The anti-Greek riot of 1909: South Omaha

John G. Bitzes

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THE ANTI-GREEK RIOT OF 1909--SOUTH OMAHA

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of History
and the
Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies
University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
John G. Bitzes
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Accepted for the faculty of the College of Graduate Studies of the University of Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

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Preface

The anti-Greek riot of 1909, in South Omaha, Nebraska, was a violent, regrettable, but significant episode in American history. Its importance rests in the fact that it took place at a time when the American people were in the process of making a very important decision concerning immigration. By 1903, the problem of the oriental immigrant entering and living on the west coast of the United States had been solved largely by adopting a policy of exclusion. There still remained, however, the great wave of the "new immigration" from southern and eastern Europe. The American native, largely of northwestern European and Protestant stock, was faced with the decision of selecting a policy toward the "new immigrant," whose cultural background was comparatively foreign.

The Greeks were a small part of this great new influx, which was finally reduced to a trickle by Federal legislation in the nineteen twenties. Thus, the purpose of this study was not only to present the local conditions, events, and reactions surrounding the anti-Greek riot of 1909, but also to place the riot within a national framework, which was characterized by a growing anti-foreign sentiment.

The list of people who aided in this work is too
long to enumerate. There are four, however, who should not go unmentioned. Dr. Frederick W. Adrian of the University of Omaha should be thanked for his assistance in applying the principles of good writing. Others to be thanked are Fran Witt, the patient typist; Ella Jane Dougherty, research librarian of the University of Omaha; and my capable and understanding wife Helen.

June 9, 1964
Omaha, Nebraska
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CHAPTER I
THE ELEMENTS OF A RIOT

On Saturday, February 20, 1909, the people of Omaha were shocked by an event of the previous evening which had taken the life of a South Omaha police officer. Newspaper headlines read: "Ed Lowery, South Omaha Policeman, Is Shot And Killed By Greek"¹ and "Officer Lowry [sic.] of South Omaha Is Shot To Death By Greek."² The third Omaha daily, the Bee, did not carry the news until the next day; but as though forecasting the coming event, it also carried an article on its editorial page entitled, "How To End Mob Rule." In the article, Governor Noel of Mississippi was credited for enunciating a strong anti-mob rule policy "after two lynching parties had secured their victims . . . ."³ The article, however, did not temper the feelings of some South Omahans.

By the use of a petition calling for a general meeting of South Omaha's citizenry, a group of local leaders hoped to rid South Omaha of the "filthy Greeks."⁴

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³ Omaha Bee, February 21, 1909, p. 4.
The mob element was moved by the meeting of Sunday afternoon of February 21, 1909; and by that evening, the Greek quarter of South Omaha was turned into a scene of violence and arson. Before the wrath of the angry mob subsided enough damage had been inflicted upon the persons and property of foreign nationals as to involve three nations filing claims against the United States for an amount totaling $161,498.50. Overnight, approximately twelve hundred Greeks were driven from South Omaha, most of them leaving the area entirely although a number took refuge in Omaha and Council Bluffs. (Omaha did not annex South Omaha until June 5, 1915.) Also, the news set off anti-Greek demonstrations in at least two other American cities—Kansas City, Kansas, and Dayton, Ohio.

The Greeks of South Omaha were not the first of that nationality to be attacked in the United States in the first decade of the twentieth century. Roanoke,

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6Ibid., p. 1.


Virginia, two years prior to the South Omaha riot, was shaken with anti-Greek violence. The Roanoke Times reported that on Saturday night, July 13, 1907, an infuriated crowd of several hundred attacked and practically demolished "nine Greek restaurants, three Greek shoe shine parlors and one or two Syrian shops." The riot started when a native American, complaining about the service he received in the Phoenix Cafe, was set upon and beaten by several Greeks. Quick action by the police and fire departments scattered the rioters and thus ended the riot. There was some shooting, but no one was hurt. The rioters did no more than destroy property and injure a few, the anti-Italian riot of New Orleans in 1891, took the lives of eleven Italians. These incidents appear

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9 Roanoke (Virginia) Times, July 14, 1907, p. 1; Roanoke Evening News, July 15, 1907, p. 1.
to have been a part of a much larger picture. They were manifestations of a complex assemblage of conditions, events, and attitudes, which together represented the underlying causes of most riots.

Civil disorder in the form of mass and destructive riots is not new in history. For centuries riots have served as convenient cloaks for the violent, the irresponsible. It is also apparent that civil disorder is a mass manifestation expressing a dissatisfaction with the status quo. This was evident with regard to the notorious riots of ancient Rome, the Byzantium, and revolutionary France. The United States has had its share. As early as 1814, a riot occurred in Boston against Spanish sailors and again in 1829, against Negroes and Irishmen.\textsuperscript{12} The Department of Records and Research at Tuskegee Institute reveal that in the span of eighty years (1882-1962) 1,294 whites and 3,442 Negroes, or a total of 4,736, died at the hands of lynch mobs in the United States.\textsuperscript{13}

Omaha witnessed two other riots, one before and


\textsuperscript{13} Tuskegee Institute, "Causes of Lynchings Classified (1882-1962)," revised as of June 1, 1962 (Mimeographed), p. 1.
one after the anti-Greek riot of 1909. The first occurred in 1891, when a Negro named George Smith, suspected of assaulting a five-year-old girl, was lynched. Negroes reportedly joined the lynch mob of some five hundred to help execute mob law.\footnote{Omaha World Herald (Morning Edition), October 10, 1891, p. 1.} The famous "Court House Riot" of 1919, was a race riot in all of its ugly manifestations. Will Brown, the victim, could have fared better in the Coliseum of second century Rome. The event almost took the life of the mayor when he tried to save the doomed victim and required the use of troops to prevent further anti-Negro violence.\footnote{Omaha Bee, September 29, 1919, p. 1.}

At the turn of the century, riots were not peculiar to America alone. They were also common in other countries. For instance, Athens, Greece, underwent three days of rioting in November of 1902, when students demonstrated against the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan, who had accepted a vernacular translation of the New Testament.\footnote{Rufus B. Richardson, "Riots in Athens," International Monthly, V (May, 1902), p. 547.} In St. Petersburg, Russia, two days after the South Omaha riot, a revolutionist's body was cut in half by the public.
executioner. "The halves of the body were hung up as a warning against outlawry. . . ." The victim had tried to throw a bomb in the bazaar. 17

Thus, it would seem that civil disorder had been too often accepted by the "group mind" as a method of action to rectify what appeared to be a wrong. It was only a matter of providing the climate and the circumstance. The climate existed in South Omaha but largely as a part of the national atmosphere.

This brings forth the second, most complex, and perhaps major underlying cause of the riot under study. It was the climate in native American circles concerning the "new immigrants," or "foreigners," who were landing almost completely unrestricted in the United States. Natives saw a mass of humanity, in some years numbering over a million, entering their land and cities. Most frightening to them was the fact that a large percentage of the influx came from southern and eastern Europe. They found the Italians, Greeks, Syrians, Russians, Jews, Slavs, Turks, and Armenians difficult to accept. 18 This group


historians and writers labeled the "new immigrants." \(^{19}\)

The American public and the heirs of the first New England and Virginia settlers, in particular, viewed the census figures of 1890, with alarm. Four years later, the Immigration Restriction League of Boston was organized. Henry Cabot Lodge led the movement. \(^{21}\) In an article in *Century* magazine, Lodge, using the figures of the Twelfth Census (1890), viewed with concern the growing influx. Quoting the population of the United States as 54,983,890, he stated that 11,503,675 of the total figure were of foreign parentage and 9,121,867 were foreign-born. He went on to point out that fifty-three per cent of the nation's penitentiary inmates, sixty-one per cent of the juvenile delinquents, and fifty-nine per cent of the paupers in almshouses were of foreign birth or parentage. \(^{22}\)

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The statistics presented were accurate but not always complete. They failed to include, for instance, that the Irish, coming from "northwestern" Europe also had a record which needed some improvement. The 1910 census showed that the ratio of Irish in almshouses was

... strikingly higher than that for any of the other immigrants; the rates for the three principal immigrant-furnishing countries of the present time—Austria-Hungary, Russia, and Italy—are lowest, the rate for Italy being 23 less than one-thirteenth of that for Ireland.

But these figures, too, did no more than substantiate the need for restriction. Solutions offered ranged from maintaining the status quo to complete exclusion, but most agreed that some kind of improved regulation was needed. Kenneth L. Roberts, in *Why Europe Leaves Home*, wrote

Of all the nations of the world which have first-hand knowledge of large emigrant or immigrant movements, the United States is the one nation which has not regulated this movement of people to its own needs. Italy's admirable emigration laws are carefully framed to suit her own needs. Hungary's emigration system was planned to build up the port of Fiume, bring wealth back to Hungary and keep Hungarians in America from being naturalized. Bulgaria, on the other hand, wishing to keep her citizens at home, forbade steamship agents in the country. Rumania puts a secret mark on the passports of Jews which

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prevents them, once they left Rumania, from getting visas which will permit them to return to Rumania again. Poland facilitates the emigration of Jews, and hinders the emigration of the infinitely more desirable Polish peasant. All foreign countries develop laws which accrue to their own benefit and meet the peculiar needs of the different countries.*

For the United States to delay doing so is suicidal. 24

Louis Stern, a United States commercial agent stationed in Bamberg, Germany, wrote the following in a consular report in 1895:

... the German emigration to America is not only not encouraged on the part of the German Government, but that, on the contrary, it has long been the purpose of the latter to increase the stringency of the laws controlling emigration.

... it is ... sought to preserve the superfluous population for the Empire itself, by directing the stream of emigration to the African colonies. It is true, however, that such efforts have as yet met with small success. 25

In 1904, the Commissioner-General of Immigration, Frank P. Sargent, argued for more restrictions. "From 1820," he wrote, "the first year in which there is a record of alien immigrants, to June 30, 1903, 20,993,441 have passed the inspection at our gates." 26 He warned

24 Robert, op. cit., p. 120.


of the growing difficulties for assimilation.

Dr. Allan McLaughlin was more specific and poignant in his remarks. He saw a "limited" merit in the Magyar and Russian Jew, but he had this to say about those coming from the Levant:

From the countries bordering on the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea we receive several thousand immigrants each year, who are so far below all others in the matter of desirability that they are in a class by themselves. This scum of the Levant includes Syrians, Armenians, Greeks, and Turks.

The Greeks are the best of the rather bad lot.27

The rate of Greek immigration reflected the shift in immigration to southern and eastern Europe. In 1881, nineteen Greeks entered the United States; in 1888, 782; in 1891, 1,105; and in 1895, 605.28 The Thirteenth Census (1910) showed that the Greek foreign-born increased from 8,515 in 1900, to 101,282 in 1910, an increase of 92,767, or percentage increase of 1,089.5.29

27McLaughlin, op. cit., p. 440.


Although 21,735 Greeks entered the United States in 1910, 8,918 returned to Greece that same year. Greece, of course, supplied only a minute fraction of the incoming masses. To take the immediate Omaha area as a specific local example, the Twelfth Census (1900) did not find a sufficient number of Greeks to warrant enumeration. A rough estimate of the immigration rate between 1905 and 1910, indicated a figure of about 800,000 per year. The years 1905, 1906, and 1907 recorded figures of over a million each.

Another cause for apprehension on the part of the native concerning the "new immigrant" was his ignorance and illiteracy, which critics claimed posed a danger to American institutions be they political, religious, social, or economic. The inference or charge seemed to be that these newcomers were not sufficiently educated to harmonize with the American cultural environment. Figures concerning illiteracy rates of foreign countries, whose immigrants were under attack, did not help to increase the respect

30U. S., Bureau of Statistics, Department of Commerce and Labor, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1910, 33rd Number (1911), Table 61, p. 95.


32U. S., Bureau of Statistics, op. cit., Table 50, p. 81.
for the "new immigrant." In 1907, the following illiteracy figures were made available: Greece, 57.2 per cent; Hungary, in 1900, 40.9; European Russia, in 1897, 70.0; and Italy, in 1901, 48.2. In contrast, illiteracy in the United States was reported to be at 7.7 per cent with 3.0 for the native white, 12.7 for the foreign-born white, and 30.4 for the Negro. The fear was that people with such backgrounds would be prone to sell their vote rather than to exercise it wisely, become public wards, or violate laws. Thus, it was not surprising when E. L. Godkin accused both the Republican and Democratic parties of exploiting the immigrant's vote, asserting that "The harm they [Immigrants] do the country as additions to the voting population is undoubted, notorious and undeniable." 

33U. S., Bureau of the Census, op. cit., Table 15, p. 1194.


From the standpoint of religion the native American, predominantly Protestant, found it difficult to accept the new immigrant who was as a general rule Jewish, Roman Catholic, or Eastern Orthodox. They were also unacceptable racially as Slavs, Semites, Greeks, or Italians. The Ku Klux Klan was to represent the ultimate expression of organized violence and persecution against these groups.  

The last half of the nineteenth century was also the era of Darwinism, which did not accept the "uniqueness of humanity and also the belief in its homogeneity." Racists seized upon Darwin to distinguish between "superior" and "inferior" breeds.

Socially, the various immigrant groups entering the United States were markedly different when it came to dress, customs, cuisines, and moral standards. Too often, the native American could not understand.  

Perhaps the most general complaint against the incoming masses was the belief that they were serving to

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37 Oscar Handlin, Race and Nationality . . . , p. 87.

38 Ibid., p. 88.

flood the labor market and thus depressing wages at a
time when organized labor was trying to raise living
standards for the American worker. The institution of
contract labor, usually associated with union-busting,
was no secret even though it was against the law. To
further irritate labor relations, immigrants were be-
lieved to accept lower wages than could be acceptable
to the native. 40 Also, the unskilled foreign laborer
was accused of bringing evil organizations such as the
Mafia of Italy into labor. 41

The foregoing differences, complaints, and con-
ditions caused a great number of American natives to
suspect and even fear the "new immigrant." Also, their
often open hostility caused the newcomer to withdraw
farther into his own group thus bringing the charge of
"clanishness." These elements came together to form
the American atmosphere toward the newcomer, who was to
derience their explosive nature in the anti-Greek riot
of 1909, in South Omaha.

A third general underlying cause was the force
which practically molded the elements of difference into

40 Steiner, op. cit., p. 310; Orth, op. cit., p. 227;

41 Omaha Examiner, June 22, 1907, p. 4.
a powerful anti-immigrant public opinion. This was the "yellow journal." The newspapers of the period found it to their advantage to play on the public's fears, prejudices, preferences, and other emotions and attitudes. The "yellow journal" assisted by the wire services was able to virtually create public opinion—to mold the mass mind.

Certainly, all journals, articles, and books were not bent against the incomer. There were numerous attempts to counteract the growing hostility toward the newcomer. Grace Abbott, Henry Pratt Fairchild, Jane Addams, Thomas Burgess, and Carl Schurz were only a few. Carl Schurz, himself a born German, wrote:

Symptoms of deterioration in our political life, or in the character of our citizenship, are observed, and some volatile intellects find it most convenient to dispose of the whole matter by simply saying that the "foreign element" is alone chargeable with it, and that the trouble can easily be cured by stopping immigration.\(^{42}\)

Immigration, he went on to say, was not

... the cause of the deterioration of our political life, nor of the lack of employment; that causes of these evils must be found, in one case in the increasing intrusion of the

\(^{42}\)Carl Schurz, "Restricting Immigration," Harper's Weekly, XLII (January 8, 1898), p. 27.
mercenary spirit into our politics, and in the other in our economic conditions, which are in some respects aggravated by our laws; and that the pretended cure was mere quackery.⁴³

In spite of the efforts of many to educate the native American to accept or reject the newcomer, the fact remained that the average American usually was best convinced by what he saw, and what he saw was often alienating and disturbing. Generally speaking, the people of South Omaha were little more than a part of a national picture of antagonism and suspicion for the newcomer. Of course, there were differences. San Francisco had its oriental problem, New Orleans, the Italian, and South Omaha, the Greek.

⁴³Ibid.
CHAPTER II

SOUTH OMAHA--IDEAL FOR A RIOT

In 1909, South Omaha was a separate municipality with a population of over 20,000.\(^1\) It had its own separate commercial district and was largely sustained by the payrolls of the meat packing industry and the railroads.

The first decade of the twentieth century was a period of considerable labor unrest in South Omaha's packing industry. When the packers refused to meet labor's demands in 1904, a strike ensued, and a number of Japanese\(^2\) and some Greeks\(^3\) were imported to work as strike breakers. The strike failed, and the "foreigners" continued to be employed. At that time, the railroads were utilizing

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\(^2\) Interview with Sam S. Drummy, April 5, 1964. Drummy was employed by the Union Pacific Railroad as a worker at the time of the anti-Greek riot; he died about a week after this interview.

\(^3\) Interview with Steve Abariotes, November 9, 1963. He came from Greece, via Cairo, Egypt, in 1903, and was the proprietor of the Olympia Candy Company in Omaha at the time of the riot, also, he served as the interpreter for John Mavrouides at the latter's first trial; Interview with Jesse Kuncel, April 4, 1964. Kuncel was eighteen years old in 1909, and served on the Omaha police force from 1919 until his retirement; Interview with Kathryn L. Kavanaugh, April 11, 1964—she was the daughter of Officer Edward Lowery and taught at South High School for forty-one years.
contract labor, especially Italians, Greeks, and Hungarians. Cases of Greek contract labor and peonage, in violation of Federal law, were reported in a number of midwestern cities, including Topeka and Kansas City, in Kansas, and Des Moines, Iowa.

In 1907, the Omaha Examiner pointed out that if California had a Japanese problem, the people of Omaha had better review the growing Italian, Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian problem in their own back yard. It specifically attacked the Italians as ignorant, anarchistic, and vicious. Still, in 1909, the Greek was relatively a newcomer to both Omaha and South Omaha. The first sizeable groups arrived about 1906, and by 1909, the total Greek population in both South Omaha and Omaha approximated two thousand. (This figure fluctuated; there were times during the winter months, when the railroad gangs were

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4 Interviews with Drummy and Abariotes; Interview with James E. Loras, December 21, 1964—he was a railroad laborer in Montana, Colorado, and North Dakota and later went into the restaurant business in El Paso, Texas, where he was respected as a Greek businessman; he arrived from Greece in 1902. Omaha Daily News, April 26, 1909, p. 3.


6 Omaha Bee, April 5, 1909, p. 8.


8 Omaha Examiner, August 8, 1907, pp. 3-4.
wintering in the area, when the figure was closer to three thousand. While both cities shared the Greek colony, South Omaha drew most of the Greek laboring class.

The native not only found the Greeks to be interfering with what he believed to be a just wage, but he also discovered the newcomers' behavior to be, in his estimation, clannish, immoral, and "un-American." In Omaha, the Greek colony was concentrated in the Third Ward, east of Thirteenth Street, between Leavenworth and Nicholas streets. In South Omaha, the Greek colony had moved into a predominantly Irish district, known at the time as "Indian Hill," which was the area roughly from Twenty-seventh to Thirty-first along "Q" Street.

In both districts the Greeks kept very much to themselves; they established their own grocery stores, confectioneries, shoeshine parlors, and coffee houses.

9Omaha Bee, February 28, 1909, p. 1; Interview with Abariotes; Interview with Louis Barellos, March 31, 1964—he came from Greece in 1904 and was a Union Pacific foreman from 1909, until his retirement in 1962; Omaha Daily News, February 23, 1909, p. 3.

10U.S., Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census, Abstract, with Supplement for Nebraska, Table 5; Omaha City Directory (Omaha: Omaha Directory Co., 1900), p. 936; Interviews with Abariotes and Barellos.

11Interview with Drummy; Interview with John J. Zaloudek, April 5, 1964—he was fifteen years old in 1909, and served on the Omaha police force from 1929 to 1962, when he was retired; Interview with Mike J. O'Loughlin, April 5, 1964—he was twenty-six at the time of the riot; Omaha Bee, February 23, 1909, pp. 1-2.
The coffee house was the center of Greek social life. There the Greek read issues of the Greek newspapers, usually the Atlantis or Greek Star (published in New York and Chicago respectively),12 drank thick Turkish coffee, argued Greek politics, and played cards. The back room was often a scene of gambling, usually at cards. The language of the coffee house was Greek. Few Greeks were interested in learning English, because most were waiting for the day when they could return to their native land and live luxuriously on their American earnings.13

Of the two thousand Greeks residing in the area, few were living with their wives. The men could not afford to bring their families with them. Thus, many chose to live four, five, or even more to a room in order to save money. Most of the Greeks were between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five, and it was not difficult for them to find American women attractive. Too often, however, they insulted young women as they

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12 The Atlantis began as a weekly on March 3, 1894, the first major Greek paper in the United States; the Greek Star, also a weekly, was started January 18, 1904. See Gregory Winifred, Union List of Newspapers, American Newspapers, 1821-1936 (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1937), pp. 121, 461.

13 Interviews with Barellos and Abariotes; Interview with George J. Bitzes, April 18, 1964—he was employed as a laborer by Swift & Co. for thirty-five years after arriving from Alatsata, a Greek colony in Asia Minor.
passed by their rooming houses and establishments, and brawls between natives and Greeks over women were not unusual. 14

Another contributing factor to a growing friction between the natives and Greeks was the fact that "Q" Street became "Greek town" especially during the winter months 15 when the railroad gangs were unemployed and had plenty of money in their pockets. It was hard to compete with the Greeks on the labor market, especially during the winter months. They were willing to accept almost any wage. Many were idle, and idleness too often bred mischief.

The Greeks did have some favorable qualities. Industries and railroads employed them because they were hard workers and obedient. They exhibited the ability to make and accumulate money whether as common laborers or as entrepreneurs. Greek investment in some thirty-four to fifty groceries, bakeries, fruit stands, restaurants, and confectionaries was estimated to be as high as a quarter of a million dollars. Their candy was popular, and their confectionaries often employed American girls. Some forty Greeks had made homes with American girls. Approximately

14 Interviews with Barelos, Abariotes, Bitzes, Drummy, O'Loughlin, and Zaloudek.

one hundred boys and girls of mixed parentage attended local schools. 16

The Greeks were Eastern Orthodox, and, in 1909, after two years of effort, the foundation had been laid for a church, St. John's, at Sixteenth and Martha streets, which represented "an outlay of $8,600, exclusive of the interior furnishings." 17 Reverend Konstantinos Harvalis was employed to serve the Greek Orthodox Community spiritually, holding his first services in the new structure on April 9, 1909. 18

Nevertheless, the Greek was a stranger and an intruder for many. The Omaha Bee captured the thoughts of the anti-Greek element when it concisely stated:

The thing that sticks in the crow of the anti-Greek element is that they work cheap; live even more cheaply, in groups; are careless of many of the little details that Americans set much store by; once in a while are impudent, ignore the restrictions of American law that lay heavily on the true patriot— in short, do not mix, are not "good fellows" like the citizens we get from northern Europe, for instance. 19

Joseph Pulcar, editor of the Daily News, had this to say:

16 Ibid., pp. 1, 4.
17 Ibid.
18 Omaha Daily News, April 9, 1909, p. 10.
19 Omaha Bee, February 28, 1909, p. 4.
Their quarters have been unsanitary, they have insulted women; in other ways they have made themselves offensive in the eyes of the great majority of the people of South Omaha, too.

Herded together in lodging houses and living cheaply, Greeks are a menace to the American laboring man—just as the Japs, Italians and other similar laborers are. Thus, South Omaha, in 1909, was an anti-Greek tinder-box, and an incident was all that was needed to set it aflame. John Masourides provided the incident—the immediate cause which was to engulf the Greek colony of South Omaha in flame, violence, and terror. Who was John Masourides?

John Masourides was a Greek, who in about 1906, arrived in the United States from a small village outside the city of Kalamata, in the state of Messinia of the Peloponnesus, Greece. John was thirty-six years of age when he left his home. He left a section of Greece where the people had known violence for centuries. They believed themselves to be the descendants of "Leonidas and his three hundred." Their greatest pride was that no conqueror had ever really conquered the people of the mountains of the Peloponnesus and that it was there that the first successful blow was struck for Greek independence.

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on March 25, 1821, after being occupied by the Turks for almost four centuries. 21

John Masourides was a typical Greek immigrant in most ways. He was dark and of medium height, wore a mustache, could speak no English but could read and write some Greek. He left behind a wife and four children and made his destination Sunrise, Wyoming, where he planned to join his brother Gust. In Wyoming, John worked as a miner for several months after his arrival. The brothers then decided to come to Omaha to open a grocery and confectionary. This they did in South Omaha.

In 1908, John went to Kansas City but returned a short time later as his brother had decided to emigrate to Alexandria, Egypt. 22 Masourides returned to South Omaha in early February, 1909, but found that Gust had already left. Meanwhile, the police in South Omaha "had kept their eyes" on John, 23 because police records showed him to have been arrested for gambling. 24 Also,

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21 Interview with Abariotes; Omaha Bee, February 21, 1909, p. 4; Omaha World Herald, May 28, 1909, p. 7.

22 Interview with Abariotes; Omaha Bee, February 21, 1909, p. 4; Omaha World Herald, May 28, 1909, p. 7.

23 Omaha Bee, February 21, 1909, p. 4.

he was reported to have been in the company of a minor, Lillian Breese.  

Miss Breese, who later proved to be seventeen and thus a minor, was the daughter of a Mrs. Alice Bell of Grand Island, Nebraska; Lillian did not know "where her father was." She was also believed to have been married, but at the time she lived with her six-year-old half-brother, Willy Bell, in a rooming house at 2407 "N" Street, South Omaha, which was run by a Mrs. Nell Haines.

Lillian Breese had no visible income except for money she received for tutoring Greeks interested in learning the English language and the money her mother occasionally sent. John Masourides met Lillian through a Mrs. George C. Kamos, the German-born wife of a Greek. After he had tried to get Mrs. Kamos to teach him English, she suggested he make arrangements with Miss Breese to organize a class. Tuition was to be four dollars a month. By February 19,

1909, she had given John three lessons and "instructed her pupil to secure a first reader."33

On the fateful evening of Friday, February 19, 1909, John Masourides met Lillian at the home of John Kardonis, a Greek friend, and escorted her home. Masourides' plan was to leave for Kansas City that evening at about eleven o'clock to collect thirty-five dollars a man owed him; consequently, the visit to her room that evening was primarily social.34

In the meantime, Officer Edward Lowery was ordered by the South Omaha Chief of Police to answer a complaint of tenants in the block where Lillian Breese lived. They had seen the couple enter the apartment together.35 Without a warrant,36 police Officer Lowery proceeded to the Haines rooming house and got the landlady out of bed, Mrs. Haines accompanied the officer to the room,37 where they found the couple sitting on the edge of the bed talking.38 The officer intended to arrest Masourides for

38 Omaha Bee, February 21, 1909, p. 4.
vagrancy and told the couple to get ready to go to the police station to see Chief John Briggs. Willy Bell, her half-brother, began to cry and Lillian "sassed" the officer a great deal... As Masourides put on his coat, a "dirk knife fell from his pocket," which Lowery picked up.

As the trio proceeded up Twenty-fourth Street toward the police station, which was located south of the Haines rooming house and on the southwest corner of Twenty-fourth and "0" streets, a series of rapid events began to unfold, which ended in the wounding of Masourides and the death of patrolman Lowery. Miss Breese later said that Lowery proceeded in front of her and behind his prisoner, who walked "at the outside of the walk." She saw Masourides put his hand in his pocket and heard the officer say "stop that." Then there were two flashes "from the man on the outside of the walk," and she ran. This version was later corroborated during the trials of John Masourides by Louis Rosenfeld and other eye-witnesses.

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however, changed her testimony before Masourides' second trial to show that the officer could have shot first. Her first version included that as Officer Lowery fell mortally wounded, he managed to get off two shots striking his assailant in the left chest and leg.

Later Masourides told his version of the incident to his friend N. J. Mandannis, a Greek contractor for the Union Pacific. Masourides claimed that he only tried to throw his pistol away to avoid being fined for carrying a concealed weapon. The officer apparently thought that he was going to attack him and fired. "Then I fired at him to save myself," said Masourides.

Wounded in the right leg and left side, patrolman Edward Lowery was carried to Schaefer's Drug Store at 2401 "N" Street. It was too late to save him. Lowery bled to death within five minutes after the gun duel; his mesenteric artery had been severed by the bullet which had struck him in the side. Lowery's wife was called from a Sybilla card party given at the Masonic Hall in South Omaha only to find her husband dead.

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45 Omaha Bee, February 21, 1909, p. 4.
46 Omaha Bee, February 21, 1909, p. 4; Omaha World Herald, February 26, 1909, p. 8.
In the meantime, John Masourides had taken refuge in the room of Lillian Breese, where police Officer Philander Harder and Harry L. Wanamaker, a serviceman from Fort Crook, found him under the girl's bed. He was forcibly disarmed of his .32 caliber pistol and taken away to jail. Miss Breese said that just before Masourides was arrested he told her that he hoped that he had killed the officer. She was also held by the police for questioning.

At the station, Masourides was given first aid and then taken to the South Omaha Hospital a little after midnight. Foreseeing a possible lynching, South Omaha authorities decided to transfer the prisoner to the Douglas County Jail in Omaha. A vengeful mob of some five hundred, which had gathered after the killing, chased the ambulance and threatened the prisoner with violence. As the ambulance approached the city limits, the mob rushed the vehicle and failed to secure its prey only because the horses were "whipped up into a dead run." Several shots were fired, but they were wild shots intended to scare rather than to do bodily harm. Taking


50 Omaha Bee, February 21, 1909, p. 4.
a roundabout way, the police managed to get Masourides to the Omaha police station fearing an attack on the county jail.51

The officers, performing their duty, succeeded in protecting their prisoner that Saturday morning; however, the mob felt cheated. The tinderbox was lit and awaited fuel to engulf the South Omaha Greek colony in flame and violence. Organization and motive were needed for the mob element, and the journals and prominent South Omaha leaders inadvertently provided it.

CHAPTER III

MOTIVE AND ORGANIZATION FOR A RIOT

Edward Lowery died in the line of duty at the age of forty-two. Born and reared in Ireland, he arrived in Chicago, Illinois, in 1887, where he met and married an Irish girl from his home town in Ireland. The following year the couple moved to South Omaha. Within seven years, they were the parents of two children, Kathryn and Leo. Lowery found his first employment in South Omaha with the Cudahy Packing Company's lard department, where he soon rose to the position of straw-boss. When the strike came in 1904, he refused to continue working and joined the strikers; consequently, he was unemployed for a short period. Before the year was out, he joined the South Omaha police force as a patrolman.¹

As a police officer, he was well-liked, respected, and considered strict as a law enforcer. He was also kind and understanding; for instance, he took care of those who had too much to drink by seeing that they got home safely.² In 1905, he returned to Ireland to visit his ailing father, rejoining his family in South Omaha that same year.³

¹Interview with Kavanagh.
²Interviews with O'Loughlin and Kavanagh.
³Interview with Kavanagh.
By 1909, the future of the Lowery family looked bright. They had a comfortable home at 2413 "G" Street in South Omaha and enjoyed the respect of the community. Kathryn, nineteen, was a freshman at the University of Nebraska; and Leo, thirteen, was attending grade school. Then the tragedy of February 19, 1909, struck. Edward Lowery was the man fate had chosen for John Masourides to slay.

In spite of the mob's attempt to lynch, or at least to frighten, Masourides during the early hours of Saturday morning, everything seemed to quiet down in South Omaha later that day. Unrest and frustration, however, were part of the atmosphere. Many felt something had to be done to avenge Lowery's death, and still others felt that the Greek colony as a whole was somehow responsible. What could be done? Several South Omaha leaders and at least two daily journals inadvertently were to provide the organization for action and then violence.

There were three major daily newspapers in Omaha in 1909; there was none in South Omaha. The Omaha Bee

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4 Interview with Leo L. Lowery, son of Officer Lowery and teacher and coach at South High School for twenty-seven years.

5 Interview with Kavanagh.
did not carry the news of the slaying until Sunday (the incident was the preceding Friday evening), when the article appeared on page four with the caption, "Greek Kills To Save Self; John Masourides Tries to Excuse Murder of Policeman." The report was objective. The Bee's editorial page seemed to be indirectly instructing when it praised the advice of Mississippi's Governor Noel, who advocated a firm hand be used by authorities in arresting mob action. He was reported to have said that state troops were "directed to shoot, if necessary, to protect a prisoner from a mob...".

In contrast, the Omaha World Herald carried the story on page one, Saturday, February 20, 1909, under the caption, "Ed Lowery, South Omaha Policeman, Is Shot and Killed by Greek." The article per se was not inflammatory, but on page eight where the article was continued there appeared the following:

**CALL MASS MEETING**

Copies of the following resolution are being circulated about the city and hundreds have already signed it. The mass meeting Sunday will no doubt be one of the largest ever held in the city:

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6Omaha Bee, February 21, 1909, p. 4.
7Ibid., p. 4.
Whereas, A condition of outlawry exists in this city among the Greeks of this city, and

Whereas, Many instances of their flagrant disregard and insolence of our laws and ordinances of this city have occurred during the past years, and

Whereas, The so-called quarters of the Greeks are infested by a vile bunch of filthy Greeks who have attacked our women, insulted pedestrians upon the street, openly maintained gambling dens and many other forms of viciousness, and

Whereas, On the evening of February 19, these conditions culminated in the cowardly and brutal murder of officer Ed Lowery, one of the most highly respected citizens of this city.

Therefore be it resolved. That we, the undersigned citizens and taxpayers of the city hereby believe that a mass meeting should be held on Sunday afternoon, February 21, 1909, at the city hall to take such steps and to adopt such measures as will effectually rid the city of the Greeks, and thereby remove the menacing conditions that threaten the very life and welfare of South Omaha.9

The Sunday edition of the World Herald included a moving article from its South Omaha bureau. Some of the passages read as follows:

There is much sadness in one home today. There is grief for a loved father and faithful, kind husband.

Grief unspeakable watches beside the bier of the martyred hero today.

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9Ibid., p. 3.
A Greek one who in his own native land was never accorded the privilege of lifting up his head and looking outward or upward, murdered Officer Lowery.

His life was filled with the brightness of freedom and his pockets filled with the easy gold. He was made to feel that he was a human being. He grew fat in arrogance and pushed aside the native sons or used them as mere rungs of his ladder of success.

And then when a gentle hand sought to restrain him for a moment from wrong doing his thought was only to kill, to kill craftily.

And he killed. 10

The article then reminded the reader of the meeting Sunday afternoon and included a proclamation of mourning, the first to be issued by a mayor of South Omaha. Mayor Frank Koutsky phrased it as follows:

PROCLAMATION OF MOURNING

Whereas, the hand of the assassin has removed from our midst, Edward Lowery, one of the best citizens who has honored this city, with his presence.

No murder in recent years has been so characterized by brutality and cowardice as was the death of Patrolman Lowery, who died at his post of duty.

In this age of a livelier appreciation of the services of public servants when the public

10 Omaha World Herald, February 21, 1909, p. 3.
eagerly demand the faithful and efficient execution of public duty, all of which qualities were abundantly found and personified in the life and service of the dead officer, it seems eminently proper and fitting that our city should officially recognize these qualities, and.

THEREFORE, I, Frank Koutsky by virtue of the power invested in me as mayor of this city of South Omaha, declare Tuesday forenoon, February 23 a day of deep mourning and sorrow, and I respectfully ask that all citizens of our city, shall refrain from pursuing their usual vocations, and that a cessation as far as possible of all business throughout the city, be made.

That public servants generally and the members of the police department particularly, who risk their lives in the performance of their duties in the protection of life and property, may know that we are not unmindful of their sacrifices.

I urge that as many as possible of our citizens may attend the funeral obsequies of the beloved officer, South Omaha's most estimable citizen, Edward Lowery.

FRANK KOUTSKY, MAYOR

The World Herald's Sunday edition again carried the text of the petition calling for the meeting Sunday afternoon.

The city's third newspaper, the Omaha Daily News, on page one carried the headlines: "Wife Called From Card Party to Death" and "Officer Lowry of South Omaha Is Shot To Death By Greek." The first article carried the

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., p. 8.
dramatic scene of Lowery's wife seeing her husband lying
dead on the drug store floor and sobbing, "Oh, my God, I
won't believe it." The feature article, occupying three
columns on the front page, reported the slaying, attempted
lynching, and the petition being circulated in South Omaha
Saturday morning. The petition was included, and the
article went on to say that it had been initiated by
Joseph Murphy, a South Omaha civic leader. At least five
hundred people had signed it, the Daily News reported.

The Sunday edition of the Daily News seemed most
concerned with the mourning in South Omaha, which took the
form of the police station being draped in black and the
policemen wearing their silver badges. It sadly noted
that Officer Lowery "was the first member of the South
Omaha police force to die by an assassin's bullet."

Before two o'clock in the afternoon of Sunday,
February 21, 1909, the circulating and published resolu-
tions had succeeded in assembling some one thousand
interested people and spectators on a vacant lot east
of South Omaha's City Hall and south of the Packer's Bank
at Twenty-fourth and "O" streets. Originally, the plan

14 Ibid.
called for the use of the City Hall, but the size of the crowd which assembled necessitated the use of the vacant lot.  

Shortly after two o'clock, the meeting was called to order, and "Henry C. Murphy, Joseph Murphy's brother, was made chairman by acclamation." By then, the crowd was estimated to be approximately three thousand. Mounting an improvised platform, Murphy, who was of Irish parentage and the former city attorney, "eulogized the life of the deceased officer," generally condemned the morals and habits of the Greeks, dwelling particularly on the molesting of women, and ended his speech by asking for action against the Greek menace. He said,

It is about time for the citizens to take steps to rid the city of this menace. We should use means to get the corporations hiring this class of labor to desist. We should immediately lay this matter, with the great necessity of the case, before these corporations.  

Murphy's statements brought two important resolutions. The first came from John Nightingale and concerned the Greek element in general. It was seconded by Al Hunter,

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18 Omaha Bee, February 22, 1909, p. 1; Omaha World Herald, February 22, 1909, p. 2; Interview with O'Loughlin.
19 Omaha Bee, February 22, 1909, pp. 1, 2.
the secretary of the meeting. The World Herald printed it as follows:

It is currently reported that the so-called Greeks, a large number of whom are employed in the packing houses of this city, have brought with them to this city not only a condition of outlawry and viciousness, but that a large percentage of them are suffering and their bodies are affected by vile, loathsome and contagious diseases, and that a large number of them are suffering from syphilitic and other taints and yet are permitted to handle food and eatable products consumed by the people of this city and the public at large.

I, therefore, move you, Mr. Chairman, that a thorough investigation be made as to which packing houses be given the widest publicity possible in order that the ravages of disease with which these men are infected shall not be transmitted to unsuspecting people.

The following men were to form the committee for approaching the packers: H. C. Murphy, Judge Caldwell, Maurice Hinchey, Frank Dolozal, H. B. Fleharty, A. J. Burth, John Nightingale, John McEntire, Police Chief John Briggs, and Al Hunter.

The second resolution was introduced by Al Hunter and concerned the mourning of Edward Lowery:

Standing today in the presence of an atrocious and brutal murder of one of South Omaha's

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22 Ibid.
leading citizens, who died at his post of duty by the hand of a scurvy Greek assassin, I deem it but proper that this body adopt a resolution calling upon all patriotic and law-abiding and liberty loving citizens of this city to recognize the hours from 8 to 12 o'clock a.m. on Tuesday, February 23, 1909, the funeral hours of the late Edward Lowery, as hours of mourning and sorrow.

That citizens generally in all walks of life be permitted and requested to abstain and to refrain from the performance of any labor or the pursuit of any business during those hours, when the gallant officer is receiving his last earthly rites, and that as a mark of appreciation and a testimonial to our high regard for the faithful, true and loyal officer that as many as possible of our citizens join and participate in the obsequies over the dead body of Edward Lowery.

Other speakers were to follow Murphy. Jeremiah Howard, a born Irishman and well-known labor agitator, and J. P. Kraus, both representatives to Nebraska's lower house, followed Murphy with "speeches of the same tenor." Then came Frank Dolezal, "a man of influence in Bohemian circles," and John Hinchey. "Howard's speech," the Bee reported, "was characterized by bitter denunciation not calculated to calm the crowds." He insisted that the government take action not to permit Greeks to handle meat. Kraus "asked that the Greek conditions in the city be taken

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23Ibid.
24Interviews with O'Loughlin and Zaloudek.
up with the state labor commissioner." Hinchey made a motion "that the laws governing the carrying of concealed weapons should be carefully looked into and more thoroughly enforced." Hinchey's motion was carried. Others continued to speak to the crowd until approximately three in the afternoon when a sizeable segment of the human mass degenerated into an instrument of violence and fire.

\[27\text{ Ibid.}\]
\[28\text{ Ibid.}\]
CHAPTER IV

RIOT UNLEASHED

In honor of George Washington's birthday, the Omaha Bee of February 22, 1909, carried a quotation from the famous Farewell Address, delivered on September 19, 1796. It read:

The very idea of the power and the right of the people to establish government presupposes the duty of every individual to obey the established government.¹

Unfortunately, the passage was not published in time, because the day before, February 21, 1909, South Omaha was the scene of demagogery, lawlessness, arson, and violence.

The anti-Greek riot began about three o'clock in the afternoon when the fired up and unbridled crowd shouting "Kill the Greeks" or "Remember poor Lowery" swarmed into the Greek quarter of South Omaha spreading violence and destruction as it went from one Greek establishment or boarding house to another.² The mob, which consisted of

five hundred to a thousand defiant men, women, and even children, began by marching west on "Q" from the site of the meeting and then south to "Q" Street, where it began its attack on the unsuspecting Greeks. Soon the length of "Q" Street from Twenty-fourth to Twenty-eighth was a mad scene of over one thousand rock-throwing rioters and curious spectators. It was difficult to tell who was the rioter and who was the spectator. The street had been under-going a resurfacing and the new nine-pound bricks were torn out of their new bed and used as projectiles.

The new "Q" Street viaduct (Twenty-sixth to Twenty-eighth Street) had been recently opened for pedestrian traffic and enabled the huge crowd to pass to the other side of the Greek colony. Before making the crossing, however, the mob had reduced ten or twelve Greek stores and lodging houses to shambles. The Greeks, shocked and overcome, tried to flee for their lives, but their efforts too often ended in their falling into the hands of the mob, which invariably subjected them to insults and severe beatings.

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4 Interview with Zaloudek.
5 Interview with Drummy; Omaha Bee (Morning Edition), February 22, 1909, p. 1.
In desperation, a Greek fired bird shot into the crowd wounding two boys. Young Frank Sweeney was hit in the abdomen by four pellets, another struck his forehead, and some hit his hands. Joseph G. Gamble, the other boy, was struck in the leg by the same discharge. The shooting served to further infuriate the menacing mob.

The rioters then split up into two groups. While one part of the mob moved west on "Q" over the viaduct, another went north to Twenty-fifth from "Q" to attack Nick Mega's grocery and meat market. Mega's establishment was the first non-Greek, but foreign, business to be attacked. "The front was smashed in and the stock damaged." The mob then moved on to Twenty-sixth and "N" streets where some Greek lodging houses were broken into and severely damaged.

The next major objective was the Demos' Brothers Confectionary on the southwest corner of Twenty-fourth and "L" streets. According to a deposition made on July 17, 1909, by Mary G. Demos, co-owner of the confectionary, she was alone in the store when the assault came. When Miss Demos saw the threatening mob approach, she called the police station, which was only a few blocks

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Ibid.

Ibid.
away, for protection. The officer answering "laughed at her over the telephone." Going to the register she tried to salvage the cash. The crowd threatened and threw stones. Again she called the police, who again refused assistance. By that time the mob had entered the store to smash the fixtures and scatter the stock. What it did not destroy, it looted. After the mob withdrew, apparently satisfied with its work, the police and a few friends arrived. They assured Miss Demos that the store would be safe and asked her to go home. Also, Miss Demos made the statement that she was sure that the police participated in the plundering which followed her departure.

Shortly after her terrifying experience, she was hospitalized for a nervous condition. 9

What were the legally constituted authorities doing in the meantime to bring the rioting under control? At about five o'clock that evening, Mayor Frank Koutsly, who had left the meeting before it ended to visit his ailing brother, was on his way home, when he was met by anxious members of the Fire and Police Board. Describing conditions, they told the mayor that Douglas County Sheriff E. F. Brailey was cooperating with South Omaha's police to bring matters under control. Also, W. C. Lambert,

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9Omaha Bee, February 23, 1909, p. 1; Ion, op. cit., deposition of Mary Demos (July 17, 1909), Numbers 1 and 2.
chairman of the Board, and commissioners Wesley P. Adkins and A. H. Murdock stated that they had issued orders to close all saloons and "telephoned Governor Shallenberger advising him of conditions, though not asking for assistance from the state which he [the governor] informed them would be promptly forthcoming at their request." The request was never made. After the report by the Board, Mayor Koutsky spent an hour in the police station and then went to his home, only a short distance south of the station, where he remained the rest of the evening.

South Omaha Police Chief John Briggs found it difficult to organize the city's police force once the mob action started. Later, he stated that he had been caught completely unawares. In fact, he had participated in the meeting, which proved to be the fountain-head of the riot, and even accepted a committee position. Chief Briggs had listened to the speeches and made no effort to "admonish them [the speakers] to be careful nor did he advise them to stop speaking." As soon as the rioting began, Briggs notified the Fire and Police Board but remained with the rioters hoping to keep things under control until assistance could arrive. Accompanied by police officer Shields,

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10 *Omaha World Herald*, February 22, 1909, p. 2; *Ion, op. cit.* deposition of Frank Koutsky (April 28, 1909), Part K.
he tried to reason with the crowd. The two officers did not on any occasion use their clubs or revolvers against the rioters. In fact, Briggs later deposed, wherever he and Shields went "the mob obeyed orders." Their control disappeared, however, when the mob began to split up and move in different directions. 11

At five o’clock, Sheriff Brailey arrived "with some deputies and remained until the trouble was over at midnight." By six o’clock, all members of the South Omaha police force, which included two captains, two detectives, two jailers, and twelve patrolmen, were on duty. By then the riot was completely out of control and enjoyed the encouraging cover of darkness. 12

In desperation, the South Omaha authorities requested the assistance of the Omaha police, but Chief Donahue, home and ill at the time, "took the view that the public safety would be better subserved by him ‘keeping out of it.’" Omaha’s Mayor Dahlman endorsed his chief’s inaction and stated: "I think it would be unwise for us to take a hand in it now." The reason for the refusal was said to be that Omaha did not wish to "disconcert"

11 Ion, op. cit., deposition of John Briggs (April 26, 1909), Part E.

12 Chief Briggs later stated that with forty officers and a patrol wagon "the crowd could have been broken up inside of an hour." See Omaha Daily News, February 22, 1909, p. 3; Ion, loc. cit.
the South Omaha police and that the introduction of Omaha police could have incited more trouble. Precautions, however, were taken. Omaha police Captain Dunn prepared for a possible assault on the county jail, which now housed a wounded and fearful Masourides. Also, Dunn gave orders for officers to use force in the event the South Omaha rioters tried to cross the Sixteenth Street viaduct.

The governor's assistance had been refused and Omaha refused to lend its assistance; thus, the rioters continued their reign of terror into the night when arson was added to their array of weapons. A sizeable mob assembled at Thirty-second and "Q" streets and attacked a combined home and grocery store of a Greek and "burned it to the ground." The Bee described events surrounding the holocaust as follows:

Three young Greek boys were taken from that burning building by the mob and roughly handled, being beaten with clubs and kicked by the infuriated leaders of the riot. Then the oldest of the three lads was marched up town at the head of a long line of rioters, the leaders shouting that he was to be put on a train and shipped out of town.

At Twenty-eighth and "R" streets, the attempt to fire a Greek store ended in the wounding of a member of

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15Ibid.
the mob, Charles Nestroyl of 3014 "R" Street. The wound was facial but considered serious. 16

A gun duel at Thirtieth and "Q" streets ended with a Greek being seriously wounded in the leg. He was saved from the mob by Sheriff Brailey and Chief Briggs, who succeeded in taking him to the police station. 17

Fred O'Mallin, a member of the mob, was also wounded in this action but not seriously. 18

Women also participated in the riot. The World Herald reported that a "handsomely gowned" and "pretty" young lady of not over twenty-two "led the mob part of the time." She led an attack on a shoeshine parlor and then passed boxes of shoe blacking to the boys to use as ammunition. She appeared to enjoy it. 19

The Greeks made a determined effort at 2516 "Q" Street, when the violence became intense. Six Greeks, armed with shotguns poised at the menacing crowd, took positions at the second-story windows. With provocation they would have fired into the mob which included "hundreds of women and children." Captain Turnquist persuaded

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Omaha Bee, February 23, 1909, p. 2.
the Greeks not to fire unless they were attacked; subsequently, the mob moved away, and a deadly duel was thus averted. 20

At Twenty-sixth and "O", a loyal dog proved effective against the rioters. It held them at bay in spite of flying missiles and broken glass. The dog saved his master and was still on guard the next morning long after the riot had subsided, and his master had fled. 21

A Greek of small stature was cornered in a building on Twenty-sixth and "N". With his back to the wall, he faced the rioters bringing the first assailant to his knees with a blow. He then found himself fighting eight or more attackers. Finally, he managed to escape "with nearly all his clothes torn off and his face bruised and bleeding." 22

The firing of a two-story frame building at the corner of Thirty-third and "Q" streets drove six Greeks into the hands of the waiting mob. One of the Greeks, Thomas Argolis, broke away from his beaters and dashed for a moving street car. He was not permitted to enter the front door but "Detective Shields protected him from

20 Ibid., p. 8.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
his assailants until he ran around" and boarded the rear platform. Shields also frustrated an attempt to take the victim from the moving car. Argolis, barefooted and coatless, was then removed from the street car and driven to the police station for safety. Meanwhile, the fire department tried to put out the fire only to find that members of the mob had cut the hose.

By nine o'clock, Sheriff Brailey had increased "his force of deputies to forty." That hour found thirty wounded and bleeding Greeks in the South Omaha jail. The police station had been turned into a hospital.

The poor sufferers, always hatless, sometimes barefooted, and in one instance clad only in underwear, unable to speak English, in jail as their only refuge to save their lives after being already half killed by mobs of strangers on a foreign soil, they suffered their pains with stoicism and uttered not a word or cry, though trembling piteously.

About an hour before midnight, a throng was seen firing a boarding house at Twenty-eighth and "R" streets, the scene of a gun duel earlier in the evening. Waiting for the Greeks to come out

A young colored man pounded upon the sidewalk with a hammer and yelled: "What will

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24 Ibid.
we do with them when they come out?"

"We'll beat 'em up," was the cheerful response from down the line.

As a Greek emerged from the burning building, he was covered with "nickel plated bulldog revolvers," cocked and pointed. He escaped only after being severely beaten. 27

The establishments and persons of many foreigners, other than those of Greeks, also came under the violent attacks of the rioters. Besides the grocery of Nick Mega, the saloon of John V. Maftein, a Rumanian, was assaulted and a large stock of liquor destroyed or plundered. 28 The saloon of Peter Soski, another Rumanian, at Twenty-sixth and "Q" streets suffered the same fate. 29 Four Polish laborers, mistaken for Greeks, were set upon and savagely beaten. 30 Turkish and Austro-Hungarian citizens were also attacked. 31 In summary, Sunday, February 21, 1909, was not a good day for residents of South Omaha if they had a foreign accent.

27 Ibid.
Shortly before midnight, the mob action began to subside rapidly, and the police began to make arrests in sizeable numbers. Sheriff Brailey arrested nine men at one time. The number soon reached twenty-five. Almost immediately, friends and relatives tried to free them on bail. Chief Briggs refused. By midnight, the riot had all but died out, and, with the exception of a few isolated cases, the police and firemen were in control.

The mob, however, had had its moments, because for some six to nine hours

... with revolvers and club and brickbat, with torch, with blows and abuse the ruffians march from place to place, crushing in windows, drinking the stolen liquors from wrecked saloons, stealing merchandise, assaulting those whom they sought, until the blood flower like rivulets from cruel wounds, in one instance shooting a respectable groceryman through the leg, and in another dragging a terror-striken youth, clad only in his underwear, from a street car where he had sought refuge, and beating him still more.

Such was the way hundreds of South Omahans spent their Sabbath on February 21, 1909. The passing of midnight on the twenty-first of February brought a new day. On that day, Washington's birth date, began the revelation of the riot's consequences.

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CHAPTER V

ASSESSMENT OF A RIOT

The sun rising on Monday, February 22, 1909, shed its rays on a quiet South Omaha. The riot was over, the fires were out, and preparations were under way for Officer Lowery's funeral. There were those, at the same time, who had their doubts about the peace. Early Monday evening, Governor Shallenberger alerted the national guard in Omaha in an effort to discourage or control any tendencies toward another anti-Greek outburst, especially after the Lowery funeral which was scheduled for Tuesday morning. Furthermore, Sheriff Brailey posted deputies and special police guards to watch over the Greek properties in an effort to prevent additional destruction and looting. The precautions did not appear to be necessary. The only groups to gather did so "to talk over the riot of Sunday." Nevertheless, the national guard and the police remained in readiness until after the funeral.


Troops and police were not the only factors contributing to a quiet South Omaha. Actually, there were no Greeks to attack—they had fled or gone into hiding, and Masourides was out of reach. At nine fifteen o'clock Monday morning, John Masourides, shackled, handcuffed, and on a stretcher, was taken from the county jail under heavy guard to Burlington Station and by rail to the Nebraska State Penitentiary in Lincoln. John's countrymen, however, had to seek their own safety. Many took refuge in Omaha and Council Bluffs, because they had hopes of salvaging something from Sunday's turmoil; others put as many miles between them and South Omaha as possible.

Of an estimated thirteen hundred refugees, only about two hundred fled to Omaha. At eight o'clock, Monday morning, the South Omaha refugees were joined by hundreds of their Omaha countrymen in the combination restaurant-pool hall of Gus Abarotes at Sixteenth and Howard streets in Omaha. The meeting's object was to adopt a course of action. The meeting had the protection of Sheriff Brailey.

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Local Greek leaders such as N. J. Mandanis, L. B. Cokoris, and others tried to calm and caution their fearful and at the same time angry countrymen. N. J. Mandanis warned them against meeting "violence with violence" and asked them to rely on the law for protection. This was difficult for the victims to accept, and many were ready to go to South Omaha with guns to protect their lives and properties.

Mr. Cokoris, President of the local chapter of the national Pan-Hellenic Society, said,

Those in trouble will be fed and cared for and all those who wish to leave Omaha will be provided with tickets if they have not money enough of their own.

Others at the meeting made similar pacifying appeals, and finally the crowd dispersed without incident with the provision that another meeting was to be held at two o'clock that afternoon in Baright's Hall at Nineteenth and Farnam streets. The two o'clock meeting, composed of some five hundred South Omaha and Omaha Greeks, was orderly in spite of those who advocated violence, and, again, the speakers who advocated taking a course within the law won.

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12Ibid., pp. 1, 4; Omaha World Herald, February 23, 1909, p. 1.
Across the Missouri, the people of Council Bluffs looked out of their windows Monday morning to see "large numbers of Greeks . . . walking the streets . . . with bundles of bedding and clothes on their backs. . . ." Early that morning, the local police began to round up over three hundred Greek refugees who had used every means possible to escape South Omaha. The round up continued through the day.\(^{13}\) Bluffs authorities hoped to prevent further violence and a possible riot. As the Greeks were taken into custody, they were disarmed of some twelve revolvers, several butcher knives, twelve razors, and other crude weapons. It was not long before the police station became overcrowded. Then the city auditorium was used. Those who wished to leave Council Bluffs were assisted in their departure. Nine Greeks with tickets to Denison, Iowa, were escorted to the railroad station.\(^{14}\) The refugees, grateful for the orderly reception, publicly thanked Council Bluffs Mayor Thomas Mahoney and Chief of Police George H. Richmond with a statement on the front page of the Nonpåriel.\(^{15}\)

\(^{13}\) Council Bluffs Nonpåriel, February 23, 1909, p. 1.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 2.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 1.
Many Greeks, however, were not far enough from South Omaha when they reached Council Bluffs. Farmers reported seeing "suspicious looking foreigners" along the roads east of the city. Actually, Greek refugees were reported from all parts of Omaha's environs. Some took refuge near Fort Crook, Nebraska, hoping for protection from the army. Some one hundred "were seen by trainmen walking south on the Burlington Railroad tracks, north of Plattsmouth. . . ." Another fifty refugees "were picked up at Gilmore . . . by the Union Pacific motor." Others bought tickets for Kansas City, Des Moines, Sioux City, Falls City, and as far east as Chicago. Fort Worth, Texas, seemed to receive the largest number, about four hundred. The refugees hoped to find employment in Fort Worth's growing meat packing industry. Reporters also noted that among the fleeing Greeks there "were a few women, hollow eyed and staring."

16 Ibid., February 22, 1909, p. 3.
18 Ibid., p. 1.
19 Ibid., February 22, 1909, p. 3.
21 Fort Worth Record, February 26, 1909, p. 1.
They seemed to be in shock, some still not willing to believe what had transpired in South Omaha that fateful Sunday evening.

Not all the Greeks left South Omaha. Forty had "barricaded their rooms with trunks" in their boarding house at Thirtieth and "R" streets when the riot broke Sunday afternoon. They were armed with guns and knives and kept watch until they were discovered Monday morning. Sheriff Brailey and four deputies then escorted them to Omaha.23 The following Wednesday, "a few Greeks drifted down to South Omaha to get their belongings..." Their leaders advised them not to go in large groups. There were no incidents.24

Assessments of the damages caused by the rioters ranged all the way from $35,000 to over $280,000.25 Claims were submitted by natives as well as foreigners. The natives owned the properties, which housed the Greeks and their businesses, and made claims covering approximately fifty damaged buildings.26 Some of the claimants were:

23 Ibid., p. 1.
Jim Ferguson for losses at Twenty-sixth and "Q" streets; L. C. Gibson for owners who suffered losses; F. J. Lewis for the Demos Confectionary; William Boies for the total loss of his property at Twenty-eighth and "R" streets; J. Kohn for damage to his building at Twenty-second and "Q" streets; Morris L. Goldberg for losses sustained by the Atlantic Hotel at Twenty-fifth and "Q" streets; and Hugh Kelly for fire losses to his building at Thirty-third and "Q" streets. Total damages suffered by landlords were estimated to be as high as $20,000. An attempt by some of the landlords to secure relief from the fire insurance companies failed, because the policies did not provide payments for losses due to riots.

The Greek claims were by far the greatest, ranging as high as $288,130.29 Within a week after the riot, demands were made that the city of South Omaha be held accountable for the riot and the devastation it caused. The Greek colony of Omaha, through the Pan-Hellenic Union, engaged the law firm of Sullivan and Rait with offices in Omaha.

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29Ion, loc. cit.

At first the Greek claims were sketchy and small when compared to the final figure. A. B. Cokoris,31 "the king of the Greeks," said to be worth some $25,000, was reported to have lost approximately $4,000 from damages to his two businesses, plus a net income of fifty dollars a day.32 The Bee reported that Cokoris also made profits "by dealing in Greek labor" and was responsible for bringing to South Omaha many of the most lawless and conscienceless of his fellow countrymen; that when reprimanded for his conduct by officers he shrugs his shoulders and laughs at American law.33

His final claim was $25,528.10, which included losses in profits and leases as well as in property.34 Although Cokoris had hoped to reopen his businesses, which consisted of a grocery at 2519 "Q" Street and a bakery at Thirty and "Q" Street, he eventually left Omaha and settled in Chicago.35

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31 The Omaha journals often and erroneously used the spelling of "Cokos" instead of "Cokoris"; Interview with Abariotes.


33 Ibid.; There is a very good possibility that Cokoris mocked American law, because he was aware of the fact that some police could be bought off. This was implied or definitely stated in three of the interviews.

34 Ion, loc. cit.

35 Omaha Bee (Morning Edition), February 23, 1909, p. 1; Abariotes in his interview stated that Zees, not Cokoris, owned the best restaurant, contrary to the statement which appeared in the Bee; Ion, loc. cit.
John Zees, a prominent leader of the colony, and his two brothers, Anathanasios and Vasile, were undoubtedly the greatest losers. Their combined restaurant-billiard room was among the finest in either city. The Zees establishment was the headquarters for the "aristocratic" Greeks. It was furnished in the latest motif with small tables and "oxidized steel chairs . . . resembling a high-class uptown drug store." It was demolished. The brothers reported additional losses suffered by their boarding house, meat market, grocery, coffeehouse, bakery, labor agency, rentals business, and steamship agency, all located in the twenty-four hundred block on "Q" Street. The Zees claim finally came to $93,996.69, which included losses in profits, leases, and property. 37

Some thirty-four Greek businessmen, in all, submitted claims for losses suffered in conjunction with the riot. The final figure came to $247,954.99, of which $154,588 was for profit losses, $10,050 for leases, $63,316.99 for material loss, and $20,000 for damages suffered by their landlords. 38

36 Omaha Bee (Morning Edition), February 23, 1909, p. 1; Interview with Abariotes.
37 Ibid., loc. cit.
38 Ibid.
Demands for payment of personal effects lost because of the riot were presented by one hundred and sixty-eight Greek laborers. The sum total of this collective claim came to $15,875.35.

Another claim was submitted by Greeks injured in the riot. Injuries suffered ranged from sprains and minor fractures to ruptures and bullet wounds. Two men who suffered gun-shot wounds, Vasilios Pechecole and Dionysios Catapodis, submitted claims of $2,000 each and backed their claims with depositions from doctors who treated their wounds. The largest single claim came from Mary Demos, one of the proprietors of the Demos Confectionary. She asked $8,000 for "general break-down from nervous shock, incapacitated for labor for life." The final injuries claim involved thirteen Greeks claiming $24,300.

Thus, the aggregate claim submitted by the Greek colony eventually totaled $288,130.34. Later, this figure was reduced to $153,533.

Three days after the riot, James Rait of the law firm of Sullivan and Rait notified the Greek claimants that they could not "possibly recover any damages from..."
the city of South Omaha." The State of Nebraska, he counselled, did not provide that municipalities be held "responsible for mob violence..." Rait also stated: "Nor can we, as counsel for the Greeks, sue the federal government, or even present claims of damages to the State Department at Washington." The firm did, albeit, acting as directed by the Greek Minister in Washington, solicit and complete Greek claims in legal form. The result of its efforts later became a part of the Professor Ion report, which was to serve as the basis for the case of the Greek Government in supporting its subjects, who had suffered because of the South Omaha riot.42

The following month, South Omaha's City Attorney S. L. Winters confirmed the findings of Sullivan and Rait concerning the suability of a Nebraska municipality. Winters' statement was made to local citizens who had hoped to collect for damages to their properties. 43

In addition to Greek and native claimants there was John V. Maftein, a Rumanian saloon keeper, who claimed one thousand dollars and a week's receipts. His building, owned by the Magic City Realty Company, suffered an

42 Omaha Bee, February 26, 1909, p. 1.
estimated loss of three hundred dollars. Ten Hungarians submitted claims of $5,981.50 through the Austro-Hungarian Embassy in Washington for destruction of properties and physical injuries to their persons. The Ottoman Embassy demanded indemnities of $1,984 be paid to sixteen Turkish subjects, including the family of one Nicholas Jimiks, who was allegedly beaten to death during the riot.

The indemnities requested by the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Greek representatives in Washington came to a total of $161,498.50. On January 14, 1916, about six years after the South Omaha riot, United States Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, with the approval of President Woodrow Wilson recommended to the United States Senate that an appropriation of $41,030 be made to satisfy the above claims and to be paid accordingly: $230 to the government of the Ottoman Empire, $40,000 to the government of Greece, and $800 to the government of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The amount requested was $120,468.50

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46 The death of Nicholas Jimiks was not confirmed. This was the only reference to a death resulting from the riot. A check of the South Omaha Coroner's records from 1908 to 1911, by Douglas County Attorney Don Knowles on June 9, 1964, revealed no entry for the death of Jimiks.
short of the total claims the three governments had considered reasonable.\textsuperscript{48} The Senate approved the appropriation.\textsuperscript{49}

What were the "claims" of the Edward Lowery family, which had lost its provider so suddenly? There were no claims to be made, because there was no police pension fund or insurance; consequently, the mother, Catherine Bergin Lowery, had to provide for her family by taking in boarders. The family did not even escape the payment for the funeral arrangements. Although there was a Lowery fund reported to be $505 on March 21, 1909, Catherine Lowery did not see a penny of it.\textsuperscript{50} The fund was started the day of the riot when Henry and James Murphy contributed a total of fifty dollars and the Majestic Theater added another twenty-five.\textsuperscript{51} The Lowery family did receive approximately one hundred and fifty dollars from a musical benefit held at South High School in South Omaha later that year.\textsuperscript{52}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{48}Ibid., pp. 2-3.
\item \textsuperscript{50}Interviews with Kavanagh and Lowery; Omaha World Herald, February 21, 1909, p. 3 and March 21, 1909, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{51}Omaha World Herald, February 21, 1909, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{52}Interview with Lowery.
\end{itemize}
The people of South Omaha, following in the spirit of their Mayor Frank Koutsky, did join together to give Edward Lowery an impressive funeral. On Saturday night, February 20, 1909, the body of the deceased was moved from Heafey and Heafey Mortuary to the Lowery home. From there it was escorted Tuesday morning to St. Bridget's Roman Catholic Church by members of the South Omaha police force and fire department and Omaha police force. "The funeral cortage," it was reported, "was one of the longest ever seen in South Omaha." Although the weather was inclement, "over one-half a mile of closed carriages followed the remains from the church to the Holy Sepulcher cemetery."53

Father Moriarty delivered the funeral sermon during which he stated:

The church can only deplore the affair of Sunday. ... The church can only and will only sanction what is lawful. Certainly there is punishment due to the man who committed this crime, but it is for the laws of the country and the state to mete out this punishment and not a self-appointed band of citizens.54

Thus was Officer Edward Lowery laid to rest. The episode of the riot, however, did not close with the funeral of the officer. Public reaction had begun already and was to gain momentum as the people of the community realized the full import of this act of lawlessness.

CHAPTER VI

LOCAL REACTION TO THE RIOT

It was not long before the people of Omaha, South Omaha, and Council Bluffs realized that the riot of February 21, 1909, was nothing more than a dramatization of all the crimes the deliberating natives had laid at the doorstep of the Greek colony, that Sunday afternoon before the riot. After the violent outbreak, no one of any prominence accepted the spirit that came out of the Sunday meeting or the destruction and terror which followed. There were, however, qualified regrets, which reflected the deep-seated dislike some harbored for the Greeks even after the great storm.

Realizing that the rioters had to be punished by the law, Douglas County and South Omaha authorities almost immediately began to consider action for the prosecution of those defiant of law and order. Douglas County Sheriff E. F. Brailey moved cautiously. He expressed the belief that it seemed best "to let things quiet down a bit" before corrective action was taken.¹ Those arrested at the time of the riot, twenty-five in all, were released the next day, but were told to report back Wednesday

¹Omaha Bee, February 23, 1909, p. 2.
morning of the twenty-fourth.2

County Attorney James P. English indicated he planned to prosecute the South Omaha rioters if enough evidence could be "found to warrant an indictment."3 "His office began the investigation Monday night," but it was interrupted Tuesday morning for the Lowery funeral. English planned to join in the investigation of reports to his office concerning the riot. He insisted on "first-hand evidence, not hearsay."4 The county attorney's office was particularly interested in the arsonists who fired "the Greek lodging house at Twenty-eighth and "R" streets." Those guilty of participating in the riot, English said, were to be tried by police court while those destroying property were to be "bound over to district court."5

On Wednesday, February 24, 1909, complaints against two hundred rioters were filed in South Omaha's police court.6 Considerable time was spent collecting evidence. Later, on April 7, 1909, an information was filed in District Court against seven men under the charge of "unlawful

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4Ibid.
5Ibid.
6Ibid.
assembling." They were: William Chandler, Charles Brown, August Turner, Thomas Waddell, W. L. Trobaugh, Dewitt White, and Thomas Halman. In the end, not one rioter was convicted in either police court or district court.

The reaction of the Omaha, Council Bluffs, and Lincoln newspapers was very quick and poignant in condemning the South Omaha riot of February 21, 1909. Their evaluations and criticisms varied considerably in points of attack, degree, and attitude.

Victor Bosewater, editor of the Bee, took a firm stand against the riot. He struck out at the riot's spirit of vengeance, the disregard for law and order, the use of yellow journalism, "the incendiary appeals to race prejudice," and the weaknesses of the law itself. The editor laid the riot at the doorstep of "the disgraceful public meeting" held in South Omaha and referred to its leaders as "demagogues." The forces of law and order, in particular, he said, failed in their duty to maintain law and order. Rosewater was especially disturbed by the fact that "a whole race" was punished because of a crime one of its members committed. He maintained that every citizen, regardless of nationality or race, was entitled to the protection of the law and insisted that "law and

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7Ibid., April 7, 1909, p. 1.
not the mob must rule."8

The Omaha World-Herald became more specific in its views concerning the "scenes of violence and brutality," which characterized the rioting. The mob, it asserted, represented the "dregs" of South Omaha and not its good citizens. The editor set aside the "underlying causes" of the anti-Greek feeling and declared that there was one principal question facing the people of South Omaha and Douglas County: Why was the law outraged? Its machinery had broken down. The newspaper called for the severe punishment of the rioters, because only by this method could "the good name of South Omaha, of Douglas County and of the state of Nebraska be saved from a crushing disgrace." It referred to the Sunday meeting as "calmly deliberative," however, like the Bee, it felt that the Sunday meeting was poorly timed and that the city's authorities were somehow responsible for permitting the meeting to take place, specifically singling out the Mayor, Chief of Police, and the Fire and Police Board. The accusation was qualified, however, with statements implying that the riot would have taken place regardless of any action taken by the civil authorities, because "certain grievous social and industrial conditions"

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8 Omaha Bee (Morning Edition), February 23, 1909, p. 4.
existed for which the "cheap labor policies" of the packing houses were largely responsible.9

The editorial of Joseph Pulcar of the Omaha Daily News condemned the riot but strongly qualified its attitude toward the Greeks. The Greeks, he wrote, were "a menace to the American laboring man—just as the Japs, Italians, and other similar laborers are." Pulcar went on to criticize their way of life and attitude. He accused the foreigner of not working for the best interests of the United States and of having no desire "to live in a land of liberty." At the same time, however, Pulcar recognized the fact that the Greek was being brought into the United States by his countrymen, who served the packing houses and other big businesses as labor contractors. It was financially profitable for the contractor, he said, to have the Greek live cheaply. A low standard of living made a low wage scale more acceptable. The editor of the Daily News informed his readers that the United States government was aware of the cheap and undesirable labor being furnished by Greece, and, because of its lax immigration laws, held it "partially responsible" for the South Omaha riot. The solution, Pulcar wrote, lay in the passage and enforcement of "more stringent

import contract labor laws."\textsuperscript{10}

The editor of the Council Bluffs \textit{Nonpareil} seemed to think that the principal cause for the friction between the American native and Greek was economic rather than one of ideals or morals. The Greek he labeled as "thrifty, industrious, economical, acquisitive," the American as a "spendthrift," which caused the existing incompatibility. The editorial asserted that the native's anti-Greek feeling had been enhanced by the recent increase in the number of Greeks in the community. In large numbers, the Greek was difficult to assimilate; consequently, it would be better "if newcomers such as the Greeks did not colonize so much." The \textit{Nonpareil}'s editor, however, could not help wondering if the proud Anglo-Saxon would someday suffer the same abuses as the "dregs" of a fallen Greece.\textsuperscript{11}

On Tuesday following South Omaha's riot the \textit{Nebraska State Journal} of Lincoln had some very poignant remarks to make. It accused the South Omaha mob of duplicating Masourides' crime by trying to seek vengeance through the use of violence. Certainly, it stated, a Greek was not the only one ever to slay a policeman. The \textit{Journal} assigned the cause of the riot to the recent

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Omaha Daily News}, February 23, 1909, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{11} Council Bluffs \textit{Nonpareil}, February 24, 1909, p. 4.
increase in the number of Greeks in the west and the antagonistic attitude of local labor leaders toward the newcomer. Native labor was finding it difficult to compete with the Greek, who, for instance, was doing much of the work on Nebraska's railroads. The Greek had gone as far as to largely displace the Negro bootblack in Lincoln.12 The Journal's editor added that local newspapers were beginning to carry headlines heretofore peculiar only to those of San Francisco, which had an oriental problem. The Oriental and the Greek problems, it noted, involved the same basic issue of cheap labor, which could be solved only by the foreigner, the Greek in the case of Nebraska, becoming more aware of the citizen's responsibilities, especially that of voting.13

Later in the week following the riot, the Nebraska State Journal was particularly bitter toward South Omaha for disgracing itself and humiliating the State of Nebraska. Referring to South Omaha as a "pig-sticking city," the editorial condemned the "rabble" which sought to cleanse its city with terror and destruction. The Journal could not accept the persecution of the Greek colony because

12Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln), February 23, 1909, p. 4.

13Ibid.
of a crime committed by one of its members.\textsuperscript{14}

The newspaper accounts of the Sunday afternoon meeting had been focused on the activities and statements of three men: former South Omaha city attorney Henry C. Murphy and Nebraska state legislators J. P. Kraus and Jeremiah Howard. All three men were asked to explain their alleged part in instigating the riot, which followed the meeting they had largely organized and led.

Speaking to a Bee reporter Murphy admitted that a wiser person would have done more to pacify the crowd which he addressed Sunday, but he denied the responsibility of instigating the riot which followed. He insisted that there was a Greek problem long before the meeting and that the number of prominent business men of South Omaha who signed the petition calling the meeting reflected the local demand for action to alleviate the conditions which were causing the friction between the native and the "insolent Greek." He accused the Greeks of being violent men who often resorted to the knife and pistol. The Greek, he said, was too often found mistreating American girls and cited an instance of an "insolent Greek" making improper advances toward a school teacher on West "O" Street. He expressed hope

\textsuperscript{14}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, February 25, 1909, p. 6.
that the Greeks had fled South Omaha, because unlike the "little Jap," who "sidesteps when an American approaches," the Greek goes as far as to break the law. The riot, he insisted, "did not start at the citizen's meeting." It was started two hours later by "a crowd of good-natured fellows," who saw the opportunity to even old scores with the Greeks. 15

Murphy was contradicted, however, when another principal speaker at the Sunday meeting, Jeremiah Howard, stated that the riot issued from the meeting. While speaking to the assembled crowd, Howard realized the possibility of his audience degenerating into a mob, but he was afraid to utter words of caution for fear he would move his listeners to violence through the power of suggestion. He went on to insist that the majority of the people attending the meeting were law-abiding citizens and that the purpose of his speaking was to support the resolutions presented. 16

Although Henry C. Murphy was to make another lengthy statement to the press, 17 state legislators Howard and Kraus had comparatively little to say. Kraus flatly

16Ibid.
refused to discuss the matter with the press especially after one of his friends made the remark, "I did not know you were such a Marc Anthony [sic]."\(^{18}\) At the opening session of Nebraska’s legislature, however, Kraus immediately "rose to a question of personal privilege." Speaking before the House, he flatly denied making a speech at the Sunday meeting and stated that his only contribution was a resolution directed to the governor and the Nebraska labor commissioner. He went on to defend Representative Howard who, he said, had not used exciting language in his speech.\(^{19}\) Howard did not request the floor.

The day following Kraus’ statement before the House, a special committee of the Nebraska House of Representatives gave Howard and Kraus "certificates of excellence," because their behavior at the meeting preceding the riot was not found to be "serious or unbecoming members of the august law making body of the State."\(^{20}\)

It was the general feeling in South Omaha that the resolutions passed at the fateful meeting of February

\(^{18}\) *Omaha Bee*, February 23, 1909, p. 1.

\(^{19}\) *Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln)*, February 23, 1909, p. 2; *Omaha Bee*, February 23, 1909, p. 1; *Nebraska House Journal*, 31st Biennial Sess., January 5 to April 1, 1909, p. 385.

\(^{20}\) *Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln)*, February 23, 1909, p. 2.
21 and the riot which followed had a telling effect on the employment policies and labor force of the city's meat packing industry, especially at the three major packing houses: Armour, Swift, and Cudahy.

The Greeks quickly disappeared from the city's largest industry. Acting Manager Bowers, of Armour and Company, reported that all the plant's Greek employees had asked for their pay and left town. Bowers denied that the industry was "responsible for having brought Greeks to South Omaha." He later made the following biting statement to the press:

It is false that any filthy or diseased men handle food products. The United States government prevents that. All of those statements were gotten up by the leaders of the petition calling a mass meeting last Sunday. It was done for the effect on that crowd. One of the worst features of the trouble is that the Roumanians and the Austrians, who were among the best workingmen in the packing houses have also disappeared. About two-thirds of our Roumanians are gone. We want that class and will have them protected.

Swift and Company's acting manager, Mayberry, said he did not intend to encourage the Greeks to stay or to offer them special protection. Swift's Manager Howes

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stated, three days later, that "contrary to prediction none of the Greeks returned to work at the packing houses." He further claimed that his plant did not employ over fifty Greeks. M. R. Murphy, Cudahy's general manager, claimed to have given orders "to discontinue the employment of Greeks" about two weeks before the riot; consequently there were very few Greeks in Cudahy's employment the previous week.

There were other reactions to the riot by the local citizenry. Mayor Koutsky regretted permitting the meeting to take place. South Omaha Police Chief Briggs labeled the meeting as "the cause of the riot" and deplored it. H. J. Pinkett, a Negro, writing to the "Public Pulse," accused the South Omaha mob of disgracing the state of Nebraska. He accused the politicians of using the mob element "for their own advancement." Pinkett expressed concern for his own race if one of its members would commit a similar crime. He then poignantly stated:

It is too bad that we have to admit that our civilization is so veneered and that men

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
cannot see that the real crime is committed by
the men higher up who foster and encourage those
agencies which bear crime and shame and misery
and death. These are the real offenders against
the state; the ones to be punished for the wrongs
committed by the creatures of their system. 28

Omaha Mayor Dahlman bore censure when he appeared
before a meeting of "the current topics department of the
Women's Club." Most members insisted that Omaha
officials should have acted "to prevent the . . . riot
against the Greeks in South Omaha." They also condemned
South Omaha officials and the upper classes in general
for allowing matters to reach such a state of anarchy,
for failing to break up the mass meeting on Sunday, and
for failure to protect the Greeks. 29

Thus within a week after the anti-Greek riot,
many political and civil leaders in the area as well as
members of the local press expressed their revulsion toward
the deeds of the South Omaha mob. Once, however, the news
media transmitted the story of the riot to other parts of
the United States, the incident took on a national charac-
ter. Americans and Greeks hundreds of miles away found
it necessary to comment; perhaps, they felt that what hap-
pened in South Omaha was a reflection upon and a lesson
for all citizens within the borders of the United States.

CHAPTER VII

THE NATIONAL REPERCUSSIONS OF THE SOUTH OMAHA RIOT

The news of the South Omaha anti-Greek riot traveled quickly to all corners of the United States. Of seventeen representative newspapers checked in various parts of the country, eleven carried the news of the riot on the front page, four reported the incident elsewhere in their papers, and two, the Christian Science Monitor and Kansas City Star, did not mention the riot at all. Reactions were varied. In two cities, it set off anti-Greek demonstrations.

The reports of Officer Lowery's slaying and the events leading up to the riot in South Omaha apparently had their effect on the mob element of Kansas City. The Kansas City Times reported that on Sunday, February 21, 1909, a street fight took place between Greeks and Americans at Second Street and Kansas Avenue, Kansas City, Kansas. The disturbance involved some six hundred men and boys using stones and knives and resulted in the injury of four and the arrest of thirty Greeks and two Americans. The incident necessitated the use of "a second detail of police before the streets were cleared." ¹ No

destruction of property was reported.

In Dayton, Ohio, the anti-Greek feeling took on destructive as well as violent proportions. On Monday, February 22, 1909, the Dayton Journal used a two column front-page article to describe the South Omaha riot under the headline "Wild Mob Rips Up Homes of Omaha Greeks." On the following day the Journal reported a riot in its own back yard:

A reproduction in miniature of the recent violent attacks by mobs on Greek stores and homes in Omaha, Neb., was enacted in Dayton Monday evening about 7:30, when a crowd of men and boys in the West End stormed the candy and cigar store of several Greeks at 1212 West Third street, infuriated at the alleged insults heaped upon white girls by the Greeks.

Windows were smashed in, signs and outside decorations were demolished and one of the Greeks claim that some one emptied the contents of a revolver into the store from the alley in the rear. No one was hurt in the melee, although the store was full of Greeks when the assault occurred and stones and bricks were flying in all directions.

Quick action on the part of the Dayton police halted the attack and scattered the crowd. John Thomas and Peter Johnson, the Greek proprietors of the store, did not press charges and claimed that the incident had resulted from a desire to avenge Jack Jackson and "Skinny"

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Titus: The two men had been sent to the "workhouse" for breaking the front window of the Thomas and Johnson establishment "some time ago."\(^4\)

The Chicago Daily Tribune gave extensive coverage to the South Omaha riot\(^5\) and serio-comically commented:

When Greek meets South Omaha, then comes the tug of riot, arson, bloodshed, and other unpleasant things.\(^6\)

The Chicago Record-Herald ran full columns on pages one and two under the caption "Bloodshed and Ruin Mark War on Greeks."\(^7\) The Record-Herald's publisher and editor, Frank M. Noyes, condemned the logic of race riots and then stated:

With a fine patriotism the orators discriminated between Greeks and Americans, the assumption being that all the members of the mob at the mass meeting were Americans. Apparently, however, the Americanism of some of these speakers is of recent origin, and it is a fair inference that among the crowds of rioters were many persons who have not perfected title yet. But all felt the deeper thrill when the eloquence was poured forth. They were not Greeks, anyway, which was the equivalent of being Americans or barbarians as the Greeks might say. The fact that they were different from the Greeks was enough to make a common bond for that particular

\(^4\)Ibid., February 24, 1909, p. 2.
\(^6\)Ibid., February 23, 1909, p. 10.
\(^7\)Chicago Record-Herald, February 22, 1909, pp. 1, 2.
brotherhood, especially when it became clear that the Greeks were to be attacked and pil­laged and that the assailants might enjoy the strength that comes from union.  

On February 22, the Denver Post carried the story of the riot on page four, 9 but two days later the column of Alice Rohe gave support and voice to a leader of the Greek colony in Denver, Leonidas K. Skliris, who was re­ferred to as an "intellectual Spartan." Skliris claimed that the anti-Greek riot in Omaha was caused by foreigners. He said:

Just run over the names . . . J. P. Krause  
[sic.7 . . . , he added with fine sarcasm; Frank Dolezol, a leading Bohemian of Omaha, and--it is a laugh--Attorney H. C. Murphy. A great line of American ancestry for you, isn’t it?

Think of our Hibernian-American Murphy get­ting up and inciting a riot against a race of people for the crime of one man. 10

The Shreveport Journal of February 22, 1909, carried a short front-page account of the South Omaha incident, 11 but the editor wrote:

We note with interest that Mr. O’Shaughnessy of Omaha objects to the "Greeks taking America."

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8 Ibid., February 23, 1909, p. 6.


10 Ibid., February 24, 1909, p. 5.

As if the O'Shaughnessy's and the O'Toole's and the other Irish had not already grabbed it.\(^{12}\)

and the Arkansas Gazette of Little Rock ran the South Omaha riot news on the front page of its February 22, 1909, issue.\(^{13}\) Then on the following Wednesday, the editor made the sarcastic remark that America should have no fear of Greece, because, Miltiades, the hero of the Battle of Marathon, and "some of the other great generals are now on the retired list."\(^{14}\)

The Daily Oklahoman of Oklahoma City, in relating the news of the riot, made the observation that it was difficult to believe that a community would turn to mob violence without "extreme provocation." The Oklahoman seemed to accept the thesis that the riot was aimed at ridding South Omaha of the low class of Greeks living in the stockyards district; however, the newspaper did not hesitate to assign part of the blame to laxity in the application of existing Federal immigration laws. It went on to warn that outbreaks of violence, such as those also witnessed in San Francisco and New Orleans, would continue "if some of the railroads and importation

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 4.

\(^{13}\) Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), February 22, 1909, p. 1.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., February 24, 1909, p. 4.
societies" were not stopped from encouraging undesirable labor to enter the United States.\textsuperscript{15}

The San Francisco \textit{Chronicle} not only gave front-page space to the South Omaha riot,\textsuperscript{16} but, three days later, it had much to say with regard to unwanted foreign groups in general. The editor pointed out that the United States was not plagued with race conflicts as long as the assimilable northwestern European was the newcomer. The difficulties arose, he wrote, with the "influx of ignorant peasantry with a large infusion of Asiatic blood." Although the Italian was acceptable, the peoples of eastern and southeastern Europe, who composed the "turbulent races" such as the Greeks, would only transplant their vices to the United States. These groups, the \textit{Chronicle}'s editor maintained, had a high content of Asiatic blood in their veins, thus would prove to be undesirable. The east coast had yet to learn the lesson that the influx of undesirable races had to be stopped for the benefit of the American nation and its heritage.\textsuperscript{17}

The \textit{Daily Times Herald} of Dallas, Texas, on the other hand, gave the riot a few lines on page seven of

\textsuperscript{15}Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), February 23, 1909, p. 1 and February 24, 1909, p. 6.


\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, February 25, 1909, p. 6.
and in a short editorial comment attributed the cause of the violence to "human nature."\(^{19}\)

Some thirty-five miles west of Dallas, the Fort Worth Record seemed to take a more serious view of what had happened in South Omaha. The news was given front-page attention\(^{20}\) with no apparent objection to the news that some four hundred Greek refugees from South Omaha were traveling to Fort Worth to work in its meat packing industry.\(^{21}\) The Record's editorial page of February 28, 1909, reflected the belief that man inherently preferred his own kind; thus when he felt that someone inferior intruded, he was very apt to express resentment in one form or other. The editor pointed out that there was little difference between the Westerner's concern over the influx of the oriental and the South Omahan's concern over the Greek's inroads. As was the case of the Southerner in relation to the Negro, the native of the North and West did not wish to see his social or economic status jeopardized. To maintain his position, the native

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\(^{18}\)Daily Times Herald (Dallas, Texas), February 22, 1909, p. 1.

\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 6.


\(^{21}\)Ibid., February 26, 1909, p. 1.
was apparently willing to resort to violence. The editor went on to warn, however, that license for violence in any case left American society open to greater dangers, which could jeopardize our way of life. Thus, he wrote:

...we have on the one hand the natural and understandable racial or popular feeling, and on the other the inevitable evil consequence of its indulgence. The condition is an admonition to both the superior and the inferior races, or to both the native and the alien classes, to be careful and tolerant.

The editorial concluded by warning ambitious politicians against exploiting the foreign vote through the use of flattery, because the newcomer's lack of proper understanding of American social and political values could make his vote dangerous to the very institutions Americans sought to preserve.

At least four other newspapers across the United States carried the news of the riot without editorial comment. The day after the riot, the New York Times, St. Joseph Gazette, Dallas News, and Seattle Post-

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22 Ibid., February 28, 1909, p. 11.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
Intelligencer gave front-page coverage to the incident. The Richmond Times Dispatch was busy covering the return of the "great white fleet," which had arrived at Hampton Roads on February 21, after a trip around the world; nevertheless, a story of the riot was reported on page four.

Thus, the South Omaha anti-Greek riot did have an effect upon the minds of Americans in many parts of the United States. Their reaction was diverse in character and view. The American people said their piece, so to speak, but what of the Greek? How did he feel about the violence, arson, and terror of the South Omaha riot?

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29 Richmond (Virginia) Times Dispatch, February 22, 1909, p. 4.
CHAPTER VIII

THE GREEK APPEAL FOR UNDERSTANDING AND JUSTICE

For the average Greek laborer and businessman in the Omaha area, the anti-Greek riot was difficult to comprehend and still more difficult to accept without expressing strong feelings of regret and resentment. The Greeks were too proud to accept the riot without striking back. Their leaders, cautioning against violence and encouraging the observance of the due process, advocated concerted and determined action.

Although the Greeks residing in Omaha together with approximately two hundred South Omaha refugees had informally met on Monday morning, February 22, the first organized meeting was held that afternoon at two o'clock in Baright's Hall at Nineteenth and Farnam streets in Omaha. The Baright meeting

... was called for three reasons— to deplore the crime Masourides' act of violence, to allay any thoughts among the Greeks of rising against their persecutors, and to raise a fund for the widow of the murdered officer.2

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2 Omaha Bee (Morning Edition), February 23, 1909, p. 2. The fund for the Lowery family was subsequently deferred. The interviews with Lowery and Kavanaugh revealed that the Lowery family never received money from the Greek colony.
After cautioning the passions of the audience, the Greek leaders proceeded to organize and orient their countrymen. N. J. Mandanis read a telegram from Li. A. Coromilas, the Greek Minister in Washington, asking that the Greek colony not pursue a course of violence and to expect the law to provide justice.  

In the course of the meeting, Peter Matsukas, speaking through an interpreter, told a Bee reporter that the Americans should be told that the Greek people deeply regretted the death of Officer Lowery. His death, however, was caused by the act of one man and not by the Greek colony. Matsukas criticized South Omaha for not giving his people the opportunity to explain their position. Asserting that they did not believe in murder, he stated that they were placing themselves under the protection of the "laws of the United States and the State of Nebraska."  

Taking the floor and speaking in English, Louis B. Cokoris, president of the local Pan-Hellenic Society, reviewed the conditions existing in the Omahas toward the Greeks and then said,  

We are all more than sorry to see the people of the greatest country in the world act as they

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3Omaha Bee, February 23, 1909, p. 2.  
4Ibid.
The Greeks assembled agreed to engage the law firm of J. L. Sullivan and James Bait and attorneys Harry B. Fleharty and J. M. MacFarland to handle their claims and grievances through legal channels. Later that week, the legal counsel reported that Greek claims could be best expedited through the Greek Minister in Washington. The lawyers, however, immediately began to secure depositions and other evidence, which was to be used in the claims of the Greek Government against the United States.

The Greeks of Omaha continued a determined effort to convince the American people that the South Omaha riot was the result of a general misunderstanding. The principal instrument for this appeal for justice was the local Pan-Hellenic Society, which used the local newspapers as its voice. A letter to the editor of the World Herald was drafted and signed by Louis B. Cokoris, President of the Society, George Cosmos, Secretary, and John Beshilas, Treasurer. Their letter pointed out that approximately one thousand Greeks living in Omaha and South Omaha were

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5Ibid.
7Omaha Bee, February 26, 1909, p. 1.
naturalized citizens of the United States and that at times there were as many as three thousand Greeks employed in the Omaha area. At least one thousand of them were members of the local Pan-Hellenic Society, which was "organized for social, religious and charitable purposes." The majority of the Society's membership was Endeavoring "to become good American citizens." Their letter went on to state that the Greek community had recently purchased a site for a church and had engaged a priest to serve its religious needs. In addition, Greek parents did not hesitate to send their children to the local schools. The signatories wished to remind the local citizenry that the recent killing was the first "felony or serious crime . . . charged to a Greek in the past three years in Douglas County." At the same time, however, they recognized the fact that the Greeks had been guilty of gambling, drinking, and other minor offenses. Their letter expressed the hope that the newspapers would examine the record of the Greek colony carefully and report their findings to the American people. The Greeks, they stated, did not intend to take the law into their hands and were sure that the good citizens of Douglas County did not approve Sunday's mob violence. In closing, the three leaders pledged themselves to the principles of law and order and asked only that the Greek
people be treated fairly under the law. The president of the Pan-Hellenic Union's national organization, D. Manoussopoulos, and its general secretary, V. Venetazanakis, petitioned the people of Omaha, local journals, and Nebraska's governor for justice. Their letter to the editor of the Omaha Daily News deplored the "fact that any American citizens should by their acts give countenance to mob violence." It was difficult for them to believe that American principles had reached the level where the act of one man would bring punishment to all the members of the offender's race. Such treatment did not do justice to those Greeks who had accepted the precepts of American government and who were loyal to the "land of their adoption."

The Chicago office of the Pan-Hellenic Union sent a telegram to Nebraska's Governor Ashton C. Shallenberger. The wire informed the governor that the Union represented fifty thousand members of Greek parentage belonging to one hundred local societies all over the United States. The governor was asked to protect the rights and properties

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9The titles "Pan-Hellenic Union" and "Pan-Hellenic Society" were used interchangeably and referred to the same organization of Greeks in America.
10Omaha Daily News, February 23, 1909, p. 3.
of the Greek colony in South Omaha. Appealing to the American sense of "fair play," the telegram expressed the belief that it was not within the right of a mob to render justice of its choosing to a foreign community because of the violent act of one of its members. 11

Antonio Ramessin, representing the "Graecio-Roman Protective Association" of Council Bluffs, also criticized the acts of South Omaha's mob element and requested that justice be done. 12

Gus Nanos, a former resident of South Omaha, expressed his bitterness toward the people of South Omaha in a letter to the editor of the Daily News. Gus made it clear that the Greeks would not return to South Omaha to shine shoes for five cents in spite of news to the contrary. Never in all his travels, he wrote, had he witnessed such treatment as was dealt to the Greeks living in South Omaha. This was particularly disgraceful in America, "which everyone calls a free country." Nanos refused to believe that Officer Lowery's death caused the riot. He maintained that the anti-Greek feeling issued from the native's erroneous belief that the

11 Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln), February 24, 1909, p. 2; Omaha World Herald, February 23, 1909, p. 4.
12 Council Bluffs Nonpareil, February 22, 1909, p. 3.
Greek did not spend his money in South Omaha. He insisted that his people did spend their money but not to get drunk, as commonly believed.\footnote{Omaha \textit{Daily News}, February 27, 1909, p. 4.}

Greek newspapers published in the United States expressed their regret and antagonism regarding the South Omaha riot but were also didactic to the Greeks of America. The \textit{Atlantis} of New York City in giving an account of the South Omaha riot referred to the expulsion of the Greeks as "savage."\footnote{\textit{Atlantis} (my translation), February 22, 1909, p. 5.} It blamed the anti-Greek acts of violence in Kansas City and Dayton on "American newspapers," whose "extensive coverage of South Omaha's scenes of savagery . . . increased the irritation toward foreigners and racial hatreds."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, February 23, 1909, p. (not legible).} It also brought the labor unions and their leaders under fire for stirring up "troubles and animosities."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

The editor of the \textit{Atlantis} also had critical words for the Greeks in America. He insisted that the status of the Greek would be enhanced 

\begin{quote}
\ldots if there existed a unity, for which we \textit{Greeks} would defend and work, a unified cry for all those \textit{Greeks} in America.
\end{quote}

Unfortunately we are unorganized, and undefended, as long as the snakes of discord in the
bosom of the Greek communities continue to fight against all that is good. Organization of Greek communities and societies will begin with the expulsion of the ravagers and wicked worms, those who poison the sap of our society just at the moment when something good is about to transpire.  

The Greek Star of Chicago described "terrifying" and "barbaric" scenes of violence and arson instigated by "two representatives and a Bohemian." It wrote bitterly that it was a "horrifying blow to see Greeks expelled and Greek businesses cast into a Sodom and Gomorrah." The Star severely criticized the South Omaha authorities and the mob action; yet it explained to the Greek reader that although America is a "free country," it has set definite limits to freedom, which the Greek must identify. The Star's owner and editor P. S. Lambros also noted that crimes committed by Greeks were often found in newspapers. Then he wrote:

With all this, we Greeks have the nerve to complain to our hosts in this country, without taking into consideration the criminal and detestable acts committed against the Americans.

The lessons suffered by our countrymen in South Omaha hurt our hearts; however when we

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17 Ibid.
18 Greek Star (my translation), February 26, 1909, p. 1.
19 Ibid., p. 4.
see women, lawyers and representatives attacking the Greeks, we must admit that there must have been many other causes of the riot besides the killing of the officer.20

Perhaps the various appeals for order, understanding, and justice did serve to educate and pacify, but the fact remained that the municipality of South Omaha and the State of Nebraska could not be held accountable for the damages suffered by the Greeks. Also, United States District Attorney Goss in Omaha revealed two days after the riot that the United States Government would probably act in the matter; however, he had not received any orders from Washington, D. C. 21 The United States Government did not initiate any action but waited for the Greek Government to act. Thus, the Greeks began to apply to the Greek Minister, L. A. Coromilas, for advice and guidance.

Coromilas was notified of the riot Monday, the day after the incident. He promised an immediate investigation to be followed by a report to the United States Department of State; he pointed out, however, that the Federal Government could only "request" the cooperation

20 Ibid.
of the governor of Nebraska.22 The following day, February 23, Acting Secretary of State, Robert Bacon, received a call from L. A. Coromillas, "who took up the case of the Greek residents of South Omaha..."23 That day Secretary Bacon dispatched a wire to Governor Shallenberger, which read as follows:

Represented to Greek Minister that lives and property of Greek subjects at South Omaha endangered by mob violence. Department expresses hope and feels confident state authorities will take every precaution and measure to assure to them that entire security to and protection of their possessions and property guaranteed to them by article I of the treaty of 1837. Will you kindly cause me to be informed by wire of the actual conditions?24

Within hours of the same day, the Governor sent the Secretary his reply:

Trouble at South Omaha seems all over. Authorities have matters completely under control. Every protection and security will be offered the Greek subjects who are in Nebraska.25

In the meantime, Greek refugees in Omaha also retained Joel W. West to uncover the legal aspects of

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22Omaha Bee, February 23, 1909, p. 2.
23Ibid., February 24, 1909, p. 1.
their claims and advise on a course of action. The opinion of Attorney West was that those Greeks who incurred damages could "recover from the United States government under the Greek Treaty of 1837." Article I of the Greek treaty provided that,

The citizens and subjects of each of the two High Contracting Parties may, with all security for their persons, vessels and cargoes, freely enter the ports, places, and rivers of the Territories of the other, wherever Foreign Commerce is permitted. They shall be at liberty to sojourn and reside in all parts whatsoever of said territories;—to rent and occupy houses and warehouses for their commerce; and they shall enjoy generally, the most entire security and protection in their Mercantile Transactions, on conditions of their submitting to the Laws and Ordinances of the respective Countries.

In 1889, the Attorney General of the United States had made the following ruling concerning the Greek Treaty of 1837:

The rights and privileges granted to the subjects of Greece in Article I of the Treaty of 1837, are guaranteed to them with all the force of law. The word "subjects" in the treaty embraces corporations, joint stock companies, and other associations, commercial and industrial, constituted in conformity with the law of Greece. No legal objection exists in the secretary of state instructing the United States minister at Athens to give the government of Greece an assurance that such corporations and associations may exercise in the United States all the rights and privileges granted subject to the appropriate laws of the United States and those of the several states.

The Bee included this observation:

The treaty with Italy, made in 1871, does not guarantee property of Italian subjects, but Congress, nevertheless, made settlement of property losses sustained in the riots of New Orleans a few years ago. The Italian government at the time made demands upon the government of the United States for recompense for Italian property destroyed. This government replied that it could do nothing under its dual form of government, explaining its inability to compel a state to make recompense. The foreign government claimed to misunderstand the explanation and recalled its minister. Out of a spirit of amity Congress then made settlement for the New Orleans losses, though disavowing any liability. 27

Consistent with his promise, the Greek Minister sent Professor Theodore P. Ion, a Greek teaching at the University of Boston, to investigate the complaints of South Omaha's Greeks. Arriving in Omaha on Sunday, March 21, 1909, Dr. Ion spoke to a mass meeting of Greeks in Baright's Hall. He advised his countrymen to obey the law, not to resist arrest, and "to abstain from talking to women with whom they had no acquaintance." 28

During his first day in Omaha, Professor Ion did not hesitate to voice his views. He confidently stated that precedents supported the payment of indemnities by the United States Government for the irresponsible acts


28 Omaha Daily News, March 22, 1909, p.1; The Theodore P. Ion report to the Greek Minister, dated July 3, 1909, stated that Dr. Ion arrived in Omaha on March 29. The date of March 21 is most likely correct.
of its citizens and cited the anti-Italian Mafia riots of New Orleans (March 14, 1891) as a case in point. He was also surprised that "no rioters had been punished." He compared the apathy of the law in South Omaha with Turkish justice after three thousand Armenians were massacred in Constantinople."29

Ion spent the next day in the offices of "Sullivan and Rait taking affidavits from Greeks who suffered."30 He assured the reporters of the Daily News that Greek claims were to be filed against the Federal Government, but they would not be excessive and would be based on actual losses sustained by the plaintiffs. Professor Ion went on to say that his report would be submitted to the Greek Legation in Washington for diplomatic action.31 Later in the week, Professor Ion traveled to Lincoln to confer with Governor Shallenberger and to secure an interview with John Masourides, who was still being held in the state prison pending his trial.

Before Dr. Ion was ready to submit his report to the Greek Minister on July 3, 1909, he had made two trips to Omaha and was convinced that Greek claims of $288,130.34

29Omaha Bee, March 23, 1909.
31Ibid.
were valid and payable. His report came to some ninety pages, in which he charged the South Omaha police with brutality in handling the wounded John Masourides after he allegedly murdered Edward Lowery. Ion supported the testimony of Masourides. The riot, Dr. Ion said, was caused by "demagogues" and he obtained an affidavit from South Omaha’s Police Commissioner and quotations from and copies of Omaha newspapers to support his statement. He accused the orators of the Sunday meeting before the riot of inflaming the people with their language and again quoted from Omaha journals to substantiate his statements. Ion also included statements from witnesses who claimed that police in civilian clothes supported the rioters and also participated in the riot. The true cause of the anti-Greek feeling, he stated, was economic. The lower class of South Omaha was jealous of the labor and business competition the Greeks offered. A large part of the Ion Report was composed of itemized claims submitted by citizens of Greece, who suffered from the riot. A Greek committee report, which was suggested by Sullivan and Rait and which assessed the damages suffered by Greek

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32 Theodore Ion, op. cit., Parts B, C, and D.
33 Ibid., Ion's letter to L. A. Coromilas.
34 Ibid., Parts N, O, and P.
businesses in South Omaha, was included. It also included depositions and affidavits from doctors, Greek citizens, South Omaha Mayor Frank Koutsky, Chief of Police John Briggs, and the city Fire and Police Commissioner, W. C. Lambert.

On December 20, 1909, Coromilas submitted the report of Dr. Ion to President Taft's Secretary of State, Philander C. Knox, with a letter of transmittal, in which he supported the claims of the subjects of His Majesty the King of Greece. In the letter, the Minister accused the South Omaha officials of gross negligence and lack of action to prevent or halt the riot. He then proceeded to present arguments and precedents to support the Greek request for indemnities.

The United States Department of State, however, did not present the Greek request for indemnity to the Congress of the United States for almost six years. During this period the claims were investigated by a Federal agent.

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36Ibid., Letter of transmittal by L. A. Coromilas, dated December 20, 1909, to United States Secretary of State P. C. Knox.
37This report was not available because of Section 3 of the National Archives General Restriction No. 5, which requires clearance and a release from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Release was denied by J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in a letter to me dated May 1, 1964.
On January 14, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson upon receiving a report from his Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, submitted a request for an appropriation of $40,000 to be paid to the Greek Government. The following month, on February 3, 1916, Congress approved the appropriation, which, in addition, provided for $1,030 to be paid to the governments of Turkey and Austria-Hungary for claims submitted by their subjects in connection with the riot.

The Greeks wronged by the anti-Greek riot had voiced their opinion. After approximately six years some degree of justice was awarded in the form of $40,000 which was a good deal less than the $288,130.34 originally claimed and subsequently reduced to $153,533. The fact remained, however, that the Greek colony of South Omaha was never to be the same again. The majority of its members had been scattered to the four winds, some returning to their homeland. There remained two questions: What was the ultimate fate of John Masourides and what became of the Greeks who had lived in the Omaha area?


CHAPTER IX

TIME AND JUSTICE

The South Omaha anti-Greek riot was obviously not acceptable as a solution for those who stopped to think and weigh the Greek problem. Violence and arson were brutal means to express antipathy or revulsion, especially in a civilized society where law and order played such an important role. It was also apparent that once the wrath against the Greeks was unleashed both Edward Lowery and John Masourides, who together had inadvertently provided the immediate cause, were all but forgotten. The due process of American law, however, had not forgotten John Masourides. Justice had to make her decision according to the law, and she was to take her time; for several years were to pass before the fate of John Masourides was decided.

On February 25, 1909, a formal inquest was held in the coroner's office of the city of South Omaha. On that day a jury of six, after hearing fourteen witnesses, recommended that John Masourides "be held according to the Law and Testimony" for trial.¹ The inquest was conducted by James P. English, the Douglas County Attorney, who later

¹Douglas County (Nebraska) Attorney, "Douglas County Coroner's Verdict, Vol. III" (Inquest Number 8032, Coroner's Office, City of South Omaha, February 25, 1909), p. 35.
served as the prosecuting attorney for the state in the Masourides trials. At the inquest, Masourides was not represented by counsel. Attorney English's principal witness was Lillian Breese, who testified that the shots which felled and killed Officer Lowery had come "from the direction of the Greek," who had been walking on the outside of the walk. Dr. A. H. Koenig, another witness to the slaying, substantiated the testimony of Miss Breese in the sense that he saw the first shots being "fired by a man nearer the curbstone." Sam Truehart and Jesse Carr, witnesses for the prosecution, further corroborated the previous testimony with regard to the direction of the shots.

On the basis of the complaint and information of F. G. Good, sworn before Douglas County Judge Charles Leslie on March 22, 1909, John Masourides was arraigned for trial. The prisoner had been brought from the state penitentiary to Omaha the previous day. At the arraignment

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5 Ibid.
6 Douglas County (Nebraska) District Court, Doc. 13, 782, F. G. Good, "State Complaint Number 13-782" (March 30, 1909).
he was represented by attorney John M. MacFarland while assistant county attorney Magney represented the State of Nebraska. The court was asked to charge Masourides with "unlawfully, feloniously, wilfully, maliciously and purposely and of deliberate and premeditated malice” killing Officer Lowery and to hold the defendant for trial under the charge of murder in the first degree. Masourides pleaded not guilty to the charge and waived preliminary hearing. During the arraignment, Masourides showed signs of "uneasiness" and appeared glad to return to the county jail. That same day Judge Leslie issued a warrant for Masourides' arrest, which was nothing more than a legal formality. Masourides had not left the hands of the police since the moment he was dragged from under Miss Breese's bed the night of the shooting.

On April 3, Masourides was reported to be seriously ill, because his chest wound had failed to heal properly. For a time, it appeared as though death was to cheat justice. Nevertheless, on April 5, County Attorney

7Ibid.
9Douglas County (Nebraska) District Court, Doc. 13, 782, Charles Leslie, Judge, "Warrant for Arrest" (March 22, 1909).
10Omaha Bee, April 3, 1909, p. 4.
James P. English filed an information with County Clerk Robert Smith charging Masourides with murder in the first degree. Arraigned again two days later, the defendant repeated his plea of not guilty.11

During the night of April 21, 1909, a heavy guard led by Sheriff Brailey moved the last prisoner, Masourides, from the old city jail, called the "old bastille," to the new jail on Eleventh and Dodge streets,12 where he remained until the trial.

In an effort to secure a thirty-day postponement for his trial, John Masourides filed an affidavit with the county clerk on May 3, 1909. The defendant, through counsel, explained that time was needed for his wounds to heal. He also informed the court that he could not speak English.13 The next day, as though expecting this move on the part of the defense, prosecutor James English secured a sworn affidavit from Dr. Lee B. Van Camp, stating that the defendant was mentally and physically able to stand trial.14 This was followed by a second affidavit

11Douglas County (Nebraska) District Court, Doc. 13, 782, James P. English, Douglas County Attorney, "Information" (April 5, 1909).

12Omaha Daily News, April 22, 1909, p. 3.

13Douglas County (Nebraska) District Court, Doc. 13, 782, John Masourides, "Affidavit" (May 3, 1909).

14Ibid., Lee, B. Van Camp, Dr., "Affidavit" (May 4, 1909).
certifying that Masourides was in good health; Deputy Sheriff Osbourne swore, on May 5, that Masourides "exhibited unusual pain only when taken before the judge." Within a week, Judge Sutton handed down the ruling that John Masourides would go on trial for murder in the first degree on May 17. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the date set was not to be the date of the trial; thus the defense gained another week. It took two days and the examination of eighty-seven men before a jury was secured on Tuesday, May 25, 1909. Both the defense and prosecution freely exercised the right to challenge until the twelve jurors were chosen. None of the twelve men selected was a resident of South Omaha. The jurors were permitted to go home for the night and instructed to return when the court convened the next morning.

The following morning, the defense led by John M. MacFarland and the prosecution led by James P. English.

presented their opening statements before the court. As was expected, English asked for the death penalty. Attorney John M. MacFarland began and ended his argument for acquittal on the basis of the fact that Officer Lowery had no warrant for the arrest of Masourides and that the latter had the right to defend himself.

Thus began the first trial of John Masourides. Presided over by Judge A. L. Sutton, the court heard fifteen witnesses, who had been subpoenaed for the defense, and twenty-five for the state. Most of the defense witnesses, at least two-thirds, were Greeks. No Greeks appeared for the state.

Summoning its witnesses, four of them eye-witnesses, including Lillian Breese and Louis Rosenfeld, the state spent little time presenting and closing its case against the defendant, who was accused of premeditated murder. Defense Attorney MacFarland, assisted by James Rait, tried to show that the character of John Masourides did not warrant the charge levied against him and presented witnesses in an effort to substantiate his

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22*Douglas County (Nebraska) District Court, Doc. 13, 782, "List of Witnesses" (May 24, 1909).
case. Also, the defense tried to prove that Miss Breese, although a witness for the prosecution, was virtuous and Dr. Elizabeth Lyman testified accordingly.23

On Thursday, John Masourides took the stand in his own behalf. Prosecuting Attorney English refused to accept George C. Stamos as an interpreter, because he believed Stamos was unduly biased and offered Steve Abariotes instead. Through Abariotes, Masourides related the main details of his personal history and how he came to be in the company of Lillian Breese the night of February 19, 1909. He insisted that he had no intention of killing the officer and that he acted purely in self-defense after the officer had fired first. His purpose for reaching into his pocket for his gun was, he said, to dispose of the weapon before reaching the police station, where he expected to be searched. 24

The case went to the jury shortly after two o'clock in the afternoon of Friday, May 28. 25 Before the jury withdrew to deliberate, Judge Sutton gave it instructions. His statement included the following:


24Ibid.; Interview with Abariotes.

The criminal code of Nebraska defines the crime of murder in the first degree and provides the punishment therefor, as follows: "If any person shall purposely and of deliberate and premeditated malice . . . kill another . . . every person so offending shall be deemed guilty of murder in the first degree, and upon conviction thereof, shall suffer death or shall be imprisoned in the penitentiary during life, in the discretion of the jury."

Premeditated malice exists when an intention to take life unlawfully is deliberately formed in the mind, and that determination is meditated upon before the fatal stroke is given.

The law requires no specific time for deliberation and meditation between the formation and the consummation of the intent or plan to kill. It is only necessary that the act of killing be preceded by a concurrence of will, deliberation and premeditation on the part of the slayer, however brief the period of time therefor may have been.26

The judge "refused the following instruction to the jury as provided by the defending attorney":

A person may resist an unlawful attempt at arrest, and if necessary, rather than submit, may lawfully kill the person making it.

There must be a cause for making the arrest, a crime committed, a reasonable ground to believe that the person sought to be arrested committed the offense, otherwise no officer nor any individual is authorized to make an arrest.27

26 Douglas County (Nebraska) District Court, Doc. 13, 782, A. L. Sutton, Judge, "Instructions by the Court On Its Own Motion."

27 Ibid., "Instructions by the Defense" (May 28, 1909).
It took the jury nineteen hours to deliberate the fate of John Masourides. On the first ballot, one juror voted for finding the defendant guilty of murder in the second degree and held his position until nine o'clock Saturday morning when he joined the other eleven. At nine-thirty, May 29, 1909, Frank M. Hamling, the jury foreman, submitted the verdict to the court. John Masourides was found guilty in the first degree and sentenced to hang.29

The accused stood before the judge to receive sentence but did not understand the verdict until his attorney MacFarland, through an interpreter, explained it to him Saturday afternoon. Masourides is said to have replied, "I don't think I ought to be hanged, but if it is the law, I am ready to die at once."30 The widow of Officer Lowery upon hearing the verdict expressed her approval.31

Two days after the trial, John M. MacFarland, still acting as Masourides' defense attorney, filed a

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29 Ibid.; Douglas County (Nebraska) District Court, Doc. 13, 782, Frank M. Hamling, "Verdict for Plaintiff" (May 29, 1909).
30 Omaha Daily News, loc. cit.
31 Ibid.
motion for a new trial on the basis of sixty-six grounds, including the coercion and intimidation of witnesses by police and also because of "newly discovered evidence." The motion was denied, and the Greek colony through the Pan-Hellenic Union pledged to carry the case to the Nebraska Supreme Court. On September 11, John Masourides was returned to the Nebraska Penitentiary in Lincoln for execution, but on October 19, the Clerk of the Supreme Court issued a stay of execution for Masourides.

The Masourides case came before the Nebraska Supreme Court in January of 1910, and on February 26 of that year, the Court handed down its decision granting John Masourides a new trial, based on "erroneous proceedings by the lower court." The majority opinion was delivered by Chief Justice Manoah B. Reese, who stated "... that the evidence submitted to the jury ... was not sufficient to sustain the verdict. ..."

The Chief Justice also maintained that the county attorney had secured a statement from Lillian Breese the day after the tragedy but failed to make public the contents of said statement. The Court was of the opinion that

32 Douglas County (Nebraska) District Court, Doc. 13, 782, John M. MacFarland and Sullivan and Rait, "Motion For A New Trial" (May 31, 1909).

33 Ibid., T. W. Smith, Warden, "Receipt for Prisoner" (September 11, 1909).
English tried to impeach his own witness, Lillian Breese, by stating during the trial that Miss Breese had given a distorted version of her original testimony. Also, the prosecution had not proved premeditation in the act of John Masourides. Thus, the judgment of the district court was reversed and the cause was "remanded for further proceedings in accordance with law." 34

Less than a week before the second trial of John Masourides was due to begin, Lillian Breese, the star witness, disappeared. The Supreme Court had granted the new trial largely on the basis of her testimony. After two days of search, the police found her living with her mother at 1209 Arbor Street in Omaha. She denied going into hiding and promised to be at the trial on Tuesday, May 24, 1910, when the proceedings were due to begin. 35

There was little difficulty in selecting a jury. The selection began at eleven o'clock in the morning of May 23, and was impaneled the next day. 36 When the trial began in the Court of Judge William A. Redick, the jury included at least two residents of South Omaha. 37

34 Masourides v. State 86 Neb. 105, 125 N.W. 132.
36 Douglas County (Nebraska) District Court, Doc. 13, 782, "List of Jurors" (May 24, 1910).
37 Omaha Daily News, May 25, 1910, p. 3.
proceedings were very much like those of the first trial, including the refusal of the judge to accept the defense's motion that a person had the right to resist arbitrary arrest, that is, without a warrant being served. Again the defense claimed that Masourides' act was not premeditated. There was some difference; for instance, Lillian Breese was now a defense witness. Also, Mrs. Katherine Lowery, the widow of the deceased officer, and Kris Masourides, brother of the defendant who had traveled from Greece for the trial, were in attendance.

County Attorney James P. English again prosecuted. He changed his tactics from the first trial in the sense that he did not ask Miss Breese "to tell of the shooting." He concentrated only on the events preceding the slaying. Again the prosecution produced witnesses who testified that they saw Masourides shoot first, including a surprise witness, George King, who corroborated their testimonies.

It was reported that English had hoped to cross examine Lillian Breese; however, he was frustrated when


40 Ibid., May 25, 1910, p. 3.

41 Ibid., May 26, 1910, p. 4.
the defense did not call her as a witness. Miss Breese had changed her version of the slaying by claiming that she did not know who fired first on the evening of February 19, 1909.\textsuperscript{42}

On the last day of the trial, May 28, English gave the closing remarks for the prosecution over a period of about four hours, finishing at about three o'clock in the afternoon.\textsuperscript{43} The case went to the jury at three-thirty-five. On the first ballot, two jurors voted for acquittal. The fifth ballot brought agreement on Masourides being guilty with "four jurors voting for life imprisonment, four for hanging, and four for second degree murder." The seventh ballot came at seven-thirty-five o'clock, when they all agreed on second degree murder. While the jury waited for Judge Redick to arrive, they sang the melody "Nearer My God to Thee." The verdict was read before the court at eight-fifteen that evening. The charge of second degree murder carried the penalty of ten years to life imprisonment.\textsuperscript{44} John Masourides was sentenced to fourteen years in the Nebraska State Penitentiary and was delivered in Lincoln by Douglas County Sheriff E. F. Brailey on

\textsuperscript{42}Omaha World Herald, May 28, 1910, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{43}Omaha Daily News, May 28, 1910, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., May 29, 1910, p. 1.
June 18, 1910.

John Masourides, Number 5322, served in the Nebraska Penitentiary for a period of some five and one-half years. On December 13, 1915, he "was furloughed by Governor John M. Morehead, and later deported from this country." The prison records show that Masourides was finally discharged on March 15, 1920. The last information regarding Masourides indicated that he was in Egypt.

As for the Greek colony in the Omaha area, it quickly melted away to a few hundred. The census of 1910 listed 187 Greeks in Lincoln, 486 in Omaha, and 59 in South Omaha. This was a long way from the estimated two to three thousand, who made their homes in the area before February 21, 1909.

Although the colony did have a period of considerable

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45 Douglas County (Nebraska) District Court, Doc. 13, 782, T. W. Smith, Warden, "Receipt for Prisoner" (June 18, 1910).


47 Interview with Abariotes; Efforts to locate John Masourides in Greece and Egypt have failed; he is believed dead.

growth between 1918 and 1926, it never again reached its former size. Slowly the Greeks adapted themselves to their American environment. Time, education, and understanding came to make the Greeks more acceptable, because they were found willing to help build and sustain their new homeland.

As members of the Greek colony married or brought their families from Greece, the center of the colony, which now began to be called the "community," shifted from the coffee house to the church, St. John's, first located at Sixteenth and Martha Streets (1909-53) and then moved to 602 Park Avenue.

The community, first organized in 1907, celebrated its golden anniversary on May 4, 1958. In its fiftieth year, the St. John's community, numbering some five hundred souls, was found to be in the hands of young Americans of Greek and non-Greek descent, who were very proud of their Greek and Eastern Orthodox background as well as their Anglo-Saxon and Protestant heritage.

When some of the older members of the Greek Orthodox community in 1963, were asked about the anti-Greek riot, they invariably began their statements with

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the wish that the episode might be forgotten. By and large, John Masourides, Edward Lowery, and the anti-Greek riot were forgotten, but the fact remained that the riot and all of its consequences still remained in the record of time as another example of irrational human behavior.
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An attempt to give the reader an understanding and insight concerning the "new immigrant" living in Chicago. Studies the immigrant in relation to the judicial system, public health, politics, education, and society in general.

A history of American immigration policies. Presents arguments for and against restriction as well as how they have affected legislative behavior.

Criticizes the present immigration policy of the United States. Seeks to liberalize it. The author is the Executive Director of the National Committee on Immigration Policy of New York.

The author attempts to picture the Greek immigrant for the American reader. The Greek's social, political, economic, and religious characteristics are delved into rather well.

Cavanaugh, Francis P. *Immigration Restriction at Work Today*. Washington: Catholic University of America, 1928.
A study of the administration of immigration restriction by the United States. It was submitted as a partial fulfillment for a Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

A series of some eleven essays concerning the history of immigration in the United States with an effort to interest students to study and do research in this area.

A pamphlet furnished to aliens who are preparing for naturalization as citizens of the United States.

Calls for a constructive immigration policy and is opposed to exclusion or the literacy test. Wishes restriction and inspection to keep out the undesirables.

Reviews restriction and the bending of the law set down in 1924 to fit the needs of a world torn by war and conflicting ideologies.

A study of the various immigrant groups, some sixteen, by various contributors. It reaches back into the countries of origin and tries to give the reader an understanding of the newcomers.

The study begins from 1790, and presents the acceptance of the immigrant by Boston's society. It is a study of conflict and adjustment.
An excellent collection of statements on the various facets of immigration as a factor in American history. The statements are by well-known authorities, such as, Isaac A. Hourwich, Samuel Gompers, Robert L. Stevenson, Charles F. Adams, and others.

A study of the economic impact upon the United States by European immigration. Defends European immigration but does not mention Oriental immigration.

A sketchy history of Omaha, which did not mention the riot of 1909.

The book is divided into two parts. Part one deals primarily with the immigrant and the second part deals with the history of the American labor movement. He forecasts the inevitable end to free immigration.


Exposes the restrictive policies of other nations in the area of immigration and emigration. Builds a case for better United States immigration laws.


Presents the ideas and considerations of Americans, especially those of New England, which led to restricted immigration in the United States.


A sketchy history of Omaha, which did not mention the riot of 1909.


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