

Anton Cermak, Czechcagoans and Czech Immigration to Chicago in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century

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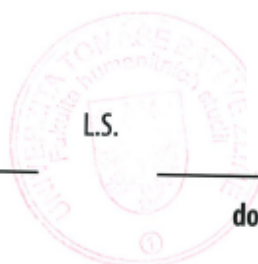
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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce se zabývá českými emigranty žijícími ve Spojených státech amerických ve městě Chicago na přelomu devatenáctého a dvacátého století. Práce je rozdělena na tři kapitoly, v první kapitole jsou popsány důvody emigrace a příklady prvních Čechů v Chicagu. V druhé kapitole jsou uvedeny důležité české čtvrtě, osoby, organizace a jejich vliv na sociální, kulturní a politický život české komunity. Taktéž je zde zmíněno, jak Češi z Chicaga a celé Ameriky podporovali nezávislost samostatné Československé republiky během První světové války. Ve třetí kapitole je podrobněji představen nejslavnější chicagský Čech Antonín Čermák, který se stal úspěšným podnikatelem, ikonou české komunity v Chicagu a starostou onoho města.

Klíčová slova: Chicago, Češi, Antonín Čermák, emigrace, imigrace, politika, volby, politická mašinerie, prohibice, etnika, české čtvrtě, Československo

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Czech immigrants who lived in the city of Chicago in the United States at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter describes the reasons for emigration and provides examples of the first Czechs in Chicago. The second chapter presents important Czech neighborhoods, individuals, and organizations and their influence on the Czech community's social, cultural, and political life. It also mentions how Czechs from Chicago and throughout America supported the independence of the Czechoslovak Republic during World War I. The third chapter provides a more detailed introduction to the most famous Czech in Chicago, Anton Cermak, who became a successful businessman, an icon of the Czech community in Chicago, and the city's mayor.

Keywords: Chicago, Czechs, Anton Cermak, emigration, immigration, politics, elections, political machine, prohibition, ethnicity, Czech neighborhoods, Czechoslovakia

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I hereby declare that the print version of my bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Chicago witnessed a significant influx of Czech immigrants seeking better economic opportunities and political freedoms in the United States. This pivotal period in American history was marked by the emergence of a distinct Czech community in Chicago that contributed significantly to the city's growth and development. The social, cultural, and political lives of these immigrants in Chicago, and their contributions to the city, are part of this thesis. The term “Czechcagoan” is a non-standard English term used in the text to refer to citizens living in Chicago with Czech heritage, particularly in the Czech neighborhoods colloquially referred to as “Czechcago.”

The thesis examines the significant impact of World War I on Czech immigrants in Chicago, who played an active role in the fight for the independence of their home nation, from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the formation of the new country of Czechoslovakia in 1918. The focus is on the contribution of the Chicago Czech community in supporting the cause of Czechoslovak independence during the war, including the participation of Anton Cermak.¹

Cermak was prominent in Chicago's political and social landscape throughout the 1920s until his death in 1933. His legacy as a Czech-American politician and a community leader has left an indelible mark on the city's history. This thesis aims to describe Anton Cermak's political career, his role in supporting the Czechcagoan community in Chicago, and issues such as Political Machine, Prohibition, Organized Crime and Nepotism all of which shaped Chicago during the early part of the twentieth century. By exploring the life of Anton Cermak, this thesis seeks to shed light on the broader history of Czech immigrants in Chicago and their contributions to the city's political and social landscape.

¹ Diacritics are used for the spelling of All Czech words and names throughout the thesis except for “Anton Cermak,” for which the Americanization is preferred due to the fact his name is written this way in the sources cited.

1 CZECH IMMIGRATION IN NORTH AMERICA

1.1 Reasons for migration

During the second half of the 19th century, there were three primary reasons for individuals to emigrate from their homeland to the United States of America.² The first reason was the economic situation within the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the hope of a better life abroad. For example, Cermak's family decided to leave Kladno, a city in Central Bohemia 30 kilometers from Prague, because the economic situation in their hometown was bleak, with a scarcity of viable job opportunities, particularly in the dominant industry of mining which was in decline. Despite efforts to improve conditions through strikes by miners, the situation did not improve.³ During 1890 and beyond Europe was in an economic depression exacerbated by the McKinley Tariff, which raised duties on imports from Europe and thus made trade to the US nearly impossible for some businesses.⁴ In the mid-19th century, the United States was undergoing industrialization, which created numerous job opportunities in the factories and other industrial institutions, making the US an attractive option for inhabitants, including Czechs and other immigrant groups.

The California Gold Rush also had a significant impact in the 1850s. With newspapers in the Czech lands flooding people with stories of gold nuggets being found in California and the potential riches waiting there, many were inspired to leave their homes in the Czech lands to seek their fortune. During this period, approximately 25,000 Czechs left their native lands. Although gold fever was not a primary cause of this exodus, it certainly boosted this number.⁵ Another reason for Czech emigration was religious freedom. At that time, Austro-Hungary, like most areas of Europe in general, was not the most tolerant place to live if one's religion did not align with the majority of the population, for example: being a Protestant or Jew in a primarily Catholic country often led to difficulties when it came to employment. While religious tolerance in Czech lands began to improve between 1848 and 1867,⁶ in the

² Joseph S. Roucek, *The Czechs and Slovaks in America* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company, 1967), 26; Jaroslav Egon Salaba Vojan, and Rudolph Jaromír Pšenka, *Directory and Almanac of the Bohemian Population of Chicago* (Chicago: Bohemian-American Hospital Association, 1915), 70.

³ Alex Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), 3–4.

⁴ Jaroslav Egon Salaba Vojan, *Česko-americké Epištoly* (Chicago: Literární kroužek, 1911), 49.

⁵ Thomas Čapek, *The Čechs (Bohemians) in America: A Study of their National, Cultural, Political, Social, Economic and Religious Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 28–29; Roucek, "Czechs and Slovaks," 27.

⁶ Milan Hlavačka, "DĚDICTVÍ REVOLUCE 1848–1849," Historický ústav AV ČR, accessed March 11, 2023.

<http://abicko.avcr.cz/2008/3/04/dedictvi-revoluce-1848-1849.html>

United States, religious freedom was protected by the First Amendment to the US Constitution, ratified in 1788. Notably, freedom from government interference in religious beliefs and practices throughout the country was even advertised by the New York Immigration Commissioner as a main selling point to divert the overwhelming flow of waves of migrants to various states. Many Czechs moved to the Midwest to states like Wisconsin or Illinois⁷ Czechs, especially Protestants or Jews who felt pressured under the officially Roman Catholic Habsburg Empire, decided to migrate to the US.

The third reason for Czech migration was the political situation. The Czech lands were now under the rule of the Austrian Empire (1804–1867), which led to conflicts with (and among) the various ethnicities within the domain who desired more autonomy or disagreed with the monarchy. Some individuals were persecuted and even imprisoned due to a new police force created after 1848 that pursued those who were active during the attempted revolution of that year.⁸ The Czech writer Karel Havlíček Borovský was arrested in 1851 and forcibly exiled, eventually leading to his ill health and death. This event was a major influence on the ongoing Czech National Revival, significantly increasing its notoriety among the general population. The political upheaval led to the emigration of many Czechs and Slovaks in search of a haven where they could continue to be politically active⁹ without fear of harassment.¹⁰ The United States was one of the main countries this population went to.

Although Chicago had the largest concentration of Czech immigrants it was only one of the destinations for some. Most immigrants arrived in the United States via New York, and many decided to settle there. Others continued their journey to join family members who had already settled elsewhere, or they sought opportunities in more Western destinations. In these places, the population density was lower than in the growing cities on the east coast, and the land was more readily available and affordable. The 1920 census provides valuable insights into the spread of Czechs across the United States. Illinois had the highest number of Czech residents, totaling 140,000 people. Ohio followed in second place with 59,206 residents from the Czech lands, and the most Czech and Slovak populated city was Cleveland. Nebraska was in third place with 54,024 residents, with the majority residing in

⁷ Čapek, “Study of Czechs,” 37–38.

⁸ Hlavačka, “Revoluce,”

⁹ Irving Cutler, *Chicago Metropolis of the Mid-Continent* (Iowa, Dubuque: Kendal/Hunt, 1982), 81.

¹⁰ Malynne Sternstein, *Czechs of Chicagoland* (Mount Pleasant: Arcadia, 2008), 8.

Omaha. New York ranked fourth with 52,730 Czech residents, followed by Texas with 49,929. Finally, Wisconsin occupied sixth place, with 46,425 citizens, mainly in Milwaukee.¹¹ Between 32 and 43 % of Czechs and Slovaks were employed in agriculture, with a higher percentage in the second generation of these immigrants.¹²

1.2 History of Czech immigrants in Chicago

There is no definitive evidence to confirm who was the very first Czech to settle in Chicago, with records existing from before the 1850s. For some time, the strongest contender for the title of the first Czech in Chicago was Vojtěch Šklíba, who arrived in the city in 1846. Writing in 1939, the historian Rudolf Bubeníček began his research by searching for anyone with the name Šklíba or any possible English derivation of the surname and came across a doctor with the surname Skleba. Upon contacting the doctor, it was confirmed that the family was descendants of Czech immigrants. Vojtěch Šklíba was a successful businessman who specialized in making saddles and harnesses. He also established a cart-building business, which employed fifteen people. This is reminiscent of a young Cermak, who also started his own carriage business and became prosperous. Šklíba passed away in 1888 at the age of fifty-four.¹³ Henry Homer, born in 1818 in Čkyně, Bohemia, should be mentioned; Homer opened a grocery store in Chicago in 1842, and his business thrived. Even when Homer lost his properties in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, he started over and continued until he died in 1878.¹⁴

As mentioned above, surnames such as Šklíba and Skleba underwent Americanization to better adapt to American society. Early immigrants in the second half of the 19th century either kept their original surnames or changed them via the German language due to the cultural influence on these people at that time in Europe and the notion that Germanic-sounding names in the US were more privileged compared to Slavic ones. (German immigrants also settled mainly in the Midwest and north-central US, along with many

¹¹ Thomas Čapek, "Czechoslovaks in the United States." in *World's Fair Memorial of the Czechoslovak Group (Czechs and Slovaks) International Exposition, Chicago, 1933, Incorporated*, ed. Jaroslav Egon Salaba Vojan, and Michal Laučík (Chicago: Czechoslovak Group, 1933), 28–29; Roucek, "Czechs and Slovaks," 27–30.

¹² Čapek, "Study of Czechs," 70.

¹³ Rudolf Bubeníček, *A History of the Czechs in Chicago*, trans. Karleen Chott Sheppard (Chicago: Czech and Slovak American Genealogy Society of Illinois, 1939), 26; Miloslav Rechcigl jr. "The First Czech in Chicago." *Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences*. Accessed January 31, 2023; Sternstein, "Chicagoland," 11.

¹⁴ Rechcigl, "Czechs in Chicago,"

Scandinavians.) Many more name changes were made among the second generation of Czech immigrants, who viewed the US as their home and often tried to hide their Slavic origin.¹⁵ The easiest solution was a direct translation for simple surnames reflecting everyday objects, animals, traits, or jobs. For example, Mlynář became Miller, Hrnčář became Potter, and so on.¹⁶ There were other solutions if a translation was impossible or they chose not to use this technique. The most common technique was simply removing diacritics. In the second generation, only a few families kept using them, and in the third generation, no one did. Another common technique was replacing diacritics with digraphs, which gave the name an English look and mimicked the original pronunciation. For example, Průša became Prusha and Hamáček became Hamachek.¹⁷ When it comes to Anton Cermak, it is unclear when he or his family first dropped the diacritics in their name. However, the most probable scenario is that Anton Joseph Cermak used the original spelling Antonín Josef Čermák “when dealing with Czechs, but when it came to any official document or general contact with anyone else, the Americanized Cermak was used.” Interestingly, in an advertisement for one of his companies aimed at Czech citizens in the English-language “Bohemian Almanac” of 1915, the original version “Čermák” was used.¹⁸

The first significant wave of migrants coming to Chicago started at the beginning of the second half of the 19th century after the failed revolutionary attempts in the Austrian Monarchy in 1848–1849.¹⁹ The Czech community in America formed a unique and diverse group that embraced American values such as liberty and equality while maintaining a solid connection to their cultural heritage mainly through fraternal organizations. They made significant contributions to American society through their hard work and dedication. However, they also tended to distance themselves from other ethnic groups, seeking to

¹⁵ Lenka Procházková, “The Americanization of the Czech surnames in Chicago,” *Naše řeč* 99, no 3 (July 2016): 147–157.

<https://kramerius.lib.cas.cz/view/uuid:6b997800-41a8-45c1-a549-1ecc55346b16?article=uuid:adccb1fb-c5fc-4f9b-866b-829c09ac5a3f>

¹⁶ Čapek, “Study of Czechs,” 114–118; J. B. Dudek, “The Americanization of Czech Surnames,” *American Speech* 1, no 3 (December 1925): 161–166. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/452540>

¹⁷ Procházková, “Surnames,” 147–157; Čapek, “Study of Czechs,” 114–118.

¹⁸ Vojan and Pšenka, “Bohemian Almanac,” 193.

¹⁹ Josefa Humpal Zeman, “The Bohemian People in Chicago,” in *Residents of Hull-House, Hull-House Maps and Papers: A Presentation of Nationalities and Wages in a Congested District of Chicago Together with Comments and Essays on Problems Growing Out of the Social Conditions*, ed. Rima Lunin Schultz (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 116; Cutler, “Metropolis,” 79; Čapek, “Study of Czechs,” 28; Rouček, “Czechs and Slovaks,” 26.

preserve their unique cultural identity.²⁰ The exception to this tendency were Slovak immigrants living in Chicago thanks to language similarity, cooperation during the First World War, and the fact that they often saw themselves as one nation back in Europe.²¹ The Poles and Czechs began cooperating in the economic and political fields in the 1860s, recognizing that their joint force was significant enough to compete with other ethnic groups in Chicago. After President Lincoln's assassination in 1865, the Poles and Czechs held a meeting to pledge their support to Andrew Johnson, hoping he would continue Lincoln's policies like equality and freedom. In 1871, they convened again to discuss the candidature of Frank Nowak for Collector of the West Division,²² a tax-collecting body at that time. The social class range of Czechcagoans was somewhat broad, from blue-collar workers who moved mainly for economic reasons to educated middle-class and intellectuals²³ who had been politically active in their homeland and sought refuge in America. Yet, percentagewise, the blue-collar population was by far the largest.

The first crucial nationwide event that Czechs participated in heavily was the US Civil War. They were mostly pro-Union and anti-slavery, creating the Slavonian Lincoln Rifle Company. In 1861, they became part of Company F of the Illinois Twenty-fourth Regiment.²⁴ The volunteers who returned from the war were enriched by their experiences. They had seen a large portion of the country, met different groups of people, and shared their stories with relatives and friends back home in Chicago, which raised awareness in the Czech community about the geopolitical situation in the United States.²⁵ Due to a lack of materials

²⁰ Joseph Chada, *The Czechs in the United States* (Washington, DC: SVU Press, 1981), 2–4; Alena Jaklová, "COMMUNICATION AND IDENTITY OF CZECH IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA," *Informatologia* 45, no. 2 (2012): 115–120. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/84801>

John M. Allswang, *A House for All Peoples: Ethnic Politics in Chicago 1890–1936* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971), 22.

²¹ Peter A. Rovnianek, "The Slovaks of America," in *World's Fair Memorial of the Czechoslovak Group (Czechs and Slovaks) International Exposition, Chicago, 1933, Incorporated*, ed. Jaroslav Egon Salaba Vojan, and Michal Laučík (Chicago: Czechoslovak Group, 1933), 38; Joseph Jahelka, "The Role of Chicago Czechs in the Struggle for Czechoslovak Independence." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 31, no. 4 (December 1938): 382.

²² Dominic A. Pacyga, "CZECHS AND POLES IN CHICAGO: PAN-SLAVISM AND THE ORIGINS OF THE CERMAK DEMOCRATIC MACHINE, 1860–1931," *Migration Studies Review of Polish Diaspora* 158, no. 4 (2015): 56–68.

<https://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-36244266-e295-4dd1-ad54-1800d57be7af>

²³ Zeman, "Bohemian People," 116; Čapek, "Study of Czechs," 81.

²⁴ Zeman, "Bohemian People," 125; Čapek, "Study of Czechs," 156; Jaroslav Egon Salaba Vojan, and Michal Laučík, *World's Fair Memorial of the Czechoslovak Group (Czechs and Slovaks) International Exposition, Chicago, 1933, Incorporated* (Chicago: Czechoslovak Group, 1933), 90; Vojan and Pšenka, "Bohemian Almanac," 34.

²⁵ Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 14.

on this specific topic, it is unclear whether Czech veterans suffered psychologically from participation in the war what later became known as Post-traumatic stress disorder.

In terms of education among Czech migrants, a high percentage were literate, particularly those who arrived after 1899. Approximately 98.4 % of male migrants and 99.13 % of female migrants could read and write, which can be attributed to the compulsory school system in Bohemian lands. However, a challenge they faced was the need for more proficiency in the English language, with German being the most spoken second language, as it was in their homelands. Education was vital in shaping their culture and politics, but religion also significantly divided Bohemians and Moravians. While Bohemians comprised a significant free-thinking portion of the community, Moravians tended to hold on to their faith and loyalty to the Catholic Church.²⁶

The flow of Czech immigrants to Chicago increased with each passing decade and peaked around 1910. However, after the onset of World War I, the numbers began to drop drastically, with only a few hundred individuals arriving each year. The establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918 and the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1919 (which demarked official breakup of Austria-Hungary and recognition of Czechoslovakia) also played a role in reducing such a drastic need for migration, as political and religious oppression was no longer an issue. Additionally, restrictive immigration laws passed in the US in the 1920s further impacted the flow of Czech immigrants to Chicago.²⁷ These laws included the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and its successor, the Immigration Act of 1924, which imposed even stricter restrictions on immigration, particularly from Eastern and Southern Europe. Consequently, the number of immigrants admitted to the United States was limited to only two percent of the foreign-born population of a particular nationality that had been in the country as of 1890,²⁸ posing a significant threat to the Democratic party, which had relied on the votes of new immigrants. Anton Cermak was briefly a leader of the united

²⁶ Jaklová, "Communication," 115–120; Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 24–25; Cutler, "Metropolis," 80; Čapek, "Czechoslovaks in the United States," 27; Zeman, "Bohemian People," 124.

²⁷ Pšenka, "Zlatá kniha," 223; Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 80; Cutler, "Metropolis," 45.

²⁸ Philipp Ager, and Hansen Casper Worm, "Closing Heaven's Door: Evidence from the 1920s US Immigration Quota Acts," *Discussion Papers on Economics* no. 11 (October 2017): 5–7.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3059439>

Slavic-American opposition to these restrictions, which included Czechs, Slovaks, and Poles.²⁹

1.2.1 Czechs within the demography of Chicago

As the second largest US city at that time (after New York) and a target destination for many European migrants, Chicago underwent substantial changes between 1848 and 1933. The city's population saw a significant boom, fueled by immigration and births. The data presented reveals a remarkable pattern of population growth in Chicago over 50 years. The city's population rose rapidly from 500,000 in 1880 to 1,100,000 in 1890 and continued to soar to 1,690,000 by 1900 and 2,185,000 by 1910. The growth rate remained robust through the following decade, as evidenced by the population reaching 2,700,000 in 1920 and 3,370,000 in 1930. These figures demonstrate an extraordinary increase in population and highlight Chicago's role as a thriving urban center during this period.³⁰

Between 1890 and 1910, Chicago competed with Vienna for the title of the second and third most populated city with Czech citizens worldwide behind Prague.³¹ As the Czechcagoan community grew, so did its members' political and business ambitions, including Anton Cermak. The population of Czechs in Chicago rose from around 75,000 in 1900 to 110,000 in 1910.³² However, a decade later, we can observe stagnation in the community's size, with a population of 106,000. This decline was likely caused by a cut-off in the stream of first-generation immigrants from Europe during World War I, the passing of elderly first-generation citizens, and mass migration to suburbs outside of Chicago, which fell outside of the census' purview. Some second-generation Czechcagoans have not revealed the origin of their parents and thus were categorized as Americans. Nonetheless, the number of new-born second and, at this point, even third-generation Czechs increased significantly during this period.³³ Furthermore, if we were to consider the surrounding areas of Chicago, it is estimated that the number of Czechs in the region could be estimated to as many as 200,000 people.³⁴

²⁹ Allswang, "Ethnic politics," 131.

³⁰ Green, "Cermak's Machine," 102; Pšenka, "Zlatá kniha," 185.

³¹ Vojan and Pšenka, "Bohemian Almanac," 29; Cutler, "Metropolis," 80.

³² Cutler, "Metropolis," 80.

³³ Vojan and Pšenka, "Bohemian Almanac," 39.

³⁴ Roucek, "Czechs and Slovaks," 31; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 29–30.

For context, it is worth noting that the total number of Czechs in the United States was 215,000 in 1890, growing to 356,000 in 1900; 539,000 in 1910; and 622,000 in 1920. At this time the population of Slovaks was almost the same at 619,000. After 1930, Czechoslovaks were counted together in the US census at 1,382,000 people.³⁵ These figures encompass both first and second-generation Czechs, with those of the third generation being classified as Americans without ethnic distinction.³⁶ According to data from 1914, we can see the distribution of Czechs in the city based on their ward affiliation. The ward with the most Czechcagoan residents was Ward 12, which comprised so-called Czech California and had a population of 30,430 people. This particular ward, which is described below, was considered Anton Cermak's stronghold, a neighborhood which he had firm control of until his death, and it helped him get elected to various posts. The ethnicity of democratic committeemen from 1918 to 1932 was Czech. The second-highest Czech-populated ward was Ward 10, located in the Pilsen neighborhood, with a population of 21,943 people. Following that, the third-highest Czech-populated ward was Ward 34, which comprised California, Lawndale, and Crawford and had a population of 19,093 people.³⁷

³⁵ Čapek, "Czechoslovaks in the United States," 26–27.

³⁶ Vojan and Pšenka, "Bohemian Almanac," 72–73.

³⁷ Allswang, "Ethnic politics," 89; Vojan and Pšenka, "Bohemian Almanac," 39–42.

2 CZECH COMMUNITY IN CHICAGO

2.1 Neighborhoods

Over the years, Czech citizens moved from one location to another several times for multiple reasons, such as the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 and changes in real estate and rent prices forced people to move somewhere cheaper, and others took the opportunity to sell their properties and move as well.³⁸ Czech immigrants to Chicago settled throughout the city, making their presence felt in many different neighborhoods.³⁹ While they were not the first to arrive in most areas, or the only ethnicity present, they formed a significant community in specific neighborhoods. In these areas, Czechs comprised most of the population for a period, reflected in local businesses, organizations, and social institutions such as taverns. Alongside Czechs, other ethnicities, such as Germans, Irish, Poles, and Slovaks lived in these neighborhoods, creating a diverse and vibrant community.⁴⁰

The first proper Czechcagoan neighborhood, named Prague contained the highest concentration of Czech residents at 10,000 at its peak just before the Great Fire of 1871, which started close to Prague. Since the 1860s, the district had spread horizontally from Canal to Halsted and vertically from Ewing to Twelve Street on the Near West Side of the city.⁴¹ In 1863 began the first significant project done by Czech Catholics - the St. Wenceslaus church, which no longer exists.⁴² Prague's growth and relative success was just a foreshadowing of what will become their next establishment. By the 1870s, Prague was on the verge of the capability to sustain the ever-growing population.⁴³ Czechcagoans were among the first to notice and respond to the blaze during the Great Fire, with some attempting to help evacuate others and contain the fire. Around half of the Prague neighborhood was

³⁸ Sternstein, "Chicagoland," 18.

³⁹ Rudolph Jaromír Pšenka, *Zlatá kniha Československého Chicaga* (Chicago: August Geringer, 1926), 207; Vojan and Pšenka, "Bohemian Almanac," 37.

⁴⁰ Sternstein, "Chicagoland," 23.

⁴¹ Zeman, "Bohemian People," 115; Vojan and Pšenka, "Bohemian Almanac," 30–33.

⁴² United States Department of Interior National Park Service & Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. Daniel Bluestone, Lydia Brandt, Diane Dillon, Cora Palmer, Edgar Barron, Flora Flavela, David Hernandez, Stephanie Navarro. (Historic Preservation Program, University of Virginia, 2005), 15–19; Vojan and Pšenka, "Bohemian Almanac," 53; Pacyga, "Czechs and Poles," 56; Čapek, "Study of Czechs," 57.

⁴³ US National Park Service, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, 15–19.

spared from the devastation, with only a few buildings being destroyed. However, it is worth noting that at least one Czech person lost their life during this tragic event.⁴⁴

The neighborhood of Pilsen, situated between Cermak Road to the south and West 16th Road to the north, was a successor to the Prague neighborhood. It spans from Halsey Street in the east to Western Avenue in the west.⁴⁵ built mostly after 1871 because of cheaper land and the possibility of building wooden frame houses.⁴⁶ It did not take long, and the entire district was thriving with shops, theatres, banks and churches. The name was taken from the Tavern of Pilsen, founded in 1870 by Matěj Škudera.⁴⁷ The somewhat isolated location of Pilsen contributed to the rapid development of the Czechcagoan community there, as they had to be more independent from the rest of the city via its stores and available work. For several decades, Pilsen was the largest hub of the Czech community not only in Chicago but also in the United States in general. It served great importance in the social, cultural, and political world of Czechcagoans.⁴⁸ Only ten years after the foundation the population grew up to 45,000. Due to the strong presence of freethinkers both Catholics and Protestants decided to build their facilities, the Bethlehem Congregational Church for Protestants and St. Procopius parish for Catholics.⁴⁹ Most residents in Pilsen were blue-collar workers employed in factories, butchers, railways, lumberyards, breweries such as the Czech Atlas, and many more. Shop owners often built their houses with businesses on the first floor and their flats above. Pilsen was also home to many organizations such as Sokol and newspapers like *Denní Hlasatel* (Daily Herald), which played an important role in the Czech community's social, cultural, and political life in Chicago.⁵⁰ Among many buildings which became a center of community life Thalia Hall is noteworthy for several reasons—built by John Dušek in 1893

⁴⁴ Bubeníček, “History of Czechs,” 230–241; Vojan, and Laučík, “World’s Fair,” 90.

⁴⁵ US National Park Service, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, 15–19.

⁴⁶ Frank S. Magallon, “A Historical Look at Czech Chicagoland,” Chicagoland Czech-American Community Center. Accessed February 5, 2023. <http://www.chicagocacc.org/the-historical-czech-chicagoland>

Vojan and Pšenka, “Bohemian Almanac,” 37; Pšenka, “Zlatá kniha” 24; Pacyga, “Czechs and Poles,” 56–57.
⁴⁷ Sternstein, “Chicagoland,” 23. Cutler, “Metropolis,” 78; Vojan and Pšenka, “Bohemian Almanac,” 37; Dominic A. Pacyga, *Chicago, City of Neighborhoods: Histories & Tours* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1986), 238.

⁴⁸ US National Park Service, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, 15–19.

⁴⁹ Pacyga, “Neighborhoods,” 240; Vojan and Pšenka, “Bohemian Almanac,” 54. 60; Zeman, “Bohemian People,” 123.

⁵⁰ Department of Planning and Development & Commission on Chicago Landmarks. *Pilsen Historic District Primarily West 18th Street between South Leavitt and South Sangamon Streets, and 13 blocks bounded by West 18th Street to the North, South Ashland Avenue to the West, West 21st Street to the South and South Racine Avenue to the East.* (City of Chicago, 2019), 17; Sternstein, “Chicagoland,”

in Romanesque Revival style,⁵¹ which gave it characteristic look - Thalia Hall is a building with theatre, meeting rooms, stores and flats.⁵² Pilsen was first stopping destination for Cermak's family and years later Anton went back there to start a new life.⁵³

The third significant neighborhood was Lawndale, also known as Czech California,⁵⁴ as referred to by its residents. As the population in Pilsen grew, more and more people sought new spaces to build their homes. By the 1880s, Czech California started transforming into a self-sufficient Czech hub, much like Pilsen.⁵⁵ The neighborhood then spread from 26th Street to California Avenue, where it got its name Czech California. Despite being occupied by other ethnicities, the influx of Czechs was too strong and those who came before them were not keen on becoming a predominantly Czech neighborhood, so many of them decided to leave.⁵⁶ Soon, Lawndale was full of shopkeepers, restaurants, banks, schools, churches, and meeting halls of various organizations.⁵⁷ The Czechs also founded another brewery called Pilsen and next to it was the Pilsen Park, which was a site of many events.⁵⁸ Lawndale was also tightly connected with Anton Cermak, who lived here for decades and where his political career started, naturally thanks to the Czechcagoans him up.⁵⁹

However, these were only some of the areas in Chicago where Czech and Slovak immigrants chose to settle. In approximately 1905, the more prosperous and affluent community members moved away from the densely populated streets of Pilsen and Lawndale and instead decided to reside in the suburban towns of Cicero and Berwyn. The population in these areas grew exponentially, and by 1920, the combined number of Czech and Slovak residents in Cicero and Berwyn had reached 50,000. By the 1930s, this figure had exceeded 100,000, indicating a significant and enduring concentration of Czechs and Slovaks in these regions.⁶⁰

⁵¹ Vera Laska, *The Czechs in America, 1633–1977: A Chronology & Fact Book* (New York, Dobbs Ferry: Oceana Publications, 1978), 110; Magallon, "Historic Look,"; Commission on Chicago Landmarks, "Pilsen Historic District," 17.

⁵² Pacyga, "Neighborhoods," 244; Cutler, "Metropolis," 79.

⁵³ Ivan Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone* (Prague: Knižní klub, 1998), 11–13.

⁵⁴ Pšenka, "Zlatá Kniha," 24.

⁵⁵ Cutler, "Metropolis," 78–80; Magallon, "Historic Look," Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 33; Vojan and Pšenka, "Bohemian Almanac," 37.

⁵⁶ Magallon, "Historic Look,"

⁵⁷ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 33–36; Czech & Slovak American Genealogy Society of Illinois, "Czech California - Bohemian California," Accessed February 5, 2023.

<https://csagsi.org/czech-california/>

⁵⁸ Cutler, "Metropolis," 81.

⁵⁹ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak,"; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 31.

⁶⁰ Vojan, and Laučík, "World's Fair," 92; Cutler, "Metropolis," 82; Pšenka, "Zlatá Kniha," 24.

Czech influence reached far on many levels, including education. Apart from schools founded by Czechcagoans, even a public high school in Cicero called Sterling Morton had Czech classes thanks to 85 % of 3080 students being youth from Czech families, but most of them were not fluent enough, so these classes were supposed to help them.⁶¹ In both Cicero and Berwyn, for decades were Czechs elected to the town hall's offices, including the position of mayor.⁶²

2.2 Organizations, events, and press

As the Czech community in Chicago expanded, the desire for cultural cohesion grew stronger. This was a natural response to the typical human inclination to seek out and surround oneself with those with similar cultural backgrounds in a new and unfamiliar environment. Although the Czechcagoans were united as a whole, they were also divided into various sub-communities based on their individual preferences, mainly regarding religion and politics.⁶³ This division was evident in the various Czech Catholic churches, Freethinkers schools, and newspapers that reflected these differences. Over the years, many clubs, associations, and organizations have been formed in the community, with an estimated 750 across Chicago.⁶⁴

Benefit and Fraternal societies played a significant role in the lives of many Czechcagoans, providing support to those in need, such as the sick and elderly. However, their primary function was social. Typically, groups of people who knew each other or shared a similar background gathered weekly or monthly to strengthen their relationships and camaraderie as a community and help them cultivate traditions and the Czech language.⁶⁵

In a new country where other ethnic groups could be hostile, Americans might view Czech immigrants as "bohunks," a derogatory term for poor, blue-collar Bohemians or other Slavs with unfamiliar names⁶⁶ The main reason for this was the immigrants' limited proficiency in English, despite their high literacy in their native languages. This lack of English

⁶¹ Čapek, "Study of Czechs," 102–103; Pšenka, "Zlatá Kniha," 198.

⁶² Magallon, "Historic Look,"

⁶³ Laska, "Czech Chronology," 110; Zeman, "Bohemian People," 115–128; Allswang, "Ethnic politics," 5, 8.

⁶⁴ Karel D. Bicha, "The Survival of the Village in Urban America: A Note on Czech Immigrants in Chicago to 1914," *The International Migration Review* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1971): 72–74; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 43–44; Pacyga, "Neighborhoods," 240.

⁶⁵ Bicha, "Urban America," 74; Jaklová, "Communication," 115–120.

⁶⁶ Zeman, "Bohemian People," 128; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 85.

proficiency proved to be a major obstacle when attempting to integrate into American society or secure employment. However, as subsequent generations were born, a noticeable linguistic shift occurred, with the first generation predominantly speaking Czech, the second generation becoming bilingual, and the third generation primarily English-speaking in contrast to the first.⁶⁷ Anton Cermak came to the US when he was less than two years old, technically being more part of the second generation of Czechcagoans, having the advantage of understanding and speaking both Czech and English. However, despite his bilingualism, he struggled with his oratory skills, frequently making speaking errors such as incorrect pronunciation and using simpler sentence structures. As a result, he was unable to sound like a native English speaker. To make up for any deficiencies in his speeches and arguments, Cermak relied on his vigor and enthusiasm along with the vast amount of information and data he was able to gather on any given topic. During committees, he exuded energy and gestured with fervor, and when engaged in a heated debate, he would pound his fists on the table with such force that some feared he would break it. As a result, not many people were willing to argue with him; he was “too much to hustle with.”⁶⁸

Fraternal societies tried to uplift the social and cultural life among Czechcagoans. In addition to supporting those in need and promoting social cohesion, the benefit and fraternal societies also played a significant role in education. Many of these organizations funded schools for children and adults wanting to further their education. This was particularly important for faster integration into the society of immigrants who often arrived in the United States with limited education and faced significant challenges in adapting to a new culture and language. By providing opportunities for adult education, these societies helped members of the Czech community gain new skills and knowledge and improve their chances for success in their new home.⁶⁹ It's worth mentioning that about one-third of these societies were run by Freethinkers as volunteers because they were non-profit organizations, most of which were led by democratically elected members. In addition to supporting education, these societies provided other benefits, such as life insurance, disability insurance, and death benefits, to their members, as mentioned at the beginning. From a cultural standpoint, they held

⁶⁷ Jaklová, “Communication,” 115–120.

⁶⁸ Gottfried, “Boss Cermak,” 110–111.

⁶⁹ Gottfried, “Boss Cermak,” 45; Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 137–138.

theatrical plays, picnics, balls, and choral performances.⁷⁰ This was much needed to preserve a cultural life among Czechagoans focused mainly on work and family.

When one delves into the Czechs' history in Chicago, one will almost certainly come across the name “Sokol,” meaning Falcon. This term has associations mainly focused on gymnastics but also maintaining Bohemian nationality and cultivating both physical and mental culture via physical activity, pageants and plays, and maintaining lending libraries.⁷¹ Their motto was “a sound mind in a sound body,” this conviction can be traced back to Ancient Greece.⁷² Membership was limited to those who lived honest and honorable lives.⁷³ It's worth mentioning that women were practicing separately from men and were to a degree, their own entity within Sokols.⁷⁴ In Chicago, multiple lodges functioned as individual entities, some of which merged and others divided. Each of them had a hall where they trained and gathered. The most known are Tělocvičná Jednota Sokol, Česko Americký Sokol, Plzeňský Sokol, Sokol Havlíček-Tyrš, and Sokol Slovanská Lípa.⁷⁵ The Sokols held large gatherings called “Slets” in America and participated in multinational Slets in Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia, in 1920, 1926, 1932, and 1938.⁷⁶ When enough groups were in Chicago and the United States, the decision was made to establish a central headquarters in Chicago in 1878, named the “National Sokol Union in the United States.” One of the first things they agreed upon was standardizing uniforms for all members. They even had a periodical publication called the “American Falcon.”⁷⁷ As the Sokols were generally a freethinking organization, Czech Catholics created their version, called “Orlí” or “Eagles,” which did not follow precisely in the footsteps of the Bohemian counterpart. On the contrary National Sokol Union had a warm and cooperative relationship with Bohemian Sokols. The first “Slet” of the Czech Catholic version was held in Chicago in 1909, where they performed alongside other groups.⁷⁸ Anton Cermak was a proud member of the Sokol, and he was even part of the board of directors of Sokol Chicago and the American Sokol Gymnastic Union.

⁷⁰ Laska, “Czech Chronology,” 110; Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 138.

⁷¹ Roucek, “Czechs and Slovaks,” 32; Laska, “Czech Chronology,” 86; Cutler, “Metropolis,” 78; Vojan, and Laučík, “World's Fair,” 40.

⁷² Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 142; Vojan, and Laučík, “World's Fair,” 42.

⁷³ Laska, “Czech Chronology,” 86.

⁷⁴ Bubeníček, “History of Czechs,” 269–270.

⁷⁵ Bubeníček, “History of Czechs,” 244–252; Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 78, 142; Cutler, “Metropolis,” 81; Čapek, “Study of Czechs,” 57; Vojan and Pšenka, “Bohemian Almanac,” 64.

⁷⁶ Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 78, 145.

⁷⁷ Bubeníček, “History of Czechs,” 264–268; Vojan, and Laučík, “World's Fair,” 43–44; Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 143; Vojan and Pšenka, “Bohemian Almanac,” 64.

⁷⁸ Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 144.

He liked the idea of hard work, helping one another, discipline, and all the virtues that Sokols represent and support.⁷⁹ He was also supposed to accompany the Sokols to the Slet in Prague in 1920, but unfortunately, health issues forced him to stay in the United States.⁸⁰

Building and Loan Associations were crucial in developing the Czech community, particularly in the neighborhoods themselves. Owning a piece of land and building a home was something that the Czech people highly valued, and these associations were meant to help achieve that goal. From 1885 to 1893, there were five known associations out of a total of forty that loaned and distributed over four million dollars during this period.⁸¹ The Czech Building and Loan Association had a substantial presence in this sphere. In 1912, 106 out of 227 associations in Chicago were Czech, with half of the total capital. These numbers increased in 1917 to 125 associations, with the total capital amounting to 15,000,000 dollars.⁸² Thanks to them, people could save money to acquire property or build new ones.⁸³ These matters were particularly close to Cermak, thanks to his business in real estate and his role on the building-and-loan committee in the State Legislature. In 1907, he also became the Lawndale Building and Loan Association president.⁸⁴

The Czech press in Chicago had a long lifespan, from the 1870s until the 1950s. Like other organizations, newspapers were divided based on differing opinions and viewpoints of the world and reflected their target audience. Freethinkers and liberals had *Svornost* (concord), religious individuals had *Narod* (nation), and socialists had *Spravedlnost* (justice). Nevertheless, some newspapers, such as *Denní Hlasatel* (daily herald), attempted to remain neutral and appeal to everyone by providing straightforward news without any particular agenda or bias.⁸⁵ The first successful periodical in Chicago was *Svornost*, with its first release on 8 December 1875 and headquarters on Canal Street. The founder was August Geringer, an important figure in the Czechagoan press.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 45.

⁸⁰ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 66.

⁸¹ Zeman, "Bohemian People," 118.

⁸² Pacyga, "Czechs and Poles," 60; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 45; Vojan and Pšenka, "Bohemian Almanac," 44; Bicha, "Urban America," 74.

⁸³ Vojan, "Epištoly," 39.

⁸⁴ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 23; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 45.

⁸⁵ Pacyga, "Neighborhoods," 240; Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 129–136; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 32; Cutler, "Metropolis," 80.

⁸⁶ Vojan, and Laučík, "World's Fair," 92; Pšenka, "Zlatá kniha," 27; Cutler, "Metropolis," 78; Vojan and Pšenka, "Bohemian Almanac," 83.

2.3 Important and influential Czechs in the 20th century Chicago

Anton Cermak was not the only, nor the first person of Czech heritage to impact the Czech community or Chicago as a whole, although he was arguably the most well-known Czechcagoan until Ray Kroc uplifted McDonald's into a multi-billion company.

Another prominent business figure to mention who allied with Cermak is Jan A. Červenka, known in the US as John Cervenka. In 1882 he emigrated to the United States from Bohemia when he was twelve and worked in various factories, learning carpentry along the way. He later became a representative of a woodworker's union but left that post in 1899 to open a restaurant. Červenka was involved in founding the Pilsen Brewing Company of Chicago and became its president in 1903 and stayed there for almost the rest of his life. He was also a member of organizations such as the Czech Tavern Keeper's Association, Blue Island Merchants Association, American Bohemian Press Bureau, and National Liquor League of America.⁸⁷

Naturally, in his position as a brewery president, Červenka was against laws that restricted or prohibited the consumption of alcoholic drinks, which is why he was a member of the United Societies for Local Self-Government, which pushed back against these laws. He also played a role in bringing Anton Cermak into this organization, which gave Cermak political leverage for years to come. During World War I, Červenka supported independent Czechoslovakia and, along with Cermak, raised funds for Liberty Bonds, also called Liberty Loans (securities issued by the US Department of Treasury to help finance the war via borrowings from the general public). Červenka contributed as much as possible to the war effort by becoming a member and spokesperson of the Foreign Language Division. He was chosen as the President of the Citizens Committee of the 83rd Division and the State Council of Defense in his home territory, where he participated in all patriotic activities. Also, Červenka hold the position of President of the Czecho-Slovak National Council of America.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ "HON. JOHN A CERVENKA." The Broad Ax, March 31, 1923.

https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/data/batches/iune_bismuth_ver01/data/sn84024055/00332898048/1923033101/0052.pdf

Pšenka, "Zlatá kniha," 234; Czech & Slovak American Genealogy Society of Illinois, "John Cervenka Brewer - Business Man - Politician Supporter of Chicago's Czech Community," Accessed February 3, 2023. <https://csagsi.org/john-cervenka-business-man-politician/>

⁸⁸ The Broad Ax, "John Cervenka,"

After the war, Červenka continued helping via Liberty Bazaar, which funded families of fallen Legionnaires.⁸⁹ The connection between Anton Cermak and Červenka went beyond just a political alliance, and their paths intersected on many occasions. For example, they were both members of the Bohemian Charitable Association, an organization in which Červenka became president thirty years later, he was also a member of the Bohemian-American Hospital Association with Anton Cermak and Karel Vopička among others who wanted to create Czech hospital.⁹⁰ From 1910 eight years onward Červenka was Clerk of the Probate Court of Chicago.⁹¹ In 1923 he was elected as the City of Chicago Treasurer as he was no newcomer in politics and even in financial business thanks to his post as Vice President of Kaspar American State Bank. When Cermak became the mayor Červenka was selected as Purchasing Agent of Chicago and continued in a related position as a superintendent of the city bureau of central purchasing until his retirement in 1948.⁹² It is safe to say that Jan Červenka was an active participant not only in the Czech community but also in American society through his hard work in business, charity, politics and as a leader of various organizations.

Another prominent figure in the Czech community in America was Karel Josef Vopička, also known as Charles Vopicka, who emigrated to the United States in 1880 at the age of 22 and quickly established a successful career in the banking and real estate industries. Among his other influential positions Vopička served on the Chicago Board of Education, the Board of Local Improvement, and the Chicago Charter Convention. He was also a member of the board of directors for the Kaspar State Bank, the Illinois Manufacturers Association, and the Chicago Association of Commerce. In addition, Vopička was a co-founder of the Atlas Brewing Company and served as its director,⁹³ thus repealing Prohibition became an important goal for him.

Vopička was briefly chairman of the Bohemian-American Hospital Association, along with other members such as Anton Cermak and Jan Červenka. In 1913, President Woodrow

⁸⁹ CSAGSI, "Cervenka,"

⁹⁰ Vojan and Pšenka, "Bohemian Almanac," 68.

⁹¹ Pšenka, "Zlatá kniha," 234; CSAGSI, "Cervenka,"

⁹² Magallon, "Historic Look,"; Čapek, "Czechoslovaks in the United States," 33; CSAGSI, "Cervenka," Vojan, and Laučík, "World's Fair," 94.

⁹³ Roucek, "Czechs and Slovaks," 40; Pšenka, "Zlatá kniha," 236–237.

Wilson selected Vopička as the US ambassador to Romania, Serbia, and Bulgaria, a post he held throughout World War I,⁹⁴ working to maintain and defend US interests while also helping other allied nations and the efforts of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk to gain support for the creation of independent Czechoslovakia. After resigning from his post in 1920, Vopička continued to play an active role in the Chicago community through his involvement in the Chicago Athletic Club, the South Shore Club, the Iroquois Club, and Bohemia Club.⁹⁵

2.4 Support of independent Czechoslovakia during World War I

The struggle for an independent Czechoslovakia was carried on by many people, some of whom, even sacrificed their lives in Europe while fighting as volunteers in foreign legions, for the Triple Entente against the Central Powers. The years 1914 to 1918 were challenging for Czechs because their soldiers fought on both sides, Austria-Hungary in the Central Powers and foreign legions in Triple Entente. One of the most prominent groups rooting for independent Czechoslovakia was the Czech and Slovak community in the United States, with Chicago as the center of the organized movement on the other side of the Atlantic.⁹⁶ However, the tendency of Czechs to either gain more power within the Habsburg Monarchy or to break free and be independent was not new, as we can see traces of it back to the Czech literary revival and revolutionary period of 1848.⁹⁷ This as indicated above, caused a significant wave of new migrants to the United States. Czechs generally maintained their culture, habits, and desire to know what was happening in the old country, mainly concerning politics and events of great importance, such as the beginning of the Great War. Throughout the centuries in Europe, a strong feeling of division between Slavs and Germanic people had developed, and this feeling was carried over even to the other side of the ocean.

Naturally, Czechagoans sided with their Slavic comrades, the Serbs, against the Austrians. On July 28, 1914, when the First World War began, they organized a protest at Pilsen Park in Chicago to support Serbia.⁹⁸ After this meeting, there was a solid demand to aid the Serbians and thus the international organization the Czechoslovak Red Cross, later renamed

⁹⁴ Roucek, "Czechs and Slovaks," 40–41; Vojan, and Laučík, "World's Fair," 33; Čapek, "Czechoslovaks in the United States," 33; Vojan and Pšenka, "Bohemian Almanac," 68.

⁹⁵ Pšenka, "Zlatá kniha," 236–237.

⁹⁶ Sternstein, "Chicagoland," 59; Rovnianek, "The Slovaks of America," 38.

⁹⁷ Jahelka, "Czechoslovak Independence," 381; Vojan, and Laučík, "World's Fair," 38.

⁹⁸ Jahelka, "Czechoslovak Independence," 386; Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 43; Pšenka, "Zlatá kniha," 41; Pacyga, "Czechs and Poles," 62–63.

the Czechoslovak Relief Association, was born.⁹⁹ Leading figures Josef Tvrzický and Jaroslav V. Nigrin soon realized that this war was a perfect opportunity to gain independence for their people in Europe, and they started sharing this idea among Czechs in Chicago. Nevertheless, the Czechoslovak Red Cross was not an organization designed to do such a task, and because of that, on September 2nd, the Bohemian National Alliance was founded by merging multiple organizations: the Czech-American National Council, the Czech-American Press Bureau and the Czech-Slav Relief Fund, with its president becoming a man named Jaroslav J. Zmrhal.¹⁰⁰

The influence of this alliance did not stop in Chicago; on the contrary, meetings were held in nearly every major Czech settlement across the United States, and it was decided to make the Chicago office the headquarters of operations for the entire country. Over the years, the number of branches grew to three hundred and fifty. The Alliance's main tasks were raising funds¹⁰¹ and spreading information and propaganda, for example, educating Americans unfamiliar with the ethnic issues emerging in Austro-Hungary and explaining why it was crucial to fighting for independence.¹⁰² They also acted as a recruitment center for Czech volunteers willing to fight as legionaries in France. It also became a bridge between American Czechs and their European counterparts, mainly Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and the National Council of Czech Countries in Paris.¹⁰³

Anton Cermak was not merely a passive supporter of the cause, but he actively worked to advance the formation of a new country in Central Europe. He spoke publicly at numerous events and gatherings, emphasizing the need for brotherhood between Czechs and Slovaks and promoting a strong sense of patriotism for the United States and its values. Cermak was at the forefront of various initiatives, serving as the president of the National Army Aid Association (a non-profit charitable organization helping US soldiers by donating them necessary material aid) and a member of the Liberty Loan Committee of the Twelfth Ward created by residents of the twelfth ward to organize financial support of Czechoslovak resistance in Europe.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Pšenka, "Zlatá Kniha," 42.

¹⁰⁰ Jahelka, "Czechoslovak Independence," 388; Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 43–44.

¹⁰¹ Pšenka, "Zlatá Kniha," 56.

¹⁰² Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 46.

¹⁰³ Jahelka, "Czechoslovak Independence," 394–398.

¹⁰⁴ Pacyga, "Czechs and Poles," 66; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 92; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 49–50.

By 1917, the motivation to support the independence of Czechoslovakia was very strong, and the cooperation between Czechs and Slovaks was at an all-time high. Political lobbying was necessary and left the biggest mark in this struggle. Propagator Charles Pregler contacted high politicians and officials of the State. Intellectuals like Zmrhal, Vojan and Pregler attended conferences where Czechoslovak matters were discussed, for example the Congress of Oppressed and Dependent Nationalities in Washington or the Long Beach Conference of Foreign Relations. The United States joining the war only accelerated things even more. Josef Tvrzický stated that at least three thousand volunteers were ready to join the war, six hundred from Chicago.¹⁰⁵ In May 1918, T.G. Masaryk visited the United States to garner support for the Czech cause receiving a warm welcome and attention as one of the leading figures of resistance against Central Powers.¹⁰⁶

Masaryk was no stranger to the United States, particularly Chicago, having visited there three times before the outbreak of war. For example, in 1902 he gave lectures at the University of Chicago on the philosophy behind Czech history and culture as being a small nation.¹⁰⁷ This was made possible through the invitation of philanthropist and Slavic culture enthusiast Charles Richard Crane who contributed to the realization of Slavic lectures at the University of Chicago. In addition, he later played an important role in the struggle for independence, using his power and contacts, particularly with President Wilson. During Masaryk's third visit in 1907, he again came to Chicago and held speeches at the Association of Czech Freethinkers.¹⁰⁸ Czechagoans did not hesitate and bought many US Liberty Bonds, a popular way of supporting America and its war effort. In the Third Liberty Loan, they invested almost 5,760,000 dollars and when counting the whole Czech population across the country, the amount of support went up to 50,000,000 dollars.¹⁰⁹

Later that year, the US acknowledged the National Council as the Czechoslovak provisional government. After President Wilson and the American government approved the Declaration of Czechoslovak Independence, the struggle for recognition was finally over. Without the tremendous economic and political efforts Chicago Czechs made over four years, achieving

¹⁰⁵ Jahelka, "Czechoslovak Independence," 401–405.

¹⁰⁶ Kovtun, "Masaryk," 43–45; Pšenka, "Zlatá kniha," 64; Magallon, "Historic Look,"

¹⁰⁷ Čapek, "Study of Czechs," 237; Kovtun "Masaryk," VIII.

¹⁰⁸ Kovtun, "Masaryk," VIII–IX, 17.

¹⁰⁹ Pacyga, "Czechs and Poles," 59; Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 59.

this outcome would have been significantly more challenging, if not impossible.¹¹⁰ But the support did not stop by winning the war and founding a new state, since the war began numerous people back in Czechoslovakia found themselves in dire living conditions following World War I, as many family members who had previously supported their households either died or were left unable to work due to injuries sustained in combat. This left many children as orphans and families struggling to survive. American Czechs, including Czechcagoans, recognized the urgent need for aid and sent many supplies, including staple foods and clothing, to those in need. In 1919 alone, hundreds of thousands of supplies were shipped to Czechoslovakia to help alleviate the suffering of those affected by the war,¹¹¹

The camaraderie experienced during the war persisted even after it ended, affecting charitable activities and political awareness. This was harnessed by politicians such as Anton Cermak to build a solid voting base. However, as the late 1920s and early 1930s brought about Prohibition and the Great Depression, people faced their own problems, and relying solely on the World War One euphoria was no longer effective. Consequently, Cermak spent years building his political machine and climbing the Democratic hierarchy. Ultimately, the Czechcagoan community's support for independence serves as a remarkable example of their significant influence in shaping the new nation of Czechoslovakia. Finally achieving political rule over their own lands was a goal their ancestors had envisioned for almost three centuries.

¹¹⁰ Jahelka, "Czechoslovak Independence," 407–410.

¹¹¹ Chada, *The Czechs in the United States*, 72–73.

3 ANTON CERMAK: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A UNITED STATES POLITICAL FIGURE

3.1 Life as a Czechcagoan

Anton Cermak was born on May 9th, 1873, in Kladno, Austria-Hungary (today's Czech Republic) to a working-class family with a low income. His father worked as a coal miner in Kladno, and his mother cared for their family at home.¹¹² Due to their rough economic situation, Anton's father moved to the United States for a brighter future. There were many reasons why families moved abroad to the US, but it is safe to assume that the Cermak family belonged to the category of economic migrants. They moved to Chicago in 1875 when Anton was only two years old.¹¹³ Their first stop was the Pilsen neighborhood, where Anton's father worked in a Bohemian community center, but not for too long. They moved again to a town named Braidwood, Illinois, where the primary source of income was yet again the coal mine.¹¹⁴

The significant Bohemian community in Braidwood was a huge benefit for their family, which was helpful if you were new in the country and did not know any other language.¹¹⁵ Cermak's education during his childhood was subpar, and his attendance record left much to be desired. Despite these shortcomings, he possessed an innate drive to achieve greatness. Even in his youth, he showed leadership skills, forming and leading groups, such as a boys' gang in Braidwood. When he was thirteen, Cermak secured his first job at the Chicago and Wilmington Coal Company. Despite earning a meager wage of around 1.50 dollars per day, he was motivated by his desire to help support his impoverished family. Cermak's charisma and fearlessness later earned him the role of spokesperson for his fellow miners. However, his advocacy for better wages ultimately got him fired. At sixteen years old, Cermak decided to move to Chicago. He was determined to succeed and make a better life for himself and his family. His journey toward achieving his goals had only just begun.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 6.

¹¹³ Pšenka, "Zlatá kniha," 235; Green, "Cermak's Machine," 100.

¹¹⁴ Green, "Cermak's Machine," 100.

¹¹⁵ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 4–5.

¹¹⁶ H.K. Barnard, *Anton the Martyr* (Sacramento: Hassell Street Press, 2021), 17–19; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 367–368.

In many cases, Cermak's life is reminiscent that of Benjamin Franklin and his story of a self-made man, in other words, a story of the American dream. Once in Chicago, living in the Pilsen neighborhood, Cermak started saving money by working for a street railroad company. After a few years, in 1892, he finally saved enough money to buy his horses and create a carriage business. Later, he became quite successful,¹¹⁷ employing 40 people and building a brand-new house. He also began doing business in real estate and joined forces with other real estate companies.¹¹⁸ In 1894, when Anton was 21 years old, he married a young woman also born in Bohemia named Marie Hořejšová. She worked as a milliner. For years to come, she stood by him, supporting his career and caring for their family.¹¹⁹ When Cermak was a state representative, he also tended to his business ventures. In 1907, he was elected president of the Lawndale Building and Loan Association. The following year, he became the manager of the Lawndale National Bank. Additionally, he was a prominent member of the Twenty-Sixth Street Business Men's Association.¹²⁰ Interestingly, he served on both the committee on banks and the committee on building-and-loan associations, which were issues of particular interest to him.¹²¹

Throughout the years, Cermak experienced various health issues, most related to his obsessive work ethic and the considerable amount of stress he faced. For instance, he suffered from kidney stones, inflammation of the colon as well as severe backaches caused by sitting behind his desk for prolonged periods.¹²² Sixteen-hour working day was not uncommon for Cermak. These health problems necessitated his hospitalization for several weeks, or his retreat to Florida to recuperate. Cermak also visited Czechoslovakia where he went through health procedures for example in Karlovy Vary. The first visit in 1921 was not only entertaining for him in seeing his former homeland, but it was also beneficial for tightening relations among Czechs in Europe and Chicago. He was proud to propagate the success Czechcagoans made abroad, and his messages sent back home helped to keep readers informed about his travels. In 1924, he was invited to visit his homeland by the Czechoslovak government, which he did several times, During his last visit to Czechoslovakia in 1932, Cermak met with several notable figures, including T.G. Masaryk

¹¹⁷ Pšenka, "Zlatá Kniha," 235.

¹¹⁸ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 13–15.

¹¹⁹ Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 23.

¹²⁰ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 23.

¹²¹ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 55.

¹²² Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 46; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 86.

and Jan Antonín Baťa in Zlín. Many politicians sought out Cermak to learn about US politics and his experiences working in a metropolis three times larger than (Czechoslovak) Prague. One of the primary objectives of Cermak's visit was to promote the World's Fair, which was scheduled to be held in Chicago in 1933 and featured a Czechoslovakian exposition.¹²³ Unfortunately, Anton passed away before the World's Fair in 1933 and could not witness the outcome of the tremendous effort he had dedicated to the event.

3.2 Political career

Cermak's political career began at the grassroots level in the Lawndale ward, where he had moved into a new house. He was a civic-minded individual who sought to contribute to public affairs, assist others, and enhance the quality of life in his community. In 1894, a fellow Czech American named Vladimír Červený approached him for assistance, as Červený was a member of the Democratic Party and hoped that Cermak could help him due to being young prosperous and respected businessman.¹²⁴ It could be speculated, Cermak viewed his political involvement as a new and exciting endeavor, an uncharted territory waiting to be conquered. It was also an opportunity for him to expand his social network as a successful businessman. He began his climb up the political ladder as a precinct election official, then became an assistant precinct captain, and finally achieved the position of precinct captain in 1900 after six years of hard work.¹²⁵ Cermak's responsibility as a precinct captain was to ensure smooth elections with maximum votes for Democrats. While he mostly acted with integrity, Cermak admitted using questionable practices in dire situations.¹²⁶

In 1899, Cermak secured a position as a court bailiff and was appointed secretary of his ward and chairman of the Democratic Party a year later. His direct interaction with voters for several years gave him valuable experience that he utilized throughout his political career.¹²⁷ By 1902, Cermak had set his sights on a new challenge, a step forward in his political career, and the role of representative in the Illinois General Assembly seemed like the perfect opportunity. With the support of the Czech community in his district and other groups like the Zoldaks (a club of Czechcagoan businessmen), of which he was a member, he had a solid

¹²³ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 120; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 66–68.

¹²⁴ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 20; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 16; Pšenka, "Zlatá Kniha," 235.

¹²⁵ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 21; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 18.

¹²⁶ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 18–19.

¹²⁷ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 23–24; Pšenka, "Zlatá Kniha," 235; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 16.

chance of being elected.¹²⁸ At a meeting of precinct captains in the Hotel Chicago, Cermak expressed his desire to the higher-ups of the Democratic Party. He spoke to George Brennan, who was essentially number two in the party hierarchy. Depending on your beliefs, it was pure coincidence or destiny that Brennan was a teacher in Braidwood and young Cermak was his pupil. After a warm welcome, Anton shared his desire to become a representative.¹²⁹ Despite the uncertainty surrounding Brennan's role in Cermak's election, he ultimately won by a slim margin of just one vote. Cermak's self-assuredness and charm may have influenced his success and upbringing in Braidwood, where the Czech community was predominant. This may have given him a sense of belonging and confidence that set him apart from other Czechs who suffered from an inferiority complex, a phenomenon that still exists today. In contrast to Chicago's larger Irish, German, and Italian communities, Cermak's background in a predominantly Czech environment may have contributed to his political success.

Still, Cermak felt quite nervous about his new job in the Assembly until he became more accustomed to his environment. Although he worked hard, his first term could have been more ground-breaking. In 1904, he managed to retain his position thanks to the support of his fellow Czechs and the Democratic Party. During his second term, he was appointed to more prestigious positions with actual influence on the matters he was interested in.¹³⁰ Cermak held a strong stance against laws that imposed restrictions on alcohol consumption, manufacturing, or sales probably because of his Czech cultural influence and firm belief in personal liberty. Being a frequent patron of bars and clubs in his younger days, he recognized the significance of these establishments in the lives of ordinary people and the economy. He believed any prohibition or limitation would only result in adverse effects such as bootlegging, smuggling, and increased criminal activity. To further his cause, Cermak joined United Societies for Local Self-Government and was elected as the organization's secretary and basically became their spokesman due to his position in the Chicago Charter Committee.¹³¹ Cermak's aim was not to remain in the Illinois General Assembly indefinitely. Instead, he wanted to play a role in Chicago's politics. He decided to run for the alderman seat in the Chicago City Council from the twelfth ward in 1909, which was a stronghold for

¹²⁸ Pšenka, "Zlatá kniha," 235; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 48–50; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 21.

¹²⁹ Paul M. Green, "Anton J. Cermak: The Man and His Machine." in *The Mayors: The Chicago Political Tradition*, ed. Paul M. Green, and Melvin G. Holli (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 100; Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 30; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 20.

¹³⁰ Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 31.

¹³¹ Green, "Cermak's Machine," 101; Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 31–32; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 52–54.

Czechs in the neighborhood of Czech California. Cermak triumphed on the election and began his work in the city council in April of that year.¹³²

Cermak's decision to maintain his seat in the State Legislature while serving as an alderman caused quite a stir and became a target for criticism. However, Cermak saw no problem with holding two posts as long as he continued to fulfill all his duties. In 1910, he eventually quit his post as a state representative to focus solely on his work as an alderman.¹³³ After two years of hard work, during which he gained a reputation as a reliable person, Cermak was appointed as a Bailiff of the Municipal Court of Chicago. This position required someone with qualities that Cermak possessed, such as leadership skills and the ability to handle responsibilities. It was also the first post where he had executive power and was responsible for his subordinates.¹³⁴ While performing his duties as a Municipal Court of Chicago Bailiff, Cermak attempted to leverage his position to assist individuals who received eviction orders from judges, even if it meant utilizing his own personal funds. However, as these cases grew into the hundreds, he could not handle it alone. As a result, Cermak established the Bailiff's Benevolent Association of Chicago, which allowed individuals to donate funds to support those in need.¹³⁵ We will never know for sure whether it was purely altruistic behavior or another approach to gain political points among voters. Maybe it was a mixture of both. Cermak was a heavily opportunistic person who tried to squeeze from any situation something beneficial for his cause, yet he felt the obligation to help people basically for the entirety of his life just because he was in many ways more fortunate than others.

In 1918, after six years of working as a Municipal Court of Chicago Bailiff, Cermak ran a campaign for the Sheriff of Cook County. However, he suffered his first electoral defeat for several reasons, such as lack of support from the German community thanks to his sentiment during World War I and recent allegations of corruption, even though they were never proven.¹³⁶ Due to these misfortunes, Cermak had only one viable option to continue his career: returning to his alderman post. Fortunately, winning in his twelfth ward was a safe bet as it remained unshaken and loyal. He resumed his position as an alderman in the Chicago

¹³² Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 33; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 58–61; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 32–33.

¹³³ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 62–64.

¹³⁴ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 34; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 77–79.

¹³⁵ Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 33–34.

¹³⁶ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 91–97.

City Council and served there between 1919 and 1922. The man Cermak replaced was his friend and ally, Otto Kerner, whose cooperation with Cermak dated back to 1902 when the lawyer Kerner provided legal support to Cermak. It is said that it was Kerner's idea in the first place not to run for candidacy again and leave the post to Cermak instead. Although Democrats were at a low point in the state and nationwide, they had a majority in the City Council, and Cermak was their leader and a leading figure in many important committees, wielding a degree of power against the Republican Mayor Thompson.¹³⁷ During his tenure, Cermak tackled various challenges facing the city, including working on the Chicago City Plan, which involved the construction of new city infrastructures and upgrading old ones such as roads and railway terminals and expanding city boundaries. Additionally, he had to deal with the economic issues resulting from Thompson's irresponsible leadership, which was a significant problem to find new revenue streams without increasing taxes. Finally, the battle against Prohibition was stronger than ever from 1919 onwards, and Cermak, along with the United Societies for Local Self-Government did everything in their power to stop or at least mitigate its negative impact on the city's budget and criminal activity.¹³⁸

Cermak did not want to serve as alderman indefinitely. Thus, when the opportunity to become the President of the Cook County Board presented itself, he embraced it. During the 1922 elections, he faced off against Charles S. Peterson, a wealthy Scandinavian businessman supported by the "dries", who was not a politician. As this was Cermak's first election outside his Czech community stronghold, he required additional support. He secured backing from the Irish-American Society of Cook County, probably thanks to Cermak's reputation as a devoted and respectable politician with public welfare in mind, and the Polish Fellowship League of Illinois, whose leader, M.S. Szymczak, was a close friend of Cermak's. Despite the stiff competition, Cermak emerged victorious by 20,000 votes. Initially, Cermak faced challenges as the majority of Republicans in the board and committees posed a significant obstacle for him. Democrats were one vote shy of gaining control over the board. However, in 1923, Murray, a Republican commissioner, switched sides and began cooperating with Cermak thanks to promised patronage no doubt. Finally, the much-desired work could commence. Cook County was the most populous county in the United States at the time with over three million residents, and its duties and budget were on

¹³⁷ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 98–100.

¹³⁸ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 111–121.

par with Chicago.¹³⁹ Cermak's main focus was improving matters such as the Cook County Forest Preserve, which provided a recreational area for people from the West Side to escape the busy city streets and pollution. People could enjoy picnics, swimming in a swimming pool, or playing golf. He increased the area from 27,000 acres to 32,000 to build all these places. Another significant accomplishment was the improvement of healthcare and elder care, particularly in Oak Forest where over 4,000 senior citizens of Cook County lived. Before his tenure, this facility had a negative reputation, but Cermak was able to change that. He increased the hospital budget from 500,000 to 1,000,000 dollars. Additionally, he oversaw the construction of new a county courtroom and jail. Cermak's investment in infrastructure allowed him to cut taxes by 10 % due to responsible economic policies and thorough savings in the county's budget. These efforts demonstrate his dedication to improving the lives of Cook County residents.¹⁴⁰

In 1928, a United States Senate special election was held in Illinois. Despite the Democratic Party not being the strongest at the time, they could not nominate just any ordinary politician without substantial experience in case they unexpectedly won the election. Cermak decided to take on this burden, even though that he had always emphasized that his political ambitions were limited to Illinois and Chicago, not politics on national level. His primary focus during the campaign was to end Prohibition, and he took every opportunity to fight for this cause, which was popular among citizens as well as among the (legitimate) business community. Unfortunately, his wife Mary Cermak was terminally ill during the campaign and was receiving treatment in Florida. She passed away that same year. Despite facing such a personal tragedy, Cermak performed better than expected in the campaign. However, this was not enough, and the Republican candidate emerged victorious. Nevertheless, Cermak's energy during the election did not go to waste. In August 1928, the Irish-American George Brennan, the leader of the Chicago Democratic Party, passed away, leaving a power vacuum that Cermak was ready to fill.¹⁴¹

Before Cermak could achieve the big score of mayoralty, he had to strengthen his position within the Democratic Party, especially since the Irish were his biggest and strongest

¹³⁹ Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 34–37; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 76–83; Gottfried, “Boss Cermak,” 122–132.

¹⁴⁰ Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 36–39; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 81–85.

¹⁴¹ Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 34–37; Gottfried, “Boss Cermak,” 157–168; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 130–136.

competition in the Chicago Democratic politics.¹⁴² The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 marked a turning point that benefited the Democrats. In 1930, Cermak won his third term in Cook County, an important step towards strengthening his position within the Democratic Party and achieving his ultimate goal of becoming the next mayor. Cermak's opponent in the mayoral race was William Hale Thompson, who was selected by historians and political experts as one of the worst mayors in US history.¹⁴³ Thompson had been Cermak's political rival since 1915.¹⁴⁴ The campaign was fierce, with Thompson resorting to personal insults against Cermak. In one famous quote, Thompson said, "I won't take a back seat to that Bohunk, Chairmock, Chermack or whatever his name is. Tony, Tony, where's your pushcart at? Can you picture a World's Fair mayor with a name like that?" Cermak responded quickly, saying, "He doesn't like my name... It's true I didn't come over on the Mayflower, but I came over as soon as I could."¹⁴⁵ However, Thompson's mocking of Cermak's name was a big mistake because it was seen as an insult in ethnically diverse Chicago to all non-Anglo-Saxon and Irish names. The result was an undisputable victory for Cermak with 200,000 more votes.¹⁴⁶

When Cermak assumed the role of mayor, he faced an enormous challenge. Chicago was in a state of near catastrophe, thanks to the incompetent and unethical leadership of Mayor Thompson. The city was buried in debt, with meager revenue streams and low employee morale. Only around 50 % of all taxes were collected in 1930. Cermak was shocked by the condition of the city's treasury, remarking, "I knew that the city was in bad shape financially. But I never dreamed that it was entirely broke, flat broke. Hardly a nickel was left."¹⁴⁷ Drastic actions were necessary. Up to 2200 superfluous positions were eliminated, and those who remained had to work much harder than they had under Thompson to retain their jobs. Other cost-cutting measures were implemented, thus, the cost of the city's administration in 1932 was lower by 13 million dollars compared to 1931. Many people were unhappy with these changes, but Cermak had no other option in order to save the city from a financial

¹⁴² Harold F. Gosnell, *Machine Politics: Chicago Model* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1937), 102.

¹⁴³ Melvin G. Holli, *The American Mayor: The Best & The Worst Big-City Leaders* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 12–13.

¹⁴⁴ Douglas Bukowski, "Big Bill Thompson: The "Model" Political," in *The Mayors: The Chicago Political Tradition*, ed. Paul M. Green, and Melvin G. Holli (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 62.

¹⁴⁵ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 182–183.

¹⁴⁶ Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 45–51; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 163–177.

¹⁴⁷ Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 55.

collapse. Thompson had even paid employees with funds previously allocated for other expenditures. Since banks had also refused to lend the city more money, and as a result, various funds were depleted by the time Cermak took office.¹⁴⁸

Despite Cermak's successful efforts to prevent Chicago financially collapsing, the city still encountered economic difficulties, particularly concerning paying the salaries of municipal workers. Cermak met with Franklin Delano Roosevelt on February 15, 1933, in Miami to acquire federal aid. However, during the meeting, an Italian man named Giuseppe Zangara, hiding in a crowd next to Roosevelt's car while the future president was giving a speech, attempted to shoot Roosevelt but shot five other people, including Cermak. Roosevelt immediately had Cermak rushed to the hospital and ordered his car to drive him there. After undergoing surgery, Cermak's condition stabilized, and for some time, it seemed that he would recover. He even worked from his hospital bed, keeping his focus on his goal of securing money for municipal employees, particularly teachers. The much-needed funds were prepared for payment a week following the assassination attempt. However, after spending some time in the hospital, Cermak's condition suddenly worsened, and he passed away on March 6, 1933.¹⁴⁹ Some people speculated that Cermak was the target of the assassination from the start, possibly because of his ongoing conflict with the Chicago mafia due to his efforts to end Prohibition, as the mob was making a tremendous amount of money from bootlegging and illegal speakeasies. However, this theory has never been clearly supported by any concrete evidence, remaining confined to the realm of rumors and speculation. Lawyer Francis X. Bush appointed by Cermak in 1931 to reorganize city hall's legal department made a comment about Cermak's work attitude.

He had a quick brain, and he was a resourceful, wonderful administrator. He loved administration. He had a great pride in his administrative ability. As an administrator he was more astute than Dever,¹⁵⁰ although both were keen for efficiency. But Cermak, knowing politics, was better in enforcing discipline. An appointee had to produce, or his sponsors had to give him another man. He was independent and smart. He had a sense of people trying to use him. He was not polished or direct; he spoke plain English. He was more ruthless than Dever, not sentimental about getting rid of people. He was a great measurer of the political worth of an individual. You wouldn't fool him. He always knew how much influence each one had in his ward. I admired him, but I loved Dever.

¹⁴⁸ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 247; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 192–197, 209–216.

¹⁴⁹ Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 79–84.

¹⁵⁰ William E. Dever was a Democratic mayor of Chicago between 1923–1927.

You couldn't love Cermak. He didn't have personal warmth. But had he lived he would have made a great mayor.¹⁵¹

3.2.1 Political Machine and Nepotism

The political machine played a crucial role in American political history, especially regarding Democratic Party from 1850 to 1950. The most famous example of this machine is Tammany Hall in New York which has an undesirable reputation of being a center of corruption thanks to those like Mayor Tweed,¹⁵² in fact, among connotations around political machines, corruption is the most common one. Democratic political machine in New York from 1840 to 1850 focused on the influx of Irish immigrants fleeing their homeland due to the potato famine. Being threatened by white Anglo-Saxon Protestant ideologies, Irish immigrants sought protection in terms of politics, religion, and work stability in exchange for tremendous voting power, which grew yearly.¹⁵³ Those in charge in Tammany Hall saw this opportunity, and thus, the machine was started and kept running for the following decades. In general, these machines aimed to gain and maintain political power by providing social services and jobs to immigrants and the working class in exchange for their support in elections. The political boss or “bosses” who controlled the machine often held significant power and influence over the government and the city. This influence was maintained through the distribution of patronage, such as government jobs, contracts, and favors, to loyal supporters.

Chicago was a turbulent and ever-changing city in terms of both demography and politics. As the second largest city in the United States during its time, it experienced a stable influx of migrants, mainly from Europe. This influx of people forced Democrats and Republicans to adapt to these changes to prevent their political machines from becoming stagnant. Cermak owes the start of his career to the unwavering support of the Czech community, which he maintained until his passing. However, he also achieved the remarkable feat of creating a multi-ethnic political machine, which was crucial for his successful runs for political offices, such as the President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners and the Mayor of the City of Chicago.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Gottfried, “Boss Cermak,” 270.

¹⁵² Terry Golway, *Machine Made: Tammany Hall and the Creation of Modern American Politics* (New York: Liveright, 2014), 93.

¹⁵³ Golway, “Machine Made,”

¹⁵⁴ Green, “Cermak’s Machine,” 99–100.

For a significant period, Cermak garnered support from various Slavic ethnicities, including Slovaks and Poles, in addition to Czechs. He also managed to secure support from the Jewish community during his presidency in Cook County thanks to decisions like creating a special Jewish section in the county's poorhouse.¹⁵⁵ The cooperation between Czechs and Poles in Chicago dates back to the early days of their communities, based on the mutual benefit of a strong political influence. By combining their resources, these communities could compete with other ethnic groups, particularly the Germans and Irish. This cooperation provided a solid foundation for building a powerful political machine. During the 1870s, the Czech community in Chicago was more developed and organized than the Polish community, and thus the Czechs remained the leading figures to a certain extent until the 1930s, even though a well-organized Polish community twice their size had emerged by then. Cermak recognized the existing Czech-Polish cooperation during World War I and saw the opportunity to leverage it for his political machine. He understood that maintaining the status quo was vital to his success.¹⁵⁶ However, it was almost impossible for Cermak to rally every ethnicity under his banner. He struggled for years against the Irish and German communities, depending on the political climate in the city and the world at large. For instance, during World War I, Cermak was a staunch advocate for independent Czechoslovakia. In his speeches, he strongly denounced Germans and Austrians to the extent that he lost the majority, if not all, of his German voters. This backfired on him during his 1918 campaign for the office of Sheriff in Cook County.¹⁵⁷ Regarding the Irish community, it was not just Cermak who had difficulty getting along with them, the entire Czech community faced similar challenges. Despite this, Cermak cultivated influential Irish allies like Pat Nash, who helped greatly in gaining Irish votes.¹⁵⁸

In addition to the ethnic tensions and the competition between Democrats and Republicans, there was one issue that divided society more than anything else - Prohibition. For years, people were split into "wets," meaning those who supported drinking alcohol and "dries," who were against alcohol consumption. From the very beginning in 1907, Cermak was against any alcohol prohibition and fought against it for more than half of his political career

¹⁵⁵ Allswang, "Ethnic politics," 106; Green, "Cermak's Machine," 103–104.

¹⁵⁶ Pacyga, "Czechs and Poles," 56–68.

¹⁵⁷ Green, "Cermak's Machine," 100; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 92–94.

¹⁵⁸ Green, "Cermak's Machine," 103, 107.

as a top member of the United Societies for Local Self-Government. This issue had a significant impact on both his political and personal life. Anton Cermak's involvement as one of the wet leaders from the beginning provided him with a potent weapon - a common ground for many individuals who identified themselves as wet and were willing to fight alongside others regardless of ethnicity, beliefs, or social class. This topic, which unified diverse groups under a single cause, was a goldmine for someone with political ambitions like he did.¹⁵⁹ Unfortunately, Cermak passed away shortly after prohibition was finally abolished in the State not having time to enjoy the victory.¹⁶⁰

Nepotism has long been a well-known and widely used technique for gaining political influence and allies at all levels of political life, from the city to the state to the nation. This form of patronage involves granting a job to someone in exchange for their loyalty or as a show of gratitude for their support. Unfortunately, nepotism often comes at the expense of work quality because many people in these positions lack the necessary skills to perform the required tasks. Cermak often used his political power to strengthen his position in his current office and within the Democratic Party. For instance, during his presidency in Cook County, he maintained solid and positive relationships with Czechagoans by appointing high-ranking positions to Czechs, such as Karel Josef Vopička, who became a member of the Board of Education, and Jan Ptáček, who was appointed police captain. Additionally, many Czechagoans held top management positions in various facilities within Cook County, such as František Věneček, who served as the director of Oak Forest senior center, and Otto Princ, who was the chief doctor. Furthermore, some clinics within the hospital were led by Czechs, such as Dr. Pecival in the psychiatry department and Dr. Jelínek as the head dentist.¹⁶¹

Cermak was known to repay previous support by appointing his supporters to various positions. One such case involved M.S. Szymczak,¹⁶² who led the Polish Fellowship League of Illinois and supported Cermak during the elections in Cook County. As a result, Cermak appointed Szymczak to work for the Cook County Forest Preserve District between 1926 and 1928. Additionally, Cermak recommended Szymczak for a position on the Board of

¹⁵⁹ Pacyga, "Czechs and Poles," 67–68. Allswang, "Ethnic politics," 105–106.

¹⁶⁰ Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 32.

¹⁶¹ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 83, 153.

¹⁶² "U.S. SENATOR LEWIS WANTS SZYMCZAK ON CIVIL SERVICE BOARD," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 15, 1933, https://archive.org/details/per_chicago-daily-tribune_1933-03-15_92_63/page/n5/mode/2up?q=Szymczak+Chicago

Governors of the Federal Reserve System,¹⁶³ and Szymczak was ultimately selected as a member of the Board, where he served from 1933 to 1961. Others like Otto Kerner and Červenka benefited from friendship with Cermak, but probably the biggest seat by 1933 with Cermak's man sitting on it was Illinois' Governor Henry Horner¹⁶⁴ who consulted with him on many occasions about the state's administration.

To eliminate competition, Cermak often resorted to nepotism. For instance, when deciding who would become the Democratic candidate for Mayor in 1930, Cermak faced opposition from Irish democrats seeking the same position. To secure the nomination for himself, Cermak made promises to Michael Igoe, offering him the role of commissary for South Chicago Park, along with support for his candidacy for State Representative and Democratic National Committee. Another contender, Herman Bundesen, was planning to run as an "independent democrat," which caused a stir. Cermak responded straightforwardly: "Bundesen wants to be health commissioner, and I'll give it to him. I think he'll withdraw."¹⁶⁵ As expected, Bundesen withdrew from the race after being offered the position.

During Cermak's tenure, the Democratic Party was fragmented into competing factions, the largest and most potent being the Sullivan and Harrison groups. Throughout the years, Cermak aligned himself with each faction as he saw fit and typically emerged victorious. While his opponents viewed this as pure opportunism, his supporters viewed it as a clear indication of his brilliant diplomatic skills.¹⁶⁶ Although Cermak was inclined to the Harrison group for around fifteen years, in 1915, he started to transition to the Sullivan-Brennan group, and by 1920 Cermak became a full-fledged supporter of the now-just Brennan group due to Sullivan's death, and indeed his nomination as president of the county board in 1922 could be viewed as a form of a reward from Brennan.¹⁶⁷ As the old saying goes, "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer." This statement can also be applied to the relationship between Cermak and Brennan. To maintain power within the Democratic party, it was

¹⁶³ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 79.

¹⁶⁴ "HORNER WINS; SMALL ALSO." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 13, 1932, https://archive.org/details/per_chicago-daily-tribune_1932-04-13_91_89/mode/2up?q=Cermak

¹⁶⁵ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 204.

¹⁶⁶ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 33–34; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 66–69, 81.

¹⁶⁷ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 105, 122–123.

essential to maintain a good relationship with Brennan, despite him being Cermak's biggest rival and obstacle on the hierarchy ladder since 1920.

Building a robust political machine requires gaining control over your party as a first step. After Brennan died in 1928, Cermak became the Chairman of the Democratic Party in Chicago, thereby consolidating his grip on the party. With this accomplishment, he could set his sights on the mayoral office. The 1931 mayoral election saw Cermak's machine achieve impressive results, with Czechoslovaks giving 84 % of the vote to Cermak, Poles 70 %, Lithuanians 62 %, Yugoslavs 64 %, Jews 61 %, and Americans 61 %. The only groups that remained loyal to Thompson were predominantly African Americans at 84 %, Italians at 53 %, and staunch Republicans.¹⁶⁸

3.2.2 Crime and Corruption

Organized crime and political machines made a dangerous combination in Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s. Anton Cermak balanced between two worlds - fighting against crime and gangs while trying to benefit in his business ventures and political ambitions. Over the years, Cermak was involved in several scandals and even charged with various offenses, though he was never convicted. Cermak had many enemies, including his political nemesis William "Big Bill" Thompson and notorious gangster Al Capone. It's no surprise that Thompson and Capone worked together, helping each other stay in power politically and financially. During Thompson's time as mayor, protection against law enforcement became a regular commodity within his administration, which crime bosses could buy, and in return, Al Capone donated money to Thompson's campaigns.¹⁶⁹ Organized crime flourished due to Prohibition, as people were thirsty for illegal alcohol, and criminal groups were more than happy to meet the demand. As mentioned before, Cermak was fully aware of this connection and dedicated a significant amount of time and resources to end Prohibition and cut off the gangs' revenue streams.

Yet seemingly no one was immune to some kind of disgrace. Anton Cermak was first embroiled in a scandal known as the "Lorimer Affair" in 1909 when Republican William Lorimer was elected as an Illinois State Senator with 108 votes, 53 of which were from

¹⁶⁸ Green, "Cermak's Machine," 105; Allswang, "Ethnic politics," 48, 161; Bukowski, "Big Bill," 80.

¹⁶⁹ Bukowski, "Big Bill," 61, 77.

Democrats. Accusations of bribery quickly surfaced, and the US Senate declared the election invalid in 1912, forcing Lorimer to resign. The investigating committee questioned Cermak to determine if he had been paid to vote for Lorimer, but he was never found guilty. Despite this, Cermak's opponents were not satisfied, claiming that his friendship with Lorimer and his close connection to the main Democratic briber, Lee O'Neill Browne, was evidence of his guilt. Historian and author Alex Gottfried said in his book from 1962, "Cermak was plagued with accusations relating to Lorimer until the end of his life."¹⁷⁰

In 1917, while working as a Bailiff, Cermak got into trouble again. Municipal Judge Gemmill accused him of corruption and office misconduct, claiming that the Bailiff's Benevolent Association, mentioned in the Political Career chapter, was forcing people to donate money, and these funds were used for bribes. The atmosphere was dire until a witness came forward and gave testimony that cleared any allegations, and Gemmill had to withdraw. However, the damage was done, and Cermak demanded an official apology. An investigation held by the Judge's committee on bailiffs took six months, and Cermak's name was cleared, but Gemmill did not apologize. As mentioned in the Political Career chapter, the negative press surrounding this investigation contributed to Cermak's lost elections for the post of Cook County Sheriff.¹⁷¹

During his tenure as President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners in 1926, Cermak faced yet another accusation of graft. The Citizens Association accused him and the board of buying land through intermediaries instead of dealing directly with the landowners, wasting millions of dollars. However, Cermak refuted these allegations by granting the Citizens Association access to relevant documents, demonstrating that 90 % of deals had no intermediaries. Additionally, the combined value of the acquired lands had increased by 25 million dollars over the years. Also, he invited some citizens to the forest-preserve advisory committee to avoid further allegations. In response to this minor scandal, Cermak adopted a new coping strategy. Rather than "declaring war" on his opponents, he remained calm,

¹⁷⁰ John Callan O'Laughlin, "WILL ASK SENATE TO REPAY LORIMER \$25,000 EXPENSES?" *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 15, 1912, https://archive.org/details/per_chicago-daily-tribune_1912-07

15_71_169/mode/2up?q=Lorimer+election+invalid; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 56–58.

¹⁷¹ Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 51–52; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 51–52.

reasonable, and cooperative. By doing so, he displayed confidence in his own right and maintained a positive image.¹⁷²

One potential scandal emerged while selecting the Democratic candidate for Mayor in 1930. As discussed in the chapter on Political machines and nepotism, Cermak successfully convinced all potential candidates to withdraw from the race, except for John S. Clark, who refused to step down despite Cermak's efforts. In December of 1930, Clark announced during a Democratic meeting that he had been offered 250,000 dollars to withdraw from the race. This revelation caused a stir, with many demanding to know whether the offer had come from Cermak or his associates. Clark denied that Cermak was involved, stating that it was someone acting on behalf of those interested in Cermak's election. Cermak himself never confirmed or denied any involvement. The potential scandal was averted because the media was kept in the dark. The Democratic Party kept anything discussed during the meeting a closely guarded secret.¹⁷³

The fact that Cermak was never proven guilty of any fraud or misconduct indicates his innocence or that he was "part of the system" where those in power with connections and money could occasionally slip between justice's fingers. Ironically, out of all people it was Thompson who tried to compromise Cermak during the 1931's campaign accusing him of illegal activities claiming that someone with a fortune estimated up to 6 million dollars¹⁷⁴ could not make it entirely by legal actions.

When Cermak assumed the position of mayor, he finally gained control over the police force, which was essential for his goal of eliminating gangsters, particularly Al Capone, from the city. In typical Cermak fashion, his first action was to conduct a thorough inspection of the city's police, which revealed that 200 positions were unnecessary. He also reassigned several officers from desk jobs to street patrols. Additionally, numerous Police Captains, who were put in charge by Thompson, were dismissed for "incompetence." There were some

¹⁷² Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 145–146; Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 104–106.

¹⁷³ Edward L. Gorey, *Chicago Evening American*, December 17, 1930; Gottfried, "Boss Cermak," 202.

¹⁷⁴ The accuracy of this sum provided by William Hale Thompson is unclear, but if his claim was valid, the equivalent purchasing power today, accounting for an average inflation rate of 3.02% between 1930 and 2023, would be \$95,363,054. Ian Webster, "Value of \$6,000,000 from 1930 to 2023 Inflation by Chicago Illinois," Official Data Foundation, accessed April 25, 2023. <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1930?amount=6000000>.

controversial directives given by Cermak to the police officers regarding their handling of gangs. Despite requiring a warrant from a judge, he allowed police raids in brothels, casinos, and illegal alcohol breweries. Furthermore, he told police officers to “shoot first” if they encounter armed criminals. Additionally, Cermak created a new police team consisting of his most loyal men, equipped with state-of-the-art gear and following orders directly from him. The public gave this team various monikers, like “Cermak’s Commando.”¹⁷⁵

Cermak was not alone in his desire to see Al Capone behind bars. Many individuals worked towards this goal, including federal detective Eliot Ness, FBI director Edgar Hoover, Treasury Department's Bureau of Internal Revenue agent Frank Wilson, US Attorney Johnson, and US district judge Wilkerson. However, a significant obstacle was that these individuals could have collaborated more effectively, viewing each other more as competitors than colleagues. Nonetheless, Cermak prioritized ensuring that the city hall supported any effort to bring Capone to justice, a type of backup that would have been impossible under Thompson's administration. On October 6, 1931, Al Capone's trial began with tax evasion charges. The verdict was delivered on October 24, sentencing Capone to 11 years in prison and a fine of 50,000 dollars.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 198–204.

¹⁷⁶ Philip Kinsley, “GANG MONARCH GUILTY ON 5 TAX FRAUD COUNTS,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, October 18, 1931, https://archive.org/details/per_chicago-daily-tribune_1931-10-18_90_42/mode/2up?q=Al+Capone+guilty Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 203, 224–228.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this thesis was to describe Czech immigrants living in Chicago, who created in the late nineteenth and early twenty centuries unique community nowhere else to be seen due to its size, reaching up to the second spot of the biggest Czech city after Prague, and its influence on the politics within city, county, and state.

In the first chapter, the thesis listed how economic instability in some fields, like mining, forced people to leave their homes and look for work abroad. Also, the failed revolutionary period of 1848 caused many politically active people to seek haven in the US. Lastly, those who felt discriminated against due to their different religion in a vastly catholic country felt the need to find a new home. By combining these three main reasons, the Czech community in Chicago rapidly grew, becoming influential ethnicity among others.

The second chapter of the thesis describes the growth of Czech neighborhoods contributing to the city's overall development and leaving its mark visible even today. The neighborhoods like Pilsen and Czech California were functioning like hubs to the Czech cultural, social, and economic life with streets filled with stores, banks, meeting halls for Sokols or many offices of building and loan organizations that held the capital necessary for such rapid expansion. Among Czechcagoans were many successful individuals active in business and politics, like Jan Červenka and Karel Vopička, both involved in the two biggest Czech brewing companies in Chicago. Červenka was for many years a friend and ally of Anton Cermak, working together on many occasions. Vopička played a role in the struggle for Czechoslovak independence during his post as a US ambassador. Czechcagoans were generally helpful during World War I thanks to Chicago being headquarters for operations of the Bohemian National Alliance, rooting for independent Czechoslovakia via fundraising and political agenda.

The final chapter focused on Anton Cermak, arguably the most well-known Czechcagoan politician. His story is truly a variation of the "American dream" about someone who managed from poverty to become a rich businessman and, a more importantly powerful politician who built his own Democratic political machine focusing on ethnics like Czechs, Poles, and Jews as well as spoils to his allies in the form of jobs and lastly uniting people against Prohibition in the name of personal liberty. Anton Cermak was a workaholic with a

strong desire to seek and maintain power, but unlike William Hale Thompson, he kept public welfare in mind doing anything he could to show that he was a responsible politician. By the end of his life, Anton Cermak was the most powerful man in Illinois, having under control Chicago, Illinois' Democratic Party, Cook County and Governor's office. Democratic Party was stronger than ever in Illinois thanks to Cermak, and even after his death, the remains of the Democratic machine he left helped his successors. From 1931 to 2023, no one was elected as a city's Mayor outside Democratic Party.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

US United States