some extent adjusted the newspaper's political focus and rhetoric to address the change in attitude among its readers. The importance of ethnicity in the public political debate thus seems to have decreased also among the substantial number of Norwegian Americans in the region who remained loyal to the Republican Party. Additionally, when interpreting the modest presence of ethnicity in the public discourse one should consider the process of Americanization. The extent to which and ways in which different topics were discussed indicate that the political self-assertion of most

Norwegian Americans in the region primarily was conditioned by American experiences, not memories and attitudes from Norway.

The political experience of Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota should be interpreted in a wider perspective. American history illustrates that economic crises have often inspired movements of political reform. The political developments to which Norwegian Americans and several other ethnic groups in northwestern contributed should be appreciated as parts of a broader and more significant movement of political change in America. The growth of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party were national political developments. These movements were primarily stimulated by economic challenges and to some extent inspired by traditional American agrarian ideals. This study has demonstrated that many Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota in their own way, to some extent exploiting parts of their Norwegian heritage and perceptions of ethnic identity, contributed to these national movements. That Norwegian immigrants joined movements of reform was not a geographically isolated phenomenon. Norwegian Americans in other states and regions also participated. For example, many Norwegian immigrants in North Dakota engaged in the protest against the status quo during the 1890s.³⁶⁴ In Wisconsin, numerous people of Norwegian descent joined Robert LaFollette's push for political reform in the late 1890s and onward.³⁶⁵ Norwegian Americans who supported these movements of protest were joined by many other ethnic groups and old-stock Americans.

The reduced political importance of ethnicity in Northwestern Minnesota was mirrored by similar developments elsewhere. In Wisconsin, for example, as Jørn Brøndal has demonstrated, one important consequence of the 1893-1897 depression and the subsequent growth of Progressivism was that "(...) politicians became increasingly identified with clearly defined, substantial political questions" while the "(...) promotion of politicians for office on the basis of empty labels and diffuse value judgments fell out of fashion."³⁶⁶ From one perspective, the political experiences of many Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota can be interpreted as a foreshadowing of wider and more far-reaching political changes. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that Norwegian Americans never uniformly supported political reform. Most Norwegian Americans in southern Minnesota did not abandon the Republican Party. In fact, Soike has demonstrated that in 1892 and 1894 the votes by southern Norwegian settlements for agrarian gubernational candidates fell short of

those given to these candidates by the region as a whole.³⁶⁷ The most important reason for this was the Republican nomination of Knute Nelson. *Fergus Falls Ugeblad's* support for this Norwegian American from 1892 onward illustrates how many Norwegian immigrants in northwestern Minnesota remained loyal to the Republican Party despite the winds of reform that swept the region. As economic prosperity replaced depression towards the end of the 1890s, the majority of Norwegian Americans returned to the political party which they had supported before 1890: The Republican Party.³⁶⁸

This study has demonstrated that the political self-assertion of Norwegian Americans in the region was conditioned by a variety of influences. The diversity of backgrounds is reflected in the ways in which Norwegian immigrants actively used ethnic identity as a resource in the public political discourse between 1890 and 1894. The variations in the form and content of their ethnic expressions underscore the flexibility and evolving nature of Norwegian American perceptions of ethnic identity. In light of this, one may assert that many Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota during the first half of the 1890s to a significant degree constructed and shared an ethnic identity specific to that region. Due to a wide range of influences, past and present, Norwegian and American, cultural and socioeconomic, this dynamic identity had arguably become more secular, radical, and American in nature than that of Norwegian Americans to the south and east. At the same time, one should bear in mind that perceptions of ethnic identity among Norwegian Americans in northwestern Minnesota would soon change yet again. Against the backdrop of historical change in the early 1890's, this study has presented a textual analysis of limited scope that focuses on the views expressed in three contemporary Norwegian-language newspapers in the region. Yet placing a spotlight on the civic discourse found in those newspapers offers a remarkably revealing and valuable picture of one aspect of the political experience of Norwegian Americans in America.

Appendixes

Appendix: 1) Terminology

The following pages present the terminology of the statistical material of this study. The terminology of the individual topics is clarified by describing as precisely as possible the content and boundaries of each. Some central statistical developments are also pointed out. Refer to Appendix: 2 tables 3:5-3:8. The more specific composition of each subject category is as follows:

Class-related matters includes the sub-topics “Business antagonism,” “Cooperation,” “Farmer matters,” “Labor matters,” and “Plutocracy”;

Economic matters includes the sub-topics “Currency,” “Depression,” “Other economic,” “Tariff,” and “Trusts”;

Ethnocultural matters includes the sub-topics: “Ethnic appeals,” “Religion,” and “Temperance”;

Pure politics includes the sub-topics: “Corruption,” “Democracy,” “Political disenchantment,” “Reform,” “Reformer Distrust” and “Women.”

Individual topics:

Business Antagonism: Refers to criticism of local shopkeepers and other salesmen or agents. The topic was mostly discussed in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* during the first months of 1890, when local businessmen and shopkeepers were held responsible for rising prices on household items. Later that year the blame was shifted to the tariff. *Business antagonism* was also present as a minor topic in *Nordvesten* during the 1890 election campaign. Most of these statements derive from personal conflicts between farmers and businessmen. The counted statements have clear political undertones.

Cooperation: Refers to statements emphasizing the necessity to cooperate as farmers and reformers to achieve political change. The topic differs from “Plutocracy” and “Reform” in that people of the lower classes explicitly are encouraged to set difference aside and combine forces against the interests of plutocracy.

Corruption: Refers to statements criticizing corrupt politicians. This topic is different from “Political disenchantment” in that focus is directed towards specific actions and individuals. In other words, the critique in these statements is less systemic.

Currency: Refers to statements concerning the money problem. This individual topic was most extensively discussed in *Rodhuggeren* during the 1894 election campaign

Democracy: Refers to statements about the principles of democracy, most often the power of the people to invoke change. In *Nordvesten*, this topic is most often touched upon in statements encouraging voters to do their democratic “duty” (in other words, vote for the Republican Party). The rationale behind not voting for Populists and Democrats was that they were corrupt and unreliable. Also included in this topic are statements which address more philosophical aspects of the system of government. These are mostly found in the newspapers of reform. Areas of interest stretches from discussions on the serious social, economical and political contemporary developments in Tsarist Russia - related to American democracy, via questions like “(...) has social democracy come into existence due to discovery of the human side of Christianity?” and “is it possible to develop a fair tax system when humans by nature are unfair and dishonest?,” to excruciatingly detailed explanations of the classical Greek principle *Ostracism* – interestingly related to why Boen without question should be re-nominated for the People’s Party ticket.³⁶⁹

Depression: Refers to statements about the depression after 1893.

Ethnic appeals: Refers to statements that reflect explicit ethnically infused political expressions and opinions. This topic reflects direct expressions of ethnic identity, for example clear-cut references to and use of a common Norwegian heritage, discussions about what it means to be Norwegian American, explicit calls for national allegiance to political candidates of Norwegian descent, and expressions of anti-Catholic sentiment. These statements were expressed more effectively and to a greater extent by the editors than by the readers. Whereas expressions of *ethnic appeals* in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Rodhuggeren* centered on the invocation of different aspects of a shared Norwegian past, in *Nordvesten* most of these expressions were focused on arguments for national allegiance to Norwegian American politicians.

Farmer matters: Refers to statements about agricultural matters in a political context. Most often, the statements addresses economic hardship, for example unreasonably high interest

rates, unpredictable grain prices, crop failures, unfair prices on twine, or the nuisance of hunters (from the city) conveniently mistaking farm animals for ducks.

Labor matters: References, either positive or negative, to matters concerning workers, strikes and relations between the labor and farmer factions within the populist movement. This topic jumps to a prominent statistical position in 1894, post importantly because of the Pullman Strike.³⁷⁰

Other Economic difficulties: References with political overtones about the bank system, interest rates, and money-men.

Plutocracy: References to the widely accepted notion that money governed politics. The references tend to be uniformly critical in *Rodhuggeren* (where the topic was most extensively discussed) and in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* (where the topic was more central for political debate in 1890 than in 1892 or 1894). Plutocratic elements in American society were increasingly criticized in *Nordvesten* between 1890 and 1894.

Political disenchantment: References to criticism of the current political regime. The topic was popular in the newspapers of reform, especially in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* (criticizing elements both within the Republican Party, People's Party, and the Democratic Party). This topic is different from "Plutocracy" in that the disapproval of the old parties (and certain elements within the reform movement) is more vague and general. The plutocratic characteristic of the political system are not addressed explicitly.

Reform: Statements referring to the need for political reform in general (vague reason).

Religion: Refers to statements expressing approval or disapproval of the connection between religion and politics.

Tariff: Refers to statements concerning the tariff question.

Temperance: Refers to arguments either for or against the temperance movement in a political context.

Trusts: Refers to statements about the tariff.

Women: References to women in a political context.

Party Matters:

The extent to which *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, *Nordvesten* and *Rodhuggeren* presented news from different political parties and about different politicians indicates the political allegiance of each newspaper. Statistical data has been collected on the number of positive, neutral and negative statements about differing political factions in each newspaper.

Republican Party matters: Statements about meetings, speeches, politicians and other political developments in the Republican Party camp.

Alliance Party matters: Statements about meetings, speeches, politicians and other political developments in the Alliance Party camp. For the 1890 election and also to some degree for 1892 (due to the ambiguity and confusion regarding the relation between the Farmer's Alliance movement and the novel People's Party), the count of this category indicate the extent to which the newspaper in question reported on and discussed the reform – oriented Organization/Party/Faction which stood for election. For 1894, the count indicates references to the Alliance as a semi-political organization, which lingered on and even expanded despite the emergence of the People's Party (and some places probably because of it).

Democratic Party matters: Statements about meetings, speeches, politicians and other political developments in the Democratic Party camp.

Prohibitionist Party matters: Statements about meetings, speeches, politicians and other political developments in the Prohibitionist Party camp.

People's Party matters: Statements about meetings, speeches, politicians and other political developments in the People's Party camp.

Appendix: 2) Statistical Tables and Number Count

Statistical Tables

Table) 3:1. Percent of incidence of categories of topics in all political statements combined.

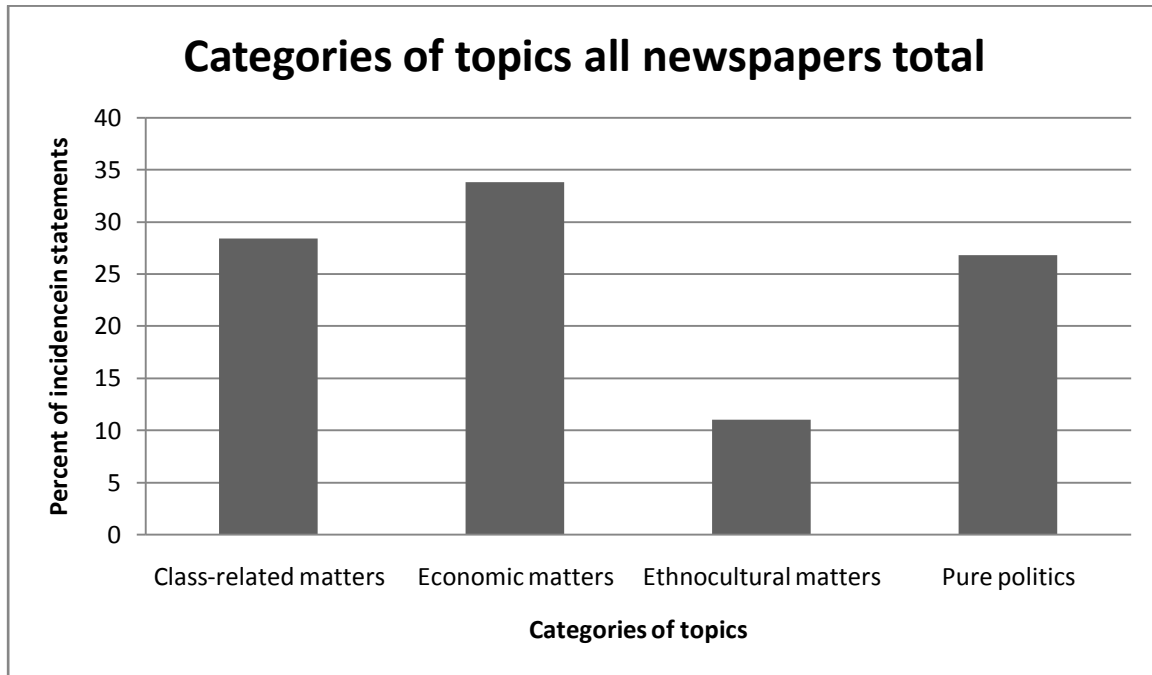


Table) 3:2. Percent of incidence of categories of topics in all political statements in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*.

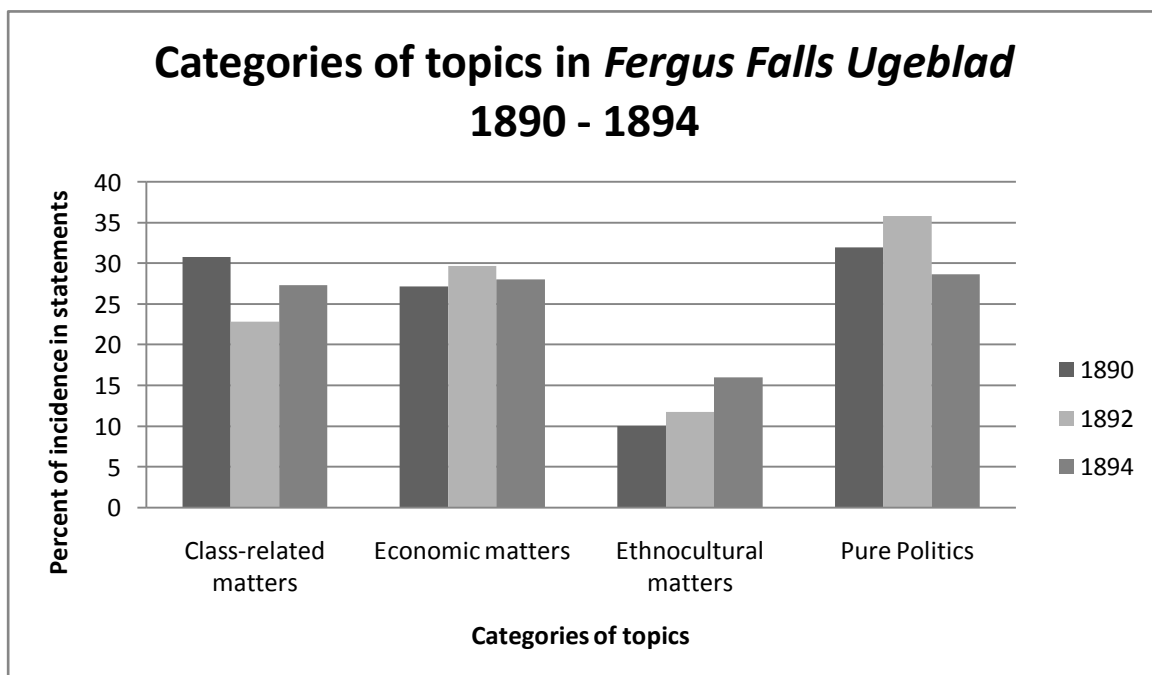


Table 3:3. Percent of incidence of categories of topics in all political statements in *Nordvesten*.

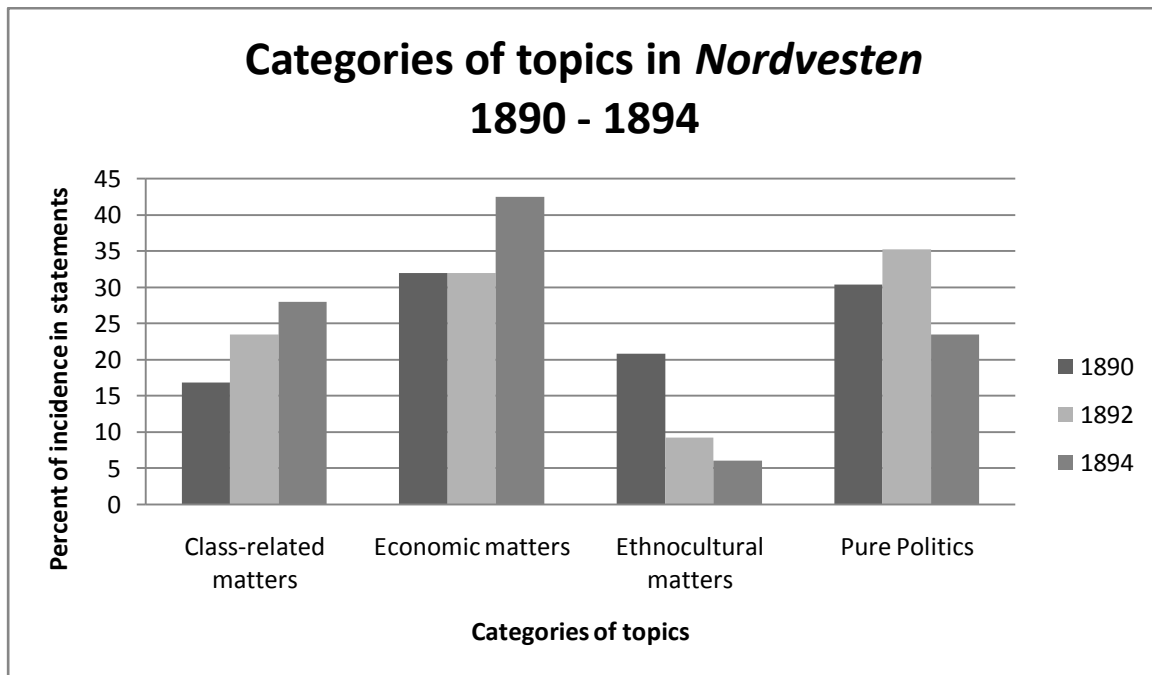


Table 3:4. Percent of incidence of categories of topics in all political statements in *Rodhuggeren*.

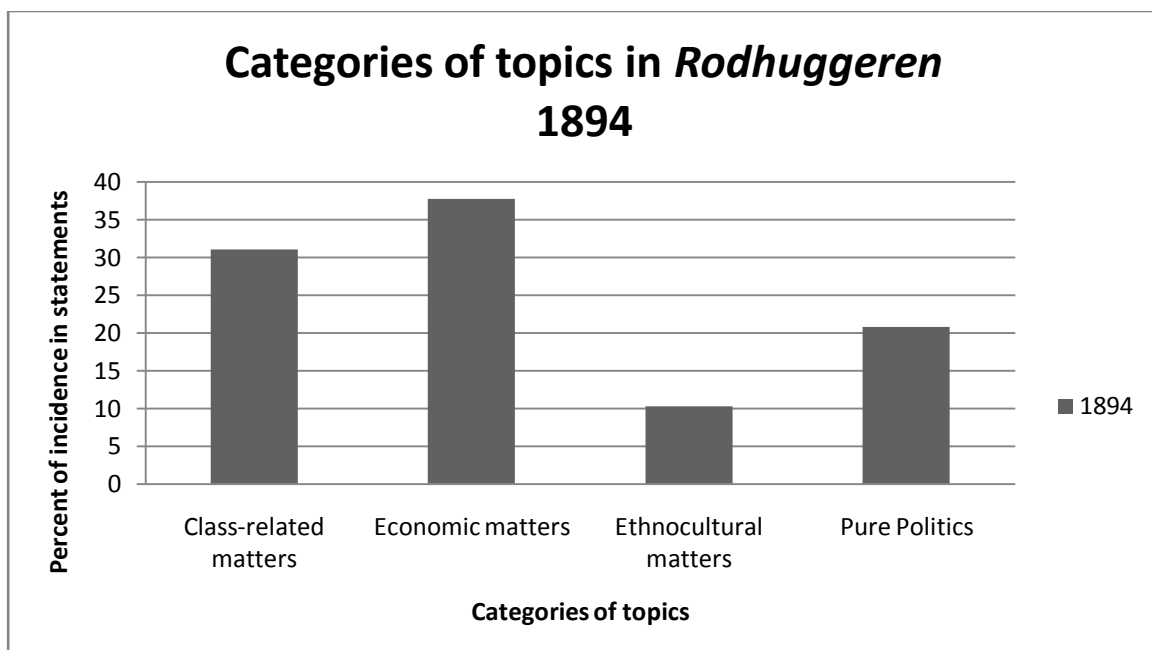


Table 3:5. Percent of incidence of individual topics in all political statements combined.

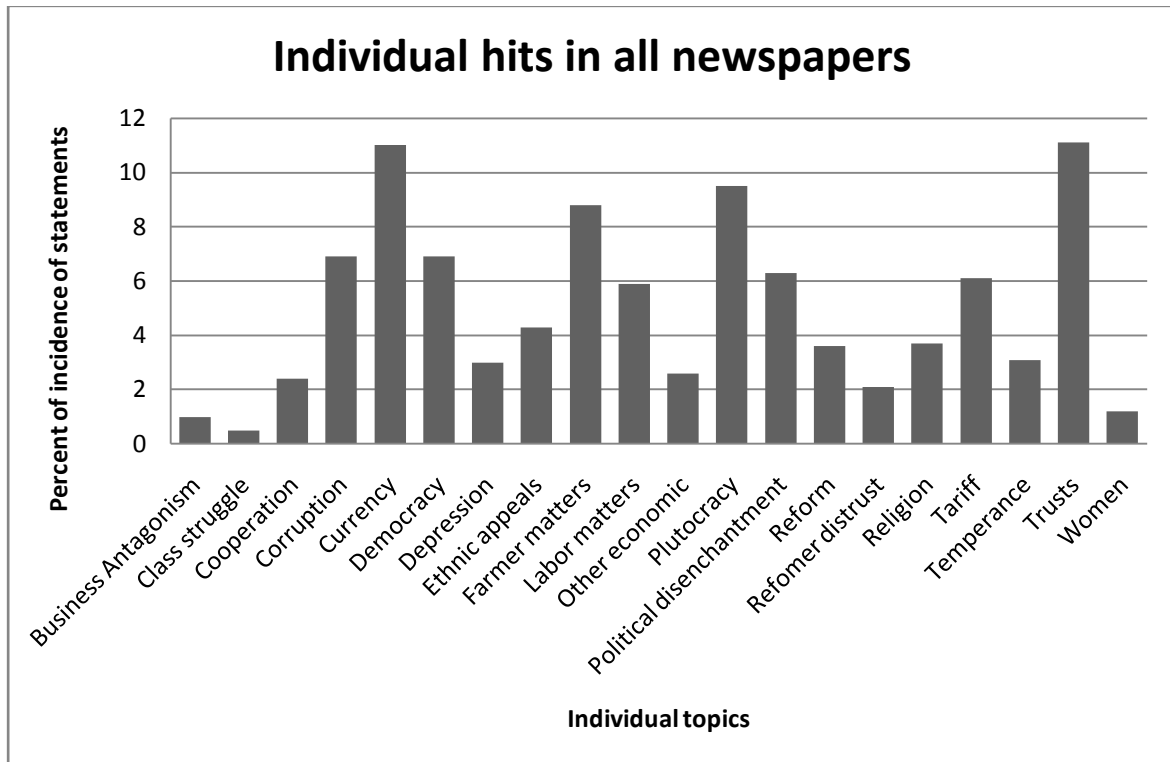


Table 3:6. Percent of incidence of individual topics in all political statements in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*.

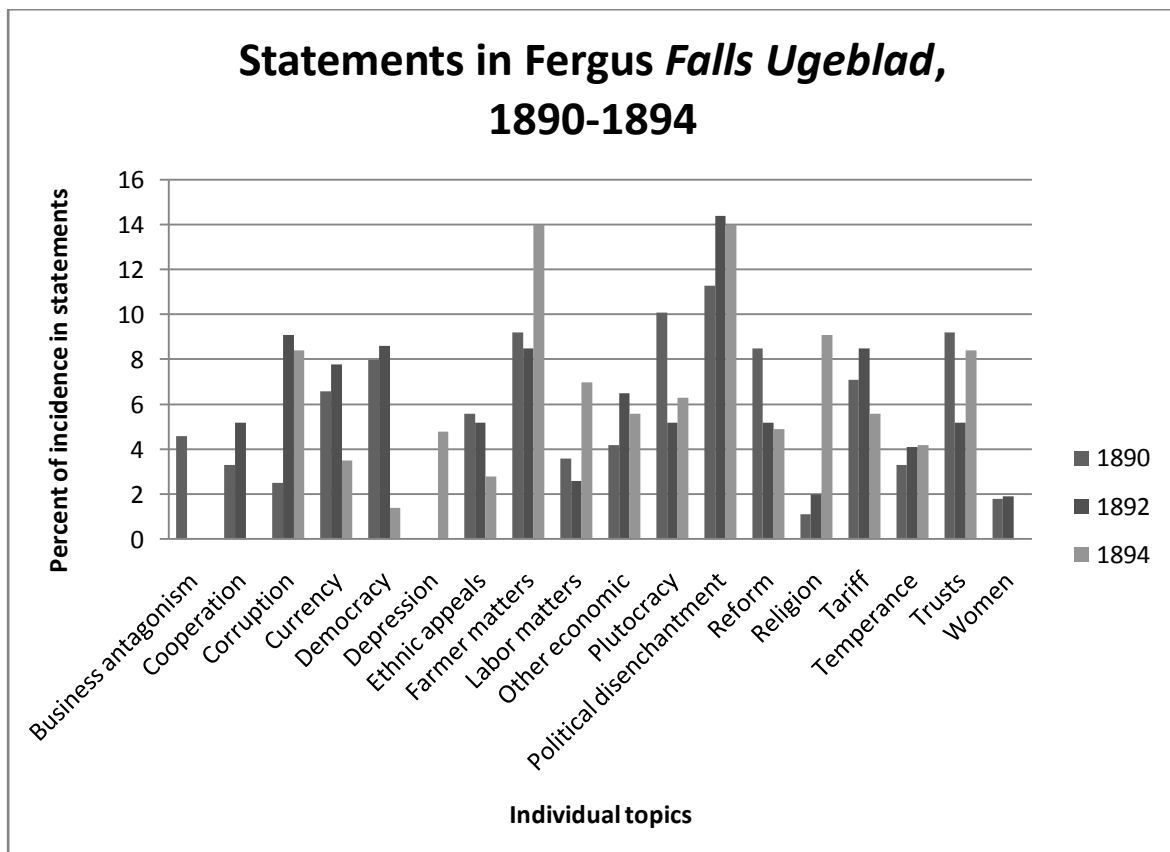


Table 3:7. Percent of incidence of individual topics in all political statements in *Nordvesten*.

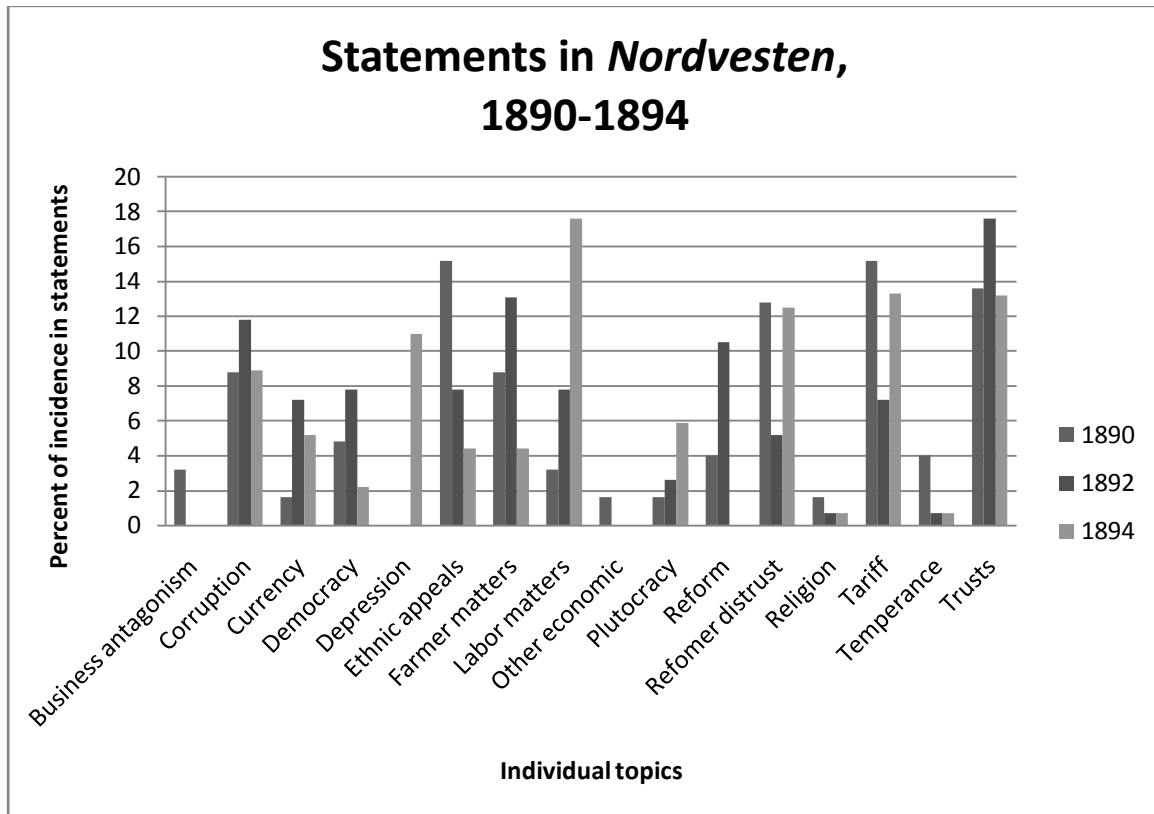


Table 3:8. Percent of incidence of individual topics in all political statements in *Rodhuggeren*.

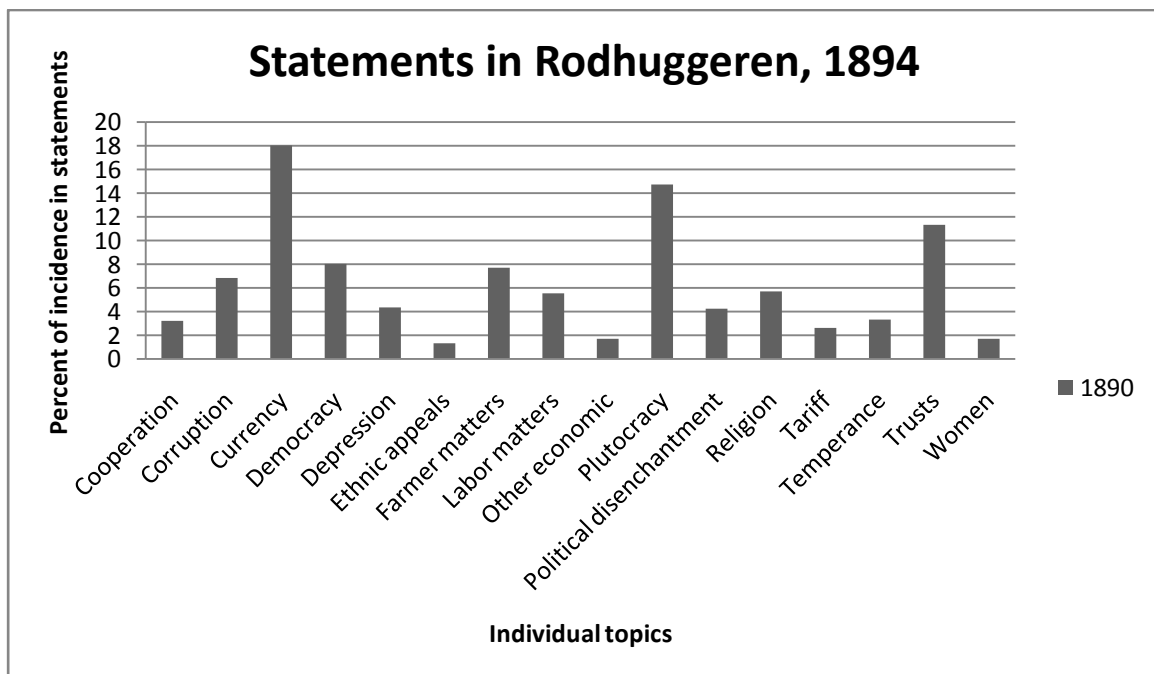


Table 3:9. Percent of incidence of political allegiance in all political statements in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*.

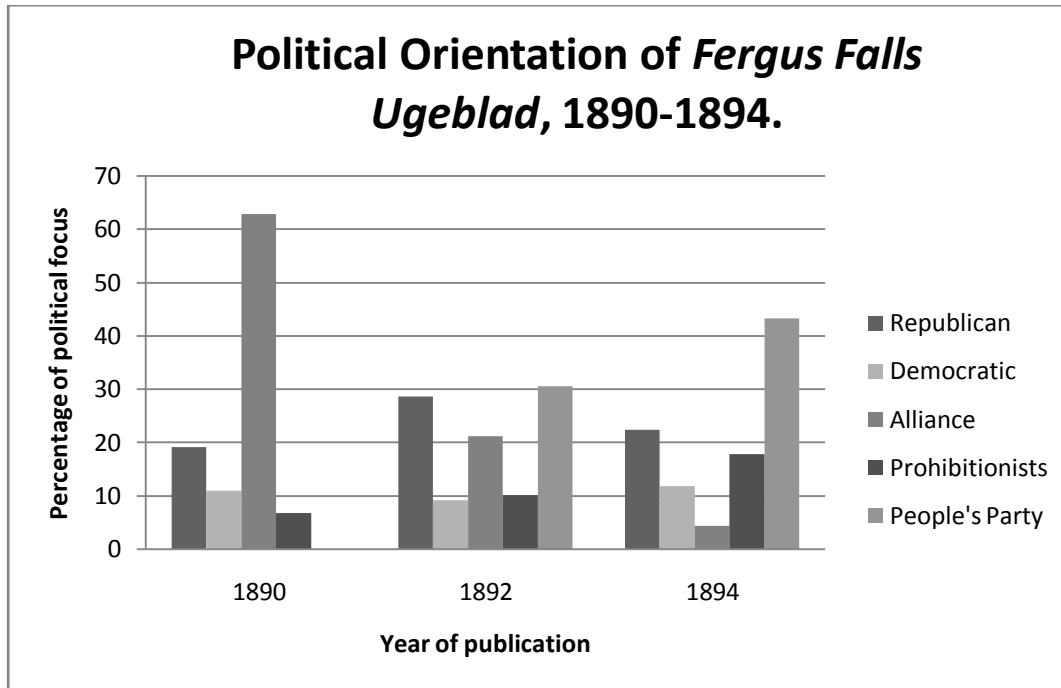


Table 3:10. Percent of incidence of political allegiance in all political statements in *Rodhuggeren* 1894.

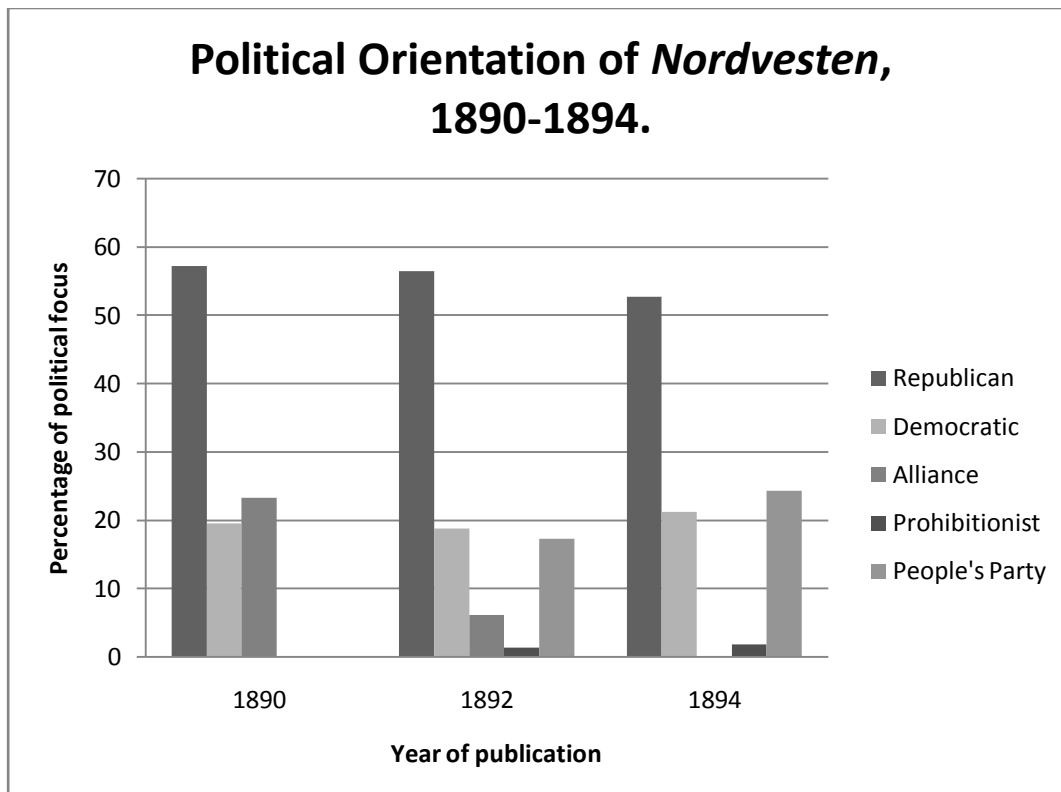
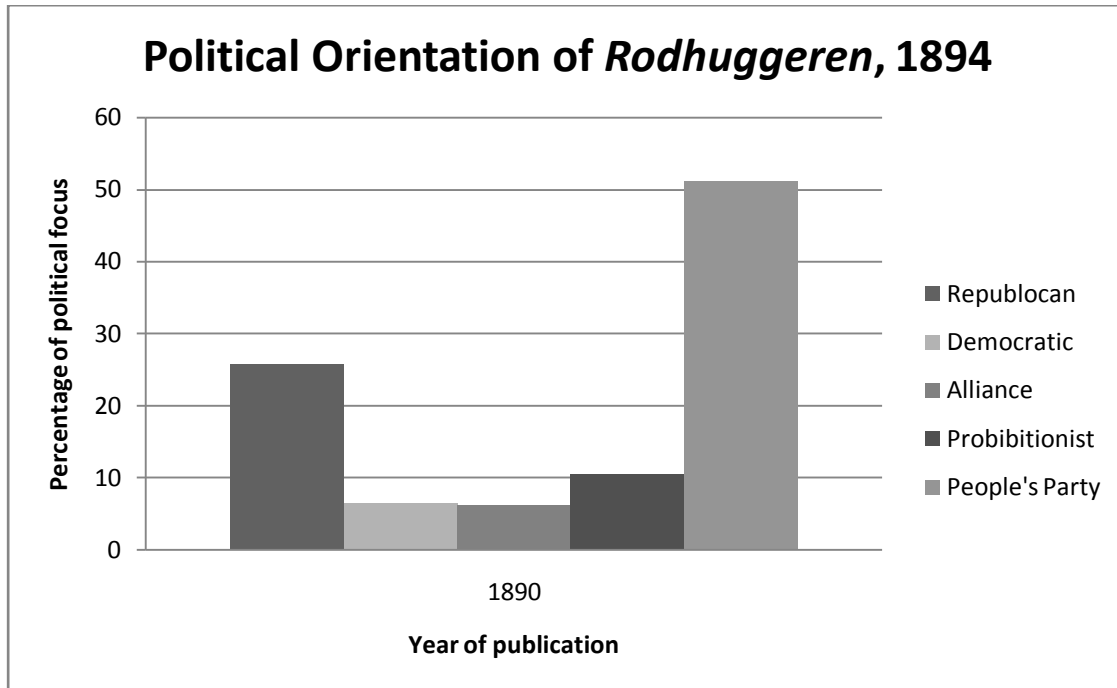


Table 3:11. Percent of incidence of political allegiance in all political statements in *Rodhuggeren* 1894.



Number Count for Topical Statistics:

Fergus Falls Ugeblad 1890:

Class-related matters: (“Business antagonism”: 18, “Farmer matters”: 36, “Labor matters”: 14, “Cooperation”: 13, and “Plutocracy”: 45), Totaling: 120.

Economic matters: (“Currency”: 26, “Other economic”:16, “Tariff”: 28, and “Trusts”: 36), Totaling: 106.

Ethnocultural matters: (“Ethnic appeals”: 22, “Religion”: 4, and “Temperance”: 13), Totaling: 39

Pure politics: (“Corruption”: 10, “Democracy”: 31,” “Reform”: 33, “Political disenchantment”: 44, and “Women”: 7), 125

Fergus Falls Ugeblad 1892:

Class-related matters: (“Farmer matters”: 13, “Cooperation”: 8, “Labor matters”: 4, and “Plutocracy”: 8), Totaling: 33.

Economic matters: (“Currency”: 12, “Other economic”: 10, “Tariff”: 13, and “Trusts”: 8), Totaling: 43

Ethnocultural matters: (“Ethnic appeals”: 8, “Religion”: 3, and “Temperance”: 6), Totaling: 17

Pure politics: (“Corruption”: 14, “Democracy”: 13, “Political disenchantment”: 22, “Women”: 3, “Reform”: 8), Totaling: 52

Fergus Falls Ugeblad 1894:

Class-related matters: (“Farmer matters”: 20, “Labor matters”: 10, and “Plutocracy”: 9), Totaling: 39.

Economic matters: (“Currency”: 5, “Depression”: 7, “Other economic”: 8, “Tariff”: 8, “Trusts”: 12), Totaling: 40.

Ethnocultural matters: (“Ethnic appeals”4, “Religion”: 13 and “Temperance”: 6), Totaling: 23.

Pure politics: (“Corruption”: 12, “Democracy”: 2, “Political disenchantment”: 20, and “Reform”: 7), Totaling: 41.

Nordvesten 1890:

Class-related matters: “Business antagonism”: 4, “Plutocracy”: 2 “Farmer matters” 11, and “Labor matters”: 4) Totaling: 21.

Economic matters: (“Currency”: 2, “Other economic”: 2, “Tariff”: 19, and “Trusts”: 17), Totaling: 40

Ethnocultural matters: (“Ethnic appeals” 19, “Religion”: 2, and “Temperance”: 5), Totaling: 26.

Pure politics: (“Corruption”: 11, “Democracy”: 6, “Reformer distrust”: 16, “Reform”: 5), Totaling: 38.

Nordvesten 1892:

Class-related matters: (“Farmer matters”: 20, “Labor matters”: 12, and “Plutocracy”: 4), Totaling: 36.

Economic matters (“Currency”: 11, “Tariff”: 11, “Trusts”: 27), Totaling: 49.

Ethnocultural matters: (“Ethnic appeals 12,” “Religion”: 1, and “Temperance”: 1), Totaling 14

Pure politics: (“Corruption 18,” “Democracy 12,” “Reformer distrust”: 8,” and “Reform”: 16), Totaling: 54.

Nordvesten 1894:

Class-related matters: (“Farmer matters”: 6, “Labor matters”: 24, and “Plutocracy”: 8), Totaling: 38.

Economic matters: (“Currency”: 7, “Depression”: 15, “Tariff”: 18, and “Trusts”: 18), Totaling: 58.

Ethnocultural matters: (“Ethnic appeals”: 6, “Religion”: 1, and “Temperance”: 1), Totaling: 8.

Pure politics (“Corruption”: 12, “Democracy”: 3,” Reformer distrust”: 17), Totaling: 32.

Rodhuggeren 1894:

Class-related matters: (“Farmer matters”: 63, “Cooperation”: 26, “Labor matters”: 45, and “Plutocracy”: 122), Totaling: 256.

Economic matters: (“Currency” 148, “Depression” 35, “Other economic”: 14,” “Tariff”: 21, and “Trusts” 93), Totaling: 311.

Ethnocultural matters: (“Ethnic appeals” 11, “Religion”: 47, and “Temperance”: 27), Totaling: 85.

Pure politics: (“Corruption” 56, “Democracy”: 66, Political disenchantment”: 35, and “Women”: 14), Totaling: 171.

Number Count for Political Orientation Statistics:

Fergus Falls Ugeblad 1890:

Republican Party matters: 39

Alliance matters: 129

Democratic Party matters: 23

Prohibitionist Party matters: 14

Fergus Falls Ugeblad 1892:

Republican Party matters: 31

Democratic matters: 10

People’s Party matters: 33

Alliance matters: 23

Prohibitionist Party matters: 11

Fergus Falls Ugeblad 1894:

Republican Party matters: 15 (pos 2 neu 6 neg 7)

Democratic Party matters: 8 (pos 0 neg 4 neu 4)

People’s Party matters: 30 (pos 9 neg 9 neu 12)

Alliance matters: 3 (pos 0 neu 3 neg 0)

Prohibitionist party: 16 (pos 8 neu 7 neg 1)

Nordvesten 1890:

Republican Party matters: 91 (pos 91)

Alliance matters: 37 (pos 0 neu 2 neg 35)

Democratic Party matters: 31 (pos 0 neu 2 neg 29)

Prohibitionist Party Matters: 0

Nordvesten 1892:

Republican Party matters: 222 (pos 163 neu 58 neg 1) (Knut Nelson pos 65 neu 12 neg 0)

Democratic Party matters: 74 (pos 0 neu 12 neg 62)

People's Party matters: 68 (pos 3 neu 4 neg 61) (Boen neg 3 pos 3, Donnelley neg 23)

Alliance matters: 20 (pos 0 neu 9 neg 11)

Prohibitionist party: 5 (pos 0 neu 4 neg 1)

Nordvesten 1894:

Republican Party matters: 119 (pos 85 neu 34 neg 0) (Knut Nelson pos 28 neu 4 neg 0)

Democratic Party matters: 48 (pos 1 neu 8 neg 39)

People's Party matters: 55 (pos 0 neu 2 neg 53) (Boen neg 6)

Alliance matters: 0

Prohibitionist Party matters: 4 (pos 0 neu 3 neg 1)

Rodhuggeren 1894:

People's Party matters: 239 (Boen matters 67)

Democratic matters: 20 (neg 18 neu 12)

Republican matters: 120 (neg 105 neu 15) (Knut Nelson neg 37 neu 3)

Prohibitionist Party matters: 49 (pos 0 neu 9 neg 40)

Alliance matters: 29

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Notes

Notes to Chapter One

¹ Lowell J. Soike, *Norwegian Americans and the Politics of Dissent, 1880-1924*, (Northfield, Minnesota, 1991), 78, 114-115, 195-197.

² Soike, 48.

³ Soike, 187. Because of this, focusing primarily on one state in particular could enhance the structure and coherence of the study. The editors and readers of the newspapers would have the same political frame of reference in the sense that they discuss the same political developments within a specific context. For example, a single-state focus would enable analyses of how the same candidate or list of candidates was discussed in the different ideological camps of the Norwegian American press. Since an important factor constituting the boundaries of this paper in fact is emphasizing specific issues, elections and candidates, this argument of increased coherence should be taken seriously.

⁴ Ronald P. Formisano, "The Invention of Ethnocultural Interpretation," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 99, No. 2 (Apr., 1994), 475-476. This study is in part informed by discussions about the so-called "New Political History." For some of the most important contributions to the ethnocultural interpretation of history see Lee Benson's *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: a test case* (Princeton, N.J., 1966) and several essays by Samuel P. Hayes published in the 1960s. Hayes argues for the *relative* importance of ethnic and religious differences for political differences. This study appreciates the potential fruitfulness of this approach as demonstrated by Benson, Hayes, and Paul Kleppner in *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics 1850-1900* (New York 1970), and in *The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892: Parties, Voters and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1979), Richard Jensen in *The Winning of the Mid-West: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago, 1971), and more specifically in relation to Norwegian Americans by Lowell J. Soike in *Norwegian Americans and the Politics of Dissent, 1880-1924*, and Jørn Brøndal in *Ethnic Leadership and Midwestern Politics: Scandinavian Americans and the Progressive Movement in Wisconsin, 1890-1914*, (Northfield, Minnesota, 2004). At the same time, as the works of Brøndal and Soike among others suggest, a study of the political effects of ethnic and religious differences should also consider and discuss the relative importance of socio-economic influences. The ethnocultural interpretation of history has been criticized, among others, by James E. Wright in "The Ethnocultural Model of Voting: A Behavioral and Historical Critique," *American Behavioral Scientist* 16 (1973), 653-674, and by J. Morgan Kousser in "The New Political History: A Methodological Critique," *Reviews in American History* 4 (1976), 1-14.

⁵ Kanchan Chandra, "What is Ethnic Identity and Does it Matter?," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 9, June 2006. (SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1082040>), 6-7, 22-23. Political scientist Chandra discusses in this essay the degree to which current definitions of *Ethnic Identity* may be justified. She questions the applicability of the more widely used definitions of the term as suggested by Max Weber in *The Origins of Ethnic Groups* in *John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith eds., Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 35-40, by Donald Horowitz in *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), and by James Fearon in several articles, among others, by discussing how the role of descent is specified, and to what extent other features should be combined with it in defining ethnic groups. The debated roles of descent are (1) a common ancestry (2) a myth of a common ancestry, (3) a myth of a common origin, and (4) a "descent rule" for membership, and features combined with descent include (5) a common culture or language, (6) a common history, and (7) conceptual autonomy. This study does agree with some aspects of the critique of the inflexibility of previous definitions of *ethnic identity*, and accommodated for a more supple understanding of the concept. This is in line with what has been attempted by several other scholars of Norwegian American ethnicity, for example Lowell J. Soike in *Norwegian Americans and the Politics of Dissent 1880-1924*, 4-8 and Jørn Brøndal in *Ethnic Leadership and Midwestern Politics – Scandinavian Americans and the Progressive Movement in Wisconsin, 1890-1914*, 30-38.

⁶ Odd S. Lovoll, *The Creation of Historical Memory in a Multicultural Society*, <http://www.nb.no/emigrasjon/> (16/09/11); Orm Øverland, "Hjemlandsmyter: Om Skaping av Gamle Røtter i et Nytt Land," in *Tid og Tanke, Nr. 3/høst 1998, Migrasjon of Tilpasning: Ingrid Semmingsen. Et Minneseminar*, ed. Odd S. Lovoll, (Oslo, University of Oslo, 1998), 143-157.

⁷ Brøndal, 2. This study understands the concept of ethnic identity as flexible, dependent on local circumstances, and transformational. See Frank Thistlethwaite, "Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in *Population Movements in Modern European History*, ed. Herbert Moller (New York, Macmillan, 1964), 73-92; Kathleen Neils Conzen et al., "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the USA," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12 (1992), 4-5; Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York, 1964), 23-24.

⁸ For example, difficult economic conditions in northwestern Minnesota, as one influence among many, imbued the ethnic Norwegian Americans in this region with a more class-related content than did more stable economic conditions, as one influence among many, in southern Minnesota or northern Iowa.

⁹ Lovoll, "Et samtidshistorisk forsknings-prosjekt om norskamerikanere" in *Tid og Tanke, Nr. 3/høst 1998, Migrasjon of Tilpasning: Ingrid Semmingsen. Et Minneseminar*, ed. Odd S. Lovoll, (Oslo, University of Oslo, 1998), 133.

¹⁰ Soike, 197, referring to Samuel P. Hays' concept of *situational analysis* in "New Possibilities for American Political History: The Social Analysis of Political Life," in Lipset and Hoffstadter, eds, *Sociology and History: Methods*, (New York, 1968), 197-202.

¹¹ Brøndal, 251. His study focuses on Scandinavian Americans in Wisconsin, but several of his insights are just as relevant for developments in northwestern Minnesota.

¹² Soike, 4. For example, Soike proposes that class consciousness should be considered an ethnic attribute because past class memories and experiences from Norway (combined with present economic circumstances) seem to have influenced what may be described as ethnic – or religious – voting patterns.

¹³ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, July 25, 1894, "The People's Party Convention in Minneapolis," originally published by *Representative*. For examples of perceptions of ethnic identity presented by Norwegian Americans, see chapter three.

¹⁴ Several historians have addressed this issue from different angles. Orm Øverland in his essay *Hjemlandsmyter: Om Skaping av Gamle Røtter i et Nytt Land*, for example, argues for a comparative perspective on the American experience for different ethnic groups. He asserts that many aspects of the homecoming myths which were developed by Rasmus B. Andresen in the first half of the 1870s and influenced Norwegian American culture for decades are so similar to myths created by other immigrant groups that they should be categorized as typically American rather than typically Norwegian American.

¹⁵ Brøndal, 208, referencing Fredrik Barth's "Introduction" in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The social Organization of Culture Differences*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Bergen, 1969), 15; see also Gordon, 81.

¹⁶ Brøndal, 4; Soike, 191. This understanding of religion as a determinant for political action is in line with the interpretation of several other ethnoculturally oriented historians, for example Ronald P. Formisano's in *Birth of Mass Political Parties*, (Princeton University Press, 1971) 137-38.

¹⁷ Other areas characterized by Norwegian American radicalism were the Twin Cities and the Dakotas. This analysis of northwestern Minnesota touches many developments which also may have characterized the Norwegian American political experience, especially in North Dakota, but also in the Twin Cities.

¹⁸ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 198. Soike, 189-193; Jon Wefald, "A Voice of Protest: Norwegians in American Politics, 1890-1917," *Topical Studies 1*, (Northfield, Minnesota, NAHA 1971), 27-28. Many Scandinavian workers in the Twin Cities also supported reform movements.

¹⁹ Soike, 74-75; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 192.

²⁰ Soike, 45-46, 74-75, 77-78; Babcock, Kendrick C., *The Scandinavian Element in the United States* (Urbana, Illinois, 1914), 157; "F. P. Brown," Editorial in *Nordvesten*, August 14, 1890.

²¹ Soike, 188-191; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 192, 198.

²² Soike, 22-23, 189-194; Brøndal, 208; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 190-198.

²³ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 198.

²⁴ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 121-123.

²⁵ Wefald, 44; Brøndal, 5.

²⁶ Wefald, 44; Soike, 255.

²⁷ Wefald, 3.

²⁸ Wefald, 4.

²⁹ Soike, 23.

³⁰ Soike, 191.

³¹ Soike, 191-192.

³² Soike, 194-195.

³³ Brøndal, 208; Fredrik Barth, "Introduction" in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The social Organization of Culture Differences*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Bergen, 1969), 15; Gordon, 81.

³⁴ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 198. Lovoll's nuanced and balanced approach to and analysis of the Norwegian American political experience in America has been particularly inspiring.

³⁵ Lovoll, *The Promise of America* 198.

³⁶ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 192-198, 202.

³⁷ Brøndal, 208, 250, 255. As will be argued in chapter four of this paper, his argument for the secularizing effects of the Progressive movement in Wisconsin may to some degree be transferred to the role of the Populist Party in Minnesota.

³⁸ Brøndal, 249.

³⁹ Brøndal, 250.

⁴⁰ Brøndal, 208.

⁴¹ Brøndal, 225- 226.

⁴² Brøndal's discussion on the defusing character of the political elites' vague appeals to ethnicity, for example, has been particularly helpful.

⁴³ The need for a complementary analysis of Norwegian-language newspapers in the area has in this regard been voiced by several critics, most explicitly by Sally M. Miller in the review of *Norwegian Americans and the Politics of Dissent, 1880-1924*, by Lowell J. Soike in *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (Sep., 1992), 679-680, and by Peter Kivisto in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Spring, 1993), 818-820.

⁴⁴ An exhaustive analysis is found in chapters three and four.

⁴⁵ The selection of sources in this research project has also been influenced by the availability of newspapers and the scope of the study. The quite extensive micro-film collection of Norwegian American newspapers at the national library in Oslo has made it possible to single out three newspapers which provide relevant material for analysis. Although a research trip to the library of Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul and St. Olaf's College in Northfield was made to supplement some of the material, most importantly the first issues of *Rodhuggeren*, most of the examined material has been found in Norway. The process of gathering information prior to analysis has been time-consuming. Considering the scope of this paper, this has directly influenced the number of newspapers that have been studied. However, because the selected publications represent the large majority of political positions that Norwegian Americans voted for in the region during the time period, it seems unlikely that a wider assortment of newspapers from northwestern Minnesota would have significantly altered the conclusions of this paper.

⁴⁶ Soike, 94-95. The Democratic experience of Norwegian American in northwestern Minnesota is well exemplified by the independent publication *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, and the Populist-oriented *Rodhuggeren*.

⁴⁷ "The Grubber" is a literal translation of "*Rodhuggeren*." The intrinsic meaning is "The Reformer" or "The Radical." Both the editors and the readers of the newspaper again and again refer to the act of grubbing (clearing roots and stumps by digging) in a political context (clearing society in general and the political stage in particular of destructive "roots and stumps"). Because a translation like "The Radical" does not encapsulate the full meaning of *Rodhuggeren*, the literal translation "The Grubber" is more authentic.

⁴⁸ Brøndal, 212.

⁴⁹ One obvious exception is America-letters. Brøndal in his analysis of *Skandinaven* and *Hemlandet* notes that the voices of city or rural laborers were only rarely heard (Brøndal, 211). A parallel may be drawn between this observation and the degree to which common people were represented in *Nordvesten*. However, in part due to alternative political outlooks, both *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and particularly *Rodhuggeren* invited rural laborers to voice their opinions. As a result, these newspapers to a greater extent than *Skandinaven* and *Nordvesten* expressed a bottom-up perspective.

⁵⁰ Soike, 94-95.

⁵¹ Fredrick C. Luebke, reviewing "A Voice of Protest: Norwegians in American Politics, 1890-1917" by Jon Wefald, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Jun., 1972), 186-187; Franklin, D. Scott, reviewing "A Voice of Protest: Norwegians in American Politics, 1890-1917" by Jon Wefald, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (Feb., 1973), 165-167.

⁵² Miller, 679-680.

⁵³ Soike, 194.

⁵⁴ See Appendix: 2, Statistical Data. After an unfortunate loss of data only the break-up into statements about political issues and parties remained. This has necessitated a focus on tendencies rather than precise numbers in the following analysis.

⁵⁵ Brøndal, 214.

⁵⁶ Brøndal, 214.

⁵⁷ Ole Stubstind to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, (Nidaros Alliance) to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, July 2, 1890; C. B. Brandborg (President) and H. E. Boen (Secretary) to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, august 27, 1890; Nils Anderson (Eagle Alliance nr. 273) to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 1, 1890; Louis Hanson to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, Desember 3, 1890. These examples reflect very well the variety of information which was conveyed.

⁵⁸ Appendix:1 and Appendix: 2.

⁵⁹ Appendix: 2, Tables 3:1, 3:5.

⁶⁰ The fact that this study, as noted, only focuses on *political* statements may be an important reason for this. From a different perspective the dominance of economic issues of course reflected the economic circumstances in northwestern Minnesota at the time. A detailed analysis of this may be found in chapter three.

⁶¹ *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* for extensive periods supported the Prohibitionist Party, and had a clear-cut Lutheran orientation.

Notes to Chapter Two

⁶² Soike, 24, 74; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 121; Ingrid Semmingsen, *Veien mot Vest: Utvandringen fra Norge 1865-1915*, (Oslo, H. Aschehoug & Co., 1950), 249.

⁶³ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 122. For example, of the 83,856 people of Norwegian descent who lived in Minnesota in 1875, about 61 percent had emigrated from Norway. The rest had either been born in America or moved west from older settlements.

⁶⁴ Soike, 22; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 25-26.

⁶⁵ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 61.

⁶⁶ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 179-180; Ingrid Semmingsen, "Det Norske Amerika" – i Fortid og Nåtid, (<http://www.nb.no/emigrasjon/>, 05/08/2011).

⁶⁷ Jon Gjerde, "Chain Migration: a Case Study from Western Norway," in Rudolph J. Vecoli and Suzanne M. Sinke, eds., *A Century of European Migration, 1830-1930*, 158-81 (Champaign, Ill., 1991).

⁶⁸ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 117-125; Semmingsen, *Veien mot Vest, 1865-1915*, 248-250.

⁶⁹ Semmingsen, *Veien mot Vest, 1865-1915*, 249.

⁷⁰ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 118, 121.

⁷¹ Soike, 185-197; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 192-195. For specific examples, see chapter three and four of this study.

⁷² Soike 14; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 1.

⁷³ Soike, 162; Ole Georg Moseng et al., *Norsk Historie 2: 1537-1814*, (Oslo, Univesitetsforlaget, 2003), 9-38.

⁷⁴ Soike, 17-18; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 10, 81.

⁷⁵ Moseng et al., 148-153. Anger was as a rule directed towards the representatives of the King who people had to relate to in daily life rather than the King himself.

⁷⁶ Soike, 20.

⁷⁷ "Estate society" refers here to the traditional hierarchical division of society into three distinctive estates: the clergy, the nobility (in Norway the political and cultural elite), and commoners.

⁷⁸ Moseng et al., 336-337; Sverre Steen, *Langsomt Ble Landet Vårt Eget*, (Oslo, J. W. Cappelens Forlag, 1967), 125-133

⁷⁹ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 7.

⁸⁰ Steen, 125-126.

⁸¹ Moseng et al., 283-285.

⁸² Jens Arup Seip, *Utsikt over Norges Historie*, (Oslo, Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS, 2010), 52-54.

⁸³ Moseng et al., 320-325; Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Typisk Norsk, Nasjonal identitet - et ufullendt prosjekt*, <http://folk.uio.no/geirthe/Typisk2.html> (30/08/2011). The historical debate about the extent to which perceptions of a Norwegian ethnic identity existed before the end of the 18th century is complex. Generally speaking, historians today emphasize the identity which existed as more cultural than political in nature.

⁸⁴ Jostein Nærbøvik, *Norsk Historie 1860 – 1914*, (Gjøvik: Det Norske Samlaget, 1999), 180-183; Seip, 90-92, Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 63.

⁸⁵ Seip, 22.

⁸⁶ Steen, 165.

⁸⁷ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 3.

⁸⁸ Nærbøvik, 26, 85; Soike 12; Lovoll, *Norwegians on the Land*. Lovoll asserts that the isolated nature of rural communities in the first half of the nineteenth century can hardly be overstated.

⁸⁹ Seip, 145-146, 148-150. More affluent farmers in the central areas of Norway joined politics earlier.

⁹⁰ Nærbøvik, 97-98. Norway was reinvented as an economically liberal society, quite unique in its structure compared to other countries in Europe at the time.

⁹¹ Nærbøvik, 172.

⁹² Nærbøvik, 172-188.

⁹³ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 10.

⁹⁴ Lovoll *The Promise of America*, 19-22.

⁹⁵ Brøndal 19; Nærbøvik, 22; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 19.

⁹⁶ Nærbøvik, 23; Lovoll, *The Promise of Americas*, 16; Semmingsen, *Veien mot Vest, 1865-1915* 47-48.

⁹⁷ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 21.

⁹⁸ Nærbøvik, 23; Semmingsen, *Veien mot Vest, 1865-1915*, 57-58, 84-85, 238-239; Lovoll *The Promise of America*, 22.

⁹⁹ Lovoll, *Norwegians on the Land*. For example, emigrants from Lower Telemark between 1841 and 1845 were estimated to have left with values equal to about \$2,200 to \$4,400.

¹⁰⁰ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 127.

¹⁰¹ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 55.

¹⁰² Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 51. In 1850 Norwegian immigrants made up 3 percent of Wisconsin's population (9,467 persons). This had increased to 5,6 percent (close to 60 000 people) by 1870.

¹⁰³ Soike, 24; Semmingsen, *Veien mot Vest, 1865-1915*, 181-184; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 31-36.

¹⁰⁴ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 33. The third wave of emigration lasted from 1900 through 1914, with a total of 214,985 departures. After World War 1 emigration again picked up, but never reached the same intensity again.

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- ¹⁰⁵ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 31.
- ¹⁰⁶ Semmingsen, *Veien mot Vest, 1865-1915*, 84-85, 140-141, 238-239; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 28, 31 34-35.
- ¹⁰⁷ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 34.
- ¹⁰⁸ Nærbøvik, 23; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 34.
- ¹⁰⁹ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 34.
- ¹¹⁰ Nærbøvik, 23; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 35-36.
- ¹¹¹ Semmingsen, *Veien mot Vest, 1865-1915*, 50.
- ¹¹² Soike, 20.
- ¹¹³ Semmingsen, *Veien mot Vest, 1865-1915*, 48-55; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 35.
- ¹¹⁴ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 126-128.
- ¹¹⁵ Semmingsen, *Veien mot Vest, 1865-1915*, 157.
- ¹¹⁶ Brøndal, 18.
- ¹¹⁷ Lovoll, *Norwegians on the land*.
- ¹¹⁸ Nærbøvik, 26; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 63; Qualey and Gjerde, "The Norwegians" in June Drenning Holmquist, ed., *They Chose Minnesota; A Survey of The State's Ethnic Groups* (St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society, 1981).
- ¹¹⁹ Nærbøvik 26; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 47, 63.
- ¹²⁰ Nærbøvik, 85.
- ¹²¹ Nærbøvik, 33-36. Whereas one fourth of Norwegians lived in cities or towns in 1875, around 1900 every third Norwegian lived in urban areas.
- ¹²² Lovoll, *Norwegians on the land*. The explanation for this preference for a rural existence among Norwegian Americans is found in the time of emigration, the patterns of settlement, and the region of origin in Norway.
- ¹²³ Soike, 15; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 8.
- ¹²⁴ Soike, 15; Peter A. Much, *Social class and acculturation*, (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press), 198-200; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 9.
- ¹²⁵ Soike, 13; Nærbøvik, 172-173, 182.
- ¹²⁶ See chapter three for specific examples.
- ¹²⁷ Soike, 17.
- ¹²⁸ Soike, 17.
- ¹²⁹ Soike, 22.
- ¹³⁰ Nærbøvik, 172.
- ¹³¹ Nærbøvik, 177.

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- ¹³² Nærbøvik, 179; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 152-155, 197-198.
- ¹³³ Nærbøvik, 180.
- ¹³⁴ Nærbøvik, 97-213.
- ¹³⁵ Nærbøvik, 180-181.
- ¹³⁶ Semmingsen, "Det Norske Amerika" – i Fortid og Nåtid.
- ¹³⁷ Semmingsen, *Veien mot Vest, 1865-1915*, 257-258; 441; Skarstein, 119-120.
- ¹³⁸ John B. Whist, *Norsk-amerikanernes festskrift, 1914*. (Decorah, Iowa : Symra Co., c1914)., 64-65; Semmingsen, *Veien mot Vest, 1865-1915*, 258-259.
- ¹³⁹ Semmingsen, *Veien mot Vest, 1865-1915*, 131-136, 260; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 134-135.
- ¹⁴⁰ Qualey and Gjerde, 228.
- ¹⁴¹ Carl H. Chrislock, *The politics of protest in Minnesota, 1890 – 1901, from populism to progressivism*, (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1954), 22, 25-29; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 192-193; Editorial in *Rohuggeren*, 1894, July 31.
- ¹⁴² Qualey and Gjerde, 42-43.
- ¹⁴³ Chrislock, *politics of protest in Minnesota, 1890 – 1901, from populism to progressivism*, 108.
- ¹⁴⁴ John D. Hicks, *Populist Revolt: A history of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, (Minnesota, University of Minnesota, 1955), 536-38; Editorial in *Nordvesten*, Mars 13, 1890; Editorials in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 24, 1890; Editorials in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, August 27, 1890; Editorials in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*; Semptember 3, 1890; Soike, 91; , Gieske L. Millard and Steven J., Keillor, *Norwegian Yankee – Knute Nelson and the Failure of American Politics, 1860-1923*, (The Norwegian American Historical Association, Minnesota, Northfield, 1995), 148.
- ¹⁴⁵ Chrislock, *The politics of protest in Minnesota, 1890 – 1901, from populism to progressivism*, 100; Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, August 27, 1890; Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 3, 1890.
- ¹⁴⁶ "The alliance ticket," Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, August 17, 1890; Editorial in *Nordvesten*, November 13, 1890; Soike, 91, 96.
- ¹⁴⁷ Soike, 78.
- ¹⁴⁸ Editorial in *Nordvesten* Mars, 13, 1890.
- ¹⁴⁹ Chrislock, Carl H., *The politics of protest in Minnesota, 1890 – 1901, from populism to progressivism*, 22, 25-29.
- ¹⁵⁰ Olaf O. Vinje to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 22, 1890.
- ¹⁵¹ Babcock, *The Scandinavian Element in the United States*, 157; Soike, 44-46.
- ¹⁵² Soike, 45.
- ¹⁵³ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 180; Soike, 75.
- ¹⁵⁴ Gieske and Keillor, 121-144; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 189-190.
- ¹⁵⁵ Samuel P. Hayes, *Political Paty and the Community-Society continuum*, 158.

¹⁵⁶ John J. Aune to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, July 2, 1890; C. W. Brandbourg and Haldor Boen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, August 17, 1890.

¹⁵⁷ J. Aune to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, July 2, 1890.

¹⁵⁸ Chrislock, Carl H., "The Alliance Party and the Minnesota Legislature of 1891," in *Minnesota History Magazine*, September 1957, 298-299.
<http://collections.mnhs.org/MNHHistoryMagazine/articles/35/v35i07p297-312.pdf>. (03/07/2011)

¹⁵⁹ Soike, 77-78, 94-95.

¹⁶⁰ Gieske and Keillor, 151, Carl H. Chrislock, *The Alliance Party and the Minnesota Legislature of 1991*, 298-299.

¹⁶¹ Gieske and Keillor, 151; "I Minnesota," editorial in *Nordvesten*, November 13, 1890.

¹⁶² Soike, 78, 94-95.

¹⁶³ Soike, 79; Gieske and Keillor, 151; Chrislock, *The Alliance Party and the Minnesota Legislature of 1991*, 300.

¹⁶⁴ Soike, 92.

¹⁶⁵ "Alliance Man" to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, June 23, 1890. Although the name of the letter writer is concealed, the letter may be authentic. The "Alliance man" refers to a specific decision made by his Farmers' Alliance, and informs readers that he lives in Moodside, Polk County.

¹⁶⁶ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 181-188.

¹⁶⁷ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 181.

¹⁶⁸ Johannes B. Wist, "Pressen efter Borgerkrigen." In *Norskamerikanernes Festskrift, 1914*, ed. Johannes B. Wist. (Decorah, Iowa, Symra Company, 1914), 117; Odd S. Lovoll, *Norwegian Newspapers in America: Connecting Norway and the New Land*, (St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010), 119.

¹⁶⁹ Wist, 100. Anfin Solem was the son of Ellef and Inger Serine (Evavold) Solem, and married Sept 1880 to Marith Ronning. (<http://listsearches.rootsweb.com/th/read/TRONDELAGE/2006-04/1144506585> (17/04/2011))

¹⁷⁰ Lovoll, *Norwegian Newspapers in America: Connecting Norway and the New Land*, 121.

¹⁷¹ Editorials in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 5, 1892; Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 12, 1894.

¹⁷² Wist, 117; Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, November 18, 1893. Hagen accentuates this explanation himself when he in the first issue of *Rodhuggeren* points out that the emergence of his new venture is a direct result of *Normanden's* fall. This Grand Forks newspaper was sold last spring and will now, Hagen predicts, be controlled the fierce Republicans. Thus *Normanden*, who reportedly has fought heroically for enlightenment, freedom and progress, will become a Republican newspaper. As a result, the Peoples Party would allegedly lack the consistent support of a Norwegian newspaper. The consequences of this for the Peoples Party and the movement of reform in the north of Minnesota and North Dakota, areas so densely populated with Norwegian readers, could be severe

¹⁷³ Wist, 128.

¹⁷⁴ Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, November 28, 1893.

¹⁷⁵ Lovoll, *Norwegian Newspapers in America: Connecting Norway and the New Land*, 121.

¹⁷⁶ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 8, 1892; Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, January 2, 1893.

¹⁷⁷ Wist, 96. Wist's involvement in *Nordvesten* must be considered when evaluating the credibility of this statement.

¹⁷⁸ *Nordvesten*, November 2, 1892. Wist in *Norsk Amerikansk Festskrift 1914* informs readers that Listoe gained this position as a result of persistent advocacy for the Republican Party both through his paper and by “practical political involvement” elsewhere.

¹⁷⁹ A closer analysis is found in chapters three and four.

¹⁸⁰ Gieske and Keillor, 107, 118.

¹⁸¹ Wist, 100.

¹⁸² Wist, 79.

¹⁸³ Wist, 101.

¹⁸⁴ American Newspaper directory, Volume 32, 1st edition.

¹⁸⁵ Knut Huttetu to *Rodhuggeren*, December 19, 1893.

¹⁸⁶ Olaf O. Vinje to *Rodhuggeren*, January 9, 1894.

¹⁸⁷ Timothy Tidelswift to *Nordvesten*, Mars 20, 1890.

¹⁸⁸ American Newspaper directory, Volume 32, 1st edition.

¹⁸⁹ American Newspaper directory, Volume 32, 1st edition. At this time Listoe was no longer responsible; in 1897 he had acquired the position as American Consul in Rotterdam, and as a result he sold fifty percent of the newspaper to F. C. Listoe, and returned the editorial tasks to Chr. Brandt.

¹⁹⁰ Wist, 98. It must be noted that since Wist was the editor of *Norsk Amerikansk Festskrift 1914*, it is only natural that he emphasizes developments beyond his control when explaining the demise of *Nordvesten* (He consistently stresses that the editors were never to blame for the loss of readers). It is likely that Hagen, if he hypothetically speaking had been the editor of the *Festskrift*, would have explained the situation quite differently.

Notes to Chapter Three

¹⁹¹ The term *political elite* encompasses high-ranking politicians, for example Ignatius Donnelly and Knute Nelson, and less influential but nevertheless powerful men like Haldor E. Boen and Kittel Halvorson. Also included in this group are the editors of the newspapers which have been studied. As far as possible, focus in this chapter will rest on political statements from ordinary farmers.

¹⁹² Brøndal, 210-211; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 181.

¹⁹³ Answer from the editors of *Rodhuggeren* to a letter from H. P. Bjørge, “Kan ‘Løgnaktige Personligheder’ gavne Reformsagen?,” *Rodhuggeren*, September 4, 1894.

¹⁹⁴ Brøndal, 213. Compared to Brøndal’s findings in his study of *Skandinaven* and *Hemlandet*, editorial control was unquestionably more limited in *Rodhuggeren* and *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*. It is likely that the level of manipulation and construction Brøndal identified correlates more closely to the extent to which the editor of *Nordvesten* exercised his editorial power. For some specific examples, see: Answers from the editors to the letter “Fra lecturer Trovaten,” written by Andrew Trovaten, *Rodhuggeren*, September 18, 1894; “Fra Elbow Lake,” Gilbert Hagen to *Rodhuggeren*, October 23, 1894; Answer to Mr. John Baardson from Anfin Solem, “Prohibitionistenes Tidel,” Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 12, 1894.

¹⁹⁵ Brøndal proposes that one important influence on editorial style may have been close party affiliation. In the sense that Republican newspapers followed an already established press tradition characterized by editorial authority, this is correct. However, the fact that *Rodhuggeren* also had very close ties to the political party it supported indicates that the relevant press culture in a political camp was more important than the

proximity between political interests and the newspaper. This being said, there also existed Populist publications which were characterized by strong editorial control.

¹⁹⁶ "Hvem er Dukes?," Editorial in *Nordvesten*, September 4, 1890.

¹⁹⁷ Brøndal, 213.

¹⁹⁸ Brøndal, 210. Brøndal notes that a culture of anonymity prevailed among letter writers in both *Skandinaven* and *Heimlandet*.

¹⁹⁹ For example, see: Listoe, "Fra Læg og Lærd," in *Nordvesten*, October 9, 1890. The piece of information was printed again and again as an introduction to the newspaper's quite limited section of letters to the editor.

²⁰⁰ John J. Aune to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, July 4, 1894.

²⁰¹ Appendix: 2, Number count for political orientation statistics (after tables), *Nordvesten*, 1890-1894; "En Republikaner" (Mower County, Minnesota) to *Nordvesten*, May 19, 1892.

²⁰² Ole E. Hagen and Torkel Oftelie, "Til Venner og Motstandere," Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, November 18, 1893.

²⁰³ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 207-208.

²⁰⁴ T. B. (Rothlay, Minnesota) to *Rodhuggeren*, January 30, 1894. For more telling examples, see the discussion about the subject categories *Class-related matters* and *Pure politics* below.

²⁰⁵ "I Norge kalte man slikt snobberi," T. Olson to *Rodhuggeren*, July 17 1894. For another telling example, see: John J. Aune to *Rodhuggeren*, July 10, 1894.

²⁰⁶ "Jo, Jentene kommer," Ella Jacobson to *Rodhuggeren*, February 6, 1894. Personally, she is particularly interested in political information provided by "Politikustown" and "Per i Sjumilsstøvlene," two ironic and playful political weekly sections of *Rodhuggeren* which will be discussed in greater detail in a different context towards the end of the chapter. This letter is most likely authentic. First, the writer has left her full name and address. Second, some grammatical errors indicate that the letter in fact has been written by a child. Third, one may rightly question the point of forging a letter like this.

²⁰⁷ Halvor Shirley to *Rodhuggeren*, August 28, 1894; "Om Kvinnesagen," Samuel Garborg to *Rodhuggeren*, September 4, 1894; "Miscellaneous," Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, August 28, 1894; "Til de Skandinaviske unge Damer," Thea Rudth to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 10, 1894; Olaf O. Vinje to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 3, 1890.

²⁰⁸ Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, 1894, February 27th.

²⁰⁹ "Magne on Kvinnesagen," Magne to *Rodhuggeren*, February 20th 1894.

²¹⁰ For example, see: Editorial (about Laura Eisenhuth) in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 10, 1890;

²¹¹ Jean Christie, *Sarah Christie Stevens, Schoolwoman*, <http://collections.mnhs.org/MNHHistoryMagazine/articles/48/v48i06p245-254.pdf> (13/09/2011)

²¹² "Fra Elbow Lake, Minns.," B. T. Hagen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, Oktober 12, 1892.

²¹³ Brøndal 211.

²¹⁴ Both *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Rodhuggeren* also expressed considerable amounts of non-political content. However, their political roles as organs for the reform movements and the continuous presentation of letters to the editor conditioned a consistent political focus. *Nordvesten*, by comparison, did not have the same close political relation to its readers.

²¹⁵ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, October 30, 1890.

²¹⁶ These are just general trends, and reflect the general orientation (probably in part based on editorial background, political orientation, and target audience) of the newspapers.

²¹⁷ Brøndal, 273-274. Due to a slightly different approach and variation in content between the newspapers studied here and *Skandinaven* and *Heimlandet*, several topics/categories of topics have been changed.

²¹⁸ The more specific composition of each category is as follows: *Class-related matters* includes the sub-topics "Business antagonism," "Cooperation," "Farmer matters," "Labor matters," and "Plutocracy"; *Economic matters* includes the sub-topics "Currency," "Depression," "Other economic," "Tariff," and "Trusts"; *Ethnocultural matters* includes the sub-topics: "Ethnic appeals," "Religion," and "Temperance"; and *Pure politics* includes the sub-topics: "Corruption," "Democracy," "Political disenchantment," "Reform," "Reformer Distrust" and "Women." The categorization and terminology above is only inspired by Brøndal. The statistical material in this project has been processed in a quite different way than the material in his study.

²¹⁹ Appendix: 1. Topic explanation.

²²⁰ This exemplifies the individual topics *Ethnic appeals* and *Religion*. These were the two most extensively discussed individual topics within this category from 1890 to 1894. See Appendix 2, Tables 3:1-3:4.

²²¹ Appendix 2, Tables 3:1-3:4. The relative statistical importance of this category varied from paper to paper, but on average it stabilized around at 10 percent. The developments over time for *Nordvesten* (in which the category dropped from 20 percent to 6 percent between 1890 and 1894) and in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* (in which the category increased from 10 percent to 16 percent in the same period) seem primarily to have been a consequence of editorial intervention. As such, these variations will be accounted for in chapter four.

²²² Brøndal, 219, 273.

²²³ This exemplifies the individual topics *Trusts*, *Currency* and *Tariff*. These were the three most extensively discussed individual topics within this category from 1890 to 1894. See Appendix 2, Tables 3:5-3:8. The statistical variations between the different newspapers reflect differences in their political points of view.

²²⁴ D. Hicks, *Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, 95-96.

²²⁵ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 192.

²²⁶ "Her er min haand 'Rodhugger'," Knut Huttetu to *Rodhuggeren*, December 19, 1893. The signature "Knut Huttetu" is fictional. He contributed to reader discussions in both *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Rodhuggeren*.

²²⁷ Ole E. Hagen to *Red River Dalen*, May 20, 1890.

²²⁸ "Verdens Gang I Norge," Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, September 18, 1894; "Norges Hypothekbank," Halstein Lade to *Rodhuggeren*, July 10, 1894.

²²⁹ This exemplifies the individual topics *Plutocracy*, *Farmer Matters*, and *Labor Matters*. These were the most extensively discussed individual topics within this subject category. See Appendix: 2, Tables 3:5-3:8. In the newspapers of reform, this subject category remained relatively stable at between 25 percent and 30 percent. In *Nordvesten*, the percentage of class-related matters steadily increased from a little over 15 percent in 1890, to more than 25 percent in 1894. Possible explanations for this will be discussed in chapter four.

²³⁰ For examples, see "Folkepartiets Statskonvention" Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, July 20th, 1892; "Det Nye Parti," Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, August 27, 1890, "Haarde Tider," John Vik to *Rodhuggeren*, January 2, 1894.

²³¹ In fact, *labor matters* were discussed more than twice as much as *farmer matters* in *Nordvesten* that year. (Appendix 2, table 3:7). *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* in a similar vein increased its focus on labor matters from around 8 percent in 1890 and 1892 to 14 percent in 1894. (Appendix 2, table 3:6). For examples, see "Strike og Oprør,"

“Blod flyder i Chicago,” “Debs er ikke istand til at holde Strikerne i Tømme, og tilkaldte Tropper skyder paa Hoben,” “Lovløse Sværme af Chicagos Udsbud benytter sig af Striden til i Arbeidernes Navn at brædne, rove og ødelegge Jernbanernes og anden Eiendom,” Editorials in *Nordvesten*, July 12, 1894.

²³² John D. Hicks, *Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party*, 95-96, 103; “Towns of Everts,” Chr. Berg to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 22, 1890.

²³³ The following examples give a representative selection in a variety of genres and from writers of different social status. “Farmernes og Arbeidernes Platform i Minnesota,” Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 8, 1890; “Fra Elbow Lake og Omegn,” B. T. Hagen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 8, 1890; “Hvorfor danne et nytt Parti!,” Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 24, 1890; John J. Aune to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, July 2, 1890; “Er Farmernes og Arbeidernes Klager Berettigede?,” O. F. Løseth to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 15, 1890.

²³⁴ “Rothlay,” Tollef O. Grønseth to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, Oktober 15, 1892.

²³⁵ Gustaf Kyllander to *Rodhuggeren*, January 9, 1894.

²³⁶ J. S. Jacobsen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, Jan 8, 1890, Defending shop-keepers: En Israelit to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, February 12, 1890; J. U. Biborg to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, Februrary 5, 1890; C. B. Brandborg to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, January 22, 1890; “Stag Historiens Anden Del,” C. Hanson (slagter) to *Rodhuggeren*, January 2, 1894.

²³⁷ Ebbe to *Rodhuggeren*, September 4, 1894.

²³⁸ Soike, 28-29; Wefald, 26-27. Many other factors must also be taken into consideration when explaining Norwegian American participation in political movements at the time.

²³⁹ “Farmerbevegelsen,” En ven af farmerne (from Battle Lake) to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, July 9, 1890.

²⁴⁰ Chr. Berg to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 22, 1890. An even more poetic example of how perceptions of ethnic identity could be used in a political context may be found in the discussion of *pure politics* below.

²⁴¹ This exemplifies the individual topics *Corruption*, *Democracy*, *Political disenchantment* and *Reform*. These were the four most extensively discussed individual topics within this category from 1890 to 1894. See Appendix: 2, Table 3:5-3:8.

²⁴² Knut Huttetu to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 1, 1890. For more examples, see: Editorial in *Red River Dalen*, May 20, 1890; *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 8, 1890. Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 17, 1890.

²⁴³ “Elbow Lake,” B. T. Hagen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, Oktober 12, 1892.

²⁴⁴ Readers to *Rodhuggeren*, January and February 1894.

²⁴⁵ “Hr. Rodhuggar!,” Olaf O. Vinje to *Rodhuggeren*, December 12, 1894. See also “Hr. Rodhugger,” Olav Haugtro to *Rodhuggeren*, January 16, 1894; Lars T. Sunde to *Rodhuggeren*, January 16, 1894; Agnostik to *Rodhuggeren*, January 2, 1894.

²⁴⁶ For a representative selection of campaign songs and poems, see: “Nordens Aand,” Ole Kringen in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 19, 1890; “Lys,” Olav Haugtrø to *Rodhuggeren*, Februray 20, 1894; “Jernbanekongen og Satan,” J. B. Anderson to *Rodhuggeren*, Juli 13, 1894; “Campaigne Marsch for den Norske Amerikaner,” P. Ydstie in *Rodhuggeren*, August 28, 1894; “Tidens Guder er dens mænd; Lars O brekke to *Rodhuggeren*, September 18, 1894; F. Teldahl to *Rodhuggeren*, October 2, 1894.

²⁴⁷ Editorial, *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 10, 1890.

²⁴⁸ B. T. Hagen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, Oktober 8, 1890.

²⁴⁹ B. T. Hagen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 12, 1892.

²⁵⁰ Magne to *Rodhuggeren*, December 5, 1893. For similar expressions of the need to “purify politics,” see *Rodhuggeren*, December 5, 12, 19, 26, 1893 and *Rodhuggeren* January 2, 9, 16, 1894.

²⁵¹ Appendix: 2, Tables 3:5-3:8.

²⁵² “Prohibitionistenes Tidel,” “Hvem kandidatene er,” Editorials in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 12, 1894; “Prohibitionistenes Tidel,” “Hvem kandidatene er (forts.),” Editorials in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 19, 1894; “Prohibitionistenes Tidel,” “Hvem kandidatene er (forts.)” Editorials in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 26, 1894; “Prohibitionistenes Tidel,” “Hvem kandidatene er (forts.),” Editorials in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 17, 1894. The histories of the Norwegian American Prohibitionist candidates and local temperance movements are here discussed in detail.

²⁵³ The space-boundaries of this project does not allow for an exhaustive discussion of the extent to which indirect expressions of ethnic identity may have surfaced in the political discussions about temperance. More explicit and relevant expressions have been prioritized.

²⁵⁴ Brøndal, 216; “Til redaktørene for ‘Rodhuggeren’,” A. J. Hulteng to *Rodhuggeren*, January 2, 1894; Agnostik to *Rodhuggeren*, January 2, 1894; “Eagle Lake,” B. R. F. to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, June 20, 1894; A. J. Hulteng to *Rodhuggeren*, August 14, 1894; Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, August 14, 1894; September 11, 1894; Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, November 2, 1894.

²⁵⁵ S. G. Mogan to *Rodhuggeren*, February 20, 1894. See Also “Til Agnostikk,” Bjug to *Rodhuggeren*, January 23, 1894;

²⁵⁶ Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, February 13, 1894. For more telling examples of unconventional religious expressions, see: “En bøn om hjelp,” C. J. W. Brede to *Rodhuggeren*, July 31, 1894; “Fra valley sity, N. D.,” Gunder Pedersen to *Rodhuggeren*, September 25, 1894.

²⁵⁷ Ebbe to *Roghuggeren*, 1894, September 4th. For another telling example, see “Til redaktørene for *Rodhuggeren*,” A. J. Hulteng to *Rodhuggeren*, January 2, 1894.

²⁵⁸ Soike, 106-108. The Editors’ loyalty to and distrust of specific candidates also played an important role. Although not so relevant from a bottom-up perspective, it should be noted that editor Solem in the 1894 campaign seems to have thrown his support behind the Prohibitionists even though he favored temperance over prohibition principles. The major reason for this was supposedly his dislike of People’s Party candidate Haldor Boen (and the editors of *Rodhuggeren*) (Soike, 107). At the same time, Solem in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* supported Sidney M. Owen, the People’s Party candidate for governor. “Folkepartiets Guvernørkandidat,” Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 10, 1894.

²⁵⁹ Soike, 107. Only a few readers voiced their opinion about this matter (see below). Editors and politicians to a much greater extent discussed the political implications of religious affiliation, for example by commenting on the anti-Catholic activity by the American Protective Association.

²⁶⁰ Appendix 2, Tables 3:6-3:8. The individual topic “Religion” was most commonly discussed in relation to the Prohibitionist Party. See Appendix 1 for explanation of individual topics.

²⁶¹ Soike, 102-103, 108-109; “People’s Party Ticket,” Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, weekly from September 7 onwards, 1892; “Prohibitionistenes tidel,” Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 12, 1894; “Ole Kron,” Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 3, 1894; “Vor Næste Senator,” Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, Oktober 17, 1894;

²⁶² Soike, 91, 93; Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, October 2, 1894; *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, “Til Rodhuggerens Redatør,” letter to the editor by H. S. Hillboe to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, Oktober 17, 1894; “Whiskyplanken,” Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, October 23, 1894; L. H. Reitan to *Rodhuggeren*, October 23, 1894.

²⁶³ Appendix: 1 and 2, Table 3:6. The percentage of statements connecting religion and politics (most importantly religion and reform) quadrupled from 1890/1892 to 1894. The editorial support of and criticism of the differing political parties will be discussed more closely in chapter four.

²⁶⁴ "Den bedste Politik," Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 5, 1894.

²⁶⁵ H. P. Nelson to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 31, 1894. Also see: "Vil du stemme for fuld Reform den 6te November?," H. P. Nelson to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 10, 1894.

²⁶⁶ H. B. Brekke to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 19, 1894; Olaf O. Vinje to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 26, 1894.

²⁶⁷ Brøndal, 216, 273. Appendix: 2, Tables 3:5-3:8.

²⁶⁸ Brøndal, 216; Soike, 107.

²⁶⁹ "En Fra Olden" to *Rodhuggeren*, July 31, 1894.

²⁷⁰ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 159-160. An abundance of non-political religious content in both *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* and *Nordvesten* indicate that local churches still were a central element in Norwegian American society in the region.

²⁷¹ Brøndal, 221. In this regard the findings of this study correlate with Brøndal's. He writes that "(...) To support a politician because he was of Norwegian (...) background was a much simpler matter than to discuss the political meaning of being Scandinavian-American."

²⁷² Brøndal, 224.

²⁷³ "Hr. Redaktør!," E. A. To *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 12, 1892.

²⁷⁴ Appendix: 2, Tables 3:5-3:8. The link between national attachment and specific attributes was most frequently invoked by the political elite. See chapter four for a more exhaustive discussion.

²⁷⁵ A voter, to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 16, 1892.

²⁷⁶ Brøndal, 62, 140; Øverland, *Hjemlandsmyter: Om Skaping av Gamle Røtter i et Nytt Land*, 155-157.

²⁷⁷ "Skal man rope Hurra eller klede seg i Sek og Aske," Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, July 31, 1894; Brøndal, 62.

²⁷⁸ "Skal man rope Hurra eller klede seg i Sek og Aske," Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, July 31, 1894. Only the first half of the letter has been copied, as it sufficiently exemplifies the point.

²⁷⁹ "Skal man rope Hurra eller klede seg i Sek og Aske," Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, July 31, 1894.

²⁸⁰ The style of writing in the different pieces varies. Most likely, they were composed by a range of reform-oriented persons with varying degrees of connection to the editors of the newspaper. Some pieces, due to their content and criticism of certain individuals, seem to have been written by the staff of the newspaper, while others are more detached from the contemporary political debate, and may have been the results of personal initiative. For some examples, see "Fra Politikustown," Pædagog to *Rodhuggeren*, January 2, 1894; "Fra Filistertown," Methusalem to *Rodhuggeren*, January 23, 1894; "Per i Sjumilsstøvlene," Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, January 30, 1894; "Fra Politikustown," Ahasverus to *Rodhuggeren*, July 10, 1894; "Fra Politikustown," Ahasverus to *Rodhuggeren*, July 31, 1894; "Fra Filistertown," Truls to *Rodhuggeren*, October 2, 1894.

²⁸¹ "Fra Filistertown," Methusalem to *Rodhuggeren*, January 23, 1894.

²⁸² "Fra Filistertown," Truls to *Rodhuggeren*, October 2, 1894.

²⁸³ "Jo, Jentene kommer," Ella Jacobson to *Rodhuggeren*, February 6, 1894.

²⁸⁴ "Folkehøyskoler i Amerika," Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, January 30, 1894.

Notes to Chapter Four

²⁸⁵ See Appendix: 1 for a detailed definition of "ethic appeals."

²⁸⁶ Gieske and Keillor, 117-18, 122-123; Wist, 97-98. Søren Listoe, a long time enemy of Knute Nelson, was removed by the Norwegian American when Nelson beat Charles F. Kindred for the Republican nomination in Minnesota's fifth congressional district. (Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 190) The history of conflict between Listoe and Nelson does not seem to have influenced the press coverage of the Norwegian American's runs for the position of governor in Minnesota in 1892 and 1894.

²⁸⁷ Wist, 98-99.

²⁸⁸ Wist, 117.

²⁸⁹ "Alliancens Valgseddel," Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, August 27, 1890.

²⁹⁰ "Republikanernes Statskonvention," Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, August 3, 1892; "Ogsaa om mødet i Elbow Lake," Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892; "People's Party ticket," Editorials in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* from September 7 - October 16, 1892.

²⁹¹ "Prohibitionistenes Tidel," Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 12, 1894.

²⁹² At this point, *Rodhuggeren* to a greater extent than *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* covered Alliance activities (6,4 percent in *Rodhuggeren* against 4,5 percent in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*), see Appendix: 2, Tables 3:9-3:11.

²⁹³ Appendix: 2, Number count for political orientation statistics.

²⁹⁴ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, August 27; Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 3, 1890; Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 8, 1890; Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 15, 1890.

²⁹⁵ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, August 27; Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 3, 1890.

²⁹⁶ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 3, 1890.

²⁹⁷ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 3, 1890.

²⁹⁸ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 29, 1890. It must be mentioned here that the Democratic Party actually had endorsed several of the candidates in the fusion ticket. This did not stop Solem from attacking what he perceived to be a rotten and corrupt political establishment (including both of the old parties). He proposed that the contemporary political movement against the rotten status quo was of greater significance than the movement against slavery and the civil war, "(...) because slavery never has caused the demise of any nation, but political corruption has."

²⁹⁹ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 3, 1890.

³⁰⁰ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, October 30, 1890. Listoe's reference to nationalistic sentiments is discussed in greater detail later.

³⁰¹ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 3, 1890.

³⁰² Editorial in *Nordvesten*, September 25, 1890.

³⁰³ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, July 19, 1894.

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- ³⁰⁴ Political-religious arguments were most explicit in 1894, and refer to the notion of “reform through Christianity,” as discussed in the previous chapter.
- ³⁰⁵ “Snap Shots,” Kodak to *Rodhuggeren*, October 23, 1894.
- ³⁰⁶ Editorial answer to a reader’s letter written by Mr M. Sektnan to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 5, 1892.
- ³⁰⁷ Editorials in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 5, 1892. It should be noted that Solem exercises extreme caution when criticizing Mr. Boen. He excuses himself several times in the article, and seems to appreciate that pulling his support for a fellow Norwegian American reformer was a drastic measure.
- ³⁰⁸ “The People’s Party Ticket,” Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 7, 1892; “Folkepartiets stats-tidel,” Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 26, 1894.
- ³⁰⁹ Soike, 62.
- ³¹⁰ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, September 12, 1894.
- ³¹¹ Appendix: 2, Table 3:7. For example, the percent of incidence in statements for the individual topics “temperance” and “religion” remained for the most part below two percent, while the percent of incidence in statements for the individual topic “ethnic appeals” was around sixteen percent in 1890, around eight percent in 1892, and around four percent in 1894.
- ³¹² Editorial in *Nordvesten*, July 31, 1890.
- ³¹³ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, August 14, 1890.
- ³¹⁴ “Fredrik P. Brown,” Editorial in *Nordvesten*, September 11, 1890.
- ³¹⁵ “Fredrik P. Brown,” Editorial in *Nordvesten*, October 30, 1890.
- ³¹⁶ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, September 18, 1890; Editorial in *Nordvesten*, October 18, 1890; Editorials in *Nordvesten*, October 30, 1890. The most prominent of these out-of state “fine Norwegian American specimen” was Nils P. Haugen, “(...) the only Norwegian to currently have a seat in the US congress.” (October 30, 1890). Additionally, Knute Nelson was frequently mentioned during the 1890 campaign even though he was not a candidate for any public office that year.
- ³¹⁷ Appendix: 2, Number count for political orientation statistics.
- ³¹⁸ “Guvernør Nelson,” Editorial in *Nordvesten*, March 31, 1892.
- ³¹⁹ “Fredrik P. Brown,” Editorial in *Nordvesten*, November 3, 1892.
- ³²⁰ Soike, 45.
- ³²¹ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, November 3, 1892.
- ³²² Editorial in *Nordvesten*, November 1, 1894.
- ³²³ Orm Øverland, *Immigrant Minds, American identities: making the United States Home, 1870-1930*, (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 170-183.
- ³²⁴ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, October 27, 1892.
- ³²⁵ Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, October 30, 1894.
- ³²⁶ Soike, 112-114.
- ³²⁷ “Boens ’Mudderpram’ gaaet sig fast i sit eget mudder,” Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 3, 1894.

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- ³²⁸ Olaf O. Vinje to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 19, 1892.
- ³²⁹ Appendix: 2, Number count for political orientation statistics.
- ³³⁰ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, October 30 1890.
- ³³¹ Republikaner to *Nordvesten*, October 30, 1890.
- ³³² Appendix: 2, Number count for political orientation statistics. The statistical data for some years indicate the extent to which press coverage of the different political parties were positive, neutral, or negative. Interestingly, almost everything which was written in *Nordvesten* about the Democratic Party and the People's Party was negative.
- ³³³ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, October 27, 1892.
- ³³⁴ "Et Minneapolis brev," Ola to *Rodhuggeren*, July 31, 1894.
- ³³⁵ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, September 6, 1894.
- ³³⁶ Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, January 9, 1894. An entire thesis can be written about *Fergus Falls Ugeblad's* and *Rodhuggeren's* besmirching of one another and other newspapers.
- ³³⁷ Niels Anderson to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, October 1, 1890.
- ³³⁸ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, October 6, 1894. Editorial in *Nordvesten*, October 13;
- ³³⁹ Gieske and Keillor, 165-166.
- ³⁴⁰ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892; "En kjæk guvernørkandidat," Editorial in *Nordvesten*, November 3, 1892; Gieske and Keillor, 165.
- ³⁴¹ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892.
- ³⁴² "Ogsaa om mødet i Elbow Lake," B. T. Hagen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892.
- ³⁴³ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892; Gieske and Keillor, 165.
- ³⁴⁴ "Ogsaa om mødet i Elbow Lake," B. T. Hagen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892.
- ³⁴⁵ "En kjæk guvernørkandidat," Editorial in *Nordvesten*, November 3, 1892; Gieske and Keillor, 165-166. According to Republican *Pioneer Press* the Democrats and Alliance masses had evidently formed 'an organized conspiracy to break up the meeting.'
- ³⁴⁶ "Ogsaa om mødet i Elbow Lake," B. T. Hagen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892; Editorial in *Nordvesten*, November 3, 1892; Gieske and Keillor, 165-166; Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892.
- ³⁴⁷ "Ogsaa om mødet i Elbow Lake," B. T. Hagen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892; Gieske and Keillor, 165-166.
- ³⁴⁸ "Ogsaa om mødet i Elbow Lake," B. T. Hagen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892.
- ³⁴⁹ "Ogsaa om mødet i Elbow Lake," B. T. Hagen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892; Gieske and Keillor, 166.
- ³⁵⁰ "Ogsaa om mødet i Elbow Lake," B. T. Hagen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892.
- ³⁵¹ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892.

³⁵² Editorial in *Nordvesten*, October 27, 1892. Knute Nelson was a small man. For example, he was called the “little Norwegian.” (Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 190).

³⁵³ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, October 27, 1892.

³⁵⁴ “Ogsaa om mødet i Elbow Lake,” B. T. Hagen to *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892.

³⁵⁵ Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, November 2, 1892.

³⁵⁶ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, October 27, 1892.

³⁵⁷ Editorial in *Nordvesten*, October 27, 1892.

³⁵⁸ Soike, 78.

³⁵⁹ Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, November 2, 1894.

Notes to Chapter Five

³⁶⁰ Soike, 186.

³⁶¹ Soike, 186-197.

³⁶² Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, October 30, 1894. However, it should also be noted that readers of the divergent newspapers spent between one and two dollars for a subscription every year in a time characterized by serious economic hardship. This may have boosted the political and social polarization of the press. From a more general perspective, the fact that the newspapers of reform were owned and controlled by individuals who were unafraid to follow their at times quite unconventional personal ideological convictions must also be considered.

³⁶³ Soike, 78.

³⁶⁴ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 192.

³⁶⁵ Brøndal, 251-253; Soike, 189; Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 193, 198.

³⁶⁶ Brøndal, 219.

³⁶⁷ Soike, 78.

Notes to Appendixes

³⁶⁸ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 192.

³⁶⁹ Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, January 2, 1894; Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, July 24, 1894; Editorial in *Rodhuggeren*, July 17, 1894; Editorial in *Fergus Falls Ugeblad*, August 15, 1894.

³⁷⁰ Comment: two very informative articles – political rhetoric and rationalization taken into consideration - (one re-printed from *Den Danske Pioneer*, one written by the editors themselves) about the Pullman Strike may be found in *Rodhuggeren*, 1894, July 31.

