**1880s Nativists replaced by modern day Nativists but message remains the same**

By Patrick Osio, Jr./HispanicVista.com

A Nebraska elementary school teacher was arrested and convicted for teaching in a foreign language. He was fined and jailed as the law read that teaching elementary school children a foreign language or using a foreign language to teach was a crime. How can this possibly happen in America?

Were this article to end at this point, letters would pour in suggesting that the teacher and I go back to Mexico. Letters would include hoorays for Nebraska along with reminders that English is the language of America and that Mexicans do not want to assimilate to the American culture and way of life and are stealing jobs from Americans.

Hold off on the letters, there is more to the article. The teacher arrested and jailed was not a Hispanic, he was of German ethnicity and the language he used was not Spanish, it was German. The teacher appealed to the Supreme Court (Meyer vs. Nebraska) that in turn overturned the conviction as an infringement on personal liberty.

Since the creation of the country after the American Revolution there have been those, known as nationalists, who oppose immigration, foreign language usage and the practice of religions and cultures not conforming to those of the nationalists. Today’s similar in attitude group are but the latest batch, whose commonality with past groups is their claims that unless we make a final stand the country, culture and sovereignty will be overrun and forever lost.

Teacher Myer’s Supreme Court case was in 1923. But the question of language dates to the organization of the new country as the founders debated which language to adopt. German was of prime consideration, as was Dutch and even Greek was considered. There was good reason, about one-third of the population was foreign born and numerous languages were in use. English was chosen as the nation’s language (though never as the official language) simply because the majority of the founders in power were English users.

Early day nativists argued that immigrants depressed the wages of "artisans and laborers because newcomers would work for less pay than native-born workers." This argument was heard in the early 1800s about the Irish and German immigrants, today it’s about Mexicans.

We also hear that Mexico through Mexican immigrants is hatching a Reconquista, a plot to take back the “conquered land.” In 1844, the argument was that the Pope in Rome was secretly planning to seize control of America through Irish Catholics. In those days opportunistic political candidates campaigned to deny citizenship to Catholic immigrants denouncing Catholicism as an evil foreign influence.

To diminish the power of those already citizens a secondary argument was that "a set of citizens, German and Irish, wanted to get the Constitution of the U. S. into their own hands and sell it to a foreign power." From 1840 through 1880, German immigration was in excess of 4 million and Irish immigration over 1.5 million – their number making them the target.

Nativists attack and periodic influence continued into the 1900s. Germans after WWI once again became targets as happened to Myers in Nebraska. The 12+ million Italian, Jewish, Poles, Austrians, Czechs, Hungarians and Slovaks immigrants arriving through the 1920s, suffered the same wrath, in some cases worse at the hands of nativists.

Fortunately nativists have always been a minority in the Unites States but their power to create national division and cause fear about immigrants is always present. We are again faced with such force.

Nativists don’t want immigration reform because to them it’s not about immigration; it’s about the kind of people coming to America – modern day nativists don’t want Mexicans of color.