



Josef Raab, Jan Wirrer, eds. *Die deutsche Präsenz in den USA—The German Presence in the U.S.A.* Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008. 848 pp. EUR 69.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-8258-0039-0.



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A Substantial Collection in Need of Connections

Linguist Jan Wirrer and literary scholar Josef Raab have compiled thirty-seven papers from a conference held in 2004 at the University of Bielefeld in Germany. Their volume provides an eclectic mix of essays on German ideas, images, and people in the United States, with contributions on history, culture, language, literature, law, architecture, the media, and music. *Die deutsche Präsenz in den USA—The German Presence in the U.S.A.* is not only interdisciplinary but also transatlantic, drawing on the talents of senior researchers in North America and Europe. The result is a bilingual collection. Twenty essays appear in German (accompanied by English abstracts) and seventeen in English (with German abstracts). When all is said and done, the book runs to 848 pages.

Although *Die deutsche Präsenz in den USA* is ambitious in scope, it is not sophisticated in conceptualization. According to their introduction, Wirrer and Raab aspire to contribute to the "wider recognition and deeper understanding" of the German influence on the United States (p. 24). The editors maintain that "the impact of seven

million German immigrants and their descendents upon American history and culture has been largely neglected in historical and cultural research, and publications on this topic are still comparatively scarce" (p. 14). They predict that readers will be "surprised" to hear of the extent of the German presence in the United States (p. 13). Forgoing the opportunity to draw larger conclusions, Wirrer and Raab sketch the history of German immigration to the United States and enumerate the book's contents. The chapters are organized into eleven sections according to broad—and overlapping—categories, including "German Influences in American Culture" and "Germans and Germany in Internal and External Conflicts." Rather than reiterating the editors' taxonomy, this review will introduce selected essays before evaluating their cumulative effect.

Belying the claim that the volume attends to neglected topics, many of the papers showcase projects that have already yielded publications. Texas-based historian Walter D. Kamphoefner reports on his work that documents and analyzes chain migration.[1] Anke Or-

Ortlepp, a German-educated historian who now works in the United States, describes the German American women's movement of the late nineteenth century. Focusing on radical groups, she argues that German women demanded American citizenship. Ortlepp's important findings would have been even more significant if she had contextualized immigrant feminists within a German American community that was hostile to the Anglo-American suffragists who preached temperance. Her work on Milwaukee (*âAuf denn, Ihr Schwester!â: Deutschamerikanische Frauenvereine in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1844-1914* [2004]) would support such an endeavor.

Hartmut Keil, a German historian, also draws on his continuing research in a sketch of working-class Chicago.[2] Keil embraces the model of labor migration that Dirk Hoerder—himself a German American scholar—has developed (*Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* [2002]). Another historian from Germany, Wolfgang Helbich, summarizes his analysis of German letters written during the American Civil War. He notes that the 10 percent of Union soldiers who were born in Germany rarely expressed a patriotic understanding of their service. Estranged from and ridiculed by their native-born counterparts, immigrants intensified their ethnic identification.[3] Interestingly, Helbich takes a strikingly quantitative approach to a cultural issue.

Other essays in *Die deutsche PrÃ©senz in den USA* are more literary. A German professor emeritus of American studies, Peter Freese, argues that images of Germany in American novels âcontain [an] unresolved tension between praise and denunciation, deep admiration and enraged condemnationâ (p. 294). In the nineteenth century, James Fenimore Cooper considered German cleanliness worthy of admiration, while in the wake of WWII, Erica Jong found it sinister, âa carefully contrived facade to intimidate foreignersâ (p. 299). Many writers have dwelled on Germany's âcontradictorinessâ (p. 294). As Raab notes in his piece, while Mark Twain found many German customs âquaint and bewilderingâ and the German language downright âperplexing,â he considered many German traits âendearingâ and many German achievements impressive (pp. 386, 387, 383). Freese's and Raab's essays raise the question of whether the relationship between Americans and Germans has been uniquely conflicted. By global standards, their two countries are similar. Although the United States and Germany have never been bound by the ties of empire, immigration exposed such men as Twain to the German language and German culture without leaving home. When Americans con-

structed an image of the German âother,â perhaps this dynamic ensured it would be distinctively conflicted.

Taking a different tack, German legal scholar Oliver Lepsius argues that American jurists learned from Germans at critical junctures. He proposes that from 1870 to 1918, Americans became interested in German administrative law and legal education. After 1930, individual "migrants" from German Europe also leavened American legal scholarship. In addition, the German language left traces in the United States, as several essays by linguists note. Putting such observations in perspective, Hans J. Kleinsteuber analyzes how German TV, a German-language television channel created by a consortium of German broadcasters and supported by German taxpayers, failed to crack the American market. Kleinsteuber focuses on the early twenty-first century, offering a fascinating insight into the German presence in contemporary United States.

The most satisfying studies in the work under review are those that compare and contextualize. Ohio-based geographer Timothy G. Anderson, for example, discusses how Westphalians responded when the proto-industrial production of linen was upset during the mid-1800s. Migration was one of several strategies that these Germans deployed. Anderson's careful local study complements his appreciation of world systems theory. Stefan Rinke, a German historian of Latin America, systematically compares German migration to the United States and South America during the nineteenth century. His essay emphasizes the importance of patterns established during the colonial period, networks, landholding practices, and stereotypes of the receiving country.

Less substantial offerings also appear in *Die deutsche PrÃ©senz in den USA*. Melissa Knox-Raab lampoons Americans's commercialized appropriations of German food, and Wolfgang Braungart laments the state of American instruction in German literature. The volume concludes with an excerpt from a novel by Thomas Meinecke and a report of the exhibit of German Americana that accompanied the Bielefeld conference.

Die deutsche PrÃ©senz in den USA would have benefited from more connections and fewer contributions. The existence of German American encounters probably will not surprise anyone tempted to open this imposing book. Many edited collections have tackled the subject.[4] Supported by educational and governmental organizations, especially the German Historical Institute in Washington DC, scholars of German America hardly require another such edition to confirm that they conduct

research.

Wirrer and Raab's affirmation that Germans have influenced the United States is also a problematic rationale for a scholarly publication. Although the statement is undeniably true, it risks positioning *Die deutsche Prsenz in den USA* as a celebration of the German impact on America. To be clear, none of these essays resemble the uncritical and fileopietistic histories of the nineteenth century. Yet within Wirrer and Raab's frame, each paper seems to publicize a fresh German contribution. They are unified only by the editors's insistence on Germany's significance.

It is time to integrate German American interactions into broader discussions of North America, Europe, and the world. Such historians as Andrew Zimmerman and Russell Kazal have begun this task. Zimmerman's *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (2010) awaits review. Kazal's *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* (2004) investigates the relationship between Germans and Americans within the power structures of race, religion, gender, nation, and class. He suggests that immigrants mediated the American reception of Germany. He chiefly concerns himself, however, with tracing the process by which the complex German American community of the early twentieth century gave way to scattered cultural references, an indifference to German television, and kitsch. Kazal establishes precisely the sort of links that would strengthen *Die deutsche Prsenz in den USA*.

Notes

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[1]. Kamphoefner's interest in chain migration dates to his early work, *The Westfalians: From Germany to Missouri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). More recently, see Walter D. Kamphoefner, "Kettenwanderung, Siedlungsmuster, Integration; Chain Migration, Settlement Patterns, Integration," in *Von Heuerleuten und Farmern: Die Auswanderung aus dem Osnabrcker Land nach Nordamerika im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Kamphoefner, Peter Marschalk, and Birgit Nolte-Schuster (Bramsche: Rasch Verlag, 1999), 53-81.

[2]. For Keil's earlier work, see Keil and John B. Jentz, eds., *German Workers in Industrial Chicago, 1850-1910: A Comparative Perspective* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1983).

[3]. For a study that shares Helbich's conclusion, see Christian B. Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007). The project that produced Helbich's findings has been translated into English. Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich, eds., *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home*, trans. Susan Carter Vogel (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[4]. The best include Wolfgang Helbich and Walter D. Kamphoefner, eds., *German-American Immigration and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective* (Madison: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, 2004); and Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, eds., *America and the Germans*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).