

BOOK REVIEWS

A Review of Robert Henry Billigmeier, *Americans from Germany: A Study in Cultural Diversity* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1974), 189 pp.

Billigmeier's short book in the publisher's series on Minorities in American Life surveys the history of the German element in the United States from the discovery of America to the present. The earlier section owes an acknowledged debt to Albert Faust's *The German Element in the United States* (1909) while the subsequent chapters represent the assimilation of much significant research that has been accomplished on the German-Americans since the publication of Faust's work. One could quarrel with the organization. Chapter I treats the colonial period, including, rightfully, the Pennsylvania Germans. Chapter II shifts to the nineteenth-century during which the overwhelming majority of Germans immigrated to America. In a brief third chapter the author returns to the Pennsylvania Germans and brings them up to World War I. Chapter IV not only reviews the effects of two world wars in accelerating assimilation but summarizes the immigration of intellectuals during the 1930's, the failure of Nazi propaganda, and the role of the church in the German-American community. A worthy conclusion scans the current status of German culture in America and makes reference to a few of the more significant, active German-American societies in the United States.

Billigmeier refers to a survey conducted by the U.S. Fed. Census in late 1969 in which Americans identified their national origins. Of those who reported a European origin, the largest number (twenty million) gave Germany as the land of their ancestry. The second largest group mentioned England (nineteen million), followed by Ireland with thirteen million. The author could have supplied additional data from the 1970

Census which reveals that there were 3,622,000 persons of German stock (at least one parent born in Germany) in the United States in 1970 and that, astonishingly, 6,093,000 persons in 1970 reported German as their mother tongue. This number of German-speaking people in the United States was once much larger, for it has been declining in recent decades. The significant point, however, is that throughout the history of the United States, the German language has been spoken natively by more Americans than by any other non-English speaking group of immigrants until the year 1970. In 1970, the Spanish language surpassed German as a non-English mother tongue spoken by Americans.

Frequently, this enormously large contingent of German-speaking immigrants had little but the language to hold them together. The churches, clubs, press, literature and German-language schools experienced some successes and some failures during the period from 1820-1920. Billigmeier chronicles the stories of these institutions in dealing with his larger headings. Although the German-American churches were undoubtedly the most significant forces in retention of German culture in America, the reader will not find extensive treatment of this subject matter. The author provides at least passing reference to virtually all the German immigrant groups: Amish, Hutterites, Mennonites, Forty-eighters, Black Sea Germans, Volga Germans, German Lutherans, German Catholics and many more. His treatment of the topic is adequate for a text of 180 pages.

The footnoting is thorough. There is an index but not a bibliography. The paperback cover is attractive while the printing is comprised of reduced typewriter plates. Typographic errors appear on page 11, 1863 should read 1683; p. 43, footnote 19 should include the publisher Dorrance with the date 1937, not 1936; p. 45, footnote 52 geneological is misspelled; p. 150 Felix Block should read Bloch and Konrad Blcok, Bloch, James Frank, Franck; p. 156 Berthold should be Bertholt; p. 167, Whey to When; p. 175 geneology to genea-

logy. In spite of these errors, the student looking for a quick survey of the German-American element will find this book helpful.

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Oskar Holl, *Fremdsprache: Deutsch; Deutschunterricht, Germanistik und deutsches Image in den U.S.A.: Ein Erfahrungsbericht* (Pullach bei München: Verlag Dokumentation, 1974).

The student of German-Americana will read this volume with a critical eye for it has implications for all teachers and students of German in the U.S. Holl examines the methodology of American Germanists and the image of Germany and German culture which they transmit to students of German. This is not a "Forschungsbericht" but rather an "Erfahrungsbericht." It is based on Holl's teaching experienced in the U.S., interviews with one hundred students, discussions with numerous American Germanists and a study of basic research.

Holl traces the American educational system, discusses the situation of foreign language study in the U.S., outlines methods of German instruction and language instruction materials and critiques the basic content of German instruction. Holl indicates that students of German have a weak knowledge of European history and, hence, lack meaningful historical judgement. They lack knowledge of various European languages. Their love for German literature surpasses their love for the German language. They have a one-sided picture of German literature. Only certain authors are read: Kafka, Brecht, Grass, Dürrenmatt, Frisch, etc. Stereotypes of Germany and German culture in American society are transmitted by American Germanists.

Holl examines the major reasons motivating students to study German. The two major reasons are: 1. The foreign language requirement, and 2. German descent. Of interest to

readers of this journal is the second factor: the major factor in motivating students to study German is German ancestry. The study of German is strongest in areas where the German-American element predominates. This should have some implication on the course offerings at American German departments. Unfortunately, the German-American student will find very, very few German departments which offer courses on German-American culture and literature. It has been my personal experience as a German-American that American Germanists display an astonishingly great degree of ignorance for German-Americana. This ignorance is met by an equivalent disregard and scorn German-Americana. German-Americans are typically regarded as the beer-drinking, polka-dancing, Bratwurst-eating ethnics devoid of cultural concerns. American Germanists know little or nothing of Rattermann, Fick, Nies and other great poets, authors and historians. To the German-American student German culture is not something foreign or alien to America, but rather something native to this land.

It is essential that American Germanists and other scholars "wake up" to the neglected and unexplored area of German-Americana. It is high time for them to recognize this topic as a legitimate area of study for students of German. According to the US Census 25 million Americans identify themselves in terms of German ethnicity. The number of German-speaking Americans is estimated at anywhere between six and twenty million. Their German-American heritage should be addressed in terms of courses of study on the German-American culture. The failure to offer such courses is an indication of a very basic and essential lack of understanding. At one time American Germanists participated fully in German-American life, because most of them were of German-American background. Many teachers of non-German-American background are unaware of this heritage while others are blatantly insensitive to its finer qualities. I submit that American Germanists will have to work more closely with the ethnic community in the

future for the purpose of the advancement of the study of German. The continued disregard for German-Americana will contribute to the demise of German departments. A perfect model of action will be the many Afro-American departments which work in and with the Black community. Their professors see no divisions between the academic and ethnic community.

The shifting of the focus will be difficult. It means to start talking less about German culture in Europe and more about German-American culture. It means to stop teaching obscure works of prose and poetry and start teaching the German literature which rises out of the American experience: Sealsfield, Gerstacker, Nies, Beissel, Viereck, Fick, etc. Is it not time, after three and one half centuries of American life, for German-American culture to be recognized and studied?

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Robert Vexler, *Germany — A Chronology and Fact Book 1415-1972*. Oceana Publication: Dobbs Ferry, New York, 1973. World Chronology Series.

Students and teachers of German history will welcome this chronology of German history from 1415 to 1972. In a series of World Chronology, Oceana Publications should be commended for also publishing 184 pages on German history. Also commendable is the inclusion of a name index and bibliography. It should be mentioned, however, that all the references mentioned in the bibliography were published either in the U.S. or in England.

In all fairness, to do justice to such a theme as the German history over a time span of some 557 years (1415 to 1972), would require more than 164 pages—(twenty pages are bibliography and name index). As a result it is a great undertaking

with only a very meager result. Of the 164 pages of selected chronology, introductions, summaries and selected documents, 101 pages deal with the twentieth century, and only sixty three pages attempt to cover the remaining 484 years of German history. Four lines attempt to cover the fifteenth century, i.e., one single item; absolutely nothing on the sixteenth century, a mere five and one-half pages are to cover the seventeenth century, eleven pages are donated to the eighteenth and twenty-four pages to the nineteenth century. The editor has selectively limited the history of Germany to such a degree that he forced it completely out of focus and, thereby, minimized the value of the book as "a research tool for the student". The author could have included in the sixteenth century, which didn't receive even one line, Dr. Martin Luther's ninety-five theses and their far-reaching effects; after all this was the beginning of the Reformation. One thing should be said — the author does cover the last half century. He does not "present", as he claims in his foreword, "the basic facts necessary to an understanding of the development of the German nation". What has been presented is correct; the fault is that the book does not present an objective, a scholarly picture. The editor should know that it is not quite cricket to stack the cards. The book lacks objectivity.

Finally, according to the World Chronology Series, this book is intended to complement the ethnic studies on emigrants from the various countries of the world. Studies on German-American history has been a much neglected theme. I hope that the books in this series covering other countries do greater justice to them and their contributions to our society.

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Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I*. Northern Illinois University Press, 1974.

This book explains why American society "Lashed out at its German element during World War I." Luebke maintains that the German-Americans had a rich ethnic culture in spite of, rather than because of, recurring waves of nativist intolerance. He sees the war as the traumatic climax of an ethno-cultural struggle between the dominant English core culture and the assertive ethnic counter culture of the German-Americans. The crisis of the war did not create conflicts between the two cultures, rather war was the occasion that converted latent tensions into manifest hostility.

Luebke poses key questions on the dynamics of a multi-ethnic nation. German-American culture was the only major ethnic culture to match the dominant core culture in America. The clash of the two cultures was symbolized in contests over Sabbatarianism, prohibition, suffrage, compulsory education, immigration, education, etc. German-Americans believed America was not a nation with a uniform ethnic identity, but a pluralistic society in which members of all ethnic groups could be just as American as person with English antecedents. The core culture equated English culture with Americanism.

Luebke brilliantly analyzes the various elements in German-America: Jew, Catholic, Sectarian and Lutheran. It is the first original synthesis since 1940 (John Hawgood, *The Tragedy of German-America*). This outstanding portrayal of a greatly misunderstood major ethnic group contrasts sharply with the shoddy scholarship and disgusting superficiality of recent books on the German-Americans. During World War I serious efforts were made to destroy the culture of America's major ethnic group. This book examines the roots of this intolerance. Appended to the text is a bibliographical essay. Anyone interested in the problem of the preservation of ethnic culture

in America should consider the central thesis of this important work.

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Guido Ransleben, *A Hundred Years of Comfort in Texas*. Naylor Co., San Antonio, 1974.

All manners of Comfort are presented in Guido Ransleben's extraordinary chronicle of *A Hundred Years of Comfort in Texas*. Recently revised and updated by the author and published by The Naylor Company of San Antonio, Texas, this edition has an additional chapter on new businesses established since 1954. Ransleben's book is sponsored by the Kendall County Chamber of Commerce and scheduled for release July 4, date of the Annual Homecoming Day.

Narration spans the 120-year history of Comfort, Texas beginning in its earliest days when German immigrants convened with Comanches over land concessions and ending with its modern progress and promise in business and industry. A copious amount of the book, some 112 pages, provides a pictorial supplement to the text with approximately 300 photographs identified and captioned with painstaking care.

In 1973 the Lyndon B. Johnson National Historic Site requested and obtained permission to display two photographs of threshing machines from Ransleben's book. The photographs may be viewed as part of the Old Ranch permanent exhibit, at the site formerly owned by Johnson's grandfather and great-grandfather.

Recalling the early writing of his book, Ransleben remembers "it started with the centennial story of my hometown of Comfort when the Centennial Committee selected me to write the history." His son Otto and daughter Irma added their help to the project, and Mrs. Ransleben, who had never struck a typewriter key before 1954, assisted her husband by typing all titles for photographs contained in *A Hundred*

Years of Comfort in Texas. The author recollects eighteen months at work on the writing, that "nearly all of this work was done from sundown to midnight."

Guido Ransleben, retired since 1960 from his executive position in sales and advertising at San Antonio's Pioneer Flour Mills, is now curator for the Comfort Historical Museum. On Saturday afternoons, he and his wife give guided tours through the archive, where the public is welcome and admission is free.



GERMAN-AMERICANA: A Bibliography

Compiled by Don Heinrich Tolzmann

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This bibliography selectively lists books, pamphlets, records, photography albums, dissertations, government documents, newspaper and periodical articles relevant to the study of German-Americana. It includes American, German-American and German publications covering all aspects of German-Americana: immigration, settlement, ethnicity, state histories, politics, language and literature, the book trade, religious life, education, customs, folklore, intellectual history, music, theater, the arts, business and industry, radicalism, biography and genealogy. Most of the research is recent (1941-1973) and should be available in research libraries. Library locations are listed for some of the older items and brief annotations are provided when necessary. All of the major bibliographies and general histories of German-Americana are listed so that the student may gain access to earlier research in the field.

Directories of present-day German-American national organizations, historical and literary societies, periodicals and newspapers, book stores, printers and schools are also included, since contact with these groups, institutions and organizations is essential for anyone engaged in research on German-Americana.

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