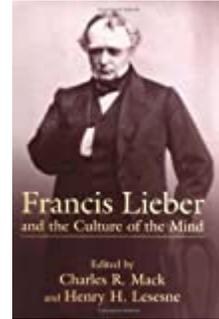


Charles R. Mack, Henry H. Lesene, eds. *Francis Lieber and the Culture of the Mind: Fifteen Papers Devoted to the Life, Times, and Contributions of the Nineteenth-Century German-American Scholar, with an Excursus on Francis Lieber's Grave, Presented at the University of South Carolina's Bicente.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005. Table of contents + illustrations. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-535-7.



Reviewed by Giles R. Hoyt (Max Kade German-American Center, IUPUI)

Published on H-German (December, 2006)

Francis Lieber's Considerable Influence on American Thought

The significance of Francis (Franz) Lieber—revolutionary, diplomat, philosopher—has long since been documented. He served as a conduit for continental thought and contributed to the content and structure of American thought in the nineteenth century. The present collection of essays originates, as the title suggests, from a symposium commemorating the bicentennial of the founding of the University of South Carolina and its most illustrious faculty member, Francis Lieber. The preface mentions that Lieber was less than popular during the Confederate period because of his anti-slavery stance. In fact, he left South Carolina for Columbia University in 1856, but Lieber did spend twenty years at the South Carolina College, as the university was then known, and he did much of his significant work there. It is, therefore, appropriate for the university to claim Lieber. His name graces a number of buildings there, and the university has a collection of Lieber's papers and other artifacts of his life. The majority of his papers are, however, in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. This collection of papers further verifies the considerable importance of Lieber as a major factor in American thought.

Culture of the mind is an appropriate title, for that was Lieber's main focus: the encouragement of individual reflection that would produce civil liberty in the body politic. His position was basically conservative in that he realized the necessity for ethical norms to provide the guidelines for unruly human behavior. This extended from his *Manual of Political Ethics Designed Chiefly for the Use of Colleges and Students of Law* (1838-1839) to the famous "Lieber Rules" that in 1863 became part of the U.S. Code for behavior of troops in the field. These rules, which are still in use today, became the basis for the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. It is interesting to note that Lieber became a U.S. citizen and was in many ways a conservative American, but still had a grand cosmopolitan vision of the interconnectedness of humanity. Indeed, he and his family were deeply involved in the events of American history and he lost a son who fought for the South. In spite of his deep disillusionment with German political life, he intended to return to Germany when unification took place in 1871 in order to aid the establishment of a potentially new society. Unfortunately his life ended in 1872, before he could lend a hand. The brief prologue written by Peter Becker provides a useful

overview of Lieber's work and life.

The essays are all rather short, but this is not necessarily a problem. Generally each gives a compact look at some aspect of Lieber's thought. The essays are included in six sections, including "Slavery and the Constitution," "The South and the Civil War," "Thoughts on Armed Conflict," "Hermeneutics and Linguistics," "Practical Reason" and "The Art of Living." These topics certainly concerned Lieber, a man fully engaged in the world of his time. The first section's two essays, by Paul Finkelman and Michael Vorenberg, make clear that Lieber was a practical man not above careful compromise in positions on issues, in particular in the very conservative southern state of South Carolina. While Lieber was not a friend of slavery, he did not publicly or directly write or speak against it until his move in 1856 to the North. He was even the holder of household slaves. However, as Vorenberg points out, his work on constitutional law and advice to Abraham Lincoln was extremely important to the ultimate success of the civil rights amendments.

Lieber's relationship with the South changed his view of humanity, darkening it, and he gradually moved away from a Kantian view of morality to a position closer to the English empiricists, as noted by Michael O'Brian—a position he was inclined to anyway. He generally shared fellow southern intellectuals' predilection for free trade and decentralization. Certainly he was the original "intellectual as migrant," constantly traveling and absorbing the ideas around him, like George Santayana and Hannah Arendt after him, a "dissatisfied but valuable breed." O'Brian convincingly and succinctly shows the divided nature of Lieber's sensibilities, which reflected Romantic and Enlightenment, German and Anglo-American thought. An overview by Robert Wolfe of the roles of Lieber and his son Norman as archivists in preserving and indexing Confederate documents concludes the section on Lieber and the South.

The section on armed conflict begins with a useful if somewhat derivative overview of Lieber's Military Code. L. Lynn Hogue discusses the application of Lieber's code, which was created for the Union forces, up to the present. Two further essays on the topic, by James Turner and Gregory Raymond, review the theory behind Lieber's code of conduct and its international ramifications. Both essays discuss the current thinking regarding the conduct of war compared with Lieber's original thought. Lieber's work continues to be significant and remains much of the basis for legal and moral considerations of waging war.

Lieber's views and observations on language are per-

haps less well known than much of his other work, but nonetheless remain useful. The essays by John Catalano, on Lieber's theory of homophany, the interplay of mind and sign, and Stuart Davis, on Lieber's observations of African American English, make use of ample evidence. The work by Davis is part of a larger study and constitutes one of the most interesting essays in the collection. Lieber was one of the very few, if not the only, educated people to observe the language of slaves carefully, including his own household help. Davis shows how Lieber's observations support both the Creole argument and the English-dialect argument concerning the origin of African American English. Both apparently contributed in various ways to the makeup of African American English.

Jeremiah Hackett and James Farr discuss the philosophical basis of Lieber's ethics and political theories. They succeed in succinctly presenting useful insights into Lieber's work. Both essays examine Lieber's work in terms of his contemporaries and sources with very good notes, although the mechanical problem of errors in the footnoting of Hackett's essay is unfortunate. Farr recognizes also the gaping problem areas for more modern sensibilities, namely Lieber's disavowal of women's political rights and lack, early on, of any discussion of slavery in his books on ethics and politics. Lieber trimmed back the role the Enlightenment had assigned to natural law and stressed the science of politics applied to the structures of government and society. He stressed human rather than natural rights. Lieber was clearly the premier political theorist of his time. Indeed, Columbia College appointed him in 1856 as the country's first professor of history and political science.

In the section entitled "The Art of Living," essays by Steven Samson and Charles Mack discuss Lieber's function as an emissary of intercultural intellectual relations, and might well be better called "Lieber as Cultural Emissary." Samson describes Lieber's use of German scholarly traditions and methods combined with Anglo-American political traditions. He also further treats the effect Lieber and others, such as Carl Follen and the New Englanders George Tricknor and George Bancroft had through their infusing German educational experience into American higher education in the antebellum period. Samson also provides a good overview of Lieber's views on civil liberty and government, especially given that earlier essays in the collection also treat these topics in some detail. Lieber was consistent in his commitment to institutional liberty and saw no distinction between human rights and property rights. In spite of his dedica-

tion to the one moving, organically developing world civilization, he remained very American. Mack's short essay on Lieber and the arts also shows Lieber to be very American in his broad appreciation of the various forms of art, despite initially being culturally starved in Columbia, South Carolina. He very much appreciated the classical and neoclassical rather than the baroque or northern Renaissance. Lieber appreciated art directly and emotionally. Mack uses the essay to ask for a reconsideration of our modern approach to art criticism, which has lost its way in "contemporary discourse imprisoned by pedantry and polemic" (p. 147). Lieber would likely agree.

An epilogue bearing the title, "The United States and Germany in the Time of Francis Lieber, 1798-1872," is the penultimate essay in the collection. Here Hermann Rupieper provides an overview of the generally, sometimes even very, positive relationship, between the German states and the United States up until the unification of Germany under Prussia. This relationship began with Frederick the Great at the time of the American Revolution and continued through positive trade relations in the nineteenth century and direct involvement of Amer-

icans in the Paulskirche provisional government in 1848 and 1849 to Prussia's and Otto von Bismarck's support for the North during the Civil War. In fact, during the latter, Germany became the main market for U.S. government obligations. All these factors were further supported by the general appreciation of private citizens for Germany as a major source of scientific and cultural education. From the formation of the Reich on, however, competition for colonies and world markets along with concern about Germany's growing military might and rigid system began to cloud the relational horizon severely. Francis Lieber played an active part in the good relations, and, as the author points out, would have been shocked at the events of the first half of the twentieth century.

The book, however, does not end with the epilogue. It includes a final excursus by Susan Olsen, Historian of Woodlawn Cemetery in New York, where the Lieber family plot is located. It gives the history of that plot and an interesting overview of Lieber family genealogy. This collection of essays is a valuable addition to our understanding of Francis Lieber and American intellectual history.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Giles R. Hoyt. Review of Mack, Charles R.; Lesene, Henry H., eds., *Francis Lieber and the Culture of the Mind: Fifteen Papers Devoted to the Life, Times, and Contributions of the Nineteenth-Century German-American Scholar, with an Excursus on Francis Lieber's Grave, Presented at the University of South Carolina's Bicente*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. December, 2006.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12632>

Copyright © 2006 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.