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Between Third Reich and American Way: Transatlantic Migration and the Politics of Belonging, 1919-1939

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Between Third Reich and American Way: Transatlantic Migration and the Politics of Belonging, 1919-1939

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A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVAL PAGE

This Dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Historians consider the years between World War I and World War II to be a period of decline for German America. This dissertation complicates that argument by applying a transnational framework to the history of German immigration to the United States, particularly the period between 1919 and 1939. The author argues that contrary to previous accounts of that period, German migrants continued to be invested in the homeland through a variety of public and private relationships that changed the ways in which they thought about themselves as Germans and Americans. By looking at migration through a transnational lens, the author also moves beyond older conventions that merely saw Germanness in language and culture. Instead, the author suggests a framework that investigates race, class, consumerism, gender and citizenship and finds evidence that German migrants not only utilized their heritage to define their Americanness but that German immigrant values, views and norms did indeed fundamentally shape American national identity.
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To Nichole
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Introduction

In 1937 Georg Durrschmidt, one of the roughly 600,000 German immigrants that had arrived in the United States after World War I,\(^1\) wrote a letter to the editors of the *Sächsische Heimatbriefe* ("Letters from the Saxon Home"), a small make-shift publication that had recently reached out to reconnect Saxon emigrants with their home state, and in particular with the "new" National Socialist Germany.\(^2\) Funded by the *Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland* ("People’s Association for Germandom Abroad," or VDA), an organization dedicated to the preservation of German language and culture across the globe,\(^3\) the editors of the *Heimatbriefe* were asking their readers all over the world

that you write back to us and tell us about yourself and the Germans out there so that we can tell our boys and girls at home and in school how you […] wrestle for self-assertion

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\(^1\) LaVern Rippley, *The German-Americans* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), 198.

\(^2\) Georg Durrschmidt to the *Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland* (VDA), *Sächsischer Landesverband, Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden* (henceforth abbreviated *HSTA*), Call Number 12460 Nr. 41, 1937-1036. Having received thousands of responses from all over the world, VDA staff transcribed the letters. They are stored in numbered folders (in this case: Nr. 41) sorted by region. Within those folders they are numbered annually, though the year is not noted on the respective document. I have thus consistently added the year to the citation by inserting it between the number of the folder and the number of the letter. Transcripts survived the war and continue to be stored at the *Hauptstaatsarchiv* in Dresden, Germany. I have translated all quotes from the German. Spelling errors are omitted since it was often impossible to determine whether writer or transcriber committed them.

\(^3\) The history and origins of the VDA will be discussed in Chapter 3. See especially Section 3.4.2.
and for the reputation and continued existence of the Reich that we are building for all future generations.4

Durrsschmidt, a married tinsmith with two children and a veteran of World War I, had moved his family to Queens, New York, where he had secured a job with Bell Laboratories. He had been naturalized and had adjusted his name from the original Dürschmidt to a more suitable American equivalent in 1932. Durrsschmidt owned a home where he and his family lived and enjoyed the benefits of a steady income. Yet, his ties to the small village near Zwickau in the heart of Saxony, where he was born, had prompted him to respond to the editors. As he considered the state of German America, he wrote: “We really shouldn’t be homesick here in New York, after all, there are so many German churches, clubs, amusement facilities etc. And yet,” he continued, “especially among the urbanites no intimate alliance will develop, something that is so much easier to do on the countryside.”5

Historians of German America have long wrestled with the question of what exactly happened to this group of immigrants once vibrant, visible, and imbued with a “strong ethos of separatism.”6 How is it, they wonder, that one of the largest ethnic groups7 ever to reach the United States fell

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4 Sächsische Heimatbriefe, October 1934, 1.
5 Durrsschmidt to VDA, HSTA, 41-1937-1036.
7 “Ethnicity” is a contested term. I am employing Russell Kazal’s definition of an ethny as a group with “a shared sense of peoplehood tied […] to specific Old World ancestries”. See: Russell Kazal, “Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History,” The American
apart into disparate regional varieties while other groups from Europe, particularly the Irish and Italians, left such distinct traces in American national life and culture? Most scholars agree that the early twentieth century was the key period in the “disappearance” of German America. They argue that both negative experiences such as the ostracism of World War I and increased opportunities to join the American “mainstream” prompted Americans of German origin to blend into the “white ethnic.”

But German America did not just disappear. As George Durrsschmidt and many others writing from all over the continental United States reported to the VDA, there still existed a vast infrastructure of German American life as late as the 1930s, including stores, movie-theaters, churches, clubs, and restaurants. There were public debates about the future of the German community in newspapers and radio shows, but discord seemed to triumph over unity. Alice Kern, the wife of the prominent German American writer and scholar Dr. Albert J.W. Kern, had

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Historical Review 100:2 (April, 1995), 439, footnote 7. For a good discussion of the ongoing debate about the meaning of ethnicity, see: Jason McDonald, American Ethnic History: Themes and Perspectives (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 4-6.

experienced the evolution of German America since her arrival in the United States in 1884. Alongside her husband, who served as the president of the United German Societies of New York City in the early 1900s, she had witnessed successful attempts to unite German American organizations, only to see those efforts disintegrate during World War I. The 1920s brought some resurgence, but as she wrote in late 1937, “our German community today is more splintered than ever before.” 9 Importantly, neither Kern nor Durrsschmidt described submergence or disappearance, but rather disintegration and division – and both pointed to interior causes rather than blaming outside forces. Such reasoning was a general trend among the writers to the VDA. To be sure, there were many complaints about German immigrant assimilation, about the lack of enthusiasm many Americans of German heritage showed for German culture and language. But the biggest cause for internal discord seemed to have been disagreements about what exactly German culture was and how to best express that culture in the United States.

This dissertation discusses intra-ethnic and transnational10 dynamics in German America. Like other works on U.S. immigration history, my study

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9 Alice Kern to VDA, HSTA 42-1937-112. Her date of arrival can be determined via the 1900 United States Federal Census.
10 The term “transnational” has its own contested history, which I discuss in Section 1.2. In general, I am utilizing Eiichiro Azuma’s notion of the transnational as “inter-National”, a perspective “that stresses the interstitial (not transcendental) nature of [migrants’] lives between the two nation-states.” See: Eiichiro Azuma, Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5. For a good overview of transnationalism’s potential and pitfalls, see: Bryce Traister, “The
builds on recent developments in trans-/international scholarship, which emphasize the fluidity and global reach of the immigrant experience. Rather than describing immigration in linear, teleological, and essentialized terms, historians have begun to employ a model that views historical transformations as the result of multidirectional exchange of people, goods, and ideas, while simultaneously pointing to the interrelated attempts of nation-states to restrict, control, and profit from these movements. This approach has been applied with particular success to the Americas and to trans-Pacific movements.  

While the history of European immigration has certainly not been neglected, it has received substantially less “transnational” coverage. This gap is particularly evident in the case of German America. Despite an emerging interest in the role that emigration and “Germans abroad” played in the discursive negotiations of national consciousness in Germany, there have been

Object of Study; or, Are We Being Transnational Yet?” *Journal of Transnational Studies* 2:1 (2010).


almost no studies investigating the impact of changing notions of ethnic and cultural belonging on the status and identity of German migrants in the United States between World War I and World War II.\textsuperscript{14} However, considering the academic assumption of German America’s demise after 1915, this is not surprising.

I argue that German Americans continued to be strongly invested in the homeland throughout the interwar era,\textsuperscript{15} negotiating their hyphenated, heterogeneous identities along lines of race, gender, citizenship, and class.\textsuperscript{16} More specifically, I identify transnational spaces for such negotiations and explore the “discursive strategies and everyday

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\textsuperscript{14} The only exception I am aware of is Hans-Werner Retterath’s 2000 dissertation, which is available only in German. Retterath, \textit{Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke. Zur Ethnizitätskonstruktion durch die auslandsdeutsche Kulturarbeit zwischen 1918 und 1945} (PhD. Diss., Philipps-Universität Marburg, 2000).

\textsuperscript{15} It should be noted that I am not the first one to do so. In the past two or three decades, numerous studies, particularly of urban German-America have found a vibrant culture alive and well until at least World War II, sometimes beyond. Kazal, \textit{Becoming Old Stock}, 2. See also: Ronald Bayor, \textit{Neighbors in Conflict: The Irish, Germans, Jews, and Italians of New York City, 1929-1941} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Robert Paul McCaffrey, \textit{Islands of Deutschtm: German-Americans in Manchester, New Hampshire and Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1870-1942} (New York: Peter Lang, 1996); Leslie V. Tischauer, \textit{The Burden of Ethnicity: the German Question in Chicago, 1914-1941} (New York: Garland, 1990); Don Heinrich Tolzmann, \textit{The Cincinnati Germans after the Great War} (New York: Peter Lang, 1987).

\textsuperscript{16} Another important aspect, the role of German-language religious institutions, could not be included in this dissertation.
practices,” by which immigrants in the United States of all social backgrounds used their pasts to explain the present and shape the future. German immigrants to the United States continuously re-imagined their position in American society through a prism that included both a retrospective memory of their migratory experience and the homeland, as well as a projective consideration of contemporary political, social, and economic events. Since the majority of emigrants permanently stayed in the United States their experiences became part of the American experience in the interwar era.

In this sense, my work hopes to participate in a resurging debate about the various manifestations of “Germanness abroad.” While this increasingly large body of scholarship investigates the ways in which emigrants negotiated their sense of ethnicity and belonging within the respective host cultures, such explorations have almost completely

17 Eiichiro Azuma, Between Two Empires, 5. More specifically, Azuma’s work confronts the “bounded meanings of nation and race through close analysis of the discursive strategies and everyday practices that the immigrants adopted and deployed relative to the different hegemonic powers.”

ignored the United States, by far the most popular destination of German emigrants.¹⁹

One objective of this dissertation is to contextualize and complicate the argument that the period during and immediately after World War I was a critical juncture, at which German Americans, once a vibrant and vocal ethnic group, no longer felt the bonds of the *Heimat* and largely assimilated into the American mainstream. Striving to explain this decline, historians such as Russell Kazal have pointed to a slow process, in which lower class migrants rejected the high culture celebrated in privileged German American cultural organizations and became more confident to embrace American culture particularly because their whiteness allowed them to participate in public sphere and consumer marketplace.²⁰ Scholars have cited additional external reasons such as anti-German hysteria during the war, Prohibition, and the 1924 Immigration Act to explain why ethnic Germans never regained their prewar visibility as a group.²¹ Some exceptions notwithstanding,²² the period after World War I

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¹⁹ A recent conference, held at Berlin’s Free University, “Rethinking the *Auslandsdeutsche,*” that brought together many of the most prominent scholars on the topic, did not feature a single paper on the United States.

²⁰ Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock,* passim.

²¹ To be sure, this was not an argument reserved for German immigrants. Newcomers from around the world were seen as bearers of anti-American ideas like Communism, Socialism, Anarchism, and Fascism. As Charles R. Crisp, a congressman from Georgia, put it: “Little Bohemia, Little Italy, Little Russia, Little Germany, Little Poland, Chinatown […] are the breeding grounds for un-American thought and deeds.” Quoted in: Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 100.
has consequently received little attention beyond a focus on how America’s Nazis overshadowed German American attempts to maintain neutrality. The problem with such approaches is their simplistic and largely uncritical adoption of “Germanness” as a collective identity defined by either bourgeois nationalists or, later, radical National Socialists. I maintain that most German immigrants in the United States pragmatically incorporated only those elements of Germanness abroad into their personal (as opposed to collective) sense of belonging that helped them master their complicated lives in the United States, characteristics such as their whiteness, work ethic, economic prudence or civic education.

My work is thus more closely aligned with studies that have focused on the impact of migration on civic and national consciousness in the United States. The racial and political diversity of the immigrants that arrived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century challenged the status quo in the United States, as these new arrivals demanded the full benefits of American cultural, political, and economic citizenship. At the same time,

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immigrants continued to be heavily invested in the politics of the homeland. My dissertation shows that German Americans closely observed the struggles to put Germany back on its feet after World War I and that the sharp differences that emerged among the populace back home changed the political, social and cultural standpoints of Germans abroad. At a time when both Germany and the United States underwent rigorous renegotiations of nationalism and belonging – usually ensconced in cheery slogans such as Volksgemeinschaft and the “American Way of Life” – the migrants who appear in this history had to find new ways to think about themselves. Their heritage often became a means to escape the reality of everyday life, make sense of it, or even resist it.

Writing Transnational History

For more than a decade, transnationalism has transformed academia. Notoriously hard to define, it is best summed up as “a diverse, contested, cross-disciplinary intellectual movement” without one definite meaning. Generally, transnational histories attempt to investigate beyond the national and international, beyond the domestic and foreign policies of one


nation or another, thus decentering the nation-based narratives that still shape much of public history. More importantly, however, transnational theory compels us “to acknowledge that the nation […] is a thing contested, interrupted, and always shot through with contradiction.”

History written from a transnational vantage point contextualizes nationalism, it recognizes that national borders and boundaries as well as the spaces, institutions, and traditions defining national identity are constantly renegotiated and everything but stable.

For my own work, transnationalism signifies a different understanding of migratory processes. Transnational scholars view migration not as a one-way-street, a teleological voyage with a final destination from one national body to the other. Instead, they envision transnational spaces and “multisited ‘imagined communities’ whose boundaries stretch across the borders of two or more nation-states.” Migrants traveling back and forth between origin and destination inhabit these spaces and use them to reimagine who they are now and were in the past. That knowledge is then passed on to the next generations. Through such processes, migrants change our cultural understanding of nation, nationality, national identity,

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and national belonging. A transnational approach thus enables historians
to understand migrants not as silenced, disappearing voices, at best
invisible to the "national" eye, at worst perceived and understood as a
threat to the nation-state. Instead, they become active participants in a
political, cultural, and social sphere in which they are empowered to
choose “among various strategies of accommodation or opposition”30
available in the transnational space of the ethnic community.

An important example of such work is Eiichiro Azuma’s *Between Two
Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America*,
which chronicles the experience of Japanese immigrants in the United
States between the late 1800s and World War II.31 There were, of course,
differences between the German and the Japanese experiences, most
notably the racial politics of the time, which undermined Japanese
Americans’ civic rights. However, the similarities between the two groups
are just as striking: Both German and Japanese immigrants originated
from strong, nationalistic and militaristic societies, which emphasized race
as a crucial part of their self-definition.32 And both groups had to deal with

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30 Kathleen Conzen, David Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George Pozzetta, and
Rudolph Vecoli, “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.,”
31 Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires*.
32 Studies of Japanese ethnic nationalism include: Kevin M. Doak, “Ethnic
Nationalism and Romanticism in Early Twentieth-Century Japan,” *Journal of
Belongs? National Narratives and the Ethnic Imagination in Twentieth-Century
Japan,” *American Historical Review* 102:2 (April, 1997), 283-309; John Dower,
*Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986); Michael Weiner,
“Discourses of Race, Nation, and Empire in Pre-1945 Japan,” *Ethnic and Racial
the intractable conflict of war, which forced them into an antagonistic relationship with the American state and its people and left them in an emotional no-man’s-land. Azuma’s work has been a guideline for my own because of the juxtaposition of subjectivity and responsibility: Japanese immigrants, Azuma wrote, may have been “caught between the ideological and often repressive apparatuses of the two nation-states, [but] their bodies were anchored in America, their interests rooted in its socioeconomic structure, and their activities disciplined by its politico-legal system.” In other words, while certainly remaining connected to the social sphere of the homeland, Japanese immigrants had no choice but to deal with the society they encountered – a hostile society, in which they were racially othered, excluded, and eventually even imprisoned. At the same time, Azuma held immigrants “accountable for their actions and inaction, their choices and judgments, and their complicity and resistance.” This is to say that immigrants were not merely victims, but agents of their own fate – if only to the degree permitted by the society they encountered.

I believe that acknowledging this dichotomy is one of the fundamental preconditions to any viable approach dealing with the history of German America between the two World Wars. While certainly subjected to some injustice, I will show that Germans in the United States engaged in

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*Studies* 18:3 (July, 1995), 433-456, which is also reprinted along with other essays on race and nationalism in modern Japan in: Michael Warner, ed., *Race, Ethnicity and Migration in Modern Japan* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005).

arguments amongst each other and against other groups, thus helping to create new injustices while resisting and helping to dispel old ones. Like Japanese-Americans they had to find ways to retain a sense of belonging rooted in the past while embracing their presence and future as Americans. Many did so successfully. Others only reluctantly followed suit. Still others decided to embrace their German heritage and even remigrated to participate in what the Nazis proclaimed to be a millennial empire.

Chapters

Chapter One of this dissertation explores how Germany’s conception of national belonging developed throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and provided an ideological framework for the histories of German migration to the United States. I maintain that German American historians and writers such as Albert B. Faust and Rudolf Cronau pursued transnational agendas in appealing to both American and German discourses, particularly to nationalized prototypes of “the immigrant.” In their descriptions of the migratory past, they focused on the contributions of a mythical immigrant – the hard-working, virtuous pioneer – to the settlement and development of the United States, while simultaneously lamenting the lack of appreciation for those achievements by the American and German publics. Unfortunately, their perspective has rarely been questioned but frequently reproduced, setting the paradigm of
victimization and decline that clouded much of German American historiography during the Twentieth Century.

The next four chapters counter such arguments.

Chapter Two compares the transformation of two competing national ideologies in Germany and the United States and discusses how migrants navigated that divide. The 1920s and 1930s were two decades in which the respective paradigms of citizenship evolved into strictly opposing models, the German based on ethnicity (and thus exclusive), the American based on a commitment to its civic norms (and thus inclusive and open to repatriation). For German Americans this evolution was a painful process. Many of them had employed their ethnic belonging as a source of pride and, more importantly, as justification for their challenge to Anglo-American superiority in the United States. German American leaders continued to define Germanness in increasingly chauvinistic terms, often closely following events back home and aligning with views proposed by governments from Weimar to Nazi Germany. Meanwhile, “average” migrants, far from simply being assimilated Americans, continued to draw upon their heritage to negotiate challenges unique to their particular group. As I will argue, they tried to define Germanness as compatible with the “American Way of Life,” even though that eventually proved to be impossible.

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Chapter Three examines the intersection of race and nation: German migrants were outraged at their treatment during the “Great War,” which undermined their belonging in the “white ethnic” by othering them racially (the “Hun”) and by ostracizing them politically, culturally and socially. The response may have been a thorough submergence into American society for some, but many others were repelled by the treatment and vowed to fight back against the prejudices. One way to do so was to reaffirm their racial belonging in a campaign against the “Horror on the Rhine,” the purported acts of sexual violence committed by black African occupation troops against the German population in the Rhineland. The campaign culminated in a mass meeting at New York’s Madison Square Garden on February 28, 1921. Examining a variety of sources, including newspapers and pamphlets from the United States and Germany, I argue that this meeting helped set the tone for much of the next two decades, in which German Americans stressed the racial unity of Northern Europeans and white European Americans. Invoking transnational discourses of whiteness and belonging, they used their German heritage to reassert that they were members of humanity’s “finest race,” and thus demanded to be accorded the full benefits of American citizenship. While widely denounced by American media for its overt pro-German and anti-British rhetoric, the campaign thus helped reinforce a racialized ethnic-national identity among organized German Americans that opened the door to Nazi propaganda a decade later.
Chapter Four complicates the argument from the previous chapter by pointing to internal divisions along social lines. It shows how German American organizations alienated lower class immigrants by transposing “old world” social norms and conventions on migrants, who frequently had come to the United States precisely to escape these norms. At the same time, these social constructions of Germanness abroad, which imbued a seemingly homogeneous German people with qualities such as reliability, character and the reputation for a strong “work ethic,” proved to be advantageous for some individuals to achieve their goals in the United States – not least, because contemporaneous American praises for the “self-made man” and “free enterprise” were based on such virtues. These contradictions appear throughout the 1920s and 1930s in letters – either written to the VDA or published in the German American press – in middle-class accounts of German American life, and in the internal documents of German American organizations, which were reluctant to accept working-class members among their ranks. Taking into account the social and political conflicts dividing Germany at the time, I argue that much of the frustration about assimilation and decline can be attributed to social disagreements about what exactly it meant to be “German” between 1919 and 1939.

Chapter Five examines the intersection of gender and nation through the prism of consumer culture, particularly focusing on German American women and their adoption of a hyphenated identity to assert their essential
role in private and public life. I focus especially on a 1932 incident that caused righteous indignation among the German immigrant population in Philadelphia: At the height of the Great Depression, the department store Wanamaker’s had stopped publishing its advertisements in the Philadelphia Gazette Democrat, one of the most-widely read German American dailies at the time. Several German organizations drafted resolutions and individuals added protest letters demanding that the ads be returned – first, due to the critical importance of the advertisements for the financial well-being of the Gazette Democrat, an important transnational space for the local German community; and second, because the advertisements were perceived as important guidelines to navigate private budgets and master the public shopping sphere. I contend in this chapter that German Americans, particularly women, attempted to preserve these hyphenated “safe spaces” and that their failure to do so had little to do with neglect. Conversely, the unstoppable expansion of mass consumer culture may be more to blame. A culture “almost violently hostile to the past and to tradition”35 left little room for ethnic niche markets, which had consolidated by the 1930s across the United States and across all ethnic groups. Celebrations of European migratory cultures remained local and did not reappear on a national scale

until the ethnic revivals of the 1960s. Here, too, German emigrant history mirrored, shaped, and became American history.

**Conclusion**

What constitutes Germanness abroad? German language, song, and tradition? A German meal, Oktoberfest, and beer brewed according to the German purity law, the *Reinheitsgebot*? Or can we locate the traces of a transatlantic migratory wave in everyday American life today – in its racial and social politics, in American patterns of shopping and consumerism, and in the discursive negotiations of what it means to be an American? My argument is: All of the above. All of these characteristics can potentially help us understand the ways in which German migrants helped bring about the contemporary United States, its culture and institutions, its norms and values.

I believe the study of German migration to the United States is a wide-open field. Whereas other immigrant groups have been thoroughly studied, German America has thus far rarely been examined through a theoretical lens that exhausts the full potential of four transformative decades in the study of immigration (see especially Chapter 1). This dissertation can hardly close that gap. Instead, it aims to open up investigative areas for future research. For every question it answers, it raises many more. When, for example, I investigate the politics of citizenship and belonging in Chapter Three, it is all but inevitable to draw a straight line to the civic
discourse of the 1950s, when McCarthyism ruled in the United States, driven by a populist anti-Communism deeply entrenched in the German American community. And when I discuss the transnational negotiations of modernity and consumer culture in Chapter Five, it raises the question, whether or not German Americans drove the popularization of Austrian economic ideas propagated by libertarian theorists Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, which led to the rise of the neo-liberal economics during the 1960s and beyond.36

Moreover, the implications of my argument go well beyond the American continent. At a time (2016), when Germany is once more dealing with a perceived threat to its national cohesion, this time because of a refugee exodus from war-torn Syria and elsewhere, the question of what constitutes Germanness is as relevant as ever. “In Germany, a big question is back on the table: What is German — and how German do you have to be to belong to Germany?” journalist Anna Sauerbrey recently asked in the New York Times. Her answer: “For a disturbing number of Germans, the answer is culture, including religion.”37

As I wrote and researched this dissertation, I learned quickly that the vision of German identity propagated during the 1920s and 1930s still influences the ways in which Germans think about belonging to the nation

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36 See, for example, the story of German American, Peoria-born Frederick J. Schlink, who founded the consumer protection agency Consumer Research, but ended up “a full-fledged apologist for unregulated capitalism” of the Austrian kind. See: Charles McGovern, Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 166-167, 309.
37 Anna Sauerbrey, “What is German?” The New York Times, May 26, 2015,
today. Even though some of the policies have been excised of their essentialist, even racist connotations, these undertones still shape the contemporary discourse on migration and belonging. The transnational perspective on emigrated Germans in the “New World” and the role they played in defining the boundaries of belonging there, thus serve as a mirror to understanding “Old World” politics. As such, this dissertation is more than just an historical inquiry into a demographic subgroup of the United States – it is indeed a contribution to a contemporary political debate.
Chapter 1: A “Tragedy”? – German American Historiography in Transnational Tension

1. Introduction

In 1940, the British historian John A. Hawgood published *The Tragedy of German America*, a sweeping overview of German immigration to the United States from the 1830s to the 1920s. In his study, Hawgood argued that in their attempts to create a better Germany abroad, German immigrants not only met with the resistance of Americans, who rejected the hyphenated nationalism of all newcomers, but also with the dismissal of Germans back home, who despised the emigrants for leaving the “fatherland.” The “tragedy,” according to Hawgood, was this peculiar position outside both old and new world cultures, while the reconciliation of the two poles became the decisive challenge of the immigrant group – a challenge that German Americans had thus far failed to overcome.38

The reception of Hawgood’s book by many historians of German America at the time was quite positive, not merely because of its intriguing argument, but also because of the quality of the research. Dieter Cunz of the University of Maryland, a recent émigré from Nazi Germany, noted that despite a large body of work covering German immigration to the

United States, “German-American historiography has remained a quite thorny and rocky field, in which only few flowers bloom that one can enjoy.” In Cunz’ opinion, Tragedy was different. Hawgood had moved beyond hagiographic – and quite common – descriptions of German immigrants as virtuous pioneers and trailblazers. Instead, he observed that they tended to stay clustered together, preferring the security of urban areas and established communities to the adventure of the prairie. Even the book’s shortcomings, for example its ignorance of social differences among German Americans, did not undermine its scholarly acumen. To the opposite, the fact that other scholars critically engaged with it was evidence of its academic excellence. Even the New York Times, which frequently criticized German American works for their ethnic chauvinism, reviewed Hawgood’s book favorably, echoing Cunz’ criticism of German American historiography: “Perhaps it took a disinterested outsider to give a complete and unbiased report of the history of the Germans in the United States.”

I argue in this chapter that the lack of scholarly acumen, which characterized German American studies from its beginnings until mid-century, was largely due to the struggle to come to terms with two rejecting poles, German and American national identity. In other words,

40 Hawgood, Tragedy, 33; Cunz, “Die Deutsch-Amerikaner,” 343-348.
Hawgood’s “tragedy” argument applied to the historiography of German America as well, particularly to those accounts written in the United States by authors with German origins. They will be the focus of this chapter. As I will lay out, these historians, many of them amateurs, aimed to relieve the transatlantic tension by writing histories that attempted to please both contemporary Americans as well as their kin in Germany. In their narratives, Germans were both leading contributors in American life, while also successfully preserving German language and culture abroad. Unsurprisingly, given their political focus, many early works on German America lacked academic objectivity. However, when met with criticism, these historians frequently resorted to narratives of persecution and self-loathing, which transcended the postwar era and cast a long shadow on German American historiography until today. Hawgood’s book could have become a watershed – but it didn’t.

In fact, I suggest that much (though certainly not all) of the subsequent scholarship written by German Americans was conceived within the confines of that conflict. Whereas other ethnic histories successfully emerged from the pressures of Americanization during the 1960s and 1970s, German American history has struggled to come to terms with its convoluted past, open up to modern academic trends and find meaningful ways to attract new talents. Though some works have explored new territories, such as gender, race, and class, too many others have been

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42 For a good overview, see Russell A. Kazal, “Revisiting Assimilation,” 437-471.
unable to transcend old narratives, engage with that history critically and lead German American historiographical studies into the twenty-first century. To be sure, this chapter will not be able to fill that void. But it attempts to begin the discussion by exploring the transnational dynamics in the “tragic” historiography of German America.

To do so, I have read and analyzed some of the most important texts of the time. Unlike most of the following chapters, which use a variety of archival sources, this chapter is largely based on the contextualization of those histories and a discussion of the authors’ motifs. It is meant to start a conversation on the transnational background of German American historiography – but it also sets the stage for my exploration of German American life during the interwar era in the chapters that follow. As such, it is not only a metacritique of existing accounts through a transnational prism, it also provides a detailed view on the discursive strategies employed by migrants, in this case the writers of German American history, to explain their present status through a historical lens.

In this chapter, I will thus first lay out in brief the history of German emigration to the United States and, next, the role of that emigration on the German national consciousness in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Then, I will discuss how the first authors wrote within the confines of that context, which set the historiographical narrative patterns that can – to a certain degree – still be found today.
2. Emigration, Historiography and the Nation in 19th Century Germany

2.1. Emigration to the U.S. and the Heterogeneity of German America

A useful place to start this brief overview of emigration from Germany to the United States is the period around 1815 and after. Though many families had sought religious or political freedom as well as economic opportunities in the “new world” before, emigration did not become a widespread social phenomenon in the German states until then. Wars had ravaged Central Europe, the old order of aristocratic and church rule had collapsed while overpopulation and corruption challenged the survival of countless families who could no longer live off the land. In 1816, catastrophic harvest failures put many families on the brink of disaster. As Mack Walker notes, there was “emotional turmoil at all levels of society, for the old orientations of loyalty, status, and law were wrenches apart and twisted into new.” In other words, it seemed as if an old way of life was collapsing.  

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43 This section does not provide a comprehensive overview of German emigration, but rather keeps in mind the focus of this chapter. A better place to find such a complete overview, including an excellent bibliography, is James M. Bergquist, “German-Americans,” in Multiculturalism in the United States: A Comparative Guide to Acculturation and Ethnicity, eds. John D. Buenker and Lorman Ratner (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2005), 152-172.

Desperate, the first families decided to emigrate, particularly from the South Western German states that bordered the Rhine River, which provided easy access to the transatlantic ports on the North Sea. Actual emigration numbers remained comparatively low until mid-century, ranging between a few hundred annually in the 1820s to a high of nearly 30000 in 1840, yet the period was critical for the establishment of major migratory patterns: Once settled in rural farming villages or booming industrial centers, those that had left sent letters home and told of their lives across the Atlantic. Families, friends, and neighbors read of their exploits and decided to tread the same paths as previous generations, often migrating to the exact same town or city, where they knew fellow villagers from back home. Others followed the advice of bourgeois adventurers like the doctor Gottfried Duden from Bonn, who contributed to the excitement with descriptions of “freedom in paradise.” In short,


45 Moltmann, Deutsche Amerikauswanderung, 201.
47 LaVern Rippley notes that those who were actually motivated to emigrate because of Duden’s descriptions later denounced him as a “lying dog” (Rippley, German-Americans, 44). The quote is from a later visitor, Nikolaus Lenau, one of Duden’s admirers. See: G.A. Mulfinger, “Lenau in Amerika,” Americana Germanica I (1897), 7-61. Quote on pages 20/21. See also: Kamphoefner, “Immigrant Epistolary,” 38-41.
transatlantic exchange between Germany and the United States was a critical component of migration from the start.

As most other newcomers to the United States, Germans emigrated during the nineteenth century through necessity. Pushed by political and religious restrictions, military duties, poverty and lack of opportunity, those that left often did so with a heavy heart rather than, simply, because they were drawn by the American promise.48 As more and more families established migratory “bridgeheads”, emigration numbers rose.49 Between 1845 and 1858, 1.3 Million people left the German states, constituting the first of three large emigration waves to the United States during the nineteenth century.50 Mostly peasants and small-town craftsman facing economic ruin from industrialization and the structural reforms that benefitted the aristocracy and the middle-class, migrants faced a choice either to move to German cities to work in factories – or to leave the country. Mack Walker argued that the “prospect of joining the wage-labor class, the lowest he [sic] knew, was abhorrent to the pride, training, and traditions of the independent freeholder or artisan.”51

48 Walker, Germany and the Emigration, 34.
51 Walker, Germany and the Emigration, 52.
Instead, those desperate to preserve their dignity and independence chose to leave and preserve the way of life they knew elsewhere, with little regard for the German nation: “He who chose Auswanderung [emigration] might be attached to his home village, but probably not much to his home country […]; if his roots must be torn up, let them be transplanted to a new land, not another province or another duchy.”

Walker’s 1964 study of German emigration to the United States in 1964 was thus an early proponent of the “transplantation” theory; he argued that immigrants were not simply passively “dislocated” or “uprooted,” dropping any “cultural baggage” from the homeland as soon as they stepped foot on American soil. Instead, Walker describes them as active agents of their own destiny with the clear intention to recreate as much of their old life as possible. “The Auswanderer [emigrant] went to America less to build something new than to regain and conserve something old, […] theirs were not so much acts of radical affirmation as acts of conservative rejection.”

Though Walker’s argument is somewhat simplistic, as a general observation it has stood the test of time. More importantly, it critically undermines the observations of later historians (see Section 1.3) that envisioned German migrants as pioneers and trailblazers. By and large, they were not.

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52 Walker, Germany and the Emigration, 52.
54 Walker, Germany and the Emigration, 69.
After the volume of emigration had slowed down during the 1850s, numbers began to rise again in the mid-1860s, when the end of the American Civil War and a number of armed conflicts in Central Europe increased both the “push” and “pull” factors. During the second wave of emigration, which lasted from roughly 1864 to 1873, about one million migrants left the German states. A third wave began in 1880 and lasted until the mid-1890s. In 1881 alone, 220,000 people left the German Empire, which was unified following the Franco-Prussian war of 1871. Walker maintains that a general desire for security and independence, which neither the German states nor Empire could provide, remained an important reason prompting many families to leave. But there was a shift in geographical origins and social backgrounds. During the first half of the century, emigrants had been mostly peasants and artisans from the Southwest. By the late 1800s, increasing numbers from the Eastern states, from Mecklenburg, Saxony and Eastern Prussia, joined the flow. Instead of landowning peasants they were agricultural laborers, factory workers instead of skilled artisans.

The change in the social makeup of the migrants had great implications for the experience abroad. While earlier generations had often become peasant farmers and settled in small rural German-language

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communities, now increasing numbers of immigrants went to America’s booming industrial centers, opting for manufacturing jobs instead of agricultural labor. “New and solidly German farming communities were indeed established, in south-western states like Texas as well as the Middle West, but the typical German experience in America was urban.”

German immigrants were a large and vocal minority in cities like Chicago, New York and Philadelphia, and they were influential in the development of such smaller but no less booming cities as St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Cincinnati. And they were increasingly aware of the new social categories that separated people into working class, educated bourgeoisie, and those that owned capital. This strong urban association notwithstanding, there has been a persistent “myth” in German American historiography that claims the German immigrant was a frontiersman realizing America’s “Manifest Destiny.” Many, if not most Germans instead preferred the security of “prepared” land or urban comforts to daring ventures on the frontier. And they sought familiar environments – the forested hills of Ohio for those from the Southwest, the ethnic neighborhoods of Chicago and Milwaukee for later generations – where

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60 Blackbourn, The Long Nineteenth Century, 196-197.
61 Historian John Hawgood, referenced in the introduction of this chapter, was one of the first historians to dispel the myth spread in the 1920s and 1930s. See: Hawgood, Tragedy, 33.
they could recreate the way of life they knew and preserve old world customs.\footnote{Hawgood, \textit{Tragedy}, 33.}

Finally, before discussing the impact of emigration on the burgeoning German national consciousness, a small, but influential group of emigrants should be highlighted: After the failed Revolution of 1848/9\footnote{This is not the place to recapitulate the history of that revolution. Suffice it to say that after a variety of violent liberal uprisings particularly in Western and Central Europe, the old order of religious and aristocratic rule nearly collapsed. Nearly. As liberals convened to establish democratic societies, the conservative elements regrouped behind their military forces and eventually ended the revolution violently. Across the continent, liberal and radical democrats had to escape from persecution, imprisonment, and even potential execution. A good English-language overview of the entire period is provided in Jonathan Sperber's \textit{The European Revolutions, 1848-1851} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).}, between four and ten thousand so-called “Forty-Eighters” escaped persecution and left for the United States. Even though their number was small, they wielded significant influence in the public life of the United States. Equally important, they would shape the image of the German American in American life. The “Forty-Eighters” often originated from the educated middle-class and held respectable jobs – lawyers, professors, scientists, writers and journalists – and they brought with them great expectations about German culture abroad.\footnote{A fine transnational history of that the “Forty-Eighters” and their impact on American life was recently published by Mischa Honeck, \textit{We are the Revolutionists: German-Speaking Immigrants and American Abolitionists After 1848} (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011). See page 189 FN 5 for the count. See also: Charlotte L. Brancaforte, ed., \textit{German Forty-Eighters in the United States} (New York: Peter Lang, 1989) and Bruce Levine, \textit{The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).} While their contributions to German American cultural life were significant, the new national self-
confidence and pride they imported to the United States also caused severe conflicts with older German Americans, particularly those who had come to the United States to escape the damning influence of the German bourgeoisie in proscribing a way of life.\footnote{Rippley, German-Americans, 50-52.} Many of these more established migrants had no sympathy for the missionary zeal of the newcomers, precisely because it caused an indiscriminate nativist backlash against all Germans. I will discuss the internal conflicts in more detail in Chapters 2 and 4.

American nativists viewed the runaway revolutionaries with suspicion. While they were often at best ambivalent about German migrants in general “the refugee intellectuals of 1848 and their adherents received the harshest bashing from the nativist camp.”\footnote{Honeck, We are the Revolutionists, 19.} “Native” Americans worried that the failed revolutionaries would meddle with American politics and infuse American life with atheist views of European enlightenment. European radicals, the Congressman Henry M. Fuller of Pennsylvania believed, had “already raised the black standard of atheism, and declared a war of extermination against the faith which supported [native-born Americans’] ancestors.”\footnote{Honeck, We are the Revolutionists, 20.} As Mischa Honeck has observed, this fear was not entirely unfounded. German liberals immediately got involved in the social lives of their host communities and subjected the politics and institutions to the harshest criticism. The German-language *Turn-Zeitung*,

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\textsuperscript{65} Rippley, German-Americans, 50-52.  
\textsuperscript{66} Honeck, We are the Revolutionists, 19.  
\textsuperscript{67} Honeck, We are the Revolutionists, 20.
a newspaper published by a group of “Forty-Eighters,” exclaimed in 1853: “Anglo-Saxon civilization, which measures the value of a human being only on the basis of income, in which outer appearance is everything, truth and honor nothing, leads to a moral servitude, material slavery, and antisocial barbarity; it destroys all bonds of society, consolidates the monarchical principle, wherever it exists, and undermines the republic.” The German revolutionaries considered themselves to be the real democrats. They felt that American democracy, though certainly politically ahead of European nations, desperately needed some infusion of (German) culture. “I would feel more comfortable here if there were more paintings, better drama, and less religion,” the feminist journalist Ottilie Assing, a confidante of Frederick Douglass’, wrote.68

In essence, then, by the late nineteenth century, the German American community was no community at all. Social, religious, and regional differences made it hard to celebrate a common culture, especially since being German meant different things to different people and, more importantly, since those that claimed for themselves the right to define Deutschtum (Germandom) did not always find the support of others.69 The successful ascension of the second German Reich into the rank of a global world power and the consolidation of the nation-state around its

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68 Honeck, We are the Revolutionists, 20-22; Assing quote from: Maria Diedrich, Love Across Color Lines: Ottilie Assing and Frederick Douglas (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 104.
69 See especially Chapter 4.
racial/ethnic roots added another layer to the migrants’ complicated negotiations of hyphenated belonging. While liberal revolutionaries in the United States demanded the preservation of German culture abroad, changing perception of the “immigrant” in the old world also increased the pressure on those, who felt an emotional connection to the national project back home. For many German migrants, however, the social discourses that drove the evolution of turn-of-the-century American national identity – decreasing immigration, Americanization, suburbanization and the evolution of a “white ethnic” – proved to be an appealing alternative. However, as I will argue in the chapters to follow, they did so in ways that reflected their own origins in ways that nationalists on neither side of the Atlantic Ocean recognized.

World War I further subdued all-too public displays of immigrant nationalism. American public opinion, never truly in favor of the Reich, increasingly shifted towards a view of German monarchy and militarism as antithetical to U.S. democracy. Reports of German atrocities in France and Belgium early in the war further added to the mistrust, as did the German sinking of the British passenger ship Lusitania, which killed 197 Americans in May 1915. The American entry into World War I in April 1917 set of an intense anti-German atmosphere. With suspicions of

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70 Kazal, Becoming Old Stock, 7-13. Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty, passim; Guido A. Dobbert, “German-Americans between New and Old Fatherland,” American Quarterly 19(1967), 663-680. Rippley, German-Americans, passim. See also my discussion of whiteness, race and German America in Chapter 3.
German fifth column activities in the United States circulating across the country, many German Americans suffered from the comprehensive Americanization campaigns that aimed to homogenize U.S. society and to eradicate the remnants of German ethnic nationalism.\footnote{Capozzola, \textit{Uncle Sam Wants You}, 179-189; Ford, \textit{Americans All!}, 17-20. See also: Katja Wuestenbecker, \textit{Deutsch-Amerikaner im Ersten Weltkrieg: US-Politik und nationale Identitäten im Mittleren Westen} (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007), 199.}

The fact is undisputed that these Americanization campaigns negatively affected German American life.\footnote{Kazal, \textit{Becoming Old Stock}, 171-194.} German Americans were expected to show their loyalty by taking on American citizenship and by abandoning the German language at home and in public. Vigilante organizations, which often resorted to violence and intimidation, pursued those that dared to question the American war effort. Readership of German American newspapers declined sharply.\footnote{Capozzola, \textit{Uncle Sam Wants You}, 183. Kazal, \textit{Becoming Old Stock}, 176.} And by early 1918, the American government had enacted sweeping restrictions that forced all “enemy aliens” to register, punished everyone obstructing the sale of war bonds, and even went after those spoke ill of the American flag, its army, its uniforms, the constitution or its government.\footnote{Wuestenbecker, \textit{Deutsch-Amerikaner}, 167-168, 214-246.} Moreover, “German-language training was expurgated from school curricula in communities across the nation, patriotic ceremonies featured the burning of German
books, and several states restricted the freedom to speak German in public.\textsuperscript{75}

At the same time, recent research has shown that the German American experience during the “Great War” was nowhere near as catastrophic as earlier histories suggested.\textsuperscript{76} The majority of migrants, whether those in small towns or those in major cities, continued their lives largely undisturbed. Some paradigmatic anti-German milestone events have turned out to be much more complicated than originally assumed. For example, the lynching of Robert Praeger, a German-born miner in Collinsville, Illinois, was probably rather motivated by the victim’s socialism than his German origins, an assumption supported by the fact that the mob itself contained a great number of German Americans.\textsuperscript{77} Instead, it is much more likely that the contemporary idea of what it meant to be German led those willing and able to define Germanness in the United States between World War I and World War II to the conclusion that

\textsuperscript{75} Kazal, \textit{Becoming Old Stock}, 176.


German identity was fading. In order to understand that perception, we need to take a closer look at the impact of emigration, particularly to the United States, on the burgeoning German national consciousness throughout the nineteenth century.

2.2. Emigration and Nationalism in Germany

Authorities in the affected “emigration” states, especially in the German Southwest, almost immediately took note when emigration numbers rose in the 1810s and 1820s. To make sense of what was happening, governments commissioned reports, quickly learning about miserable, stranded emigrants crowding roads and harbors across Europe. From the Americas, they heard tales of broken promises and miserable migrants living in great poverty. Assuming wrongly that merely the poorest of the poor as well as discontented radicals were leaving for a better future elsewhere, officials and aristocrats in states like Württemberg, Bavaria or Hessen showed little concern for the effects of emigration. They failed to appreciate its causes, in particular the hopelessness and distrust in government that pervaded many rural areas.


79 Mack Walker’s book *Germany and the Emigration*, esp. 1-41, continues to be the definite study on emigration and its causes. See also Kamphoefner, “Immigrant Epistolary,” 34.
On a local level, some officials encouraged emigration, fearing “rioting and revolt at any moment if the distressed people did not leave.”\[80\] In that sense, municipal and state governments often saw emigration as a “safety valve,” an easy way to solve overpopulation and dislodge political dissent.\[81\] Others, incapable of grasping the impact of what was happening, described emigration as a disease, a “fever” or an “epidemic.”\[82\] There also existed a widespread belief that “the Auswanderung [emigration] was created by swindlers and demagogues, disturbers of the public order who exploited the misery of the populace” with empty promises of free passage and free property in the United States.\[83\] Rather than recognizing their citizens as active agents seeking a better future elsewhere, aristocrats and authorities often saw passive victims of exploitation and deceit. Rather than accepting a duty to support them at home, they saw in their citizens little more than assets of the state, to be used for military and economic exploitation. Many of the perfunctory explanations “tended to deny the emigrant his or her unique and often sensible reason for leaving their ancestral homelands to seek better opportunities or career prospects for themselves and their children abroad.”\[84\]

\[80\] Walker, Germany and the Emigration, 1-33. Quote on page 19.
\[82\] Naranch, Beyond the Fatherland, 24.
\[83\] Walker, Germany and the Emigration, 6-8 and 16-20, quote on page 17.
\[84\] Naranch, Beyond the Fatherland, 24. Accordingly, the states also approached emigration differently. Emigration was never generally prohibited. However, many states enacted and enforced rules and restrictions around military service and the loss of one’s local citizenship. To emigrate, permission by the authorities
If state governments routinely failed emigrants, they found powerful advocates within the growing nationalist movement to unify Germany that picked up in intensity during the 1820s and 1830s. In fact, care for emigrants proved to be an ideal way to showcase the paternalistic concern of the educated bourgeoisie for the people, a core message of the movement. Nationalists spoke of, and often believed in, the organic composition of the people, which “belonged” in and to Germany. As both the national movement and out-migration picked up in volume and intensity, nationalists envisioned emigration as a process akin to a body losing blood, and they lamented the virility of emigrants lost to “foreign acres, where only foreigners harvest the fruit,” according to the colonial officer Johann Jacob Sturz (1800-1877).

Bemoaning the failure of the burgeoning national community to feed and protect its citizens, liberal intellectuals like Ludwig Gall (1791-1863), was needed and it was frequently denied if an individual had a criminal record or was in debt. Some states, on the other hand, actively encouraged criminals and the poor to emigrate.


who had emigrated to the United States in 1819 but returned one year later, implored state governments to support emigrants. “The state was to serve both as a paternalistic protector and defender of German interests abroad and as a caring and compassionate maternal figure who did not abandon her children to foreign exploitation and appropriation.”

But in their attempts to initiate more proactive government action, bourgeois agitators like Gall met with the resistance of German authorities, especially those in the rising power Prussia, who declined to take on any responsibility for emigrants. This failure of the state to act, writes historian Bradley Naranch

became a long-term political grievance that had a profound impact on the confidence of later generations in the cultural resiliency of the German nation to prosper in a modern environment characterized by international economic rivalry, global exploration, and colonial conquest.

Emigration became one of the defining challenges to German nationalist pride and self-confidence.

With governments slow to respond to requests for action, members of the intellectual middle-class invested in the politics of emigration turned to the private sphere to enact their own imperial adventures. Here, migration intersected with visions of a powerful German nation on par with other

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87 According to his account of the travels, the first sentence Gall was confronted with upon his arrival in New York was: „On ce [sic] more damn’d emigrants!“ He soon decided the United States was not for him. Ludwig Gall, Meine Auswanderung Nach Den Vereinigten-Staaten in Nord-Amerika, Vol. 2 (Trier: F.A. Gall, 1822), 6.

88 Naranch, Beyond the Fatherland, 42.

89 Walker, Germany and the Emigration, 24-28 and 59-60.

90 Naranch, Beyond the Fatherland, 28.
European empires. Instead of losing German emigrants to “foreign acres,” as Sturz had suggested, bourgeois nationalists envisioned future German colonies in the Americas that would add to the glory of the would-be nation, a new Germany abroad “that was not riven by internal conflicts of class, region, and confession.” Again misjudging the motivations of those who left, they felt that migrants shared in that dream and that the “colonies” they founded could help establish a permanent German presence abroad.⁹¹

Countless new organizations were founded during the 1830s and 1840s, which purported to (and often did) provide for the welfare of emigrants. They sought out spaces, where national feelings could be strengthened and nationhood maintained. For example, one such organization devoted to promoting “colonization” abroad, the Verein zum Schutze deutscher Einwanderer in Texas (“Association for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas”) planned to establish a permanent and independent German colony there. “Organizers of the society had two objectives: land investments that would increase in time and a safe outlet for countrymen who wanted to emigrate.”⁹²

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⁹² Rippley, German-Americans, 45-46, also 54 and 76-78.
The Revolution of 1848 and 1849 and the assembly of national delegates in Frankfurt put this discourse on a political foundation and provided an arena to further debate the impact of emigration on the developing German nation-state. The result, not surprisingly, was “a mixed record of colonial fantasy and practical, if unrealized, measures designed to connect the fatherland to its disparate communities of ‘nationals’ abroad.” Colonialism and emigration, in other words, emerged as two interconnected issues where anxieties about population loss, cultural decline and the threat of alien invasion converged. Bourgeois elites could position themselves as custodians of a superior culture, educated, hard-working, spiritually sound, and destined to protect “Germanness” against the denigrating influence of everything non-German. The constitutional congress in Frankfurt aimed to set up a unified German state capable of protecting emigrants and asserting Germany’s role as a leading super power akin to its British and French counterparts, while simultaneously protecting and controlling its subjects at home and abroad.

An emblematic trope in this vision became the figure of the Auslandsdeutsche (the ‘German abroad’). Bradley Naranch has described how this “imagined identity” came to express in the post-revolutionary middle-class print culture “the conflicted feelings of national pride and

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93 In late May 1848, a group of elected delegates of many German states came together in Frankfurt to debate the content of a constitution for a united German nation-state. See Sperber, European Revolutions, 138-139.
95 Fitpatrick, Liberal Imperialism, 366; Naranch, Beyond the Fatherland, 47.
powerlessness felt by many Germans who were interested in the fortunes
and misfortunes of German emigrants in the United States, Latin America,
Western Europe and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{96} The terminology signified a paradigm
shift: whereas during the first half of the nineteenth century, middle-class
nationalists often described emigrants as \textit{Auswanderer}, powerful,
adventurous individuals who took on their own destiny and voluntarily left
Germany for good, the \textit{Auslandsdeutsche} represented tragic loss of the
homeland. Much like the patronizing assessments of governments and
aristocracy, this had little to do with the reality experienced by emigrants.\textsuperscript{97}
While bourgeois Germans envisioned romanticized images of the nation
and its empire in cultural and ethnic terms, millions of peasants, artisans,
and workers that saw their way of live permanently destroyed and left
European societies not to resurrect a German empire abroad but to save
an old, quite regional or even local way of life. “The \textit{Auslandsdeutsche},
quite simply, was not the German emigrant […].”\textsuperscript{98}

This is not to say that emigrants abandoned everything German or
denied their heritage, as many observers alleged. But most emigrants
merely possessed a rudimentary sense of German national identity. While
their way of life collapsed in the old world, lower-class Germans remained
disenfranchised politically, economically and culturally – to them,
“Germany” had little to offer. As I discussed in the previous section,

\textsuperscript{96} Naranch, \textit{Beyond the Fatherland}, 19-20.
\textsuperscript{97} Naranch, \textit{Beyond the Fatherland}, 50.
\textsuperscript{98} Naranch, \textit{Beyond the Fatherland}, 21.
emigrants were in fact aiming to transplant life to the United States in a much more active and optimistic manner than assumed by bourgeois observers. When the latter fantasized about emigrants' separation from a mythical homeland, they only partly captured migrant reality. Emigrants lost a *Heimat*, but not necessarily a nation, and their losses were far from mythical, they were real. Like the terminology describing it, bourgeois visions of emigration did not encapsulate the immense diversity of experiences and cultural identities of the millions of persons of German descent living around the globe. Instead it located them in a monolithic national imaginary that denied their claims to individual expression and autonomy of self in ways that were politically and rhetorically useful domestically.  

99 Naranch, *Beyond the Fatherland*, 52.

This conflict between myth and reality, between *Auslandsdeutsche* and *Auswanderer*, arose when the liberal revolutionaries in the late 1840s arrived in German American communities across the United States. The “Forty-Eighters” found the state of German America to be lacking. Politically, they despised slavery and uniformly supported the Republican Party, whereas older immigrants “found their ideas of liberty and equality in the Jeffersonian doctrines of the Democratic party,”100 which tolerated slavery. And while established immigrants often congregated in religious institutions where German language, culture and traditions were passed on, the liberal revolutionaries founded social and cultural clubs as well as

100 Rippley, *German-Americans*, 53.
parochial schools. The 1848 liberals often rebuked older settlers publically, “calling them barbarians, without art, music, and culture.”

When liberal nationalists reported their observations back to Germany, they further added to the already deteriorating opinion Germans held about their kin abroad. The more the reality of German unification converged with colonial fantasies and an increasingly racial view of the nation, the less German America fit into the romanticized descriptions of migrant life that pervaded the German public sphere for much of the second half of the nineteenth century. Originally, the Auslandsdeutsche had been, “the ultimate cultural colonizer, bringing the values of hard work, spiritual vitality, classical education, and love of order to the inferior races on the imperial periphery as well as to the civilized metropolises of Western Europe and the United States.” Now, many questioned the suitability of emigrants to extend the German nation beyond its borders. Some even spoke of an “emigration fever” and suggested that emigrants left not because of poverty or social immobility but due to their own lack of roots and ability. To others, emigration amounted to treason. In essence, elites blamed the émigrés for the conditions that pushed them out. By the 1890s,

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101 Rippley, German-Americans, 53.
102 For a more detailed discussion, see Bradley Naranch, Beyond the Fatherland, 53.
103 Naranch, Beyond the Fatherland, 55-56.
growing Anglophobia, skepticism of the ultimate national allegiances of German-American families, and the end of the last major wave of German transatlantic migration further eroded the importance of the Auswanderer as a symbol of national identity. The Auslandsdeutsche and the possibility of seeking new colonization spaces for the German diaspora in its African colonies and a German-dominated Mitteleuropa became a fixture in the nationalist imaginary of the radical right.\textsuperscript{105}

As I will attempt to show throughout this dissertation, such rejection by the fatherland greatly disappointed German Americans. For many migrants that had left Germany disillusioned after the failed Revolution of 1848/9 – as well as many others\textsuperscript{106} – the country’s ascension into the elite circle of world powers was a matter of great personal pleasure. To be sure, liberals were missing some of the democratic elements that they had fought for during the revolution, but even those critical of some of the Kaiser’s policies “found it difficult to hide their enthusiasm over developments in Bismarck’s Germany.”\textsuperscript{107} Not surprisingly, many of the historians, activists and writers who first told the story of German migration to the United States shared a great “pride in the progress of Germany” and they attempted to appeal to the Germans back home by writing histories of hard-working, diligent, and resilient settlers, who preserved

\textsuperscript{105} Naranch, \textit{Beyond the Fatherland}, 71.
\textsuperscript{106} Luebke, \textit{Bonds of Loyalty}, 32-33. See also Chapter 4.
German language and culture abroad. In that sense, as I will argue in more detail below, early German American history was steeped in the transnational politics of belonging from the start: its writers participated in a transatlantic debate about the past, presence, and future of German America.

It was not until the 1920s that German nationalists again reached out to Germans abroad, when German foreign policy discovered ethnicity as a political lever following World War I. The Versailles Treaty curtailed German military, political, and economic might. Cultural approaches were often not merely the only affordable means to make international politics, but also the only ones accepted by the Allies. Aiming to reverse Versailles, the German government, and in particular the German Foreign Office, the Auswärtige Amt, believed that it could awaken the ethnic national consciousness of Germans around the world and use them politically. The United States, which was not only becoming a major global power, but also had an enormous number of citizens that were ethnically German, became one of the main targets of the cultural foreign policy of Weimar Germany, which aimed to rekindle the pride in German heritage through culture, language – and history. I will discuss in more detail throughout the following chapters the implications of that shift for German migrants in the

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109 Retterath, Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke, 135, FN 731.
110 It would go beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive overview. For a complete overview of that history, see Chapter 2, Section 4.
United States. Here, it should simply be noted that in its increasingly racialized manifestations, the post-World War I German nationalism emphasized the history of its people to create a symbolic transnational unity (particularly in Europe, of course) around the simple argument that despite outmigration and diaspora, Germans all over the world had retained their traditional character.\footnote{Retterath, Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke, 21. Michael Wala, “Reviving Ethnic Identity: Foreign Office, Reichswehr, and German Americans during the Weimar Republic,” eds. Helbich, Kamphoefner, German-American Immigration and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective (Madison: Max Kade Institut for German-American Studies, 2004), 328-331.}

3. The Historiography of German America

3.1. Origins and Early Developments up to World War I

Apart from some scattered local and clerical histories largely written by amateur historians, there was no professional or scholarly effort to capture the German experience in the United States prior to the 1850s. Among the first authors to take on such a task was the jurist and historian Franz von Löher (1818-1892) who published his Geschichte und Zustände der Deutschen in Amerika (“History and Circumstances of the Germans in America”) in Cincinnati in 1847.\footnote{Franz von Löher, Geschichte und Zustände der Deutschen in Amerika (Cincinnati: Verlag von Eggers und Wulkop, 1847).} Von Löher was a temporary visitor to the United States. In fact, having stayed only seven months, he returned to Germany the year his book was published and participated in the German Revolution the year after. His views were similar to those of other liberal revolutionaries, who – before settling in the United States
themselves – believed in the achievements of the *Auswanderer* and lamented the Anglo-American establishment’s lack of appreciation for the German “element”.

Von Löher may also have believed in the power of history to unite German migrants around an ethnic-national identity that was still in its development.\(^{113}\) That belief was more prevalent a few decades later, when German American historiography experienced its first scholarly and popular impulse. With nativism on the rise, Anglo-American master narratives questioned the contributions of German immigrants and threatened to further exclude them from the evolving American identity.\(^{114}\) A new generation of historians attempted to counter that trend by establishing a more pluralist vision of the United States. They “saw in German American achievements an argument for the retention of their own identity and distinction apart from others, and they viewed history as the means to preserve and further ethnic group pride and solidarity.”\(^{115}\)

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\(^{114}\) As historian John A. Doyle noted in 1889: “I have preferred to regard the history of the United States as the transplantation of English ideas and institutions to a distant soil, and the adaptation of them to new wants and altered modes of life […] The history of the American colonies is in one sense nothing more than a continuation of English history.” John A. Doyle, *English Colonies in America, Vol 1-5* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1882-1907), I, 1-2. Doyle was a British historian, but his argument stood for one particular school of thought that viewed the American colonies as nothing but an extension of the British Empire. Even the opposing school of “nationalist” historians saw early American history as a product of British democratic culture, if not as one directly tied to the Empire. See: Max Savelle, “The Imperial School of American Colonial Historians,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 45:2 (1949), 123–34.

\(^{115}\) Don Heinrich Tolzmann, “German-American Studies,” 281.
Moreover, since they were intimately familiar with the accusations and prejudices discussed in the previous section, I argue that they also hoped to appease German nationalists back in the old world by highlighting the great achievements of their kin in America.  

Writers like the historian Albert Bernhard Faust (1870-1951), the philologist Julius Goebel (1857-1931) or the journalist and painter Richard Cronau (1855-1939) were either born or trained in Germany. They had spent many of their formative years in the old world. And the model of German American history they created hinged upon a hybrid nationalism molded in the transnational immigrant world that most German migrants lived in, a world shaped by their desire to belong as full members to the United States, while simultaneously retaining a stake in the evolving German nationalism back home. As such, writing German American history they developed discursive strategies, to use Eiichiro Azuma’s terminology, to position themselves and the ethnic group they purportedly spoke for between two evolving empires: Germany and the United States.

Of course, historiography was only one part of the larger German American project that aimed to entrench its culture, its language, and its unified political voice firmly in mainstream American life and as a part of

117 Faust, born in Baltimore in 1870, was a first generation American, the son of a shoemaker from Hessen. Goebel was born in Frankfurt, Germany and Cronau originated from Solingen. See Retterath, Deutscherkanertum und Volkstumsgedanken, 403-406.
118 See also Introduction, especially pages 10-14.
American national identity. The historian Hans-Werner Retterath has recognized three interrelated strategic “pillars” in that struggle: First, the idealization of the German American, which meant homogenizing and stereotyping groups and individuals by highlighting their virtues and their character, both to show achievements past, but also to proscribe a way of life to contemporary generations that slowly drifted towards Americanism;\(^{119}\) second, the preservation of language in institutions, publications and communities;\(^{120}\) and third, a consensual historiography of German American achievements.\(^{121}\)

Retterath argues that one of the unique characteristics of German American historiography – as opposed to German or American historiography – was its assimilatory approach. Whereas German writers often attempted to emphasize how migrants had kept separate, German American authors aimed to convince their audience that the historic achievements of their subjects had helped build the contemporary United States, earning them the right to define what it meant to be American.\(^{122}\) They thus sought to counter nativism and Americanism in the United States, increase the self-confidence and pride of German Americans in

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\(^{119}\) Retterath, _Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke_, 224-268.

\(^{120}\) Retterath, _Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke_, 269-302.

\(^{121}\) Retterath, _Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke_, 303. Retterath focuses on the period between the two World Wars and he includes in his study a vast number of writers and activists based in Germany. But since the general patterns were established before World War I, his observations also help us understand the motivations of the German-American authors who operated largely from the United States.

\(^{122}\) Retterath, _Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke_, 304.
their own heritage, and establish a collective identity as well as a sense of unity among the heterogeneous group of immigrants in the United States.\textsuperscript{123} And they did not, as Kathleen Neils Conzen once noted, accept assimilation as “the normal fate of any immigrant group,” but rather literally wrote against that assimilation by stressing the historical achievements of German immigrants.\textsuperscript{124}

As early as 1883, German Americans had begun holding annual German Days across the country to commemorate their own and their ancestors’ achievements. Around the same time, the first histories of German America were published.\textsuperscript{125} In 1886, the first German American historical society was founded in Baltimore, others followed in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in 1891 and in Chicago, where the German American Historical Society of Illinois began publishing its journal, the \textit{Deutsch-Amerikanischen Geschichtsblätter}, in 1901.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{123} Retterath, \textit{Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke}, 303.
\textsuperscript{124} Conzen, “Paradox,”153.
\textsuperscript{125} Charles T. Johnson, \textit{Culture at Twilight: The National German-American Alliance, 1901-1918} (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 9; Retterath, \textit{Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke}, 123; Anton Eickhoff, \textit{In der Neuen Heimath: geschichtliche Mittheilungen über die deutschen Einwanderer in allen Theilen der Union} (New York: Singer, 1884); Gustav P. Körner, \textit{Das deutsche Element in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika, 1818-1848} (Cincinnati: A.E. Wilde & Co, 1880). There are very few earlier examples of German-American historiography. One is Franz von Löher’s \textit{Geschichte und Zustände der Deutschen in Amerika}. Another is a Cincinnati-based journal called \textit{Der Deutsche Pionier} that collected stories of German achievement and was published between 1869 and 1887.
But activities remained scattered and largely unorganized on a national level, so that by the late 1890s, German American leaders attempted to unite the entire ethnic group in one national organization. In 1901, this led to the foundation of the National German-American Alliance (NGAA, Deutsch-Amerikanischer Nationalbund), a federation of hundreds of German immigrant organizations and by far the largest group ever attempting to represent the entire German ethnic group in the United States. Of course, the NGAA did more than to publish histories. Its self-proclaimed aims included the unification of German Americans, their protection against nativist attacks and the promotion of a good relationship between the United States and the German Empire. The NGAA organized cultural events, proposed and lobbied for public policies supporting the perpetuation of German culture and language in the United States. And to drive the latter objective, the NGAA financed a variety of historical publications outlining the achievements of German immigrants.

Importantly, the NGAA was largely run by members of the educated middle and upper classes with strong ties to Germany. Charles J.


Hexamer (1862-1921), president of the NGAA from 1901 to 1917 was an engineer and the son of a failed 1848 revolutionary who had fled Germany in 1856.\textsuperscript{130} The German-born and educated Rudolf Cronau, famous for his paintings of the Sioux, continued publishing his articles in middle-class German magazines like \textit{Die Gartenlaube} long after he had permanently settled down in the United States.\textsuperscript{131} Richard Bartholdt (1855-1932), a Congressman from St. Louis who arrived in the United States as a sixteen-year old adolescent in 1862, pressed for the official incorporation of the NGAA in Congress in 1907 and was a frequent visitor to the homeland until his death.\textsuperscript{132} And Dr. Marion Dexter Learned (1857-1917), Professor of German at the University of Pennsylvania, who edited the two NGAA publications, the academic \textit{Americana Germanica} as well as the bulletin \textit{Mitteilungen}, was a key member of the transatlantic academic network that drove the advancement of German Studies in the United States.\textsuperscript{133} All of these men had distinct ties to the German bourgeoisie, a

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\begin{enumerate}
\item Johnson, \textit{Culture in Twilight}, 5-9.
\item Retterath, \textit{Deutschamerikaner und Volkstumsgedanke}, 401.
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personal and professional interest in preserving German culture in the
United States – and limited insights on the experiences of working class
German immigrants across the country. Their social bias may, in fact, be
the common denominator in a group that was still highly diverse in
regional, religious, and political backgrounds.

It is an important aspect of this historiography – one that I will explore
in much greater detail in Chapter 4 – that many of the texts coming out of
this network never reached a mass audience, for one because they were
written from a vantage point representing the authors’ social perspective.
As the historian John Appel has shown, among the members of the GAHS,
there was an outspoken disdain for “popular” or “readable” books. This
is surprising given their objective to awaken widespread awareness
among America’s German migrants for their past achievements. Oddly
enough, writers who otherwise praised the agency and achievements of
their subjects, particularly working-class “pioneers”, explicitly excluded
them from reading their texts. This aspect is a striking example of the
gap between myth and reality discussed in the previous section, a
disconnect that prevented German American historiography from ever
making an impact, either in academia or the public mind. Whereas Italian

who later “presented the Allied cause in America” (Cornell Daily Sun, September
23, 1921, n.p.).

134 Appel, “Marion Dexter Learned,” 300. See also Kazal, Becoming Old Stock,
and Irish American ethnic cultures were rooted in the working class, German American culture was frequently not.

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As noted above, a deeply political, revisionist and consensual historiography was an essential tool identified by the NGAA to reach its aims of unification and advancement. “To value something,” Hexamer argued in 1901, “one must know its history.” To pass on that knowledge, the NGAA encouraged the foundation of local and regional historical associations, explicitly in order to include the contributions of German Americans in the history of the United States. In 1901, the NGAA also created a national organization, the German-American Historical Society (GAHS), to coordinate its activities and homogenize the message. Based at the University of Pennsylvania, the GAHS published an academic journal, the *Americana Germanica*, renamed the *German-American Annals* in 1903. *Americana Germanica* had been founded in 1897, four years before the GAHS made it its official organ, and its board members represented the highest echelons of American academia including the University of Chicago’s Starr W. Cutting (1868-1935), Faust of Cornell, and Harvard University’s Kuno Francke (1855-1930), who

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139 Faust joined Cornell in 1904 after stints at Johns Hopkins (1894-1896), Wesleyan (1896-1903), and Wisconsin (1903-1904). Christoph König and Birgit
devoted a lifetime to developing and curating the Germanic Museum there. The *German-American Annals* focused on the historical and present-day achievements of German Americans, with special considerations to language and literature. While ostensibly objective and academic, the journal always provided ample room to make the political case for “German Achievement in America,” for example when it reprinted an eponymous speech given by NGAA president C.J. Hexamer at Madison Square Garden in New York in November 1902, in which he praised the historic accomplishments of German migrants.

But it was the historical monographs written by and for the NGAA that would permanently transform the historiography of German America. In March 1904, the Germanic Department of the University of Chicago announced the Conrad Seipp Memorial Prizes, donated by Mrs. Catherine Seipp in memory of her late husband, a successful German American brewer. The prizes were to be awarded to the three best monographs written in German American history, or more precisely on “The German Element in the United States with Special Reference to Its Political, Moral, Social, and Educational Influence.” The books were to number roughly

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142 C.J. Hexamer, “German Achievement in America,” *German American Annals*, 1(1903), 46-53.
800 pages in volume and could be written in either German or English.\textsuperscript{143}

The three members of the committee to select the winners were Professors Hanno Deiler (1849-1909) of Tulane\textsuperscript{144}, Bryn Mawr’s Karl Detlev Jessen (1872-1919)\textsuperscript{145} and the famous pioneer historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932), then a Professor of history at the University of Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{146}

The first price of $3,000 was eventually awarded to Albert Bernhard Faust’s two volume \textit{The German Element in the United States} (1909). Faust, a regular contributor to the \textit{Annals}, approached the subject from a strictly academic point of view. At the time, his book fulfilled all standards of the historical discipline and was praised, by one reviewer, for “its scholarly thoroughness, its impartiality, its logical arrangement, and its interesting style.”\textsuperscript{147} Its comprehensive approach made it “both indispensable and suggestive to all subsequent workers in German and

\textsuperscript{143} See announcement for the Conrad Seipp Memorial Prize in \textit{The Stanford Daily}, Volume XXV: 26, 4 October 1904.
\textsuperscript{144} Deiler was himself a prolific scholar of German-American history in the New Orleans area. “At a time when immigration was dwindling, and the majority of the many organizations which had previously provided charity and support to the German community either dissolved for lack of need, or became, essentially, social clubs, Deiler was leading the cultivation of a sense of nobility among New Orleans’ Germans. His scholarly work and activity in the community alluded heavily to the virtue present in Louisiana’s German history […]. He documented this history prolifically, and sought adamantly to heighten awareness of its significance in his own time […].” See: www.hnoc.org/collections/gerpath/gersect6.html (accessed December 27, 2015).
\textsuperscript{146} See introduction to Faust, \textit{German Element}.
\textsuperscript{147} Oscar Kuhns, “Review of The German Element in the United States, with Special Reference to Its Political, Moral, Social, and Educational Influence,” \textit{The American Historical Review} 15:3 (1910), 615–617, quote on 617.
American history”. In fact, Faust’s book still stands out single-handedly as the defining work on German America of that time. It was reprinted as late as 1995 and favorably reviewed as late as 2005.

The committee awarded the second prize, worth $2,000, to Rudolf Cronau’s *Drei Jahrhunderte deutschen Lebens in Amerika* (“Three Centuries of German Life in America”). Cronau had first visited the United States in the 1880s to report about the American West for the bourgeois magazine *Die Gartenlaube*. After permanently relocating to the United States in 1901, he became involved in German American organizations and wrote extensively about the migrant experience in the United States. Published in German only, his book went through two editions in

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149 Claudia Liebrand, “Tacitus Redivivus or Taking Stock: A.B. Faust’s Assessment of the German Element in America,” in: Tatlock et al, *German Culture in Nineteenth Century America*, especially 43 and 44.

150 See bibliographical sketch at the Solingen, Germany archive, where his personal assets are stored: http://www.archive.nrw.de/LAV_NRW/jsp/findbuch.jsp?archivNr=147&tektid=278&id=033 (accessed January 6, 2016)
1909 and 1924, reaching a broad audience in the United States and in Germany. Like the third-prize winner, Georg von Bosse’s *Das deutsche Element in den Vereinigten Staaten* (1904), its aim was to rekindle the relationship between Germany and German America by highlighting the achievements of German migrants in the United States, both with regards to their prosperity and to the preservation of German language and culture abroad.\(^{151}\)

In essence, all these histories shared a joint perspective that attempted to establish the impact of German virtues – loyalty, modesty, diligence, efficiency, frugality, sense of duty – on the “New World” from the beginning of European discovery: The authors “found” Germans among the Vikings, Germans in Jamestown, Germans in New Amsterdam, Germans on the frontier. They described the diligence of German settlers, hailed the bravery of their military achievements – for example by General von Steuben in the Revolutionary War and the countless Germans fighting in the Civil War – and praised the loyalty of contemporary German Americans, whose character and personality made them ideal assets to the United States.\(^{152}\) The suggestion was, as Russell Kazal has aptly summarized “that Germans did not simply contribute to the progress of


\(^{152}\) Retterath, *Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke*, 227-230 and 303-370.
America but counted among its founders—just as much as Anglo-Americans, if not more.”

German American historiography was always written in a transnational context of two competing, increasingly aggressive nationalisms that could hardly be combined into one, hyphenated hybrid identity. That, as discussed above, was the tragedy of German America, as the British historian John Hawgood would describe it in the 1940s. The effect of this transnational intermingling was that German migrant historians lent heavily from their colleagues back home, engaging in, for example, aggressively anti-English arguments as well as constant laments about the lack of appreciation that American historiography showed for the German achievements. “How often have American circles hated, ridiculed and even persecuted the strange, but noble German ways,” Julius Goebel, head of the German Department at Stanford, complained. Somewhat more cautiously, A.B. Faust simply declared “the prominence of the Germans as a formative element of the American people, their continuous participation in the labors of peace and the

155 Goebel, *Deutsche Element*, 6. For a brief bibliography on Goebel, see Retterath, *Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke*, 406. Goebel was a controversial scholar who was ousted from Stanford in 1905. His firing, however, had nothing to do with his historical research. See: W. B. Carnochan, “The Case of Julius Goebel: Stanford, 1905,” *The American Scholar* 72:3 (Summer, 2003), 95-108.
burdens of war, suggested a need of a record of the essential facts in their history.  

Noticeably, some authors also attempted to refute accusations by German writers, who criticized the absence of a cohesive German culture in the United States. And if they admitted that absence, they blamed it at least in part on Germans back home.  

Again, Goebel: “It is incomprehensible that the children of the nation [des Volkes] that produced the greatest historians of the modern era did so little to foster the memory of its past in the world.” Interestingly, Goebel largely blamed this absence on the failures of German aristocracy to comprehend, protect and respect emigrants. “Too shortsighted and narrow-minded to comprehend the value of overseas settlements and unable to accompany the Auswanderer to America, they sought to characterize the Auswanderer as a criminal.” Goebel continues:

Back then, the heinously ridiculous view may have developed and spread that is still widespread today, that the Auswanderer to America were forever lost to the fatherland. And since then Germany has burdened itself with the unforgivable guilt of not taking care of the weal and woe [Wohl und Wehe] of its emigrated children […].

156 Faust, German Element, vi. For another, quite elaborate example that transcend ethnic boundaries and argues for cultural pluralism, see Edward F. McSweeney’s prelude “The Racial Contributions to the United States,” in Schrader, Germans in the Making, 1-29.
157 Retterath, Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke, 227-230 and 303-370. Among those that criticized German-American disunity was for example Gottfried Fittbogen (Retterath, Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke, 303).
158 Goebel, Deutsche Element, 5-6.
By merging German middle-class values with well-known characteristics of American ideal types – the frontier, or self-made man; the soldier; etc – German American authors attempted to create a valid hyphenated identity that would allow them to celebrate the culture they loved while regaining the cultural capital to participate in the American public sphere. Or, in the words of Rudolf Cronau: “the reverent love which the Germans bear the land of their birth in no way tends to diminish the loyalty which they owe to the country of their adoption.”\(^{159}\)

3.2. German American Historiography after World War I

World War I dealt a serious blow to all efforts to entrench historical German achievements in American national identity. Prior to the U.S. entry into the war, the NGAA, many of its members, and countless other German American organizations openly lobbied for American neutrality and called for a weapons embargo against the Allies, specifically against Great Britain.\(^{160}\) In the nationalist backlash that followed, many German American organizations yielded to the public pressures and disappeared from public view, as did the NGAA, which dissolved in April 1918 already under investigation from the federal government for its disloyal activities.\(^{161}\) The *German-American Annals* published its final two issues in

\(^{159}\) Cronau, *German Achievements*, 7.
1919 with a total of three contributions, none of which touched upon German culture in the United States.\textsuperscript{162} Some professional careers ended during the war, such as Detlev Jessen’s, who had once judged upon the best monograph in German American history and whose German classes at Bryn Mawr simply ceased attracting students in 1918.\textsuperscript{163} At the University of Michigan, the Iowa native Carl E. Eggert and the German citizen Ewald Boucke, both of the German Department, were dismissed for allegations of “pro-German” activities, along with three other colleagues. Enrollment in the Germanic Studies programs subsequently plummeted from 1300 to 150.\textsuperscript{164}

Beyond such disparate and anecdotal instances, however, the academic careers of those involved in attempting to rewrite German American history continued largely undisturbed. For example, Alexander R. Hohlfeld (1865-1956), a constant board member of the \textit{Annals} from its first to its final issue, remained on the faculty of the Wisconsin German Department from 1901 until he retired in 1936. While there, he supervised 25 major works on Anglo-German literary relations, training scholars that “assumed leading positions in German departments and professional

\textsuperscript{162} \textit{German-American Annals}, 21:1 and 21:2 (1919).
organization” across the United States.\textsuperscript{165} Kuno Francke (1855-1930), whose moderate affirmation of his German heritage was favorably reviewed by the \textit{New York Times} in 1916, retained his position as the curator of the German Museum at Harvard until 1929, a year before his death.\textsuperscript{166} And Albert Bernhard Faust, the author of the \textit{German Element}, stayed at Cornell until he retired in 1938 with his reputation intact – despite having received honors for his work in Germany as late as 1937. Upon his death in 1951, the university praised his work and bemoaned the loss of “a member who, by his personality, his writings, and his teaching, has contributed much to [the university’s] lasting distinction.”\textsuperscript{167} Like the ethnic leadership, most regional and local historical societies continued their work largely uninterrupted throughout World War I and beyond.\textsuperscript{168}

At the same time, the post-war era offered plenty of space for new voices in German American studies. The most influential was Carl Wittke, a second-generation American, whose research focused especially on the German-language press and the Forty-Eighters. As Don Heinrich Tolzmann noted in 1988: “Although affected by the assimilationist perspective of his time, his work contributed to reestablishing German

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\textsuperscript{167} See http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/bitstream/1813/17833/1/Faust_Albert_Bernhardt_1951.pdf (accessed, Jan 2, 2016).
\textsuperscript{168} Retterath, \textit{Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke}, 313.
\end{flushleft}
American history as an area of study and research, and it remains a point of departure for a number of fields. „169 Wittke was indeed influenced by the historiographical trends of time – particularly the “Melting Pot” theory of immigrant assimilation and Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis. „170 But he argued that German Americans, though ultimately unsuccessful, fought assimilation much longer than other ethnic groups. „171

Wittke’s career – and many others – showed that even though the attraction of German language, history and culture as a field of study suffered during and immediately after the war, the 1920s offered plenty of opportunity for its resurgence. Weimar Germany and the United States edged much closer both politically and culturally during the decade. As a rising global superpower, the United States depended on Germany as an economic and political partner in the rebuilding of Central Europe. „172 And New York still had the second-largest German population after Berlin, an important electorate to appease. As New York mayor Jimmy Walker, in office from 1926 to 1932, aptly concluded: “I don’t know who started the

172 See Chapter 2, Section 4.
war and I don’t know who won it, but what I do know is this: let’s forget it for once and for all!”

Many German Americans, however, did not simply forget the period – they strove for the full redemption of their ethnic group. To them, the war had shown that the United States did not appreciate its German element and those that had felt persecuted before the war had seen their worst suspicions become a reality. For them, now was the time to reestablish German immigrant culture as part of the American Way. At the same time, they were acutely aware they needed a change of tone to appease and appeal to the American public. When former members of the NGAA founded its successor organization, the Steuben Society of America (SSA) in 1919, they dropped the rhetorical belligerence, installed English as its operating language and only admitted American citizens. Instead of overstressing ethnic pride and separatism, the SSA crafted its public message in a language more palatable to an American audience. Its

174 The SSA had its historic purpose written into its name. The Prussian general Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben had served George Washington during the war of Independence and it was his memory that the SSA attempted to revitalize in order to lift the status of German America as a whole. Focusing on German-language teaching and history textbooks, the SSA actively campaigned against anti-German bias and for the inclusion of the heroic deeds committed by the likes of General von Steuben. Kupsky, The True Spirit, 98-100.  
official mission, for example, was merely “to arouse citizens of German
descent to a greater sense of their civic and political duties and rights.”\textsuperscript{176}

Nonetheless, the focus on common roots and the “arousal” of ethnic
awareness remained at the center of the SSAs activities. As did its
mission “to keep alive the many noble contributions that persons of
German birth and ancestry have contributed to [the] country.”\textsuperscript{177} Just like
the NGAA, the SSA thus had its own historical association, the Concord
Society (CS).\textsuperscript{178} Recounting the history of German achievement in the
United States was, according to Victor Richter, its secretary, “the
precondition of all political work by Americans of German heritage.”\textsuperscript{179} And
Frederick Franklin Schrader, its first president, told the \textit{Journal} in
Milwaukee, where the CS was headquartered, that his organization aimed
“to reawaken a feeling of pride in the achievements of great Americans of
German extraction […]. A new spirit is ready to assert itself in reclaiming
for the German race on this continent its just dues.”\textsuperscript{180}

Not surprisingly, then, the books and articles on German American
history that were published during the 1920s largely pursued the same

\textsuperscript{176} Wala, “Reviving Ethnic Identity,” 331. FN 14.
\textsuperscript{177} Mission statement of the Milwaukee Steuben Society. See:
https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/999463650302121 (accessed February 18,
2016).
\textsuperscript{178} Retterath, \textit{Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke}, 305 and 367. The
“Concord” was the ship that brought the first German settlers across the Atlantic
Ocean.
\textsuperscript{179} Retterath, \textit{Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke}, 313.
\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Milwaukee Journal} August 29, 1920, 10.
arguments as those before the war. They aimed to preserve the memory of the heroic deeds committed by German immigrants throughout American history and they strove to (re-)awaken the “justifiable race-pride” of German Americans in those contributions. They also displayed immigrants in line with German expectations, as cultural preservers of “Germanness.” Take for example, this passage from Frederick Franklin Schrader’s *The Germans in the Making of America* (1924): “The Teutonic race is inherently a race of naturalists and of land and home seekers, and deep and abiding as is the love of the individual German for his native land, the romantic tendency of his nature […] has carried him to the remotest corners of the earth in his individualistic capacity, and accounts of traces of his presence in almost all early exploring expeditions.” In the interwar years, the idealized German immigrant as pioneer and self-made man, always true to his German roots, increasingly served a political purpose, namely to invoke the common historical bonds between

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182 Faust, *German Element*, 3rd Edition 1927, Volume I, XIII.  
Germany and the United States, to rekindle that cooperation and, as a consequence, to defend the German right of self-assertion. As Hans-Werner Retterath notes, historical events were selectively accentuated and exploited to comment on current political and economic affairs, for example by overemphasizing the historical cooperation between the United States and Germany’s predecessor states or the involvement of “German” soldiers in American wars, especially the War of Independence and the Civil War.¹⁸⁴

However, when U.S. and German politics once more drifted further and further apart in the late 1920s and 1930s, it became near impossible for individuals and organizations to navigate this treacherous mélange of conflicting national interests, whether they focused on history, language, culture, or politics. Those that attempted to do so were inevitably confronted with a political backlash that threatened careers and, in the case of ethnic organizations, their mere survival. In Philadelphia, the Deutscher Klub und Technischer Verein (“German Club and Technical Association”), struggled to arbitrate between its moderate and its increasingly radicalized ethnic-nationalist members (see also Chapter 4). Another example of such transnational conflict is that of the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation (CSMF), a heavily endowed organization devoted to

¹⁸⁴ In one instance, both Cronau and Faust called the Battle of Yorktown in 1781 “the German battle” for its high percentage of German participants on both sides. Cronau even included a sentimental anecdote about a “German” fraternization afterwards (Retterath, Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke, 334).
German language teaching, education exchange and cultural preservation, which produced several historical works,\(^{185}\) cultivated connections to the Weimar Republic and, later, the Third Reich. The CSMF was, by all accounts, the only organization capable of driving a politically motived historiographical agenda during the late 1920s and 1930s. And it attempted as much, establishing its publication, the *American-German Review*, “as the central organ of publication for German-American studies […]. Because of its slick format and popular style it attained a sizable readership consisting of the interested German-American public as well as scholars.”\(^{186}\) As Gregory Kupsky has shown, the CSMF’s members saw “closer intellectual relations between the United States and Germany” as a way to enrich their domestic program. Despite strong internal opposition against cooperation with the Third Reich, the CSMF eventually pursued a pro-German agenda and intended its publications, historical and otherwise, “to inoculate the American public against the ‘distortions’ of the

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mainstream press.” 187 Ultimately, the CSMF lost many of its most influential members and much of its American support over its inability to sever its ties from Nazi Germany. 188

Beyond the pressures of American disapproval, German Americans found it difficult to divest from Nazism due to the aggressive involvement of the Nazis in German American affairs. Beginning in 1933, the new National Socialist government pursued geopolitical influence through cultural programs between Germany and the United States, particularly German America. According to the historian Cornelia Wilhelm, such plans included a historiographical agenda that aimed to make U.S. history appear more “German.” Attempting to create a strategic partnership between both countries, the Nazis wanted to “educate […] the Germans in America of their supposed ‘Germanness’ and to win their sympathy for Germany.” 189 Ignoring the heterogeneous origins of America’s Germans, the Nazis “imagined that they could rely on the exaggerated number of 20 million ‘Germans’ in America.” 190

While such designs were doomed to fail, their success with many German Americans historians seriously damaged the reputation of the field – in the 1930s and beyond. A good example of this development is the engagement of Heinz Kloss, an amateur historian sponsored by the

187 Kupsky, The True Spirit, 204.
188 Kupsky, The True Spirit, 205-207
190 Wilhelm, “Nazi Propaganda,” 59.
Nazis, who collaborated with various German American organizations, including the CSMF. In 1937 Heinz Kloss even suggested the foundation of an “American-German research institute” at the behest of the CSMF, an idea that was thwarted by the increasing tensions between Germany and the United States.\textsuperscript{191} Among German Americans there was little resistance to Kloss’ non-scientific approach. His work imbued German American historiography with a view of ethnicity that defined “Germanness” around racialized values and characteristics.\textsuperscript{192} According to Wilhelm, Kloss claimed that “all German people shared a common essence, which united them and which was manifested in the traditions, folkways, crafts, language and relationship with the soil […].”\textsuperscript{193} Furthermore, following now familiar narratives, in his 1937 book \textit{Um die Einigung des Deutschamerikanertums}, Kloss overemphasized the importance of German American organizations and achievements, and lamented the lack of appreciation thereof by mainstream American historiography.\textsuperscript{194}

All together, it was an approach that one reviewer rightfully dismissed as “wishful thinking” but too many others applauded.\textsuperscript{195} The inability to reject such racist views ultimately led German American historiography to

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{191} Tolzmann, “German-American Studies,” 284.
\textsuperscript{192} Wilhelm, “Nazi Propaganda,” 63.
\textsuperscript{193} Wilhelm, “Nazi Propaganda,” 63.
\textsuperscript{194} Heinz Kloss, \textit{Um die Einigung des Deutschamerikanertums: Die Geschichte einer unvollendeten Volksgruppe} (Berlin: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1937).
\end{footnotes}
write itself into the margins of academia and American public life during the 1930s.

Of course there were those who tried. In his review of John Hawgood’s book *The Tragedy of German-America*, quoted in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, Dieter Cunz\(^{196}\) criticized the absence of scientific, objective studies on German America. According to Cunz,

> the consistent attitude of most German-American historians is apologetic. Based on the feeling that the merits of the German element in America have always been unduly ignored, they elevate and push the contributions of the Germans in such an untenable and blatant tone that every decent German blushes as a consequence.\(^{197}\)

Indeed, it was hard not to notice the hyperbole and cultural chauvinism permeating the pages of German American historiography before World War II. Readers learned only, to quote Rudolf Cronau, “of the glorious past of the German element in America, of its well-nigh endless record of achievements and sacrifices on behalf of the nation, of its enduring patriotism when others failed of their duty or knew not where to turn.”\(^{198}\) Instead of producing balanced accounts, which displayed the modesty they purportedly valued as characteristically “German,” German American authors created a mythical past that offered at best a fraction of the history it purported to represent and had little foundation in actual scientific

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\(^{196}\) Cunz was himself a recent émigré to the United States. He eventually published several studies on Germans in Maryland.

\(^{197}\) Dieter Cunz, “Die Deutsch-Amerikaner,” 343-348.

\(^{198}\) Cronau, *German Achievements in America*, 7.
research. Their work helped manifest a mythologized imagery of the devout German settler on the frontier – cultural, educated, religious, hard-working – that may have inspired some readers. But it did not resemble the urban reality that many German Americans now experienced. In fact, life in the industrial city – which was the predominant reality for German Americans at the time, was hardly mentioned at all.\textsuperscript{199} To make matters worse, such ethnic-nationalist accounts could only meet with the resistance of most American readers during the late 1920s and 1930s. Not only did the United States and Germany drift towards a military conflict, the period was also marked by the cultural juxtaposition of the American Way and the totalitarianism of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{200} The consequence, in short, was an almost complete submergence of German American historiography during the 1940s and 1950s.

4. Ethnic Revival and the Continuities in German American Studies

It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that the historiography of German America once more received a serious scholarly impulse from

\textsuperscript{199} I have not been able to find any mentioning of urban life in either Faust’s \textit{German Element} or Cronau’s \textit{German Achievements} – except, of course, when German immigrants became successful as entrepreneurs. To be fair, this is a general trend in American historiography before World War II. Most famously, Frederick Jackson Turner’s narrative focused on the American West, as did many other influential historians. The study of cities was often left to sociologists, most prominently those of the Chicago School. See: Gary Gerstle, “Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans,” \textit{Journal of American History} 84 (1997): 524-558, here: 529; Russell A. Kazal, “Revisiting Assimilation,” 442-443.

academia. This was in part thanks to a renewed popular interest in the immigrant past. During the ethnic revival of the 1960s many European Americans began to search for and to celebrate their Old World roots.\textsuperscript{201} In academia, immigration scholars of the new social history became interested in examining the story of their immigrated ancestors back in the old world\textsuperscript{202} as well as from a variety of new perspectives, including race, gender, and class. This period brought forth countless reinvigorating approaches to the history of German America from scholars like Kathleen Neils Conzen, Werner Sollors and Walter Kamphoefner, to name just three prominent examples.\textsuperscript{203} Moreover, it coincided with a renewed interest in the study of migration in Germany, where academics had largely avoided the topic since World War II.\textsuperscript{204} The 1980s and 1990s thus saw a substantial increase of serious scholarship with special emphases on the history of German labor migration to the United States,\textsuperscript{205} the


\textsuperscript{204} Wolfgang Helbich, “German Research on German Migration to the United States,” \textit{Amerikastudien / American Studies} 54:3 (2009), 384-385.

\textsuperscript{205} In this area, the work of Harmut Keil is without comparison. See Keil, \textit{German Workers’ Culture in the United States 1850 to 1920} (Washington, D.C.:
unearthing of female migration histories as well as the role of gender in the migration process, and immigrant letters.

However, this did not lead to the rejuvenation of German American studies as an academic field. The reason for that failure is complicated, but part of it lies, I believe, once more in the inability of German American organizations to adequately address their complicated past. Unlike German society itself, which was forced to work through its involvement with National Socialism and the Holocaust, German Americans could ostensibly look back at their ethnic-cultural roots without too much regret. I suggest that the existence of countless grassroots ethnic historical societies, made up not only of professional scholars, but also of amateur historians with a personal stake in German American historiography, has done much to delay that process. More precisely, the persistent emphasis on immigrant contributions and achievements, on the same markers of “Germanness” – language, high culture, etc. – as well as the lack of


scholarly impulses from and exchanges with American academia as a whole, has left German American history on the sidelines.

I want to briefly outline some examples of such continuities. First, there was a continued focus on “contributions” in too many influential histories of German America written in the United States that I reviewed for this chapter. Ubiquitous examples include Henry A. Pochman’s 800-page investigation of *German Culture in America*, published in 1961, which finds traces of German philosophical and literary influence everywhere in American life and in the works of many famous Americans, from Samuel Longfellow through Ambrose Bierce, Henry James and, of course, Mark Twain; 208 Richard O’Connor’s admittedly non-academic treatise, which attempts to discover “what social and historical impact the German-American has made on the United States”; 209 and LaVern Ripley declaration in *The German-Americans* (1976), still a standard history, that he aimed to “demonstrate the tremendous impact which the German immigrants in the United States exercised on the cultural growth of America”. 210

Another continuity that I find troubling is the largely uncritical and persisting use of the term “German element.” 211 Its origins in immigration

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209 Richard O’Connor, *The German-Americans*, 5. O’Connor also notes a German lack of “reluctance […] to mingle their Aryan blood.” Ibid.
210 Rippley, *German-Americans*, 143.
211 See for example: Rippley, *German-Americans* (1976), 180; O’Connor, *German-Americans* (1968), 404; Tolzmann, “Society,” (1988), 165; George F.
history have not yet been adequately analyzed, but it certainly predates Faust, who utilized it in the title of his 1909 history of German migration to the United States, *The German Element in the United States*. During the early 1900s, many ethnic historians applied the term to various different groups – it was part of the common academic vocabulary. However, the term suggests an essentialized, even racialized understanding of humanity that is not only completely outdated but should be treated with special care by those dealing with German history, whether “at home” or “abroad.” This is not to suggest that I believe any of the authors who used or use the term are beholden to the essentialized values of a bygone age. But I do think it signifies a certain resistance to critical thinking and innovation necessary to further and keep alive the study of an immigrant group.

Finally, it is perhaps the survival of the “idealized immigrant” of turn-of-the-century historiography that is most surprising and most troubling. Rather than questioning this trope utilizing the scholarly resources available on both sides of the Atlantic, author after author simply copied

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213 Etymologically, the term has always referred to an essential, undividable part of a whole, for example in chemistry. See “element, n.” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, March 2016), retrieved March 13, 2016.
the hard-working and diligent “German,” an archetype established more than a century ago by those still dreaming of an American way of life defined by its German immigrant minority. Take for example, Carl Wittke’s 1936 history of *German-Americans and the World War*, which describes “millions of enterprising, thrifty, and law-abiding [German] settlers who came to the United States to make it their permanent home.” Wittke continues:

Artisans, tradesmen, farmers, highly-trained professional men—they had been welcomed as valuable additions to the American population. The German-American element took a natural and pardonable pride in the phenomenal progress made by the Fatherland, especially after 1870, and tried to preserve their cultural heritage in the new country as long as possible by supporting newspapers and countless organizations which should keep alive their language, their music, their literature, and their entire German *Lebensanschauung*, in a new environment. But their real home was America. Here they established their families and often achieved the prosperity which the old Fatherland had denied them. They became American citizens and played, for the most part, an important and honorable and sometimes distinguished role in public affairs.\(^{214}\)

A decade later, Wittke again introduced German Americans as

\(^{214}\) Carl Wittke, *German-Americans and the World War*, 3.
just enough idealism to save and build homes in the New World.\textsuperscript{215}

In 1962, the historian John J. Appel built on Wittke’s model to portray German immigrants as those who merely “desired a secure, stable family life more than riches or adventure and who preserved, with inevitable modifications, many of the social, economic, religious and cultural patterns of the homeland.”\textsuperscript{216} Paraphrasing Wittke, Appel argued that German migrants “resisted Americanization longer than most other European nationalities.”\textsuperscript{217} That same year, Theodor Huebener, then the head of the Department of Foreign Languages in the New York City public school system, published a book called \textit{Germans in America}. In his acknowledgements, Huebener readily admitted that for a lack of better sources he relied heavily on Faust’s \textit{German Element} and Wittke’s \textit{We Who Built America}. Consequently, his narrative was built around the same stereotypical depictions of heroic, noble German settlers, who never forgot their German heritage. For example, in a chapter called “The German – The Fearless Frontiersman” Huebener writes:

\textsuperscript{215} Wittke, \textit{We Who Built America}, 187. This is not to say that such arguments did not have their raison d’être or lacked scholarly merit. Wittke, for his part, was an excellent historian with a long list of achievements. A professor at the University of Ohio for, he critically engaged with Nazi apologists like Heinz Kloss as early as 1938 and his signature book, \textit{We Who Build America}, remains a classic in American immigration historiography. His vision of the monolithic American settler, however, should not have survived as long as it did in the historiography of German migration to the United States.

\textsuperscript{216} Appel, “Marion Dexter Learned,” 287. Appel references Hawgood’s \textit{The Tragedy of German-America} in this instance.

\textsuperscript{217} Appel, “Marion Dexter Learned,” 287. Interestingly, Appel quotes Heinz Kloss here, whose involvement with National Socialism the Jewish émigré Appel must have been aware of.
The German pioneers were a sturdy lot, their women working in the woods and fields together with the men. They were honest and thrifty, but because of the difference in language, they generally refrained from taking positions of leadership in the community. That may explain why they have not been given adequate mention in the average American history text.

Huebener’s style was not quite as chauvinistic as that of his turn-of-the-century predecessors, but the message is the same: Despite Hawgood’s findings that Germans had indeed rather preferred the safety of urban America, Germans once more appear as sturdy, honorable pioneers, who preserved their language abroad and paid the price with their secondary role in the United States and the amnesia of American history.\textsuperscript{218}

This brand of history as attracted its critics before me. As early as 1976, Patricia Herminghouse lamented that not only did early historians like Faust still provide the most definite accounts, unfortunately, “their [academic] approach has seldom been transcended either. With varying degrees of popularization, almost every book available today on the Germans in America is written in the same filiopietistic, positivistic vein with little serious analysis of the effects of the American experience on the

\textsuperscript{218} Consequently, Dieter Cunz reviewed the book unfavorably. Praising Huebener for his work in the New York public school system, Cunz wrote that the book under review “will add nothing to his laurels.” Cunz condemns Huebener’s ignorance of recent scholarship, calling it “the author’s cardinal sin.” It is particularly the consistent reliance on Faust as a model that stirred Cunz’ disapproval. Huebener, he points out, copied errors from Faust that Faust himself had already mistakenly copied from older sources (Dieter Cunz, Review of The Germans in America. The German Quarterly 36:4 (1963), 491–93).
immigrants.” 

With the exceptions of some works, Herminghouse concluded, “it seems reasonable to assume that the ethnocentrism of most of the existing materials and the tainted past of some of the research contributed to a general shunning of the whole field.”

Perhaps worse, in recent years, there has been a deterioration of scholarly standards. In his review of two then recent works on German Americana between the two World Wars, historian Jeffrey Sammons had to realize the debate on German American internment during World War II was not only tainted by unscholarly representations and the willful misinterpretation of data but that other colleagues in the field, while similarly disconcerted, had resigned themselves to “a feeling of helplessness.” Sammons alerted his readers “to a deterioration of scholarly standards” in the discipline and warned: “If we do not maintain vigilance about standards and integrity, we run the risk of losing the respect of a constituency that I think we do not always sufficiently consider: our academic colleagues in other disciplines.”

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219 Herminghouse, “German-American Studies,” 5.
221 Jeffrey L. Sammons, “Review: Were German-Americans Interned during World War II? A Question concerning Standards and Integrity,” *The German Quarterly* 71:1 (Winter, 1998), 73-77. Moreover, in 2000, the former president of the SGAS, Don Heinrich Tolzmann published his *German-American Experience*. In the book, Tolzmann copied entire passages, including the one quoted above from Huebener. Apart from the complete lack of scholarly integrity, this incident also speaks to the inability of German-American Studies to update its historiography to modern standards, not to speak of innovative ways to make the study of German-America interesting to graduate students. See: Robert W. Frizzell, Review of Tolzmann, Don Heinrich, *The German-American Experience,*
Sammons criticized what he deemed fabricated evidence of a widespread “campaign” that argued the German American community was the victim of persecution during World War II. In a similar case in 2001, Ron Robin attacked Stephen Fox, author of America’s Invisible Gulag for Fox’ pseudo-scientific attempt in “victimology” and criticized “the author’s inability or unwillingness to distinguish between the bearers of indignities and those who confronted existential threats.”  

There is, in fact, no credible evidence of any widespread persecution or internment of German Americans in the United States comparable to the fate of Japanese Americans.

Indeed, the comparison suggested in Fox’ title seems inappropriate, but the larger point here is a different one: There seems to be an unwillingness or a lack of serious scholarly interest in bridging the gap between victimization and vilification, between the “Good German” and the Nazi, in historical accounts of German Americana between the two World Wars. German American Studies has repeatedly failed to adjust to critical developments in modern academic scholarship or to come to terms with its convoluted past. An in-depth analysis of that failure would go beyond the scope of this chapter – indeed it seems to me that a critical examination of German American studies as a field is long overdue.

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5. Conclusion

In a 2011 volume on the future of German American Studies, its editors Cora Lee Kluge and Mark Louden argued that in the past three decades the field had “reinvented” itself. Contrary to the 1980s, the authors argue, it now offered “a wide range of interdisciplinary perspectives […], community history, art history, historical geography, political science, law, immigration studies, literature, folklore, music, language, and linguistics.” Looking back at more than a century of German American Studies in general, and specifically its historiography, I would suggest that this is not much of an improvement, not to speak of a “reinvention”. Literature, folklore, music, language, and linguistics have always been at the center of a discipline attempting to find a presence of “Germanness” in the United States strongly based on the characteristics proscribed a century ago by the proponents of *Deutschtum* on both sides of the Atlantic.

The authors continue: “No longer seen as relics of an uninteresting past, the contributions and traditions of immigrants from German lands are now viewed as an integral part of our country’s fabric,” they write, once more reiterating a claim that is as old as German American Studies itself. The obliviousness is all the more startling considering the fact that

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the volume itself includes chapters, whose authors criticize old narratives of “contributions” and victimization. Walter Kamphoefner’s excellent piece on “Elvis and other Germans,” for example, rightly demands research beyond characters that fit into existing patterns. Suggesting one route, Kamphoefner calls for more research into the roots of anti-Communism using such prominent characters as Joseph McCarthy, who grew up in and was politically supported by the Catholic German community in rural Wisconsin. There is a German contribution worth looking into. Moreover, Kamphoefner also suggests opening up the field to transnational investigations of American religious history and argues that German American Studies has much to learn from the blooming research on Hispanic Americans. In the ensuing chapters I will aim to transcend traditional boundaries of Germanness in the hope of developing new ways to talk about the historical and present-day traces of German migrants in the United States.

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225 Kamphoefner, “Elvis and other Germans,” 43, see also: Kathleen Neils Conzen, “Immigration Religion and the Public Sphere: The German Catholic Milieu in America,” in German-American Immigration and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective, eds. Wolfgang Helbich and Walter D. Kamphoefner (Madison, WI: Max Kade Institut, 2004), 73.
1. Introduction

During and after World War I, many German Americans felt like second-rate citizens in the United States and a great number of them expressed frustration with their status as Americans of German descent. For example, Paul Schulze from Manchester, New Hampshire, who had immigrated in 1892, complained that “here, the German only counts, when he has to do his duty, but when he asks for his rights, he is only a foreigner.”227 Similarly, Käte Küchler from New York, a more recent arrival in the United States, lamented that “here you are only a foreigner and a German one at that.”228

There were, of course, many reasons why German Americans felt rejected in the interwar period. Much of it had to do with the anti-German atmosphere caused by World War I and, later, the racist, exclusionary, and belligerent policies of the National Socialists. Another reason was the shared sense among German immigrants that they should be afforded a status superior to, for example, immigrants from Eastern or Southern Europe (see also Chapter 3). However, many Germans also struggled with the new realities of the interwar years, which forced them to negotiate

227 Paul Schulze to VDA, HSTA 12460-45, 1938-722.
228 Küchler to VDA, HSTA 12460-41, 1935-106. Emphasis in original.
increasingly absolutist definitions of Americanness and Germanness. In the global order arising after World War I, states increasingly attempted to police and control populations around a set of new values and obligations. The respective national implications of this process were shaped not merely by lawmakers but in an ongoing public discourse, in which many Americans actively participated. I argue in this chapter that German immigrants to the United States weathered this storm—much like other ethnic groups—within a transnational framework that included the political, social, and cultural realms of old home and new home. By pushing back against nativists, who tried to force them to give up their religions, languages, and histories, German Americans helped transform the norms and values of the changing United States. However, while many successfully embraced key aspects of Americanization, such as English language and American history and simultaneously used the tenets of American democracy as a defense of their cultural differences, others were left frustrated with a sense of “inbetweenness” that was impossible to reconcile with such exclusive definitions of national identity.

In this chapter I first lay out the global developments, which led to the manifestation of stronger boundaries between nation-states and the apparatuses designed to police them. Next, I discuss the respective implications of this process in the United States and Germany, focusing in particular on the increasing significance of “Germandness Abroad” during the 1920s and 1930s. Finally, I examine how immigrants could utilize
letters to organizations back in Germany like the VDA to navigate these two competing identities and stake out a space for their own transnational negotiations of belonging.

2. The “Golden Age” of Identification: The Global Politics of Citizenship and Belonging

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, during much of the nineteenth century, migration from Europe to the United States solved two interrelated problems: Overpopulation and hunger in the Old World and labor shortages in the New. Whereas local, regional and state laws had initially restricted migration, by the 1850s more and more states in Europe, and particularly in Germany, realized that such restrictions inhibited international trade and the growth of the global economy. “For the political elites, the integration of markets was more important than matters of security policy.” Consequently, during the second half of the nineteenth century, border controls as we know them today were almost non-existent for travel in North America and Central Europe and migrants needed no passports or visas to cross borders or stay abroad.

But by the late 1800s industrialization and urbanization had begun to transform traditional societies in Europe and the United States, resulting in

231 Russia was an exception. Oltmer, *Migration und Politik*, 21.
the development of massive urban centers, where hundreds of thousands of people lived in anonymity and, often, great poverty. Millions of migrants traveled around the globe in search for new opportunities, bringing in contact heterogeneous and disparate cultures.  

Riots and strikes frequently disrupted the social fabric of cities on both sides of the Atlantic, while epidemics wreaked havoc among the urban poor and crime rates escalated. Amidst the chaos, social reformers in North America and Europe attempted to impose order through comprehensive social policies and municipal reforms. Equipped with an unwavering trust in “objective knowledge” and the emerging disciplines of modern science, these men and women were concerned with the ways in which diverse populations were to coexist and how to regulate that coexistence both externally and domestically. Some questioned the capability of minorities, immigrant or not, to participate in the democratic institutions of modern nation-states and there were systematic attempts to disenfranchise, marginalize, or simply exclude segments of the population along lines of race, gender, class and religion.

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232 Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 44.


or urban hygiene programs, realizing that educated, healthy citizens were needed to preserve the social peace and guarantee stability.\textsuperscript{235}

Though attitudes differed, the discourse on how to solve the problems of the time was a transatlantic one. Between the 1870s and 1940s “the North Atlantic economy formed […] a world mart of useful and intensely interesting experiments. […] These were the years […] when other nations' social politics, in short, were news.”\textsuperscript{236} This applied especially to the exchange of knowledge and experience between Germany and the United States. Both countries were ascending geopolitical powers with booming industrial centers in steady need of labor. Both were suddenly confronted with millions of migrants leaving, passing through, or permanently settling; both subsequently implemented major legal and social reforms that extended the reach of the national government into the private sphere. American scholars often studied at German universities and vice versa, developing extensive networks for the exchange of information.\textsuperscript{237} Not


\textsuperscript{236} Rodgers, Atlantic Crossings, 4. See also: Thomas Bender, A Nation Among Nations. America’s Place in World History (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Ian Tyrrell, Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

\textsuperscript{237} For a critical discussion of that exchange, see especially Gabriele Lingelbach, “Cultural Borrowing or Autonomous Development: American and German Universities in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in: Thomas Adam and Ruth Gross, Travelling Between Worlds: German-American Encounters (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), 100-123. Other works on the topic include: Henry Geitz, Jürgen Heideking, and Jürgen Herbst, eds., German Influences on
surprisingly, both countries frequently found similar solutions to solve comparable problems. This is especially evident in the case of migration and citizenship.

The United States, a frontrunner in the liberalization of global migration policy, was also a leading force to curb the global flow of immigrants in the late nineteenth century. As I will discuss in Section 3 of this chapter, the new immigration law of 1882 and the establishment of Ellis Island as a gateway for migrants in 1891 centralized a national immigration policy and redefined the ways in which states dealt with immigrants and cross-border travel. Almost simultaneously, the German Reich changed its policies of emigration, not least because American immigration authorities in Ellis Island sent back every migrant perceived to be destitute or carrying an infectious disease. Germany thus instituted a systematic control apparatus and determined migration paths, establishing for example Berlin’s Ruhleben train station and Hamburg’s emigration harbor for that purpose. There, migrants were checked for diseases – often discriminating against

some groups on a racial or ethnic basis and sometimes even for their political orientation. Other countries like Italy, the Netherlands, Great Britain or Norway, adopted similar policies.\textsuperscript{238} It was during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, then, that the idea of policed borders around territorial nation-states became the ruling paradigm. Nations across the globe devised cultural narratives of their cultural, civic, or ethnic composition and from a contemporaneous point of view these narratives provided legitimacy to the argument that it was necessary to control cross-border movement. States also extended the rights and duties of citizenship beyond the national borders, remaking consulates and diplomatic services from trade hubs for merchants into places citizens could turn to for everything from lost luggage to legal advice.\textsuperscript{239}

There were, of course, critical differences between the United States and Germany that emerged in the years leading up to World War I. For example, the U.S. Expatriation Act of 1907 stipulated that naturalized Americans could lose citizenship after being abroad for five years and that American-born women would lose theirs upon marriage to a foreigner, whereas the 1913 German Nationality Law set forth that German citizenship was based on descent without regard for birthplace and

\textsuperscript{238} Oltmer, \textit{Migration und Politik}, 22.
residence. But these differences were never as diametrically opposed as some scholars have suggested in the past. Pointing to critical cultural components of every national identity, even Rogers Brubaker – a well-known proponent of the ethnic-civic divide in citizenship theory – recently conceded that such normative distinctions are “at best problematic.”

Creating a sense of separation and difference always depended on the creation and perpetuation of cultural narratives and many modern nation-states thus realized the critical importance of a “national” education. Germany and the United States, for example, instituted agendas of nationalization – attempting to “Germanize” or “Americanize” the next generation – or set up juvenile courts (the United States in 1900, Germany in 1908) intended to police the behavior of children and adolescents.

World War I, unlike any other war before, depended on the loyalty and participation of its citizens. Unprecedented numbers of men were drafted into military service, while women supported the war effort from the “home front.” The war was no longer fought merely on local battlefields but affected the entire nation. When increasing instances of sabotage and espionage made the question of loyalty a matter of national security, many countries engaged in the war expanded policies to control the movement

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of both their own citizens and foreigners. Great Britain, for example, adopted the Aliens Restriction Act of 1914 to increase the government’s ability to police the movement of non-citizens, while France instituted an obligation for foreigners to carry an identity card in 1917. What had been designed as temporary measures soon became permanent policies, so much so that political scientists today refer to the interwar era as the “golden age of identification practices.”

In this context, we need to take a closer look at the consequences of the Versailles Peace Treaty that ended the war. For many observers World War I had signaled a collapse of the global order it deemed to protect. “It dealt a severe blow to the power and prestige of the leading imperial powers […]. The war strained the resources of European powers, exposed as hollow their claims to superior civilization, and decimated the image of Western military invincibility […].”

The statesmen and policymakers that met in Paris in early 1919 not only set out with the goal to fashion everlasting peace but also to bring about a global civil society guaranteeing permanent political stability and economic prosperity. At the same time, activists from all over the globe – labor leaders, female suffragists, anti-colonialists, and spokespeople for oppressed nations from

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Albania to Vietnam – arrived to plead to the conference on behalf of their respective causes and constituents.²⁴⁵

But the contentious negotiations behind closed doors in Versailles paid little attention to these various interests and its result, the Versailles Peace Treaty, was “a symptom of [the negotiating parties’] disguised internal disunity.”²⁴⁶ Most importantly, it produced a blueprint for the future of international politics by privileging irredentist nation-states and thus retroactively legitimizing the nationalist frenzy, which had started the war in the first place. Historians continue to debate whether the aims of those involved were nobler and the Peace Treaty simply an aberration, a falsification of those noble aims.²⁴⁷ The American delegation, in particular, sported the political clout of a moral cause, representing a system of government that was, for many, a model for the world. “[U.S. President Woodrow] Wilson explicitly cast himself and America as defenders of the weak against the powerful, of common folk against autocratic regimes, of

²⁴⁷ For example, the historian Trygve Throntveit recently argued that President Wilson did not in fact espouse any völkisch notions of ethnic belonging, which proved to be a foundation for the territorial readjustments in Europe. Instead, Throntveit suggests, “the principle of national self-determination and the privileging of the ethnic nation-state were incongruous with Wilson’s political thought.” Rather, Wilson had simply failed in providing leadership to realize his vision of an international community which replaced “the yoke [of foreign oppression] with the mantle of self-government for all citizens, under any state, whatever its origins.” See: Trygve Throntveit, “The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination,” *Diplomatic History* 35.3 (2011): 445-481, quote on 454.
small nations against great powers.” But the visible cracks in the American system – most notably the consistent discrimination against African-Americans – were already receiving global attention. And President Wilson, a Southerner, was not exactly known for his proactive stance on race relations. Consequently, what little consensus could be reached among a quarreling and divided group of Allies in Paris was based on the smallest common denominator produced by decades of “scholarship” on human differences: That some people had the capacity to govern themselves and others did not and that the stability of the world depended upon the guidance of those “civilized” enough to take control. After all, Communist uprisings threatened stability in Eastern Europe and anti-colonial movements threatened imperial rule in Egypt, Indochina, and India. Rather than addressing the woes of the colonized and removing the “yoke” of foreign expression, the Versailles peace treaty thus proved to be the “apex of imperial expansion,” solidifying Western rule and deferring (if only temporarily) the cause of freedom and self-determination in favor of

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Moreover, the Versailles Treaty established a new political logic in Europe by rooting the legitimacy of nation-states in ethnic origins, thus creating new political entities like Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. “The principle of nationalism, which [...] took the self-determining nation-state as the sole legitimate entity in international relations thus became a central component of the new international order [...].” Ultimately, however, the new nation-states proved to be “too weak to project a clear national identity and they became breeding-grounds for mutually conflicting irredentist claims and for experiments in enforced nationalist regimentation.”

In fact, these “experiments” occurred all over the Western world throughout that period, as nation-states attempt to craft cohesive national populations by imposing a common language and culture. Migrants were, of course, particularly affected by that “national regimentation” especially if they attempted to preserve their cultural peculiarities in a foreign land. Not surprisingly, attempts to control migrant populations frequently prompted fierce resistance. Polish families, for example, protested pedagogical attacks against their native language in Germany, while Germans often viciously opposed similar attacks on their language and culture in the United States. As ethnic groups defended themselves against the increasing intrusion into their private lives, it became clear that state policy

253 Peukert, Weimar Republic, 45.
frequently “produced agency rather than discipline.” In other words, rather than succeeding in their disciplinary aims, state policies encouraged the resistance of those subjected to the measures.

This urge to retain a connection to the homeland was particularly strong for both Irish and German Americans, who both underwent grand transformations in their hyphenated consciousness during the 1910s, stemming from World War I and the Irish revolution. “[B]are in mind that American citizenship means something more than rights; American citizenship includes necessarily the ideas of duty, the idea of responsibility,” reminded the Irish-American activist Daniel Cohalan an audience in New York City in 1921 (see also Chapter 3). “You have no right to withdraw yourselves as a class apart. The man who comes here, the woman who comes here, the race which comes here and which is not satisfied to be American, ought better never to have come.” Citizenship was a duty and it included “the duty of taking an active part in the public affairs of the country, the duty of helping to create a public sentiment by which the country is going to be swayed […]” As I will discuss below, German völkisch nationalists invoked similar ideals, reminding Germans abroad that their duties were to the German people – even if they were not citizens. It is one of the objectives of this dissertation to examine the discursive negotiations of these competing nationalisms by German

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*Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting* (New York: New York Campaign Committee Against the Horrors on the Rhine, 1921), 30-31.
Americans still heavily invested, willingly or not, in the politics of the homeland.

Germany and the United States also engaged in experiments in “enforced nationalist regimentation” and what these experiments meant for the migrants that traveled between those two nation-states.

3. Immigration and Citizenship in the United States after World War I

The debate about immigrants and their integration into the American body politic has received considerable attention by scholars who have examined themes of citizenship and belonging with a special focus on immigrant communities in the interwar period. During the 1920s, disputes about race, gender, and labor relations stirred up vicious debates among Americans about the social fabric of the nation. This section provides a brief summary of that history.256

3.1. Restricting Immigration, Enforcing Americanization

Chinese workers were an early prey of nativist agitation when the Exclusion Act of 1882 prohibited their entry and established legal precedence for the principle of exclusion.257 The act and the subsequent judicial quandaries “helped set the parameters of American immigration law and to establish the rights of all aliens.”258 The consequences of such legislation for European immigrants became clear, when a report by the

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257 Lee, At America’s Gates, 40-43.
258 Daniels, Guarding the Golden Door, 18-23. Quote on 23, emphasis in original.
Dillingham Commission published in 1911 lamented the slow assimilation (particularly by immigrants from Eastern Europe) and recommended a new restrictive and ethnically discriminating immigration policy based on the presumption that some immigrants were inferior in education, ability, and genetics. Not coincidentally, an entire volume of the Report entitled, *A Dictionary of Races or Peoples*, was based in part on the German physician Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s scheme separating humans into “Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, Malay, and American,” which was critical to Germany’s own development of a model of citizenship.\(^{259}\) The report also proposed a quota for immigrant groups and demanded a literacy test (enacted in 1917), thus bridging the gap between ethnic/racial and civic qualifications for American citizenship.\(^{260}\)

During and after World War I, the national mood towards immigration deteriorated further: Many Americans were highly skeptical, if not afraid of the ideological experiments currently at trial in Europe – such as Communism in Russia and Fascism in Italy – and felt that immigrants from those areas would pose a challenge to American ideals. Economic fears about the country’s own future thus paired with xenophobia and a rejection of European culture and civilization after the cataclysmic collapse of the

\(^{259}\) Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 78. See also Chapter 3.
“Great War.” In many ways, then, the 1924 Immigration Act was a logical consequence of a national discourse that increasingly pushed aside alternating views such as the cultural pluralism of Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne, who had stressed the qualities of a heterogeneous United States, arguing that “pluralism represented what was best not only for the individual, but for democracy and for American governance.” The Act set annual quotas according to national origins at two percent of the respective nationality’s total number in the 1890 United States census. It thus significantly impeded immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, which had reached its height between 1890 and World War I. Moreover, by defining nationality along racial lines, it shut down immigration from Africa and Asia altogether. In 1929, a second version of the National Origins Act reduced the number of immigrants to 150,000 per year and further manifested Anglo-Saxon dominance by increasing the quota for Great Britain and decreasing the numbers for Scandinavia, Ireland, and Germany. The racist nature of the acts, writes Roger Daniels, “perpetuated old injustices and created new ones.”

It is hard to determine the exact consequences of the Johnson-Reed Act on German America. To be sure, German Americans recognized in the legislation the “shameless discrimination against Skandinavian [sic],

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261 Daniels, Guarding the Golden Door, 49.
262 Jacobson, Barbarian Virtues, 212.
264 Daniels, Guarding the Golden Door, 51-56. Quote on 56.
Irish and German elements in favor of a pauperized unemployed English proletariat,”265 because it prohibited a new flow of immigrants from Germany after the war. And indeed, official numbers for immigration showed a significant decrease for the period between 1925 and 1933, from nearly 100,000 in 1924 to little over 3,000 in 1932.266 However, at the same time I would argue that immigration legislation was beneficial for German immigrants, because it appeased nativist anger and defined belonging by way of skin color. It was the Americanization campaign accompanying immigration reform, which ultimately proved to be most detrimental to the cause of German Americans, particularly for the “gatekeepers,” who had profited from ethnic divisions for many decades. For them, the pluralist doctrine was most appealing as it stressed the diversity of the American people as an essential characteristic of the nation as a whole and allowed them to balance political loyalty to the United States with cultural allegiance to the homeland.

Unfortunately for many of these ethnic gatekeepers, whether German, Irish, Italian, or any group, the overwhelming political stream embraced “Americanization.” The concept held that those portions of the citizenry capable of attaining equal rights of full citizenship needed the necessary education to exercise those rights and to exploit their full potential. In most

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266 Hartmut Bickelmann, Deutsche Überseeauswanderung in der Weimarer Zeit (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1980).
views, this vision excluded African-Americans, Native Americans, and – as of 1882 – Asian Americans, who were not seen fit to participate in the American body politic. But immigrants from Europe were also increasingly singled out as targets of the Americanization campaign. In his famous speech on anti-hyphenation, for example, Theodore Roosevelt had specifically accused German and Irish immigrants of betraying American institutions, arguing “those hyphenated Americans who terrorize American politicians by threats of the foreign vote are engaged in treason to the American Republic.”

After the war had ended, social reformers, who had identified poverty and social divisions as the main issues dividing the country, clashed with nativists and patriotic activists, who saw immigrants as the main carriers of socialism, bolshevism, and anarchism and wanted to erect “Americanism” as a bulwark of freedom against these ideologies.

Though generally benefitting from their “whiteness,” German Americans were subjected to attacks that questioned their political loyalty and integrity. This was by no means self-evident. German Americans had long been presented as ideal immigrants: ambitious, zealous, and highly willing to naturalize. But immediately before and during the war, American nativists and interventionists accused German immigrations of disloyal behavior and portrayed them in racial iconography as the “Hun”. Hysteria followed the sinking of the Lusitania in early May 1915 along with increasing suspicions of fifth column activity after immigrants were

implicated in incidents such as the explosion of the “Black Tom” munitions depot in July 1916 and the purported radicalization of labor, such trends provided the ideological foundation for the popular embrace of “Americanization” and “100% Americanism” campaigns directed particularly, though not exclusively, against German Americans. German was no longer taught in schools and sometimes even completely outlawed in public, as in Iowa, which had a sizeable German population. But after the war, the image of the evil alien changed once more. If the “Hun” embodied the enemy during the War, this role was assumed by the (foreign) revolutionary after war’s end.

What exactly nativists meant when they wrote and talked about “Americanization,” apart from the naturalization of its immigrants, remained unclear and was often vague and contradictory. The image of the “American” was mainly defined in the negative, as opposed to the lazy, disloyal anarchist revolutionary: Americans were hard-working and loyal. This provided an opening for German American activists, who stressed the historical contributions of German immigrants and demanded the full rights of American citizenship, including the right to criticize American participation in the Great War (see Chapters 3 and 4).268

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3.2. A new concept of citizenship: Rights vs. Duties

World War I also marked a critical change in the relationship between state and citizen. Christopher Capozzola has shown that terms such as duty, sacrifice, and obligation entered the everyday language and public sphere of the United States during and because of the Great War, as Americans discussed whether or not to participate in the military conflict in Europe, how to oblige the population to participate and how to celebrate the war once it was over. “Political obligation,” writes Capozzola, “energized, mobilized, and divided Americans during World War I.”

The structural changes that transformed citizenship during that time included military service and jury duty, a federal income tax, the Dillingham-Hardwick Act, which legalized the deportation of (broadly defined) anarchists, and the infamous Espionage and Sedition Acts, which made disloyalty a crime and undermined free speech. In many ways, the rules of citizenship began to function as a “demarcation line between friend and enemy.”

These transformations had very real consequences for immigrants from Germany as the United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917 and roughly 250,000 non-naturalized German American men became “enemy aliens,” women followed in the Spring of 1918.

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Countless voluntary associations across the United States enforced the unwritten rules of the new civic law. The roots of this enforcement dated back to World War I but persisted beyond its end. "America’s first world war marked an unprecedented mobilization of social institutions, human labor, and popular will." The boundaries between the public and private, between social and personal responsibility began to soften. "Now, the private obligations were suddenly fundamental to war mobilization in a moment of crisis, prompting state intervention into American bedrooms, kitchens, and congregations, places where the federal government hadn’t always been before.” Doing one’s part in “the war effort thus became not just a good deed but a duty, and serious consequences ensued for those who failed to join in. People were, therefore, obliged to volunteer in a culture of coercive voluntarism.”

As I have discussed above, German Americans were suddenly forced into an unbridgeable conflict. They wanted to show solidarity with both their old and new homeland and many of them pushed for a policy of isolation during the war. Incidentally, they often used voluntary associations like ethnic clubs and churches to resist militarism and coercion. Like other isolationist organizations in the country, these institutions “sheltered draft dodgers, gave voices to workers’ demands, [and] protected German Americans from the onslaughts of 100 percent

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Americanism.” At the same time they experienced the violent hyper-patriotism and coercive voluntarism directed against “draft dodgers, food hoarders, or subversive ‘Pro-Germans’.” Christopher Capozzola notes that it “was not a mere psychic aberration or a deviation from American political culture. Pervasive political violence, willingly undertaken, reflected politics as usual. Coercive voluntarism made America’s first world war both its most democratically mobilized home front as well as its most violent.”

At the ideological core of these changes was a strengthening belief in the duty “to work, to be loyal to the nation, to conform to the norms of the community.” The question was exactly how to define those norms, how to enforce conformity and where to draw the legal line between appropriate government intervention and overreach. During the war, wartime legislation allowed severe measures to silence dissent, such as wire-tapping or the monitoring of private mail. And, as the Palmer Raids to deport anarchists in late 1919 and early 1920 showed, these measures had been everything but temporary. In January 1902, the Bureau of Investigation (BI), a precursor of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), had rounded up roughly 10,000 labor organizers, communists, and hundreds of innocent bystanders, many of them American citizens, in an

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273 Capozzola, Uncle Sam Wants You, 10.
274 Capozzola, Uncle Sam Wants You, 10-11.
275 Capozzola, Uncle Sam Wants You, 6.
attempt to “[hunt] down [...] enemies of the United States.” In close coordination with the Justice Department and the Immigration Bureau, the BI manufactured accusations, denied aliens legal counsel, and forged false confessions, revealing in the process “its hostility toward ethnic and religious minorities.” “Thus, the [BIs] reports insinuated that Irish-Americans who favored Irish independence, Jews who advocated the establishment of a national homeland in Palestine, civil libertarians who defended the rights of dissidents, and anyone who argued that the United States should recognize the Soviet Union were engaged in ‘subversive’ activities.” Public support for the radical measures was strong and remained so even in spite of persistent organized initiatives protesting the treatment of those arrested. Those defending the rights of the accused in courts and public hearings risked being ostracized as unpatriotic or “un-American.”

Germans, then, were by no means the only “victims” of the extraordinary mobilization of public and politics against ethnic pluralism that would became a prevalent element in the United States during the next decades; a blend of public and official sanctions created an atmosphere of submission among many groups of immigrants. Those unwilling to accept the political status quo as well as their new civic duties

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were often treated harshly by neighbors, employers, and the state. Political radicals of a variety of faiths, including anarchism, socialism, and communism, were also vulnerable to ostracism, persecution, and the declaration that they were un-American. During periods of national crisis, nonassimilating immigrants and political radicals became the targets of state-sponsored coercive campaigns to strip them of their now alienable rights to free expression and free assembly.  

In many ways, this was the legacy of World War I, a legacy that persisted throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The next section describes the changing conception of national belonging in Germany and its consequences for Germans abroad with a special emphasis on the United States.

4. Emigration and Transnational Belonging in Germany after WW I

I have discussed the relationship between migration, the nation-state, and national consciousness in Chapter One, emphasizing in particular the historical contingency of “Germanness.” While ethnicity and culture were always at the core of German nationalism, the idea of “ethnic” (and thus almost perpetual) belonging to the German nation, *ius sanguinis*, had only been uniformly codified a year before the outbreak of World War I in the 1913 Nationality Law of German Empire and States (*Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz*, short: RuStAG). Though based on older regional legal traditions, this law determined German citizenship according to blood lineage rather than membership in the territorial community of a

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state and distinguished between citizens, non-citizens, and “ethnic” Germans living outside of the boundaries of the state. The latter group was provided with an “automatic right of entry to and citizenship of” Germany. But what were the duties inherent in this ethnic form of belonging for citizens and ethnic Germans? And what was the duty of the state towards those not living under its auspices?

The negotiation of these relationships entered a critical stage in the interwar period when the fate of Germans abroad – emigrated or displaced – became a dominant issue in the public discourse of Weimar Germany, not least due to the German political impotence after World War I. The terms negotiated in the peace accord at Versailles had placed the entire guilt and the upcoming burden in the form of reparations on Germany, which was forced to abandon its air force and reduce its military. More specifically, the Versailles Treaty "not only eliminated Germany as a major military factor by sharply limiting its armed forces, it also reduced the country's population, territory, and resources, and, through the mechanism of reparations, converted Germany into the world's major debtor." Millions of Germans were suddenly living outside of the new

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boundaries of the post-Versailles Weimar Republic and hundreds of thousands emigrated, especially to the United States. No longer capable of simply flexing the country’s military and economic muscles, German statesmen and politicians had to look elsewhere for geopolitical leverage and this provided an opening for ethnic, so-called völkisch nationalists, whose activities had thus far been largely ignored by those in charge.281

4.1. The Weimar Republic and the Politics of Self-Determination

In his now famous “Fourteen Points” speech to the American Congress on January 8, 1918, U.S President Woodrow Wilson had suggested the principle of self-determination – though not yet verbatim – as a way to divide territory along lines of "nationality" without explicitly specifying, who was entitled to their own “nation” and who was not.282 His program later


281 Tammo Luther, Volkstumspolitik des Deutschen Reiches, 1933-1938 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2004), 25-32.

282 Manela, Wilsonian Moment, passim. Manela shows that the principle of self-determination proved to be little more than a hollow promise to nationalists inside and outside of Europe. Moreover, it is worth noting that Wilson never actually used the term “self-determination” but that it was subsequently ascribed to his theoretical approach. See: Throntveit, “Fable of the Fourteen Points,” 445-481. Throntveit argues that self-determination never was Wilson’s primary concern and that the emphasis on the principle as such has “obscured the true character
became the foundation for the peace treaty negotiated in Versailles, even though many critics at the time noted the racial and religious hypocrisies that granted the right of self-determination to some while denying it to others. But for the defeated Germany, this emphasis on ethnicity provided a small opening in a dire situation for three important reasons: first, by stipulating that the nation-state be the base unit of international relations, it reestablished Germany as an important geopolitical player in Central Europe with “ethnic” legitimation; second, it provided a divided Weimar Republic with a powerful anti-narrative against the “shameful diktat” of Versailles, which had divided the ethnic community by placing Millions of Germans outside of the country’s territorial boundaries; and third, because the

repulse of Russia and the division of central, eastern and southern Europe into a handful of small and medium-sized states [...] gave Germany the chance to establish an informal hegemony in the region by expanding her economic and cultural influence through a policy of accommodation and co-operation with the new nations.\footnote{Peukert, \textit{Weimar Republic}, 45.}

Many German statesmen and völkisch nationalists were keenly aware of the potential card they had been dealt and realized that cultural diplomacy, \textit{Auswärtige Kulturpolitik}, would be a critical tool in future international negotiations.\footnote{Katja Gesche, \textit{Kultur als Instrument der Außenpolitik totalitärer Staaten. Das Deutsche Ausland-Institut 1933–1945} (Köln: Böhlau, 2006), 61.} Consequently, it emerged as a systematic, state-funded
feature of German foreign policy in the 1920s and “was seen as a lever to extend German influence now that the Reich had lost the traditional assets with which it exercised power within the international system: a strong economy, a large army and reliable allies.” However, the official government policy remained subdued and secretive, as diplomats realized the detrimental implications, should cultural diplomacy be misunderstood (or accurately recognized) as propaganda.

The cultural diplomacy of the Weimar Republic pursued three overarching strategies largely aligned with the general objective to reestablish Germany as a global power: The first strategy was to stress the ethnic unity of the German nation in order to revise the borders by actively utilizing ethnic Germans abroad as instruments of foreign policy. The conventional wisdom during the 1920s was that roughly 25 Million Germans, a quarter of all ethnic Germans worldwide, lived outside the boundaries of Germany and Austria. These so-called Volksdeutsche (or Auslanddeutsche) were the target of both direct efforts to stir up discontent and initiate a process leading towards territorial reunification as

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well as indirect efforts that aimed to utilize *Volksdeutsche* in order to change the policy of other countries towards Germany.\footnote{287 Gesche, *Kultur*, 74-75.} In the words of Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann:

> Politically [Germans abroad] will be called upon, to shape the politics of the foreign state which they help sustain in a way that is beneficial to the German Empire; culturally they will serve as born mediators for the proliferation and understanding of German culture and German world view amongst the people of their state.\footnote{288 Stresemann quote in Luther, *Volkstumspolitik*, 35.}

Stresemann’s statement applied particularly to German Americans, not least because German politicians like Stresemann “actively cultivated American goodwill and support” during the 1920s.\footnote{289 Rennie Brantz, “German-American Friendship: The Carl Schurz Vereinigung, 1926-1942,” *The International History Review* 11:2 (May, 1989), 229-251, here: 229.}

The second strategy attempted to exploit the global appeal of science and knowledge during the 1920s: By supporting new academic disciplines focused on the “folk,” German cultural diplomats hoped to support ethnic nationalism by providing it with a scientific foundation.\footnote{290 Gesche, *Kultur*, 74-75,} Organizations like the *Deutsche Ausland-Institut* (DAI) and the *Deutsche Akademie* (DA) collected a wealth of information on German settlements around the globe to examine and document “Germandom abroad in its origin and development, its character and achievements”. For example, scholars like the seasoned politician Otto Boelitz (1876-1951), the young economist Martin Lohmann (1901-1993), or the former Catholic bishop Franz Xaver Gesche, *Kultur*, 74-75.
Geyer (1859-1943), a child of the colonial age, were sent to the United States to study the language of local communities in Pennsylvania and the Midwest and examine their critical role in the preservation of German culture abroad. Historians like Gottfried Fittbogen and Heinz Kloss wrote volumes about the contributions of Germans in American history and helped initiate celebrations of historical characters with German roots like Baron von Steuben and Peter Minuit. The goal was to invigorate understanding for the deep meaning of the community in language and heritage, in spiritual life and in culture and thus strengthen the consciousness of common identity of all Germans; and finally to raise the meaning of German spiritual labor and German culture in the entire world.

In other words, it was to provide a scientific foundation for the belief that ethnic identity was worth preserving and that German language and culture provided a foundation for the many positive contributions Germans could make to foreign countries like the United States.

Finally, the third strategy consisted of attempts to improve the German reputation and economic opportunities by praising German cultural achievements both at home and abroad, thus “making a good impression”. Using some of the same means discussed above, like the celebration of German history and language, scholars wanted to appeal to both the general American and the specific German American audience.

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291 Retterath, Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke, 270-287.  
292 Retterath, Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke, 303-370.  
293 Mission Statement DA, cited in Luther, Volkstumspolitik, 55.  
294 Gesche, Kultur, 74-75.
Celebrations of German culture were meant to renew pride in German heritage, generate a collective identity abroad and counter the “Americanism” and cultural propaganda dominating U.S. public discourse. The idea that this form of cultural propaganda could produce any results also went back to World War I, since “the legend went, Germany had failed to present her cause convincingly to the international public, whereas her adversaries had led a ruthless but effective psychological campaign which isolated the Reich.”

It is worth noting that while the overall goals of the political administration certainly changed in 1933, Katja Gesche has shown that the process of actual change in cultural diplomacy was rather slow. “Instead of a new, explicitly national-socialist cultural diplomacy many projects that had begun in Weimar and are still known today, simply continued [throughout the Third Reich].” Gesche lists, for example the Goethe Institute, the German Academic Exchange Service DAAD [“Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst”], and several international treaties. What changed, of course, were the messages that were sent through these programs and many countries were rightfully suspicious of the cultural foreign policy of both the Weimar Republic and, even more, the Third Reich. Therefore it was key strategy of German foreign policy in the interwar period to pursue an inconspicuous approach and support

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295 Retterath, Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke, 305-308.
296 Michels, “Deutsch als Welt sprache,” 206-207.
297 Gesche, Kultur, 74,
groups that were ostentatiously neutral and independent. Among these groups was the so-called Verein [later renamed: Volksbund] für das Deutschtum im Ausland.

4.2. Volksgemeinschaft and the VDA

Before taking a closer look at the VDA, it is necessary to discuss the Volksgemeinschaft – or “community of the people” –, an ideological trope that gained prominence in the political discourse of Weimar Germany throughout the 1920s. More amorphous than tangible, the concept itself is somewhat hard to define. Similar to the völkisch movement, which popularized it, the ideology supplementing the Volksgemeinschaft was disparate and heterogeneous. To be sure, belonging to the Volksgemeinschaft meant being part of a large community that transcended the boundaries of the German nation-state, whether in its current, past, or imaginary manifestations. Being German was defined as a kinship that transcended generations and was certainly not lost when transferred across the Atlantic. It was a “community of blood and history” that came with rights and duties.

According to a paradigmatic article published on the eve of World War II in the Thüringische Landes-Zeitung, Germans vowed “to realize their greatest good, for which they will stand up with life and limb, in the German Volkstum 298, in the conservation and consolidation of the

298 Lit. “folkdom.” But the meaning of the term escapes easy definition. It is, in fact notoriously elusive. The German dictionary Duden defines it briefly as
unadulterated character [Wesensart].” The article did specify the duties entailed in this ethnic-national identity. Apart from vowing to defend the German Volkstum with life and limb against “influences of foreign peoples and foreign blood” [fremdvölkische und fremdblütige Einflüsse], nationalists appealed to Germans to cultivate “German virtues” and German culture in order to preserve them for the future.299 And even though German citizenship became increasingly defined in ethnic terms, membership in the ethnic community was not defined as such: “participation in the Volksgemeinschaft was independent of citizenship in a state. […] A citizen of another state could remain loyal to his state yet consider himself part of the German Volksgemeinschaft.”300

In essence, then, the historical significance of the Volksgemeinschaft is to be found in the fact that “large portions of the German population saw in the Volksgemeinschaft a desirable social goal, even though they connected quite disparate contents with this term.”301 Moreover, even though a great number of political parties in Germany adopted political programs based on the Volksgemeinschaft, historians agree that it

“essence, character of the people, as it finds expression in its life, its culture” [Wesen, Eigenart des Volkes, wie es sich in seinem Leben, seiner Kultur ausprägt]. I would argue that Volkstum is in essence an attempt to record and perpetuate the values and traditions of a people, which are constantly in flux.

299 Uwe Puschner, Handbuch zur völkischen Bewegung (Munich: KG Saur, 1996), XVII-XVIII.
300 Allen Thomsen Cronenberg Jr., The Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland: Völkisch Ideology and German Foreign Policy, 1881-1939 (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1970), 50-51.
301 Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt, eds. Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2009), 9.
remained a myth and that its descriptive historical value for the period between 1919 and 1945 is low. If anything, it was the “promise, the mobilization, not the detection of an actual social condition [which] was crucial to the political power of the talk of the ‘Volksgemeinschaft’.”

As noted above, for völkisch nationalists, the collapse of the monarchy was an opportunity to further manifest German notions of belonging on culture, custom, language, and heritage that transcended the borders of nation-states. Throughout the 1920s, organizations like the VDA were pivotal in popularizing their own vision of the Volksgemeinschaft. The VDA was the first and foremost important organization devoted to Germans living in the United States, not least because it was “the largest organization concerned with the cultural, economic and political status of ethnic Germans outside the Reich” during the 1920s.

Founded as Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein [“General German School Association”] in 1881 to promote and fund German-language schools for ethnic German minorities outside of the Reich, the VDA profited immensely from the nationalist upswing during and German geopolitical impotence after World War I. “At the very moment when we

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303 Cronenberg, Volksbund, iv.

lost our former state, we won our people,” wrote VDA president Franz von Reichenau in 1919. World War I had been a moment of collective “rediscovery” and “reawakening” as Millions of German soldiers, nurses, and others involved in the war effort returned home with stories of ethnic Germans who had retained language and culture abroad. Building upon these experiences, the VDA exploited the social and political fragmentation of postwar Germany by romanticizing the sense of belonging experienced in these ethnic communities, thus enforcing “the notion that all Germans formed a wider Volksgemeinschaft.” They supported a pluralistic, classless interpretation of that concept, nonetheless in its racialized rhetoric, the VDA “did much to contribute to the attitude of racial superiority already held by many Germans and to soften the reception of violent anti-Semitic view enunciated by National Socialists throughout the 1920s.”

The VDA portended to be above partisan politics after the National Socialists took control in 1933. The organization welcomed the rise of the Nazi Party and once more changed its name from Verein to a more ethno-nationalist Volksbund. For the first years the VDA enjoyed the protection of some high-ranking Nazi officials like Rudolf Heß and received major financial support from the new administration, partly because of

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305 Cronenberg, Volksbund, 44.  
306 Cronenberg, Volksbund, 47.  
307 Cronenberg, Volksbund, 56.
overlapping goals such as the revision of the Versailles Treaty. In 1933, the major ideological difference between National Socialism and the VDA was that the latter stressed the allegiance to all ethnic Germans around the globe, whereas the Nazis mainly looked to ethnic Germans abroad as pawns in their geopolitical games. And even though some conflicts with competing organizations like the NSDAP-AO arose, the VDA was able to continue their work until at least 1937, when efforts to reach Germans abroad were centralized in the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle.

While the VDA’s geographic focus lay mainly on the “lost territories” and ethnic German minorities in Eastern and Southern Europe, it always cultivated good ties to the United States, if only for financial support. When the victory of National Socialism ushered in “a new era,” the organization could increase its efforts across the Atlantic thanks to generous state support. The VDA hired an official representative in the United States, Carl Günther Orgell, sent speakers on continental tours, and acquired the addresses of countless German Americans around the country. Starting in October 1934, it also increased its emphasis on publications and began sending out the Heimatbriefe, a newsletter

308 Cronenberg, Volksbund, 93-101. For the VDA, the Treaty had torn apart the German national community against the will of the people.
309 Cronenberg, Volksbund, 113.
312 Kipphan, Deutsche Propaganda, 30-31.
distributed by the VDA’s regional chapters under different names, for example as *Buten und Binnen* (“Outside and Inside”) from a branch in Lower Saxony, as *Thüringer Heimattbriefe* from a branch in Thuringia, and as *Sächsische Heimattbriefe* from the chapter in Saxony.\(^\text{313}\)

The very first issue of the *Heimattbriefe* defined its role in the new Nazi state: “to suffuse the entirety of the German people of all classes with understanding and sacrificial spirit for the pan-German task.” The VDA thus presented itself in line with the SA or the Hitler Youth as participating in a common struggle for “the protection of the German borders and the German territory in the Baltics, in Upper Silesia, on the Ruhr and in Carinthia.”\(^\text{314}\) Editorials in the *Heimattbriefe* were written in the form of letters and attempted to establish a personal connection with the readers by using the informal *Du* as opposed to the formal *Sie* and by explicitly soliciting responses, which were featured prominently in subsequent issues. The *Heimattbriefe* were, as one editorial argued, more than just a magazine but “a private letter between comrades, worthy of your personal response.”\(^\text{315}\) Rather than pressing an openly partisan agenda, the VDA purported to be apolitical, emphasizing emotional representations of the homeland and imagery of industry and improvement. Beneath that thin layer of political neutrality, however, the VDA was part of the Nazi propaganda machine. Racial Darwinism and notions of ethnic unity

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\(^{313}\) Kipphan, *Deutsche Propaganda*, 33-34.

\(^{314}\) *Sächsische Heimattbriefe*, 2 (December, 1934), 368.

\(^{315}\) *Sächsische Heimattbriefe*, 4 (April, 1935), 3.
permeated the Heimattbriefe: “The war against the German people”, one editorial argued,

against German culture, German character and life is being continued; German school, language and education, German territory and economic power are extremely endangered. The de-Germanization [Entdeutschung] of Millions of Germans is the goal of countless […] forces.316

German Americans would both embrace and reject this assessment. Given the “anti-German propaganda” that many detected in newspapers and the anti-immigrant legislation that discriminated against Germans just as it did against Irish, Italians, Poles and other groups, their sense of cultural superiority was injured. However, especially in the context of the United States, talk of assimilation and de-Germanization always took on an accusatory tone, suggesting that German migrants had somehow “given in” to Americanization and assimilation. The following section will show how the recipients of the Heimattbriefe crafted transnational responses that reflected the interstitial nature of their own position between Third Reich and “American Way.”

5. German migrants between Third Reich and American Way

Throughout the next chapters I will be examining how German Americans participated in the transnational discourse of national belonging by negotiating in the United States. I will show how old world conflicts and consensuses along lines of class, race, gender, and religion were

316 Sächsische Heimattbriefe, 2 (December, 1934), 368/9.
transported to the new world and how some of them were transformed or
pervaded to divide or unite German Americans and many other ethnic
groups in the multicultural space of urban life. The letters to the VDA in
response to the *Heimatbriefe* cannot capture the entire German American
experience in all its heterogeneity. Nevertheless, they speak to a larger
trend among migrants who had left Germany during the late nineteenth or
early twentieth century. These letters associate the idea of German
*Volkstum* and heritage both as an emotional reference to explain who the
migrants were and how they felt about their place in U.S. society. It should
be noted that the *Heimatbriefe* portrayed an overly optimistic image of
National Socialism and respondents generally viewed Hitler’s rise and the
“New Germany” positively. Moreover, they evidently accepted the VDA as
sufficiently trustworthy to describe their experience in the United States.
Built on ethno-cultural theories of human history, the narrative presented
in the *Heimatbriefe* provided a nationalized legitimacy to the sense of
dislocation, exploitation, and disillusionment widely shared among
German Americans. Nonetheless, writers often offered nuanced
perspectives on migrant life in the United States and complex views about
the intersection of class, race, and national heritage. Though some
responded warily, not knowing who stood behind the publication, many
accepted the *Heimatbriefe* as a medium to express their views about the
“New Germany,” including criticism and, in some rare cases, outright
rejection. Moreover, the men and women who wrote the letters often used
their origins to reassert their position in American society, defying both dominant U.S. discourses that frequently stressed a fundamental dichotomy between the two nations as well as German appropriations of their fate for political purposes. The letters offer a fascinating glimpse at the discursive negotiations of Germanness during the 1930s. As such they are certainly not comprehensive, but – as I hope to show in this section – might well be paradigmatic.

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German nationalists had frequently singled out German Americans for their lack of devotion in preserving German culture abroad. Subjected to repeated accusations of assimilation, cowardice, or treason from various representatives of the fatherland, the respondents immediately turned the argument against the German state upon receiving the *Heimatbriefe*. An overwhelming number of those who responded from the United States expressed satisfaction that they had not been forgotten back home. For example, Rudolf Blumentritt of Troy, Alabama expressed his gratitude to the VDA for taking up the cause of Germans abroad: “It is a joy to know that, finally, the *Heimat* is remembering those who still feel German and are voicing their Germanness on an advanced post.”³¹⁷ In the past, Blumentritt suggested, “you would have to be a half-starving Volga-German […] before the *Heimat* remembered those that often left not light-

³¹⁷ Rudolf Blumentritt to VDA, HSTA 12460-45, 1934-25.
heartedly and under pressure of the circumstances.” If the _Heimatbriefe_ served in part to remind Germans all over the world of their duty to the fatherland, Blumentritt and others like him proposed mutual responsibility between the German nation and its people: “Those of us who are doing well abroad can contribute much to the defense of the fatherland against encroachments. Greetings from home like yours will help to revive flagging courage and fighting strength.” If the _Heimatbriefe_ were indeed a call to duty, Blumentritt was ready to act, though he never made it clear for whom he was fighting exactly and how he intended to contribute. But his letter was also a reminder that many migrants were not doing well, particularly in the United States, where unemployment and disillusionment still reigned in 1934, at the height of the Great Depression.

Hertha Winkler of Buffalo, New York similarly described the cultural vacuum that had been filled by the _Heimatbriefe_ in 1937. Many times, she writes, she had heard her compatriots complain: “Why did former German governments never care for Germans abroad [Auslanddeutsche] and their problems? How much value has been lost to the _Heimat_ in this manner – but for decades we were only looked on as pariahs!” Perhaps Winkler was masking her own thoughts behind the opinion of others, but post-World War I immigrants repeatedly expressed a general sense of neglect, betrayal, and alienation, paired with new hope in the future. Fritz Spindler

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318 Blumentritt to VDA, HSTA 12460-45, 1934-25.
319 Blumentritt to VDA, HSTA 12460-45, 1934-25.
320 Hertha Winkler to VDA, HSTA 12460-41, 1937-359.
described the near-decade he had spent in the United States as “nine years of foreign service [Auslandsdienst].” 321 And Paul Herchert in Cleveland, Tennessee asserted that “[the heart] may be in the second fatherland for the longest time, but the Heimat stands strong and true in the heart […] We, too, are sticking to our Führer, even though we are not under his care.”322

Pre-World War I immigrants generally felt more settled in America, and felt more loyal to the United States than more recent migrants. Nonetheless, they also responded to the Heimatbriefe in great numbers and voiced a similar blend of joy and indignation. “We were lost to you, forgotten,” wrote Otto Köhler in December 1936, 32 years after he had arrived in the United States. A builder by trade, Köhler had established himself as a prominent member of the German American Lutheran community in Staten Island and in many ways exemplified the “assimilated” immigrant. Köhler, too, applauded VDA efforts and affirmed his connection to the Heimat: German Americans, he wrote, were “Amerika verpflichtet, Deutschland verbunden [obligated to the United States, tied to Germany].”323

The slogan Amerika verpflichtet, Deutschland verbunden, as Cornelia Wilhelm has shown, was popularized by the German American Bund, a

321 Fritz Spindler to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-319. Another example of such rhetoric can be found in the letter of Anna Schmid from New Britain, Connecticut (HSTA 12460-45, 1937-1033).
322 Otto Köhler to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1936-1492.
323 Köhler to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1936-1492.
pro-Nazi organization of ethnic Germans living in the United States. The Bund’s members admired the achievements of the “New Germany” and propagated an ideology of anti-Semitism, anti-Communism, and, later, isolationism, which aimed to prevent the United States from joining World War II on the Allied side. Their self-proclaimed purpose was to combat the “missing conscience among German-Americans regarding their cultural and völkisch roots in Germany.” Organizations like the Bund, Wilhelm argues, functioned as a space in which migrants could “for the first time experience the real Volksgemeinschaft.” Köhler did not claim membership in the Bund, but his use of the slogan suggests at the very least some loose affiliation. The slogan’s repeated appearance in numerous letters testifies to its success. The Bund soon attracted the attention of American authorities, which became increasingly nervous about the proclamations of common “blood and race” that supposedly united all Germans, trumping political loyalties and citizenship.

Nevertheless, the letters show that German Americans did not simply “buy into” the message of National Socialism, whether propagated by the Bund or the VDA. In a particularly striking instance, Fritz Strecker of Staten Island recalled the “German Day” on 1 August 1937 with great joy. He described the constant pressures to shed all German “layers” in

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324 Wilhelm, Bewegung oder Verein?, 65.
325 For another example, see M. Haenel to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1937-1088.
326 Wilhelm, Bewegung oder Verein?, 65.
327 Annual “German Day” festivities were regarded as among the very few successful manifestations of unequivocal National Socialist ideology in the United
public and expressed his satisfaction with the possibility to “shed all American ‘layers’” during the German Day. There “we enjoyed our Frankfurters and Sauerkraut and beer […]. The German national anthem was well received and gladly sung.” But, he added,

it was different with the Hitler salute. Heaven knows, we are all Americans here, after all, and not Hitlerians. Maybe most of those present, naturalized German-Americans, felt the same way. The Hitler flag and so on next to the American flag is “all right” in my opinion. There are many Germans in this country. But still, I must ask you: Has anyone here ever seen masses of British or French flags fly in celebration of British or French festivities? – And if the Italians do it, and the Bolsheviks, the German should feel like the Brit: Nobody challenges German rights, because the USA is as German as it is British. Or is not?328

Strecker had arrived in the United States in 1927 and had made a new home for himself and his family. And even though his own letter had alluded to the challenges of being German in the United States, Strecker remained certain that Germans had their rightful place in American society. Moreover, he felt that celebrations of German heritage, such as the one that took place on the “German Day,” reaffirmed his position as an American: his German “stock” put him on equal terms with other “white” Americans. Italian politicians like New York mayor La Guardia, he argued, would remain the exception, since “Southern Humanity” belonged to the Southern hemisphere of the Americas. “North America will remain, if God

328 Fritz Strecker to VDA, 12460, 41-1937-1156.
permits, Nordic, Saxon! Well, let’s say Germanic; the Anglo-Saxons are a part of it, Scandinavians and Dutch, too.” As such, the homeland nationalism expressed at “German Day” celebrations reflected Strecker’s pragmatic belief in the redemption of German America. He also echoed the nationalist racialism of Madison Grant, Lothrop Stoddard and other proponents of a “white” United States, thus underlining his belief in the racial privilege of German Americans (see also Chapter 3).

Strecker was optimistic that the United States would accept a certain amount of old-world patriotism among its migrant population. In the United States, he argued, “man stands above the state that he constitutes to protect his freedom.” And despite the fact that the freedom may have had some shortcomings, Strecker rejected German reproaches about German American assimilation:

> In Germany one tends to call that cowardice, weakness or treason against Germandom, against Germany. But in the end to every German the fatherland means just as much, as the Germans means to the fatherland. […] In other words: May the fatherland serve the German! If the fatherland serves the German, then, maybe the German abroad will also serve the fatherland.\(^{329}\)

Strecker’s letter thus articulated a complex relationship between German migrants and the Nazi state. Strecker had attached a note to his letter, writing that he had long hesitated to send it, because it contained “political opinions.” But, he added, “I believe that every man has a right to have his

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\(^{329}\) Fritz Strecker to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1937-1156.
own opinion and soul.” Moreover, in yet another note attached to the letter, Strecker’s wife apologized for her husband’s harsh words: “He has not fully recovered from his nervous breakdown.”

Despite acknowledging the benefits of the United States, however, many writers voiced a general sense of loss and unhappiness, denouncing the United States as a corrupt and heartless country. Käte Küchler, who lived on New York’s Upper East Side, for example, praised the American health care and education systems, food and electricity prices, the radio, and the availability of consumer items, such as electric washing and sewing machines. Even though her husband, a painter, had trouble finding steady employment, a union salary ensured that all bills were paid. “I don’t know how a worker scrappes by a living in a Berlin tenement,” Küchler ruminated, “maybe he envies me.” At the same time, life in New York and the recent economic crisis had left her with a bitter sense of disappointment. “Often, I keep a yearning watch for the rays of sunshine that have long left us in our street shafts […] but are cheerfully reflected in the windows of the high elegant residential hotels that are 20 stories high or more.” Life back home may have been hard, Küchler continued, but

on Sundays we packed our backpacks and off we went into the wonderful nature with our wonderful folk songs. What a

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330 Fritz Strecker to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1937-1156. Addendum to Fritz Strecker to VDA, Ibid.
331 Käte Küchler to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-106.
332 Küchler to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-106.
happy wanderer my husband was and I tippy-toed next to him in good spirits, oh and that gave us strength for the whole long workweek.  

Küchler concluded her letter with a lament: “We are uprooted, that is the tragedy of our life here, never will I take roots here, from the Heimat we are weaned [...] and here you are only a foreigner and a German one at that.”

With the Heimattbriefe, the VDA appealed to emotions of loss and disappointment, prevalent in many German American attitudes towards both Germany and the United States. The editors connected the plight of individuals and the national community to global changes threatening the economic, cultural and, ultimately, racial survival of Germans and Germanness across the globe. By invoking the Heimat, they spun a web that promised to alleviate the metaphysical sense of loss with transnational solidarity but also exploited economic and cultural fears by playing into omnipresent notions of social and racial Darwinism, which depicted Germany in a dramatic struggle for survival with its enemies. Nazi visions of the Volksgemeinschaft propagated collectivism over individualism and freedom from the bonds of global capitalism at a time when capitalism was experiencing its largest crisis to date. The letters show that many migrants accepted such “old world propaganda.” Paradoxically, however, the exchange also helped German migrants to

333 Küchler to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-106.
334 Küchler to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-106. Emphasis in original.
imagine and assert their position in American society. Shifting perceptions of racial and civic belonging to the American body politic were simultaneously undermined and reinforced by transnational exchanges between German America and the *Heimat*: the *Heimat* back home helped German Americans find a *Heimat* abroad.

6. Conclusion

As the above examples show, German-language migrants continually re-imagined their position in American society through a prism that included both a retrospective memory of the migratory experience and the *Heimat* and a projective consideration of contemporary political, social, and economic events. The relationship between migrant, homeland, and host society depended on individual assessments of inclusion or exclusion, of opportunity or the lack thereof. Many migrants had left Germany for pragmatic reasons, and used the same criteria to judge their presence and future prospects in the United States. Strecker or Küchler may have agreed on defining Germanness in terms of racial heritage, but they chose their loyalties in ways that reflected their experiences. In judging the present through the lens of the past, they integrated into and became a part of the diverse, heterogeneous United States. The next three chapters will discuss different manifestations of that process.
Chapter 3: The Campaign Against the “Black Shame” - Race and Whiteness in German America

1. Introduction

On March 1, 1921, most New York newspapers, and many others around the country, had the same big story on their front page, describing an event that highlighted the political fault lines dividing the city: “Probably the greatest meeting New York City has known,” noted the *New York American*, “was held in and around Madison Square Garden last night.” “Fifteen thousand persons crowded into Madison Square Garden,” reported the *New York Herald*. And even though the *New York Times* had counted only 12,000 that night, it also devoted front-page coverage to a controversial event, the apex of a vicious debate that had divided the United States in the weeks before: The “Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting” on February 28, 1921.³³⁵ Organized by a diffuse group of individuals – appropriately named “The New York Campaign Committee Against the Horror on the Rhine” – the meeting was the result of months of public protest against the presence and purported crimes of black African occupation troops from Northern Africa, Senegal, and Madagascar against

the local German population during the French occupation of the Rhineland following World War I.

This chapter explores the politics of race that permeated the “Horror on the Rhine,” thus offering a new angle into the persistent presence of German America in the political discourse of the United States in the interwar era. I argue that a coalition of German and Irish Americans coalesced around this transnational cause to reaffirm their right to speak and participate in the American public sphere, from which they felt unjustly excluded. As one speaker at the event, the distinguished veteran Colonel Alexander Edward Anderson put it: as Americans, “we have the duty to protest against such kind of occupation. (Applause.) You would not be loyal to your own blood, you would not be loyal to humanity, and not being loyal to humanity, you could by any manner of chance be loyal to the traditions of America.”  

The participants thus reaffirmed a familiar pattern of claiming whiteness to earn civic and material inclusion in the United States. Moreover, looking back at a Germany that many participants had “never seen […] except through the eye of imagination” this diverse, heterogeneous group of Americans employed a transnational lens, which allowed them to redefine their heritage as cultural and racial credit in the struggle against “Americanism” and for participation in the American public sphere.

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336 Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting (New York: New York Campaign Committee Against the Horrors on the Rhine, 1921), 14.
337 Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 16.
This chapter will discuss the origins of that history by reinserting the debate of race and belonging in the history of transatlantic migration. Race and national identity converged in discursive negotiations of hyphenated belonging among German Americans during the early 1920s. These intersections also implicated questions of class and gender, but those will receive more attention in the following chapters. After summarizing the historical importance of race and racial thought – particularly as it pertained to questions of immigration and immigrant rights – I turn to the events in Germany. The “Horror on the Rhine” caused a socio-political wave of protest and indignation large enough to cross the Atlantic to the United States, where it provided the context that highlighted questions of belonging and that left a permanent impression on German American identity abroad. Finally, the chapter briefly explores implications of such transnational negotiations of whiteness and belonging upon the German American interwar experience.

2. Race, Whiteness, and German America

The plight of African-American slaves and their descendants as well as central structures of exclusion, violence, and inequality have left indelible marks on U.S society. They have defined the country’s history from the day European settlers and their slaves arrived on North American shores. For almost as long, countless scholars and scientists have attempted to justify, criticize, or simply explain the discrepancies between the American
promise and its reality as well as the asymmetrical relations of power among the nation’s heterogeneous populations. Race, in its various theoretical manifestations, has been frequently invoked, not least because “white” settlers legitimized conquest and slavery based on the inherent superiority of Anglo-Saxons. Though notoriously intangible, race has thus become “the lingua franca of American society and politics.”

Ironically, even though the founders of the Republic practiced slavery while preaching freedom, and preached peace while unleashing war on the continent’s indigenous populations, the metaphorical blame for the contentious conflicts that followed has often been shifted to its victims. White explanations for racial strife typically assailed people of color by

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emphasizing not the contentious history of white racism but the mere presence of blacks in the white United States. Thus, post-Civil War Southern lore romanticized its antebellum history as an era of stability and order, while Northerners unfamiliar with conditions in the South frequently blamed the seeming lack of civic engagement among African-Americans on their innate inferiority rather than realizing the impact of violent intimidation and continuous suppression. In other words, the “race problem” became the “Negro problem”.340

In recent years, however, scholars have deconstructed the scientific myth of whiteness as well as the cultural narratives that enabled and enforced it.341 As Matthew Frye Jacobson writes, “[t]he contest over whiteness—its definition, its internal hierarchies, its proper boundaries, and its rightful claimants—has been critical to American culture throughout the nation’s history, and it has been a fairly untidy affair.”342 Whiteness, in that sense, never simply equaled race and signified more than merely skin

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341 It should be noted in this context that scholars have been interested in such cultural deconstructions of race and whiteness for much longer. For much of the twentieth century, however, their arguments were more or less ignored by the mainstream. Among these scholars was, for example, W.E.B. DuBois, but the importance of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903), which challenged prevailing ideas about African-Americans, was not recognized until much later. Similarly, the work of Franz Boas at Columbia University in the early 1900s, which challenged the validity of “whiteness” was largely ignored by the sociological mainstream of the day (See: Hoerder, “Migration Research,” 64).
color. Instead, it represented power and social capital. In the U.S. Northeast, for example, where more established Americans frequently defended their cultural and social advantage vis-à-vis European immigrants from Ireland, Germany, Italy, and Eastern Europe, “race was marked by language, nationality, religions, and social status, as well as by color.” Many of the new immigrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century faced challenges to their whiteness and were only accepted as “white” over time. Race, Jacobson explains, “is a theory of who is who, of who belongs and who does not, of who deserves what and who is capable of what.” The struggle over race and whiteness was thus part of the larger cultural competition between disparate and heterogeneous populations that met, and often clashed, in the United States. And while it frequently intersected with religious and political

343 Jacobson, Whiteness of a Different Color, 6.
344 Guterl, The Color of Race, 5-6. Irish-Americans nationalists, for example, “drew upon more than fifty years of scientific discourse about ‘the Celt’ to construct a transatlantic racial community predicated on the belief that the Irish and the Anglo-Saxon were biologically, culturally, and historically different. This racialized nationalism rested upon a broader belief that there were an abundance of white races, every one of them racially distinct, and that each of these white races possessed a unique national and world-historical destiny. Irish nationalism, then, derived its racialized qualities from an older, Romantic sense of racial difference in which ‘race,’ ‘nation,’ and ‘folk’ were all loosely, but imprecisely, connected in history, language, and biology.” (Guterl, The Color of Race, 69) See also: Noel Ignatiev, How the Irish Became White (London: Routledge, 1995, 2nd Ed., 2009), especially 1-8 and 170-204.
345 Jacobson, Whiteness of a Different Color, 4. White Ethnicity, according to David Roediger, specifies “the consciousness of a distinct identity among usually second- or third-generation immigrants who both see themselves and are seen as racially white and as belonging to definable ethnic groups.” Quoted in: Kazal, “Interwar Origins.” 79.
discrimination, by the early twentieth century it emerged as the staple of the xenophobic nativism that attempted to regulate immigration and close the “Golden Door” for most of the world’s population.\textsuperscript{347}

During the 1920s, Americans discussed questions of racial belonging in the context of emerging political threats, particularly Bolshevism, which anti-immigration activists described as a “condition” rather than a mindset, thus questioning not only the loyalty of immigrants, but their “racial” compatibility with the institutions of American democracy.\textsuperscript{348} Americans with ethnic backgrounds in Northern and Western Europe viewed immigrants, especially from Southern and Eastern Europe, “as white but inferior to northwest European ‘Nordics’.”\textsuperscript{349} Even Progressives, who aimed to educate the newcomers questioned immigrants’ inherent ability to participate in American civic society. They embodied, writes Matthew Guterl, Richard Hofstadter’s “classic description of the Progressives as conservative anti-Semites, paranoid fascists, and zealous rivals of the upstart robber barons. […] The growth of the cultural institutions in the early twentieth century was an integral part of patrician efforts to resolidify

\textsuperscript{348} Guterl, \textit{The Color of Race}, 44-46. “Fearful of the demons of Bolshevism, patrician Americans reached out to assimilating immigrants and the working class even as they pushed dissenting elements of American society away. In contrast to those who professed devout patriotism to America, “hyphenated” immigrants—and especially Jews—were presumed to be racially distinct and bore the brunt of anti-Bolshevist Nordic authoritarianism. Nativism was now understood as class warfare; domestic economic strife was international racial strife bound up with national loyalties.” (45) See also: Gerstle, \textit{American Crucible}, especially pages 89-125.
\textsuperscript{349} Kazal, “The Interwar Orgins,” 80.
cultural authority and social status.” Immigrants often responded indignantly by showcasing their ability to blend and assimilate into white America.

At the same time, however, other newcomers were unwilling to simply submit themselves to that logic. Irish and German Americans especially resisted the “Anglo-Saxon argument,” which emphasized the kinship of the United States and England. They felt left out of and excluded from the narrative that established a normative American national identity as British derived. An Irish newspaper thus once complained about school curricula teaching “each rising generation of Irish, German, French, Scandinavian, Polish, Italian and other children that they were the descendants of a class of commercial marauders in England styling themselves the great ‘Anglo-Saxon race.’” This resentment conflicted with immigrants’ definition of their own destinies in the United States and ran afoul of their treasured heritage as Irish or Germans (or French or Italians). Irish Americans in particular could not overlook the cruel irony of living in a country dominated by Anglo-Saxons, whose rule they had tried to escape by coming to the United States in the first place. Why would they shed their history at the request of the old colonizer? Many other Americans

350 Guterl, The Color of Race, 30.
352 Quoted in: Jacobson, Whiteness of a Different Color, 208.
353 A number of historians have argued that Irish activism against Anglo-Saxons gave them ethnic cohesion as a group in the United States. See Joseph O’Grady,
agreed. Progressive era proponents of cultural and ethnic pluralism like Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne thought that American democracy was well suited for a diversity of sorts: “Democracy,” wrote Kallen, “involves not the elimination of differences,” but their “perfection and conservation.”\(^{354}\) Similarly, Bourne argued that an American “cosmopolitan” ideal should draw on the various immigrant traditions to serve a democratic culture – he even called for “dual citizenship.”\(^{355}\) Supporters of ethnic nationalism went even further: they wanted to nurture old world identities in the United States, fighting for the homeland’s future on the American front.\(^{356}\)

The racial discourse in the United States entered a new age when millions of African-Americans migrated to the urban North to escape the vicious and violent racism of the South. It was during the 1920s that the “Negro” began to be perceived as the “utmost social threat” and whiteness brought an opportunity for recent immigrants, particularly from Eastern and Southern Europe, to remake themselves into members of the white establishment.\(^{357}\) When race riots broke out in cities across the United States in 1919, it signaled that the line between white and non-white had

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\(^{354}\) Quoted in: Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 213.


finally begun to blur. Race, a term still frequently used to signify national heritage (i.e. the German “race,” the Irish “race”) increasingly came to mean color.\textsuperscript{358} For European immigrants living in the very cities that were the final destination for most African-Americans – such as Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia – the differences between Italians, Irish, Germans, Czechs, Poles and countless others slowly disappeared and after the 1924 Johnson-Reed Immigration Act foreclosed immigration, “the development of a racialized consumer society speeded the absolute assimilation of immigrant groups (previously understood as racially distinct) into the singular ‘white race.’”\textsuperscript{359}

The discourse about race and belonging cannot be accurately captured without pointing to the complex history of global imperialism/colonialism. The supremacy of the “white race” was an essential ideological trope to legitimize all colonial conquests. In the United State, it, too, helped justify the displacement of Native Americans under the ruse of “Manifest Destiny.” And race certainly played a critical role during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when both Germany and the United States reached out for colonies beyond their


\textsuperscript{359} Guterl, \textit{The Color of Race}, 6; McDonald, \textit{American Ethnic History}, 16. See also Chapter 7.
immediate continental neighborhood. Colonial settings provided opportunities to assert white masculinity in the context of imperial war and this was especially true for immigrants lingering on the boundaries of whiteness: As colonial soldiers they could prove their virtue and civilization. The colonial context gave immigrants the opportunity to include themselves in the “white race” while simultaneously excluding the “savages.” Imperialism “fostered a pan-European, pan-white political sensibility that countervailed the otherwise divisive logic of Anglo-Saxon supremacy dominating other arenas of public discourse.” Moreover, it “left a heritage of race-feelings that enriched the emotional appeal of Anglo-Saxon nativism.”

For German immigrants arriving in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the imperial arena provided a transnational logic to explain human hierarchies. Germany, after all, had


recently engaged in colonial adventures of its own, and narratives of white supremacy permeated the fabric of German everyday life. It was no wonder that German Americans fought in America’s imperial wars in great numbers.\(^{364}\) In the colonies, the coexistence of whites and blacks was never a problem as long as no one transgressed social hierarchies between colonizers and colonized. In that sense, U.S. imperial endeavors also added another complicated layer to debates on American citizenship and belonging. American discourse alternated between self-confidence and a sense of cultural crisis, “between a belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race and a fear that ‘the race’ could be corrupted through miscegenous [sic] relations with immigrants and ‘Negroes,’ and through the mere fact of overlordship in tropical climates.”\(^{365}\) A broad anti-imperialist movement used the racial logic to paint a dooming picture of the “post-colonial” age, when the United States was to accept “the peons, negroes, and Indians of all sorts, the wild tribe of Comanches, the bug-and-lizard-eating ‘Diggers,’ and other half-monkey savages […] as equal citizens of the United States.”\(^{366}\) In fact, the notion that these “savages”, Native Americans, African Americans, Filipinos, Chinese, Mexicans, etc.,

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\(^{364}\) See, for example, Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 60. Renda points out that the conflict in Haiti gave many young German-Americans the opportunity to prove their loyalty to the United States without having to fight the German Empire.


\(^{366}\) Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 276,
were not suited for American citizenship was one of the very few matters that both imperialists and anti-imperialists could agree on.367

Colonial settings reinforced the notion that race was a defining factor in human history and that the purity and dominance of the “white race” needed to be preserved. “The policing of sexual boundaries—the defense against hybridity—is precisely what keeps a racial group a racial group. [...] Thus sexuality is one site at which all the economic advantages, political privileges, and social benefits inhering in a cultural invention like Caucasian converge and reside.”368 Sexuality, then, was precisely the area where critics of both German and American colonialism, saw the “barbarizing repercussions.” In other words, contact with uncivilized peoples, especially sexual contact, threatened the racial purity and integrity of the colonizers. Germany and the United States shared a colonial experience in that sexuality and miscegenation played critical roles in the making of “race” and the protection of the boundaries thus established.369

In this context, it is important to note that a transatlantic “scientific” community provided the logic of racial difference, which defined the ways in which Americans and Germans thought about human hierarchies.

367 Capozzola, Uncle Sam Wants You, 103; Jacobson, Whiteness of a Different Color, 211; Mae Ngai, Impossible Subjects, 27.
368 Jacobson, Whiteness of a Different Color, 3.
Academic racism and eugenics were part of a dominant belief system among a populace ready to trust “scientific” explanations. Madison Grant (1865-1937), an influential American eugenicist, argued that “Members of the Nordic race, if they hoped to secure their tenuous grasp on world domination and genetic magnificence, needed to recognize the transnational, transreligious, translinguistic, and transatlantic nature of their racial identity.”

For many observers, World War I was the catalyst of a more forceful argument. If increasing immigration, crime, and (for some) alcoholism had not already been ample warnings of the impending decline of white civilization, World War I certainly amounted to a racial suicide of global proportions. “From a race point of view,” wrote Grant in his influential 1916 work The Passing of the Great Race, “the present European conflict is essentially a civil war and nearly all of the officers and a large proportion of the men on both sides are members of [the Nordic] race.”

His point was that instead of killing each other, Europeans should collaborate with their white American kin to defend their continents against the onslaught of a (perceived) non-white aggression.

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Such theories also reached German America during and immediately following the “Great War.” The *Philadelphia Tageblatt*, a Philadelphia-based German-language newspaper published in cooperation with the German unions, positively reviewed the publication of the 1920 treatise *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* by the journalist and historian Lothrop Stoddard (1883-1950). Stoddard had predicted the weakening of the white race due to immigration and miscegenation and warned of an impending racial war between whites and non-whites. The difference between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the *Tageblatt* wrote, was that “now white people are more or less in a defensive role against a dreadful wave, which rolls against it and that will be especially dangerous, now that the yellow races [sic] have learned so much in the World War.”\(^{372}\) This particular *Tageblatt* piece made no mention of the Great Migration, but as Russell Kazal has shown, the newspaper constantly reported on the increasing presence of African-Americans in Philadelphia’s German districts and it progressively moved towards a position that identified black migration as a threat, showing a stance that shifted “from indifference to concern and, at times, pronounced fear and hostility.”\(^{373}\)

This shift reflected an overarching trend among German Americans. In fact, by the end of World War I, many felt threatened by the presence of

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\(^{372}\) *Philadelphia Tageblatt* January 13, 1921, 7. For a good summary of Stoddard’s argument, see Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 96/7.  
\(^{373}\) Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock*, 248-249.
blacks in traditional white neighborhoods like Philadelphia’s Germantown – as did other white Philadelphians. They responded with exclusion, intimidation and sometimes outright violence, while others began fleeing the city for the suburbs. In doing so, they joined forces with other immigrant groups – Poles, Russians, Italians and especially Irish.  

During the 1920s and 1930s, many German Americans in Philadelphia, particularly those of working-class and Catholic backgrounds, “increasingly saw themselves as sharing identities in common with other European-Americans, including the ‘new immigrants’ entering their neighborhoods and parishes.” Their “common denominator,” writes Kazal about Philadelphia-Germans, was their whiteness:

> Their touchstone was the Great Migration, which brought tens of thousands of black Southerners to Philadelphia in the late 1910s and 1920s, and saw large numbers of African Americans settle, for the first time, on the edges of traditionally German neighborhoods. These changes gave such ‘not-black’ identities, including white identity, greater salience for German Catholics and workers, at precisely the moment they were starting to mix with Slavs, Italians, and the Irish.  

While this may seem like a convincing argument for assimilation, the answer is more complex. To be sure, whiteness was a solidifying factor in the “Americanization” of German America. At the same time, however, for

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many migrants their Germanness was constitutive of their whiteness. In other words, by celebrating their German roots, German Americans could place themselves among the ranks of America’s established elites.

3. “Black Horror on the Rhine”

In the months after the Armistice in November 1918, Germany was in chaos: small and large revolutions erupted across the country while the population confronted the collapse of the Second Reich and the unconditional surrender of its troops to allied forces. The Versailles Treaty furthered German humiliation in its insistence that Germany alone was responsible for World War I. 376 Many conservative elites, who had enthusiastically supported the war and had dreamt of a global empire, now needed to explain and to escape the crisis. Driven by a blend of nationalist ire and anxiety, these elites soon singled out a number of scapegoats to blame for the current crisis, including the “dishonorable French,” “Jewish press scoundrels,” “the “November criminals,” who had signed the Versailles Treaty and thus subjected Germany to its harsh conditions. 377 Perhaps the gravest provocation occurred in the winter of 1918/19, when between 25,000 and 45,000 French colonial soldiers from Northern Africa, Senegal, and Madagascar entered the Rhineland – an area west of the Rhine bordering the Netherlands and Belgium – as part of the French

376 Peukert, Weimar Republic, 21-51.
377 Lebzelter,“Schwarze Schmach,” 52; Peukert, Weimar Republic, 3-4. These disparate “explanations” for why the war was lost, were eventually subsumed in the infamous Dolchstoßlegende (the legend of the ‘stab in the back’).
occupation forces. They became known as the “black beasts.”

To many Germans, and as we shall see to many others, the presence of these black troops signaled the fulfillment of the worst fears voiced by Stoddard, Grant and others: African occupiers on hallowed German grounds. It was one thing to be at war with whites – to be occupied by black colonialists was quite another.

The presence of these troops as occupiers became a critical rallying point to reestablish the faltering power base of German conservatives and reunite a divided German populace around a reactionary ideology. They inspired a campaign anchored in the discourse of self-victimization and self-pity, which dovetailed with a broader narrative of duty and obligation that appealed to the “national honor” of the German people in the face of “national catastrophe”. During its height, from early 1920 to late 1922, a wide coalition of public officials, including Secretary of State Adolf Köster and Chancellor Gustav Stresemann, activists, politicians, and journalists


bitterly complained about the alleged sexual and violent transgressions of African soldiers against the German population – especially women and children. While the German government quietly supported and coordinated private activities, such as independent civic initiatives, against the “Black Shame,” newspapers ensured that horror stories about rape and murder reached all corners of the country.  

To be sure, the press and authorities either exaggerated or plainly lied. Even German observers asserted that African troops were often more disciplined than their French counterparts and that there was no evidence of systematic transgressions. In other words, the stories were a campaign of fabrication and myth, which played into the racist prejudices of both elites and many “average” Germans. Individual cases of sexual transgression and violence against the German population, especially women and children, were used to argue that African soldiers were, by their very nature, sexual predators. “The image of a white (often naked) German woman raped by a black soldier endowed with dangerous,

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381 Interestingly, even though some debates about the boundaries of blackness ensued among the Allies, since the troops not only originated from Senegal, and Madagascar but also from Northern Africa, no such thing occurred in Germany. In fact “the Germans never tired of pointing out, that many of the North Africans were so ‘black’ as to be indistinguishable from Negroes.” Nelson, “Black Horror,” 611. Americans frequently shared that opinion. Senator Gilbert Hitchock (D-Nebr.) argued a few years later that “there is no need to make a distinction [between the Senegalese and the Algerian and the Moroccan]. They are men of an inferior, half-civilized race. They are brutes when stationed among white people, as the evidence shows.” (quoted in: Nelson, “Black Horror,” 623.)
‘primitive’ sexual instincts lies at the heart of the ‘Black Shame’ discourse,” writes Iris Wigger, who recently published the most exhaustive account of the period thus far. However, if there ever was any concern for the putative victims, it was marginal at best. After all, “German women on the Rhine were predominantly not physical victims of black troops, but symbolic victims of a campaign which peddled racist, sexist and pornographic imagery and manufactured a nationwide crisis where one did not exist.” Wigger argues that such figurative victimization and humiliation reflected patriarchal anxieties and repressed sexual fantasies projected onto a context of national crisis. Mistreated female bodies, in that sense, became symbols of a defeated, powerless German nation and, equally important, a threatened white race. More than merely insulting Germany, campaigners argued that the black troops weakened the whiteness of the German people. By sending them to Germany, the Allies, and particularly the French, metaphorically excluded Germany from membership in the white world and undermined the “political solidarity of Europe.”

From a contemporary perspective, it is hard to miss the cruel irony behind such statements only months after the military tactics of the “Great War” had contemptuously abandoned the morality and human dignity of “civilized nations” – let alone solidarity among Europeans. This irony did

not escape everyone, but the protests against the “black shame” nonetheless enjoyed popular support from the German public and nearly all political parties.\footnote{Roos, “Nationalism, Racism, and Propaganda,” 46-47. See also: Lebzelter, “Schwarze Schmach,” 39. Notable exceptions were the Communists and the Independent Social Democrats. It is also worth noting that some politicians, especially those from the far left, challenged the racist discourse, but were either ignored or ostracized by their moderate and conservative colleagues. (Lebzelter, “Schwarze Schmach,” 43)} It seemed as if the simultaneous international discourse on eugenics and “racial purity” that I have discussed above remade female German victims into a “suitable metaphor for [the] idea of the nation, grounded in blood.”\footnote{Wigger, “Black Shame,” 39.} The ideology behind the notion of “white civilization” was, after all, transnational in scope. As the campaign against the “Black Shame” took off, German nationalists quickly realized that many former enemies shared the same commitment to uphold racial hierarchies. Support for the campaign came from all over the globe, including Great Britain, the United States, and even France and it became, according to historian Julia Roos, “one of the most important propaganda efforts of the Weimar period.”\footnote{Roos, “Nationalism, Racism, and Propaganda,” 45. See also: Nelson, “Black Horror,” passim.} In England, the well-known British journalist E.D. Morel drafted a pamphlet, in which he protested against the “colored outrages,” while the American feminist Ray Beveridge actively lobbied for the cause in Germany.\footnote{Nelson, “Black Horror,” 616. Nelson writes: “Fifty thousand Swedish women signed a statement supporting [E.D. Morel’s] views, and similar expressions of opinion were organized in Norway, Italy, and France itself.”} The case became an “international cause célèbre” when more and more public figures – politicians, scientists,
activists – joined the cause and various government agencies organized and sponsored demonstrations and protests, particularly with the support of women’s groups.  

After the Allies rejected initial attempts to discourage the stationing of black troops in the Rhineland, campaign organizers realized that the United States was their most likely ally, not least because of the large German American community. As I have discussed above, the United States was hostile towards its own minorities; the race riots of 1919 had their roots in white hostility to their own black troops in the American Expeditionary Forces. It is hard to ascertain whether or not German activists adapted American “race tactics” in order to combat occupation and French domination. But groups like the Deutsche Studentenschaft (DSt), a German student organization, whose overtly racist message included a warning that “[t]hese coloured beasts covet the fair, blueeyed daughters of the Moselle,” seized the opportunity and sent a large number of pamphlets across the Atlantic as early as Spring of 1919. Though the exact organizational structure behind these international efforts, if one ever existed, remains unclear, there can be no doubt that groups like the DSt specifically targeted German American organizations

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like the German Society of Pennsylvania to spread their message.\footnote{One indication is that multiple pamphlets specifically addressed to the German Society have survived in their Philadelphia archives. See previous footnote.} This strategy was completely in tune with the official line of German foreign policy at the time, which – though incapacitated – had finally begun to understand that culture would be a viable political argument in the years to come. A positive image of Germany could bring great political and economic advantage, and Germans abroad became an important factor, especially in countries where they could wield significant political influence – like the United States, which rapidly emerged as a global leader.\footnote{See Chapter 2, Section 4.1.}

Accordingly, those behind the “Black Horror” activism attempted to rally Americans of German heritage group around a common cause. Pamphlets, which were often sent in both English and German,\footnote{Some German pamphlets also contained an appeal to translate them.} usually contained the appeal in bold letters: “Give this paper to everybody [sic]!”\footnote{Veröffentlichungen der wahren Absichten, loc. cit., No. 24, 2.} Similar pamphlets regularly reached the German Society in 1919 and 1920. These publications frequently contained images that depicted, for example, black French troops guarding historical castles on the Rhine River.\footnote{Veröffentlichungen der wahren Absichten, loc. cit., No. 33.} [Fig. 1+2, see end of chapter] They also demanded that Germans abroad heed their duty to support the fatherland: “We remind you of a great duty: Respond to lies and canards of the enemy press with all certainty. Report to us and send us the articles for or against our work, so
that we can rip off this world’s mask of lies and deception.” Listing the “lies” of the allied presses, the same pamphlet proclaimed in bold letters: “The whole world is against us.” Later editions of the pamphlet contained reprints of similar articles and cartoons from around the world, particularly the United States. [Fig. 3]

To be sure, we do not know enough about the motives, goals, strategies and impact of the plans of those behind those pamphlets. However, the point of this chapter, as noted above, is not to provide a complete history but rather to establish a novel storyline, a way of transnational storytelling that opens up a new historiographical realm for future research. In order to do so, we must now turn to the enactment of the “Black Horror” in the United States, or, in other words, its Americanization.

4. The Americanization of the “Black Horror”

The news of a potential conflict in the Rhineland reached the White House almost immediately after the Armistice. President Woodrow Wilson, a fierce and aggressive defender of white supremacy and segregation, pressed the French Premier Georges Clemenceau on the matter of black African troops as occupation forces: “I have been told that the French government has the intention of sending Senegalese into the left bank [of the Rhine]. Is this true?,” he asked Clemenceau in early 1919. The French

Premier responded that he planned to withdraw the one battalion currently in the Rhineland, “for I believe as you do that it would be a grave error to occupy the left bank with black troops.” A few weeks earlier, an American official had warned a French colleague that the presence of black occupation soldiers could be exploited for political purposes: “One or two cases of rape, committed by your blacks on the German women, well advertised in the southern states of America, where there are very definite views with regard to the Blackmen [sic], would likely greatly reduce the esteem in which the French are held.”

First reports reprinted from German newspapers – a common practice during the time – appeared in the German American press in the spring of 1920; by early June enough letters from angry American citizens had reached the State Department to prompt President Wilson to investigate the matter. He solicited reports from several officials working in Europe, among them the American commissioner in Berlin, Ellis Loring Dresel, and the American commander in Coblenz, General Henry T. Allen. Both reports concluded that the German claims were vastly exaggerated. But while the Wilson administration consequently did not further pursue the issue, German American nationalists like George Sylvester Viereck

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400 Nelson, “Black Horror,” 610. In his American Monthly, George Sylvester Viereck did not beat around the bush: “Already there is considerable unrest among the American negroes who fought in France and learned in France the easy complaisance of French grisettes. What dangerous fires may not be kindled in our own negro colonies by the news that in the occupied territory French negroes, may, with impunity, terrorize and assault white women?” See: “America’s Moral Duty,” Viereck’s American Monthly (VAM) 12:3 (1920), 69.
increased their public pressure. His magazine *Viereck's American Monthly* reported extensively on the issue, arguing that “French niggers rape, slay and mutilate German women,” and favored a proactive German American response to defend German purity both in the United States and in Europe: “German-Americans Organize!” Viereck allowed other writers to use his magazine as a platform for similar agitation. For example, in its November 1920s issue, the conservative American actress Ray Beveridge, who had spent almost the entire war in Germany, warned the *Monthly’s* readers of a “Negro Reign of Terror in Germany.”

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One particularly appalling example of German American activism appeared in the December 1920 issue of the *Monthly*. Viereck reprinted an open letter by the playwright, poet, and protégé of Ambrose Bierce, Herman George Scheffauer (1878-1927) to James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) of the NAACP: “You yourself, sir,” Scheffauer wrote addressing Johnson, “as an enlightened and cultured man of color must surely be aware that it is an unforgivable crime to introduce these savages, fresh from the wilds […] into a community of highly-cultured white people […].” Scheffauer noted that “the orderly and educated American negro” was surely above “these savages,” but warned Johnson that the atrocities “will irreparably damage the just cause of the American negro and alienate all European sympathies for the wrongs and tortures inflicted upon him.” Thus, Scheffauer concluded, the “National Association must denounce in the most unsparing terms the bestialities of these savages, and put the blame where it belongs—upon the white French.”

Apparently, Viereck had taken it upon himself to forward the letter – along with a copy of the *Monthly* – to Johnson, who wrote back to Viereck on December 11, 1920. His letter was a polite and firm response to a type of racism that Johnson was surely familiar with – a type of racism that drove the ideology contained in terms such as “civilization” and “culture.” The NAACP believed, Johnson wrote,

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*American Negro’s Opportunity,* *VAM* 12:10 (December, 1920), 300; emphasis in original.
that crime is crime and is no whit worse when performed by Africans on Europeans than it is when committed by Europeans on Africans. We therefore strongly condemn in unmeasured terms such passages in your propaganda as imply or seem to imply that the heinousness of these alleged crimes lies principally in the color of the accused.

On behalf of his organization, Johnson refused to participate in the activism against the presence of black troops. But, he added, turning his response into an anti-colonial critique, “we would gladly join you and anybody to ask for the removal of all troops from all parts of this war-sick world.” 405 Viereck, of course, did not recognize (or ignored) the references to colonialism and racial injustice. For him, it was a missed opportunity for African-Americans to join ranks with German Americans. His ethnic group, Viereck argued, supported African-American demands for legal, political, and social equality. But the fact that Johnson and the NAACP now declined to take a strong position against such sexual breaches of the social contract regulating the coexistence of black and white in the United States, was reason enough for Viereck to issue a stern warning:

BUT ONCE LET THE AMERICAN PEOPLE SUSPECT THAT BEHIND THE COLORED MAN’S DEMAND FOR SUCH EQUALITY THERE LURKS A FUTURE PURPOSE TO CLAIM RIGHTS ALSO TO WHITE WOMEN—AND THE FIRES OF BLIND, IRREPRESSIBLE, RACIAL CONFLICT WILL BE LIT IN AMERICA. 406

Viereck surely hoped for broad support from the American public for his strong position. And indeed, Viereck’s activism must be seen as an attempt to steer German America back into the political and cultural center of U.S. society. During the presidential campaign of 1920, Viereck and his co-editor Edmund von Mach, one of the founders of the Steuben Society, thus juxtaposed the issue of racial purity and political equality in a quest for ethnic cohesion among German Americans and their acceptance among other Americans. They enlisted other prominent members from within and without the migrant community in an effort to mobilize public opinion against the “traitor” Wilson, who was deemed responsible for the terms of the Versailles treaty and thus the presence of the African troops on German soil. Supported by wealthy donors from the German and Irish American communities they established “The New York Campaign Committee Against the Horror on the Rhine” and printed thousands of pamphlets, which were distributed across the country.


408 Nelson, “Black Horror,” 617-620. While never explicitly mentioned, the heavy involvement of the Steuben Society in the organization cannot be doubted, since a large number of its co-founders served on the board or various committees that helped organize the event: The chairman Rudolph Pagenstecher; Theodore Haebler, the treasurer; Dr. Edmund von Mach, chairman of the Committee on Speakers; George T. Riefflin, who served on both the Preliminary Campaign and Ways and Means committees; Dr. Franz Koempel, a member of the medical staff; as well as the wife of Rudolf Cronau. Other members of the committee included prominent German-Americans like the publisher Bernhard H. Ridder,
By October, newspapers across the East Coast and the Midwest printed agonizing accounts of the purported and largely unproven crimes committed by African soldiers, while also introducing various activities organized on a local level. In leading publications like the *New Yorker Staatszeitung* and the *Philadelphia Tageblatt*, the Schwarze Schmach – the “black shame” – became a leading topic. The *Tageblatt* published eleven lengthy articles on black African troops in Germany in October and early November 1920, denouncing the “severe crimes against morality [schwere Sittlichkeitsverbrechen]” committed by French colonial troops. Usually reprinting or paraphrasing articles previously published by German newspapers, the *Tageblatt* listed specific details of the crimes and even names of the victims. Comparing the incidents to scenes from Dante’s *Inferno*, one report described the “dreadful agonies, which constantly, hourly threaten reputable German women, innocent girls in the spring of their lives and boys, still in their delicate childhood”. The “wild, African soldiers,” the article continued,

indulge in their bestial appetites, uninhibited, even protected by their superiors. […] Blacks, […] savages from the darkest

George Sylvester Viereck, vice chairman Reverend Dr. William Popcke, a Lutheran clergyman who later served as the president of the United German Societies of New York and vice chairwoman Frida Muller Spiering, the wife of renowned violinist Theodore Bernays Spiering. (*Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting*, passim).

409 The *Staatszeitung* published a report by E.D. Morel in seven installments between October 7 and October 14, 1921 and published a number of articles and editorials on the topic. For example: “Mariannes Schmach,” *Staatszeitung*, October 17, 1921, 6; “Eine unbewußte Ehrenrettung,” October 18, 1921, 4; see also: Nelson, “Black Horror,” 617/8.

Africa are dragged to the banks of the Rhein, to the heart of Europe, where they are to guard a white nation in a country of European culture a thousand years old. The black man, fetched from his clay hut from Africa’s Ivory Coast, to guard and threaten like slaves in Bonn and Mainz, in Worms and in Speyer, the descendants of those, who built the soaring Romanic and Gothic cathedrals there. The life and health of the members of a white *Kulturnation* at the mercy of the stupidity and wildness of black barbarians!  

The outrage against the presence of black soldiers, manufactured as it was, transcended the social boundaries that otherwise divided the readership of *Tageblatt* and *Staatszeitung*. If there were any differences in reporting, they could be found in the stronger anti-French sentiments voiced in the latter. “The France of today,” one editorial on October 17th argued, “can no longer uphold the pretense that it will lead civilization to a good end and it shakes the current social order. The France of tomorrow will be barbarism [sic].”  

By early 1921, the purported crimes of African soldiers in Germany were the dominant topic in the *Tageblatt*, while ranking second in the *Staatszeitung*, where the aid for hungering children in Germany attracted the greatest attention. In February, during the last four weeks before the mass meeting in New York City, 32 articles appeared in the *Tageblatt*, including six that were prominently displayed as national news on page one. On February 22nd, for example, the *Tageblatt* featured an article on the “Senegal-Neger” on its front page, two editorials on the topic and a

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lengthy article critical of the American Legion’s attempts to mark the movement against the “black shame” as disloyal.\textsuperscript{413} The \textit{Staatszeitung} published the same number articles, 32 in total, in less than two weeks before the mass meeting in New York. It even specifically called on its readers to attend the meeting, for example on February 20, 1921 on page 1 [See Fig. 4].\textsuperscript{414}

German Americans uttered the same fears of black violence. For them, the presence of black troops was an affront to German culture and civilization and as such encapsulated the experience of many Germans around the world, whose self-confidence was shattered after World War I. After all, the years of the Great War had arguably been the period of German America’s largest humiliation to date. Moreover, activists repeatedly pointed out that public outrage was not directed against the black soldiers themselves but against the French government, who aimed to humiliate and, ultimately, erase the German nation. While German American leaders were not responsible for the defeat in World War I, they, too, had to explain why the German American community was subjected to such persecution and scrutiny during the war. The American fear of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[413] “Senegal-Neger”, PT, Feb 22, 1921, 1; “Die Wahrheit über die schwarze Schande ringt sich durch,” Ibid., 4; “Sekretär Colby’s Propaganda,” Ibid., 4; “Deutsche Gespenster,” Ibid., 7. For more on the American Legion, see below.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
German American disloyalty was, after all, not entirely unfounded.\textsuperscript{415} Just like in Germany, then, this discourse of victimization replaced self-critical reflection and an analysis of one’s own shortcomings.\textsuperscript{416}

Beyond these seemingly similar debates, however, the American campaign had developed into a distinctly unique discourse on the future of U.S. society. The climactic meeting at Madison Square Garden on February 28\textsuperscript{th} provided the space where the national implications of this international discourse were pronounced in a public setting large enough to capture the entire nation. Why was it important for the campaigners, to bring, as they proclaimed, “the whole question of the Horror on the Rhine to the attention of the American people”?\textsuperscript{417} Was it simply another case of propaganda instigated by the German government, as the American Legion, a veteran’s organization, and other critics alleged? Or were the campaigners merely “concerned” – in the racist dictum of the time – about the wellbeing of their German cousins abroad?

Of course, leaders like Viereck und von Mach had recognized that the issue resonated with many German Americans, not least because racial hierarchies also thrived in an American context. The organizers hoped that

\textsuperscript{415} The German government had in fact actively supported fifth column activity in the United States during the “Great War.” The “Black Tom” explosion in July 1916, for example, was organized by the German secret service with the support of German-Americans. Activists like Viereck and von Mach had also been paid by the German Foreign Service to influence American public opinion against an American entry into the war. See: Jules Witcover, \textit{Sabotage at Black Tom: Imperial Germany’s Secret War in America, 1914-1917} (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1989).

\textsuperscript{416} See also: Lebzelter, “Schwarze Schmach,” 39-40.

\textsuperscript{417} \textit{Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting}, 6.
the issue would become a rallying point for German Americans. The “chief reason” for the meeting’s success, they wrote in a pamphlet published after the meeting, was

the growing sense of strength and dignity of American citizens of German blood. By them the meeting had been arranged, they bore the brunt of the attacks—and they stood firm as honest Americans of German blood should stand. As American citizens they feel the moral responsibility for the use which is being made of the victory won by America. They feel the shame which the presence of uncivilized French colored troops on the Rhine brings to the fair name and the honor of America. Knowing conditions on the Rhine to be as they are, these American citizens would be unfaithful to their duty if they did not do everything in their power to awaken the conscience of their fellow-citizens to the Horror on the Rhine.418

This passage points to the transnational identity that German American leaders attempted to cultivate after World War I. Resisting the “attacks” of the preceding years, they wanted to be able to speak up as “honest Americans of German blood” and to gain respect for their heritage and for their achievements. Owing loyalty to the United States, they thus felt entitled to claim its ideological foundations for themselves. Countering allegations of disloyalty and treason, Dr. Joseph Rummel, a New York Catholic priest, argued that if their protest was treason

then it is the treason of George Washington. (Applause.) It is the treason of Abraham Lincoln. (Applause.) It is the treason of William McKinley. (Applause.) Or even the treason of the two million sturdy boys who under the flag that knows no stain or dishonor, and that has no greater mission than the

418 Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 7.
defense of the innocent and helpless, crossed the seas to let the world know where America stands on the question of civilization, and what it can do when innocence is assailed. And if this be treason, I say in your name and in the name of all decent Americans, make the most of it. (Applause.)

If they had been pushed to the periphery of society during World War I, German Americans now aimed for their complete rehabilitation. In this regard, the narrative created around the “Horror on the Rhine” allowed them to achieve a critical objective: instead of divorcing their fate as Americans from the German homeland – as many commentators demanded at the time – they could reemphasize the European roots of American culture. If the war had been about the freedom of all people, as President Wilson had claimed, they should be entitled to express their opinions as well as pursue their own rights and ends, especially in the United States.

The speakers at the mass meeting belabored these points time and again. For example, Colonel Alexander Edward Anderson, a veteran of America’s imperial adventures in the Philippines and a member of the American Legion, argued that the meeting was “American in scope, in that it calls upon the people to recognize and acknowledge the purpose for which we went to this war: in the interest of all of humanity.” And, Anderson continued, Germans were no different from Americans, they

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419 Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 42.
420 Anderson was expelled from the legion a few weeks later precisely because he had spoken at the mass meeting. See “Anderson is Guilty, Expelled by Legion for Rhine Protest,” The New York Times, March 23, 1921, 1.
421 Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 11.
were not the “Hun” of World War I propaganda. To emphasize that point, Anderson drew a telling comparison: "If we choose to be liberal and fair-minded and just, we must realize that the occupation of the country inhabited by those God-fearing, liberty-loving people is no different that would be an occupation of our own glorious country inhabited by a like people."\(^{422}\) The blame, for Anderson, lay not with the black troops, who were simply “dragged and coddled and inveigled out of the wilds of darkest Africa”, but with the French, “the people responsible for putting them there”. The French, he argued, had undermined one of the central foundations of Western civilization at the time: The rule of the white race. Addressing the audience directly, Anderson argued that as Americans, “you have a duty to protest against such kind of occupation. (Applause.) You would not be loyal to your own blood, you would not be loyal to humanity, and not being loyal to humanity, you could by any manner of chance be loyal to the traditions of America. (Applause.)"\(^{423}\) America was built on the tradition of a white racial order and it was the duty of Americans to protect it.

Transcending previous definitions of whiteness, many of the speakers used the term “race” to evoke race as skin color, which reflected contemporary scientific opinions around the globe. But the discussion always had a uniquely American twist: Otto Stiefel, an attorney from New

\(^{422}\) \textit{Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting}, 13 (emphasis mine).

\(^{423}\) \textit{Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting}, 13-14.
York and co-founder of the Steuben Society, believed that America had not been created “by one race and for one race,” but by God, “and he [sic] didn’t even ask the help of one Englishman in the performance of the task. (Great applause.) My friends, those blessings exist for the people who inhabit America, all of them—all children of Europe—all are equally entitled to the benefits which God has bestowed, without distinction.”

The distinction that all “people” equaled “all children of Europe” was critical. The speakers at the event agreed (and probably many of its critics as well) that whiteness signified privilege. While they were not specific on where exactly the boundary between white and non-white lay, it was very clear that African-Americans were by definition not white, and thus had no place in the American body politic. “I am very glad that the issue we are raising here tonight is not a race issue,” proclaimed the feminist Sara Bard Field, pointing to the complex and shifting meaning of race during the time. “We have no quarrel with the black people as a people,” she continued:

> When I consider how America and other nations have treated the black people, bringing them here in the past under all sorts of promises [sic!], to make them slaves, and then keeping them enslaved for so long, I feel that we have a great obligation to the black people, and therefore I am very glad that this is not a matter of race prejudice, but is a matter of knowing that you cannot bring people of a primitive civilization into touch with a people of higher civilization without the most menacing results ensuing. And, therefore, I

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424 *Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting*, 15 (emphasis mine).
am making this protest on the ground of morality and not on the ground of race prejudice. (Applause.)^{425}

Stiefel even spoke of the “human race” when he evoked his German heritage as the foundation for his call for racial order in the United States: “I am proud of my German origin because events have demonstrated that the creative energies of the Germanic people are unsurpassed in the history of the human race.”^{426}

The cultural sense of superiority voiced by Stiefel prefigured the fine line that German American ethnic nationalism would tread throughout the 1920s. Negotiating the increasingly exclusionary definitions of national identity in both Germany and the United States was a balancing act. After all, if Germans were “unsurpassed” in their achievements, how should they stand on equal terms with other white Americans? For now, however, Stiefel settled for equality, nothing more and nothing less, when he proclaimed that American citizenship “has been hideously outraged, hideously debased by the influences that have controlled the destinies of this nation for the past four years.” Now, he continued, it had to be “restored to its full heritage, the full development of its power. (Applause.) Of citizenship by tolerance we have had enough! (Applause.) Of citizenship by effacement we have had enough. (Applause.) Of citizenship by the grace of a dominant race we have had plenty and enough. (Applause.)” Germans did not simply want to be tolerated or, even less,

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^{425} Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 28.
^{426} Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 15.
dominated by more established Anglo-Americans. They wanted equal rights and access to power. And Stiefel was certain that “a new consciousness is sweeping slowly over America.”

The new consciousness envisioned by Stiefel was a blend of Horace Kallen's pluralism, which stressed the diversity of the American nation, and the ethnic nationalism that German immigrants shared with Irish, Polish, or Jewish immigrants. As an American of German heritage, Stiefel believed he should be entitled to the same pride and connectedness that Anglo-Americans felt for the British Isles:

Köln, Koblenz, Heidelberg, Mainz—all the beautiful Rhinepfalz, and the Rhine [...]. My friends, I have never seen them; I have never seen them except through the eye of imagination. I have never seen the majestic river, the smiling valleys, the vine-clad hills; by I hope to see them some day (applause), and when I see them may they be free from the Black Horror. By invoking these historic German cities and the mythic Rhine River, Stiefel grounded his own Anglo-Saxon heritage in the German homeland, included Germans in the narrative of white progress and stressed the necessity for solidarity among the European civilizations. “What idea can contain more virulent corruption than that any race should bring about the pollution of its own women?” Stiefel asked. “That is the lowest step to which humanity can sink.”

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427 Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 15.
428 Jacobson, Barbarian Virtues, 201-219.
429 Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 16.
430 Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 18.
were endangering the survival of the entire white race. To Stiefel, the policies of the French – Stiefel also placed the blame squarely with the French and exculpated the African soldiers – violated “every instinct that [Nature] planted in the breasts of man for the preservation of his race. The men who [pollute their own women] are traitors to the whole white race, and foes to every other.”

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Generally, the Irish-American speakers adopted a similar message. They, too, argued that the presence of African occupiers on German soil “is a problem, that every true American every true man [sic] in the world should make his own.” Nonetheless, it became clear that the Irish based the discussion on their own peculiar discourse of race and belonging, which had historically evolved in the century of Irish immigration to the United States. Like the Germans, their nationalism had developed in part as a reaction to American nativism as well as the developments back home, in particular the movement to liberate Ireland from British rule. Like many of the German speakers, they assumed a biological and cultural difference between Irish and Anglo-Saxons. They were also convinced that they had been forced away from their homeland because of the hunger and poverty caused by British imperialism. If German nationalism was anti-French, Irish nationalism was anti-

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431 Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 18.
432 Rev. Patrick Mythen, Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 19
English.\textsuperscript{433} Still divided from “white” America by a “razor-thin line,”\textsuperscript{434} the Irish had held conventions to voice their nationalist dissent as early as 1916. It is very likely that the organizers of the German mass meeting in February 1921 had consulted with Irish activists like Daniel Cohalan, a leading organizer of the Irish-American cause, who spoke for the German Americans at their event.\textsuperscript{435} Cohalan argued that there “is no group in this country […] who are [sic] entitled to rule over the rest of us. There is no strain of blood in this country that is in any way superior to any other strain.”\textsuperscript{436} He also reminded his audience as an Irishman “that you have put up for too long a time with this thing of permitting one group of men to step on you as if you were not American citizens. (Applause.)” Their service for the country had translated into a right of being American, this was not a matter of privilege:

> But bare in mind that American citizenship means something more than rights; American citizenship includes necessarily the ideas of duty, the idea of responsibility. You have no right, as you have done for too long a time, to give over your judgment to another group of people. You have no right to withdraw yourselves as a class apart. The man who comes here, the woman who comes here, the race which comes here and which is not satisfied to be American, ought better never to have come.

This duty included “the duty of taking an active part in the public affairs of the country, the duty of helping to create a public sentiment by which the

\textsuperscript{433} Guterl, \textit{The Color of Race}, 68-81.
\textsuperscript{434} Guterl, \textit{The Color of Race}, 69.
\textsuperscript{435} Guterl, \textit{The Color of Race}, 70-99.
\textsuperscript{436} \textit{Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting}, 29.
country is going to be swayed, the duty of examining every question.”

Irish-Americans like Cohalan were prepared to lead that fight, especially against the Anglo-American establishment. “Do you realize, those of you who are of German extraction,” the Reverend Patrick Mythen asked the audience,

that if we who are of Irish extraction and you will come together in this land […] – as we have the right to do, we are the majority here, and we act as the majority should act – that we would mighty quickly banish into the mists when it came this phantom of Anglo-Saxonism? […] And this, my friends, shall be our work, and this shall be our endeavor, that we Americans shall decide what it means to be 100 per cent Americans. We shall decide that […]. We are Americans.

The crowd responded with enthusiastic applause and “three cheers for the Irish Republic.”

But immediately after Mythen had finished his speech, von Mach, who acted as a moderator, quickly reminded the audience that it should not forget that “a few unfaithful American citizens of Anglo-Saxon blood do not give us the right to overlook the splendid qualities of the broad-minded and open-hearted members of that race.” Von Mach was far less interested in building a German-Irish front: he, like his fellow organizers, wanted that German culture and achievements would be accepted by the Anglo-Saxon elites who ran the country and that these elites invited

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437 Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 30-31.
438 Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 25.
439 Addresses Delivered at the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting, 26.
German Americans into their midst. His vision of the “white ethnic,” after all, included all white people, however broadly defined.

Many listeners must have agreed. There had always been a sense of disappointment, of hurt feelings in the complaints about the injustice done to German immigrants during World War I, about the apparent indifference and disregard that the American public showed towards the achievements of its German “element.” When critics again attacked the activists as peons of the German government and the meeting as “organized chiefly for the purpose of creating discord and ill-feeling between the people of this country and the people of France,” many German Americans were surely reminded of World War I. Yet, there was also hope for redemption. In the days after the meeting the German American press celebrated the “voice of the people” [Des Volkes Stimme] and reiterated the argument that the attendees had not simply followed the call of German propaganda, but that they had aimed to awaken the “national conscience” [Volksgewissen] of the entire United States and to protest the “crime” against the German nation, which “constitutes a crime against the entire civilization.”

Nonetheless, in the weeks after the meeting support dissipated in the face of criticism mounted by the media, the American public and from public officials (who prohibited similar events, for example in

441 “Des Volkes Stimme,” Staatszeitung, March 2, 1921, 4
Philadelphia). With memories of fifth column activities during World War I still fresh, many Americans felt the protests against the “Black Horror” were based on German propaganda and consecrated the service and sacrifices of American soldiers during the Great War. In mid-March, an event organized by the veteran’s organization American Legion drew about as many as 15,000 supporters to Madison Square Garden in a demonstration of patriotism. “Loyalty is demanded to America and to America alone; and he who seeks under the protection of the American flag to make this country a brew house of sedition and revolution and probable war is endangering the peace and welfare of the nation that protects and defends him,” said Senator Frank Willis of Ohio at the event. “He whose chief interest is in a foreign land is not a whole-hearted American.” The event showed that Americanism was a powerful force in the 1920s and those who wanted to remain invested in old world culture and traditions were well served to do so privately.

Over the next several years the issue occasionally resurfaced. For example, during a November 1922 visit of the former French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, senators Robert L. Owen (Oklahoma) and Gilbert M. Hitchcock of Nebraska renewed the charges, arguing, as the New-York Tribune reported, that the sole purpose of the black troops on

German territory was “to exasperate Germany into resistance in order that France might have an excuse for dismemberment of Germany.” But the German American press largely stayed away from the matter and adopted a markedly subdued tone. The Tageblatt, for example, always made sure to distinguish between the French government and the French people, or in other words, protest a policy but not an entire nation. Internal divisions among German Americans took over once more and the Tageblatt attempted to divest itself from any bourgeois influence – especially after Social Democrats and Communists came under increasing attack in Germany and conservative German Americans like Viereck and von Mach, “the German Philistine elements of America [deutschspießerischen Elementen Amerikas],” threw their support behind the reactionary and undemocratic elements in the homeland. Moreover, women – as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5 – had become a driving force in German American life during the 1920s and felt misrepresented by a discourse that saw them merely as victims.

5. Conclusion and Outlook

If silence had helped German Americans walk the fine line between loyalty and disloyalty during the First World War I, they had erred in their belief that challenges to their cultural citizenship, to their rights to speak

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and argue, had been temporary. World War I changed the relationship between the American state and its citizens, and profoundly so. A “culture obligation” had evolved that was directed in particular against ethnic particularism and political radicalism and that was enforced by both the state and the public through a blend of state coercion and civic voluntarism.\textsuperscript{446} The German American campaign to resist the culture of conformity and obligation\textsuperscript{447} by stressing white ethnic pluralism set back attempts at reconciliation, since many Americans saw in their activism a continuation of World War I disloyalty. Especially among more conservative Americans, who strongly identified with the Allied cause, few bought into the “rotten black troop propaganda” \textsuperscript{448} and leading publications like the \textit{New York Times}, the \textit{Nation} and \textit{New Republic} distanced themselves quickly from the movement.\textsuperscript{449} Yet, even though the erosion of socio-political connections to the homeland was unstoppable, many migrants – and this was certainly true for German Americans – would earn their rights as “Caucasians.” This chapter has attempted to show that the white ethnic – a coalition that transcended ethnic and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Capozzola, \textit{Uncle Sam Wants You}, 11-15.
\item “Americans’ sense of obligation came from many places: political traditions of republicanism that valued the common good over individual liberty, utopian visions of community, Christian beliefs that made of duty a virtue, paternalist notions that legitimated social hierarchies and demanded obedience to them. In the early twentieth century, such language crossed party lines, from conservatives who sought to uphold the status quo to progressives who dreamed of a new era of shared sacrifice. It was a way of talking about politics that predated the war; the needs of war mobilization made its use pervasive.” (Capozzola, \textit{Uncle Sam Wants You}, 6-7)
\item Nelson, “Black Horror,” 620/1.
\item Nelson, “Black Horror,” 621/2.
\end{enumerate}
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religious boundaries – was molded in part in racial discourses like the one discussed here.

In the years to come the migration of African-Americans increasingly took center stage in the struggles over public space and belonging in the American city. Whiteness became “a monolith of privilege” and the “racial differences within the white community lost their salience, as they lost their reference to important power arrangements of the day.”\textsuperscript{450} It was no coincidence that Lothrop Stoddard, who had so viciously demanded immigration reform in his 1920 book \textit{The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy} refined his argument only seven years later in \textit{Reforging America}: “[M]ost of the immigrant stocks are racially not too remote for ultimate assimilation.” Stoddard was talking specifically about European immigrants. On the other hand, Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans and particularly African-Americans, he concluded, would remain unable to become full members of the body politic: “Here,” he wrote, “ethnic differences are so great that ‘assimilation’ in the racial sense is impossible.”\textsuperscript{451}

The 1924 Immigration Act further reduced the immigrant threat and signified a critical step towards a monolithic acceptance of whiteness as the norm for Americanness. Ethnic differences became less significant, and the notion of the Caucasian “brought the full authority of modern

\textsuperscript{450} Jacobson, “Whiteness of a Different Color,” 95.
\textsuperscript{451} Quoted in: Jacobson, \textit{Whiteness of a Different Color}, 98.
science to bear on white identity, and it did so in a way that challenged the
scheme of hierarchically ordered white races [...]. The idea of a
‘Caucasian race’ represents whiteness ratcheted up to a new
epistemological realm of certainty.”  

452 If there had been “white races”
before, now there was simply a “white race.”  

453 At the same time, however,
the Immigration Act signaled a critical point of departure, in which German
and American understandings of race and belonging drifted apart.
Whereas Americans would soon no longer consider race and nationality
as equal, discourse in Germany steered more and more towards that
conclusion. Whereas race came to signify skin color in America, it signified
nationality in Germany. And in Germany, a different skin color was
tantamount to being alien.  

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For German migrants it was not always easy to navigate both worlds.
When hundreds wrote to the Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland
more than a decade later, many of the tensions between race and
nationalism were still unresolved. Writers commented on the “hodgepodge
country” [Misch Masch Nation] USA and wondered about the implications of
miscegenation that were hard to overlook, especially in America’s cities:
“All nations are here, from all over the world. And all of them are
intermarried. How many half-blacks [Halbschwarze] are running around

452 Jacobson, Whiteness of a Different Color, 94.
453 Jacobson, Whiteness of a Different Color, 97. See also Roediger, Working
Toward Whiteness.
454 Jacobson, Whiteness of a Different Color, 94-95.
here, with veritable jew-faces \textit{[Judengesichter]}\textsuperscript{455}. As for other European immigrants, Fritz Strecker of Staten Island believed that Italian politicians like New York mayor La Guardia would remain the exception, since “Southern Humanity” belonged to the Southern hemisphere of the Americas. “North America will remain, if God permits, Nordic, Saxon! Well, let’s say Germanic; the Anglo-Saxons are a part of it, Scandinavians and Dutch, too.”\textsuperscript{456} And F.J. Ehrhardt considered moving from the Bronx to Minnesota, the Dakotas or Montana, “because the temptation of getting involved with a Jewish girl \textit{[Judenmädchen]} or worse a Negress (Mulatto) is especially big in this part of town. But so far I have been mindful of my German blood and will continue to do so.”\textsuperscript{457} All of them participated in discourses defining the intersection of race and nation in the United States – and they did so through a transnational perspective that is essential to understanding the history of American society in the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{455} Osterwalder to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-89, 2.
\textsuperscript{456} Fritz Strecker to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1937-1156.
\textsuperscript{457} F.J. Ehrhardt to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-765. Ehrhardt also asked the VDA for financial support to travel out west and “protect his German blood.” For similar expressions, see Hans Doelling to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1937-519; M. Haenel to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1937-1088;
[Fig. 1:] Front page of a pamphlet distributed by the Deutsche Studentenschaft (DSt). Date: Presumably in the Spring of 1919. (See Fig. 2 for detailed view of image; source: Horner Library, German Soc. of Pennsylvania)
[Fig. 2:] Detailed view of image on front page. The image shows two French African soldiers guarding the ruins of a medieval castle, presumably on the Rhine. (Source: Horner Library, German Soc. of Pennsylvania)
[Fig. 3:] Undated pamphlet, approximately between 1919 and 1921 (Source: Horner Library, German Soc. of Pennsylvania)
"Auf zum Protest!"

"Die Tatsache (der Schwarzen Schande) bil-
det ein Verbrechen an Europa als Ganzen.
Der Appell an die Frauen Europas und der
Vereinigten Staaten, an die internationalen
Arbeiterstaaten, an alle, die in jedem Lande für
Frieden und internationalen Wiederaufbau
eintreten, sollte unübersichtlich sein!"

(C. A. Kerel-London.)

Das "New York Citizens' Committee against the Horrors
on the Rhine" ruft alle Amerikaner, Männer und Frauen, auf zum
Protest gegen den
"Schrecken am Rhein."

Um durch eine überwältigende Kundgebung die Behörden in Was-
ington zum Einschreiten gegen diese der Zivilisation zugesagte Schmach
zu veranlassen und die Frauen am Rhein, in der Pfalz und an der
Saar vor den furchtbaren Prüfungsstößen zu schützen, findet eine
Massen-Protestversammlung
am Montag, 28. Februar, abends 8 Uhr,
im
Madison Square Garden
statt, für die freie Eintrittsarten im Hauptquartier, 126 50. Str.
zu haben sind.

Keiner darf fehlen!
Es gilt der Humanität!
Chapter 4: “Deutsche Arbeit,” the American Way – Transnational Negotiations of Social Belonging in German America

1. Introduction

In the *New York Staatszeitung* on May 4, 1920 an anonymous writer using the alias *Alpendorn* summarized his thoughts on the present state of German America in a letter entitled “Regarding the Chapter: Unity.” The author stressed the importance of the historical lesson learned during World War I and the new “trust” and “love” many migrants had discovered for their native Germany. “It is possible that the war evoked an invigorating homesickness among the Germans,” wrote *Alpendorn*. Before the war, the author argued, German Americans were dismayed by the arrogance and self-righteousness of upper-class elites who policed immigrant behavior in ethnic organizations. *Alpendorn*, for example, recalled being rebuked by an “older German woman, belonging to the better class and well educated” for the use of a German word in an English conversation. In the German clubs, *Alpendorn* had observed, “the Germans are more pro-American than the natives themselves. Discord and sarcasm ruled. […] A new member was treated so arrogantly that he quickly wished for its exclusion.” But during the war, German Americans had learned their
lessons: “The war had its good side after all. It showed the stubborn Germans that they have to be unified once more.”

This chapter explores the role of social and political boundaries in German America between World War I and World War II. I argue that the persistent investment of many immigrants in competing ideas of Germanness at home contributed to the ways in which they viewed and responded to the interwar experience in the United States – nativism, anti-immigration legislation, the Great Depression and the rise of the Third Reich. As I discussed in Chapter 3, there had always been a social bias in middle-class accusations of assimilation and decline, which were directed – to a large degree – against less affluent members of the migrant community. Like Alpendorn, many of these “yankeified” Germans were repelled by the condescension directed against them by wealthier and more educated representatives and they rejected the argument that they were any less “German.” On the other hand, they often utilized the social, racial, and cultural undertones of Germanness, as propagated by the middle-class, to improve their own situation in the United States.

To explore that ambiguity through a transnational lens, I use the trope of Deutsche Arbeit – “German Work” – as an instructive example. Dating back to the nineteenth century, the idea that there was something unique

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and exceptional about the German work ethic was an important component in the larger development of German nationalism – and it was an integrative element in the migratory experience to the United States. In fact, many German migrants of all social backgrounds relied on their heritage and on the reputation of Deutsche Arbeit abroad, to master the challenges of life they encountered there. At the same time, many working-class migrants rejected the idea that the middle-class had a peculiar role to play in the preservation of these qualities. This ambiguity resurfaced in many of the letters written to Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland (VDA), which had presented migrants with a new vision of work that leveled social boundaries and promised an alternative vision to the alienating experience of American capitalism. Rather than simply buying into this ideology, however, respondents attempted to reconcile their attraction to and at times admiration for the achievements of the Third Reich with past experiences and present realities. Moreover, rather than simply accepting the notion that as German workers they had a duty to the Third Reich, they incorporated the ideals of Deutsche Arbeit into their sense of belonging to the “American Way.”

After discussing the origins of Deutsche Arbeit in the middle-class imaginations of German national identity during the second half of the nineteenth century, I examine how the idea sustained a persistent strategy to idealize Germans in the United States. Next, I point to some instances that exemplify how transnational negotiations of ethnic identity shaped the
history of German America between the two World Wars, followed by a
discussion of such negotiations in the letters the VDA.

2. Imagining Germanness: Deutsche Arbeit Before World War I

2.1. Class and the Origins of Deutsche Arbeit

During the nineteenth century, millions of individuals and families left
their rural villages in Central Europe to find stable jobs and new
opportunities in growing industrial centers or overseas. Those that
ended up in German cities soon learned that industrial life could not keep
many of its promises. Being a wage earner had its advantages, especially
during periods of economic prosperity, when industrial labor provided
consistent occupation with competitive wages. However, at least until mid-
century many laborers – men, women, and children – were forced to work
14 to 17 hours a day, six days a week with no insurance against
unemployment or sickness. Their livelihoods were threatened by illnesses,
accidents, and – worse – economic downturns, which resulted in reduced
hours (and thus wages) or mass layoffs. With little money to spare,
workers were forced to live in overcrowded neighborhoods that could
hardly manage the overbearing rush of new arrivals and lacked clean
water or any medical infrastructure.

459 Blackbourn, The Long Nineteenth Century, 135-156; Hans-Ulrich Wehler,
Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte, Band 3: Von der Deutschen Doppelrevolution
bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges 1849-1914 (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1987),
140-149.
460 Wehler, Gesellschaftsgeschichte, Band 3, 140-149.
With opportunities for individual advancement almost non-existent, urban workers were permanently caught in a vicious cycle of hope and desperation. For the factory owners, they were little more than replaceable parts of a machine aiming to produce profit, and until 1867 they had no voice in the political process. Sharing that experience with countless others, however, the "proletariat" began to develop a social consciousness, one formed by the hierarchies and injustices of the factories where they worked and the cities where they lived. After early successes of working-class activism were revoked following the Revolution of 1848 and 1849, the labor movement resurfaced with full force during the early 1860s. Workers’ goals included not only improvements of working conditions (such as reduced hours and better pay) but also their recognition as equal members of the polity.\textsuperscript{461} However, German states (and after 1871: the German Empire) greeted such ideas with hostility and force. State police and military often violently disbanded meetings and demonstrations; workers retained only a tangential role in the political process. Consequently, an increasing number of industrial workers from German cities joined the flow of migrants across the Atlantic, believing that the United States offered better opportunities and greater political freedoms. By the 1870s, industrial workers replaced artisans and skilled craftsmen

\textsuperscript{461} Wehler, Gesellschaftsgeschichte, Band 3, 155.

At the same time, middle-class German intellectuals began investigating possible solutions to what they termed “the social question.” Some like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels realized that the exploitation of workers was part of the fundamental logic of capitalism and envisioned a proletarian society, which worked not for profit but for the common good. To overcome the alienation of the industrial process, the proletariat was to experience individualism through social community.\footnote{Joan Campbell, \textit{Joy in Work, German Work: The National Debate, 1800-1945} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 16-27.} Incidentally, many radical nationalists like the journalist Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl found similar answers to the same questions. Riehl initially dreamt of a classless community as well, though not one of the workers, but of the people, the \textit{Volk}. He, too, abhorred the mere profit-oriented approach of capitalism and emphasized that workers should joyfully toil for the German nation. Ultimately, however, there was no room for the collectivist ideas of Marx and Engels in the nationalist approach. Riehl wanted to dissolve the international proletariat and answer the “social question” by providing a “national” counter-narrative. He aimed to define “German” in opposition to and as a protection against the influences of a globalizing world and was
convinced “that Germans possessed a special, and indeed superior, approach to work, one centered on the idea that work is its own best reward, and is alone capable of giving meaning to human existence.”  

By making workers aware of these rewards and their duty to perform for the fatherland, Riehl and other nationalists later who adopted his arguments hoped to solve the problem of proletarian alienation through a sense of fulfillment and joy in work. In his book *Deutsche Arbeit*, published in 1861, Riehl valorized the supposedly unique work ethic embedded in German society and the qualitative superiority of German labor and industrial production. To him, the idea that there was something unique and traditional about the ways in which Germans performed their daily tasks, whether on the field or in the factories, provided historical continuity in a time of uprooting social transformations.

For themselves, Riehl and other members of the educated middle class – educators, academics and artists – envisioned a mediating position between labor on the one side and industrialists as well as the government on the other. Their role was to be in the education of the people by “teaching” workers and peasants about the values and morals of the German work ethic. Consequently, their narrative proscribed

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traditional middle-class values, such as frugality, cleanliness, timeliness and hard work as the norm to be imitated by the Volk. “Correct table manners, sartorial codes, the emphasis placed on cleanliness and hygiene, the importance attached to timetables, whether in the school, on the railway or at mealtimes,” writes David Blackbourn, “all are instances of the way in which bourgeois values informed everyday life.” Bourgeois writers also stressed stability and restraint, rejected social mobility and polemically criticized the pursuit of “Mammon” (to be found especially in the United States).  

The ideal of Deutsche Arbeit was propagated in advertisements and pamphlets as part of a national discourse, defining what it meant to be “German” both at home and in the world. It was part of a grand narrative that attempted to establish the unique qualities of the German nation – a nation that was not yet an empire like France; a nation with no grand history of global trade and maritime hegemony like Great Britain; a nation, furthermore, that lacked a frontier like the United States. “In the global context of the beginning of the twentieth century,” writes Sebastian Conrad, “the notion of ‘German work’ can be understood as a typical latecomer discourse, a form of protest against the underprivileged role Germany appeared to play in the international arena.”  

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Deutsche Arbeit became a symbolic justification for Germany’s desire to assert itself among the likes of Great Britain, France, and the United States. “It was a foundational term, suggesting that Germany’s position in the world was the product of her own efforts and achievements.”

Although initially expressing admiration for folk culture, nationalists like Wilhelm Riehl increasingly dismissed peasants and workers, finding the greatest value in the work ethic and culture of the Protestant urban middle-class. The more the division of labor became the norm, and the louder the working-class protested against its exploitation, the further the intellectual middle-class drifted into an antagonistic relationship with workers and closed ranks with industrialists and government aristocrats. The theologian Heinrich Lhotsky became well-known for his popular diatribes against workers. The historian Joan Campbell writes that according to Lhotsky the bourgeoisie retained “what the proletarian had lost, namely belief in the German idea of work.” If the German Empire was to rise up among the echelon of empires, Lhotsky insisted, “the masses must once more be taught that work is at the heart of a meaningful existence, because it alone enables people to experience, and therefore comprehend, the world, their fellows, truth, God.” Not surprisingly, such chauvinism and arrogance contributed to the social and political

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468 Conrad, “Globalization Effects,” 63. It is worth noting that such ethnic nationalism/exceptionalism is by no means a phenomenon unique to Germany.
469 Campbell, Joy in Work, 41-46.
470 Campbell, Joy in Work, 119.
fragmentation of the German nation. Between the 1880s and World War I, a permanent divide opened up between the middle-class and the people whom they purported to represent: the working class.

2.2. Deutsche Arbeit, Migrants and the United States

While predominately used to explain the German experience at home, the concept of Deutsche Arbeit was also employed to analyze manifestations of industrialization elsewhere – especially in the United States. For many Germans, the burgeoning power across the Atlantic Ocean was the epitome of modern capitalism and perceptions of American industrial life greatly impacted the ways in which they thought about work (and themselves) well into the twentieth century. “America,” writes Philipp Gassert, “was considered the Mecca of the rationalization movement and was seen as the exact opposite of a traditional agrarian, static, and hierarchically organized society. The terms Americanism and modernism were therefore used almost synonymously.”

For some, the United States thus became a model, a prototype to be emulated in order to overcome the constraints posed by a traditional society like Germany, which was organized precisely around such hierarchical social structures. But for others – including the proponents of Deutsche Arbeit, who profited from those very hierarchies – the United States was a nightmare, one

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which threatened the status quo and the stasis they preferred.\textsuperscript{472} The soulless nature of American capitalism, they argued, was demonstrated by the superficial pursuit of profits and consumer goods, of individualism and self-interest. American capitalism stood as the antithesis of Deutsche Arbeit, which emphasized community and culture, not individualism and profit, even while upholding inequality, social hierarchies and privilege of the few.

Migrants were crucial to German views of the United States. They wrote letters and frequently returned home to talk about their experiences in Amerika. But the ideology of Deutsche Arbeit also shaped the ways in which they interpreted their experiences. Workers, for example, who may have rejected the bourgeois culture at home, often internalized what it meant to be “German” abroad – ideas about their superior skills, about their work ethic and workmanship. Already profiting from their “whiteness”\textsuperscript{473} in the United States, they additionally drew on such qualities propagated as German since their employers – many of them of German heritage themselves – preferred workers with the “correct” heritage. At a time when character was equated with race and nationality, the ideal of Deutsche Arbeit thus became a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts: In the


competitive world of industrial America, German workers gained respect by aspiring to ideals, which ultimately made them stand out. Paul Buhle, an historian of American radicalism, found that even among German socialists in the United States, there was a strong sense of national identity. “Quoting in bold and rebellious style some of the greatest German writers, emigré [sic] Socialists laid claim to the best of their country’s national culture as they tried to build a viable tradition in America.”

Meanwhile, socialist newspapers “dripped with nostalgia for German culture.” Moreover, pride for the unity of the German Empire, finally achieved in 1871, and for its military and economic prowess was rampant among many Germans, even though they had escaped political restrictions and military duties of the German Empire and accused the middle-class of “the most submissive, expiring royalism and veneration of Bismarck.”

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475 Gregory Kupsky, The True Spirit, 163.
476 The quote is from an article entitled “German Culture,” published in the Chicago-based Vorbote on March 13, 1895, which argued that there were fundamentally different manifestations of German culture in Chicago. Unlike bourgeois representatives, who merely engaged in “the most submissive, expiring royalism and veneration of Bismarck” workers rallied around the labor movement “for which the German people’s heroes and singers of freedom have not given their lives their vain.” The article attributes the fragmentation of German culture to the significant differences among the social classes. It is reprinted in: Keil and Jentz, German Workers in Chicago, 381-382. See also: Frederick C.
Bourgeois immigrants to the United States, on the other hand, often came to the United States to explore working-class immigrant lives across the Atlantic. The journalists who published their works in popular magazines like *Die Gartenlaube* were especially interested in learning how migrants fared under the reign of American capitalism and their findings embodied many of the ambiguities present among Germans about the United States. Descriptions varied between romanticized representations of ideal Germans abroad, who diligently cultivated the land and preserved their heritage, and more pessimistic accounts that noted a general absence of German culture among these emigrants and worried about “yankeeification.” Meanwhile, scholars of industrialization like Hugo Münsterberg (1863-1916) and Max Weber (1864-1920) came to the United States in order to study the implications of rationalization and scientific management and find ways to attenuate the alienation that many workers experienced on a daily basis. Often fascinated with the ideas of innovators like Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford, they wanted to reconcile the American way of work with the German approach. Münsterberg, who came to Harvard University in 1892 and stayed until his death in 1916, attempted to combine the best of both worlds in his approach to applied psychology, which incorporated scientific management while remaining

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477 Naranch, “Inventing the *Auslandsdeutsche*,” 26-27.

committed to the goal that “mental dissatisfaction in the work, mental depression and discouragement, may be replaced in our social community by overflowing joy and perfect inner harmony.”

This desire to remain true to the ideals of Deutsche Arbeit while simultaneously embracing the American way was a defining element of the German migrant experience in the United States. As I have discussed in Chapter 1, the turn-of-the-century chroniclers of German American life set out with the explicit objective to emphasize the peculiar qualities of German settlers on the frontier (and of German soldiers on the battlefields). Using the theme of Deutsche Arbeit, German ethnic nationalists attempted to unite Germans in the United States, while also partaking in American public discourse as full-fledged members of the polity: Celebrating the extraordinary qualities of German settlers was in line with German nationalist thinking, compatible with the American logic of capitalism, and it homogenized a diverse group of migrants according to a set of norms that could be proscribed and regulated by the German middle class – by them. By merging German bourgeois values with well-known characteristics of American ideal types – the frontier, or self-made man; the soldier; etc. – the ethnic nationalists who came together in the National German American Alliance wanted to create a valid hyphenated

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identity that would allow them to celebrate the culture they loved while earning the cultural capital to participate in the American public sphere.

But the world they described never mirrored the reality of German American life. Despite their joint interest in Deutsche Arbeit, an “intimate alliance” between workers and the middle-class never developed.\textsuperscript{480} To the dismay of the German middle-class, German working-class immigrants immediately gained a reputation for political radicalism as many of them participated in the conflicts between industrialists and the working class. Most infamously, a group of German anarchists was accused of (and eventually executed for) the bombing on Chicago’s Haymarket Square on May 4, 1886.\textsuperscript{481} The “Haymarket Affair,” as it became known, significantly impacted American public opinion of German immigrants – and it prompted almost immediate responses by worried German American leaders, who had already been concerned about the status of the “German element” in the United States. “Especially now, when a few German socialists and anarchists violate the laws of the country,” wrote the German-language newspaper Der Long Islander in 1886, it was “important to show the nativists, already encouraged to new

\textsuperscript{480} The quote is from Durrschmidt to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1937-1036, as cited before in the introduction.
activity by such acts of a minority, that the German immigrant has always provided his patriotism, nay, often has surpassed the native in love of his adopted country.”

The disconnect between reality and imagination manifested itself in a persistent, underlying mistrust of the lower classes, which, German American leaders argued, stained the image of the entire community. In fact, the literature produced by members of the NGAA or German American Historical Society\textsuperscript{483} abounded with cultural chauvinism, which was frequently directed against the very readers it was trying to motivate and unify: German Americans. For example, the Lutheran pastor Georg von Bosse complained about Americanized descriptions of German culture such “Sour Crout Kitchen,” which apparently spoiled his enjoyment of the food. Von Bosse thus concluded that “German-Americans cared little about the glories of German culture, [and] that socialists among them had abandoned the God of their fathers along with the Reich and Kaiser.”\textsuperscript{484} His remarks epitomize the fundamental and persistent inability

\textsuperscript{482} Quoted in: Appel, “Marion Dexter Learned,” 293, Fn. 19. The article was actually published two months before the Haymarket bombing, a fact that testifies to the general wariness of middle-class German-Americans regarding the possible consequences of German socialist activities in the United States.\textsuperscript{483} See Chapter 1.\textsuperscript{484} Quoted in Appel, “Marion Dexter Learned,” 290. See also Georg von Bosse, \textit{Ein Kampf um Glauben und Volkstum: das Streben Während meines 25 jährigen Amtslebens als deutsch-lutherischer Geistlicher in Amerika} (Stuttgart: Belser, 1920), 200, 220. Sometimes even esteemed writers like the historian A.B. Faust faced the vicious criticism, as when the linguist and co-founder of the Modern Languages Association Julius Goebel criticized Faust for his “very wicked [bitterböses]” use of German, which, Goebel argued, would “lower the reputation of German-Americans in Germany.” Appel, “Marion Dexter Learned,” 289, Fn 9.
of wealthy middle-class observers to relate to the everyday exigencies of lower-class immigrants, of those trying to make a living by marketing “Sour Crout” – or any other product – to an American audience. Selling a traditional product an Ocean away from Germany preserved communal ties to the homeland in a way that was equally effective – if not more so – than the publication of academic literature about the qualities of mythical frontiersmen. Selling “Sour Crout,” in other words, was the reality of Deutsche Arbeit – not a myth imagined by the middle-class.485

Such divisions defined the history of German America and were an important reason for the continuous disunity among German immigrants in the United States before World War I. The “conflicting material interests, which divide German culture into various camps of battling interest groups, make themselves apparent in all areas,” an article in the Chicago Vorbote summed up a raging debate about the future of German America during the 1890s. It continued:

The fragmentation of German culture can only be prevented by drawing those interests into the foreground which would offset the social and economic class conflicts within German culture. But since a stunt like this is impossible in modern society, we will have no other choice but to let matters run

On Goebel, see Retterath, Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke, 406. Goebel's review appeared in Americana Germanica, I (1897): 102. 485 For the importance of food for immigrant identity, see Kristin L. Hoganson, Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), esp. 127-150. Moreover, the example cited at the beginning of this chapter also suggests that educated Germans would scold others for not speaking English under certain circumstances. Controlling language was about control first, and language second.
their course, until the victory of socialism makes possible tomorrow what is impossible today. If German culture was to represent the interests of all Germans, it needed a more accommodating ideology to support it. And that included a more inclusive vision of Deutsche Arbeit. Those who agreed saw their opportunity arise once the carnage of World War I had led to the collapse of the German Empire.

2.3. A New Message: Deutsche Arbeit after World War I

After World War I, the politics of Deutschum entered a new phase that redefined Deutsche Arbeit. The collapse of traditional power structures, of monarchical rule and aristocratic leadership opened up new possibilities for those who believed that different interests in the nation needed to find common ground to solve current problems and rehabilitate Germany in the eyes of the world. But amidst recurring crises, the new Weimar government struggled to gain legitimacy. Critics from the left and right viciously attacked its inability to put people back to work and restore economic wellbeing. In this context, the meaning of work was once more widely discussed. Conservative defenders of social order appropriated the terminology and emphasized “German” character of labor to undermine, for example, the transnational socialist movement. At the same time, nonpartisan organizations like the Verein für das Deutschum im Ausland

486 “German in America,” Vorbote July 18, 1895, reprinted in Keil and Jantz, German Workers in Chicago, 382-4.
(VDA) used the discourse of work to present a vision of national community that transcended all social boundaries – a Volksgemeinschaft, united in work. It was this vision, among others, that provided a common ideological foundation for a divided country and eased the transition into the successor regime of the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich.  

The movement to refocus German nationalism on the wellbeing of the people, the Volk, was led in no small part by a new generation of activists, whose voices had carried less weight prior to the war. Traumatized by the experience of World War I and its aftermath, this new generation was much more devoted to reconciling the social differences, which had thus far prevented a popular appeal for the movement. The VDA, for example, owed its success during the 1920s and 1930s in part to a group of writers and journalists like Hans-Christoph Kaergel (1889-1946), Herrmann Ullmann (1884-1858), and Max Hildebert Böhm (1891-1968). All hailing from modest backgrounds, they challenged the existing structures of the organization, which had always been led by aristocrats and upper-class intellectuals. During the early 1920s, Ullmann, Böhm and others successfully asserted a more pluralistic agenda, whose principal aim was non-political, cultural assistance of all Germans – including those living in areas outside of immediate political interest. The VDA’s

487 Campbell, Joy in Work, 4-6.  
489 Cronenberg, Volksbund, 48. See also: Berthold Petzinna, Erziehung zum deutschen Lebensstil: Ursprung und Entwicklung des jung-konservativen “Ring”-
message refocused on the utopia of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, a classless society without party divisions, in which every member worked for the common good. Crucially, this community transcended national boundaries and was independent of citizenship – even beyond Europe. However, like many of their older compatriots, Ullmann and Böhm found democracy inimical to the development of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and were hostile to some basic principles of capitalism, such as individualism and even private property.\(^{490}\)

Under the influence of these new voices, the VDA reached out with particular zeal for workers at home and abroad. For example, in its 1922 yearbook the VDA published a “Letter to a Worker” [*Brief an einen Arbeiter*], which attempted to reconcile old divisions between conservative elites and the working class, because “it is, to speak in your [the workers’] language, not customary for a worker to sit down at a table with professors

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\(^{490}\) Cronenberg, *The Volksbund*, 52-56; and Tammo Luther, *Volkstumspolitik*, 43-45. This departure from basic capitalist ideals, in particular private property, marks a critical difference between the elite bourgeois nationalism of the late nineteenth century and the more populist version of the Weimar Republic. Nonetheless, despite all their talk of a transnational community, the VDA was deeply committed to the geo-political goals of all German governments, pre- and post-1933: revision of the Versailles treaty, reestablishment of the “old” national boundaries and if possible even a German *Mitteleuropa* that included all German-speaking lands (such as Austria and South Tyrol). See: O’Donnell et al, *The Heimat Abroad*, 9; Cronenberg, *The Volksbund*, 52; Luther, *Volkstumspolitik*, 43-45.
and businessmen.”\textsuperscript{491} Appealing to national solidarity the VDA called on German workers to overcome their own social prejudices and inhibitions in favor of national community, stressing neither civic nor social but ethnic belonging. In light of what the writers perceived to be continuing attacks on German language, culture, and economy, the article argued, it was “simply very necessary that you and your brothers put as much value on your German nature as other people put on theirs and that you, just like others, are not merely conscious comrades of class \textit{Klassengenossen}, but also comrades of people \textit{Volksgenossen}, that is Germans.”\textsuperscript{492}

This vision of a new community of people was in many ways an alternative model to American capitalism. Germans continued to feel ambiguous towards the United States, at once admiring the efficiency of American industry and fretting about labor conditions and alienation in American factories.\textsuperscript{493} Some, like Herrmann Ullmann, also feared that Germany was threatened by “American world capitalism” and argued that “Dollar imperialism” endangered German national sovereignty. The most vicious criticism, however, was leveled against the impending invasion of American culture, which would destroy German \textit{Kultur}.\textsuperscript{494} Believing

\textsuperscript{492} “Brief an einen Arbeiter,” \textit{Jahrbuch VDA} 1922, 15.
\textsuperscript{493} Campbell, \textit{Joy in Work}, 132-3.
strongly in the constitutive role of culture in the process of protecting and preserving *Deutschtum*, these activists were concerned about the excitement among German consumers for American music, dance, film and many other cultural phenomena imported from the United States. Many of them took it upon themselves to explore the situation in the United States first-hand. These trips often helped manifest the idea that the corrupted democracy of the United States and its “hodgepodge” of peoples was no model for Germany’s own future. In the countless books and articles\(^{495}\) produced from these trips, writers claimed a fundamental dichotomy between Germany and the United States: American capitalism was like a machine that bred materialism, artificiality, largesse and greed, while the German counter-model cultivated organic simplicity, idealism, and spirit. If the United States promised civilization, Germany promised *Kultur*.\(^{496}\)

For many, the key difference between both models was the work ethic. Joan Campbell has shown that a demand for quality in production and


\(^{496}\) Retterath, *Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke*, 147-148.
community (as opposed to individualism and quantity) were common elements among otherwise disparate political movements during the Weimar Republic. Influenced by the harrowing experience of mechanized warfare and indiscriminate killing during the war, almost all utopian movements in post-war Germany shared a vision of communal “joy in work” as a solution to the nation’s economic and political woes. The idea was appealing to a generation of young Germans, who embraced the idea that work could level social boundaries and bring about the “reconciliation of intellectual with manual labor” – that is, of bourgeoisie and proletariat.497

The popularity of the idea that a German work ethic could provide a common ground may help explain the immediate appeal of the National Socialist idea of the Volksgemeinschaft, which was conceived around the dogma of national salvation through work. The global economic crisis that had its origin on New York’s Wall Street in 1929 hit Germany hard, but affected especially white and blue collar workers: Entire factories were closed, unemployment was rampant, and poverty raged across the country. Even worse were the psychological consequences of long-term unemployment and exclusion from the production process, which left many workers hopeless for a better future.498 For many, the crisis solidified the idea that democracy led to chaos and that capitalism led to ruin. It opened the doors to the ideological arguments of the political fringe

497 Campbell, Joy in Work, 114.
498 Peukert, Weimar Republic, 253-255.
on both left and right, which proposed increasingly extreme remedies for
the chaos. Most successfully, of course, the National Socialists catered to
the prevailing anti-Capitalist atmosphere and “espoused a ‘German
socialism’ designed to restore joy in work and to reintegrate the workers
into the body of the nation. A class-free Volksgemeinschaft would save the
nation thanks to an altruistic work ethic.”\textsuperscript{499} The model of communal work
promoted by the Nazis was at times diametrically opposed to American
capitalism – for example in its endorsement of the common good rather
than individual success – but also showed some intriguing similarities with
rationalized modes of industrial labor, which hailed efficiency and made
status contingent upon performance.\textsuperscript{500}

For the writers of the \textit{Heimatbriefe}, who reached out to a global
audience in late 1934, \textit{Deutsche Arbeit} “explained” the success of the
“New Germany.” The Nazis, they argued, had leveled social hierarchies,
resurrected the failing German industrial landscape and brought prosperity
to its people. Especially in its initial phase, between 1934 and 1936,
rhetoric describing the special qualities of German labor pervaded the
magazine, which frequently displayed images of bustling cities and towns
with smoking chimneys and praised “German honesty, […] German

\textsuperscript{499} Campbell, \textit{Joy in Work}, 276 and 312.
\textsuperscript{500} Campbell, \textit{Joy in Work}, 312. It should be noted that National Socialist ideology
was consistently incoherent. After the Nazis had swept into power “the Nazi
ideology of work revealed its internal contradictions.” (Campbell, \textit{Joy in Work},
313)
industry [Fleiß], German cleanliness and German self-respect.” One editorial mirrored an interior monologue of a German worker and thus connected individual labor – intellectual or physical – to the collective work of the nation: “I am serving the community, - my work, my ploughing and building and saving, as well as all my recreation, my reading and wandering, all that does not only serve my self, but constitutes work in the chain of generations that stretch from the eternal past into the eternal future – [it] is service to the Volk.” The National Socialists, so the letter’s implicit argument, had erased boundaries instead of dividing society into social categories. It had reconciled intellectual with manual labor – everyone now was a worker and everyone contributed equally to the success of the nation, “all of us equally as workers, as workers of the monumental construction, planned and handed to us for execution by providence: Germany.”

This was a twentieth century version of Deutsche Arbeit, one that included peasants, workers, and emigrants. Instead of lambasting emigrants, the VDA showed a great deal of understanding for those who had left the country before and after World War I. Migrants had left, one editorial argued, at a time when

not the products of our workmanship [”Wertarbeit”] left but the German workers [”Arbeitsmenschen”] themselves and

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501 Sächsische Heimatbriefe, October 1934, 2 and almost verbatim in the February 1935 issue, page 2. See also: Spring 1938 issue, pages 2-3.
503 Heimatbriefe, December 1935, 1.
that is why you have the deepest understanding for the *entire* German fate. That is why you are called upon to do your part for the construction of the *new* Germany, which no longer allows the unconscionable waste of its people’s power [Volkskraft] and includes all of you.\footnote{Heimatbriefe, Summer 1936, 1. Emphasis in original.}

This inclusive vision was expressed in a very appealing way: Editorials in the *Heimatbriefe* were written in the form of letters forging a personal connection with readers by using the informal *Du* as opposed to the formal *Sie* and by explicitly soliciting responses featured prominently in subsequent issues. The *Heimatbriefe* were, as one editorial argued, more than just a magazine but “a private letter between comrades, worthy of your personal response.”\footnote{Heimatbriefe, April 1935, 3.} Rather than pressing an openly partisan agenda, the VDA purported to be apolitical, emphasizing emotional representations of the homeland and imagery of industry and improvement.\footnote{Parts of this paragraph also appear in my essay "Saxon? German? American?: Negotiating Germanness and Belonging in the United States, 1935–1939." *German Studies Review* 39.1 (2016): 81-98.}

The message of reconciliation and inclusion appealed to many, particularly in the United States. In 1934, many German Americans were still traumatized by the impact of the great depression. For example, Richard Stelzmann, one of the thousands of German migrants who wrote back to the VDA, only sarcastically referred to the United States as “the
land where milk and honey flow". While he observed that industry had recovered from the Great Depression by and large and that the number of "sitdown-strikes" had decreased, he noted a "real American tragedy. There are still Millions unemployed." Having emigrated to the United States in 1906, he had seen more than two decades of almost uninterrupted economic growth. Now, however, the impact of a corrupt political culture became clear: "But that’s how it goes in a country ruled by unscrupulous politicians." Similarly, Helene Bemmann of Pikesville, Maryland described a country "rich in products but poor in heart and soul". She and her husband Fritz had immigrated to the United States in 1923, but were still yearning for "our beloved Heimat."

Indeed, many immigrants, who had hoped for a better future in the United States, were disillusioned by the economic impact of the Great Depression on the land of "milk and honey" – for them the American Dream had collapsed. "The magic that surrounded America in the years 1919-1929 is gone," wrote Felix Altenkirch, who worked in a mill in Union, South Carolina. "Along with the economic crisis, many – erroneous – ideas have disappeared from the minds of the people in this land. […] Nowadays is the best time to make many Germans at least conscious of

507 Stelzmann wrote verbatim that he lived in “dem Lande, wo Milch u. Honig fliesst. (Wer's glaubt wird seelig, wer's nicht glaubt, kommt auch dahin).”
508 Richard Stelzmann to VDA, HSTA 12460, 45-1937-2229.
509 Helene Bemmann to VDA, HSTA 12460, 45-1937-698. The VDA provided the Bemann’s with prices for retirement homes in Radebeul near Dresden (Attachment to 45-1937-698).
510 Felix Altenkirch to VDA, HSTA 12460, 45-1935-261.
their peoplehood [Volkstum]."\textsuperscript{511} This was especially true for those, whose lives had been impacted by the Great Depression. Among them was Albert Helmer of New York City, who wrote of his constant search for work. Although he had just recently landed a job, he could not feel at home in the United States. "Even though I am a U.S. citizen I cling to the dear, old Heimat with every fiber of my true German heart, and especially here in New York, where one only hears and reads in the newspapers bad things about the New Germany."\textsuperscript{512}

The Heimatbriefe sent a somewhat subdued political message throughout the first years – as did the early foreign policy of the Third Reich, which pursued a public campaign for peaceful reunification throughout the 1930s and attempted to convince in particular the United States that Germany’s demands were justified and legitimate. \textsuperscript{513} Nonetheless, the writers always showed great admiration for Nazi ideology and admiration for its leader Adolf Hitler, who was referred to and quoted with increasing frequency as the decade progressed. With regard

\begin{footnotes}
\item Altenkirch to VDA, HSTA 12460, 45-1935-261. There are several ways to translate the terminology surrounding the Volk, the German people. For consistency, I have translated Volk as "people" throughout this essay even though sometimes a different translation may have been more appropriate. Volkstum, for example, refers to the national character and traditions of the German people and could also be translated as "folklore", "nationhood", or simply "nationality."
\item Albert Helmer to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-48. See also: Mrs. Otto Krause to VDA, HSTA 12460, 45-1937-3016.
\item Klaus Hildebrand, Deutsche Außenpolitik: Kalkül oder Dogma? (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1973), 30-42; and Jacobsen, Nationalsozialistische Außenpolitik, 67-68. Though somewhat outdated, Jacobsen’s overview of Nazi activities in the United States on pages 528-549 continues to be a good introduction into the topic.
\end{footnotes}
to attracting the working-class, for example, the February 1936 *Heimatbriefe*, enthusiastically called the “world issue,” argued that the number of emigrants under Hitler had decreased to 9600 and proclaimed: “The Germany of Adolf Hitler is capable of captivating especially those [farmers and workers], many of which did ‘not know a fatherland named Germany’ in the past.” After the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle had subsumed the VDA in 1937, the message did become more aggressive, shifting from a focus on the Volks as the foundation of Nazi ideology to a focus on Hitler as the supreme leader. For example, the spring issue of 1938 was devoted to showcase the improvements made under the new leadership and stressed how “not only the people of the Third Reich but also their deeds are concentrated on one goal, to serve the will of the Führer.”

In order to contextualize the responses of those who actually explained themselves and their situations to the VDA in the 1930s, a closer look at the social relations in the United States in the interwar era is necessary.

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514 The German original uses the term “fesseln,” which stands for both “to captivate” and “to tie up,” for the physical and metaphysical manifestations of keeping the masses tied to Germany.

515 *Heimatbriefe*, February 1936, 1.

516 For more on the process of *Gleichschaltung*, the politically enforced conformity of the Third Reich and its impact on the VDA, see Luther, *Volkstumspolitik*, 145-150; Jacobsen, *Hans Steinacher*, XXV-XXIX; and Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, passim.

517 *Heimatbriefe*, Frühjahr 1938, 2. Emphasis in original.
3. Class and German America During the Interwar Era

3.1. The “Social Question” in the United States

As much as German migrants retained a connection to the homeland and continued to stay invested in its political transformations, they still lived in the United States and dealt with challenges to the social order very similar to those experienced in Germany. Social coexistence within the capitalist economy was a primary concern in public debates across the United States immediately after World War I. During the war, there had been protests by workers, socialists, women, and many other groups demanding equal political rights, but it was the 1917 Revolution in Russia, which alerted many Americans. “Lenin’s Bolsheviks were radical opponents of capitalism, offering the downtrodden communism […] as a far more equitable and just social system than the private-property system prevailing in the United States and other capitalist citadels.”

Although American radicals never reached the numbers and influence necessary to pose an actual threat to the status quo, they were strong enough to instill a sense of urgency among American elites – both in corporate headquarters and the White House. Industrialists and politicians shared a growing sense that the government needed to step in and ensure the long-term stability of American, even global capitalism. President Woodrow Wilson, for instance, was greatly worried about the impact of Communism and his internationalist vision for a more equitable global

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518 Gerstle, American Crucible, 97-98.
order after World War I – manifested in his support for the League of Nations and national self-determination – aimed to undermine its appeal.\textsuperscript{519}

In the United States, countless domestic initiatives targeted Communism and other transnational anti-capitalist movements. During and after the war, corporations and patriotic associations launched Americanization campaigns, while the government-sponsored Committee on Public Information utilized a variety of visual tools – films, advertising, posters, and even cartoons – for propaganda against political dissent.\textsuperscript{520} Immigrants bore the brunt of these attacks. Working predominantly in industrial jobs, in mines and factories, they were most visible to a national audience during strikes and “in the minds of many Americans the fear of communism commingled with the fear of the new immigrant.”\textsuperscript{521} The strong racial component contained in this fear (see Chapter 5) had beneficial consequences for many German Americans, who had suffered from nativist attacks and some government persecution during the war. Indeed, by the 1920s the focus had shifted away from the “German element” towards those hailing from Southern and Eastern Europe – areas of the world many Americans believed to be the cradles of radical thought. However, many of the new legislative innovations aimed to protect social

\textsuperscript{519} Gerstle, American Crucible, 98.
\textsuperscript{521} Gerstle, American Crucible, 99.
order in the United States had consequences for German Americans as well: Prohibition, which robbed many workers of their favorite pastime and destroyed public spaces for the congregation of the working-class like bars and breweries (not to speak of the economic livelihood of many immigrants); the Espionage and Sedition Acts that legalized the immediate deportation of troublemakers and undermined free speech; coercive Americanization campaigns, which made English the required language in schools; and, of course, a series of immigration laws that culminated in the infamous 1924 Immigration Act, which introduced a quota system and closed the door on immigration. German American activists correctly assumed that the legislation would adversely affect immigration from Germany and that the lack of new “blood” from the homeland would undermine their efforts to maintain and preserve a coherent and numerically strong ethnic community.\footnote{Capozzola, \textit{Uncle Sam Wants You}, passim; Wall, \textit{Inventing the ‘American Way},’ 16-33.}

Despite these measures, however, the 1920s were also a period of national reconciliation. Many of the laws and prohibitions, which targeted ethnic particularism and political dissent, such as the Espionage and Sedition Acts and Prohibition, proved ephemeral. And immigration reform, though staying in place until the 1960s, took European immigrants out of the line of nativist fire and allowed them to partake in the Americanism campaigns of the interwar era with a more casual sense of belonging to
and being a part of “America.” “By limiting the influx of foreigners to America’s ethnic communities, the 1924 act accelerated the process of acculturation.” Moreover, during the 1920s three consecutive Republican presidencies replaced the progressive ideology that had dominated the prewar years with a pro-business atmosphere that withdrew the influence of the government and celebrated the paternalistic relationship between boss and worker – the image “of the responsible capitalist protecting his employees’ welfare.” In a process not unlike the parallel discourse on Deutsche Arbeit in Germany, the “mystique of Americanism,” the idea that in the United States owners and workers were all devoted to a common cause, provided the ideological foundation of this political rapprochement between capital and labor as well as between bourgeoisie and proletariat. “Welfare capitalism” had, as Lizabeth Cohen acknowledges, some real impact on the ways in which workers felt about the companies they worked for: “They came to expect benefits along with the job. And they judged a good company, in contrast to a bad one, by how close it came to meeting welfare capitalist standards, offering the steady, well-paying, decent work that workers could reward with their loyalty.” Many workers, Cohen argues, believed more strongly in capitalism – American capitalism – and were more willing to admit that it could serve society well. By the 1930s, proponents of American socialism

524 Cohen, Making a New Deal, 180-182. Quote on 182.
525 Cohen, Making a New Deal, 208.
– among them many of German heritage – had begun to come to terms with cultural Americanism and consumer capitalism. "No longer would a major thrust in American socialism be ‘alienated’ from the American world (as it appeared to many to be in the 1920s). […] American socialism had joined Americanism with a vengeance."526

But Americanism itself had changed, too. Many ideas, which Americans would have rejected as “socialist” only a few decades before, had become reality. 527 Frank Tannenbaum, a socialist who had immigrated to the United States from Austria in 1905, found that American socialism and American capitalism had greatly influenced each other and that the successes of the former were quite remarkable.

We have socialized things as water, public highways, education, lighted streets, bridges, medical service for the sick through public hospitals, dental services for children in public schools, parks, museums, books through libraries, and information services of various kinds…To this must be added sickness insurance, unemployment insurance, care for the old though old age pensions and for the young through maternity pensions, factory and mine inspections, and legal enforcement of protection against dangerous machinery.528

527 Susman, Culture as History, 79.
528 Quoted in Susman, Culture as History, 77. See also: Rodgers, Atlantic Crossings, 181-208.
At the same time, the working-class never lost sight of persistent inequalities within the American system: Throughout the 1920s roughly 40 percent of workers remained stuck in poverty. Many could not afford the consumer goods of the “Roaring Twenties” – the washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and cars – and they remained crowded in urban neighborhoods, where unemployment, seasonal instabilities and hopelessness loomed large. Consequently, the bonds among workers from different ethnicities grew in strength along with awareness that only a multiethnic (even multiracial) front could adequately protect the working class. This significant change in political orientation among workers, away from the disparate and often antagonistic ethnic communities of the prewar era, eventually led to successful collective action during the 1930s. Whereas ethnic particularisms and urban fragmentation had prohibited unified action before, strong post-war nativism, the immigration reforms of 1921 and 1924 as well as the global financial crisis after 1929 set in motion a process that resulted in the retreat from European nationalism among immigrant workers: “The struggle for nationhood had long provided the focus for ethnic activity. Now, those who wanted to claim their new European citizenship could return home. When most ethnics

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realized that they preferred to remain here, new questions about the meaning of nationality arose.”

However, the financial crisis of 1929 posed a fundamental challenge to the ways in which Americans thought about their nation. Many Americans had been convinced that despite crises and individual failures the nation’s capitalist progress towards abundance was unstoppable. Especially for the middle-class, the collapse was not only a financial but also an ideological disaster. The Great Depression was the first crisis that permanently disrupted the upward social movement of skilled artisans, small businessmen, white-collar employees and many others, who had been thoroughly optimistic about the potential of the American way and the power of capitalism. The financial collapse of 1929 demolished that belief. “It will be many a long day before Americans of the middle class will listen with anything approaching the reverence they felt in 1928 whenever a magnate of business speaks,” wrote the historian Gerald Johnson. “The whole pantheon of their idols has been demolished. The Big Business Man, like Samson, has pulled down the pillars of the temple…and he is pretty well buried under the ruins.”

3.2. Social divisions in German America

How exactly German Americans navigated the turbulent decade and a half between the end of World War I and the ascent of Nazism is still

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largely unknown. The very few studies of that subject dealt largely with the educated middle-class. 534 The experiences of wartime persecution, nativism and anti-immigrant rhetoric produced an indignant response from German American leaders, who believed they could reunite the entire migrant community around the common cause of post-war rehabilitation and political equality. During the 1920 presidential campaign they strongly supported the Republican presidential candidate Warren G. Harding and urged all German Americans to vote based not on their social background but on their national heritage. They persistently denounced the outgoing Democratic President Woodrow Wilson as a “traitor,” because he had led the United States into war and had been responsible, at least in part, for the Versailles Treaty, which had brought so much misery to Germany. 535 This argument carried some weight in the early 1920s, when memories of anti-German campaigns were still fresh. Working-class papers like the Philadelphia Tageblatt followed suit and accused the Democratic Candidate James M. Cox of leading the fight against the German language and culture in the United States. Reprinting an article from the influential Cincinnati Freie Presse, the Tageblatt echoed a popular argument among German Americans after the war that “no differences of class and race can be permitted in this country.” 536

534 For an overview of the exceptions, see Footnote 14 of the Introduction.  
536 Philadelphia Tageblatt, October 14, 1920, 7. Race, “Rasse,” in this instance refers to nationality, not skin color. See also Chapter 4.
Despite such proclamations of equality, even the *Tageblatt* was sufficiently enraged by the collective shame brought upon the German fatherland at Versailles to engage in continuous ethnic confrontation and the occasional race baiting.\textsuperscript{537} After all, the editors believed, the qualities of the German worker had thus far driven German industry and had contributed to the overall grandeur of the Second Reich prior to the war. One exemplary article, entitled *Deutsche Arbeit*, discussed the differences between Polish and German labor through a racial lens, which incorporated many of the elements prevalent in the rhetoric of German racial and cultural superiority. The article compared German cultural achievements to Polish *Unkultur*, “un-culture,” using the pre-war imagery of the poet Max Hecht:

There is no bigger difference than the image of the [River] Vistula on German and Polish soil! Here, it debouches wild and untamed across the wide plains of Poland, while [in Germany] one can see the obvious imprint of high cultivation. The difference between the Polish and the German Vistula is the same as between a raw son of nature and highly educated human being.

After the Versailles Treaty had turned over some of these former German territories to Poland, the article argued paraphrasing Hecht, hundreds of years of German diligence and labor were destroyed in a process tantamount to rape.\textsuperscript{538}

\textsuperscript{537} See Chapter 4.
But this was not to say that a German working-class paper like the *Tageblatt*, one devoted to ideals of socialism and committed to its cause in the United States, would simply embrace the ideology promoted by their bourgeois compatriots. In fact, much of the ostensible “pro-German” rhetoric employed by the writers was directed against American nativist vigilantism and anti-radical activism immediately after the war. The *Tageblatt* editors simply rejected the argument that every dissenter or isolationist was “pro-German.” With the much-despised President Woodrow Wilson out of office, the *Tageblatt* quickly turned back to its old foes and resorted to social tirades against the “capitalist class” as well as the “Ku-Klux-Organization of the steel capital.” Much criticism was also leveled against the “German-bourgeois elements of America,” whom editors criticized for their support of industrialists in the United States as well as the reactionary and undemocratic elements in the homeland.

The latter point is important: Despite their commitment to ideals they shared with other ethnic activists, German American socialists – at least those that wrote for the *Tageblatt* – never abandoned their investment in German politics. “When,” one poignant editorial asked, “will the socialist proletarians and the free-thinking German citizens in our country [i.e the United States] finally remember their moral duty and testify in front of the

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entire world for the *German Republic* [...]?” Americans of German heritage, the editors argued, had a *moral duty* to support the success of the Weimar experiment and the middle-class failed to fulfill that duty. The persisting, even strengthening differences among German Americans were in great part rooted in disagreements over Germany’s future.

The *Tageblatt* writers had a point. Despite an ostensible commitment to national unity, many German American organizations old and new, like the established Pennsylvania German Society (founded in 1891) or the Steuben Society (founded in 1919), continued to make social background a prerequisite for leadership and rarely permitted working class members to rise up the ranks (or even denied them membership). In Philadelphia, the *Deutscher Klub und Technischer Verein* (“German Club and Technical Association,” short: DKTV) required new members to be recommended and vouched for by at least two other members and only permitted educated professionals. The support among leading bourgeois German Americans for the democratic institutions back home was not as unequivocal. The rise of National Socialism during the late 1920s and early 1930s further testified to that tendency, as many middle-class...

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541 „Deutschamerikaner und – die deutsche Republik“, *Tageblatt* Oct 7, 1921, 4. Emphasis in original.
542 Retterath, *Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke*, 239.
543 On the Steuben Society, see Kupsky, “*The True Spirit*,” 94-126.
544 Charter of the DKTV, Deutscher Klub und Technischer Verein records, Joseph P. Horner Memorial Library, German Society of Pennsylvania, Box 3.
German Americans failed to distance themselves effectively and were at best ambivalent about the Nazis.\textsuperscript{545}

Political conflicts at home thus greatly affected the ways in which German Americans interacted with each other in the interwar period. Of course, publications like the \textit{Tageblatt} or the New York-based \textit{Neue Volkszeitung} strongly opposed the rise of fascism in Germany from the start. The Nazis were the main enemy and fascist ideology directly antithetical to everything they stood for.\textsuperscript{546} The further the situation in Germany deteriorated in their eyes, the more many of them believed in a better future in the United States. Throughout the 1920s papers like the \textit{Tageblatt} retained “a socialist commitment to an international working class,” which was based upon the joint “experience with fellow unionists of Polish, Italian, and Russian Jewish background.”\textsuperscript{547} However, they also remained invested in the fates of those who were still in Germany – family, friends, and comrades. Fashioning themselves as the “true bearers of German culture,” socialists (and many others who disagreed with the politics of the Third Reich) vowed to defend the image of their fatherland in the United States.\textsuperscript{548}

Interestingly, many of the respondents to the VDA used the same rhetoric as those on the political Left, namely the notion that it was their

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\textsuperscript{545} A convincing example of such ambiguity is provided in Kupsky, “The True Spirit,” 127-160.
\textsuperscript{546} For an account of the \textit{Volkszeitung} in the interwar years, see Kupsky, “The True Spirit,” 164-170.
\textsuperscript{547} Kazal, “The Interwar Origins of the White Ethnic,” 103.
\textsuperscript{548} Kupsky, “The True Spirit,” 169.
\end{flushright}
particular political point of view that represented the “real” Germany, that they were “the true bearers of German culture.” This similarity is remarkable and important. It testifies to the parallel constructions of Germanness, which were mutually exclusive, yet often utilized the same nationalist tropes. *Deutsche Arbeit* was one of them. Workers, which made up the political base of both the Left and the Right, believed that their efficiency and diligence made them exceptional among the workers of the United States. Those who considered themselves middle-class, such as skilled artisans and educated white-collar workers, believed that those same qualities were the foundations of their economic wellbeing and protected them from potential decline. They may have embraced their American citizenship and seen their future here, but many of them retained the belief that their German heritage was a fundamental part of their Americanness. When the economic crisis hit in 1929 and especially in the years after, however, this narrative, which had been a consistent companion in the years and decades before, faced a major challenge.

4. German Americans Respond to the VDA

4.1. Integrative Germanness

Reconciling the expectations contained in the rhetoric of Germanness with the reality of the Depression-era United States posed one of the biggest challenges to the respondents when writing to the VDA. Many migrants had gone or were still going through some hard economic times and reported of lost jobs and forced relocations. Others were employed,
but could no longer find occupations in the trades they loved and knew.549

"My husband simply can't find any work," wrote Käte Küchler, who had recently moved from Detroit to New York, “for five years I have not even known what that is, a permanent job for the husband!"550 After explaining their situation in great detail, Küchler added a post scriptum:

Don't think that my husband is incapable or not resolute enough for this country. I want to tell you that he has already swept the streets here, worked as a poster painter, as an ordinary painter, also as an art painter, worked in an Italian restaurant. Likewise for a time as a cabinet worker and finally he painted silk scarfs.551

By pointing to her husband’s willingness to take on various positions, Küchler – whether deliberately or not – stressed the family’s resilience and self-reliance as well as their determination to succeed. Living only blocks away from Fifth Avenue on New York’s East Side, Küchler was confronted daily with the upper crust of society, the “atmosphere, elegance, [and] wonderful cars.”552 Her letter did not carry any signs of envy, but she struggled to justify that the decision to emigrate to a railroad flat in Manhattan was the right one. However, she was not complaining: She and her husband were taking care of themselves. And this was true for many of the writers, who explained their personal stories through a transnational lens that stressed their origins, though rarely as directly as Johanna Kuhn from Paris, Illinois. “So far,” she wrote,

549 A similar story is told by: Paul Schulze to VDA, HSTA 12460, 45-1938-722;
551 Küchler to VDA, 5. The term cabinet worker was used in the German original.
552 Küchler to VDA, 2.
we have not, maybe because of our German skill [Geschicklichkeit], encountered any unemployment or hardship, those two sad comrades, which expelled us from the motherland. But we have not received any presents either, we have had to work for everything diligently and relentlessly.\textsuperscript{553}

For Kuhn, her Germanness defined her status in the United States. “There are so many opportunities here and diligent, ambitious people are very necessary here and well received everywhere and especially the Germans.” The reputation of German migrants and their work ethic, Kuhn wrote, made it easier for to integrate into and become an accepted member of American society.\textsuperscript{554} Just as generations before her, Kuhn relied on old narratives of diligence and character to ease the transition into America’s public sphere and create spaces of familiarity for herself and her family.

Likewise, many migrants found that being German was not an obstacle in that process. Mrs. Kuhn was surprised about the frequent complaints that Germans were not valued in the United States. “Believe me,” she wrote, “you are mistaken. […] I, we, have always found that everyone has respect for the German Man [Mensch] and can understand the political uprising in Germany as well […].”\textsuperscript{555} Written in 1937, her letter was thoroughly apolitical and she voiced her hope for international

\textsuperscript{553} Johanna Kuhn to VDA, HSTA 12460, 46-1937-916, 1.
\textsuperscript{554} Kuhn to VDA, 1-2. Kuhn’s son Wolfgang went on to become “a pioneer in the development of computer-assisted instruction in music” and taught at Stanford for over 25 years. See: http://news.stanford.edu/pr/03/kuhn319.html (retrieved: January 16, 2016).
\textsuperscript{555} Kuhn to VDA, 1.
reconciliation and peace between all people. It carried no sign of anti-Semitism or belligerence towards Germany’s neighbors. But even those that were aligned with the aggressive, ugly side of Nazism frequently found that being German opened doors, rather than closing them. One such letter was received from Harald Arias, an artist who traveled throughout the United States and made no secret out of his anti-Semitism. Arias reported that Hitler’s policies had won him admiration in some American circles: “I have already met countless 100%-Americans who tell me bluntly: *What we need overhere [sic] is not one Hitler, but 10 Hitlers!*”  

Similarly, John Rehnig of New York, who had immigrated around 1905 and naturalized in 1921, used his German heritage to assert his Americanness and continued to draw strength from what he believed to be the achievements of the Nazis. “As an American citizen with a real German heart, I greatly respect your ‘Führer’,” he wrote in German, “over here in America we need six of the kind of your Dear Adolf Hitler.”

Many Germans complained about the anti-German views of newspapers or worried about a Jewish world conspiracy. But it is worth noting that, like Mrs. Kuhn, not all of those who experienced their Germanness as an integrative element during the 1930s were outspoken supporters of Hitler’s racist and anti-Semitic policies. And among those that were, not everyone felt excluded in the United States.

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556 Harald Arias to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-245. English original italicized.
557 John Rehnig to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1938-94.
4.2. Experiencing the *Volksgemeinschaft* Abroad

The fact that many writers still felt a strong connection to their ancestral homeland brings up the question of whether or not the idea of a transnational *Volksgemeinschaft*, manifested in work, had any impact among German Americans after 1933. Some responded directly to the theme invoked by the VDA. Martha Osterwalder of New York, for example, pointed to the importance of work not simply for one’s survival but to create meaning and community across social boundaries: “We are all dependent on each other, from the smallest scavenger to the great Führer. The worth of a human is his [sic] performance and his character. Only work and true camaraderie can bring an ideal life for the general public [die Allgemeinheit].”\(^{558}\) Osterwalder, who worked as a maid at the Swiss Embassy, was one of many writers, who found comfort in the *Volksgemeinschaft*, in the prospect of it anyway, which elevated the meaning of work beyond mere financial gain. Already, she believed the common suffering that the German people experienced across the globe “can only bring us true solidarity and camaraderie, in Germany, as abroad, without interference of class pride [Klassenstolz].”\(^{559}\)

But for the majority of those who wrote to the VDA, being German still meant local, not transnational community: “We are sticking together,” summarized the wife of Otto Krause her experience as a member of the

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558 Martha Osterwalder to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-347, 1.
559 Osterwalder to VDA, 2.
German community in Wethersfield, Connecticut. Many writers reported of ample opportunities to preserve bonds to the homeland in the United States. “Of all the Auslandsdeutschen [in the world],” wrote A. Stock, “we probably have it best. Here in New York, there are over 100 German associations, there are German hours on the radio and we have here several German streets with German stores.”560 “We really shouldn’t be homesick here in New York,” George Durschmidt concurred, “after all, there are so many German churches, clubs, amusement facilities etc. And yet,” he continued, “especially among the urbanites no intimate alliance will develop, something that is so much easier to do on the countryside.”561 Indeed, there was a persistent sense of disunity that pervaded many of the letters – and especially those from the cities562 –, which mirrored the sentiments published in the German American press and in the literature about German America.

Why was it so hard to unite German Americans beyond the local village or neighborhood? The reasons that was cited most frequently by the writers were political disagreements and social differences. For example, Max Lippold of Hartford, Connecticut railed against the “troublemakers and club enthusiasts [Vereinsmeier], who cannot let go of socialism and communism.” As a supporter of the new Nazi government,

560 A. Stock to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-20
561 Georg Durrschmidt to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1937-1036.
he especially chided one particular speaker at the Hartford Sängerbund, “who used to be a Minister of Justice in Prussia and stole the pennies out of the little man’s pocket.” The fact that this man had spoken against the Third Reich did not come as a surprise to Lippold, who believed that the Sängerbund and similar organizations were responsible for the disunity among German Americans. Lippold’s letter points to a larger trend that was noticeable among socialists as well: an increasing equation of political and national identity. Everyone outside of one’s own political conviction could not represent the “real” Germany.

For the supporters of the new Nazi government, being “German” in the 1930s meant supporting the Nazi cause. Many immigrants, like Christoph Klinger from Providence, Rhode Island, who “have not found a new Heimat across the ocean” celebrated the ascent of National Socialism as the incarnation of the Volksgemeinschaft, while condemning its critics and those who neglected to defend Nazism. Klinger offered a familiar argument when he pointed out that anti-German propaganda in the United States was only successful because “the number of the few real Germans is oh so small.” Throughout the 1930s, many recent immigrants viewed expressions of German identity in the United States in increasingly exclusive terms: Arthur Rentsch from Jackson Heights, New York, bought into the Nazi logic that saw the National Socialists as the only true

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563 Max Lippold to VDA, HSTA 12460, 45-1936-1292.
564 Christoph Klinger to VDA, HSTA 12460, 45-1936-198. Klinger was among the few who remigrated to Germany in 1940.
manifestation of Germanness at home. He thus rejected all cultural events that did not explicitly acknowledge Hitler as Germany’s leader. “Unfortunately,” he wrote, “only few Germans abroad have followed the call of the Führer. How many of them deny directly or indirectly their membership in the German Volksgemeinschaft. […] Singing and gymnastics festivals are held in the belief that they performed German Kulturarbeit but they still deny the great Führer of all Germans.”

But very few were unequivocally determined to let the Nazis stand in for the entire Germany, even among the sympathetic group of writers, who responded to the VDA. Many immigrants could not forget the boundaries of class that had divided the homeland and had prompted them to leave for the United States. Emigrants had often left for good reasons, which featured prominently in respective assessments of life in the United States. Migration had not been mere adventurism, but a dismayed escape from a nation whose elites had repeatedly betrayed the people. In 1935, many migrants remembered leaving Germany unwillingly, in order to escape poverty, insecurity, and a lack of opportunity. Many blamed their departure on social divisions and class difference. Karl Ficker from Miami, Florida wondered, if there still was

that damned German class difference, the affluent, parasitic boasting of the shirt-and-tie people and the ugly disdain that your, our brothers have for the poor class of human existence, is there still the cheating and dumbing down of the lacking mass of Germans […] Is there respect for

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565 Arthur Rentsch to VDA, HSTA 12460, 42-1938-1349.
everyone, or is the opportunity for a real life […] just given to the class of owners and capitalists. [sic] 566

Many German Americans found ways to answer that question for themselves. They stayed informed about developments in Germany. Communication with the homeland was faster and cheaper and many emigrants used the opportunity of expedited and more affordable travel to visit relatives as often as possible.567 During a visit to Germany in 1933, eight years after his migration to the United States, J.G. Mühlhausen from New York recalled meeting several old acquaintances now rising in the Nazi hierarchy: “many of them were and still are everything but honest Germans.” Having recently met some members of the German Foreign Service, he complained, “the caste spirit [Kastengeist] and class arrogance [Standesdünkel] in these circles goes beyond anything I saw in the Second Reich.”568 Consequently, Mühlhausen expressed doubts about the future of the Third Reich.

While these critics rejected the classism of the Reich, they could only muster an ambiguous embrace of the opportunities and securities for migrants in the United States. An anonymous writer reported having lived in the United States for 30 years and though the writer still “remembers

566 Karl Ficker to VDA, HSTA 12460, 45-1935-79.
567 Admittedly, the evidence for this is anecdotal. For example, in their letters many writers mention recent trips to Germany (Examples include: Rudolf Blumentritt, HSTA 12460, 45-1934-25 and M. Haenel, HSTA 12460, 41-1937-1088). Moreover, data now publicly accessible via commercial providers like ancestry.com suggest that even less affluent families were able to visit on a regular basis.
568 J.G. Mühlhausen to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1937-1875.
the old Heimat with melancholy”, “my new Heimat has become dear and valued to me. I received my citizenship papers years ago. And during the war time nobody hurt me because of my German descent.”

Similarly, Helene Sachse of New York City remembered having to emigrate from Germany in hard times and described a place where “those that cannot keep pace with the course of time will be trampled mercilessly. But still,” she continued, “it would be ungrateful, if we were not to be thankful to the country that had to become our new Heimat for giving us work and income in hard times. Our emotional and spiritual life, however, had to withdraw itself; deeply inside the heart it is encapsulated.”

This pragmatic assessment of their situation connected many writers to the United States. Regarding their livelihood, many German Americans preferred the United States over Germany. “Everything is much cheaper here and workers like me don’t have to pay taxes,” explained A. Stock from New York City, who worked for a Jewish family. “We like it very much here in America, but still we are saving our money for the next trip to the Heimat.”

Fritz Strecker of Staten Island noted a recent severe sickness and added that “my family received very selfless assistance from American official and private sides, financially and otherwise, during my stay at the hospital [though] I do not want to give the impression that we were under duress, except for the

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569 Unknown to VDA, HSTA 12460, 45-1938-455.
570 Helene Sachse to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-408.
571 A. Stock to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-20.
And Käte Küchler praised the American health care and education systems, food and electricity prices, the radio, and the availability of consumer items, such as electric washing and sewing machines. Even though her husband, the painter, had trouble finding steady employment, a union salary ensured that all bills were paid. “I don’t know how a worker scrapes by a living in a Berlin tenement,” Küchler ruminated, “maybe he envies me.”

5. Conclusion

For many German Americans, the idea of a German Volksgemeinschaft was appealing after 1933. But in a nation with diverse, multi-ethnic populations, being German could never be more important than being American – at least not in public life. Those that disagreed could return to Germany, though only very few did. Among those that remained, many attempted to reconcile the transnational Volksgemeinschaft with the American Way of Life, which meant to reconcile a concept of belonging based on community with a concept of belonging based on individuality. The bridge between both was an ethnic identity that marked its members not only as white but also productive contributors to society – as hard-working, diligent, clean and effective.

572 Strecke to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1937-970.
573 Küchler to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-106.
574 One source puts the number at 6850, between 1933 and 1939. See Rippley, German-Americans, 208.
In this chapter I have explored one of the reasons why this ethnic identity never developed comprehensive unity during the interwar era, a unity as imagined by Alpendorn and many others after World War I: Persisting social boundaries among German Americans and a focus on the exigencies of everyday life among lower-class immigrants, who made up the majority of those considered “German American.” As conflicts between the various social and political fractions in Germany became more vicious and violent throughout the 1920s, competing ideas about what it meant to be “German” affected the ways in which migrants thought about themselves in the United States – but they never forgot why they left the country of their ancestors to seek a better future elsewhere.

The traces of those divisions can still be found in American life today. For much of the second half of the twentieth century, belonging to either the political left or the political right has been determined in part by individual social and cultural origins. In a radio interview with NPR, the writer Michael Lind once described the rift between left and right as follows: “The right’s fundamental narrative has been that liberals or progressives are snobbish, upper-class unpatriotic traitors. The progressive narrative is that no person could possibly disagree with liberal positions […]. There is […] constant fear on the part of progressive intellectuals that at any moment their fellow citizens will turn out to be secret Nazis and round everybody up.” Lind specifically ascribes this development to the presence of Marxist immigrant intellectuals from
Weimar Germany, like Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer who used their experiences back home to interpret what they witnessed in the USA. They were, Lind told the interviewer, “interpreting American politics through the lens of their traumatic experiences.” As did, I would add, the hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the working class who may or may not have disagreed with these social elites. Either way, the role of German Americans in the politics of the 1950s and beyond has not been studied. I argue it should be.

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Chapter 5: “As Familiar as an Old Friend” - Consumer Culture and Gender in German America

1. Introduction

Immigration to the United States has often been described as a one-way street that forces those who travel it to abandon old customs and conventions in order to be accepted – culturally, politically, and economically – as full members of American society. “Being American is a matter of abstention from foreign ways, foreign food, foreign ideas, foreign accents,” the cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead wrote in 1975. At the same time, Mead’s argument was decisively assimilationist: immigrants could signal their belonging by literally buying into the “American Way of Life.” New Americans were made, so to say, in department stores, amusement parks and movie theaters, where newcomers displayed their ability to navigate consumer culture.

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577 Two groundbreaking texts that first investigated the intersection of immigration and consumer culture are Roy Rosenzweig’s Eight hours for what we will: Workers and leisure in an industrial city, 1870-1920 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and Kathy Peiss’ Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the Century New York (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). For a more complete bibliography, see my discussion in Section 3 of this chapter. In my use of the term “consumer culture” I follow Don Slater, who defined it as a culture in which a) “core social practices and cultural values, ideas, aspirations and identities are defined and oriented in relation to consumption;” b) commodities are produced for markets, not for personal need; c) “[m]arket relations are anonymous and in principle universal;” d) private choice equals
But was an embrace of the “American Way” always tantamount to the abstention from “foreign ways,” as Mead proposed? I argue in this chapter that consumption could also be quintessentially conservative, a process that strengthened old values and helped immigrants stay connected to the homeland. This argument is not new of course, but German American historiography – perhaps unlike any other – has centered on the assumption that migrant participation in the American marketplace signaled “a retreat from ethnic concerns and from the German ethnic component of multiple identity.” I will demonstrate that such arguments are certainly not inaccurate, but miss the considerable investment in the Old World that accompanied migrants’ navigations of American consumer culture. During the interwar era German Americans trusted in a variety of norms that determined their patterns of spending in the American marketplace. And they negotiated these norms through a variety of transnational discourses in German language newspapers, ethnic advertisements, and magazines like the Heimatbriefe, which allowed German Americans to synchronize their own evolving sense of the freedom and vice versa; e) unlimited and insatiable desires are celebrated and essential; and f) consumption emerges as the “privileged medium for negotiating identity and status within a post-traditional society.” See: Don Slater, Consumer Culture and Modernity (Malden, Ma.: Polity Press, 1997), 24-32.

American Way with parallel conceptions of Americanism and consumerism back home.

To provide a concrete example of continued investments in the Heimat, this chapter discusses the 1932 campaign by a coalition of German-Philadelphians to bring back recently cancelled advertisements placed by the Wanamaker department store in the German-language daily Gazette-Democrat. German American consumers saw the advertisements as more than shopping guides by a trusted member of the local community. For them, the advertisements were “maps of modernity,” to use the words of sociologist Don Slater, which not merely replaced traditional authorities but established connections between the old and the new.\textsuperscript{580} Moreover, readers realized that advertisements helped ensure the financial wellbeing of the newspaper – a space where American life (or life in America) could be discussed and understood in a familiar language and a familiar cultural context.

The fact that women led the protests speaks to the important role that consumer culture played in the negotiation of gender roles during the interwar era. As primary authorities on domestic finance, consumption, and ethnic conservation in the home, German American women wielded enormous influence over the choices that migrants made in the

\textsuperscript{580} Slater, \textit{Consumer Culture}, 86-87. See also section 4.
marketplace. And while many of them embraced the liberating opportunities of consumerism, others found solace in stability and continuity. The image of the nuclear family, for example, that eventually became a staple of “American Way” iconography, was largely consistent with traditional German gender norms and thus provided a space for migrant women to realize their American dreams while staying connected to and consistent with old world traditions.

This chapter lays out the interconnected evolution of consumerism and gender in the context of migration. It first discusses the German discourse on Americanism, a synonym for modernity in the interwar era, and explores how conservative objections against consumption impacted the ways in which German Americans saw themselves as consumers in America. After providing an overview of competing discourses in the


582 According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the “nuclear family,” as a sociological concept, is “the basic family group consisting typically of father, mother, and their dependent children.” It is usually contrasted with the “extended family” that spans beyond two generations and includes other relatives living in proximity to the nuclear family. According to the OED, it first appeared in sociological literature in 1924. See: "nuclear, adj. (and adv.) and n." OED Online (Oxford University Press, March 2016), retrieved March 12, 2016. However, from its conception the term had normative connotations regarding gender roles, in which the man was the sole provider of income, while women were viewed as homemakers in charge of raising the kids (see section 3.2 of this chapter).

583 For a great discussion of the cultural juxtaposition of Americanism and modernity, see Victoria De Grazia, “Americanism for Export,” Wedge 7-8 (Winter-
United States, I examine the transnational culture of German America and close with a discussion of the campaign to return the Wanamaker advertisements.

2. “Americanism” and German National Identity

2.1. Consumer Culture

As the global economy vacillated between booms and busts throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, proponents and critics debated the promises and pitfalls of industrialization, internationalization, and consumer culture. On the one hand, innovations in mass production, technology, distribution, and marketing put within public reach a variety of products that mitigated the backbreaking routines of rural life, provided new opportunities for social advancement and opened up the world of leisure and amusement to the lower classes. On the other hand, those same innovations were in part responsible for the economic struggles of peasants, artisans, and local traders. The new industrial order rendered obsolete traditions and customs and undermined the cultural authority of old elites.  

584 While the German Empire certainly embraced the

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opportunities of the new age and established itself as an economic and military power during the late 1800s, a persistent, stubborn anti-modernism became entrenched in Wilhelmine society. Critics of modernity were particularly concerned about the corrosive effects of consumer culture, which purportedly threatened the integrity of the Kulturnation Germany. When the monarchy collapsed at the end of World War I, this concern turned into outright fear about the future of the country. For many Germans the specter of modernity bore the name of a rival for global supremacy: Amerika.

The United States had inspired both dreams and nightmares long before the war, of course, but during the 1920s America "emerged as the symbol of modernity tout court." To many conservatives it seemed as if

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585 In this section, I cannot always account for the various competing criticisms of modernity that flourished in the Weimar Republic and often shared metaphors but not necessarily arguments. It would be misleading, for example, to classify cultural critics like Max Weber, Gottfried Benn, or Thomas Mann in the same group as some of the völkisch voices like Hans-Christoph Kaergel and Adolf Halfeld, who later supported the National Socialist regime. For a brief but succinct discussion of the differences and similarities between cultural critics and anti-modern pessimists, see Peukert, Weimar Republic, 185-188.


American culture was taking over the Old World. American bands played Jazz in Berlin nightclubs, movie theaters showed Hollywood films, and department stores sold American fashion. “The nation’s thinking has indeed become Americanized, through and through,” warned the Protestant cleric Günther Dehn in 1929, “it is not socialism but Americanism that will be the end of everything as we know it.”\textsuperscript{588} Such laments could easily be dismissed as the last gasps of a disappearing conservative minority, but the reality was more complex. After all, throughout the 1920s Germany continued to suffer economically and many Germans were concerned about the future of humane values in a time of increasingly unregulated capitalism. By pointing to the failures of the American system, many critics participated in a legitimate debate about the country’s path into the future. “The public debate about ‘America’ was really a debate about German society itself and the challenge that modernity posed to it.”\textsuperscript{589}

In many ways, then, the discourse on consumer culture epitomized ambivalences about the arrival of global “Americanism” and vice versa: Germans addressed their anxieties about the country’s future in an American century through debates about consumer culture. Having lived through the war, many craved for American products and fashion, which remained out of financial reach for the majority. Germans across all social

\textsuperscript{588} Quoted in Peukert, \textit{Weimar Republic}, 178. See also: Retterath, \textit{Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke}, 145.
\textsuperscript{589} Peukert, \textit{Weimar Republic}, 178.
and political boundaries praised the rationalization of the American marketplace and household, and welcomed similar methods in Europe.\textsuperscript{590} At the same time, however, there was a popular push for economic nationalism, driven, for example, by leading German housewives’ associations. Seeing poverty and misery as the result of global pressures, activists denounced everything from department stores and mass produced clothing to oranges and white bread as foreign to German society and responsible for its economic disintegration.\textsuperscript{591} Patterns of American consumerism were often the main point of criticism after delegations had visited the United States. American products, the visitors argued, were mass produced and sold under questionable circumstances in department stores that offered little to no service.\textsuperscript{592}

Especially widespread among critics was the idea that American culture seduced individuals. Catchwords like “Americanization” and “Yankeefication” signaled the conviction that American-style mass consumerism incapacitated the willpower of individuals, particularly German immigrants, who embraced it all too eagerly. “In America,” wrote Adolf Halfeld in his widely read \textit{Amerika und der Amerikanismus} (1927),

\textsuperscript{592} Reagin, “Comparing Apples and Oranges,” 245-247.
“the civilization of the mass has been realized […]. There is certainly something great and new here – a machine that works with impeccable precision, but also displays all disadvantages of the machine: total sovereignty of the rule and death of the free will.”

The journalist Hans-Christoph Kaergel found a fitting metaphor for that perspective when he argued that the amusement park Coney Island resembled American capitalism in that it was like “a single giant gyroscope, whirling around Millions of people, defrauding every one of their reasoning and independence.”

This perspective of the consumer as object or hapless pawn perspired in many observations: pulp magazines “dulled” their readers, sensationalized movies “vulgarized” the masses, and advertisements misled buyers. “At best, consumers were worrisomely ill-understood, unpredictable social figures. At worst, their needs were identified with the demands of lower orders, volatile, ravenous, capricious, hence contributing to the unpredictability of economic trends, political polarization, and the degradation of national culture.”

It should be noted in this context that neither exuberant celebrations of American abundance nor prejudicial condemnation of the United States rested on broad objective or scientific observations but rather betrayed the

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593 Halfeld, *Amerika und der Amerikanismus*, XVI.
subjective nature of this surrogate debate. In fact, anti-modern critics prided themselves on their lack of objectivity and scientific observation, which they derided as benchmarks of American civilization. Instead they promoted emotional depth and spirituality as unique qualities of German culture. Kaergel, for example opened his book with a frank confession of his own subjectivity: "I have not examined this new world with statistics and new economic gauges. I have seen it as a human, but most of all as a German." The point here is not merely that German observers often indulged in obvious, intentional misrepresentations of the United States. Instead, discourse on U.S. consumer culture and modernity helped refine a German cultural exceptionalism in the struggle against capitalism's consequences. By emphasizing the special qualities of German Kultur as a safeguard against the pitfalls of modernity, cultural nationalists offered a model that was applicable around the world. Whether in Germany or the United States, uprootedness and alienation could be mitigated by a strong connection to the Heimat, a “conscious living with a German soul,” as

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598 Kaergel, Wolkenkratzer, 5. For a similar discussion, see: Halfeld, Amerika und der Amerikanismus, IX-XIII.
Kaergel called it. “Those that successfully preserve the soul of the old Heimat, are [...] always at home. [...] Maybe that is the core of the German question. Those that have given away their innermost core to false gods, have been lost to themselves and us.”\(^{599}\) In a book about the United States, this was a direct charge at German Americans, and in particular at German American women, the domestic guardians of culture and main culprits in the anti-consumerist tirades of the Weimar Republic. They held the key to Germanness in their spending.

### 2.2. Gender and Domesticity in Weimar Republic and Third Reich

“I don’t have to tell anyone what a Girl is,” wrote Hans-Christoph Kaergel to open his chapter on gender roles in the United States.\(^{600}\) Indeed, by the 1920s the omnipresent icon of American femininity, the Girl, embodied modernity for many Germans, not least because changing gender roles were a central aspect in the postwar renegotiation of German national identity.\(^{601}\) Even before World War I, Germans had discussed the role of women in American society with a mix of admiration and apprehension. While praising their civic engagement and high level of


\(^{600}\) Kaergel, *Wolkenkratzer*, 98.

education, many conservatives felt that American women pursued their public goals too aggressively. Female “shopping” became a particular annoyance for those who believed that American-style consumerism was a careless and rather pointless act of waste and vanity, which, if imported to Germany, threatened the fabric of traditional society.\(^{602}\) During the 1920s, the rise of feminine iconography propagated in newspapers and magazines, in novels, movies, and advertisements, seemed to confirm the worst fears: suddenly it seemed as if independent women were taking over German society “armed with bobbed hair and made-up face, fashionable clothes and cigarette, working by day in a typing pool or behind the sales counter in some dreamland of consumerism, frittering away the night dancing the Charleston or watching UFA and Hollywood films.”\(^{603}\)

Though little more than “male-generated fantasy” – the vast majority of women continued to work in domestic settings and those that did not could rarely afford the propagated lifestyle\(^{604}\) – the feminine threat from overseas triggered a very real German angst about social stability and traditional gender roles.\(^{605}\) Such anxieties were exacerbated by first-hand


reports like Kaergel’s *Wolkenkratzer* or Halfeld’s *Amerika und der Amerikanismus*. While admitting (and occasionally admiring) the self-confidence that American women displayed in public, both Kaergel and Halfeld saw female independence as a threat to society. In their view, women’s advances in factory and white-collar labor had devastating effects on masculinity and the social fabric. American men were submissive and had ceded all control in the household to their wives, who were focused on themselves, neglected their duties as mothers and domestic caretakers, spend most of their time working and shopping and gave birth only if the budget allowed it. Such views of American women permeated German society and even though many Germans knew better than to believe every rumor, some of the stereotypes stuck. German men of various social and intellectual backgrounds saw the United States as “a land where women rule and men are slaves,” in the words of the German American journalist H.L. Mencken, who was well-known and widely read on both sides of the Atlantic.

Once more, the question was what all this meant for the future of Germanness around the globe. For Kaergel, at least, female conspicuous consumerism symbolized the decline of tradition and its consequences. To him, make-up, hairstyles, and the culture of smiling proscribed in

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American advertisements were dangerous manifestations of the very mass society that threatened to erase cultural differences, which set apart German women from other nationalities. “I may have seen hundreds of thousands upon thousands [Hundertausende und Abertausende] female beings [in America]. And yet not a single exceptional, memorable face has remained […]. All I see is the Girl. Entirely without a name. Entirely without exceptional appearance.” Following his description, Kaergel asked rhetorically, whether or not his readers really wanted the Girl as the future of German femininity. “No,” he answered preemptively,

we want to go back to nature! I believe that the German, female being will be far ahead of the Girl in this competition. […] All I want is that we realize that the Girl is not a special creature, but an unnaturally acquired character[,] that we seek beauty […] the beauty that makes everyone into a human individual […], into a Mädchen [German: girl], a woman, a mother. But never into a Girl.  

Many Germans shared that view. For the bourgeoisie, the Girl embodied the conspicuous, uncultured, and uneducated masses. And this was as true for the conservative, völkisch right as it was for the intellectual left wing. The sociologist and journalist Siegfried Kracauer, for example, described a troupe of female American line dancers, the Tiller Girls, and their highly organized, choreographed performances, as the

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608 Kaergel, Wolkenkratzer, 98-105, quote on 100. See also: Baureithel, “Unendliche Negation,” 162-164; Retterath, Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke, 154-155.
609 Kaergel, Wolkenkratzer, 105.
incarnation of the capitalist age and the self-organizing masses, or what he called a “mass ornament”: “[t]hese products of American ‘distraction factories’ [Zerstreuungsfabriken] are no longer individual girls, but indissoluble female units [unauflößliche Mädchenkomplexe], whose movements are mathematical demonstrations.” 611 Kracauer largely refrained from moral judgment; he even argued “that the aesthetic pleasure gained from the ornamental mass movements is legitimate.” 612 Nonetheless, his observations, too, bore the signs of fear omnipresent in the German middle-class – a fear of the masses. More importantly, he recognized in the Tiller Girls and their routine the inauguration of an “American age” in Germany, particularly an age of mass production and consumption. They were “a representation of American virtues, a flirt by the stopwatch.” 613

On the conservative, völkisch end of the political spectrum, there was little sympathy for this American import. Many feared that the entire German nation would be emasculated if American-style feminism and consumerism took over. And even the organized women’s movement complained that American notions of femininity undermined German

domestic and motherly virtues. Groups like the League of German Housewives’ Associations argued that American patterns of consumption undermined the German nuclear family and the nation. Whereas American women shopped for cheap clothing and canned foods and wasted money on beauty products, the idealized German woman, the “master housewife,” was devoted to thrift and saving: “She put up, canned, or stored foods of every kind when they were in season; sewed clothes for all family members; repaired and altered worn clothes; ensured thriftiness through meticulous bookkeeping; and wasted not.” This model was almost diametrically opposed to the stereotypical image of the American consumer Girl, who “wasted” all her money on conspicuous consumer items, cared little about her children and even less for her husband or the home she was in charge of. The extent of the misinformation circulating in German society is probably best exemplified by the belief that Americans never washed their underwear. “People simply buy cheap underwear and throw it away after they have worn it….Heaven preserve us from this Americanization of the household,” one article in Die Deutsche Hausfrau [“The German Housewife”] argued.

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616 Reagin, “Comparing Apples and Oranges,” 254. It should also be noted that organizations like the LGHA were not nearly as unequivocally anti-American as they purported to be. Like much of right-wing German conservatism, activist women were fascinated by the efficiency preached and practiced in the United States (see also section 3 of this chapter). In their suggestions for a modern German household, they were even inspired by the work of the American
Again, the point is not to suggest that all Germans believed such rumors or, obviously, that they reflected reality. But many thought that American notions of femininity and consumerism threatened the very ideals of separate spheres that were formative for a gendered German national identity. Not surprisingly, the alternative model of German womanhood promoted by conservative circles during the Weimar Republic and by the Nazis during the Third Reich was in many ways the direct opposite of the public German image of the Girl. Though recent scholarship on gender and nationalism has shown that women took on various public functions in the 1920s and 1930s, their main


I should make clear in this context that it would be misleading to draw a straight line between the ideology of conservative cultural critics and National Socialists, but there was a clear affinity. In the context of this chapter, it is not important, however, to understand the precise role of women in Volksgemeinschaft and Nazi state, but to assess to potential appeal of that worldview as a leitmotif for German migrant women in the United States. A rich and diverse scholarship has shown the ways in which traditional conceptions of womanhood were included in the Volksgemeinschaft pre- and post-1933. Some of the most important English-language works include: Renate Bridenthal, Anita Grossmann and Marion Kaplan, eds., When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984); Claudia Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987); Jill Stephenson, The Nazi Organisation of Women (London: Croom Helm, 1981) and Stephenson, Women in Nazi Germany (London: Pearson, 2001). For a good overview in the German language, see Sybille Steinbacher, ed., Volksgenossinnen: Frauen in der NS-Volksgemeinschaft (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), especially Steinbacher’s introduction, pages 9-26; and: Birthe Kundrus, “Frauen und Nationalsozialismus.
responsibility in propaganda and ideology was that of mother and domestic housekeeper. This traditional image was propagated across the global German diaspora as well, for example through publications like the *Heimatbriefe*.

**2.3. Gender, Nation, and Migration in the *Heimatbriefe***

Not surprisingly, the writers of the *Heimatbriefe* looked back unfavorably at the Weimar Republic, “when it seemed […] as if many a German woman had almost forgotten her high destiny. She wanted to be totally free and independent, free of her highest duty, only wanted to live according to her own wishes, be as equal as possible to men.” Such characterizations were strongly informed by stereotypical descriptions of egoistic, profligate American women and ignored decades of pre-war history, when women in Germany had already contributed financially to household incomes. The *Heimatbriefe* blamed the “chaos” of the 1920s on the intrusion of “foreign” ideas, such as democracy and consumer culture. With little use for democracy and perhaps even less respect for its privileges, the writers behind the magazine did not account for the possibility that some women had actually embraced the opportunities of the previous decade. During the Weimar Republic, “fate had denied women the fulfillment of their destiny, to give to their *Volk* new life” by

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619 See also section 4 of this chapter on German-America.

The Heimatbriefe thus strongly denounced gender equality and made clear the separate purposes of men and women in the Volksgemeinschaft.

The man is discoverer and pioneer [Vordenker], leads in all matters of spirituality, of science, of state, and of war. While working, he is directly exposed to all kinds of difficulties and dangers. The gift of the woman, however, is internal: in heart and mind […]. In home and family, at the domestic stove is the domain of the woman and her strong responsibility.

To be sure, there were many women on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean who would have disagreed with such antiquated gender norms and it is one of my arguments that German American “assimilation” was as much a rejection of restrictive German nationalist norms as it was an embrace of the American Way. However, it should not be ignored that the Heimatbriefe did not simply deride women but celebrated their important function in the trans-national community, the Volksgemeinschaft. “Nobody feels as deeply the living togetherness [Zusammengehörigkeit] of the Volk as the German woman! It is she who […] keeps alive the flame of love for Volk and home soil, in far away lands as here in the Reich.”

Women, the Heimatbriefe argued, were literally saving Germanness at home and abroad by devoting themselves to the preservation of a community of people “of equal blood, equal type and custom, and equal

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621 Sächsische Heimatbriefe, Spring 1937, 3.
622 Heimatbriefe, Spring 1937, 1.
623 I use the term in the sense proposed by Russell Kazal as the “processes that result in greater homogeneity within a society (Kazal, Becoming Old Stock, 3).
624 See also my conclusions in Section 5.
mother tongue.” 625 They taught children language and respect for traditions and customs. “She imparts upon the child in songs, fairy tales and stories the beginnings of language, in play and cheerful dance she introduces [the child] for the first time into the community life of the Volk.” 626

Ultimately, then, the Heimatbriefe argued that it was the obligation of women to preserve German morale and ensure that families remained “brave, diligent and decent [anständig].” They were to provide a safe haven for children and husband, who could return to “the home, the cradle of peace.” 627 Equally important, the mother was in charge of the Volksvermögen, a term that could mean both national wealth and wealth of the people. “Here in the Heimat, the woman takes her housewife’s duty as administrator of the Volksvermögen, which has been earned through hard labor, as seriously as any soldier his military duty.” Whether simple commodities of everyday life, clothing or groceries – German women could not spend money thoughtlessly and were required to be as thrifty as possible “so that no damage will be inflicted upon the Volksgemeinschaft.” 628

The readers of the Heimatbriefe did not simply accept the ideology presented by the editors wholesale, but adopted parts and portions that fit

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625 Heimatbriefe, Spring 1937, 1.
626 Heimatbriefe, Spring 1937, 3.
627 Heimatbriefe, Spring 1937, 3.
628 Heimatbriefe, Spring 1937, 2-3.
their needs and thus constantly renegotiated what their “Germanness” meant to them. For example, Martha Osterwalder from New York asserted that “[m]y Heimat means more than anything else to me.” Having lived in the Americas for 21 years, “I have not lost my Germandom and I will never lose it as long as I live. How many times have I been forced to defend my fatherland abroad, oftentimes better than any man.”\(^6\) As a maid in the Swiss embassy, she was well capable of earning her own income and seemed to reject the idea that women should be restricted to home and hearth. However, she also complained:

> Women whose husband has a good income are taking away the work from single men and women. And [from] mothers whose husband is out of work. They want to save money where others have not enough to eat. They do not care for their fellow human beings and the poor hungry children. As long as they can enjoy their rich lives. [...] If they [presumably: the government] were to send home female teachers and teach them how to cook their husband’s soup, and replace them with men, so that the children enjoy a better education [...] they could not accomplish anything better for the public good.\(^8\)

Few women were as frank as Martha Osterwalder. Unlike their male compatriots most refrained from criticizing the writers of the *Heimatbriefe*. But even those that did comment, as is evidenced by Osterwalder’s complicated remarks, could hardly escape the dominating beliefs in the discourse on gender and domesticity at the time: In Osterwalder’s view, US liberal individualism undercut national solidarity and the traditional

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\(^6\) Martha Osterwalder to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935- 89.
\(^8\) Martha Osterwalder to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935- 89.
separation of genders trumped the female desire to participate in the world of work and consumption.

The discussion about the future of German femininity had obvious implications for migrant women, especially those living in the United States. If consumerism undermined Germanness, then how should they navigate the American marketplace? To be sure, there were many who simply ignored such warnings and went about their business as they saw fit.631 But as I will show throughout this chapter, there were many others who took seriously their roles as managers of the household and guardians of (some) cultural heritage. For them, ongoing debates about the preservation of German culture took on special relevance and there is some evidence that women found ways to participate in the American marketplace while retaining a meaningful connection to the homeland. Nonetheless, I also suggest that the increasingly restrictive vision of German womanhood made such negotiations more and more difficult. Their role in the Volksgemeinschaft obliged women to “lead an exemplary pure life” and stand as an example for her children “as a stable and strong personality”632 in the face of an ostensibly corruptive American Way. As we shall see in the next section, however, American consumer culture was not nearly as unequivocally modern as many Germans assumed.

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631 Russell Kazal describes the allure of American consumer culture, especially the opportunities it offered for young migrant women. See Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock*, 95-108.

632 *Heimatbriefe*, Spring 1937, 3.
3. Migrants and American Consumer Culture

3.1. Consumer Culture in the United States

The discourse on consumerism in the United States was significantly more optimistic than in Europe. Especially after World War I the positive trajectory of the country as a rising industrial power with increasing reach across the globe led many Americans (as well as many non-Americans) to believe that its system of capitalist distribution was superior in both economic sustainability as well as social equality and carried great benefits for individual citizens. Even though it hardly reached every American, the abundance celebrated in the interwar era increasingly convinced the nation that mass culture meant mass prosperity and that consumerism was citizenship: “The American citizen’s first importance to his country is no longer that of citizen but that of consumer,” wrote Robert and Helen Lynd in their influential 1929 study on “average” America, *Middletown*. “Consumption is a new necessity.”

For migrants, the American marketplace symbolized the promise of equality and democracy, or at least some compensation for the loss of

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By buying American products and partaking in leisure and amusement, they not only reaped the benefits of their migratory sacrifices but also signaled their embrace of and incorporation into American culture. By choosing to spend their hard-earned American money on movie tickets or washing machines, migrants could thus demonstrate individual self-determination, rational assessment of value, and social advancement. Moreover, in silent movie theaters and amusement parks they experienced American culture first-hand, redefined social boundaries, and broke down inter-ethnic barriers. The spectacle of difference celebrated in these institutions, however, was both fascinating and terrifying, a rite of initiation and a challenge to individual and collective identities. In the words of one German immigrant, Käte Küchler, who wrote to the VDA in

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635 Cmp. Slater, *Consumer Culture*, 35. Slater describes consumer sovereignty as “freedom, reason, and progress." See also: Andrew Heinze, “From Scarcity to Abundance: The Immigrant as Consumer,” *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence Glickman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). Heinze makes an important qualification in his argument, namely that immigrants reach through consumption the equality that the workplace denied them (190). I do not think the same applies to German-Americans, who were often valued as workers, but not as vocal citizens (see especially Chapter 4). For a deeper discussion, see Heinze’s essay and: Susan Porter Benson, “Gender, Generation, and Consumption in the United States: Working-Class Families in the Interwar Period,” *Gender and Consumer Culture*, ed. Scanlon, 223-240.

1935 with a mixture of shock and fascination: “The characters you could see in Coney Island, an ‘entertaining’ tableau of international life of the lower classes! Be still, my heart!”

Küchler’s remark suggests that immigrants did not always embrace American culture unequivocally, passively shedding all remnants of old-world belonging in the course. Nor did American consumer culture simply wipe out ethnic differences. The work of Roy Rosenzweig and Lizabeth Cohen has shown that migrant immersion in American culture was a process far more complicated than suggested by assimilationist narratives of – positively – the “Melting Pot” or – negatively – “cultural suicide,” the latter an accusation made with particular fervor by middle-class Germans and German Americans against their lower class kin. Instead, participation in the American marketplace frequently constituted a form of awakening, which substantiated a more concrete ethnic sense of origin and allowed migrants to appropriate products and leisure activities to pursue their own ends, be it pleasure, profit, or politics. Irish pubs and German beer

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637 Küchler to VDA, 1935-106, 3.
gardens, for example, catered to those seeking familiarity in a world of difference and created hyphenated experiences that helped shape public representation of the ethnic group in the United States, even though they rarely encompassed the heterogeneities of the Old World. Since patronage was frequently universal, the existence of such “traditional” establishments not only gave immigrants income opportunities and a place to feel represented, to belong, but also provided a space to introduce an ethnic group to others, initiate social interaction, and negotiate the position of the respective group within society.  

It is worth remembering that until at least the 1920s even large corporations were sufficiently impressed by the cultural resilience of many migrants to devise entire marketing ploys to meet their demands. “Immigrant consumers compelled American businesses to adapt to preferences and traditions brought from their homelands and to develop ‘ethnic’ products and markets even as these immigrants slowly adjusted to American-made goods.” In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, companies began to realize the potential markets behind these ethnicities. Some advertised their products specifically to homesick Irish Americans, while others amended their recipes to accommodate the

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kosher demands of Jewish immigrants.641 During the 1920s, the soap manufacturer Colgate hired advertising agencies to learn about the specific desires of migrants in Chicago, Buffalo, or New York. Meanwhile, ethnic radio stations drew huge audiences throughout the country.642 And in Philadelphia American corporations like Chevrolet, Gillette, Lucky Strike and Kellogg's had their advertisements translated to German for print in the local Gazette-Democrat.643 American consumer culture was thus “globalized” by immigrant markets and demands.644

This is not to say that the American marketplace per se fostered pluralism. In fact, many of the products marketed specifically to immigrants were merely vehicles “for greater Americanization and uniformity rather than for heightening distinctive ethnic tastes.” 645 Advertisers hoped to transform immigrants from old-world traditionalists into modern American consumers. Especially during the 1920s and 1930s

643 German-language ads often appeared next to local ads published in English. Though I have not been able to verify the strategies behind such translated advertisements, I noted a strong emphasis on traditional “German” values such as thrift and prudence, which suggest that companies thought about how to appeal to ethnic audiences.
644 Hoganson, Consumer’s Imperium, 8.
645 Halter, Shopping for Identity, 34.
an increasingly nationalized corporate culture demanded the assimilation of tastes and abandoned diversity in the marketplace – often against the resistance of consumers.\textsuperscript{646} At the same time imagery and language used by advertisers obfuscated the destruction of “the old ways” behind a veil of conservatism and tradition.\textsuperscript{647} For example, Roland Marchand has shown how large enterprises and corporations capitalized on nostalgic memories of family ownership by devising marketing campaigns that displayed the “owner” as the good guardian of his workers despite the fact that managerial structures had long divested many families of company management.\textsuperscript{648} By thus simulating tradition and familiarity, commodities catered to anxious customers and eased the transition into modernity. According to Warren Susman, consumer culture took on a “conservative and domesticating role” which helped Americans come to terms with full-fledged mass culture, especially concerning the renegotiation of gender roles in everyday life. For example, rather then undermining traditional


notions of separate spheres, advertisements reinforced female domesticity by promoting products that intended to help women prepare meals and do the laundry at home instead of utilizing commercial or collective venues to achieve the same ends while they pursued their own careers.\textsuperscript{649} Such consumerist models of motherhood and domesticity allowed many German American women still invested in the homeland and its culture to excel in an area that was mutually respected in both the United States and Germany. Even though many of them realized the apparent inequalities inherent in the separation of genders, their role as mother, manager and guardian of culture and morality allowed them to wield considerable influence in a country that began to advertise the family as the most important micro-unit of society and “American Way.”\textsuperscript{650}

\textbf{3.2. Women in Consumer Society}

Once relegated to the private sphere of domestic housekeeping\textsuperscript{651} and auxiliary labor, women across the Atlantic world seized opportunities in industrial and white-collar work to gain access to the public sphere,

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financial independence from their fathers and husbands, and, eventually, equal rights of citizenship. Some took advantage of leisure and consumption to redefine themselves beyond the norms of traditional life, while others embraced their new roles as managers of household finances and consumption to escape the confines of the domestic.\textsuperscript{652} By the 1920s, women were not only active as rational consumers and responsible household managers, but also engaged in public activism and pursued careers in the consumer industries. For example, under the leadership of Florence Kelly the National Consumers’ League pressed department stores to eliminate child labor and attacked retailers for their low wages.\textsuperscript{653}

And the female employees of the J. Walther Thompson Company Women’s Editorial Department successfully redefined boundaries of womanhood and femininity in advertising.\textsuperscript{654} More than simply giving women access to the public sphere and a variety of products, consumer culture provided the foundation for a “new individualism” that allowed women to challenge their role in American society: “Mass consumer


culture presented to women a new definition of gender that carved out a space for individual expression similar to men’s and that stood in tension with the older definition passed on to them by their mothers and grandmothers."655

In recent years, scholars have complicated that perspective. For example, Margaret Finnegan’s analysis of consumer activism among New York and Chicago suffragists shows that the protagonists expanded female access to the public domain by utilizing modern methods of advertising and marketing. When “department stores, manufacturers, and a changing society made consumption central to middle-class women’s lives, suffragists turned their roles as shoppers into arguments for granting women the ballot.” However, Finnegan also demonstrates that consumerism curtailed the feminist imagination of American womanhood by organizing the vision of women’s citizenship around white, middle-class ideals that perpetuated old stereotypes and created new ones.656 Similarly, in her work on the Get-Out-the-Vote (GOTV) movement, Liette Giedlow discusses how women employed modern strategies of commercial advertising to propagate their message, a message that encouraged the white middle-class to vote, while explicitly excluding non-white working-class Americans. The “commodification of political culture,” Gidlow argued,

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656 Finnegan, Selling Suffrage, 1-3.
“helped to make politics the province of people who were white and middle class or elite.” Both Gidlow and Finnegan ultimately suggest that “mainstream suffragists” of the interwar era often helped consolidate the consumerist order rather than challenge predominant paradigms.

This argument is extended beyond the nation-state in Kristin Hoganson’s *Consumer’s Imperium*, which investigates the intersection of U.S. domesticity, consumerism and empire. White middle-class women, Hoganson argues, “asserted agency through their shopping, decorating, and dining preferences and their choices of leisure and reform activities.” For her, these women were actively involved in what she calls the “globalization of the United States” since “consumption constituted a form of interaction with the wider world.” At a time when white global supremacy came natural to the people of Western nation-states, those that successfully mastered imperial culture and demonstrated their belonging to a superior civilization at home, by consuming foreign foods or displaying exotic cozy corners, helped justify both global and domestic hierarchies. This was familiar territory for many German American women. Despite all inter-national differences, German migrants came from an imperial culture that was inspired by

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659 Hoganson, *Consumer’s Imperium*, 8.
660 Hoganson, *Consumer’s Imperium*, 10 and 11. Usually, scholars focus on how U.S. consumerism transformed the world, not vice versa. See for example, De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire* and Rydell/Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna*.
661 See also Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*. 
similar discourses of cultural superiority. In this context, the culture of consumption celebrated by American women often allowed for the preservation of foreign traditions – as long as such traditions signaled a belonging to Western civilization. The “immigrant gifts” movements, for example, celebrated cultural artifacts, which linked Americans back to their ancestral homelands, most preferably those lands that allowed them to claim for themselves and the country a white European, Protestant heritage. The movement, writes Hoganson, “made Americanization more palatable by suggesting that it did not demand choices between homogeneity and difference, modernity and tradition, or social control and individual expression.”

Hoganson’s conclusions, though aimed at the pre-World War I era, thus open up an investigative space for the interwar period. Even though the cultural space for expressions of hyphenate belonging began to close between World War I and World War II in the wake of heightening nativism and nationalization campaigns, the persistent identification of many Americans with their ancestral homeland provides ample opportunity to explore the ways in which American domestic life was influenced and shaped by inter- and transnational currents – even though it was simultaneously heralded as an insulated haven from global poverty and

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despair. The spread of foreign ways through American consumer culture, whether driven by Hoganson’s middle-class consumers or by migrants from across the globe, shows the openness of American culture to the “foreign ways, foreign food, foreign ideas, foreign accents” that Margaret Mead denounced as distinctly “un-American” in the 1970s. 

Consumerism certainly provided room for German American women to demonstrate their belonging by connecting them to both the ancestral past and the American present. Nonetheless, as I have discussed in Section 2, German and American conceptions of how an individual should approach modern consumer society were hardly equal, sometimes even diametrically opposed. German migrant women had their own ideas about norms and practices guiding their status within the family and society at large, about individual and collective identities in the United States. But rather than simply disappearing, with every migrant family that arrived, such ideas about gender, domesticity, and national identity entered into and became a part of what it meant to be American.

4. German Migrants Navigate Consumer Culture

4.1. Consumerism and German America

Germany and the United States reacted differently to the ascent of consumer culture, the latter more optimistically, the former with a certain unease. Whereas Germany’s marketplace was defined by bourgeois

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664 See Introduction of this chapter.
665 See also Reagin, “The Imagined Hausfrau,” 57.
social distinctions, American consumerism promised equal access to well-paid jobs and, consequently, to an abundance of mass-produced goods. The discrepancies between both countries were in part responsible for the migration that connected them during the nineteenth and twentieth century. In the United States, German migrants pursued opportunities they were denied at home while simultaneously remaining skeptical about the impact of modernism and conspicuous consumption. American culture, many believed, threatened traditional gender roles and undermined family values, community, and culture – all trademarks of German migrant life.\textsuperscript{666}

Especially bourgeois proponents of German culture abroad advocated that both countries, Germany and the United States, should help “each other to supplant, wherever necessary, the wild egoism, materialism, greed, sensuality and pleasure madness of the present time with a sound and peaceful philosophy of life, useful activity and a full and pure enjoyment of the short span allotted to us.”\textsuperscript{667}

There would be no such cooperation, of course. Nonetheless, German migrants left behind their imprints on American consumer culture, though exactly how remains an unresolved question, since the intersection of German America and American consumer culture has received so little

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{666}See for example: Adolph Timm, “Kultur, Religion und Politik. Vom erzieherischen Standpunkt betrachtet. Ein Beitrag zur Förderung der Einheit der Deutschstämmigen in den Vereinigten Staaten,” Lecture held at the 3. German-American Congress on June 8, 1934 in Cleveland, Ohio (HSP, German Americana 501, Folder 1) \\
\textsuperscript{667}“To Save Civilization,” Undated pamphlet, Rudolf Cronau Collection, Folder 13, pages 1-2.
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attention by scholars in the past.\textsuperscript{668} Kathleen Conzen has argued that German festive culture with its beer gardens and social celebrations developed parallel to American commercial culture with little interaction between the two, and it disappeared subsequently.\textsuperscript{669} But William Leach successfully demonstrated that the developing American consumer society had distinctly German elements, which encompassed and reflected the migrant experience. Leach specifically cites the example of \textit{Gemütlichkeit}, an emotional state of “contentment, ease, and satisfaction, all in one”\textsuperscript{670} that found expression in the mixture of food, music, drink and sociability, which characterized German organizations and helped define German ethnicity abroad. Other Americans could experience \textit{Gemütlichkeit} at events such as the \textit{Oktoberfests}, which introduced the public to the customs and culture of the group.\textsuperscript{671} According to Leach, German American businessmen, among them John Wanamaker, incorporated the emotional connotations of \textit{Gemütlichkeit} into their department stores, introducing, for example, the custom of playing music at all times. Their efforts, writes Leach, “did much to improve [American

\textsuperscript{668} The only study so far fully devoted to German consumerism is: Lydia Garver, \textit{The German American consumer: Ethnicity, opportunity, and community in colonial America} (PhD Diss.: Indiana University, 2012).

\textsuperscript{669} Conzen, “Ethnicity as Festive Culture,” 73-74.

\textsuperscript{670} Leach, \textit{Land of Desire}, 139-141.

culture] by encouraging all Americans to love music, to relax a little more, and to take pleasure in sensual and beautiful things.”

Whether or not this particular argument is accurate: The point is that the presence of German immigrants changed the shape of American consumer culture and that their role helped them claim certain spaces and traditions for themselves, even though exclusively German institutions suffered in the course. Consumption, in this regard, offered an alternative to many German migrants who loathed the social control they experienced in ethnic organizations (see Chapter 4) without necessarily undermining their sense of heritage and belonging. Though not exclusively German, department stores like the one operated by John Wanamaker in Philadelphia offered a glimpse of the migratory past and the products to take that experience home. Moreover, through its advertisements Wanamaker emphasized the department store’s “responsibility for sound merchandising.” Since the market with its overwhelming plethora of products remained unpredictable, volatile, and capricious, Wanamaker thus assured its customers that “it is the endeavor of this Store at all times to sell goods at the lowest fair and reasonable prices possible—but we shall not reduce the qualities of our merchandise.”

In another instance, one of Wanamaker’s competitors, the American Stores Company, thanked

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672 Leach, *Land of Desire*, 139-141. Another example provided by Leach is how L. Frank Baum and other writers steeped in the tradition of the German fairy tale amended the storylines to make them more palatable for American tastes (Leach, *Land of Desire*, 248-249).

“the German people of Philadelphia” and the Philadelphia Gazette-Democrat for their continuous loyalty. “This [loyalty] is proof,” its advertising manager J.S. Kraemer wrote in April 1933, “that a people highly discriminating in the quality of foods find that the American Stores afford them many advantages in the way of thrift.”674 Similarly, American corporations like Chevrolet, Gillette, Lucky Strike and Kellogg’s appealed to values traditionally associated with the ethnic group, like product quality and reliability, by placing translated ads in German-language newspapers.675

Consumers trusted such advertisements in their navigation of the marketplace and relied on newspapers to bring them the ads. I have discussed the continuing importance of ethnic newspapers in various contexts throughout this dissertation. During the 1920s, they were still one

674 Letter by J. S. Kraemer, American Stores Company to Mr. J. Kutner, Advertising Manager at the Philadelphia Gazette Democrat, dated April 26, 1933. HSP, Call Number 3469 Phil. Gazette Publishing Box 1 of 2.
675 Whether or not all large corporations were as deliberate as Wanamaker in their communication to German migrants is a question that cannot be resolved here. Ads were often simply translations of the English equivalent, such as one Lit Brothers advertisement that praised “kosige, wollgefüllte Comforts und grosse Wollene Blankets [cozy, wool-filled comforts and large woolen blankets].” Neither “kosig” nor “blanket” would have been familiar to anyone who had just stepped off the boat. (Philadelphia Gazette-Democrat, November 25, 1937, 3). A Chevrolet ad asked customers “to visit a reliable dealer for the biggest values in used cars,” by translating that sentence into the German language word by word, the result being similar to that produced by unsophisticated translation devices today: comprehensible, but not particularly appealing. Gazette-Democrat, November 27, 1937, 5. The German translation read: “Besucht einen zuverlässigen Händler für die grössten Werte in gebrauchten Cars!” The ad also offered the translated slogan “Jezt ist die Zeit,” [Now is the time], misspelling the word for now, jetzt. Nonetheless, the fact that such ads continued to appear in the 1930s is evidence enough that large corporations continued to recognize German ethnic consumers well beyond the end of World War I.
of the few spaces that migrants could turn to on an everyday basis for trusted information. Apart from advertisements, consumers could also read advice columns, which told them what to buy and what to avoid. With ethnic newspapers, however, such discussions became increasingly transnational during the 1920s, since improving methods of travel and communication facilitated exchanges between old and new world: ethnic newspapers like the *Philadelphia Tageblatt*, the *Gazette-Democrat*, and the *New York Staatszeitung* frequently reprinted articles from Germany and criticized the impact of consumerism on German national culture at home and abroad. The Philadelphia *Gazette Democrat* explicitly emphasized the continued importance of the homeland by advertising its Sunday editions, which contained an entire section with articles about and from Germany, by announcing: “Intimate bonds with the old *Heimat* are established through the Sunday edition of the ‘Philadelphia Gazette-Democrat’ and Your ‘Illustrated Weekly’ produced in Germany.” Even though readership was certainly declining, many German Americans still looked to such sources of comfort and guidance and the advice they received influenced the decisions they made. Not coincidentally, a great number of articles were directed specifically at women, whose role as guardians of culture required them to be particularly careful to avoid the forces of Americanization.

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676 See for example *Gazette-Democrat* June 6, 1927, 9.
4.2. Gender and Consumerism in German America

The general custom among German migrants families, even those from the working class, dictated the presence of women in the home. Similar to what they encountered in American society, migrant women tended to take on the role of household managers in the emerging consumer marketplace.\footnote{Kazal, \textit{Becoming Old Stock}, 87-88; Schneider, “For whom,” 48-49. Kazal notes that was an important difference when it came to sociability. German-American men “scandalized Yankees by socializing, in public, with their wives and children, usually at functions involving the consumption of alcohol. New York City’s German beer gardens, for example, formed a major exception to the rule that public drinking places, such as saloons, were male territory, in which respectable women dared not linger.” While Anglo-Americans were outraged by the presence of women at such events, German-Americans celebrated their virtuosity and argued that their presence during social occasions helped retain order and morality. “For the purposes of leisure […] middle-class Germans did not define family as lodged exclusively in the private, domestic spheres; rather, with the aid of women’s moral influence, some of the family life could be led in public.” Kazal, \textit{Becoming Old Stock}, 88-89; See also: Kupsky, \textit{The True Spirit}, 62; Peiss, \textit{Cheap Amusements}, 30.} As I have discussed in section 2.3, in the minds of those who valued Germanness and wanted to preserve it, this role was imbued with additional importance since wives and mothers were in charge of maintaining a sense of “German identity behind the scenes, in the domestic sphere.”\footnote{O’Donnell et al, \textit{The Heimat Abroad}, 1-2.} When women challenged such conventions or male leadership, men often responded indignantly in private and public. For example, Carl J. Hexamer, the president of the National German-American Alliance had a reputation for deriding the Women’s Rights Movement.\footnote{Retterath, \textit{Deutschamerikanertum und Volkstumsgedanke}, 126.} And the Lutheran pastor Georg von Bosse proclaimed: “In
my house, I am Herr, and there does not rule some ‘New Woman’ or the will of the child.”

The conflict between tradition and modernity defined the ways in which German American women renegotiated gender norms. Like their “native” American peers, they carefully opened up spaces that allowed them to engage publicly without alienating the men of their community. This is not to say, of course, that none were ready to cross such boundaries more self-confidently despite male objections, for example by participating in the women’s rights movement. But for the majority, their work in church groups, charity or social events was often based, as Anke Ortlepp has observed, “on a very conservative reading of gender relations, limiting women to the home as mothers, educators, and faithful supporters of their husbands and the church.” In this context, consumer activism offered a unique way to enter into and influence a significant area of American public life, an area in which both their husbands at home and the greater society accepted women as legitimate authorities.

Scholarship on German American female consumerism and consumer activism is rare, in part because historians have tended to interpret any

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680 Quoted in Kazal, Becoming Old Stock, 88.
engagement in the marketplace as a form of Americanization.\textsuperscript{682} Yet, the little work that has been done shows how women often found old-world familiarity in their navigation of American consumer culture.\textsuperscript{683} Following the lead of other American newspapers, for example, German-language dailies recognized women as readers and consumers and started publishing regular women’s pages long before their German counterparts did. “Capitalizing on women’s new roles as major shoppers in a rapidly expanding consumer society, publishers across the nation began courting the woman consumer.” \textsuperscript{684} Far from proposing an abdication of Germanness, German-language publishers recognized the importance of women and their choices in the marketplace to the coherence of the community and specifically aimed for the female consumer to stop the perceived erosion of a cohesive German ethnicity in the United States. Magazines such as the Milwaukee-based Deutsche Hausfrau, founded in 1904, informed its readers about the newest cultural and consumer trends and survived into the 1920s and 1930s with a circulation between 40,000 and 50,000 nationwide.\textsuperscript{685} The Hausfrau was a guidebook to the American

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\textsuperscript{682} Kazal, \textit{Becoming Old Stock}, 95-108.
\textsuperscript{684} Blaschke, “Communicating,” 316.
\textsuperscript{685} Blaschke, “Communicating,” 318. The magazine did experience a severe subscription crisis during World War I, when it lost more than half of its readership. Nonetheless, it continued until 1993, when it changed its name to \textit{Das Fenster}, “The Window”. As such it continues until this day, April 2013, under
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market for German readers that featured "a colorful mixture of sentimental Old World memories, serialized German fiction, news of the world, introductions to American life-style, household hints and domestic advice, a fashion section, plus extended space for letters to the editors and other avenues for reader participation."\textsuperscript{686}

Especially during and after World War I, German American women embraced their unique opportunities as providers of spiritual, cultural, and dietary nourishment. During the 1910s and 1920s organizations like the \textit{Hilfsverein Deutscher Frauen} ("German Women's Aid Organization"),\textsuperscript{687} the "Quarter-Collection (for Immediate and Permanent Relief)", founded by Margarete Cronau,\textsuperscript{688} or Chicago's Columbia Damen ["Ladies"] Club (CDC)\textsuperscript{689} established connections to the homeland as well as to other non-German organizations devoted to similar causes. The CDC, for example, engaged in activities initiated by important feminists like Jane Addams and supported diverse causes in Germany, such as a soup kitchen in Karlsruhe, the Red Cross in Berlin as well as German theatre and

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  \item the self-proclaimed slogan “America's oldest and most popular German language magazine.” See also: www.dasfenster.com [retrieved, April 30, 2013]
  \item Blaschke, “Communicating,” 318.
  \item Kazal, \textit{Becoming Old Stock}, 158-159.
  \item See, for example: “Quarter Collection kauft neues Heim,” \textit{New York Staatszeitung}, January 16, 1921, 1. Members of the “Quarter Collection” committed to donating a quarter every Sunday for the cause. The organization helped found several hostels across Germany, where sick children could recover. Among them was the “Margarete Cronau-Heim” near Altenberg, Saxony, which was later run by the VDA. It still exists today and continues to be named after Cronau.
  \item Harzig, “Creating Transcultural Space,” 134.
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\end{footnotesize}
education activities in Chicago. Countering critics both in the United States and in Germany, women proceeded carefully to avoid reprisals and accusations of negligence. As one contemporary writer noted, potentially to address critics like Kaergel or Halfeld, who saw public activism as a sign of assimilation and thus dangerous to German womanhood: "No fear need be entertained that German women will lose their femininity, as is sometimes remarked by those that would restrict the rapid rise of gifted women. The love of home and family is as vivid as ever in normal German women and will enable her to find the right course to assist in the uplift of her people." This spirit of trans-national continuity was also communicated through the pages of newspapers such as the Gazette-Democrat, often very similar in tone and message to the Heimatbriefe, advising women on their duties towards home and family. For example, a daily page, the Frauenseite [women's page], advised women on topics such as “Silence

690 Harzig, “Creating Transcultural Space,” 134-135. As I have discussed in Chapter 5, women also played leading roles in the committee that organized the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting in New York in late February 1921. And they did so with the explicit support from leading German-American men like George Sylvester Viereck, who provided female writers ample room to express their opinions in his magazine American Monthly. See for example: “How the White Woman Can End the Rhineland’s Black Horror,” Viereck’s American Monthly (VAM) 13:1 (March, 1921), 13; and “Women to the Front!” VAM 12:2 (April, 1920): 48.


692 Though it is not entirely clear, who wrote those lines, its location among the papers of the leading German-American activist Rudolf Cronau speaks to its origins in the social milieu of bourgeois migrant circles. “The German Woman,” Undated Essay, Rudolf Cronau Collection, GSP, Folder 16.

693 “The German Woman,” 22-23.
in marriage,” suggesting that it was their responsibility to recognize and alleviate emotional issues. Other columns provided advice concerning “The naughty child,” “Burned Dinner,” or “The Dear Vanity.”694 Another column told its readers: “The way to a man’s heart, is through his stomach. Therefore: Girls, wanting to get married, learn how to cook!”695 In these sections of the newspaper, the German heritage was frequently invoked. A regular series of weekly articles called “A Guide for Housewives” [“Ein Führer für Hausfrauen”], which contained recipes, beauty advice, and other tidbits of information, noted that the “German housewife in America is always eager to receive recommendations to expand her knowledge in the performance of her obligations as housewife and mother.”696 The column, which displayed images of women cleaning, cooking and reading with a child, suggested that it could help women master their “obligations” and thus reinforced a number of conceptions about the role of women in American society and the specific qualities that particularly German women brought to the task.

Not surprisingly, consumerism was one of the main foci of these advice columns. How were women to navigate the treacherous world of American consumer culture without belying their heritage? The “Frauenseite” regularly advised women on how to use make-up or how to dress. “Our

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694 “Das Schweigen in der Ehe” and “Das ungezogene Kind,” Gazette-Democrat, June 1, 1927, 3; “Angebranntes Essen” and “Die Liebe Eitelkeit,” Gazette-Democrat, June 15, 1927, 3.
696 See, for example, Gazette-Democrat June 1, 1927 or June 2, 1927, n.p.
German woman does not need to be dressed particularly elegant—she does not need make something of herself.” Unlike French women, the article argued, German women were always graceful: “They always carry a silent, bright flame deep in their heart, a holy belief in the victory of the good, a pious hope in the grace of God and a modest, warm love for Heimat, youth, and beauty.” 697 I am not suggesting that all German American readers accepted such advice without hesitation. It is difficult to determine how exactly women felt, since newspaper rarely provided space for readers to respond beyond the realm of domestic and foreign politics. But as the next section shows, many did indeed appreciate the newspaper and the advertisements therein as important guidelines for the retention of Germanness abroad.

4.3. Wanamaker Advertisement Controversy

In the final section of this chapter, I discuss the controversy around a discontinued series of advertisements in the Philadelphia Gazette-Democrat that aroused the anger and criticism of the newspaper’s readers, among them many women, who protested against the discontinuation of the ads as individuals and as members of German American organization. Though short-lived and minor in its extent, I maintain that the incident exemplified the continued importance of hyphenated belonging in the context of consumerism and mass culture. In

their attempts to reinstate the ads, German Philadelphians showed that even in 1932 their heritage mattered to them as they went shopping in the city’s department stores. The gradual disappearance of a diverse, hyphenated shopping experience was not merely the result of a disjointed migrant community or increasing assimilation among second-generation German Americans, but as importantly a consequence of economic pressures on producers and providers in the Depression marketplace.

In the spring of 1932 the John Wanamaker department store, a staple of Philadelphia shopping since the 1870s, decided to discontinue its advertisements in the *Gazzette-Democrat*. The ads had been printed in the newspaper since the late 1800s and were widely embraced by the readership until they disappeared in late April 1932. As a response, the newspaper received roughly 130 letters of protest. Russell Kazal has interpreted the fact that most writers complained in English as a sign that particularly younger German Americans now possessed the necessary language skills to succeed in American society and were thus no longer reliant on or interested in German-language newspapers. Using a familiar “measurement” of Germanness – language – Kazal argues that despite the protests, the letters showed “that consumer culture continued to attract German Philadelphians, in ways that enabled some to de-emphasize their

698 The department store wrote back to at least some of the complainants, usually using a standard response that cited “the necessity of curtailing our advertising expenditure.” Wanamaker also held out the prospect of returning the ads as soon as economic conditions allowed such a reversal. See, for example, John Wanamaker Philadelphia to Mr. Fred C. Gartner, June 2, 1932. HSP, Balch, Call Number 3469 Phil. Gazette Publishing Box 1 of 2.
ethnic identity while partaking of new collective identities of consumption, including those open especially to women.⁶⁹⁹ As key evidence Kazal cites a letter by Mrs. A. Castor who threatened to discontinue her subscription to the *Gazzette-Democrat* if the Wanamaker advertisements were not to return, since she did all her shopping there and it was her mother who did not want to give up the paper. For the younger generation, Kazal maintained, losing the Wanamaker ads “was more a matter of concern for their parents’ generation; given their language skills, they could always subscribe to an English-language paper ‘with the Wanamaker ad in it.’”⁷⁰⁰

Of course, Kazal’s argument reflects the larger reality of second-generation immigrants, who often felt less attached to a country they had never seen than their parents, who were born there. Nonetheless, he fails to capture the complexities of the protests and its implications for German American life. Language is hardly the issue here. Most Germans spoke both languages and it seems unlikely that they would have written to an American department store in German, even one they regarded as traditionally catering to German customers. By contrast, the vast majority of those who complained directly to Gustav Meyer, the publisher of the *Gazzette-Democrat*, wrote in German. Moreover, among the roughly 45 letters (of the original 130) still archived at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Mrs. Astor’s letter is one of very few that

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threaten to discontinue the paper. The majority of respondents recognized the discontinuation of the Wanamaker advertisements as a serious threat to their community. This was especially true for German American women, the majority of the writers. They protested as individuals or as members of ethnic groups such as the Women’s Auxiliary of the German Society of Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia Tumgemeinde or the German Club and Technical Association and clearly saw matters pertaining to shopping and consumption as their territory. As such, they were unwilling to give up on the ads, which they regarded as critical to the performance of their duties as household managers.

The arguments brought forward by the protesters centered around three main issues. First, there was the matter of tradition and history: John Wanamaker’s department store had been founded by the descendant of eighteenth century German immigrants, a fact celebrated by writers such as Rudolf Cronau and Albert Bernhardt Faust (see Chapters 3 and 4), who listed Wanamaker prominently and claimed him as a leader of German

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701 I found a total of two letters, including Mrs. Astor’s, threatening to cancel their subscription. The other one was from an unknown Philadelphian who wrote: “We don’t want your paper any more, unless the Wanamaker Store Adv. apier [sic] in it again[,] we sure do miss it!” A third respondent, Mrs. W. Loeb, did point to her mother as the main reason, why she wanted the ads back. Finally, Mrs. A. Feyler wrote that “now we are forced to buy an English paper,” suggesting that she, too, might be more inclined to discontinue her subscription if the ads would not return. (HSP, Call Number 3469 Phil. Gazette Publishing Box 1 of 2).

702 Though I was not always to determine the gender of writer, by my own count women outnumbered men 3 to 1.
A letter signed by William Moennig and Carl F. Haussmann, the latter a prominent figure in the affairs of German Philadelphia, who later became and archivist for the German Society of Pennsylvania, pursued this line of argument. German patrons, Moenning and Haussmann wrote, “favor the Wanamaker House for the German ancestry of the founder who frequently proclaimed his pride of the German blood in his Grand [sic] parents.” Another letter by the ladies auxiliary of the Philadelphia Turngemeinde brought forward a similar argument, claiming that Germans across the city “pride themselves of the German ancestry of the founder of the John Wanamaker Store.” And Mrs. Auguste Senger from Landsdowne, Pa. stressed how Wanamaker ads had been part of the German communal experience for the last 25 years of her life. Senger especially pointed to the “Writings of the Founder,” which were a prominent part of the ads and “which often are real gems of psychology, businessknowledge [sic] and common sense. These ‘writings’ are often commented on during our gatherings.” Even though John Wanamaker

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704 HSP, Call Number 3469 Phil. Gazette Publishing Box 1 of 2.
705 HSP, Call Number 3469 Phil. Gazette Publishing Box 1 of 2. Other examples include a letter from German Ladies Aid Society and a resolution by the German Ladies Aid Society of the German Society of Pennsylvania, which stated: “Inasmuch as the Germans, as a rule, pride themselves of the German ancestry of the founder of the John Wanamaker Store, it would seem to be of great advantage to the management of the John Wanamaker Store to at least cater to the same degree for the German trade, as they do for the English trade, by placing their daily advertisement in the German patrons’ favorite newspaper, the Philadelphia Gazette Democrat.”
706 HSP, Call Number 3469 Phil. Gazette Publishing Box 1 of 2.
himself had died in 1922, German consumers looked to the small columns for advice and inspiration. Much like the “Frauenseite,” the “Writings of the Founder,” though not exclusively aimed at German Americans, provided readers with a sense of access and belonging to American consumer culture – and, of course, with a sense of personal connection in the increasingly anonymous world of department store shopping.⁷⁰⁷

While a number of writers thus pointed to the long tradition of reading the ads over the past decades, an equal number acknowledged that they missed them for practical reasons. Advertisements, as Don Slater has argued, serve as “maps of modernity,” “authoritative (if unstable) ‘discourses through and about objects’ which allow us to orientate ourselves to the social meaning of things in a commercial world. Advertising thus replaces traditional authorities about such meanings (e.g. religion and custom) with a modern information system.”⁷⁰⁸ At a time, when many German Americans were less enthusiastic about membership in ethnic institutions dominated by social elites (while simultaneously agreeing with many of the arguments advanced by those elites), advertisements filled a cultural void. Through such strategies as the one employed by Wanamaker, many companies successfully convinced

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⁷⁰⁷ It should also be noted that such writing were directed specifically at women who were expected to make up between 80 and 85 percent of the audience for advertisements, See: Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 66; Daniel Delis Hill, Advertising to the American Woman, 1900-1999 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), vii.

⁷⁰⁸ Quoted in Slater, Consumer Culture and Modernity, 86.
consumers that they could help replace old authorities for the benefit of all. This trend was exacerbated by the disappearance of local merchants and small corner stores, as more and more Americans moved out into the suburbs and only returned to the city for their weekly trips to the department store. When the advertisements disappeared, it was the topic of some debate. "I [...] have been asked by quite a number of my friends why it is, that we cannot get the 'News' of the Wannamacker [sic] bargains in the Gazette," wrote Mrs. Elizabeth Hummel, "please see to it that we may see it again as we would like to take advantage of their bargain prices." Through the advertisements, readers of the Gazzette-Democrat felt they were informed about the best deals in town when it came to fashion, household items and other important products. Kate Krocker thus hoped that the ads would soon return, "for the best of the Germandom", after all, it was "very annoying to drive into the city at random, only to find out that it is better and cheaper to buy in a different store."709 Having shopped at Wanamaker for 35 years, Mrs. A. Feyler was "at a loss not seeing their daily advertising."710

The question remains: why did so many German Americans decide to protest the absence of the ads instead of simply switching their

709 Unlike the previous letters, Krocker's was in German. Translated by the author. HSP, Call Number 3469 Phil. Gazette Publishing Box 1 of 2.
710 HSP, Call Number 3469 Phil. Gazette Publishing Box 1 of 2. Similar letters, who lamented the loss of the ad as a "guide" were received from Mr. Arthur Marx (undated), Mrs. Ch. Hanne (May 25, 1932), Frau M. Hoeling (May 28, 1932), Mrs. A. Oster (June 1, 1932), and Hulda Schuelke (May 28, 1932), who asked (in German), why the Gazettedemocrat "no longer publishes this valuable guide [Wegweiser] to a shopping tour?"
subscription to one of the countless English-language newspapers that still published the Wanamaker ads, as any “assimilated” immigrant would likely do. To be sure, there were some who did. Kazal’s assessment of the “assimilating” effect of consumer culture is thus not entirely incorrect, though I would argue that many second-generation German Americans did not need to assimilate, mainly because they were born in the United States, had grown up bilingual and shaped the country as much as they were shaped by it. The point is that this example shows how many German Americans still depended on newspapers and other ethnic institutions that buffered their communal experience in the increasingly diverse and anonymous American city. This was the third, and arguably most important argument invoked by the writers. They understood that newspapers such as the Gazzette-Democrat were critical to the cohesion of German Philadelphia and that there was a mutual dependency between the newspaper and its readers. The ads thus not only served as a guide for the consumers, but also provided financial support for the newspaper and ensured “that our favorite journals may enjoy a full measure of Circulation and success in all of its various departments,” as one undated letter by the German choir “Rheingold” to the Wanamaker department store claimed. Without the advertisements, “our people” were at a “disadvantage.”711 More than simply an act of disenfranchisement against the German American citizen-consumer, discontinuing the ads was a

711 HSP, Call Number 3469 Phil. Gazette Publishing Box 1 of 2.
“mutual loss to both the Wanamaker Store and the German Daily Newspapers,” according to Mrs. Rosa Busch, the President of the ladies auxiliary of the German-American Federation of Pennsylvania.\footnote{HSP, Call Number 3469 Phil. Gazette Publishing Box 1 of 2. Letter undated.}

Maybe the totality of all arguments was best summarized in a letter written on May 25, 1932 by Albert Mansdoerfer. His family, he argued, valued Wanamaker for its prompt delivery and great service and because it had provided historical continuity during a chaotic time of change.

This store was as familiar to us as an old friend – after all, it was [at Wanamaker] where we bought our first piece of furniture, a ‘Standard’ sewing machine, which we are still using and if we need needles for it, we still go to the same saleswoman, who sold us this item more than a quarter of a century ago. […] How we loved going to Wanamaker’s, when a ‘good sale’ was displayed – no bargains – but tasteful, durable things – and while shopping we always had the opportunity [to listen] to the delightful sounds of the St. Louisen organ […]\footnote{Unfortunately, a section of the letter is stuck to the record book with glue, making parts of it illegible.} it almost felt like being in a German cathedral. The Wanamaker ad told us of all [those experiences] every morning in the ‘Gazette’ [sic] and now we miss that.\footnote{HSP, Call Number 3469 Phil. Gazette Publishing Box 1 of 2.}

Whether or not Wanamaker had actually tried to achieve an atmosphere of “Old World” familiarity: Many German Americans claimed the department store as one of their own and the ads as its guide. Their absence was debated with friends and neighbors, who wondered, according to Mansdoerfer, “why Wanamaker’s suddenly turn their backs [sic] on the Germans.” Far from simply accepting defeat, a coalition of
associations and individuals decided to do something about what they felt was an important institution in German American life. They knew that diversity was threatened by the economic depression and a nationalized consumer culture that preferred uniformity. Nonetheless they asked: “Wouldn’t it be possible to convince this department store to publish their advertisement in the German newspaper again – we are subscribing to the German morning paper, not least because of the kids so that they won’t forget the German [language].”  

Far from simply assimilating or giving up their ethnic peculiarities, many German migrants in the United States were still committed to the preservation of tradition and culture.

5. Conclusion

Ultimately, the attempts to have the Wanamaker advertisements returned were unsuccessful – just like many other attempts to preserve tradition and diversity in the face of an increasingly nationalized consumer culture. However, the decline of the diverse consumer marketplace, as it panned out during the 1930s, was a process much less smooth than has been accepted so far, at least in the case of German America. Its homogenization often occurred against the resistance of those who treasured German immigrant culture for its emotional value and for the access it provided to help navigate the complicated new world of mass consumer society. Therefore, it is misleading to argue, as historians have

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715 HSP, Call Number 3469 Phil. Gazette Publishing Box 1 of 2. See also the letter by Rudy Malessa, May 28, 1932.
done in the past, that German migrants simply turned away from their heritage and assimilated. While many migrants certainly embraced American consumer society, they often did so in ways that allowed them to stay connected to the past. This was especially true for women, since their role in the consumer marketplace extended beyond the domestic sphere. As mothers, they were expected to preserve the memory and traditions of the homeland and keep alive its language. But as household managers, they were also in charge of domestic finance and, thus, navigating the complicated American marketplace. For them, institutions such as the *Gazette-Democrat* provided valuable guidelines to American society, for example advertisements, which allowed them to compare prices and learn about the newest trends. Their commitment showed that many, though certainly not all, German American women merged their identities as women in the United States with the duty ascribed to them by the ethnic nationalism of German America. Ultimately, then, I suspect that the question why German American institutions and ethnic enterprises experienced such decline during the 1920s and 1930s has to be answered by tying their history into, first, evolving nationalized mass consumer culture and, second, diverging conceptions of Germanness in the United States and back home.

And vice versa. Investigating and answering such questions is not without consequence for the general history of the United States. During the 1940s and 1950s, the war experience and the baby boom increased
pressure on men and women to adhere to traditional visions of the nuclear family. The role of women in the mass consumer society reverted to, primarily, wife, mother, and consumer – and those who varied from the norm faced condemnation. What role did German Americans play in this process? To be sure, ethnic differences mattered less than they had a few decades before. Nonetheless, as I have shown in this chapter, ethnic traditionalists may have found ways to promote familiar values – traditional motherhood, separate spheres, gendered consumerism – in post-war America, thus driving the discourse instead of simply assimilating and passively accepting it. The history of American consumerism thus offers yet another field for scholars of German immigrants in the United States to explore the remnants of “Germanness” beyond language, (high) culture, traditions, and ethnic organizations.
Conclusion

On September 23, 2015, the journalist Erik Kirschbaum once more asked that familiar question, which perplexed so many historians and journalists in decades past and which has driven this dissertation: “What Happened to German America?” His answer, however, brought little new information. After World War I, Kirschbaum concluded, “those who could hid their Germanic roots; some switched their names; many others canceled their subscriptions to German newspapers, which virtually disappeared. Whatever vestige of German America remained after the 1910s was wiped out by similar pressures during World War II, not to mention the shame that came with German identity after it.”

I have argued throughout this dissertation that it is time to move beyond that paradigm. For one, I suggest that the period between World War I and World War II offers plenty of opportunity to trace the history of German migrants in the United States, and that ethnic identification persisted, if one is willing to look beyond traditional measures of “Germananness.” I have suggested different approaches to investigate the ways in which German migrants interacted with American society, for example its civic, racial, social, gender and consumer politics. The sources I evaluated for this dissertation – German American newspapers,

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contemporary German American histories, internal documents from immigrant organizations and the letters written by German Americans in the 1930s – offer plenty of evidence. They show that migrants in the United States continued to find ways to reconcile their German origins with their desire to be included in the American body politic. Instead of passively assimilating they used their transnational knowledge of racial and social relations, of gender roles and consumer society to actively shape the society they lived in. Instead of failing to adapt to the “American Way,” many migrants quite successfully became part of and shaped the America they called “home.”

At the same time, nothing comparable to Irish-American or Italian-American culture survived in German America, no proud remembering of the European past celebrated in popular culture and on the streets of the United States. The reasons for that absence cannot simply be located in the anti-German hysteria and the Americanization campaigns, which rarely, if ever successfully pressed immigrants of any group into “assimilating.”717 Instead, the answers lie in the disparate nature of the community, its inability to overcome internal divisions, and its failure to craft a transnational culture adaptive of American society, its conventions, values, and norms. Individuals adapted for sure, but the ethnic community did not.

Most importantly, however, at least in the context of this dissertation, many German Americans actively turned away from the Third Reich and its policies. While applauding Germany’s ostensible economic revival, few became permanent and unequivocal supporters of National Socialism during the 1930s. If we are to understand this process, simple dichotomies fall short. The historian Valdis O. Lumans, for example, has argued that while “a few [German Americans] were unabashedly Nazi sympathizers and saw themselves as true Volksdeutsche, the vast majority regarded themselves as Americans and valued their Germanness merely as cultural heritage, void of any political predispositions.”

Even Cornelia Wilhelm, who rightly laments the lack of critical engagement among German American scholars with the period, notes a diametrical opposition in the existing scholarship between National Socialist “race politics and Volksgemeinschaft” on the one side and Americanization on the other.

To be sure, there were many who simply celebrated their Germanness in cultural organizations. Yet, such a dichotomy obfuscates the interconnectedness of ethnocultural and political representations of national belonging. Among those involved in the German American Bund or other American organizations supporting the Third Reich, not all were simply unabashed Nazis and among those not involved, many were.

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718 Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 130.
Instead of simply viewing their origins as cultural heritage, many German Americans remained invested in the politics of the homeland. In fact, events back in the old world were one of the dominating factors in ethnic American life and among the leading topics in the ethnic press during the 1930s. The publishers of the *New York Staatszeitung*, for example, were initially elated about the rise of Hitler and the Nazis – they hoped, as did many German Americans, that a revival of German strength could also improve their status as citizens of the United States. While critical of Nazi anti-Semitism, the editors of the *Staatszeitung* viewed the accompanying violence as “temporary” and evaluated events in Germany with “some patience, some understanding and some optimism.” It was not until the late 1930s that the *Staatszeitung* took a stronger stand against the Reich and condemned its regime.\(^720\) The Steuben Society was more openly supportive of Hitler, but it too attempted to stake out a position that would allow its members to assert their Americanness while retaining their connection to the homeland. It frequently clashed with Jewish organizations and resorted to anti-Semitic rhetoric reminiscent of Nazi diatribes in Germany.\(^721\) And then there was the infamous German-American Bund, an organization that has garnered much attention both by contemporary observers and historians. But, as I have noted, its membership was small and it short-lived publicity was much less evidence


\(^{721}\) Kupsky, *The True Spirit*, 140.
of a particular German American consciousness than a representation of a new American culture less tolerant of totalitarianism and ethnic nationalism.\textsuperscript{722}

In fact, by the late 1930s, moderate German Americans had recognized that the American public had turned “on the German-American element in the mistaken opinion that we agree with the harassment, which is now being promulgated in Germany.”\textsuperscript{723} Many tried to position themselves accordingly. An editorial in the \textit{Baltimore Sun}, for example, called on German Americans to take a stand and denounce the Nazis: “Unless we Germans act, the people of the United States may be justified in believing that all Germans approve of the present German policies as announced by Herr Hitler. Germans in this country are peace-loving and law-abiding, but if we do not express ourselves accordingly, we may be looked upon with suspicion as emissaries of the German Government.”\textsuperscript{724}

German Americans had to choose sides. Among those who conversed with the VDA, this painful process was laid out in some of the letters sent back across the Atlantic in the late 1930s. “I have endangered many of my friendships here with my sympathies for Germany,” wrote Rudolph Blank from New York City to the VDA in September 1937. “I am a faithful [\textit{treuer}] American citizen, but one that clings to the tribal culture of Germandom.”

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{722} Kazal, \textit{Becoming Old Stock}, 263.
  \item \textsuperscript{723} Kupsky, \textit{The True Spirit}, 141.
  \item \textsuperscript{724} Editorial by Gustav Mühlenberg, published in the \textit{Baltimore Sun}, February 18, 1938.
\end{itemize}
Perhaps unlike any other, Blank’s letter speaks to that inner strife among many German Americans who, to use Blank’s words, attempted to “raise an understanding” for Germany, its culture and its people in the United States, but did not agree with the anti-democratic militarism of the Third Reich. Blank was clearly not a Nazi. In fact, he abhorred the regime and, not understanding the connection between the government and the VDA, he challenged the editors of the *Heimatbriefe* to put a stop to the regime’s “mischief *[Unwesen]*”. “Dear God,” he pleaded, “all of you help put an end to those enemies of Germandom.”\textsuperscript{725} Blank wasn’t simply an assimilated American. But in the United States, there was no place for his “hyphenated” nationalism anymore.

Many others were similarly torn between their love for the homeland and the pressures of American life. They were not sure whether or not to believe American newspapers, even though doubting the reports from Germany became harder and harder as the decade progressed and the Nazi regime became less and less apologetic about its actions. “We read so many things in the newspaper, you never know if it is true,” wrote Martha Hesse from Evanston, Illinois. “To be honest, sometimes I hope it is not true. It is not only nice things that one reads. But let the newspapers write what they write.”\textsuperscript{726} Her minced words do not reveal her real thoughts or relate to any specific event – it is the timing of the letter that is telling: It

\textsuperscript{725} Rudolph Blank to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1937–1491.
\textsuperscript{726} Martha Hesse to VDA, HSTA 12460, 46-1937-1828.
was written November 10, 1939, one day after the *Kristallnacht*, when the Nazis attacked and looted Jewish stores and synagogues, killing more than 80 individuals. Like many others, Hesse never wrote another letter to the VDA.

To be sure, many German Americans continued to be invested in the homeland and their contributions to the political discourse of the 1930s and 1940s certainly helped rebuild the German-American relationship after World War II. They had to tread carefully, of course, but many did so successfully. The *New York Staatszeitung* effectively maneuvered through the 1940s by appeasing authorities, who viewed all German newspapers with suspicion. The newspaper was published and sold until 1991. Even the Steuben Society found a way to survive the Second World War II. In the late 1940s, it began re-entering the political scene collecting relief funds for Germans across Europe and taking on an anti-Communist stance. It continued to defend “the German characteristics of self-reliance, personal sacrifice, and a capacity for hard work.” It still exists today.

This is not to say that ethnic institutions did not struggle. Many German-language newspapers all across the nation, like the *Philadelphia Tageblatt*, folded in the 1940s and the 1950s. German-languages services at religious institutions also faded away, though some still exist. But as

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728 Kupsky, *The True Spirit*, 144-158.
second, third and fourth generation German Americans grew up into an American society, whose culture and prosperity was the envy of the entire globe, it came as little surprise that there was less and less interest in institutions that attempted to foster the culture, language and traditions of a nation that had just caused the single greatest catastrophe in human history: World War II and the Holocaust. “It was no time to take pride in German heritage.”

In the light of that history, it is surprising how resilient the historical artifacts of German America have proven to be. There are countless communities across the Midwest and beyond that still bear the traces of German influence to this day: In architecture, regional culinary traditions, and heritage sites, for example at the University of Wisconsin, where one of the largest student cafeterias, the Rathskeller, pays tribute to its German roots; or in celebrations of German origins, particularly the many, many Oktoberfests from Pierz, Minnesota and Glendale, Wisconsin to Chicago, Illinois and Cincinnati, Ohio, which hosts the second largest in the world after Munich, Germany. But more importantly, German migrants left their traces American culture by participating in the “white flight” that shaped American suburbia as we know it today; by working on the transatlantic relationship after World War II and creating a lasting partnership between the United States and Germany; by establishing American brands in Germany, thus contributing to post-war U.S.

730 Frederick Luebke, quoted in: Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock*, 264.
prosperity; or by participating in the anti-Communist agitation of the Cold War era.

To underline that argument, I want to provide just one additional example: Historians of the modern conservative movement often find the roots of anti-Communism among the frustrated white working class that moved from the urban centers into the suburbs in the 1930s and 1940s and formed a “fusionist consensus,” in the words of the journalist E.J. Dionne, around a common anti-Communism. Early traces of these ideas, though not yet consolidated around a movement, can be found in many of the letters written to the VDA, especially from German American living in urban areas. For example, in 1935, Albert Brueckner from Flushing, New York wrote:

> It is today an open secret in the United States that the so-called New Deal of President Roosevelt has its origins in Moscow, Roosevelt is often connected to Jewish and Communist actions and the recognition of the Soviet government by him at the time caused bad blood among the real Americans and by that I mean those that have been living here for several generations.

Brueckner observed the rise of Communism in the United States and denounced several New Deal initiatives like the National Recovery Act (NRA) as unconstitutional. His hope was with the presidential election of 1936. But, he wrote, “it would obviously be completely wrong to propagate National Socialism in the United States. […] Let us leave to the United States…”

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States its own salvation and redemption from the danger that is approaching with rapid strides.” I am convinced that “salvation” was in part shaped by German Americans like Brueckner. American history would be incomplete without an investigation of the transnational origins of such debates. This dissertation does not actively write such history – but it opens a methodological door for others to follow.

At the same time, to keep the narrative focused on the conceptual renegotiation of German American historiography, this dissertation disregarded plenty of intellectual and historical ground. For example, German American life beyond the 1920s and its influence on American society overall cannot be accurately portrayed without exploring the role of religious institutions, ethnic “safe spaces” where German language was spoken, its culture and values preserved, well beyond World War I. Protestantism, Judaism, and Catholicism furthermore provided common grounds, where German migrants could form alliances with other migrant groups and where they could help shape American views on a variety of discourses, from changing views on gender and family to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly U.S. relations with Israel. Old world religious views and experiences helped shape the new world politics of such influential characters as Henry Kissinger, Hannah Arendt or Reinhold

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732 Brueckner to VDA, HSTA 12460, 41-1935-483.
733 One of the central messages that the VDA sent through its communication channels was that National Socialism had restored order against social chaos, economic misery and Bolshevism. Cmp. Jacobsen, *Hans Steinacher*, XLI.
Niebuhr. They could not be explored here, but they should be in future research.

Moreover, the history of German migration to the United States, the fate of the ethnic community and its interaction with American society at large are also relevant for historians of contemporary Germany. While this dissertation’s narrative has mostly taken place in the United States, I suggest that it would be an instructive comparison to examine how conceptions of “Germanness” have drifted apart on both sides of the Atlantic during the first and the second half of the twentieth century – and how they didn’t. Culture and language, rather than civic norms, have been stubbornly defended as markers of “Germanness” both in the United States and in Germany and the debate on its ethnic roots are far from over. As hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Subsaharan Africa stream into Germany, debates on German womanhood, the preservation of its Kultur and the erosion of its language emerge once more.  

Historical perspectives such as the ones offered in this dissertation complicate black-and-white narratives by showing the historical precedent and its possible consequences.

Most importantly, however, there is a rich history here that has so far been left unexplored. Originally, I set out to investigate the subjective

historical environments of eight German Americans, who took part in a 1942 German World War II mission to sabotage the American war effort. Two of them defected and turned themselves in to the FBI, betraying the other six and thus causing the mission to fail. In a widely reported trial, the two defectors were sent to prison and eventually deported. The other six were executed in August of 1942. I was interested in the consequences of this trial on the families of the failed saboteurs, on the German American community, and on American society as a whole. Moreover, I wanted to know what drove them to return to Germany during the 1930s and sign to participate in a mission that brought them back to the United States. When I began my research, I quickly learned that the research on German American life in the 1930s and 1940s simply didn’t exist – that I had to set out and do it myself. This dissertation is the result. Along the way I have come along countless fascinating stories of German American life that are worth exploring. Some of them I have touched upon in the pages above. I hope I will inspire others to probe deeper and resuscitate the lost histories of that period.
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