

THE EUROPEAN ORIGINS OF GERMAN-AMERICAN DIVERSITY

Both the official motto of the United States, *e pluribus unum* ("One out of many"), and the motto expressed in the German national anthem, "Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit" ("Unity, Justice and Freedom") betray the degree to which diversity has been a given in the history of both nations. Yet each has pursued the goal of unifying its diverse elements differently.

The United States—the foremost "Nation of Immigrants," to quote John F. Kennedy's book title—has shaped its identity through a continuous process of assimilation and integration involving some 140 different nationalities, with the goal of forming a political and socio-economic whole out of a populace of different ethnic backgrounds and religious creeds. The quest for unity in German-speaking lands, on the other hand, has been predicated largely on the maintenance of a variety of diverse tribal affiliations, reaching back into antiquity but bound together by a common history, an overarching ethno-linguistic culture, and dynastic interests.

Given that today's German-speaking culture area is only about one-twentieth the size of the United States the uninitiated might expect more cultural homogeneity than diversity in German-speaking countries. At close range, however, these lands reveal a multitude of distinct cultural varieties that in part reach back more than 1500 years to the settlement of certain areas by individual tribes. Germanic tribesmen, early Christian missionaries, knights and noblemen, peasants and burghers, religious reformers and writers—all helped shape the composite which we know as German tradi-

tion today. Yet much of the common heritage is ageless, since many customs, beliefs and traditions are derived from the misty past of pagan times and transcend both present national borders and specific tribal affiliations, fully justifying historian Friedrich Meinecke's concept of a "*deutsche Kulturnation*" [Germanic cultural unity] which encompasses the German-speaking countries and regions of central Europe allowing diversity and commonality to co-exist. The industrial age, the concomitant growth of cities, increased mobility, and ease of communication have encouraged the process of homogenization, of course. Especially in the second half of the twentieth century, the gradual urbanization of even the smallest villages has been constantly chiseling away at some of the most tenacious of the individual tribal characteristics. But despite the inevitable leveling effect, much of the diversity has been retained or is being preserved for generations yet unborn.

This essay can, of course, treat only some aspects of the variety within the concept generally known as German culture and civilization. We will focus accordingly on tribal and geographic origins and linguistic differences between German-speaking regions. Along the way we will consider the dynastic-political and religious influences at work in various areas and look at customs and traditions in various locales, considering particularly the question of how certain folkways were transferred from the Old to the New World.

GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGINS

The year 1983, which marked the 300th anniversary of German group immigration to North America, generated a renewed interest in what the 1990 United States Census showed to be the largest ethnic element of the country. Tracing the geographic origins of that group is, however, not as simple as putting a finger on a present-day map. One must take into account that borders changed frequently, thus causing a fluctuating incongruence between ethno-linguistic population groups and dynastic-political territories. The former are characterized by cohesiveness and a great degree of permanence through common ancestry, language (tribal dialect), behavioral patterns and traditions in general, whether its members are inhabitants of their own state or have been annexed to another. Territorial configurations, on the other hand, came about through the exercise of power, princely marriage and inheritance—hence the tendency toward shifting borders. Another, often overlooked point with regard to the geographic origins of the German element in America is the once formidable presence of millions of Germans in the eastern and southeastern countries of Europe.

Immigrants from the German-speaking areas of Europe have been coming to America since 1608, bringing with them not just their trunks full of utensils and clothes, but their dialects, their customs and traditions, their values and beliefs. This "cultural baggage" provided them with continuity and a sense of stability which found expression in the founding of German towns and neighborhoods often based on the common regional origin of the settlers. A second generation of settlers from the same region usually followed the first in a type of "chain migration." In his essay, "When People

Migrate, They Carry Their Selves Along," the late Gunter Moltmann pointed out that while immigrants of necessity adapted to the lay of the land, the climate, and the resources available, they did not give up their customary ways.

Most people migrating from one country to another do not shake off their old clothes in a hurry and put on new ones suited to their future environment—at least not immediately upon arrival.... Along with the things necessary for their physical existence, the immigrants' baggage includes their cultural heritage, their mother tongue, their ways of life, their personal concepts, their value systems and preconceived plans for future, their hopes and expectations.¹

The immigrants' sense of identity in the New World thus continued to mirror their tribal and regional roots. Striking evidence of the tendency of immigrants to congregate and settle in areas where others from their home territory in Europe had established themselves can be found in J. Richey's *Directory of the German-American Societies in the USA*, 1988. Of the more than 800 organizations listed, a significant number show a tribal or regional orientation. In fact, three of the approximately ten most frequently occurring names refer specifically to original tribal groups: the Saxons, the Bavarians, and the Swabians.

A recent example of an attempt to preserve the German cultural heritage can be found in the first issue of the "Neues Blatt" [Feb. 1, 1997], the Newsletter of the Ostfriesen Heritage Society in Iowa. The "Goals of the Society" are:

1. To preserve the knowledge of the emigrants, their names, customs, foods and land of origin through genealogy, celebrations, and language classes.

2. To use and enjoy the Platt language for the two generations which still speak this ancient Friesen language of the low coastal lands of Germany.
3. To preserve records of the language through cassettes and video of the Plattdeutsch theater and music at our festivities.
4. To provide activities with Platt Theater and German music.
5. To form an Ostfriesen Genealogical Resource/Research Center at the Wellsburg Library, for this central pan of Iowa and all whose ancestors first settled in Grundy County and surrounding areas.
6. To bring performing groups from Ostfriesland, Germany, and for our people to perform in Germany and research their roots in the land of the ancestors.

Dat Pommersche Blatt [Jan. 1997], Newsletter of the Pommersche Verein Central Wisconsin, states: "Our Verein [*sic.*, i.e., society or organization] has chosen the Jamunder Tracht for our Tracht (folk costume)." In regard to language the newsletter reports the following: "Since the formation of our Verein, we have gathered and published information about the German dialect spoken by our forefathers. At our meetings we attempt to state resolutions brought from the floor in 'Platt'..."

The few examples mentioned here are but a small number of the myriad manifestations of the truth of Moltmann's observation. In molding a new identity in their adoptive homeland, German immigrants drew upon the "cultural baggage" they had brought with them. Practices and traditions determined largely by tribal and linguistic affiliations were a vital part of an immigrant's identity, and each individual adjust-

ed to his or her new country by adapting familiar ways to the strange land. In doing so, German-speaking immigrants enriched the American continent in a variety of ways, ranging from the introduction of effective agricultural practices and technical know-how—sausage-making and beer-brewing—to Grimm's fairy tales. Today German Christmas customs, festival planning, kindergartens, music appreciation and physical education have all become part of the American mainstream. Of course, much has been adapted to suit the dominant Anglophone culture with its tastes and mores. Hohenschwanstein, the castle of the Bavarian King Ludwig II, has now become the castle of "Sleeping Beauty;" the Christmas tree is trimmed with artificial lights; and "Stille Nacht" and "O Tannenbaum" are sung in English, as are Martin Luther's hymns. And then there are certain restrictions on the sale and the strength of beer—a livable compromise with the temperance spirit of the new American homeland.

TRIBAL ORIGINS

Now let us reach way back to the tribal origins of our German ancestors. During the *Volkerwanderung* (migration of nations) between the fourth and sixth centuries, central Europe became the domain of the Frisians, Saxons, Franconians, Alemanni, Thuringians and Bavarians—to name but the most powerful original Germanic tribes or tribal groups. Through subsequent colonization eastward beyond the Elbe and Oder rivers in the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, the new tribes of the Mecklenburgers, Pommeranians, Brandenburgers, Silesians, West- and East Prussians were formed. Interaction with various natural phenomena, from the North Sea and the Baltic to the Alps, as well as the interplay of certain

events in human history encouraged the development of regional characteristics and ways of life from within these tribal structures.

Dynastic-political influences: The unification process toward a single "Germany" was not without its bloody conflicts. An early example is the decisive battle of 496 A.D. by which King Chlodwig established Franconian superiority over the Alemanni, who were pushed southward but still retained a good part of today's Baden-Württemberg, Alsace, the largest part of Switzerland, western Austria with Liechtenstein and the southwestern part of Bavaria. In the eighteenth century Frederick the Great of Prussia captured the province of Silesia from Maria Theresia, the German empress of the house of Habsburg. And in 1866, shortly after the American Civil War, the Germans had their own North-South conflict, which ended with the ouster of Austria from the German Federation and opened the road to building the second German Empire according to Bismarck's Prussian design [1871].

A good example for fluctuating incongruence between ethno-linguistic population groups and dynastic-political territories in German history are the Bavarian Swabians, or "Bayrisch-Schwaben." The Bavarian crown acquired the sizable territory of Swabia from Württemberg for having supported Napoleon! But dynastic territorial expansion did not inwardly change the Swabians—the strongest tribal subgroup of the Alemanni—and their Swabian dialect.

RELIGIOUS SCHISMS

With the onset of the Reformation (1517) yet another significant force helped fashion German diversity. Christian denominationalism cut across tribal allegiances to

divide communities along different lines. With the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 religious and political leaders agreed on the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, whereby a prince had the right to determine the faith of his subjects, that is, as long as it was either Catholic, Protestant or Reformed; no other sects were acceptable. The intertwining of religious and dynastic interests and alliances with foreign powers, notably France and Sweden, eventually led to the Thirty Years War (1618-48), which took some six million German lives, more than a third of a population estimated at sixteen million. The land was devastated, and the nation fragmented into more than 300 essentially autonomous principalities. The general lack of tolerance for religious minorities which marked the era of the Thirty Years' War continued well beyond the Peace of Westphalia and the close of that war. Even animosity and distrust between Catholics and Protestants lasted well into the twentieth century and strongly influenced the makeup of Germany's cultural landscape. In 1939, Germany was predominantly Catholic (33%) in the south and in the Rhineland with its archbishoprics of Mainz, Cologne, Trier, and Protestant in the north and east (64%). In Austria, always a Catholic bastion, more than eighty-five percent of the population was Catholic. Switzerland, the land of Calvin and Zwingli, was 55% Protestant and 43% Catholic in the 1960s. In each area the dominant religion determines many of the common customs and traditions. For instance, Catholic Bavaria and portions of the Rhineland have a significantly larger number of holidays than the Protestant north, because of the addition of certain feast days. Individuals seeking a truly memorable celebration of Karneval or Fasching would be well advised to seek their entertainment in Cologne,

Mainz, and Koblenz, or elsewhere in the Rhineland or Bavaria rather than further north.

COMMON LANGUAGE—COMMON CULTURE

The gradual development of a common language [Middle High German] in the Middle Ages, especially through a blossoming courtly literature, paved the way toward a sense of a common culture despite often

bilingual Luxembourg, Alsace, and South Tyrol—all with political identities separate from Germany proper—we can still refer to these lands with their transnational span as the "deutsche Kulturnation." German-Americans share its (non-politically defined) cultural heritage.

Dialects and High German: Although the German-speaking areas of Europe—



Figure 1: Designations for "Kartoffel" in the German dialects before 1945

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great tribal differences and changing political alliances. Ethno-linguistic and cultural bonds have survived the demise of all three German empires. Although today German-speaking Central Europe also includes Austria, Liechtenstein, most of Switzerland,

counting only Germany in the borders of 1937 (470,662 sq. km.), Austria (83,850 sq. km.), Switzerland (all; 41,293 sq. km.), Liechtenstein (157 sq. km.)—are but a fraction of the territory of the United States (9,363,353 sq. km.), the linguistic diversity

European Origins

of the German language is immensely greater than the variants of American English. Dialects abound. Regional and often even local variants differ from each other and from High German in pronunciation, vocabulary and even grammar to an extent that can make communication increasingly difficult the farther apart any two dialect areas are.

From the numerous language maps in Werner König's *dtv-Atlas zur deutschen Sprache*, we selected the one for "potato" [fig. 1]. This basic food item with the High German dictionary entry of "Kartoffel" demonstrates how broad the dialect spectrum of many German vocabulary items can be.

The incredible range of dialectic variation practically demands a *lingua franca* if German speakers from diverse dialect groups are going to be able to communicate effectively. That linguistic middle ground is High German [*Hochdeutsch*], the standard language-equivalent to the "Queen's English"—and the principal vehicle of the media, of literature, religion, education and commerce. Most German-speakers today grow up "bilingual," with the dialect of their region and with High German. If the foreigner doesn't understand a dialect speaker, the latter will usually shift to a High German which, although often still colored by regionalisms, more or less approximates what is taught in school.

German-speaking areas outside the Federal Republic and Austria even cultivate tri-lingualism. Where the official language is either French [western parts of Switzerland, Alsace and Luxembourg], or Italian [Southern Tyrol and southern Switzerland], the local dialect as well as High German are maintained concurrently.

Low German [Plattdeutsch], spoken in the northern third of the German-speaking area, has kept a closer relationship to the Anglo-Saxon roots of the English language than have Middle and Upper German. These latter dialect groups, esp. Upper German, experienced a still unexplained shifting of consonants that didn't affect Anglo-Saxon and Low German [see below].

It would do the dialects a great injustice to look at them as "bad" or "corrupted" German. The "low" of Low German is, after all, a description of the landscape in the low-lying coastal areas of the North, where those dialects are spoken, rather than a judgment of the relative worth of a specific variant spoken. In America, more often than not, the "Low" is erroneously interpreted as second rate, "bad German." Indeed, the northern dialects have seniority: They are linked to the historic tribal substructure of the German-speaking peoples who settled in central Europe and in England [Anglo-Saxons] during the *Völkerwanderung* [migration of nations]. Each of the major tribes—the Frisians, Saxons, Franks, Thuringians, Alemanni and Bavarians—developed its own dialect and even various subdialects. When in the course of history dynastic territorial actions altered the political map, they seldom affected the ethno-linguistic characteristics of the tribes. In the southern part of the German-speaking area, e.g., the Duchy of Swabia comprised what is today Alsace, Baden-Württemberg, western Bavaria, western Austria, Liechtenstein and two-thirds of Switzerland. Even after 1500 years, the overarching Alemannic bonds still make it possible for people in these areas to communicate in their respective subdialects. Eberhard Reichmann got a lesson of this when he entered the teachers' preparatory school at Ochsenhausen in

1941. He noticed to his amazement that among his class of twenty five—all from Württemberg—there were twenty distinctly different subdialects of Swabian, Low Alemannic and Franconian spoken! But the old ethno-linguistic Alemannic relationship and its relative closeness with Southern and Eastern Franconian minimized communication difficulties when each spoke in his own local or regional dialect.

The visitor to Augsburg—thirty-three miles from Munich—will be surprised to hear people there speak Swabian rather than Bavarian. And in Nürnberg and Würzburg it is Franconian you hear, not Bavarian. The Alemanni in Alsace speak Alsatian, an

Alemannic subdialect, and French. While it is a bit difficult for Austrians to accept the linguistic designation "südbayerisch" [Southern Bavarian] for their dialect groups, it is indeed true that most of Austria was settled by Bavarians long before the year 1000 A.D., hence the legitimacy of the designation.

It should be noted that political and ethno-linguistic borders have not necessarily coincided. In the course of history the latter have shown more permanence than the former. The following linguistic map [fig. 2] illustrates these inconsistencies. We invite the reader to compare it with a modern political map. The map is based on Theo



Figure 2: German Dialects around 1930

European Origins

van Dorp's design in Adolf Bach's *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache*.³ It affords an overview of the three large dialect bands spanning German-speaking Central Europe and also shows major sub-groups of dialects. From North to South they are Niederdeutsch (Low German, often referred to as Plattdeutsch), Mitteldeutsch (Middle German), and Oberdeutsch (Upper German, not to be confused with High German).

A phenomenon called "Second or Old High German Soundshift" [*Zweite oder Althochdeutsche Lautverschiebung*] between the fifth and ninth centuries created the three big dialect bands. It affected especially the consonants "p," "t," "k." In the Upper German area they were shifted, depending on position within a given word, as follows: "p" to "pf," "f," "ff" [pipe = Pfeife; hope = hoffe]; "t" to "s," "ss," "z," "tz" [what = was; hate = hasse; to = zu; cat = Katz']; "k" to "ch" [make = mache]. Middle German participated to a somewhat lesser degree: a Frankfurter likes his "Appelwoi" [Apple wine], not "Apfelwei(n)." The line separating Upper and Middle German is also referred to as the "Appel/Apfel" line. Low German (including Anglo-Saxon) was not affected by the sound shift. Students with an English-language background who have a hard time pronouncing the "ch" as in "ich" might find solace in the company of the Low German speakers, for whom "ik" is the "right" form. The line between Low and Middle German is called the "maken/ machen" line. The Low German band of this map shows less differentiation than the Middle and Upper bands, but Mecklenburg, West- and East Pomerania, Brandenburg and East Prussia certainly also have dialect variants of their own. And along the Ruhr River you may

hear "Westfälisch," but fifty kilometers east of there it shifts to "Ostfälisch," then "Elb-Ostfälisch." Each "small" German-speaking area is, in fact, a colorful dialect mosaic!

A multilingual example may help us see the closeness and the differences between an original "Plattdeutsch" text from a poem by Theodor Storm [1817-1888], and its quite literal equivalents in English, High German, and the southwest German dialect of "Schwäbisch":

Oever de stille Straaten geiht klar de
Klockenslag.
God Nacht, din Hart will slapen un
Morgen is ok een Dag.

Over the still Streets goes clear
the bells' peal.
Good night, thine heart wants to
sleep and tomorrow is also a day.

Über die s[ch]tillen S[ch]trassen
geht klar der Glockenschlag.
Gut' Nacht, dein Herz will schlafen
und morgen ist auch ein Tag.

Ieber de schtille Schtrassa gaht klar dr
Gloggaschlag.
Guad Nachd, dei Herz will schlafa
ond morga isch au a Dag.

For southern Germans, notably the Bavarians, the Main River used to constitute a "mental border"—similar to the Mason-Dixon line of the United States. Whoever lived north of it was summarily given the slang name "Saupreiss," literally "pig Prussian." But time mellows things. A Bavarian friend of ours now has a little plaque with a heart on it and an English/German text: "It is nice to be a Preiss'/But it is nicer to be a Bayer." German TV, one of the big leveling agents, has occasional programs with "Plattdeutsch" speakers appearing in the Alps and Bavarians in Hamburg. It is humorous, of course, to show dialects outside their normal environment, but there is an educational aspect as well. Familiarity with other

dialects may ultimately engender a healthy respect for the "otherness" of dialects. Any appreciation of the validity of dialects is still in its infancy in the training of American teachers of German and evokes a provocative historical parallel. Academics in post-

festivals held throughout the United States and particularly in the Midwest. The many and rich variations of garments from areas other than Bavaria are rarely seen today.

A "Tracht" is a traditional garment typical of a certain area. The word "Tracht" is



Figure 3: Man from Mühlenbachtal and young woman from Kirnbachtal, both in the Black Forest



Figure 4: Bridegroom and bride from Eichenfurst in the Spessart mountains, east of Frankfurt am Main

war Germany frowned upon the use of American English, which was considered an inferior dialect.

GERMAN ETHNIC DRESS

Much to the amusement of German-speaking visitors coming to America, "Dirndl" and "Lederhosen," the stereotypical "German" attire, only vaguely resemble the traditional folk costumes or "Trachten" worn in the Alpine regions of Bavaria and Austria. Yet no matter how inauthentic, such outfits add color to the increasingly popular Oktoberfests, Germanfests and Strassen-

related to the verb "tragen" [to wear]. Before the leveling effect of urbanization, ethnic dress was always bound to a given place, a specific social unit, and a local/regional culture. Amish and Mennonite dress reflects clothing styles of the Alsatian, Southwest German and Swiss areas at the time of these groups' emigration. For many immigrant groups as with the Amish, dressing in traditional garb is an outward expression of belonging to a specific group or a home area. Such dress requires a commitment to a value system, shared by a specific

European Origins

community, and conformity to that system. Traditional clothing provides an immigrant community with an outward sign of its link with a cherished heritage. It is not so much a conscious attempt to flaunt one's ethnicity as it is a mechanism for smoothing the transition to a new and strange environment. In its significance for the wearer, a true folk costume or Tracht differs strikingly from the folk-like imitations which tourist drag home from their European travels.

Until the sixteenth century, farmers and people of the lower classes usually wore gray or brown-colored garments. Wearing blue was allowed only on Sundays and holidays. From the sixteenth century onward, traditional country dress developed as part of a system of order. Every trade had its distinctive work clothes and Sunday dress. Dresses, trousers, shirts, vests, and headpieces worn for work differed from those worn for festive occasions, and they differed from region to region. The Black Forest dress and the "Bollenhut," a black hat with red balls [fig. 3] differ greatly from dress and bonnet worn by the woman in the Spessart [fig. 4].⁴

True folk costumes are sewn and fitted for the wearer by specialized tailors or seamstresses, who use only natural materials: wool, linen, silk, silver, mother-of-pearl, etc. Ethnic dress features handiwork, such as embroidery, lace and handwoven materials, and uses ornamental trim very carefully, concentrating on the quality of workmanship rather than the quantity of decoration. There are different costumes for work, visiting and special celebrations, and each indicates the marital status and the role of the wearer at a given function as well as the family or clan to which the wearer belongs.

By the middle of the nineteenth century typical national/ethnic dress had begun to disappear in many places. Where tradition remained important, especially in rural parts of Bavaria and Austria, the Black Forest, Lower Saxony, Friesland, Schleswig, the Harz Mountains, Hesse and Lusatia, people continued to wear their traditional dress, often passing a well-maintained costume on to the next generation. For many wearers, traditional garb is not something to be admired only in museum cases; it is alive, it is worn and enjoyed.⁵

Let us also consider the tradition of wooden shoes.⁶ They are usually ascribed to the Dutch with stereotypical exclusivity. But wooden shoes have been known in many variations in German-speaking areas as well and all over Europe.



Figure 5: Shapes of wooden shoes from:

1. Steiermark
2. Steiermark, with leather uppers
3. Brandenburg
4. Brandenburg, with leather uppers
5. East Prussia (Memel Region)

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Attempts of the Christian Church to suppress, displace, supplant or neutralize Germanic cults devoted to the worship of deities such as Wotan or Odin, were only partially successful. Germanic peoples assigned divine qualities to the forests, believed to be the home of the gods, and rituals were held in their "hains" [lit. "groves" of worship]. Although the church was able to destroy the "hains" and many outward forms of Germanic religions, it could not completely eradicate the beliefs of their priests and worshippers.

It is generally believed that the Christmas tree is of German origin. In the pre-Christian era the oak was the sacred tree for the Germanic peoples. Legend has it that the missionary to the Germans, St. Boniface, in order to stop sacrifices at their sacred Donar Oak near Geismar, chopped the tree down [725 A.D.]. He is said to have replaced the oak with a fir tree adorned in tribute to the newborn Christ. Ironically, the evergreen tree has been ascribed magical power by the Germanic peoples as a representation of fertility. Today, the fir and its next of kin enjoy the highest degree of popularity. The Christmas tree custom has spread across large parts of the world.

The church also placed Christ's birth at the time of the winter solstice and fostered as the bringer of gifts St. Nikolaus, the bishop of Myra in Asia Minor, who died on December 6, 343. Christian symbols and earlier historical layers of Germanic mythological figures began to meld. Consequently, the old German God Wotan, riding the wild skies with his retinue, emerged out of the pre-Christian past.

To this day Nikolaus traditions vary as widely from region to region as his guise and name. He appears as St. Nikolaus (mainly in Catholic areas), Klaus, Nickel, Sünerklas, Seneklos, Pelznickel, Knecht Ruprecht, Weihnachtsmann and Christkindl (in mostly Protestant areas). He is on foot or astride a white horse, a reindeer, a mule, or even a goat. More diverse than those of the saintly Nikolaus are the many legends and traditions surrounding his often-wild companions: the Zwarte Pitt, Hans Muff, Schimmelreiter, Krampus, Leutfresser, Rumpelklas, Schmutzli. A religious myth which had its source in a Semitic nation was subsequently developed by a Mediterranean people and finally superimposed on the quite alien mythologies of the Northern Europeans. The result is a wide array of coexisting customs, Christian and Germanic.⁷

Part of the modern American picture of Christmas is that of a magnificent sleigh pulled by eight reindeer carrying a bushy-bearded Santa Claus. The eight reindeer have only been in Santa's service since 1822, the year in which Clement Clarke Moore, of Troy, N.Y., wrote his decidedly secular "'Twas the night before Christmas..." Moore's knowledge of popular views of Christmas was based chiefly on the St. Nikolaus customs brought to the area by Dutch, German and Scandinavian immigrants. In the German-speaking countries as well as Holland and Belgium, December 6th is the most distinctive children's festival of the year. The shops are full of many-shaped biscuits, gilt gingerbreads-sometimes representing the saint-sugar images, toys and other little gifts. On December 5, small children place their shoes on a windowsill or in front of the door. If they have a fireplace, they will hang their stockings there. In the

European Origins

morning they will find little gifts, an orange, an apple, and a small toy.

Forty years after Moore first published his poem, the illustrator and political cartoonist Thomas Nast created the American image of Santa Claus, a combination of

with his parents at age six. In 1862 he joined *Harper's Weekly*, primarily as a Civil War correspondent and began to produce politically acclaimed cartoons and war sketches. He was asked by a publisher to illustrate a book of holiday poems that included



Figure 6: Names of the giftgivers at the time of Nikolausfest

The underlined names are mostly those of the wild companions or scare figures. The Germanic origin of these figures is evident although difficult to trace

Moore's "jolly old elf and the Pelznickel of Nast's native Bavarian Palatinate. Nast, the son of a Bavarian army bandsman, was born in Landau, in 1840, and came to New York

Clement Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas." Combining imagery from Moore's verse and his childhood memories of Christmas, Nast created a rotund, beard-

ed, pipe-smoking figure in a woolly suit and cap, carrying a large sack of toys.⁸

In many regions, including the United States, the festivities originally attributed to the gift-giving St. Nikolaus have been transferred from December 6th to Christmas. The giver of gifts is the "Weihnachtsmann" [Santa Claus] or the "Christkind" [Christ-child, an angel]. The latter, misunderstood by Anglophones, became "naturalized" as "Kris Kringle." Christmas customs are perhaps the nicest example for cultural transfer and adaptation resulting in an American tradition with a German touch.

CONCLUSIONS

Diversity has been a constant characteristic of the "deutsche Kulturturnation." For better or for worse, in the course of history it has exacted its price and bestowed its rewards. Tribal diversity coupled with dynastic ambitions resulted in a typically decentralized nation state. The Third Reich was an unfortunate exception to this historical pattern.

While the great linguistic diversity requires an extra effort in the process of communication, the broad cultural spectrum with its roots in the tribal origins of the German-speaking peoples, their interactions, and their acceptance or rejection of foreign influences provide a wealth of enrichment.

In like manner the history of the German-Americans echoes the principle of diversity. As the country's largest ethnic group they have become an integral and formative part of the American mainstream. This makes them utterly unsuited for ethno-political purposes minority-style. Any attempt at "political" unity would be doomed to failure.

"Political" identification with the country of origin dwindles toward zero when the immigrant is ready to accept the privileges and responsibilities of American citizenship. On the other hand, "ethno-cultural" identification, such as German-American, Austro-American, Swiss-American, or Bavarian, Swabian, Pomeranian, Volga-German, may last for generations and in full harmony with the Pledge of Allegiance.

In ethnically heterogeneous settings, knowledge of the "old country's" language and heritage diminishes rapidly with progressing generational distance. "Roots" awareness, usually coupled with interest in the nearly 400 years of German-American history on the local, regional and national levels, may provide meaningful alternatives which can encourage learning the language of one's forebears and about the heritage of their homeland.

With the obvious stress on High German [*Schriftdeutsch*] in America's German programs, in high school and college, there is the tendency to exclude dialects from the curriculum, especially German-American dialects, and German Americana altogether. This has its parallel in Germany, where American English was, and to some extent still is, frowned upon in academic circles, and where American Studies occupy only a marginal place. To ignore German-American dialects and centuries of German Americana is not only academically untenable, it also ignores needs and interests of millions of Americans of German-speaking ancestry, and it misses out on a great public relations potential. Cooperation between educational institutions and German-American heritage societies can strengthen enrollments and enrich our understanding of American history.

European Origins

German-Americans, like other ethnic groups, have not been immune to the "melting pot." If inter-marriages lead to mixed ethnicity, personal preference may keep the

one or the other ethno-cultural identity alive. Today, more often than in decades past, one can hear: "Yes, I'm German, too, and proud of it."

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NOTES

- ¹Moltmann, Gunter. Keynote Address, "When People Migrate, They Carry Their Selves Along," in: Eberhard Reichmann, LaVern J. Ripley & Jorg Nagler, eds., *Emigration and Settlement Patterns of German Communities in North America* (Indianapolis: Max Kade German American Center, 1999), xviii.
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- ³Bach, Adolf. *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache*, 9. Aufl. (Wiesbaden: VMA Verlag, n.d.), 102.
- ⁴Helm, Rudolf. *Deutsche Volkstrachten aus der Sammlung des Germanischen Museums in Nürnberg* (München: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1932). Courtesy Germanisches Museum.
- ⁵This section on "German Ethnic Dress" is indebted to: "Traditional Costumes," in: *FOCUS on Germany. Special Monthly for the Allied Forces in Germany*, No.3 (1955), 11; Karen Gottier's "To Dirndl or not to Dirndl?" in: *The German Folk Dancer*, Vol. 1, No. 3. (The North American Federation of German Folk Dance Groups, May 1995); also to entries in Oswald and Beitzl [see Note 7 below].
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- ⁷Erich, Oswald A. & Richard Beitzl. *Wörterbuch der deutschen Volkskunde*, Kröners Taschenausgabe, Bd. 127, Nachdruck der 3. Aufl. von 1974 (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1996), 600 (Nikolaus map)—the indispensable work for German folklorists.
- ⁸Constable, George, ed. *A Country Christmas*. (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, Inc., 1989), 156.

