

Germans and the Union:
Immigrants' Struggle Against Assimilation in the Civil War Era

by
Nathan W. Diebel

A THESIS

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Stacey Smith

The United States of America is founded upon immigration, and Germans are one of the first European ethnic groups to settle en masse in North America. The common narrative of immigration is that of the “melting pot”; characterized by assimilation of cultures into one ‘super’ culture. German immigration has often been categorized under the “melting pot” theory, however, the German population of the 1800s turns out to be more autonomous and sovereign than the taught narrative of immigrants. Nativism pervades US immigration history. Prejudicial attacks and forced assimilation on incoming people, fostered by the hatred of the “Other”, is all too common in American history. Through evidence found in journals, diaries, and newspapers Germans resisted Americanization and instead, strengthened the bonds of their Germanness. This changes the immigrant narrative from one of assimilation, to one of choice.

Key Words: German, immigrant, American Civil War, nativism

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

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Germans and the Union:

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Introduction

Captain August Horstmann, of the Union army, commanded an ethnic unit of Germans during the American Civil War known as the “Flying Dutchmen.”¹ He wrote his parents in Germany about his “Flying Dutchmen,” expressing great admiration that was shared both among the recruits and their office corps. Horstmann, a particularly patriotic German, insisted that he and his men fought for, “preserving the Union,” and the ideals that the Union held were certainly part of Horstmann’s patriotism as well.² He, like many other Germans living in the US during the American Civil War, leapt at the opportunity to fight for their adopted nation, which symbolized newfound liberties and freedoms the immigrants acquired had since leaving their disunified “Fatherland”. Horstmann and his men were not alone in their enthusiasm for the Union cause. Germans formed many other ethnic regiments in both the northern and southern armies. They also would not be the only Germans to turn away from this same cause in just a few years’ time, when the phrase “Flying Dutchman” became a nativist slur to scapegoat German immigrants.

This paper will examine German immigrants in the United States during the American Civil War period. It will explore their varied motivations for entering the army, North and South. This paper will also focus more specifically on the experiences of Germans during the war as nativist attacks on their ethnicity rose to the surface and

¹ August Horstmann to his parents, June 16, 1862, in *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home*, ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 120.

² August Horstmann to his parents, *Germans in the Civil War*, 122.

created tensions amongst the rank and file soldiers as well as among civilians on the home front. How were these nativist attacks on Germans articulated? Did they cause waning support for the Union? How did Germans respond to being treated as enemy aliens in the Confederacy? And finally, at the end of the war, did Germans choose to keep to themselves instead of integrating into society as a result of these nativist attacks?

At the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, volunteers were easy to come by on both sides. There was a great swelling of patriotism and sense of duty that arose among all peoples in the previously united states. The newly arrived German immigrants were no exception. Thousands of Germans volunteered for both the Union and Confederate Armies and thousands more would be drafted in by the end of the Civil War. The Northern Germans were the most fervent in their support for the Union, displaying their beliefs through service. However, this paper argues that the wartime experiences of German soldiers, including nativism and perceived unfair treatment, led to the weakening of support for the Union and the strengthening of ethnic bonds within German communities.

The amount of literature on the American Civil War is enormous, and historians have examined German involvement in the conflict already. They have studied the nativist attacks on Germans in several ways. Author Christian Keller wrote his book *Chancellorsville and the Germans* primarily on experiences of German communities following the battle of Chancellorsville in 1863, arguing that it was this Union defeat that vilified the German people to the American population.³ Soon after the battle finished, northern English-language newspapers reported the defeat, labeling the 11th Corps, which

³ Christian B. Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007)

contained thirteen ethnic German regiments (half of the entire corps), to be at fault. These newspapers coined the derogatory terms “flying Dutchmen” and “cowardly Germans” to describe the alleged behaviors of German soldiers.⁴ Anne Bailey makes a similar point in her book, *Invisible Southerners*, when she describes the common stereotypes that are found in the works of past historians. Bailey disputes the claims that German soldiers were competent verging on clinical, a generalization that began in the days of the Prussian military and continued through the Second World War.⁵ Both authors emphasize the understatement of American nativism during the Civil War in previous literature.

Through focusing on the actions of Germans in the military, by using accounts of soldiers themselves while also highlighting the turbulent career of the German made hero, Franz Sigel, the previous authors effectively overview German service members’ emotions. Stephen Engle takes another approach to illustrating nativism against the German population. In his essay, “Yankee Dutchmen,” Engle argues that nativism took many forms during the 1860s; primarily in ways that resembled the now defunct “Know Nothing” party. These included attacks on Catholic Germans, assaults on the German tradition of beer drinking, the blocking of military promotions (most notably Franz Sigel) and even giving Germans less priority when it came to medical attention.⁶ The Germans of the southern states also faced nativist attacks, these are described by Dean Mahin in his book, *The blessed place of freedom: Europeans in Civil War America*, as first a general distrust escalating to arrests, trials, and murders.⁷ Letters from Texan Germans confirm

⁴ Keller, *Chancellorsville*, 123-124.

⁵ Anne J. Bailey, *Invisible Southerners* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006) 8.

⁶ Stephen D. Engle, “Yankee Dutchmen: Germans, the Union, and the Construction of a Wartime Identity,” in *Civil War Citizens: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in America’s Bloodiest Conflict*, ed. Susannah J. Ural (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 32-37.

⁷ Dean B. Mahin, *The Blessed Place of Freedom: Europeans in Civil War America*, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2002).

Mahin's argument, giving firsthand accounts of imprisonment for "disloyalty" and the flight of many Germans away from an abusive state.⁸ These letters also provide context in which Germans would volunteer for the Confederate Army out of fear or sometimes a similar sense of duty that their northern brothers felt.

Finally, historian Kristen Anderson examines the political fears of some Germans in the post war period in her journal article, "German Americans, African Americans, and the Republican Party in St. Louis." Anderson argues that some Germans feared the enfranchisement of African Americans in the border states where their numbers were high.⁹ The Germans were afraid that the newly empowered slaves would vote with the Republican Party in Missouri which, in the eyes of the Germans, had become nativist in its policies. While they differ in methodology and focus, these four authors agree on the presence of nativism during the American Civil War being a catalyst for actions Germans took following the conclusion of the war.

Another approach some historians have taken to study German participation in the American Civil War is to analyze German patriotism and support for the Union and Confederate causes. Keller, Bailey, and Engle examine letters that clearly define some feelings of German people towards the Union. While Mahin, Michael Everette Bell, and another of Bailey's articles describe the experiences of the Germans living in the newly seceded states. Engle has a magnificent quote in his article from Corporal Ludwig Kühner writing to his brother on his motivation for fighting. Kühner declared, "there's nothing

⁸ Julius Schlickum to his father, December 21, 1862, February 20, 1863, in Paul N. Spellman, "'This Fateful Revolution': Letters of a German-Texan Unionist, 1862-1863," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 121, no. 3 (December 19, 2017): 304-15. And Minetta Altgelt Goynes, *Lone Star and Double Eagle: Civil War Letters of a German-Texas Family* (Fort Worth, Tex.]: Texas Christian University Press, 1982).

⁹ Kristen L. Anderson, "German Americans, African Americans, and the Republican Party in St. Louis, 1865-1872," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no. 1 (2008): 34.

else we can do if we want to preserve freedom for ourselves and our children.”¹⁰ The other authors, who write about the Union, provide similar examples of rampant patriotism amongst the German population of the time. Bailey’s arguments, while focused on the state of Texas, provide specific examples of how Confederate politicians conspired against all Germans in the South. All of the authors that describe southern life for Germans directly point to the creation of several laws by the Confederate government as acts of nativism. These laws, the authors argue, caused a surge in mistrust of Germans on the part of American born Southern as well as many violent incidences throughout the war.

Allison Efford takes another approach, similar to that of Anderson, of focusing on the politics of the German people living in America. In *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era*, Efford highlights the importance of the anti-slavery movement in the prewar period. This was driven by the exiled liberal “48ers”, German immigrants that had immigrated from central Europe which would eventually become Germany. The “48ers” continued to call their homeland the “Fatherland” even though, at the end of their attempted liberal revolution, Germany remained broken up in principalities.¹¹ The German revolutions were similar to those occurring throughout Europe at the time. She also emphasizes how influential German-language newspapers were in showing the German peoples’ support for the Union, a point that Engle corroborates.¹² Engle argues that the German newspapers equated saving the Union, and presumably reuniting the country, with saving the American values that the German

¹⁰ Engle, *Yankee Dutchmen*, 17.

¹¹ Alison Clark Efford, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era* (Washington, D.C. : Cambridge: German Historical Insitute ; Cambridge University Press, 2013) 55-59.

¹² Efford, *German Immigrants*, 57.

immigrants had come to love.¹³ Most historians in the past had emphasized the importance of the “48rs” on German motivations to fight for the Union and Allison Efford writes in that same vein. However, other authors, who have focused more on the individual soldiers’ motivations, have cited patriotism and defending the immigrants’ new home and hearth as the main motivator for Germans during the war.

The final way that historians have studied American Civil War German participants has been through a contrast of assimilation and enclavement. Once again, Engle writes on this topic. He describes the athletic clubs, Turnvereine, that German communities created, and which promoted political involvement and contact between American citizens and Germans.¹⁴ Similarly, Bailey writes on the assimilation of Germans, but focuses on the South. Specifically, Bailey describes how, in Texas, the Germans were given a choice: assimilate or remain amongst your own people but quietly.¹⁵ Many Texan Germans did what their northern brethren did according to Efford, Engle, and Keller. They enclaved. All authors who have written on the Civil War era Germans agree that almost universally in the northern states Germans enclaved, however, Bell provides an example of a German community doing the exact opposite in Charleston, South Carolina.¹⁶ Enclaves included inner city neighborhoods as well as whole towns. These places could remain “ethnically pure” and allow for Germans to keep their traditions of beer drinking, their language, and their religious practices. Moreover, young men who joined the army to prove themselves as, “not only foreigners,” but also

¹³ Engle, *Yankee Dutchmen*, 17.

¹⁴ Engle, *Yankee Dutchmen*, 13.

¹⁵ Bailey, *Invisible Southerners*, 4.

¹⁶ Michael Everette Bell, “Regional Identity in the Antebellum South: How German Immigrants Became ‘Good’ Charlestonians,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 100, no. 1 (1999): 10.

Americans, lost their enthusiasm for Americanization.¹⁷ In short, patriotic Germans returned to their sheltered homes by the end of the war.

Historians have looked at German immigrants in America generally during this time, but specific research on German American participation in the war does not seem complete. Authors have contextualized nativism against German people and explained some of the outcomes of its existence. In this literature few authors have illustrated how specific nativist attacks decreased support for the Union cause and how this, in turn, allowed the Germans to further seclude themselves until the First World War. The authors have also not attempted to synthesize the experiences of Germans in both the North and the South, contextualizing what their lives mean for the immigrant narrative in the United States. This paper will explain the crucial connections between the nativism that German soldiers and civilians experienced, and the disintegration of their support for the Union and Confederate causes, as well as their eventual return to their German enclaves.

This paper will analyze both primary and secondary documents to prove the connection between nativism and enclavement. Many of the authors mentioned previously are used as secondary sources to contextualize the war and German involvement before, during, and after. Extensive use of letters and diary entries will show the motivations and mindsets of German immigrants involved in the conflict, as well as provide personal accounts of nativism. These letters also address German attitudes towards Americanization versus ethnic bonding. This paper will also examine translations of German-language newspapers from the St. Louis area, a hotbed for

¹⁷ Engle, *Yankee Dutchmen*, 16.

German revolutionaries and extremists. The articles will show how Germans at home received news of their boys on the frontlines and how German civilians felt about the war. News articles were often written to influence the readers one way. For half of the war, German-language papers would be Unionist, however, they would begin to promote German ethnicity and lose their Union rhetoric. Additionally, this paper will make use of military correspondence in the Union army which will highlight the ways leaders thought of German units and the German people that they supervised. Historians typically have used similar sources; however, they often have refrained from drawing conclusions from newspaper stories heralding German victories, nativists incidents, to the enslavement of the German people.

First, this paper will illustrate why Germans admired the Union cause and were active participants as well as provide context for understanding German ethnic units in the army. With the foundation of support created, the clashes began between Americans and their German immigrant counterparts. Using primarily letters and secondary accounts, as well as military communications, this paper will examine the specific ways Germans felt discriminated against while the Civil War raged on in the background. Additional letters and secondary sources will examine the lives of Germans in the South, attempting to draw comparison to the Germans living in the Union. The conflicts these two groups faced set the stage for German social retreat. Finally, this paper will argue that the persecution the Germans felt during the war led directly to the waning of their support for Unionist ideals, militant resistance in the South, and ultimately seclusion heading into the postwar era.

The Union

The American Civil War is characterized as a “Brother against Brother” conflict, and in many families, this was true. However, not all of the participants were from the United States. The Germans were one of the war’s largest participants, after American born soldiers themselves. Thousands of German men served in the Union and Confederate Armies throughout the entire war, which lasted four long years between 1861 and 1865. The German communities in the United States supported the war effort as if they had been part of the original Thirteen Colonies. In 1869, four years after the war’s end, B. A Gould published a report for the United States Sanitary Commission attempting to quantify how many soldiers fought for the Union by ethnicity. One of the difficulties with Gould’s findings is that ethnicity was not recorded until the organization of the provost-marshal-general’s office in 1863.¹⁸ According to the study’s findings, roughly 176,817 immigrants, born in Germany, volunteered for the Union army, outdoing Irish enlistment by more than 30,000 men.¹⁹

German involvement in the war is stark in contrast to the national emotion towards immigrants of just a few years prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. The Know Nothing Party during the 1850s built its platform on anti-immigration sentiments targeting German and Irish immigrants for their beer drinking practices and their Catholic beliefs.²⁰ Many Americans supported the Know Nothing immigration policies, but other aspects of the party were too radical to draw much attention. It dissolved before the war broke out with many of its members joining the Republican ticket.

¹⁸ Albert Bernhardt Faust, *The German Element in the United States* (Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 522.

¹⁹ Faust, *The German Element*, 525.

²⁰ Keller, *Chancellorsville*, 12.

The anti-immigrant atmosphere of pre-war America suffocated attempts of German immigrant assimilation and supported ethnic enclavement. Ethnic enclavement manifested in the creation of German centered communities within large cities, such as New York, Cincinnati, and Chicago. Even small towns composed of primarily German families began to dot the map of America.²¹ However, even though German immigrants and American-born Germans tended to keep to themselves, they made obvious attempts at assimilation before the war. Many German communities created Turnvereine, athletic clubs that promoted political involvement and outreach for their members.²² A German teacher, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, created the Turnvereine in the early 19th century. They were first intended to promote health and vigor, though they also helped German youth prepare to defend their nation against Napoleon. German businesses in America also helped the upper class of the ethnic group become Americanized, breaking language barriers. In some southern cities these wealthy German businessmen even owned slaves.²³ Even though some German immigrants' attempts at Americanization prior to the Civil War were successful, mostly for business reasons, a majority of Germans remained passive in molding their ethnicity. The coming of the war would change that completely.

Before April 12, 1861, when the first shots were fired at Ft. Sumter, German men filled volunteer offices offering their services. A letter from Charles H. Volk, an artillery captain, to President James Buchanan illustrates the willingness of German soldiers to fight for the Union even before the war had started. Volk wrote, "The majority of my

²¹ Engle, *Yankee Dutchmen*, 15.

²² Engle, *Yankee Dutchmen*, 13.

²³ Emile Dupre, to his mother, November 21, 1860, in *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home*, ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 40.

company consist of German-born citizens, who have all sworn to uphold and support the Constitution, which oath they are now willing to seal with their services, and in its defense are willing, if necessary, to sacrifice their blood or lives.”²⁴ German willingness to fight only grew once the United States declared war on the Confederate states. Within months, several dozen regiments of Germans were raised in the North and many more began organizing across the nation. During this time, a unit of soldiers had to be approved by the government to be part of the army, which stood as a formal recognition of service to the country. A letter to the Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, arrived on August 9th, 1861 from Alex Ramsey requesting that his unit be recognized.²⁵ Ramsey stated his desire to lead a regiment of cavalry made up of Germans living in Minnesota, claiming them to be “thoroughly drilled” as soldiers back in their own country.²⁶ Louis Blenker, of the famous Blenker’s Division, sent in his own letter describing the pace at which regiments from New York and Philadelphia formed. He claimed that, “The formation and organization of German regiments... is, comparatively to the number of recruits and the war spirit of the German population, going on very slowly.”²⁷ Blenker claims here that there are more Germans willing to participate than the army can organize, adding to the notion that Germans were enthusiastic and patriotic volunteers.

It is clear that Germans were enthusiastic about joining the military to fight for their adopted country. Their motivations, however, were varied. Some joined for the

²⁴ Charles H. Volk, to James Buchanan, January 24, 1861, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ed. Robert Scott (Pasadena, Historical Times, 1985), 56.

²⁵ Alex Ramsey, to General Simon Cameron, August 9, 1861, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ed. Robert Scott (Pasadena, Historical Times, 1985), 394.

²⁶ Ramsey, *The War of the Rebellion*, 394.

²⁷ Louis Blenker, to Major-General McClellan, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ed. Robert Scott (Pasadena, Historical Times, 1985), 458.

stable employment and promise of food. Alexander Dupre is an example of such a recruit who justified his enlistment to his parents in this way.²⁸ Captain August Horstmann understood his duty in a completely different light than Dupre. Horstmann believed in his, “fight for freedom and the preservation of the Union...my adopted homeland” and insisted to his parents that he would have glory and honor if he died defending the Union, “Much the same as it is in Germany.”²⁹ Horstmann’s letter represents a different group of Germans that participated in the Civil War. They did not seek merely food or pay, but glory, honor, and defense of particular ideals. Horstmann speaks with the voice of a “48er”, a group of radical German exiles that fully supported Abolitionists and despised the South for its, “lazy and haughty Junker spirit.”³⁰ Junker, used in this context, refers to the landed aristocracy of Prussia, which to the “48ers”, were the core problem with their “Fatherland”. While the “48ers” had loud voices and strong political power, particularly in Missouri, they did not represent the whole German ethnicity in the US. However, Germans did hold close the liberties and freedoms that the US had given them upon arrival. These rights would motivate the German population to support the nation that had given them.

Newspapers played a pivotal role in shaping how other people in the United States saw Germans. The editors of newspapers had enormous power to control public impressions of the nation, the war, and even certain groups of people. One such article that articulates how the editors wished the public to see German immigrants comes from

²⁸ Alexander Dupre, to his parents, July 14, 1861, in *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home*, ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 46.

²⁹ Captain August Horstmann, to his parents, June 16, 1862, in *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home*, ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 122.

³⁰ Captain August Horstmann, *Germans in the Civil War*, 122.

the *Cincinnati Daily Press*' June 1st, 1861 issue. The article consists of military correspondence that describes a German regiment at Camp Dennison while out on parade. The author writes that "a thousand brave German soldiers came out upon the field...The Regimental drill was one of the most perfect actions I ever witnessed... The commands were given by the bugle, and not a voice was heard above the tramping of feet as the soldiers moved to the order of the notes."³¹ The author continues his high praise of the German soldiers describing their zeal, reading of the Bible, and frequent singing of songs.³² This is just one example of English-language media attempting to paint German immigrants in a particular light. At the beginning of the war, these portrayals aimed to persuade the American people to accept their German brothers in arms. Such cross-cultural relationships also proved the righteousness of the Union cause through highlighting the willing participation of people who had only recently adopted the United States as their home. English-language newspapers would, however, begin to turn on the Germans. Following several defeats in battle and with ethnic tensions rising back home, slandering the immigrants became an obvious tactic to strengthen the majority in the north of their ethnic and moral superiority.

The transition of Germans from enthusiastically accepted patriots to an ethnicity under siege happened swiftly, over the course of only two years. By that 1863, German regiments became embroiled in many battles and even claimed to have saved the state of Missouri for the Union.³³ And yet, while the Civil War raged on, Germans came face to

³¹ Stephe., "Special Letters from Camp Dennison," *Cincinnati Daily Press*, June 1, 1861, 3.

³² Stephe., "Special Letters," 3.

³³ Steven W. Rowan, James Neal Primm, and Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincoln, Mississippi State University Libraries, *Germans for a Free Missouri: Translations from the St. Louis Radical Press, 1857-1862* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983) 261.

face with a new front in the war. This one, however, could not be defeated with bullets or cannon. Nativism, born in the 1850s, resurfaced when German immigrants emerged from their enclaves. Germans, surprised by the assault, fought strongly against nativist attacks, but even patriotism could not stop the deep seeded bias Americans held for their immigrant neighbors.

As thousands of German men entered the Union Army, German and American culture came into full contact for the first time. As the two became exposed to each other, the previous decade's nativism reappeared. Nativism emerged among native-born Union soldiers as well as the media, and nativists specifically targeted people of German ethnicity. Nativism showed itself in various forms, the day-to-day contact between Union soldiers, the perceived conspiracy against the German hero Franz Sigel, and the damning of the German 11th Corps who were routed at the Battle of Chancellorsville. Each version of nativism affected different parts of the German community and few Germans escaped attack.

Nativism surfaced early in the war, even before the disastrous Union defeat in May, 1863 at Chancellorsville. German activities in the Union at this time centered in and around St. Louis, Missouri where a strong German enclave resided. Missouri, being a border state, was the center of attention throughout the entire war, but especially in the first two years as the Unionist and Secessionist civilian populations fought their own civil war to control the state's capital. Just outside St. Louis' city limits, private militias and eventually national armies fought several battles.

The German population of St. Louis staunchly supported the Union cause and were elated when the highest-ranking German officer, Brigadier General Franz Sigel, in

the Union commanded troops to save Missouri from secession. In mid-1861 General Sigel had little military success, but the victory at Camp Jackson and another at Pea Ridge soon after earned him adoration from German immigrants throughout the United States. The German people were so transfixed with Sigel that they tied their own success in the nation to his success in the army. In support of this, when Sigel tried to resign his command after several embarrassing defeats, German newspapers blew up with the story. The papers claimed Sigel had been, “continually disparaged” by American officers above him, so much that he felt out of place in the Union Army.³⁴ This ostracization reflected how Germans themselves were beginning to feel.

The general in command of the Missouri theater, H.W. Halleck, did not help ease ethnic tensions when he wrote a letter on January 6th, 1862 to President Abraham Lincoln, “You have no idea the character of the material I have to work with. The German troops are on the brink of mutiny. They have been tampered with by politicians...”³⁵ Several days later President Lincoln replied in an utterly “Lincoln” way that “The Germans are true and patriotic, and so far as they have got cross in Missouri it is upon mistake and misunderstanding. Without a knowledge of its contents Governor Koerner, of Illinois, will hand you this letter. He is an educated and talented German gentleman, as true a man lives. With his assistance you can set everything right with the Germans.”³⁶ Lincoln clearly held admiration for German immigrants and vouched for their character, dismissing General Halleck’s worries as a miscommunication. He may

³⁴ Rowan, Primm, and Frank and Virginia Williams, *Germans for a Free Missouri*, 298-300.

³⁵ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. (Washington, 1880), 490.

³⁶ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 826.

also have seen them as an asset to the Union, as they made up the largest force of immigrant soldiers in the Union Army, one that he was willing to placate to remain on good terms with. Politicians and military leaders obviously had their biases against their Germans counterparts. The German language newspapers sensationalized these stories depicting discrimination at a high level of society. Discrimination was not limited to the politicians and officers, however; the day-to-day soldiers experienced nativism as well.

In 1863 Sergeant Wilhelm Francksen lay wounded in a hospital in Baltimore, Maryland for several months recovering from a wound he received while fighting in the Battle of Gettysburg earlier that same year. During his time in hospital, Francksen wrote about his quality of care. He depicted a German orderly as a kind-hearted man who “does what he can for me.”³⁷ Conversely, Sergeant Francksen described the American doctors and nurses as xenophobic, claiming that Americans, “think the immigrants are only good enough to work for them, and they cheat them whenever they can.”³⁸ Francksen supports a common sentiment that Germans soldiers reported throughout the war. Not only did they receive medical treatment slower than their American counterparts, but they also rarely had updated equipment or sufficient food.³⁹

American soldiers were creative in the names they gave their German comrades with the incorrect term ‘Dutch’ used as a descriptor for Germans. Common nicknames included “Damn Dutch” and the infamous “Flying Dutchmen,” which was popularized after the Union defeat at Chancellorsville in 1863. The Battle of Chancellorsville proved

³⁷ Sergeant Wilhelm Francksen, to Theodor, December 1, 1863, in *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home*, ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 145.

³⁸ Sergeant Wilhelm Francksen, *Germans in the Civil War*, 145.

³⁹ Engle, *Yankee Dutchmen*, 28.

be a pivotal point in German-American relations, not only among the troops, but the media began to take up and spread the mantle of anti-German nativism.

Union forces were engaged at Chancellorsville from late April 1863 to early May. The battle ended in defeat for the Union and would be remembered as Robert E. Lee's greatest victory over the North as his Army of Northern Virginia, composed of 60,000 men, sent the 100,000-man Army of the Potomac out of Pennsylvania. It did not take long for the Union government to begin investigations into what occurred in northern Virginia.⁴⁰ From the beginning, blame was placed solely on the 11th Corps that routed when a surprise attack came from legendary Confederate general, Stonewall Jackson. Half of the 11th Corps was comprised of German ethnic regiments who were deployed on the front lines during the final day of battle. This logically led to blaming those German regiments for fleeing in the face of the enemy. On May 8th, only two days after fighting ceased at Chancellorsville, an article in the *Orleans Independent Standard* publicly shamed the 11th Corps. The author of the article wrote, "Two attacks were made up on our center at Chancellorsville, but the rebels were repulsed with loss. Late in the afternoon a heavy force of the enemy, led by Stonewall Jackson, dashed vehemently against our right wing. Howard's corps, formerly Sigel's, composed mainly of Germans, broke and fled disgracefully before this onset, running completely through Devens' corps, and neither threats nor entreaties could rally them again."⁴¹ Not only does the article cement the idea that the 11th Corps is majority German, but it characterizes them as cowards (one of the most damning statements that can be said about soldiers). The

⁴⁰ Keller, *Chancellorsville*, 1.

⁴¹ A.A. Earle, "The Great Battles in Virginia," *Orleans Independent Standard*, May 8, 1863, 2.

author also chose to point out the connection between the 11th Corps and General Sigel who, at the time, had temporarily resigned after tarnishing his fledgling career.

By making this connection between Sigel and the soldiers, American audiences made the conclusion that not only had the German soldiers performed poorly at Chancellorsville, but that they had been trained most recently by a failed German general as well. This painted the Union defeat as a systemic *German* problem, not a Union-American one. This article was one of many that made deep cutting attacks into the German ethnicity. Other articles questioned the Germans' ability to fight in a wooded area or their sobriety during the attack claiming that, "The battle of Chancellorsville was fought, and lost by the bad behavior of the German corps..."⁴² The defeat at Chancellorsville was portrayed by the papers as a German-made disaster and, in turn, these stories caused Germans to reevaluate their loyalties. No longer would Germans speak out of their patriotism for the "Union cause"; instead, German-language newspapers that previously covered grand Union victories subsequently focused only on the involvement of German regiments in the war. German soldiers and civilians turned away from American society and halted the process of Americanization that had begun with the Civil War.

Following the Battle of Chancellorsville and the outpouring of American hostility towards Germanic immigrants, German newspapers began to move away from publicizing Union victories. The papers instead focused on German victories, even though the Germans were fighting as part of the Union Army. This practice emphasized the ethnic bonds that Germans shared with their neighbors and turned the community

⁴² "Washington Correspondence," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 18th, 1863, 2.

focus to an introspective one. In his book, Keller argues the importance of ethnic newspapers in drawing German communities closer together, noting that “Ethnic editors were powerful people in their respective communities and played a major role in how members of those communities interpreted the world around them.”⁴³ German-language newspapers drew their readers closer together and reaffirmed their cultural identity when the society around them was filled with hate and distrust for immigrants in general.

German men and women in the North showed fervent patriotism in the early 1860s influenced by their desire to impress their adopted nation and to protect their new-found civil rights and freedoms. Other Germans, mostly “48ers”, had Abolitionist ideas that also played into their motivations, but these ideals were not representative of the main German population in the US. Despite Americans’ initial welcoming of German soldiers and support for the war, old nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment came to the forefront. Events that unfolded during the Civil War contributed to anti-German support in national papers, such as the Union defeat at Chancellorsville. The day-to-day discrimination stories German soldiers returned home with also motivated the ethnic group to rescind their previous patriotism. At the tail end of the war, Germans returned to their enclaves, which they had largely abandoned in favor of showing support for the Civil War. German communities came closer together and resisted Americanization until the First World War.

The Confederacy

The northern states were not the only place where German immigrants settled in the 19th century. Thousands of native Germans inhabited the southern states by 1830 and

⁴³ Keller, *Chancellorsville*, 8.

many more would arrive before the outbreak of the American Civil War. These people shared many commonalities with their brethren who settled in the North, such as religious diversity, familial ties, and ethnic enclavement. Germans in the South faced many of the same difficulties of nativism living in a nation with a strong history of nativist and anti-immigrant sentiment.

German immigrants settled primarily in three southern states: Virginia, Louisiana, and Texas. More than 53,000 of the estimated 70,000 Germans who resided in the eleven states of the Confederacy lived in these states with 30,000 inhabiting Texas alone.⁴⁴

Throughout Louisiana, Georgia, Virginia, Texas, and South Carolina pockets of vocal Unionists support persisted for the duration of the war. Germans were often at the center of these groups.⁴⁵ Between German communities across the South shared many similar experiences with those in the North. They enclaved into small ethnic settlements to escape assimilation and loss of their heritage, as well as organized anti-immigrant groups like that Know-Nothings.⁴⁶ In these enclaves, Germans continued their traditions through language, religion, and food ways. Such an achievement was hard fought for as the southern American population tended to be more anti-foreign than the people in the North. This provided additional challenges to Germans during the antebellum period as well as during the war.

The main challenge immigrants faced in the South was the general distrust of foreigners by local governments and people. Germans were not exempted from this hostility. Southerners often described German immigrants as the “scum of Europe”, the

⁴⁴ Bailey, *Invisible Southerners*, 3.

⁴⁵ Mahin, *Place of Freedom*, 67-70.

⁴⁶ Bailey, *Invisible Southerners*, 5, Bailey *Militant*, 210.

“filthy Dutch”, and other such prejudicial statements.⁴⁷ Much of this hatred derived from German involvement in the American Revolution almost a century earlier when the Hessians, German mercenaries, fought against the colonial rebels in aid of the British.⁴⁸ Southern hatred of Germans was amplified by the fact that many Union soldiers were German-born or ethnic Germans themselves. Hatred in the South presented itself in similar ways as it did in the North. Attacks rained down on the German immigrants in southern newspapers and the proclamations of local governments throughout the war.

In the mid-19th century, American brokers marketed Texas to Europeans as a brand-new addition to the profitable land of the United States, one that had not yet been completely gobbled up by greedy corporations. Land brokers encouraged Germans to settle and create farmsteads, but they were not told that much of the arid state was inhospitable to fragile crops.⁴⁹ German settlers represented a vast number of the new people living in central and west Texas. The land was harsh, but that was not the only difficulty the newcomers faced. Nativism and a push for assimilation struck Germans hard, though their enclaves remained largely intact. The anti-foreign sentiment, however, forced Germans to keep silent on issues such as slavery, or else risk even more anger of their white Southern neighbors.⁵⁰ With the coming of the Civil War, Germans were again forced into deciding whether or not to stand on their values of freedom and liberty that many could not find in their home nation, or go with the general consensus of their state.

During the Texas secession convention in 1861, the state printed 2,000 informational fliers in German and distributed them throughout the state’s primarily

⁴⁷ Mahin, *Place of Freedom*, 65.

⁴⁸ Mahin, *Place of Freedom*, 65.

⁴⁹ Bailey, *Invisible Southerners*, 4.

⁵⁰ Bailey, *Invisible Southerners*, 5.

German counties.⁵¹ While a majority of the Germans in the North expressed anti-slavery and anti-secessionist views, the opinions of Texan Germans were inconsistent. Comal County, which was at the center of the German settlements in central Texas, overwhelmingly voted *for* secession.⁵² Conversely, Gillespie County, a German majority county in West Texas, voted 398 to 16 *against* secession.⁵³ One of the main causes for the disparity was the threat of Native American attack.⁵⁴ The western counties of Texas bordered Native land and people there constantly feared raiding. In the years before the Civil War, the federal government built a series of forts along this border and created a new cavalry division to provide protection to settlements in Texas. If the state seceded those federal troops would be evacuated, leaving West Texas German communities vulnerable to attack.⁵⁵ This motivated these Germans to vote against joining the Confederacy. In addition to the Native threat, Germans were under persecution by the newly formed Confederate government in the form of loyalty policies.

One German family, the Coreths, represented the dilemma that many German families faced. The two brothers of the family, Rudolf and Carl, faced a drastic decision: either they volunteered for the militia or go into hiding from recruitment officers and risk being discovered to be roped in anyway.⁵⁶ This risk was not tied strictly to German families in Texas. All across the South, young men and their families had to swear loyalty to the Confederacy and serve in the military under new Confederate law or risk punishment. Immigrant men often served in the militia home guard, so as to not cause

⁵¹ Bailey, *Invisible Southerners*, 11.

⁵² Bailey, *Invisible Southerners*, 11.

⁵³ Bailey, *Invisible Southerners*, 11.

⁵⁴ Bailey, *Invisible Southerners*, 11.

⁵⁵ Bailey, *Militant* 211.

⁵⁶ Carl Coreth to Rudolf 17.

conflict amongst the troops and to keep them close to their families.⁵⁷ In August 1861, the Confederate government passed the Banishment Act. This legislation required oaths of loyalty to the government. Those who refused would be given forty days to leave the Confederate States, and “disloyal” citizens who did not leave would be treated as hostile aliens.⁵⁸ The Coreth brothers and their family decided, as many other German families did, to swear loyalty while keeping their true Unionist ideas to themselves.⁵⁹ Some families did not follow this route however, and instead took to further enslavement or even flight.

In 1862, with tensions already high, the Southern government passed a conscription act requiring service of all men between the ages of 18 and 35. This included foreign born men as well. As a result, those families who had kept to themselves, primarily in Texas, were now forced to either openly swear loyalty to a despicable cause or be in a state of rebellion. In Texas, Germans that did not join the armed forces were now acting in direct defiance of Confederate orders, causing a local Confederate general, Hamilton Bee, to declare martial law in April of that same year.⁶⁰ His troops scoured the hill country where many of the dissident Germans lay in hiding. When the soldiers found Unionist Germans, they arrested them and brought them back to San Antonio to stand trial.⁶¹ Julius Schlickum was one such unfortunate Unionist German who was caught by the Southern soldiers and stood trial for his “crimes”. A court charged him with “general disloyalty”, for celebrating Union victories and other such hostile behaviors.⁶² He was

⁵⁷ Mahin, *Place of Freedom*, 70.

⁵⁸ Bailey, *Militant* 212.

⁵⁹ Goyne, *Lone Star* ii.

⁶⁰ Bailey, *Invisible Southerners*, 14.

⁶¹ Julius Schlickum to his father 309.

⁶² Julius Schlickum to his father 310.

found guilty and sentenced to jail for the duration of the war. However, Schlickum had made plans with his compatriots before his arrest for his escape from prison.⁶³ They completed the rescue operation the night after Schlickum's imprisonment and made off west. There they were joined by many other Germans fleeing Texas; however, they were betrayed, though Schlickum did not know by whom, and Confederate soldiers soon found them. On August 10th, 1862, battle ensued causing casualties on both sides. A few Germans were able to escape, including Schlickum.⁶⁴ The results of the Battle of the Nueces (also known as the Nueces Massacre) and the names of the nineteen dead German Unionists spread throughout Texas. Texas was the site of defiance and loyalty by its German population, but their complicated narrative did not end in Texas.

South Carolina presents one of the most interesting cases of divisions among Germans and exemplifies the broader tensions in American culture of the period. Generally, South Carolina's German population, being rather small compared to Texas, was uniformly made up of loyal Unionists. Many fled the state to escape persecution from the authorities and their neighbors or applied to the Prussian consulate for foreign citizenship status to remain undrafted.⁶⁵ However, this was not the case in South Carolina's largest city of Charleston. Here, nearly 2,000 Germans resided as urban dwellers.⁶⁶ These Germans lived very different lives than their cousins in the North and were different than other German inhabitants of Southern cities, such as Richmond, Virginia. Unlike other Germans, those in Charleston integrated and *assimilated* instead of

⁶³ Julius Schlickum to his father 310.

⁶⁴ Julius Schlickum to his father 313.

⁶⁵ Mahin, *Place of Freedom*, 71.

⁶⁶ Mahin, *Place of Freedom*, 71.

separating themselves from their American born neighbors.⁶⁷ Many factors led to a different experience for these German Charlestonians.

Germans have lived in Charleston since the American Revolution with the Hessian mercenaries settling before Antebellum immigration began. In the 1830s German immigration rose in Charleston, preempting German immigration in other parts of the US.⁶⁸ The consequence of this early immigration was assimilation. The German culture of Charleston is older than other cities in the US, and this allowed the American-born citizens to familiarize themselves with their new neighbors or, in some cases, accept Germans in positions of power. German Charlestonians had integrated into the economy of the city by 1861 when the Civil War broke out. Integration caused Germans to accommodate slavery into their moral outlook. It is here that the one important divide in Charleston becomes clear, one of class. Wealthy Germans desired the status quo, to keep the economy booming and the money rolling in. They favored the Confederacy. Poor Germans, those without enough technical skill to acquire better jobs, feared emancipation of the slaves and a flood of free workers competing for their jobs, and for this reason they supported secession. Middle class Germans, skilled and educated people reviled slavery, but were too dependent on the economy their fathers and grandfathers had integrated into to resist.⁶⁹ While many more Germans lived in cities other than Charleston, no other urban Germans, except perhaps those in Cincinnati, connected more with their city than the German Charlestonians. Certainly, no other Southern German enclave integrated or interacted with one specific city more than Charleston.

⁶⁷ Bell, *Regional Identity*, 9.

⁶⁸ Bell, *Regional Identity*, 12.

⁶⁹ Mahin, *Place of Freedom*, 72.

The role of German-language newspapers for mustering Union support and turning the American public against Germans is well documented in this essay, and Charleston had an effective paper of its own. The *Deutsche Zeitung*, literally the “German Newspaper”, became a heavily influential mode for the German citizens of Charleston to embrace Southern ideals, not least of which was secession.⁷⁰ The editor of the *Deutsche Zeitung*, Franz Adolph Melchers, made sure that his newspaper represented strong pro-southern ideals. It did not shy away from “the South’s ‘peculiar institution’,” unlike the *Richmonder Anzeiger*, Richmond’s German-language paper.⁷¹ Newspapers were wildly influential during this time period, just as news media is today. For Germans living in a new country they could ill afford to ignore the goings on of the country around them. However, in Charleston, not all of the Germans were new, and the city was certainly more accustomed to their presence than any other in the South.

The Germans of the South lived distinctive lives from those in the northern states. In Texas, Germans faced persecution from the beginning of the war, a theme that all Germans in the South encountered. While distrust of foreigners existed in the Union, it was amplified in the Confederacy by public opinion and by the creation of national laws that singled out immigrants and outsiders. There were similarities, however, as nativism proved to be rampant in both societies, and Germans often chose to enclave amongst their own ethnicity to escape attack. It is undeniable that German immigrants played important roles in both the North and the South, both at home and in the military. Regardless of the similarities and differences of their experiences, both sides fought to preserve their

⁷⁰ Bell, *Regional Identity*, 9.

⁷¹ Bell, *Regional Identity*, 10.

ethnicity from assimilation; not allowing the American narrative of the “melting pot” to persist.

Conclusions: Postwar German Enclavement

Many history textbooks describe the United States as a “melting pot”. The argument for the use of this term is that the US is home to a diverse group of people and that as they have lived here, their ideals, values, and customs have been mixed up together to create what American society is today. Recent historical thought has pushed back against the “melting pot” theory. Instead, historians have argued that society promoted assimilation or “Americanization” when immigrants arrived in the United States, discounting the traditions and values that other ethnicities brought to the table. The Germans during the Civil War era faced the same choice, to either be Americanized or to reject assimilation and to enclave themselves with their ethnic brethren. At the start of the Civil War, many Germans leapt at the opportunity to prove their “Americanness” through patriotism and military service. Some even expressed their desire to be recognized as Americans and not only as immigrants.⁷² However, with their exposure to nativism and discrimination, the German people began to retract their desire to Americanize.

While Germans typically did not express their displeasure with how they were being treated in terms of “Americanization”, they did actively work against assimilation into American society in multiple ways. Petty Officer Eduard Treutlein, for example, initially supported Ulysses S. Grant following the Civil War; however, three short years later, he angrily claimed that, “[for Americans], the almighty dollar is... the only final

⁷² Engle, *Yankee Dutchmen*, 16.

purpose,” and that the Anglos, “are doing everything in their power to keep the Germans under their thumbs.”⁷³ Other Germans resisted assimilation by remaining active in German American activities as Albert Krause did. While he rose to a powerful position of city engineer in Buffalo, New York, Krause remained associated with several German American associations.⁷⁴ The effect of German participation in both American and German activities stalled German assimilation. Germans did not see the need to give up their own traditions to fit within American society. The Turnvereine continued to meet and emphasize German involvement in their communities, German unions became a staple in industrial work, and even a couple of German leagues sprang up in the midst of the Civil War.⁷⁵ Germans remained both half in American society and half in their own. While many Germans had lives outside of their ethnic neighborhoods, the culture and German identity that small towns or city sections created remained integral to German ethnicity.

An additional facet of the post-war era that cannot be ignored is family. Nearly all of the Germans in Kamphoefner and Helbich’s work ended up marrying another German and live in a German neighborhood of a large city. In many cases, these couples settled in German founded cities or even returned Germany.⁷⁶ Their decisions to marry people from their own country further delayed the Americanization of Germans. Centralized communities of Germans also created barriers to assimilation. For example, the fact that German-language newspapers continued to exist for a nearly a century after the Civil

⁷³ Petty Officer Eduard Tretlein, to his parents, July 1865, in *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home*, ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 237.

⁷⁴ Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 218-219.

⁷⁵ Engle, *Yankee Dutchmen*, 41.

⁷⁶ Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, #42, 23, 36, 18.

War is proof that the German ethnicity remained strong and independent.⁷⁷ Newspapers played an important role in German patriotism and the expression of nativism, and they were also a mode of German expression of enclavement.

It is clear from the wartime experiences of German immigrants and German-Americans, drawn from journals, letters, newspaper articles, and other secondary sources, that nativism directly contributed to the withdrawal of Germans from American society and their move to enclavement during the late 1860s. Evidence reveals that the German people who immigrated to the United States had initially desired to become more American. Unfortunately, when the two cultures connected for the first time, clashes occurred, and the Germans retreated into their own people. This further complicates the narrative of the American ‘melting pot’ by challenging the idea that all cultures were able or even encouraged to live side by side, rather than assimilation.

Historians began to debunk “melting pot” theory many years ago, however, this theory still pervades in American society today. Changing from the “melting pot” theory moves the immigrant experience away from one of assimilation and instead proposes that throughout US history, immigrants did not succumb to American societal pressures. New historical thought argues that immigrants choose their experience, whether they integrate into society or remain ethnically bound. The Germans of the 1800s are a perfect example of this. The Civil War sparked German desire to emerge from isolation, however, native born Americans would not warm to the idea of sharing their social space with the immigrants. The Germans were attacked and eventually felt forced into the choice to enclave if they were to remain a sovereign ethnicity by the end of the war. These attacks

⁷⁷ “Chronicling America’s Historic German Newspapers and the Growth of the American Ethnic Press,” National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), accessed March 11, 2019.

not only led to the physical enclavement of Germans, but also may have contributed to an increase in pan-German identity in the United States following the Civil War.

German immigrants exposed themselves to what the United States had to offer and chose to resist. This flies in the face of what the US believes the immigrant narrative ought to be. Although the focus of this research was on German immigrants who lived in the US during the Civil War, it seems clear that this lens could be applied to various other marginalized groups throughout the United States' history and the same conclusion could be drawn. Immigration is the foundation of United States history and the two entities can never be separated. Debates and issues on this subject continue as the country grows larger and more diverse. However, upon closer examination, nativism and discrimination has always pervaded the US, eliminating the idea that the 'melting pot' has ever existed.

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