

SLOVENE-AMERICANS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.: A CASE OF OPTIONAL ETHNICITY

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“Slovenes came to Washington, D.C. as individuals and as families and did not come to form ethnic enclaves. In Cleveland it was a question of survival, and now they still form small ethnic enclaves in the suburbs. They came to Washington because they had certain occupations, and they didn’t depend on their ethnic group to get started.

“As far as my job is concerned, it is irrelevant that I am a Slovene. I came to Washington totally as an American with a strong ethnic background. I have never been part of an ethnic enclave in the United States, and I haven’t needed other Slovenes for personal survival. Instead, when I got to Washington, I found that being with other Slovenes provided a positive and enjoyable influence on my life. It’s been a matter of choice. We get things done only through voluntary cooperation, which takes more effort and commitment on the part of a relatively small number of people. But I feel most comfortable with that sort of arrangement.”—A first-generation Slovene.¹

INTRODUCTION

To be Slovene in Washington, D.C., is a special ethnic experience. By choice, these individuals, families and friends feel and express their ethnicity in a manner fitting their own backgrounds and the unique features of the metropolitan area. In order to be successful, ethnic group activities must have a high priority, and require considerable effort on the part of a limited number of leaders in a handful of organizations. The results, however, are very rewarding, and there is great pride in the accomplishments of the community.

Beginning in the late 1960s the concept of ethnic pluralism generated enthusiastic attention throughout American society. The desire to be culturally distinctive (as opposed to being only part of an amorphous ‘melting pot’) has become a basic theme in the lives of many Americans. For white ethnics, especially, the past two decades have been a relatively congenial time for stressing ethnic identity. Some scholars argue that ethnicity serves to offset a sense of *anomie* that has become increasingly characteristic of our mobile, rootless society.²

A concern with ethnic maintenance certainly has not escaped the attention and the lives of Slovene-Americans. As an ethnic group and as individuals, they have been very visible in the awakening of American society to the special benefits of recognizing its ethnic heritages.³ The extent of their visibility is especially notable in light of the fact that Slovenes constitute a relatively small ethnic group.⁴

The Slovene-American community in Washington, D.C., is a particularly unusual and interesting case of ethnic identity preservation. A cosmopolitan city with a great mixture of people representing most national constituencies around the world, Washington is not an especially ‘ethnic’ city in the sense of having clear-cut white ethnic neighbourhoods or large numbers of people who represent certain European heritages. Specifically, it is home to a relatively small number of ethnic Slovenes. Even so, they are remarkably active

organizationally, and during the past two decades have established a series of social and religious events that are observed faithfully from one year to the next.

This article addresses the following aspects of the Slovene-American community in Washington: 1) composition and social and demographic characteristics; 2) organizational structure and annual cycle of events; 3) emphasis upon certain aspects of ethnicity; and 4) incentives and constraints on ethnic identity.

“Ethnic identity,” as used here, means a sense of attachment to and affiliation with an ethnic group. This feeling is founded on acquiring meaningful behaviors, values and symbols which are appropriate for interacting with other members of the ethnic group. Members of an ethnic group have a subjective belief in a common heritage, or have adopted a tie to the group through intermarriage or voluntary ascription.⁵

Data for this article consist of four types of original source material: background resource interviews, semi-structured ethnic identity interviews, open-ended life history interviews, and attendance at organized events. Most of the information was collected during the early and mid 1970s; in what follows, these data are summarized and amplified with follow-up materials gathered in 1986. Also, census materials and published accounts are used; ethnographical and historical studies of Slovenes in North America generally were reviewed for this study, but its focus is on the situation in Washington, D.C.

MIGRATION HISTORY AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

As late as 1940 the Washington area was home to so few Slovene speakers that they were not counted in the census. Most of the Slovenes now in the area migrated there after World War II; they began moving there for occupational reasons and have arrived in increasing numbers ever since. The city provided many more professional and white collar jobs than industrialized areas of the country. Government work, especially, expanded, attracting well-educated Slovenes both from other States and from Yugoslavia. According to interviewees, individuals came one by one and family by family, knowing no one on their arrival. They did not establish ethnic neighbourhoods, but dispersed to all parts of the Washington SMSA.⁶

Almost all the interviewees commented on the advantages of Washington for their professional work. One woman noted: “If you happen to be a political creature, this is the best place to live.” Immigrants from Europe had Washington high on their list of desirable places to live. Not only does it strike many as being ‘European’ in tone and appearance, but it is now a cosmopolitan city; its physical beauty and cultural abundance, combined with unique career possibilities, have been very attractive to well-educated Slovenes.

Estimates of the number of Slovenes have been made using four approaches: the size of the organizations; personal estimates by Slovenes; the researcher’s listing of individuals; and census data.

It can be accepted that about 100 Washington SMSA Slovene families were active in ethnic organizations during the 1970s. Monthly Mass at the Slovenian Chapel (see below) was then attended by 40-50 people, and the five or six social events during the year attracted about twice that number. By 1986 attendance had increased substantially at these get-togethers, and often drew people from outside the area. In 1971 the Washington chapter of the Slovenian Women’s Union had 29 members; by 1986 the membership rose to 47, of which approximately equal numbers were born in Slovenia and in the U.S.A. There were about 50 members of the Bishop Baraga Society of the American Slovenian Catholic Union (KSKJ).

Census findings vary greatly from one decade to another. The *1970 Census* was unusually thorough in providing data for ethnic group estimates, in that both place of birth and mother tongue were questioned; however, the specific statistics for Slovene-Americans are, for a number of reasons, unreliable, and tend to result in *underestimates*.⁷ Keeping this in mind, it can be reported that first-generation Slovene mother tongue speakers in the city of Washington rose from 4 in 1910 to 16 in 1960, and to 29 in 1970; in the Washington SMSA, the number rose from 28 in 1960 to 74 in 1970. This increase in first-generation Slovene speakers in the 1960s was exceeded by the increase in second-, third- and later-generation Slovene speakers; and altogether in the Washington SMSA in 1970, there were 538 people who spoke Slovene as their mother tongue: 63 first-generation, 358 second-generation, and 100 third-generation and beyond.

Compared with the 21 other SMSA's for which these data were published, Washington was tenth in the number of Slovene mother-tongue speakers, behind Cleveland (the largest at over 22,000), Chicago, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, New York City, Los Angeles, Detroit, San Francisco, and Minneapolis.

Nothing reported from the *1980 Census* contradicts the figures from 1970, though the later statistics are much less rich for our purposes. Indeed, the kind of questions asked make the data insufficiently comparable with earlier results.⁸ From the data available and interviews it does however appear that the number of Slovenes in the Washington SMSA has risen since 1970, especially in Northwest Washington and the Maryland suburbs.

The author's best estimate, using all the approaches mentioned, is that between 800 and 900 people of Slovene ethnic heritage live in the Washington area. Of these at least 75% belong to the 'second-and-beyond' generations. Primarily a suburban population, about 85% of the total live in Maryland and Virginia. They are highly educated, compared both with the local population and with Slovene-Americans nationally. Most have entered the professional, managerial, technical and clerical occupations; about half are government employees. Interviewees observed that their fellow-Slovenes in the area are inclined towards academia and "work involving the mind;" the occupational preference was described as "learning, teaching, and working with people." Median income levels for families and for individuals are higher than the national levels for Yugoslav-Americans in other U.S. cities.⁹

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND ANNUAL EVENTS

Considering their relatively small numbers, and the fact that they have no central meeting-place other than the Slovenian Chapel at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Slovenes in Washington are organizationally very strong. Furthermore, they have retained an apolitical stance with respect to their organizational activities. Politics are explicitly downplayed; according to one community leader, "We cannot afford to get into these conflicts. There are not enough people to be able to take the chance of factional disputes and still have viable organizations. We do have our fights, but we manage to keep on an even keel. We have to." This does not however imply that Slovene-Americans in Washington are disinterested in politics. Like most Washingtonians they are a politically alert group; but usually political discussions are carried on privately, among friends who understand each others' political positions.

Their organizational structure is composed of a single local organization, the Slovenian Heritage Committee of Washington, and three chapters of national Slovene fraternal organizations:

There is a branch of the *Slovenska Narodna Podporna Jednota* [SNPJ] (headquarters: Chicago; founded 1904) in Arlington, VA, but it has not attracted many Washington members, partly due to its reputation as being primarily an insurance company.

In contrast, the local Bishop Baraga Chapter (No. 257) of the *Kranjsko-Slovenska Katoliška Jednota v Združenih Državah Amerike* [KSKJ] (headquarters: Joliet, IL; founded 1894) is particularly active; most of the people interviewed are members.

The third national organization with a local chapter is the *Slovenska Zenska Zveza v Ameriki* [SZŽA] (headquarters: Sheboygan, WI; founded 1926). The Washington chapter was founded in 1965 and, with the Heritage Committee and the Bishop Baraga Chapter, is very instrumental in promoting Slovene events locally.

An important change in the composition of the last two-named organizations has occurred recently. More younger men and women have joined them, and have become very active. While in the past the parents of these young people might well have had to urge them to be involved, now they are doing so on their own. Furthermore, they share leadership responsibilities with the older women and men; and this is seen as a reassurance that the organizations will flourish in the future. This development is welcomed enthusiastically by the founders and ongoing supporters of the groups.

Organizational flexibility is another factor cited for the success of these organizations and the activities that they sponsor. In the mid and late 1960s they went through a 'settling-in' period, with meetings held in members' homes in Northwest Washington, the most central location. The choice of place to hold annual events (a choice among three churches in Washington and Bethesda, MD) was also made, in part, out of consideration for convenience for the largest number of people. Over the years, a traditional series of five or six events has been established, events that everyone can schedule as part of their annual social calendar. People have become comfortable with this arrangement. Flexibility is maintained, however, in that occasional get-togethers are added, ensuring greater support for the organizations. According to interviewees, this strategy has not only resulted in increased membership and leadership; it has also led to higher attendance at events.

As of 1986 five social events are scheduled regularly every year, and a sixth is scheduled for alternate years:

- 1) *Mardi Gras* is held before the beginning of Lent, and is sponsored by the Bishop Baraga Society. It is a social gathering at which traditional foods (such as *krofi*) are served.
- 2) *Slovenian Heritage Day* is observed in April each year, and is sponsored by the Slovenian Heritage Committee. Primarily an adult performance of various aspects of Slovene cultural life for the benefit of the children, it consists of music, readings, lectures, slides and films. The local singing group also performs.
- 3) The *Mother's Day* ceremony occurs in May and is sponsored by the SZŽA. During the event, the children offer cultural entertainment for their mothers; it includes a procession, literary readings, singing, and instrumental music. The 'Slovenian Mother of the Year' award is given, and, as at all the social gatherings, traditional food is served.
- 4) The *Saint Martin's Day Dinner Dance* is a major social event. It occurs in November, and is organized by the SZŽA. Following a concert, dinner is served, with dancing to a Slovene instrumental group; and there are other types of entertainment. The number attending varies, but generally this event draws a large number of people, including Slovene-Americans from outside the area and local non-Slovene friends.

5) *Saint Nicholas Day* is held in December and is sponsored by the Bishop Baraga Society. The activities, which focus on the children, include gift-giving, singing, and the appearance of 'Saint Nicholas', 'angels' and 'devils'. As with the other events, there has been an increase in the number of participants in this activity.

6) The *Virginia Folk Festival* is held in May of alternate years; the Washington Slovene-American community participates.

Although these events provide a solid and predictable structure within which Slovene-Americans in Washington can plan to see each other regularly, other get-togethers among friends also occur with some frequency. The Singing Group, in particular, meets monthly in a private home to practise both four-part formal song arrangements and folk songs; the formal songs are often performed at the events listed above.

In addition to the normal cycle of annual activities, the local organizations frequently arrange a special event around the arrival, from elsewhere in the United States or Slovenia, of a dignitary, especially a religious leader. For example, the Archbishop of Ljubljana visited Washington in 1981 for the decennial of the Slovenian Chapel, and a special event was organized to mark the occasion.

The building of the Chapel of Our Lady (Marija Pomagaj) of Brezje at the National Shrine was a major national undertaking for Slovene-Americans, and also brought the local community together in a joint endeavor: it was initiated by the efforts of a Washington Slovene, and supported by a resolution of the SZŽA at its National Convention in Washington in 1965; and the local Slovenes provided liaison between the various organizations involved. It was consecrated at a ceremony in 1971, with the Most Rev. Maksimiljan Držečnik, Bishop of Maribor, officiating.¹⁰ Since then, Mass has been held on the first Sunday of every month; these masses provide another context within which organizational planning and socializing occurs.

ASPECTS OF ETHNICITY MAINTENANCE

Other than organizational activities, what are the means through which ethnic identity has been preserved among the Slovene-American in Washington? Four spheres of potential preservation of cultural heritage are considered here.

1) *Marriage patterns*: Interviewees have varying points of view about expectations for ethnic identity preservation among their children and grandchildren. These expectations are closely linked to the high probability that members of the the current generation will not marry other Slovenes. Most people said that the chance of one young Slovene in Washington marrying another young Slovene was "one in a thousand" or "almost impossible." Since it is such a small ethnic group, the chances of even meeting a potential Slovene spouse is highly unlikely. The study conducted in the 1970s showed that interviewees had considerable difficulty of even thinking of couples where both spouses were Slovene. The 1986 follow-up showed that at least two or three such marriages have occurred. None of the several single people interviewed was, however, intentionally looking for a Slovene spouse.

According to many ethnic group members, the ramifications of out-marriage are considerable for the future maintenance of Slovene ethnic identity. Widely varying views about marriage to non-Slovenes were expressed. One person noted that "Intermarriage has been a fact of life for Slovenes; it has been going on since 700 A.D. I don't think it, in and of itself, brings about a decrease in ethnic identity." A less optimistic picture was painted by another: "Marriage within the same ethnic group is important to the extent that if both

parents are of the same ethnic background, children more readily feel Slovenian;" and, "If a Slovene is married to another Slovene, the customs remain. If not, they disappear."

While virtually everyone expected mixed marriages to influence ethnic maintenance, there was no sense conveyed that parents should urge their children to attempt to marry within the Slovene group. Not only is such a strategy unfeasible, given the realities in Washington, but interviewees also saw it as an unfair intrusion into their children's lives and inappropriate in this day and age. Instead, they anticipated that their children would preserve their ethnic heritage in ways appropriate to the context of their own lives.¹¹

2) *Family ties*: In contrast to the realization that most of the children would marry non-Slovenes, interviewees believed strongly in the value of family closeness in fostering a sense of ethnic identity:

"A real family closeness, including the extended family members, exists. This closeness can be seen in the automatic acceptance of me and my immediate family by our relatives, no matter how infrequently we see each other. Such family closeness is rare and outstanding in this day and age."

A third-generation Slovene

In addition to the emphasis upon closeness within the family, interviewees also identified thriftiness, efficiency, neatness, hard work, and academic study as characteristics of Slovene homes. Growing up in such families is seen to inculcate certain values that embody both familial and ethnic group culture. Godparents in these families were usually chosen from within the ethnic group, especially when both parents had Slovene ancestry.¹²

3) *Religion*: All the interviewees were affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church as children. At the time of the interviews, two were agnostic. Most people attended the monthly mass (see above); in addition, many were also members of a non-Slovene Roman Catholic parish in the area.

Opinions on the role of religion in their daily lives ranged from religion having very little importance to the predominant view of religion being clearly interlocked with ethnicity. The overall pattern of responses in this respect was that religion is part and parcel of Slovene ethnic identity, and that the church is one context within which ethnicity is learned and appreciated.¹³

4) *Language*: Speaking Slovene is not, by and large, considered critical to the maintenance of Slovene ethnic identity. In contrast to first-generation individuals who had grown up speaking Slovene at home, this was rare for second-generation and non-existent for third-generation Slovenes, at least among those interviewed. When Slovene was spoken, certain factors were especially influential. First, the parents often had a strong desire for their children to learn the language. Second, if the parents both spoke it fluently, the children were much more likely to learn it. Third, the presence of Slovene-speaking grandparents (or other extended family members) within the home, or nearby, was a major incentive. Finally, if the family had visited Slovenia, there was considerably more interest on the part of the children to learn at least some Slovene.

In general, language is not considered a good measure of Slovene ethnicity: "I know many people who don't speak Slovenian and still feel a very strong tie to the old country. The best way to know about Slovenia is to live there, not to know the language." In the late 1960s an attempt was made to hold Slovene language classes, but there were too many problems with the arrangements and with finding teachers. In the mid 1980s, little Slovene is spoken at ethnic group gatherings. With so many English-only speakers in attendance, the speaking of Slovene is unworkable.

Even though relatively few American-born Slovenes in Washington know Slovene, there is still a considerable interest in Slovene publications. Some are published in Slovene, some in English, and some in both languages. A few of the publications read regularly come from Yugoslavia. Many are ethnic publications; for example, *Zarja* and *Amerikanski Slovenec / Glasilo*, published by the SZZA and the KSKJ respectively, are widely read.¹⁴

INCENTIVES FOR AND CONSTRAINTS ON ETHNICITY

To analyze the incentives and constraints that affect the extent to which Slovene ethnicity is maintained and the way in which it is preserved, we consider six major domains which interplay to influence cultural continuity and discontinuity among ethnic groups in American society generally, and the Slovene community in Washington specifically.

1) *The Historical Domain*. Direct involvement with historical developments or the indirect acquisition of knowledge through reading and hearing historical accounts affect the values that Slovene-Americans hold regarding their ethnicity. World War II is still a powerful chapter in the Slovene history for many. For some of the Washington Slovenes, the war was a personal experience; others have lived it vicariously through the personal accounts of family members and friends. For others, especially those born in the United States following the war, this part of history blends well into the background of their knowledge and experience. For pragmatic reasons, among others, Washington Slovenes downplay political ideology, including that based on wartime events, in their organizational activities. Political experiences and the interpretation of historical events do, however, play an important role in the commitment that many people feel for their ethnic heritage.

2) *The Demographic Domain*. A principal limitation on regular social interaction among Washington Slovenes is the sprawling nature of the city and its suburbs. This aspect is seen as posing serious constraints on ethnic maintenance. Convenient access to work and school, and the availability and cost of housing, have led Slovenes to live in all parts of the Washington SMSA. Typically, too, Washington people stress their occupational responsibilities and work long hours; by and large, it is not a city where people socialize spontaneously. Ethnic gatherings are usually planned well in advance. Thus, the physical context and the population profile serve as constraints against day-to-day ethnic interaction.

Interviews with Washington Slovenes made it clear that membership in one or another generation is not directly related to the degree of ethnic identity maintenance, although such membership is often connected to the way in which ethnic identity is maintained. Among the offspring of American-born Slovenes, some rather novel approaches have been adopted for the retention or rediscovery of ethnicity. For some, ethnic language has become an interesting challenge, often to facilitate visits to relatives in the homeland. Familiarity with ethnic music and dance has always provided a major means for the expression of ethnicity, and the current generation is no exception. Second-generation Slovenes have, however, more consistently followed ethnicity patterns throughout their lives than has been the case with their children and/or grandchildren.

3) *The Societal Domain*. The attitudes of the wider society within which the members of the ethnic group live has a great deal to do with how comfortably ethnic identity can be openly maintained. The social climate for European ethnics has gone through some substantial changes in American society during the past century. A common observation made by interviewees has been of the perceived decrease in discrimination with respect to their ethnic background during the past 20-30 years.

The successes of certain Slovene-Americans within the wider American society carry particular symbolic meaning. The name of former Senator Frank J. Lausche, from Cleveland, has been often raised as an example of an ethnic group member who had achieved a notable status in society and who serves as an example to young people with respect to the possibilities of political or professional aspirations. The selection of Frank Lausche in October 1986 to receive the Ellis Island Medal of Honor is of special pride to Slovene-Americans.¹⁵

4) *The Organizational Domain*. It is in the establishment of ethnic organizations and the regular observance of annual activities that the Washington Slovenes have especially excelled. They consider themselves (and others consider them) well-organized and professional in the way they do things. With these organizational resources, parents understand that if they wish to increase their children's exposure to their ethnic background, it is important to have them involved in these activities, many of which explicitly focus on the children and their understanding of their heritage. In Washington, therefore, the availability of a rich organizational life is a positive incentive for Slovene ethnic maintenance.

5) *The Familial Domain*. The family is of paramount importance in inculcating a sense of ethnic identity among the younger generations, especially in a city like Washington. Without a strong commitment on the part of the family, it is extremely unlikely that the children will grow up with an appreciation of their ethnic heritage, let alone practise it. Parents and grandparents were usually those cited as having been instrumental in teaching the ethnic background. This second generation woman's comment is typical:

"My mother is the one who is mainly responsible for my Slovenian ethnic identity. She has really pushed it. I can't imagine feeling that I had much of a Slovenian ethnic background if it weren't for her. My father used to tell me anecdotes about his childhood, but not so much about the Slovenian people. But my mother was always concerned about the nationality. And really concerned about preserving some cultural heritage in her family. If I had not been brought up in that environment, I would not have become interested in the Slovenes in Washington."

It is within the family context that a concern for Slovene heritage is usually learned. A third generation man, for instance, noted how his grandfather told him stories from the homeland, stories which his own children now find interesting. Birth order seems important in the extent to which a child focuses on ethnic identity: first-born children are, usually, the most ethnically conscious of the siblings, according to interviewees.

6) *The Individual Domain*. The five aforementioned domains converge with the individual domain to help determine the particulars of ethnic identity maintenance. Through socialization experiences, an individual acquires a cultural heritage by making selections among available alternatives. In addition to the external incentives and constraints offered by these five domains, individuals also generate their own internal incentives and constraints, which are critical in determining the place of ethnicity in their lives.

THE OPTIONAL NATURE OF SLOVENE ETHNICITY

In Washington, the preservation of Slovene ethnic identity is a matter of personal choice. Little pressure is brought to bear upon Slovenes either to downplay or to affirm their ancestry. Maintenance of ethnicity has no implications for economic or political survival; nor does it raise problems of social status within the wider society. In short, it is optional.

For those individuals and families who wish to retain their ethnic heritage and impress it upon their children, a supportive social context is available through local Slovene organizations, and religious expression is possible through participation in Mass at the Slovenian Chapel. The community is large enough and well enough organized so that friendships with fellow Slovenes can be developed. The chances of finding a spouse within the Slovene group are small, however.

Differences of political persuasion are de-emphasized in Slovene public life in Washington; thus, political diversity does not interfere in the *esprit de corps* of the group, nor does it prevent certain people from taking part in the group's activities. Similarly, it is not necessary to speak Slovene to be a leader in local organizations or to be a full participant in ethnic group life. A shared cultural heritage—with emphasis on music, food, family closeness, religion, a rich literary tradition, a strong work ethic, and a history of survival as a small nation—links Slovenes in the nation's capital together in a distinctive community.

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3. John Arnez, *Slovenci v New Yorku* (New York: Studia Slovenica, 1966), and *Slovenian Community in Bridgeport, Connecticut* (New York: Studia Slovenica, 1971); G.E. Gobetz, *Slovenian Americans in Greater Cleveland* (Willoughby Hills, OH: Slovenian Research Center of America, 1975).
4. According to the 1980 Census, approximately 126,000 in total; see The Bureau of the Census, *Ancestry of the Population by State, 1980* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980) 75, table 4.
5. Bennett, 9-13.
6. SMSA = Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. The Washington SMSA comprises the District of Columbia and the Washington suburbs located in the states of Maryland and Virginia.
7. See Bennett, 68-93. Note that 'place of birth' is insufficiently informative, since not only Slovenes but many others would report "Yugoslavia" and "Austro-Hungary", and since some Slovene-speakers were born elsewhere in Europe. Note also that 'mother tongue' data relied on the question as to what was the "language spoken at home as a child" but did not actually list Slovene as one of the choices, which thus had to be written in; also, a number of people maintain Slovene ethnic identity without having spoken Slovene at home as a child.
8. The Bureau of the Census, *General Social and Economic Characteristics, District of Columbia, 1980* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980). For example, tables listing native language use in SMSA's omit Slovene; and 'ancestry of population' is listed for each separate state and not for SMSA's. The statistics for persons who identified themselves as of Slovene ancestry, at least in part, in the individual states for 1980 are: the District of Columbia, 39; Maryland, 667; Virginia, 1072.
9. Bennett, 88-89, Table 16.
10. See Bennett, 163-64, for details.
11. Cf. Bennett, 104-08, for further examples.
12. Bennett, 108-10.
13. Bennett, 137-39.
14. Bennett, 148-49, 152-57.

15. In fact, these medals were supposed to be awarded only to members of U.S. ethnic groups of 200,000 or more, a criterion by which Slovenes would not qualify according to the 1980 census estimates. This sparked a campaign by the Slovenian Research Center of America in support of the argument that population figures were much less important than the actual contributions of an ethnic group to American society. The Statue of Liberty Ellis Island Foundation was convinced; Frank Lausche was one of 80 people awarded the medal. This evidence suggests that the societal domain in which Slovene-Americans live (especially those in Washington) no longer poses constraints against ethnic membership.

POVZETEK

V Washingtonu, D.C., danes živi kakih 800 do 900 slovenskih Amerikancev, ki ohranjajo zavest svojega etničnega porekla na dokaj svojski način, skladen z osebnim profilom posameznikov, njih osebnimi ambicijami, in ne najmanj - v skladu z značilnostmi povsem svojskega okolja ameriške prestolice. To sorazmerno neveliko skupnost v glavnem sestavljajo akademsko vzgojeni in poklicno usmerjeni izobraženci slovenskega pokolenja. Mimo vseh možnih različnosti v gledanjih na svet in življenje in nad vsemi političnimi prepričanji se je v tej skupnosti doslej posrečilo spraviti skupaj niz občudovanja vrednih letnih prireditev prosvetnega značaja. Posamezne prireditve te vrste, ki se jih udeležujejo številni Slovenci in ne-Slovenci, sklicujejo krajevne enote Kranjsko-slovenske katoliške jednote in Slovenske ženske zveze, kakor tudi washingtonski Odbor za ohranitev slovenske dediščine (Slovenian Heritage Committee in Washington, DC). Druge vrste prireditev washingtonske slovenske skupnosti predstavlja udeležba pri skupnih verskih srečanjih, cerkvenih obredih in pobožnostih v slovenski kapeli Marije Pomagaj z Brezij v American National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception v Washingtonu. Ena osnovnih značilnosti vsega tega etničnega življenja, tako svojska za washingtonski krog slovenskih Amerikancev, je v dejstvu, da pri vsej zavzetosti za ohranitev zavesti porekla, ohranjanje slovenske zavesti v tej skupnosti ostaja stvar osebne izbire posameznika.