



Barbara Lorenskowski. *Sounds of Ethnicity: Listening to German North America, 1850-1914.* Studies in Immigration and Culture Series. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010. xiii + 295 pp. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-88755-716-3; \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88755-188-8.



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Language, Music, and Identity in German Immigrant Communities in Ontario and New York

Barbara Lorenskowski's *Sounds of Ethnicity* examines how German immigrants on both sides of the Great Lakes negotiated between language retention and acculturation. Lorenskowski delves deeply into the cultural meanings of ethnic identity expressed in language and musical traditions, pride of achievements, and the questions of loyalty to the old and new homes. Along the way, the book also considers nuances of class, gender, public and private spheres, and the differences between first and second generation immigrants. Furthermore, it explores how the international border affected expressions of identity in the contexts of rural Waterloo County, Ontario, and urban Buffalo, New York. The picture derived from a careful reading of personal memoirs, official reports, and German- and English-language newspapers demonstrates the complex influences shaping the meanings of being German in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canada and the United States in its local, transnational, and transatlantic dimensions. Lorenskowski states in her introduction that the book is interested less in a study of migrants as a bounded social

entity—the ethnic *group*—as it is in the *practice* of enacting ethnicity (p. 6). She certainly accomplishes this difficult task of recreating the lived ethnicity beyond the simple attachment to place of birth, traditions, and language.

The opening chapter examines the intentions of what Lorenskowski calls “ethnic gatekeepers” who attempted to carve a meaningful place for the German language in its High German form, not the local hybrid, on both sides of the border, and uses district school inspectors’ reports to explore the successes and failures of this project. Despite the mixed results of German-language instruction, Lorenskowski argues that instructors’ pedagogical innovations marked a clear break from traditional language teaching and therefore had a modernizing effect on pedagogy.

Chapters 2 to 4 examine the significance of musical performances and nationalist rhetoric at the singers’ festivals starting in Buffalo in 1860 and especially the so-called Peace Jubilees of 1871, which celebrated the Prusso-German victory over France and the unification

of Germany. The festivals appealed to German communities on both sides of the border, and members of the host societies responded in a generally positive manner to these events.

Distinctions between Canadian and American responses to German identity are at the heart of the discussion in chapter 5 where Lorenzkowski argues that keynote speakers and the German press south of the border emphasized their loyalty to American republicanism, remaining defensive in their expression of pride in their heritage. In Waterloo County, however, the German community did not feel threatened by the *âcult of Anglo-Saxon superiorityâ* that was present in Ontario at the end of the nineteenth century (p. 149). To the contrary, German speakers and writers pointed to the close *âracialâ* proximity between the British and German peoples to claim their place among the favored ethnic groups in the country.

Chapter 6 explores singersâ festivals held in Waterloo County between 1874 and 1912. Sparked by the success of the Peace Jubilee, these festivals were, in part, a celebration of German romantic nationalism culminating in the unveiling of a bust of Emperor Wilhelm I in Victoria Park in Berlin, Ontario, in 1897. At the same time, Lorenzkowski reveals, the mixing of German and English in the speeches and programs demonstrated an attempt to include the Anglo-Canadian community in the festivals, and speaks to the formation of North American German identities that, over time, became detached from their transatlantic origins.

The final chapter of the book focuses on the situation in Buffalo between the 1880s and early 1900s and the popularization of German culture in mainstream American society. Lorenzkowski demonstrates that the singersâ festivalsâ musical repertoires became part of American *âhigh cultureâ* manifested in stone by the building of the new Music Hall. During the same period, the German ethnic community displayed signs of disintegration along class lines, as expressed in working-class festivals and the popularity of the recreated city of Old Nuremberg at the Pan-American exhibition. This heralded a process of joining the American mainstream, or *âbecoming old stock,â* to borrow the phrase from Russell A. Kazal (*Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* [2004]). Given the overall impressive use of American and Canadian literature in the field, the absence of Kazalâs work from this study seems surprising since Kazal examines in detail the recasting of German-American identity in the early twentieth century with at-

tention to class and religious differences.

Sounds of Ethnicity proposes to examine the period from the 1848 revolutions to the First World War. While these events would make very logical chronological markers for a study of German culture in North America, the book ultimately covers events between 1860 and 1903. As a result, the establishment of German-Canadian and German-American linguistic and musical identities, and the slow merging of these communities into the mainstream society is well represented. The *âsilencingâ* of German North America during the First World War, however, only appears briefly in the introduction.

Lorenzkowski rightfully points out that the lived expressions of German ethnicity within the broader North American fabric were already subsiding at the turn of the century, partly as a result of reduced immigration. It is therefore not just the impact of the First World War that *âsilencedâ* a vibrant German culture. Yet it should be pointed out that the war had a dramatic impact on German identity in North America and greatly accelerated the process of integration. The study would have benefited from even a short postscript examining the closing down of the German press in North America, ending the singersâ festivals, expressing loyalty like renaming Berlin as Kitchener, and volunteering for military service.

The book is organized thematically around the different sounds of ethnicity, starting with spoken German and language teaching in part 1, and shifting to the expression of ethnicity through music festivals, speeches, and parades in part 2. Since the earliest events described in the book were the singersâ festival in Buffalo in 1860 and the Peace Jubilees in 1871, a good starting point to impose a more chronological flow would have been the exploration of music as the earliest organized expression of a distinct German ethnic identity in North America.

Despite these minor points, Lorenzkowskiâs fine study of soundscapes makes an important contribution to our understanding of the complex constructions of ethnicity. The study moves away from an assumption of broader group identifications into a far more flexible and volatile field of identity switches based on particular situations and personal perceptions. Many of the written records were left by cultural leaders and members of the German-language press in North America who had their own interests in preserving language and ethnicity. The careful reading of these sources tells much about those who deviated from the cherished ideals of these *âcultural gatekeepersâ* who criticized those who did not preserve

the purity of their native tongue or musical traditions. In addition, this study explores transnational spaces negotiated by ethnic minorities demonstrating that international borders do matter. Even in the celebrations of the German victory over France, the German speakers at the Peace Jubilee in Buffalo emphasized their loyalty to the American Republic, creating a more defensive German identity. On the other side of the border, the close family relations between the royal houses of Germany and Great Britain allowed, at least for the period before 1914, a dual expression of loyalty to Emperor Wilhelm I and Queen Victoria. Therefore, this book also contributes to our understanding of some subtle cultural differences between Canada and the United States.

Melding an innovative approach to the study of historic sounds with an examination of the construction of identity, Lorenzkowski explores the lived language experience and linguistic and musical transformations in the immigrant community. She does not simply present a fixed German identity, but shows how Germanness changed through the practice of cultural expression. Lorenzkowski leaves the reader with the strong impression that, despite occasional expressions of ethnic pride, the daily lives of individuals were generally shaped by a quick adjustment to the opportunities, practicalities, and realities of local conditions in North America, rather than a uniform desire for ethno-linguistic preservation away from their traditional homelands.

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