

INTRODUCTION

When considering the topic of United States immigrant communities, the Slovaks do not immediately pop into most people's minds. This is, of course, understandable. Present-day Slovakia is a small country of over five million people tucked away in Central Europe between countries more prominent in most people's historical consciousness. It is nonetheless a country whose modern history is entwined with the United States, as Slovak immigrant communities, shaped by their experience in America, carried concepts and mentalities of American democracy back to their ethnic homeland.

Slovak national identity formation is a key example. From 1918 to 1993, the Slovaks and Czechs lived as part of Czechoslovakia until they separated into the independent Czech and Slovak Republics. The historical debate as to whether Slovaks and Czechs are the same or different nations, referred to as the "Slovak question," reflects the tenuous, and tedious, nature of modern national identity formation. Accordingly, their relationship exposes the challenges confronting scholars in understanding how some national identities succeed (Slovak, for example) while others (Czechoslovak) did not. More directly, the Slovak question is important because it played a role in the conflicts over national identity in East-Central Europe, particularly during the breakup of Austria-Hungary after World War I and during the national crisis in Czechoslovakia leading to the Munich Agreement and World War II. The Slovak question also played a role in the communist era, from the 1948 communist coup to the 1968 Prague Spring, through the 1993 Velvet Divorce that ended Czechoslovakia.

The most understudied element of Slovak national identity formation has been the transatlantic influence on its development. Studies of the Slovak question largely focus on its domestic development in Slovakia and underappreciate the extent to which modern Slovak national identity formation was a transatlantic phenomenon. Histories of Slovak Americans have similarly focused on the Slovaks' place as an immigrant community, considering questions of integration and social organization in the United States. This book bridges this divide to show how Slovak immigrant communities and broader transatlantic affairs and diplomacy shaped the debate over the Slovak question.

Slovak national activism in America helped establish among the Slovaks a sense of independent identity and national political assertion through a transatlantic exchange of ideas and transatlantic political and cultural organization. Slovaks living in the United States were separated from the cultural and political pressures of assimilating to Hungarian national identity before World War I and then to Czechoslovak identity afterward. Accordingly, Slovak American activists built a more independently minded Slovak identity and pushed for greater autonomy in their homeland that would be comparable to an American-styled federalist model of government. Additionally, a cultural identity where the Slovak Americans were Slovaks culturally, but American civically, shaped a desire for a similar relationship with the Hungarians or Czechs. These mentalities helped form an analogous framework for the Slovak autonomist movement in Slovakia.

With the creation of Czechoslovakia in World War I, these Slovak Americans clashed with an alternative Czechoslovak conception proffered by the new state. The Slovak Americans wanted a voice in their homeland, and were happy to cooperate with the Czechs so long as their concept of cultural and political autonomy was respected. When accommodated, they promoted an autonomist, but also democratic, direction. Slovak American nationalism was more democratic in form than many of their more liberal-skeptic counterparts in Slovakia, and their approach gained traction whenever Slovak American activists engaged with Slovak counterparts. Their support for autonomy, however, led Czechoslovak institutions and officials to limit their influence. Frustrated by this official stonewalling, the Slovak Americans shifted toward positions that were more particularistic and less accommodating of cooperation with the Czechoslovak state. This sentiment helped shape the Slovak autonomy movement to prioritize independence over other values and weakened the Czech-Slovak relationship. While their influence might have helped create a more stable, more democratic Czechoslovakia, it instead provided a disruptive influence that contributed to Slovakia's separation from the Czechs.

Only a handful of contemporary scholars have addressed the Slovak question from a transatlantic perspective.¹ This book builds on their work, while ad-

addressing the topic more comprehensively over the duration of the Czechoslovak Republic from World War I to the communist takeover of Czechoslovakia. It also integrates components of immigration history and diplomatic history into a coherent story to show how diplomacy was an additional important factor influencing the direction of Slovak nationalism. As the decisions of the world powers influenced the critical flashpoints of early twentieth-century Czechoslovakia, diplomacy became a vehicle of Slovak American autonomists' competition with Czechoslovak rivals to bring changes to their homeland and convince United States policymakers to embrace their respective views on the Slovak question.

Slovaks on both sides of the Atlantic perceived the United States and Slovakia as natural allies and hoped to build support for their goals during the world wars and the start of the Cold War. In contrast, negative stereotypes about the Slovaks promoted by Czechoslovak officials led the American foreign policy establishment to overlook Slovakia in the framework of larger events. A perception that the Western powers were siding with Czech and Czechoslovak conceptions of Slovak identity helped push Slovak nationalists toward more intransigence. It also provided a missed opportunity for the world powers to help mediate a more functional Czech-Slovak relationship at watershed moments, notably after the world wars.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SLOVAK QUESTION

The relationship of the Slovaks to the Czechs is an issue that has persisted through the modern history of the two peoples, and reflects the amorphous nature of modern national identity formation that saw some conceptions succeed while others faded. The Slovak question had its roots in the national revolutions in East-Central Europe in the nineteenth century that challenged the region's historical multiethnic empires in favor of state organizations based on particularistic ethnocultural identities. The territory of modern Slovakia had been a part of the Kingdom of Hungary from the tenth century, but the growth of a particularistic Slovak national identity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries spurred increasing Slovak activism in favor of greater cultural and political autonomy within the kingdom. This development conflicted with a similar experience among the politically dominant nation in Hungary, the Magyars. Experiencing their own national consolidation, Hungarian leaders decided to pursue a process of Magyarization to pressure Hungary's non-Magyar minorities, including the Slovaks, not only to identify as citizens of Hungary but also to embrace Magyar culture. Language was a key focal point because Slovak, a Slavic language, was very different from Hungarian, a Uralic language, and thus was the primary way for Slovak activists to distinguish the Slovaks in what was a culturally mixed Northern Hungary. Magyarization policy in turn mandated the

use of the Magyar/Hungarian language, put restrictions on minority languages, including Slovak, and limited the organization of Slovak and other minority national institutions. This system linked upward social mobility to assimilation. While Hungarian leaders hoped to alleviate national conflict and to assure loyalty to the kingdom, Magyarization policy instead spurred Slovak national activists to push for greater cultural independence.

With the reorganization of East-Central Europe after World War I, Slovak activists joined with counterparts in the neighboring Czech nation to split from Austria-Hungary and form the new state of Czechoslovakia in 1918. From a strategic and economic point of view, the union of the Czechs and Slovaks made sense for both sides. Together they maintained greater strength in population and resources than they did independently. Economically, the mix of Slovak agriculture and Czech industry held potential for an effective internal balance that would benefit both sides. Furthermore, where the Slovaks gained access to Czech experience with economic modernization, the Czechs gained access to the important Danube trade network that passed through Slovakia. The Czechs and Slovaks are also similar ethnically and linguistically, which many Czechs and Slovaks believed would facilitate a natural cooperation between the two nations. The combining of the two peoples conceptually also provided Czechoslovakia a clear majority population in what was still a multinational state that included a large German minority as well as smaller Hungarian, Ruthenian, Polish, and Jewish populations.

Nevertheless, a lack of a common political history before 1918 and core differences in their cultural development made the two peoples recognizably different in some ways. Before the creation of the new state, most Slovaks had only limited connections with the Czechs. While most of the Czechs had lived in the independent kingdom of Bohemia until their absorption into the Austrian portion of the Habsburg Empire in the sixteenth century, Slovakia had remained under the control of Hungary since the tenth century. The social situation of the Czechs in Austria had likewise differed than that of the Slovaks in Hungary. Whereas the Czechs had experienced extensive industrialization, most Slovaks remained part of the peasantry.

A religious war in the fifteenth century led by the revolutionary Hussite movement against the Catholic Church also led the Czechs to embrace a high degree of secularization entering the modern era, and the Hussites became a symbol of Czech nationalism. Alternatively, most Slovaks remained devout Catholics, and village priests were among the few Slovaks who gained an education while maintaining a Slovak national identity. Accordingly, Catholic clergy became guardians of Slovak culture, and Slovak nationalism became partially linked to Slovak Catholicism. By the start of the twentieth century, the Slovak population therefore

consisted largely of poor peasants who were mostly pious Catholics—although with a notable Lutheran minority who were important in codifying the Slovak literary language—compared to the more modern, secular Czechs. The Czech population was also more than triple that of the Slovaks.

These differences set the stage for conflicting visions regarding the position of the Slovaks in the new state. From 1918 to 1993, the Slovak question festered as a debate within former Czechoslovakia between proponents of greater Slovak self-determination in a federalized state and those, mostly Czech but also some Slovaks, who supported greater centralization under the federal government in Prague. The Czech founders of Czechoslovakia hoped to unify the Czechs and Slovaks in an undifferentiating “Czechoslovak” national identity manifested within a centralized state governed from the Czech cultural and political capital of Prague. Many of the state’s supporters believed the Czechs and Slovaks were the same people, identified by their similar languages and ethnicity. The Czechoslovak concept, however, also had hegemonic components. Many Czech nationalist leaders generally perceived the Slovak peasantry, in its social structure and religiosity, as uneducated, backward, and antimodern. According to this belief, the Czech older brother would take the Slovak under his wing and develop him up to Czech standards of modernity, and in the process teach him to become Czech or “Czechoslovak.” The Czechoslovak concept received support from a minority of Slovaks many of whom had left Hungary to study in Prague or elsewhere in Czechia. They legitimized this framework through a state ideology, which this study will refer to as “Czechoslovakism.”

While Czechoslovakism gained widespread popular and official support among the Czechs, it remained an elusive concept in Slovakia. Czechoslovakists met ample resistance from Slovak activists, who identified as “autonomists,” reflecting their desire for domestic autonomy within the Czechoslovak Republic. Whereas the Czechs framed the joining of the two peoples as the reunion of two long-lost kin, many Slovaks thought that their different historical experience had made them a different people. Slovak national activists also openly resented the sense of superiority presented by Czech nationalists concerning the Slovaks. The Slovak autonomists felt that they had joined with the Czechs on a basis of partnership, wherein the two sides recognized one another as separate and equal partners in the state. Accordingly, they had expectations of a federal relationship that acknowledged Slovak cultural uniqueness and granted the Slovaks civic equality and autonomy over Slovak domestic affairs. So-called Prague centralism became a point of ire for Slovak autonomists and fermented a general mistrust of the Czechs among many Slovaks, who felt that the Czechs had misled them in the formation of the state. The Slovak question therefore became both a political debate over regional jurisdiction and an existential one over Slovak identity.

The place of the Slovaks was nonetheless amorphous, with a range of perspectives on what defined a Slovak, a Czechoslovak, and what constituted autonomy versus centralism. The Slovaks themselves fell into three general categories on the Slovak question. The smallest of these groups, the Czechoslovakists, wanted a close, nondifferential linkage with the Czechs. Another group consisted of moderates who pursued cooperation with the Czechs, but wanted recognition of separate Slovak identity with political autonomy established gradually. These two groups were more prominent among Slovakia's Lutheran, Jewish, and secular minority. The third group, Slovak autonomists, consisted predominantly but not exclusively of Catholics and demanded immediate action on the Slovak question. They made up the largest population among these three groups, albeit a total minority. Despite a small minority of Slovak autonomists promoting a return to Hungary, participation in the Czechoslovak Republic was not widely challenged until the buildup to World War II. For most of the history of Czechoslovakia, the Slovak question was about the nature of the Czech-Slovak relationship, not about whether Czechoslovakia should exist.

Although it is difficult to determine the true popular support of autonomy, the support in Slovakia of centralism was probably well in the minority. When elections were held during the interwar First Czechoslovak Republic, all three of the largest parties in Slovakia—Slovak People's Party, Agrarian Party, and Communist Party—embraced some level of Slovak autonomy, although they differed on the best form and approach to this goal. Autonomy became an issue that crossed other political divides.²

THE SLOVAK AMERICANS BEFORE WORLD WAR I

The Slovak Americans broadly reflected these same trends. The Slovaks were emblematic of the "new immigrants" who entered the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Migrating as citizens of Hungary, they left behind a difficult peasant lifestyle to try to find new opportunities in America, mostly in the industrial workforce. Many of these Slovaks earned and saved money for several years before returning to their families in Slovakia, where they reestablished themselves with a financial cushion from their American earnings. Many traveled back and forth several times. Others, however, embraced their American experience, choosing to stay in their adopted country and bringing their families with them.

Broadly speaking, this experience entwined the history of Slovakia with that of the United States. This is due to a relatively large number of Slovaks who migrated in proportion to their total population. Most historians estimate the Slovak population in the United States in the early twentieth century at around

650,000, between a quarter and a third of the population of Slovakia at the time. Most of these Slovaks went to the northern industrial belt stretching from New York through Wisconsin, and the largest populations settled in Pennsylvania and Ohio. They migrated in larger numbers than the Czechs, whose immigrant population totaled around 350,000 during the same period.³ Because of this high volume of migration relative to their population, the Slovaks in the United States had a significant effect on the economics, society, and politics of the Slovak homeland.

In the United States, their experience was much like that of other migrants during this period. They faced the difficulties of moving into the industrial environment, of adapting to new conditions and new ideas, and of finding their place among preexisting American citizens and migrants from other locations. For those who settled permanently in the United States, this adjustment was largely addressed through the consolidation of their own institutions, including schools, churches, presses, and fraternal organizations.⁴ Churches were particularly central for Slovak Americans, both Catholic and Protestant denominations, serving as the foci for Slovak culture, education, and society in the United States. Slovak churches, for example, embraced the use of literary Slovak to replace regional dialects, and Slovak religious schools largely achieved this goal for Slovak children educated in America by the early 1900s, until English took over as the primary language of education in the 1930s.⁵ Churches also provided a core linkage to their communities back in Slovakia. It should thus prove unsurprising that members of the clergy played an important leadership role for Slovak Americans, including in politics. Religion also served as a major point of division among Slovaks, with Slovak Catholics, Protestants, and nonbelievers bringing their biases and conflicts along with them from the homeland.⁶

Fraternal associations, alternatively, provided the core of Slovak social and political organization. These groups helped Slovak laborers become acclimated to American life and provided them social security through insurance programs. They also led efforts to promote Slovak culture and national identity, pursued side by side with promotions of Americanization. They organized Slovak cultural activities, but they also encouraged Slovak immigrants to learn English and to embrace American democracy and its perceived culture of enterprise and hard work. The fraternal organizations linked Slovaks in different parts of the United States with each other, particularly among the leadership. By serving this role, fraternal organizations provided the structures for Slovak American politics. For example, Slovak fraternal lodges encouraged Slovaks to shift from the Hungarian spelling of first names to Slovak spellings.⁷

The first long-standing Slovak fraternal organization was founded in Feb-

ruary 1890, the nondenominational National Slovak Society (NSS) based in Pittsburgh. A Catholic alternative, the First Catholic Slovak Union (FCSU) in Cleveland, followed shortly thereafter in September 1890. Religious divides spurred these competing organizations. The Slovak American businessman Peter Rovnianek originally founded the NSS as a nondenominational organization with the idea of its serving the entirety of Slovak Americans. The Catholic priest Stephen Furdek, however, was concerned that its secular-based organization would encourage a loss of religious values among the Slovak Americans and he formed the FCSU as a competitor. He felt that such secularization had already overtaken Czech fraternal organizations and feared the same for the Slovaks. Other fraternal organizations soon followed, including Protestant-specific ones such as the Slovak Evangelical Union (SEU), founded in 1893 in Freeland, Pennsylvania, but also women's alternatives such as the Živena Beneficial Society and the First Catholic Slovak Ladies Union (FCSLU), both founded in 1891. The Živena Society partnered with the NSS, and the FCSLU with the FCSU. This process also saw the arrival of the Sokols, gymnastic organizations that served a similar cultural function for Slovak American youth. In 1919 there were over a dozen Slovak fraternal organizations with over 200,000 members among them.⁸

Next to fraternal organizations, the Slovak press in America, rooted in core papers such as *Jednota*, *Národné Noviny*, *Slovák v Amerike*, and *New Yorkský Denník*, was critical to uniting Slovak Americans. More than 250 unique Slovak serial publications were produced during the period of this study, although most did not last long.⁹ The fraternal organizations founded and ran many of the major papers. The Slovak press in the United States was the primary method of communication among the Slovak Americans on a national scale, and was used to spread objectives and ideas and to arrange meetings and other activities. Publishers were also educational and intellectual leaders, producing many books along with their serials. The Slovak American newspapers thus were the basis for the spread and promotion of Slovak national culture in the United States and of Americanization. As providers of news, they linked the United States to events in the homeland, for example, presenting American conceptions of democracy as frameworks for Slovak political organizations in Hungary.¹⁰

The Slovak American press regularly communicated with the Slovak press in Slovakia to share journalistic contributions. According to the Slovak American writer Draga Paučo, these connections were critical in assuring that the Slovak Americans continued to “consider themselves an inseparable unit of the Slovak ethnic family, and an integral part of the Slovak nation itself.” It was therefore not surprising that editors held a key place among the top Slovak American leaders.¹¹

SLOVAK AMERICAN NATIONAL ACTIVISM
BEFORE WORLD WAR I

The politics of national identity dominated Slovak American political activism. The experience of immigrating to the United States played a major role in forming the national identities of many new immigrants, even if such identities might have been lacking when the immigrants arrived. Slovak historians from the early twentieth century openly embraced this concept. The historian František Hrušovský, for example, asserted: "Loneliness drew the Slovak immigrants together. They felt insecure and unhappy in the strange world . . . the realization that they were an island in a strange sea made the Slovaks aware of their national origin."¹² Konštantín Čulen argued that given the circumstance in Hungary, the "real nation," consisting of both intellectuals and ordinary people, was at the time in America.¹³ Stephanie Hušek believed that migration to America effectively saved Slovak national identity.¹⁴ Accordingly, for Slovak American national activists, their migratory experience became a liberating movement, one that freed them from the shackles of Magyarization in Hungary and allowed them to develop their Slovak culture and identity without restraint. In turn, they embraced this experience as an opportunity to bring the experience of national liberation back to the homeland through financial and moral support, but also by bringing external pressure on the Hungarian government. For example, a Slovak text from 1893 proclaimed that the best way to create a "true Slovak" was to send him to America. It was there that Slovaks could embrace the role of nation-builders.¹⁵

In some respects, the Slovak Americans themselves overstated the political motivation for Slovak migration to the United States, due to a desire to see their national liberation as the focal point. Economic interests, whether finding jobs or pursuing educational opportunities, undoubtedly served as the primary motivation for most Slovaks moving to America. The politics of national identity is nonetheless important as the motivation for many would-be Slovak American leaders. The two primary Slovak American leaders of the pre–World War I era, Stephen Furdek and Peter Rovnianek, used the opportunities presented in the United States to escape Magyarization, but also to bridge regional differences in Slovakia, notably the different dialects of eastern and western Slovakia. Slovaks from different regions were thrust together in cities such as Pittsburgh and Cleveland, and thus formed a new composite Slovak identity around their adopted community. Slovak activists accordingly began organizing along national political lines and brought a significant section of the broader Slovak American population along with them.¹⁶

This process also included the issue of adapting to American life. The dual

concern of moving into a very muddled social and cultural environment and the pressure to assimilate to American political values was a key impetus for Slovak American organization. Although Slovak American leaders prioritized preserving Slovak cultural heritage, particularly maintaining the literary Slovak language, adapting to the pressures of Americanization did not prove difficult for them. Because the experience of moving to America was central to their sense of liberation as a nation, they openly embraced it as part of their national conception. They developed a dual identity as Slovak Americans, in which they conceptualized themselves as culturally and ethnically Slovak on the one hand, but civically American on the other, having embraced ideas of American-style democratic statehood and citizenry. Many leaders of local fraternal organizations also served as local government officials in their respective communities. This sense of dual identity not only served to carve the Slovaks a spot within American society, it also became a defining point for what they saw as the liberation of the Slovak nation in the homeland. Many Slovak Americans believed that by transferring American civic values back to Slovakia, they could bring the same national liberation and flourishing of national cultural that they had experienced in the United States.¹⁷ As did members of many other immigrant communities in the United States, significant numbers of Slovaks returned to Slovakia, thus providing a vehicle for these mentalities.¹⁸

Gaining recognition among the broader U.S. population, however, remained difficult for the Slovaks. They were a sparsely populated people from a region that few Americans knew much about. Getting anyone to know that they even existed as a people proved a difficult, fundamental task for Slovak American leaders. As the Slovaks started moving in large numbers, they were most often labeled as Hungarian (or Huns, "Hunkies"), or generally as Slavs (also, Slavonians). This is clearly exemplified in a reference in the *Congressional Record* that describes the Magyars and Slovaks as, "popularly known as the Huns."¹⁹ Gaining recognition as "Slovaks" was thus a key focus of Slovak American action. Peter Rovnianek, for example, produced an English-language information booklet. He called the Slovaks the "unknown nation," asserting, "We are a living nation, residing in the heart of civilization, in a country well known and cultivated," and unknown only because of the Magyar attempt to absorb them as a nation. He focused the book on defining Hungary as a polyglot state made up of many different nations, including the Slovaks, before explaining the rise of Slovak nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century, Magyarization, and finally, Slovak American institutions.²⁰ Using *Jednota*, Furdek further led the charge in the United States to gain recognition of the Slovaks as a unique people and to normalize the term "Slovak."²¹

As part of this information effort, Slovak American leaders attempted to

persuade the U.S. federal government to categorize immigrants from Austria-Hungary on the 1910 Census by nationality instead of state citizenship, which would classify them as “Slovak” rather than “Hungarian.” Although it is difficult to gauge the extent to which knowledge of the Slovaks grew because of this campaign, it was successful in getting the Slovaks at least recognized as “Slovak” in most official settings. Congress passed the changes to the census on March 14, 1910, and President William H. Taft signed them into law shortly thereafter.²²

Recognition of the Slovaks as a unique people in broader academic studies of U.S. immigration during this period, such as those produced by Edward A. Steiner and Emily G. Balch, also reflected the success of this campaign. Both works gave the Slovaks due consideration. These publications, however, reflected how far Slovak information efforts had to go. They appealed to stereotypes of the Slovaks as among the poorest, least educated, antimodern, and parochial peoples of Europe. Steiner, for example, referred to the Slovaks as “one of the crudest Slavic Types,” marking them as undeveloped, prone to fighting and drinking, and initially overwhelmed by American modernity. He also presented them as parochial, showing no interest in the outside world, and thus easily manipulated.²³ Balch’s more respectful study openly praised elements of Slovak culture, but still bemoaned Slovak “passiveness and lack of initiative and their proneness to drink.” Balch nonetheless highly approved of the Slovak immigrants in America, claiming that they represented the best of the Slovak people, marked by “energy, strength, and trustworthiness.”²⁴ These stereotypes continued to stick to the Slovaks despite the best efforts of Slovak American leaders and came to play a major role in the conflict over the Slovak question. Both Magyar and Czech nationalists used images of Slovak primitiveness as an excuse to assert their authority over them, whereas Slovaks on both sides of the Atlantic fought to counter these images to validate their worthiness for self-determination.

SLOVAK AMERICANS AND HUNGARY

In over two decades before getting involved in the creation of the Czechoslovak state during World War I, Slovak Americans had established a coherent campaign in favor of autonomy within Hungary. Their efforts included protests of Hungarian officials visiting the United States, diverse propaganda efforts, and the building of connections with the homeland for political action. This context is important for understanding the later Slovak American issues with the Czechoslovak Republic. When the Czecho-Slovak movement got underway in 1914, and Tomáš Masaryk subsequently started organizing in the United States, he recruited preexisting organization by Slovak Americans built around a different framework from his own. In this way, the Slovak Americans established a trans-

actional relationship with Masaryk's organizing, rather than serving as organic members of his movement. Accordingly, they had an independent, preexisting infrastructure that they could use to protest Prague after the war.

Alexander Maxwell has shown how Slovak activism in the late nineteenth century did not disparage being part of the Kingdom of Hungary but wanted autonomy as part of a multinational system associated with the Magyars as well as other Slavic peoples.²⁵ Slovak American activists were similarly willing to accept autonomy within Hungary, but over time became more aggressive in asserting Slovak particularism and were quicker to embrace alternatives to cooperation with Hungary. In this respect, they facilitated mentalities and ideals that greatly challenged the status quo that had developed in Slovakia before World War I.

This process began within the fraternal organizations. Although Rovnianek originally founded the NSS to serve as an aid organization, he began using it for political activism after it came under criticism from Hungarians as an independent Slovak organization. The FCSU, led by Furdek, developed likewise, promoting a national identity framed by faith, as reflected in its slogan "For God and Nation" (*Za Boha národ*). Slovak churches came to reflect this shift. The Slovaks initially had no churches in the United States and thus had to rely on churches of other national groups. To change this situation, they cooperated with Magyar immigrants who faced a similar challenge to form their own religious bodies. For example, Furdek's parish in Cleveland built St. Ladislaus Church in 1885 for both Slovaks and Magyars. Because the two ethnicities held separate services for each language, feuds over access to the church escalated. These disputes at one point led to fisticuffs during a banner blessing ceremony for the Hungarians held in the Slovak time slot, when the Slovaks insisted the sermon be given in Slovak. In 1888 the Slovaks expelled the Hungarians from the church, making it Slovak only. Slovak Americans increasingly founded lay churches, to prevent non-Slovak priests from being appointed to existing bodies.

These types of localized conflicts increased in other areas, such as debates over what flag to honor at cultural events, and Slovak nationalists increasingly expelled Slovaks more sympathetic to Hungary, the "Magyarone Slovaks," from their organizations. Furdek initially accepted Magyarone Slovaks into the FCSU, believing it important to keep all Catholic Slovaks united, but such attempts at reconciliation faded. One Cleveland journalist, according to the historian Michael Kopanic, scoffed that the feud between Magyars and Slovaks had been "explained so many times in a police court that he knew the explanation by heart."²⁶

Organizations then spread outward into direct political activities. Such activities included efforts to organize a national fund and conferences to bring together Slovak American leaders to discuss issues relating to the Slovak question, such as the Slovak Catholic Congress of September 3, 1906, in Wilkes-Barre,

Pennsylvania. Slovak Americans also formed new political organizations such as the Slovak Catholic Federation of America, founded in 1911 by the Slovak priest and scientist Jozef Murgaš. After long discussions on the need to unify the disparate Slovak groups in the United States behind a common political organization, Furdek called a conference to address the issue on April 4, 1907, in Cleveland. Attended by upward of ten thousand people, including the leadership of the major Slovak American fraternal organizations, the NSS, FCSU, and SEU, as well as the Slovak press, this conference culminated in the foundation of the Slovak League of America (SLA) on May 30, 1907. The SLA's main objective was to develop the cultural and political life of Slovaks in America as a means of supporting the cultural and political life of Slovaks in the old country. Although founded with hopeful rhetoric, existing rivalries and lack of early funding almost sank the organization before it eventually took off. The Slovak League nonetheless became the center of Slovak national activism in the United States, and it remained at the forefront of the debate over the Slovak question and the effort to make it an international issue.²⁷

These organizations played a key role in mobilizing Slovaks in public protest. Most of these protests came in response to Hungarian propaganda efforts in the United States. When the Hungarian government tried to send a memorial Hungarian flag around the United States in 1902 for propaganda purposes, the Slovak Americans protested to Secretary of State John Hay before organizing a competing program with the Slovak flag.²⁸ In another case, Slovak American activists, working with other national groups, answered an attempt to build a monument to the Hungarian leader Louis Kossuth in Cleveland with a protest campaign. Kossuth was a Magyarized Slovak who had gained positive attention in the United States for his leadership in the 1848 Hungarian Revolution. The memorial was designed to exploit this image of Kossuth as a democratic reformer and to build pro-Hungary sentiment among Cleveland's Magyars and Slovaks. Slovak activists, however, viewed him as a false democrat and a traitor to the Slovak people for embracing Magyarization. The anti-statue campaign appealed for an American hero for the statue instead, and ultimately forced the project's relocation.²⁹

Nothing stirred up the Slovaks in the United States as much as visits by Hungarian officials. Albert Apponyi, a Hungarian nobleman and politician at the forefront of Magyarization policy, visited the United States twice, in 1904 and 1911. The Slovak Americans responded both times with an extensive propaganda and protest campaign at every stage of his tour to expose the treatment of Slovaks in Hungary. Visits in 1914 by Mihály Károlyi, a Hungarian promoter of democratic reforms in Austria-Hungary, provoked a similar response. Károlyi was much admired in America as a liberal reformer, and the Slovaks attempted

to counter this image by showing him as a fraud when it came to the Slovaks. To avoid having the same experience as Apponyi, Károlyi agreed to meet with Slovak American leaders to attempt a compromise. After he made it clear at the meeting that he did not see the Slovaks as an independent nation and would not push a change of Hungarian-language laws, the Slovaks in America quickly gave up on him.³⁰ When Károlyi returned shortly thereafter to fundraise after the start of World War I, the Slovaks organized to prevent any Slovak support for his effort and also led several major protests.³¹

This protest was dependent on printed material. Newspapermen remained at the forefront of debates over the treatment of the Slovaks, both in their individual mediums and collectively. For example, they organized the Association of Slovak Newspapermen of America to collaborate in political action. Next to efforts to publish information about the Slovaks, protesting Magyarization was the primary subject of publications in English. During Apponyi's visit in 1904, the Slovak Americans produced a "Memorial Pamphlet" for the Interparliamentary Peace Conference in St. Louis attended by Apponyi, which they also provided to the press and U.S. government officials. To contrast with Hungarian claims of liberalization, this pamphlet provided counterexamples, such as the suppressing of Slovak-language education, lack of press freedom, and lack of appropriate representation of Slovaks in the Hungarian parliament. This document also contrasted the experience of the Slovaks in the United States with those in Hungary and presented an idealized image of the freedom for national development America had offered the Slovaks. "The (U.S.) government does not meddle with the people's customs, faith or language, wisely leaving these things to a natural process of assimilation."³² In 1906 Slovak journalists highlighted how American freedom had bettered their national culture and allowed them to show "the American people and the whole civilized world the oppression of their native country." This text was part of an English transcript of political trial proceedings of Slovak activists in Hungary.³³ The NSS also recruited the Czech American lawyer Thomas Čapek to write a history of the Slovaks to expose Hungarian treatment of them. In part an encyclopedic description of the Slovaks, it also presented a heroic narrative of the Slovaks resisting Hungarian oppression. Čapek's study, however, focused almost entirely on the Slovak Protestant minority, while also showing much sympathy toward pan-Slavism.³⁴

A few non-Slovak sources also buttressed the Slovak American campaign. Balch's book provided ample detail on Magyarization, criticizing it for threatening Slovak culture and forcing their high levels of outmigration.³⁵ The British historian of East-Central Europe Robert Wilson Seton-Watson produced the most prominent study of the Slovaks and Magyarization. As a great admirer of Louis Kossuth, Seton-Watson visited Hungary to complete a study of the empire.

He instead discovered the plight of the Slovaks and adopted their cause as his own. Seton-Watson's primary objective seemed to be the condemnation of the Hungarians, and he showed little admiration for the Slovaks, often presenting them as passive victims. Seton-Watson nonetheless praised the effect of Slovak immigration to America, stating: "They are doing much to leaven the Slovak population with new ideas of liberty and justice."³⁶ Slovak American activists embraced any publication that acknowledged the Slovaks, and often distributed copies of both works along with their own pamphlets.³⁷ Seton-Watson claimed that a group of Slovaks even gave a copy of his book to former president Theodore Roosevelt during the latter's visit to Budapest in 1910.³⁸

The Hungarian government at times showed concern for national minorities overseas, including Slovaks. In 1895 the Hungarian consul in Pittsburgh warned that nationalism was widespread in America, citing the development of a unified Slovak dialect. Hungarian officials also warned that Slovak villages with many returning immigrants needed to be monitored, including one labeled a "nest of Slovak nationalism."³⁹ Another discouraged the return of Slovak immigrants, fearing that they would bring nationalist mentalities back home with them. The Hungarian government thus pursued efforts to isolate the influence of Slovak American activists. It banned fraternal organizations in Hungary, and an American Action program attempted to confiscate materials mailed from Slovaks in the United States. This program also went on the offensive with propaganda efforts and funding of Slovak supporters in the United States, while encouraging Magyars in America to agitate against their Slovak counterparts. They promoted the use of the Eastern Slovak dialect, to detach it from the literary Slovak language linked to Slovak nationalism. The Hungarian Catholic Church also tried to restrict nationalist priests in the United States, while appointing only "Magyarone" clergy there.⁴⁰

These efforts saw Slovak parishioners often rejecting the Magyarone clergy, while holding firm with the teaching of literary Slovak. They also did not halt transatlantic interactions, as Slovak Americans maintained ample linkages with the homeland in support of national development. The Slovak American press worked around Hungarian censors and played a key role in bringing subversive ideas into Hungary as a proxy for the less developed Slovak-language press in Slovakia. Slovaks who returned from America often became a core part of the Slovak national movement.⁴¹ The Slovak Americans also built proxies to banned cultural organizations such as a short-lived American branch of the Slovak Cultural Institute, the *Matica slovenská*, and the Sokol gymnastic organizations.⁴²

These connections included relationships with Slovak nationalist leaders and other important figures such as Seton-Watson. Slovak political leaders in Slovakia openly encouraged Slovak American political activity and both sides worked to

establish a common political program.⁴³ Slovak American money helped fund the political careers of Slovak politicians such as Milan Hodža and Pavel Blaho, the latter of whom visited America in 1893 and November 1912 to build political linkages.⁴⁴ Furdek also had regular contact with the Slovak leader and fellow Catholic priest, Andrej Hlinka. Hlinka became an icon of the Slovak national movement when he was arrested in 1906 along with other Slovak leaders. Slovak Americans came out strongly in his support. The Slovak journalist Jozef Paučo argued that the international pressure on Hungary spurred by the Slovaks in the United States led to Hlinka's eventual release and emboldened Hlinka to continue his fight for Slovak autonomy.⁴⁵ According to Mark Stolarik, in 1906 "Slovak political leaders even offered to share the leadership of the nationalist movement with American Slovaks," to try to unify them against Magyarization. Slovaks in America raised about \$12,000 in charity, and \$7,000 to help politicians and newspapers after the event.⁴⁶ Subsequently, on October 27, 1907, Hlinka was prevented from attending the consecration of the village church in Černová, the place of his birth. When a group of Slovak protestors attempted to prevent the Magyar clergy from attending, the police fired into the crowd killing fifteen people and injuring sixty more. The Černová massacre played a decisive role in motivating Slovak nationalism.⁴⁷ This activity included a fundraising campaign in the United States to aid the families of the victims and another campaign to support Slovaks on trial for political reasons and to assist Slovak politicians and press. This campaign helped to elect Slovak members to the Hungarian Parliament and motivated the creation of the SLA to coordinate such activities more broadly.⁴⁸ These connections remained very important, establishing a transatlantic activism that continued far into the twentieth century.