



HOW GERMAN IS AMERICAN?

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Cora Lee Kluge, Kevin Kurdylo, Mark Loudon, Antje Petty
Max Kade Institute

the study. The first author (SM) was the primary investigator and was responsible for the design, data collection, and data analysis.

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Illinois at Chicago. All participants gave their informed consent before participating in the study.

Methods

Subjects

Forty-four young adults (20 males and 24 females) were recruited from the University of Illinois at Chicago. The participants were screened for any history of psychiatric or neurological disorders.

The participants were randomly assigned to the control group ($n = 22$) or the experimental group ($n = 22$).

The control group consisted of 10 males and 12 females with a mean age of 21.7 years ($SD = 1.2$).

The experimental group consisted of 10 males and 12 females with a mean age of 21.5 years ($SD = 1.1$).

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INTRODUCTION

German-American identity is, in the words of the historian Russell Kazal, a “paradox.” German-speakers have been coming to America for over three centuries, and more Americans claim German ancestry than any other. Yet there would seem to be little evidence of a distinct German-American subculture today. As another historian, Kathleen Neils Conzen, puts it, German-American identity has become “submerged” over the past century. Many German Americans themselves point to the recession of the German language from public and private life as a central example of this submergence and cite World War I as the beginning of the end for German America.

There is no denying that ethnicity no longer plays an important role in the everyday lives of most Americans of German descent. But recent scholarship has shown that the weakening of German-American identity was due less to external pressures (such as anti-German sentiments during WWI) than to the fact that German Americans, consciously or not, have come to identify themselves according to new categories, like race and class, that cut across ethnic lines. Regardless of its causes, the high degree of German-American assimilation has led some to believe that all that is left of German America is fossils: place names, the occasional half-timbered farmhouse, and gravestones.

In “How German Is American?” we explore the many ways in which influences deriving from German-speaking Europe, rather than being submerged, may still be seen flowing in the mainstream and tributaries of culture across the American landscape. Twenty images have been selected that reflect some of the ways German-speaking immigrants and their descendants have affected and been affected by other American groups. While several of the images are historical, others are modern, emphasizing the fact that German-American interaction

continues. But even the older images address themes that are relevant today and apply to American cultural groups generally, not just German Americans. In the discussion that follows, we consider how many of these themes help us understand the transatlantic ties that have bound the U.S. and Germany together throughout the years.

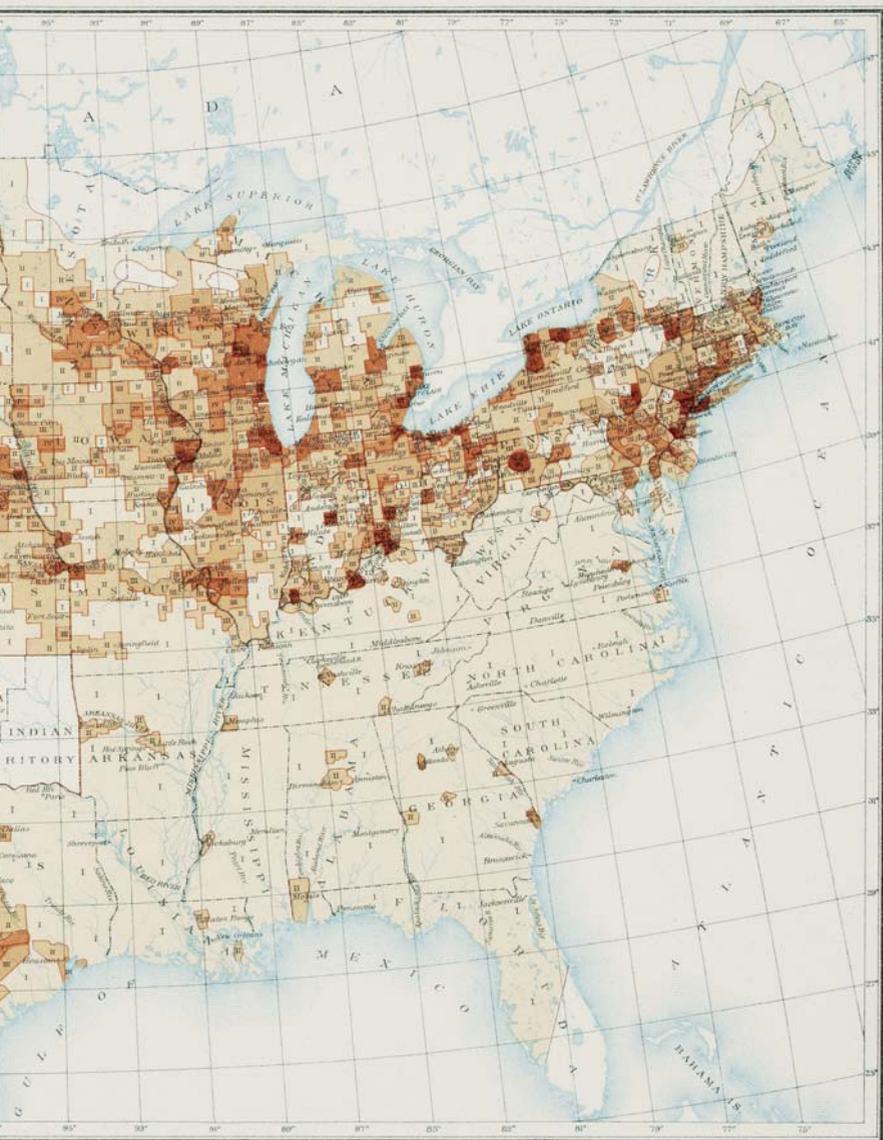
The layout of the poster is inspired by Bauhaus concepts of design. We were drawn to the timeless modernism of Bauhaus and found that the utilitarian simplicity derived from its organizing principles complements the complexity of the twenty diverse images on the poster. The strong connections between Bauhaus and American design and architecture, which are especially visible in the city of Chicago, fit well with the overall transatlantic theme of "How German Is American?" The primary colors yellow, red, and blue, which serve as borders for the images, are elemental in the Bauhaus language of visual design. The typeface of the title is Futura, which was created in 1924 by a prominent Bauhaus disciple, Paul Renner (1878–1956). The following 1951 quote from Renner on design serves as an apt motto for the project: "Das Ziel alles Gestaltens ist es, aus dem Vielerlei ein Ganzes, aus dem Mannigfaltigen die Einheit zu machen und nicht ein Ganzes in zusammenhanglose Teile zu zerlegen." (The goal of every attempt to give shape is to make out of different things a whole, out of diversity a unity, and not to reduce a whole to disconnected parts.)

We do not expect a definitive response to the question "How German Is American?" that is posed by the images and text to follow. We hope that viewers and readers will be informed, yet also inspired to think about "Germanness" and "Americanness" in new ways, as these concepts relate to themes of migration, cultural contact, and identity transcending the particulars of the German-American experience. While our poster and brochure represent finished products, the "How German Is American?" pages on the MKI Web site (mki.wisc.edu) will continue to evolve. Your feedback will be an important part of this evolution.

HOW GERMAN IS AMERICAN?



Statistical Atlas of the United States, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898, map 58, plate 20.



SETTLING IN AMERICA

According to the U.S. Census conducted in 2000, 42.8 million Americans identified themselves as being of German ancestry, representing 15.2% of the total U.S. population. By comparison, the next largest group, Irish Americans, comprised 10.8% of the population, while African Americans and Americans of English background each accounted for just under 9%. It is estimated that between 1800 and the present over seven million German-speakers emigrated to the U.S., the majority of whom arrived between about 1840 and 1914, with the peak period coming in the early 1880s. In the nineteenth century many of these immigrants settled in the states of the Upper Midwest, an area known to this day as America's "German Belt."

The map reproduced on the preceding pages shows the distribution of European-born German-speakers ("natives of the Germanic nations"), based on the 1890 census. The different shades of brown indicate varying densities of persons born in German-speaking territories: the darkest color shows 20 individuals or more per square mile, the lightest color shows fewer than 1/2 per square mile, and no color at all shows a total aggregate population of fewer than two persons per square mile. The map does not reveal information about the proportion of Germans vis-à-vis other groups, and a greater density of Germans in some areas may be largely a sign of a greater total population density there. Nevertheless, what one understands at a glance is that German-born immigrants were concentrated in cities as well as in the countryside from New York City in the east to Minnesota in the west and from the Great Lakes region south to the Ohio River. But there were also other German areas, including parts of Texas, California, and the state of Washington. At this time a number of centers of German-speaking culture emerged as immigrants estab-

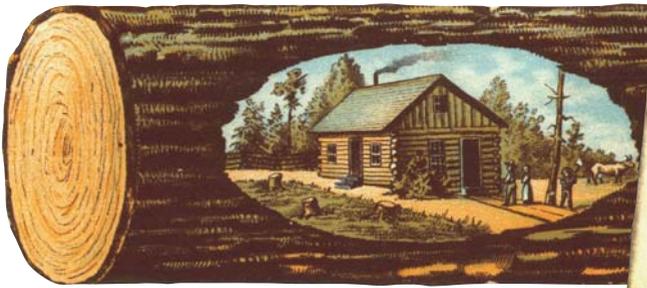
lished German schools, churches, theaters, and publishing houses.

Today, over a century after the census from which this demographic information was taken and therefore approximately four generations later, the descendants of these immigrants have become less likely to identify with their German heritage. This is reflected in a marked increase in the number of respondents who reported their ancestry in the latest census as simply “American”: in 2000 “American Americans” accounted for 7.2% of the total population, a 63% increase over 1990. While this trend may well be evidence of the “submergence” of German-American identity referred to above, twice as many Americans still do identify with their German roots.

What motivated these seven million German-speakers to come to America? Historians have identified a complex mix of factors underlying immigration generally, largely economic ones. On the one hand, socioeconomic distress in many areas of German-speaking Central Europe periodically “pushed” migrants westward; on the other, the “pull” of new opportunities in America was considerable. Most immigrants were attracted by the promise of financial security in the form of sufficient property that one could legally own and pass on to one’s descendants. In the nineteenth century this meant one thing above all else for rural dwellers, including the majority of the German-speaking immigrants: land.

According to traditional accounts of immigration in places like rural Wisconsin, German settlers were drawn to landscapes that resembled the areas they came from in Europe, especially heavily wooded ones, and were more fastidious and ultimately successful stewards of the land than the Yankees. The symbolic and practical importance of the forest in German culture, especially during the nineteenth century, did much to reinforce this romantic view of German settlers. Americans of older stock were seen as more eager to make a quick buck rather than invest large amounts of time and resources in their land; this stereotype endures to the present in

Image courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society, WHI-24505.



images of enterprising but somewhat rootless Americans. However, recent scholarship on nineteenth-century immigration has shown that local practical realities were more important in guiding Germans to choose where to settle than any innate cultural inclinations. To be sure, some evidence does support the view that German settlers valued a varied landscape and were generally less likely to move once they had established themselves in a particular location. And certainly popular narratives about Germans and their closeness to their land endure.

The romance of the American frontier is illustrated by the log-shaped card above whose purpose was to attract Germans to northern Wisconsin. During the nineteenth century the Federal Land Grant Program played a major role in promoting the expansion of the American nation. It accomplished this in part by granting land to railroad companies that promised to build along proposed routes; these, in turn, raised funds for railroad construction by selling some of the land. The Wisconsin Central Railroad, incorporated in 1877, hired W. H. Bartell beginning in the 1870s to serve as its land agent; by 1881 he is said to have sold as much as 10,000 acres. Bartell engaged the Milwaukee lawyer K. K. Kennan to serve as his repre-

sentative in Switzerland, and published brochures in German and English praising the advantages of Wisconsin land. It is important to note that virtually every American frontier state had agents in Europe to promote emigration, and many states also had offices in New York to assist new arrivals.

The two-sided log-shaped card is one of Bartell's advertisements; on it one can read in German that "our German friends would do very well to send this card to one of their acquaintances in Europe and mention to them [sic] that they could receive valuable information about the state of Wisconsin free of charge by sending their address to K. K. Kennan in Basel." The English text, apparently for those already living in the U.S., states that one could get information by writing to the land commissioner of the Wisconsin Central Railroad in Milwaukee. The image on the front of the card would seem to speak to Germans bound culturally and practically to forested landscapes: looking at a scene framed by a sturdy oak log, we view a homestead on recently cleared, though by no means denuded, land. The cow grazing in a pasture hints that dairy products and meat will be available. In the background the undisturbed woodland endures, demarcated by a fence, an important New World way of indicating property boundaries. Front and center we are drawn to the classic American log cabin, whose origins, interestingly, may be traced back to Northern and Central Europe.

During the nineteenth century, German-speaking immigrants were usually not the first people of European descent to settle on the American frontier. In the case of Wisconsin, Germans were preceded by the French and the Yankees. This meant that German-speakers were less likely to be directly involved in the physical and cultural displacement of the continent's original inhabitants, the Native Americans. Nevertheless, one intriguing and very much unfinished chapter in the long history of European-American relations deals with the contacts, real and imagined, between Germans and Indians.

David Zeisberger (1721–1808), a native of German-speaking Moravia, spent his life as a missionary of the Moravian (Herrnhuter) Church, working mainly in Pennsylvania and Ohio with various Indian groups. His extensive writings on Native cultures and languages, several of which he spoke fluently, remain invaluable sources of information for scholars today. The reproduction on this page shows Zeisberger, as portrayed in 1862 by the Alsatian-American immigrant artist, Christian Schussele (1824–1879).

In part because of contacts between German-speaking immigrants and Native Americans, Germans back home developed a fascination with Indians that has continued unabated to the present. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, hundreds of fictionalized treatments of American Indians appeared in Germany, the best known of which are the novels of Karl May (1842–1912), whose only visit to America—in 1908—came after he had completed most of his works. Today, there are an estimated 200 “Indian clubs” in Germany whose members don feathers and war paint and “recreate” traditional Native

**Image courtesy of the Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA,
<www.moravianarchives.org>.**



ceremonies. An important corrective to these activities is the Native American Association of Germany, e.V., founded in Kaiserslautern in 1994 by Lindbergh Namingha, a former U.S. serviceman and member of the Hopi Tribe. Back in the U.S., the novelist Louise Erdrich (b. 1954), whose mother is Ojibwa Indian and father German-American, has thematized German-Indian cultural contact to great acclaim.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Soon after their arrival, German-speaking immigrants began organizing institutions around which community life revolved. Although many of these local groups, such as clubs and religious congregations, were ethnically fairly homogeneous, the new arrivals, having made the difficult decision to migrate, saw themselves as very much a part of their adopted community. Despite place names like New Berlin, New Glarus, and New Holstein, they did not, for the most part, strive to create “little Germanies” on the American landscape. A look at both secular and religious community institutions illustrates nicely the synthesis of Old and New World influences in the (post-)immigration context.

In American communities as far-flung as New York, Cincinnati, La Bahia (Texas), Plymouth (Wisconsin), Lawrence (Kansas), and San Diego, one can find meeting halls and theaters bearing the name “Turner” or “Turn Verein.” The Turner movement, founded in Berlin in 1811 by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, had an enormous impact on the development of American gymnastics, both as a sport and as a formalized program of instruction within the public schools. The first Turner societies in the United States were organized in 1848 by German immigrants and exiles fleeing their country after the failed democratic revolutions of 1848/49. These “Forty-Eighters” created athletic, cultural, and social organizations throughout the country in the tradition of the German Turnvereine, which in today’s Germany are only one of many types of “Sportvereine.” The Turner motto, “Sound Mind in a Sound Body,” expresses their vision for realizing human potential through the integration of intellectual and physical development.

Some of the more radical Forty-Eighters and Turners were also Freethinkers. Freethinkers promoted an attitude of liberalism and rationality unencumbered by religious dogma, and many supported

progressive ideas such as public education reform, improved working conditions, voting rights for women, and the abolition of slavery. These issues were often raised among the Turners as well, and may explain in part the fact that large numbers of Turners enthusiastically responded to Lincoln's call for volunteers in the Union army.

The Milwaukee Turners, who provided this image, received their charter from the Wisconsin State Legislature in 1855. In 1875, their first salaried gymnastics instructor, George Brosius, became the city's

Photo courtesy of the Milwaukee Turners.



(and America's) first Superintendent of Physical Education. Five years later, a group of Milwaukee Turners, with Brosius as their coach, traveled to Frankfurt to participate in the annual Turnfest there, becoming America's first gymnastics team to compete (and win!) internationally. The Turners played a central part in the vibrant, German-influenced artistic, political, and civic culture of Milwaukee, the city once known as the "German Athens of America." The Milwaukee Turners continue today to express a deep concern for social reform and the pursuit of honest and open democratic government. Thus it is not surprising that six Milwaukee mayors, three of whom were socialists, were also Turner members. The Milwaukee Turners' continuing commitment to civic affairs is exemplified today by their involvement in the 4th Street Forum, a nonpartisan program in which panels of experts engage in dialogue with members of the public to address a range of issues of community concern.

Many Turners, Forty-Eighters, and Freethinkers were motivated by decidedly secular ideals, and admittedly religion was not the primary factor in most immigrants' decisions to leave their German homelands. Nevertheless, religion was profoundly important to the majority of the German-speaking immigrants, as it is today among their descendants, and the churches they built in America became important reflections of their origins and traditions. Traveling through rural Dodge County in southeastern Wisconsin, for example, one might come upon a little church with an unusual name: "Zum Kripplein Christi," translated by the congregation as "To the little manger of Christ." Established in 1849, this Evangelical Lutheran church is an example of the many houses of worship built by German immigrants. Today, Zum Kripplein Christi shares a pastor with nearby St. John's Church and maintains an elementary school of the same name serving ten students.

Unlike other immigrant groups, German-speakers did not comprise a single, homogeneous religious group, and in America they

were represented in numerous denominations. Thus, as early as the 1860s German-speakers in southeastern Wisconsin identified themselves as Catholics, Lutherans, Reformed, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Quakers, Jews, or organized Freethinkers. Embracing the American model of individual religious freedom, German immigrants became more flexible in their choice of church, and individual congregations had a greater degree of autonomy than they would have had in Europe. Nevertheless, their desire to belong to a German community church frequently trumped their religious heritage. When German Americans belonged to historically Anglo-American denominations, they were often at odds with certain Yankee social mores. Especially with regard to alcohol and festival culture, German-American Protestants had more in common with their Catholic countrymen than with other American Protestants.



In the nineteenth century, churches were the centers of German-American religious, social, and cultural activity, especially in rural areas; German-language services, parochial school events, and celebrations of religious holidays were important events in community life. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, German was the language used in services

Photo courtesy of Prof. James P. Leary, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

and Sunday school in most of these churches. In the more autonomous Protestant churches, German often lasted several decades longer. Zum Kripplein Christi, for example, offered a Sunday service in German as recently as the 1990s. Despite the shift to English, particularly the Lutheran congregations have not forgotten their German roots. Heritage tours, student exchange programs, and mutual visits by choirs are examples of the enduring ties between Germans and Americans on the local level.

The diversity of religious expression among German-speaking immigrants was paralleled by a high degree of heterogeneity stemming from differences in regional and linguistic origins. This situation differed from that of other nineteenth-century immigrant groups, notably the Irish, but also Italians and people of other European backgrounds. The resulting lack of a unified and clearly definable German-American community explains in part why only few Americans, including those of German descent, have any idea when Steuben Day or German-American Day falls, whereas the Irish St. Patrick's Day is one of America's most popular celebrations, and Columbus Day, named after the Italian explorer, is a federal holiday.

This historic heterogeneity was and to some extent still is reflected in the plethora of clubs and societies linked to German ethnicity. These "Vereine" (clubs, societies, associations) allowed members of the growing middle class to associate publicly with one another and became an important social expression of the changes brought on by industrialization in Germany during the nineteenth century. German-speaking immigrants brought the "Vereinswesen" (club culture) with them to America, where it represented not only an example of direct cultural transfer, but also a means through which the transition from the Old Country to the New could be eased.

Many of these clubs did not last beyond the first generation, especially with the rise of mass and consumer culture during the twentieth century, which weakened older social divisions along ethnic lines.



Photo courtesy of Prof. Mark L. Loudon, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

But some still exist today, including the Plattdeutscher Verein (Low German Club) of Watertown, Wisconsin. The Verein was founded in 1882 with a twofold mission: “fraternalism and the perpetuation of the German language, especially the Plattdeutscher tongue.” Low German

(Plattdeutsch) dialects derive from the “lower” (flatter) regions of the north, from which many immigrants to Wisconsin hailed. The dialects of this area are so different from those of the “higher” south, notably Switzerland, as to be mutually unintelligible. Though many immigrants had knowledge of the written standard dialect known as High German (so-called for its origins in the south), their identities were rooted in linguistically and culturally distinct particular regions, rather than a single “Germany,” and have endured to the present in American communities such as Watertown.

Most German-American community groups, religious and secular, were founded at least in part to preserve the German language, as is exemplified by the mission statement of Watertown’s Plattdeutscher Verein. Language maintenance was also a matter of concern among a group of Americans of German descent who have historically had little contact with other German-speaking communities in the U.S., namely the Americans known as the Pennsylvania Dutch.

Pennsylvania Dutch is an American language that developed in rural areas of southeastern and central Pennsylvania during the eigh-

teenth century. Because most German-speaking emigrants to colonial Pennsylvania were from the cultural region of Central Europe known as the Palatinate (Pfalz), Pennsylvania Dutch resembles most strongly the German dialects of this area. Nevertheless, approximately 10% to 15% of Pennsylvania Dutch vocabulary is derived from English. Although scholars and some language advocates prefer the term "Pennsylvania German," the use of "Dutch" here does not reflect a (mis)translation of "Deutsch" or "Deitsch." The English word "Dutch" was used in earlier times to describe people of both German and Netherlandic origins, often with a "folksy" connotation.

Observers, including many Europeans, frequently assume, incorrectly, that the term "Pennsylvania Dutch" is synonymous with "Amish." In fact, of the approximately 81,000 German-speaking immigrants who came to Pennsylvania during the eighteenth century, only a few hundred were members of the small, but very visible, Anabaptist sect known today as the Old Order Amish. Until the early part of the twentieth century, most speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch were of either Lutheran or German Reformed ("nonsectarian") background who, unlike the Amish and other "sectarians," did not separate themselves for spiritual reasons from the social mainstream. Although the sectarian and nonsectarian Pennsylvania Dutch lived in close proximity to one another in the colonial period, during the nineteenth century the two groups moved into different regions, including outside of Pennsylvania. Today, despite their common language, sectarians and nonsectarians represent two very distinct Pennsylvania Dutch-speaking groups.

With the dramatic demographic changes of the twentieth century, which led especially to greater mobility and the loss of rural isolation across America, maintenance of Pennsylvania Dutch among nonsectarians declined sharply; only members of the conservative Anabaptist sects have resisted these changes and continue actively to speak the language and transmit it to their children. Some nonsectarian Pennsylvania Dutch have attempted to counteract the shift to

Image courtesy of Prof. William W. Donner, Kutztown University.



English monolingualism by creating institutions to promote their language. The most prominent of these are the Grundsow (Groundhog) Lodges, the first of which was founded in Allentown, Pennsylvania, in 1933. Annual lodge meetings coincide with Groundhog Day (February 2), a New World expression of the traditional European mid-winter holiday of Candlemas. The program cover pictured here reads: "The Third

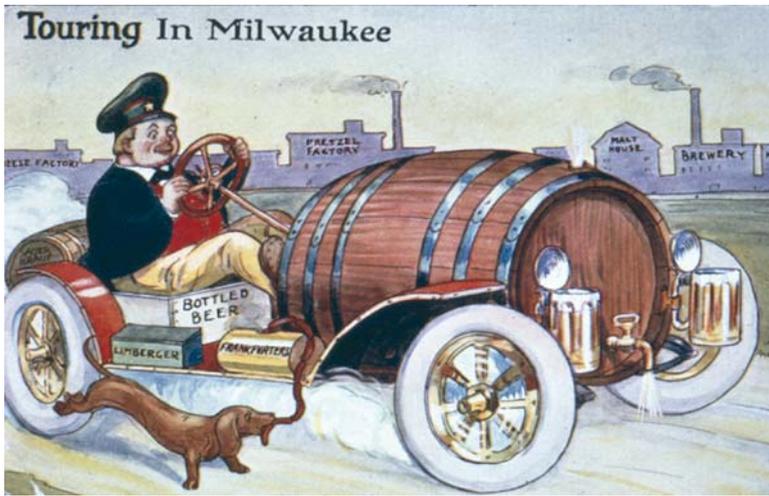
Annual Meeting of the Groundhog Lodge Number One on the Lehigh (River). Monday evening after Groundhog Day, at 6:30 p.m., the 3rd of February, 1936." Most speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch are literate in English only; the result is that English spelling conventions are usually observed when the language is written down.

Despite the virtual disappearance of Pennsylvania Dutch in the everyday lives of nonsectarians, the Grundsow Lodges remain active, and Groundhog Day has become an increasingly popular local holiday. In a uniquely American move, lodge members have recently begun a campaign to have the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation approve their design for a "special organization" license plate.

In addition to specific clubs and religious groups, certain aspects of German culture have become a part of largely deethnicized regional American identities. Examples of this can be found in the “Dutch Country” of southeastern Pennsylvania, which most visitors do not associate with Europe but with early America. Far from becoming submerged, many cultural expressions with clear antecedents in German-speaking Europe, from the forebay bank barn to hard pretzels, not only have survived in Pennsylvania but have spread across America.

The Midwest city of Milwaukee had come to be known by the late 1800s as “the most German city in America,” boasting numerous breweries, beer gardens, theater groups, and athletic and choral societies. Over time, as German Americans defined themselves less according to ethnicity, aspects of their heritage became part of the community as a whole. Today Milwaukee is known for its “beer and brats,” symbols of local culture that cut across ethnic lines and transcend their origins in the foodways of German-speaking immigrants. Perhaps we can say that Milwaukee is now “the most unconsciously German city in America.”

In the Milwaukee postcard from around 1900 shown on the following page, the central figure bears an unmistakable resemblance to stereotypical representations of ethnic Germans that were common at the time. The stout, good-natured, and quite evidently beer-loving Dutchman rides in a fanciful beer-barrel automobile through the city. Outfitted with overflowing steins for reflective headlights, the vehicle has compartments for limburger cheese and frankfurters, while a dachshund chases along after a sausage link. In the background one sees a cheese factory, pretzel factory, malt house, and brewery—all the comforts of a Dutchman’s adopted “Heimat.” While the references to Milwaukee’s brewing industry are historically correct, those to cheese and pretzels are not. Wisconsinites are known today as “cheeseheads,” to be sure, but the state’s cheese industry owes more to Yankee immigrants than to Germans.



Courtesy of Prof. James P. Leary, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

The emphasis in the image on alcohol reflects an early division between people of German heritage and Yankees over the cultural and political issue of temperance, often arising from the fondness of German Americans for drinking on Sundays, especially in connection with their family-oriented tavern culture. Similar images of and perceptions about Germans, centering on the food and drink of cheerfully hefty “Dutch” men and women, also flourished in such American communities as Chicago, Cincinnati, and St. Louis, where beer, sausages, and pretzels have become standard features not only of local cuisine but also in such mainstream American settings as the ballpark, where fans chomp and swallow while cheering on the Cubs, Reds, and Cardinals.

Not only at sports events are considerable amounts of beer and hot dogs consumed; an increasing number of American communities, many with no German heritage to speak of, now sponsor Oktoberfests. One such community is Oak Park, Illinois, located ten miles west of Chicago. This area’s rapid

growth in the nineteenth century coincided with the acceleration of German emigration to the United States, and by the end of the century Germans, with 25% of the population, constituted the largest ethnic group. As in Milwaukee, German Americans were active in business, churches, clubs, theaters, and political and cultural arenas. Despite divisions within their ranks resulting from their different regional and social origins, they presented a more or less unified ethnic group in beer gardens, at fairs, and in parades through neighborhood streets. In the twentieth century, however, Germans moved away from public displays of ethnic pride, as ethnicity gave way to more complex identities formed around class, race, and American popular culture. Midwestern cities, as elsewhere in the U.S., were changed after World War II by newcomers, including large numbers of African Americans, some of whom settled in neighborhoods where German-speaking immigrants had lived.

It thus is a curious phenomenon that the Oktoberfest has become a signature fall event in about 200 communities across the U.S. and Canada. Awash in beer, pretzels, the chicken dance, and the Schnitzelbank song, the typical American Oktoberfest today is less a celebration of German heritage—real or imagined—than it is the expression of a dynamic and culturally diverse

Image courtesy of Prof. Philip V. Bohlman, University of Chicago.

Downtown Oak Park's 11th Annual
Oktoberfest
 Friday, September 20 - Sunday, September 22
 Food • Beer Garden • Store Promotions • Rides • Family Fun

Friday
 5:30 pm Bumble Bee Bob & the Stingers
 8:30pm Koko Taylor & her Blues Machine

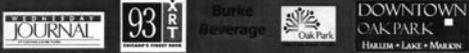
Saturday
 12 Noon Family Entertainment
 2:00 pm Polka Dance Contest
 4:00 pm Hip Fetish
 6:00 pm Bumpus
 8:30pm Liquid Soul

Sunday
 12 Noon Jimmy's Bavarians
 2:00 pm Star Candy
 4:00 pm David Young
 6:30pm Nick Colione




On Marlon Pedestrian Mall & North Blvd. parking lot. Stage located on North Blvd. at Marlon St.

Sponsored by:



local identity. In Oak Park's festival, this cultural diversity is represented by musical groups as different as Jimmy's Bavarians, Bumble Bee Bob and the Stingers, and Koko Taylor and Her Blues Machine. Even the more specifically German-themed Oktoberfests nationwide reflect an American phenomenon that is striking to European Germans, namely the predominance of symbols specific to traditional Bavaria, which strive, misleadingly, to evoke a single "German" culture.

The commodification of ethnic culture, as reflected in the explosion of Oktoberfests over the last few decades, is part of a larger trend of American communities to promote economic growth through tourism. In 2003 two New Glarus, Wisconsin, policemen, seen on the facing page in uniform and with guns at their side, posed for a Swiss photographer in front of the town's most prominent sign: a depiction of Switzerland's coat of arms and its national hero, William Tell. To a foreign visitor this is a quintessentially American picture, confirming every stereotype fostered abroad by cop shows on American television. To an American observer, however, who is drawn more to the "Old World" sign depicting a historic heroic act performed with an ancient weapon, the image speaks to the town's unique identity rooted in its ethnic heritage.

New Glarus was settled in 1845 by a group of Swiss German immigrants from Canton Glarus. For decades, this rural community looked much like any other Midwest pioneer settlement. Only toward the end of the nineteenth century, as European Americans nationwide began to celebrate their ethnic and national backgrounds publicly, did New Glarus "rediscover" its Swiss heritage. By staging festivals and pageants celebrating Swiss Independence Day, the arrival of the original immigrants, and—beginning in the 1930s—the William Tell story, New Glarus brought together not only members of its local community, but also Swiss Americans from across the country. Seeing the economic potential of tourism, the town eventually decided

to remake itself into “America’s Little Switzerland.” Based less on traditions handed down directly from the original settlers to their descendants, and more on a contemporary American image of things stereotypically “Swiss,” buildings were constructed in the chalet style, restaurants adopted Swiss menus, and folk musicians from Switzerland were invited to perform and to teach members of the community.

Today many residents of New Glarus are not of Swiss descent, but the townspeople still perform William Tell every year in both English and German, thereby creating a sense of local identity and culture. At the same time, this unique American community attracts visitors from around the world, including Switzerland. Keen on promoting Switzerland’s image abroad, the Swiss government now has plans to build a cultural center in New Glarus.

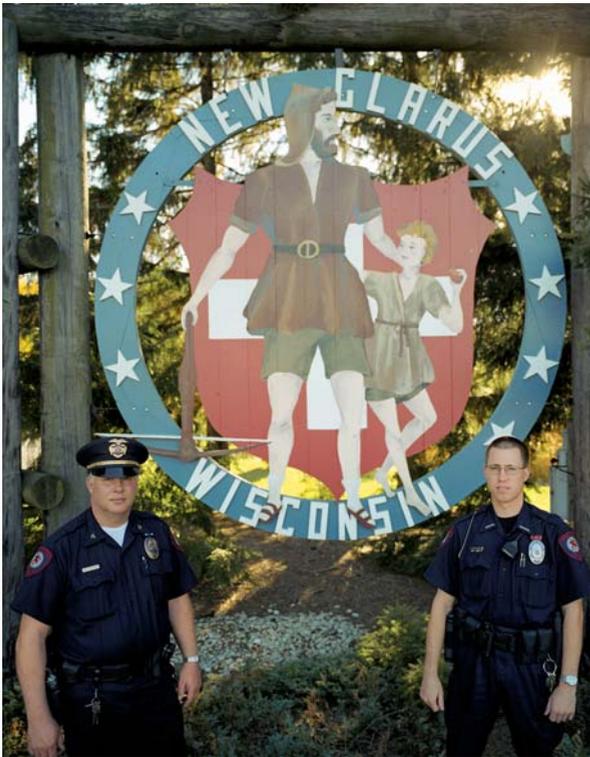


Photo by Luca Zanetti, © by Glarner Kantonalbank, Switzerland.

GROWING INTO THE NATION

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most German-speaking immigrants to the U.S. settled outside of large cities; hence some of the most direct expressions of older German-American identity can be found in small-town settings. Many or most Americans of German descent, it is said, were not interested in politics on the national level. It has been pointed out that although more Americans claim German ancestry than any other, only two presidents, Hoover and Eisenhower, were of German heritage.

Nevertheless, the relative lack of direct German-American involvement in national politics does not reflect apoliticism. Instead, there is a unique political culture of many Americans of German background, especially those whose ancestors came during the colonial era, like the Pennsylvania Dutch, which has been described by the historian Steven Nolt as “peasant republicanism.” This culture, whose origins trace back to the social conditions of Central Europe, is a curious mix of conservative and progressive elements. On the one hand, rural Germans respected the authority of inherited traditions and institutions. On the other, they valued individual liberty. In the U.S. context, rural German Americans often voted for the national party that favored stronger local control. Shortly after the Revolution,

Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society Library.



that was the anti-Federalist Republican Party of Thomas Jefferson. Later, the populist Democrat Andrew Jackson enjoyed widespread support among rural Americans, especially the Pennsylvania Dutch.

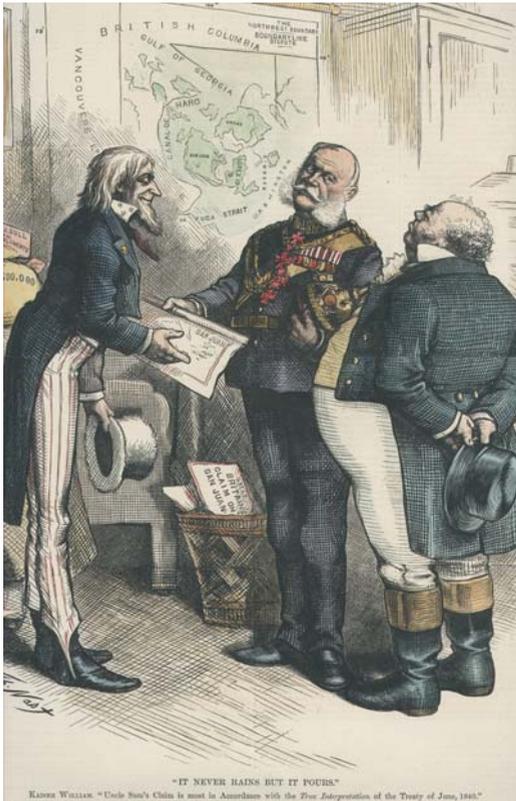
The early German-American peasant republican spirit is exemplified by the newspaper *Der Deutsche Porcupein*, published in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, whose 1798 masthead is shown on the preceding page. The newspaper's name was inspired by an English journalist and political commentator, William Cobbett (1763–1835), who wrote under the pseudonym "Peter Porcupine." The image was considered an apt one for journalists of the time: the porcupine is by nature a passive creature that defends itself only when attacked, and then with its sharp quills. Note that the angel flying over the porcupine is trumpeting "Preßfreyheit!" (freedom of the press).

ften sharper than the journalist's quill is the cartoonist's pen. At the end of the nineteenth century, as today, no major political conflict went unaddressed by cartoons on the editorial pages of American newspapers. The medium of the political cartoon was indelibly shaped by the German-born artist and caricaturist Thomas Nast (1840–1902). An ardent Radical Republican supporter of Abraham Lincoln, Nast first achieved prominence for his depictions of the horrors of slavery and the Civil War. His fame grew when his caricatures played a major role in the downfall of the notorious leader of the Tammany Hall political machine in New York, William M. "Boss" Tweed. He is credited with creating a number of classic American cultural icons, including Santa Claus, the Republican elephant and the Democratic donkey, the Tammany tiger, Columbia, and John Chinaman, a stereotypic but sympathetic rendering of Chinese immigrants, whose concerns, along with those of the Native American, Nast championed.

The image on the facing page includes two more of Nast's creations, the stout personification of Great Britain, John Bull, and none other than Uncle Sam. Here Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany stands between

America and Britain, helping to resolve a long-standing dispute over claims to the San Juan Islands in the Pacific Northwest. At the time this cartoon was published, on November 16, 1872, the Kaiser's decision in favor of the U.S. had just been announced. Reference is made in this cartoon to another disagreement between the U.S. and Britain that had recently been settled, namely the so-called *Alabama* claims. Specifically, the U.S. had argued that Britain had violated its official neutrality during the Civil War when British shipbuilders built and refitted Confederate ships. The Washington Treaty of 1871 had stipulated that the *Alabama* claims would be arbitrated by a five-member Geneva Tribunal, which included the German Kaiser; and on September 14, 1872, the Tribunal had announced that Britain should

pay the U.S. a settlement in the amount \$15.5 million. The money bag in the picture reminds us of this, and the caption "It Never Rains But It Pours" underscores the fact that two major decisions in favor of the U.S. had just been made within two months, with the German Kaiser party to both of them.



Despite, or perhaps because of, many German Americans' interest in protecting their local situation, they followed such national and international affairs closely, often with concern. After the Civil War, when the U.S. continued to grow geographically and demographically, Americans felt tension both at home and abroad. Conflicts over territories escalated between the U.S. and other nations, as the image depicts here. Within the U.S., the various waves of immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and southern and eastern Europe left many old-stock Americans—including many now well established German Americans—feeling threatened, especially during times of economic crisis; and this led to the formation of nativist, anti-immigrant political parties such as the Know-Nothings. Overall during these decades, American patriotism swelled and often crossed the line into nationalism.

At the same time, as this period in American history coincided with the rise of the newly unified German Empire, some German Americans, especially those living in urban areas, felt a certain amount of pride that their once fragmented ancestral homeland was coming into its own on the international scene. But only two generations later, the events of World War I compelled many to “remove the hyphen” and assimilate. World War I, with the anti-German sentiments it engendered, has often been assigned sole blame for the “submergence” of German-American identity. Yet many of the internal and external pressures to assimilate, which were felt by Americans of German descent, did not arise primarily as the result of the war.

Thomas Nast's Uncle Sam has most definitely endured in America as a personified symbol of the nation. Events in Europe over the past century, though, have meant that there is no equivalent figure, male or female, in today's Germany. Flag-waving patriotism in the U.S., even when it borders on nationalism, is very much a part of American national culture, but in today's

Germany the black-red-gold colors are rarely displayed except at international sports events. Nevertheless, public expressions of patriotism and nationalism were not uncommon in Germany in the past; especially after German unification in 1871, national self-esteem was running high among Germans in Europe. In this country, German Americans sought to emphasize the positive aspects of both sides of the hyphen referred to above by underscoring the contributions of traditionally German virtues to the American national experience, thus forging a German-American national identity. One important tool in the construction of this identity was the press.

Wisconsin's German-language publications appeared as early as 1844, and Milwaukee was a leading national center for German-American print culture. In the early years, large numbers of travel reports and guides for newcomers were printed, including books with advice on farming, cooking, health, legal advice, learning English, etc. The dual identity of many early German Americans is reflected in the publication shown here, *Unser Adoptiv-Vaterland*. Published in Milwaukee in 1889, this book is a history of the U.S., which presents the major moments in American history in the immigrants' mother tongue. As is reflected by the subtitle ("with special consideration

Published by the Milwaukee Herald, 1889. Cover image from the Max Kade Institute Library.



of the German-American element”), it includes a short section detailing the part played by Americans of German descent in the development of the U.S.

The following quote from *Unser Adoptiv-Vaterland* is representative of the sentiments of many German Americans who hoped that German virtues would influence the American national character in positive ways: “Mögen deutsche Gründlichkeit, Beständigkeit und Treue auch fernerhin die Kennzeichen des deutschen Elementes in den Vereinigten Staaten bleiben und sich dem amerikanischen Nationalcharacter immer schärfer und bestimmter aufprägen!” (May German diligence, steadfastness, and loyalty continue to be the hallmarks of the German element in the United States and imprint themselves ever more indelibly upon the American national character!)

In addition to print media, education was an important vehicle for promoting a national identity that was fundamentally American, but strongly influenced by the German heritage. For decades, hundreds of thousands of American children, and not only those of German background, received instruction in German in private, parochial, and public schools. In many schools all subjects were taught in German, while others offered bilingual instruction.

Das A.B.C. in Bildern (ABC in Pictures) published in 1905 by McLoughlin Bros., Inc., New York, is an example of a publication for German-speaking children in America. At the turn of the twentieth century many Americans (over 30% in some Midwestern states) spoke German in their homes, often in the second or third generation. In schools, children learned to read and write in German, but in an American context. In the image on the facing page a child is introduced to the letter “F” and the word “Fahne” (flag), written in German Fraktur. The accompanying picture of the “Fahne,” however, is the American flag, an example of the patriotic expressions in this country’s public life discussed above, as well as the patriotism felt by immigrants from Germany toward their new homeland.

Das A.B.C. in Bildern evokes America's rich history of teaching children in languages other than English, but it also recalls the significant influence of German practices and theories on American primary and secondary education in general. Many U.S. schools adopted German concepts of early-childhood education, higher education for girls, vocational education, and structured teacher training and certification. The first successful American kindergarten was founded in 1856 by German immigrant Margarethe Mayer Schurz, wife of Carl Schurz, in Watertown, Wisconsin. Many of these educational ideas were adapted to conditions in America, while other aspects of the German system, such as its three-tiered secondary education structure, were never introduced. Interestingly, German ideas for educational reform often found more acceptance in America than in Central Europe itself, especially Prussia, where the inertia of tradition remained strong.

Image from the [Max Kade Institute Library](#).



At the post-secondary level, the concept of a research university in which students pursued a major course of study and learned in seminars, rather than just large lectures, was derived directly from nineteenth-century German ideals. Today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there are signs of U.S. influence on German education: Germany is moving toward adopting certain American educational practices, especially at the university level, by creating B.A. programs, seeking private sources of funding (and student fees), and increasing access to a wider range of students.

SHAPING CULTURE

In many respects, a distinct German-American national identity has receded over the past century, and the historic connections to the Old Country are no longer obvious, even though the German heritage has left an indelible imprint on American mass and local culture. However, one exceptionally visible community of Americans has successfully preserved aspects of its European spiritual heritage—namely the religious group known as the Old Order Amish. Somewhat ironically for believers who would prefer not to be famous, the popular

Photo © by Keith Baum, <www.baumsaway.com>.



media have “discovered” the Amish and projected their images around the world, including and especially back to Germany, where fascination with a “deep-frozen” German-speaking society in the midst of the U.S., of all places, runs high.

The Amish trace their origins to the Anabaptist movement in Central and Western Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Core tenets of the Anabaptist Christian faith include the practice of adult (believer’s) baptism and the maintenance of a symbolic distance from the rest of society. Amish Christians evoke this symbolic distance more visibly than many other Anabaptist groups, notably their close spiritual cousins, the Mennonites, by dressing distinctively and accepting only selectively some of the material aspects of modern life. Underlying their apparently paradoxical lifestyle is one core virtue toward which the Amish strive, namely humility (*Demut*). The image shown on the preceding page is paradoxical for observers, who are inclined to view Amish society in negative terms (NO electricity, NO cars, NO fun ...). Though most Amish are of Swiss German descent, nearly all are bilingual in Pennsylvania Dutch and English. A small minority of Amish whose ancestors emigrated directly from Switzerland in the nineteenth century still speak a form of Bernese Swiss German.

In addition to speaking both Pennsylvania Dutch and English natively, the Amish also have a basic reading knowledge of the standard German of the Bible and other religious texts. Although the core tenets of their faith have remained unchanged since the sixteenth century, all other aspects of Amish culture, including dress, foodways, occupations, leisure activities, etc., show unmistakable—but limited—influences from mainstream America. The current Amish population is ca. 200,000 in the United States and Canada; there are no Amish left in Europe. Because of low attrition and large average family sizes, the Amish population is doubling every twenty years, thereby securing the future of the Pennsylvania Dutch language and this modern American counterculture.

Like the history of the Amish in America, the Jewish experience in this country is a rich one, extending back to the colonial era, when Sephardic Jews from Holland settled in New Amsterdam, the forerunner of modern New York. During the early nineteenth century, most Jewish immigrants were German-speaking Ashkenazim from Central Europe, who were strongly influenced by the ideals of the Enlightenment and its Jewish expression, the Haskalah. As ancient restrictions on Jews were lifted across Western Europe, partly in connection with the democratic aspirations of the revolutionaries of 1848, a number of German Jews sought to reshape traditional practices, and the movement known as Reform Judaism was born. Today, even though most American Jews trace their ancestry to Yiddish-speaking immigrants from Eastern Europe who came in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Reform Judaism, with its roots in Germany, is the largest branch of the faith in the U.S. It is also important to note that the International Order of B'nai B'rith, the world's oldest continually operating Jewish service organization, was founded in 1843 by a group of German-American Jews in New York who defined as their mission the fostering of a civic identity based on both traditionally Jewish and American values.

After Hitler came to power in 1933, approximately 100,000 German Jews came to the U.S., many of whom settled in New York. In 1934, the German Jewish Club of New York (later renamed the New World Club) began publishing a newsletter, *Aufbau*, which quickly grew to become one of the most important German-language periodicals in this country among both Jews and non-Jews. *Aufbau* thrived by changing with the times, incorporating an increasing number of articles in English for its U.S.-born readers, and becoming the world's premier source of information on Jewish issues in German; *Aufbau* was one of the few newspapers to report in detail on the events of the Holocaust as they unfolded. Leading German-speaking exiles wrote for *Aufbau*, including Hannah Arendt, Albert Einstein, and Thomas Mann. The first-page article of



Courtesy of the New York Public Library.

the *Aufbau* issue shown above was written by Emanuel Lasker, a mathematician, philosopher, and world champion chess player; born in Germany in 1868, he fled to New York in 1933, where he remained until his death in 1941.

As successive generations of German-speaking American Jews declined in numbers, so did *Aufbau's* subscriber base. The journal ceased publication in 2004, but in 2005 it was reborn as a monthly magazine published in Europe, now serving a different readership. Over the last decade, large numbers of Jews, mainly from Russia, have emigrated to Germany, and as Jewish life there enters a new era, *Aufbau* has found a new outlet for its high-quality journalism.

Many German-speaking Jewish and non-Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution came to southern California, as well as to New York. Some of the more famous among them included Bertolt Brecht, Lion Feuchtwanger, Thomas Mann, Erich Maria Remarque, and Alma Mahler and Franz Werfel. Although a number returned to Europe after the war, many stayed and made important contributions to the arts and the intellectual life of the region. Hollywood, in particular, benefited from the talents of

these new immigrants, and their influence on American popular culture is unmistakable.

The deep interrelationship between American popular culture and its German backgrounds is hinted at through the image shown at right, one of German-born immigrant artist Kurt Wiese's illustrations for the story *Bambi*. Wiese (1887–1974) is known



Image from the Max Kade Institute Library.

in the U.S. mainly as the illustrator of over 300 children's books, including works of authors such as Zane Grey and Rudyard Kipling. Two of his books were named Caldecott Medal honor books.

Bambi, published in German in 1923, was written by the Hungarian/Austrian Jewish writer Felix Salten (pseudonym for Siegmund Salzmann, 1869–1945) and first appeared in the U.S. in English translation in a 1928 edition that included Wiese's drawings. Read by Americans, both in the original as a popular story for students of German and in English, *Bambi* later became one of Walt Disney's most beloved family movies (1942). While *Bambi* is associated today with children, Salten originally wrote the novel as an adult allegory alluding to the growing threats confronting European Jews in the period between the World Wars. Disney adapted the story to express his concern about human encroachment on wildlife and the forests. Initial public reaction to both Salten's novel and Disney's film was intense. In Austria, the book was banned, while in the U.S. the American Rifleman's Association vehemently protested the film's anti-hunter bias.

There are numerous other examples of German contributions to Hollywood and also to Broadway. One is Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe's musical *Brigadoon*, based on Friedrich Gerstäcker's *Germelshausen*, which ran for 581 performances when

it opened at the Ziegfeld Theatre in March of 1947 and later became a Hollywood movie starring Gene Kelly (1954). Beyond these, of course, one should not forget the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales, which have repeatedly been translated, read, and adapted for every medium, most famously, once again, by Walt Disney for his animated films.

The export of Broadway and Hollywood products, especially to Europe, is well known. One of the most interesting examples of this is the *Sound of Music* phenomenon. The Rodgers and Hammerstein musical (1959) and the film version directed by Robert Wise (1965) created an image of Austria that bears little resemblance to either historical or modern reality. (Sorry, "Edelweiss" is not the Austrian national anthem.) Indeed, *The Sound of Music* is more an expression of American postwar popular culture than anything European. *The Sound of Music* was not performed on stage in Austria until 2005; defying critics' skepticism, the Viennese production has been a popular success.

Underlying the commercial success of mass cultural products like Disney films and *The Sound of Music* are simple story-line formulas and marketing strategies that have given American entertainment a reputation for homogeneity. On stage and screen, viewers want good to triumph over evil, with no question about who is on which side. The sameness that appeals to so many consumers of mass culture worldwide is reflected in many American enterprises that have been exported with great success, notably McDonald's. Hungry patrons expect that McDonald's fries will always taste the same, whether the restaurant serving them is in Heidelberg, Kentucky; Heidelberg, Minnesota; Heidelberg, Mississippi; Heidelberg, Pennsylvania; Heidelberg, Texas; or at any of the five McDonald's in old Heidelberg itself.

For decades, the Oscar Mayer Wiernermobile™ has been a uniquely American fixture, but behind the successful marketing campaign of this American company lies a long tradition of German-

American foodways and entrepreneurship. Like other immigrants, Germans brought with them their own unique culinary traditions, especially in the areas of meat curing and sausage making. Cookbooks published in America for German immigrants list dozens of different sausage recipes, ranging from raw beef sausage and bratwurst to liver balls and bologna. In the multicultural American context, people of various ethnic backgrounds became acquainted with German dishes, while German Americans incorporated the food traditions of their neighbors. Over time a number of historically German food items and dishes were forgotten, while others, such as the “frank(furter),” evolved beyond their European origins to become staples of a new American cuisine. On a more local level, Midwesterners of all ethnicities, especially Wisconsinites, know immediately that a “brat” is a kind of sausage, and not an ill-behaved child. While modern Germans would have no difficulty finding bratwurst at their local butcher shop, it is safe to assume that cheddar cheese brats or “Hawaiian-style” pineapple brats would be as rare as

Photo courtesy of Kraft Foods, Inc.



the 27-foot-long fiberglass hot dog and bun mounted on a Chevrolet van chassis equipped with mustard- and ketchup-colored seats and a license plate spelling “WEENR” tooling down the autobahn.

Many years have passed since 1883, when the enterprising immigrant Oscar F. Mayer opened his first meat shop in Chicago, but his synthesis of Old World techniques of sausage making with developments in manufacturing, refrigeration, and transportation has yielded products and a brand name known across America and, increasingly, around the world. In 1973, the first Wienermobile arrived in Spain; another went to Japan in 1988. And in 2000, the Wienermobile made its first visit to ... Germany.

The Wienermobile clearly speaks more to the stereotypical image of modern America as a monolithic culture than to the nineteenth-century roots of the Oscar Mayer Company; and the commercial success of American exports like hot dogs continues to feed that image. Below the surface, however, one finds much real and widespread diversity, often linked originally to particular regions, in areas such as foodways, but also artistic expression. Cajun cuisine and music that came from the bayous of southern Louisiana, for example, are now appreciated by millions and recognized as part of American culture. Less well known is the historical synthesis of German and non-German idioms in American regional (“roots”) music.

During the nineteenth century, thousands of German-speakers migrated to Texas, along with members of other European ethnic groups and Yankees. They came to an area—the northern expanse of Mexico—already characterized by years of rich cultural transfer, especially between Spanish colonists and indigenous peoples. One of the most enduring artistic expressions of multicultural contact in this region is what is known popularly as “Tex-Mex” or “Tejano” music. The leading sub-genre of Tejano music today is “norteño” (‘northern’) or “conjunto” (‘conjoined’) music, which developed in the early part of the twentieth century. Building on a traditional northern

Mexican ballad form called “corrido,” norteño/conjunto music incorporates musical influences from German and Czech immigrants, notably the polka, and especially the use of the button accordion.

One of the pioneers of the “norteño sound” was Fred Zimmerle (1931–1998), who formed the Trio San Antonio in his hometown of the same name. Earliest norteño music was instrumental, based mainly on the button accordion, bass, and the bajo sexto, a Mexican 12-string guitar. To this instrumental structure, Zimmerle, the grandson of a German immigrant, added a traditional vocal duet, forming a synthesis that is now characteristic of modern norteño/conjunto music. Zimmerle’s reputation extended back to Germany in one of the more intriguing examples of German-American musical contact. The German independent rock band F.S.K. (<“Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle” [‘voluntary self-control’]) visited Fred Zimmerle in Texas and referred to him in the song “Die Kaiser Wilhelm” on its 1996 album *International*. The final line of the song reads: “Fred Zimmerle, Sankt Anton, drückte das Akkordeon selbst in der Pfingstprozession, brachte kein Wort Deutsch hervor, dafür das Spanische schon, ganz wie du ein Texas-Sohn, doch auf dem Grammophon, da dreht sich der Beethoven Männerchor” (Fred

Zimmerle, San Antonio, squeezed the accordion even in the Pentecost procession, could speak no word of German, but Spanish instead, just as much a son of Texas as you, but on the gramophone, the Beethoven Männerchor is turning).

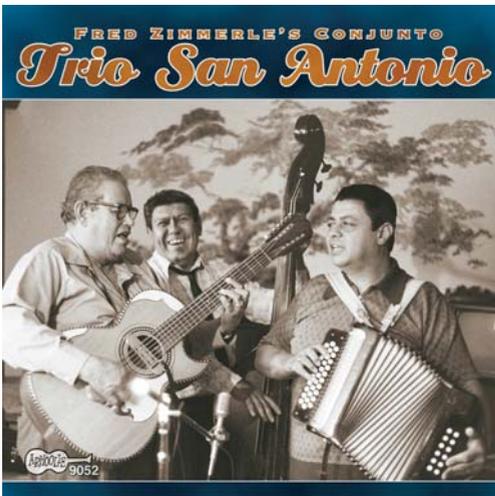


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<www.arhoolie.com>.



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As with music, cultural contact is often reflected in the transfer of words across languages. Language contact is naturally promoted by large-scale immigration, but it can also occur through other means, including global media, education, and transnational commerce. The mutual influence of German and English on one another is a good example of the way languages can be enriched through contact. Many German-derived words have entered the English lexicon through the immigrants' everyday language, including "coffee klatch," "dachshund," "delicatessen," "dummkopf," "frank," "gesundheit," "kindergarten," "kitsch," "pretzel," "sauerkraut," and "waltz." Other English words, such as "angst," "bildungsroman," "doppelganger," "festschrift," "gestalt," "leitmotif," "wunderkind," and "zeitgeist," came by way of literature, the arts, and education; until about the middle of the twentieth century, German was the most widely taught modern foreign language in U.S. schools and colleges. Even as immigration from German-speaking countries has declined and fewer Americans learn German, words like "foosball" and "poltergeist" still find their way into English. Not just words, but also parts of words from German are productive in English, including "-fest" ("gabfest"), "-meister" ("spinmeister"), and the prefix "über/uber" shown here, which means "over-" or "super-." In colloquial and regional speech, the expressions "How goes it?," "Bring it with," and "The dog wants out" are familiar Germanisms.

The influence of German and other languages on English is not a source of concern among most “language mavens.” In Germany, on the other hand, there are many who lament the increasing use of English-derived words in technology, business, advertising, and everyday speech, leading to a mixture often derisively called “Denglisch” (from “Deutsch” + “Englisch”). Words like “Bestseller,” “downloaden,” “Event,” “fit,” “Kids,” “live” (as in a “live broadcast”), “Lifestyle,” “Management,” “open air,” “relaxen,” “Service,” “shoppen,” and “Wellness,” are ubiquitous, but they comprise only a small percentage of the total German vocabulary and do not generally replace words already in the language. Those who fear the “Überfremdung” (excessive foreignization) of modern German generally overlook this fact about the contact between English and German.

It is fitting to end these thoughts on the question “How German Is American?” with a single image from today’s Germany. This is a public-service message from the Berlin municipal sanitation department (Berliner Stadtreinigung) informing the city’s residents, “We Kehr

Berliner Stadtreinigung, 1999.



For You,” a play on the German verb “kehren” (to sweep). Not only do such examples of verbal creativity demonstrate that borrowing from a foreign language is a communicatively enriching process; they also show how the centuries-long interaction between German and American cultures continues today, affecting both sides of the Atlantic.

ABOUT THE MAX KADE INSTITUTE

The Max Kade Institute at the University of Wisconsin–Madison is an interdisciplinary institute for German-American and immigration studies. By bringing together scholarly research and public outreach, we examine the experience of German-speaking immigrants and their descendants in the larger context of the multicultural diversity of North America. Our projects serve as bridges between the University and community organizations, schools, and interested members of the public. These include major conferences for both scholars and the public, as well as outreach activities directed toward schools and community groups. Much of our programming is undertaken in conjunction with our sibling organization, the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures (csumc.wisc.edu).

The Institute houses one of the largest publicly accessible collections of German-language books published in North America, as well as a growing number of research volumes related to the German-American immigrant experience. In its archives the MKI has more than three hundred family histories and hundreds of primary documents, including letters, diaries, and photographs. Of special note is the MKI's North American German Dialect Archive, a collection of thousands of hours of recorded interviews with German dialect speakers in the U.S. dating back to the mid-1940s. In 2005 the digitization of these recordings was completed.

The MKI also publishes a monograph series distributed by the University of Wisconsin Press that features new research in German-American studies, translations from German, and reprints of historic German-American publications. Recent titles include: *Land without Nightingales: Music in the Making of German America*; *German-Jewish Identities in America*; *German-American Immigration and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective*; the *Mennonite Low German Dictionary*; and *The Wisconsin Office of Emigration 1852–1855*.



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