

## Chapter 8. Conclusions

Lincoln himself had been willing to gamble on his chances of being nominated for the presidency as early as the spring of 1859. On May 30, 1859, he purchased through his friend Jacob Bunn the type and other equipment of *The Illinois Staats-Anzeiger*, a German language newspaper recently established in Springfield.

Harry E. Pratt, *The Personal Finances of Abraham Lincoln*

Counteracting the waves of immigration in the 1840s and 1850s became crucial for nativist politicians, the Know-Nothings, and members of the American Party, but their movement to put strict limits on the voting power of naturalized citizens backfired. When the proponents of the Kansas-Nebraska Act expected the peaceful settlement of newly opened territories, they also failed. In both instances the German-Americans articulated effective opposition to policies that ran counter to their vital interests. The Turners and Forty-Eighters established newspapers nationally and specifically in “bleeding” Kansas. American politicians could not ignore them. Stringfellow, who led a militant campaign to win Kansas for the South, suddenly abandoned his inflammatory newspaper, the *Squatter Sovereign*, in 1858 and conceded that he had lost. His paper in Atchison was replaced by Kob’s German *Kansas Zeitung* with a powerful base of support from a German population in Leavenworth. Stringfellow explained his failure as the result of the immigration wave.

Numerous lines converged at the destinations of Lincoln’s nomination and election. These lines share a common denominator, however: an instinctive rejection of the initiative to extend the reach of slavery in 1854. An investigation into the background of the 1854 daguerreotype of Lincoln, taken in Chicago, shows the future president’s interest in creating an alliance with George Schneider and the German-Americans. For Lincoln, Schneider’s *Staats-Zeitung* became a practical instrument for winning over the German-American voters to the Republican Party in the 1856 election. To gain the nomination and the election, Lincoln took no chances. In Springfield, he acquired a German printing press for Canisius and secretly employed his

own public relations officer in the person of Dr. Theodore Canisius. In this sequence of events, the Turners and Forty-Eighters represent an uninterrupted thread.

Lincoln gambled on the immigrant vote. He engaged in the secret purchase of the printing press at a risk. To acquire the needed funds, he acted against the advice of his close political advisor, Norman Judd, and he violated his own principles in financial dealings. It appears, in retrospect, that his hasty action was prompted by his personal interest in the presidency. A key factor in this development, and the basis of his gamble, was Lincoln's perception that the votes of the German-Americans made a decisive difference. He realized that in Illinois he could argue persuasively that the Democratic Party did not serve the interests of the German-Americans. Don E. Fehrenbacher pointed out that "the Germans in particular virtually held the balance of power in the state."<sup>1</sup> The Turners and Forty-Eighters became their spokesmen and an influential force through their newspapers, not just in Illinois, but also nationally. Lincoln's acquisition of the German printing press for Canisius, provided him with an efficient instrument to reach voters even beyond Illinois.

Lincoln's public letter to Canisius about the "odious" Massachusetts Amendment stated in no uncertain terms that the fundamental rights of naturalized citizens must be protected. The secret agreement between the two came to light in the 1920s and 1930s, but its historical significance merits closer scrutiny than it has received. Although Lincoln's letter focused on a specific issue of pressing concern to German citizens, the purchase of the German press, at the same time, went beyond the ordinary politics of the day. It had to do with strategic calculations about the 1860 election.

The primary function of a German paper for Lincoln was not simply to promote Republican platforms, as stipulated in the secret contract, but rather to further Lincoln's chances of being nominated and elected president. When Canisius later claimed that no German had succeeded better than he in making Lincoln a favorite with his countrymen, he was obviously boasting and exaggerating; he was seeking a position in Lincoln's administration. A rapid sequence of publications to promote Lincoln's views and his campaign for the presidency have, nevertheless, the Canisius imprint.

Canisius probably alerted fellow Turners in Indiana about Lincoln's candidacy at an early stage. In turn, he could probably translate and then relay the national *Turn-Zeitung* editorial favorable to Lincoln to the Springfield *Daily Illinois State Journal* and from there to the *Chicago Press and Tribune*. Through Canisius, Lincoln succeeded in accessing an effective network of communication. Canisius, an active member of the Turner Society, inherited the organizational skills that the father of the Turners, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn,

had made so successful in the development of his organization. Because of Canisius, Lincoln was indebted indirectly to the Turner legacy, which drew its political resolve from the failed revolution of 1848–49.

During his senate campaign against Douglas, Lincoln turned to Canisius for help in reaching out to the dense population of Germans east of St. Louis. It was necessary to overcome the strong foothold of Democrats in southern Illinois. How much Canisius was able to accomplish is impossible to know. Lincoln lost the election. Or did he really? As the *Turn-Zeitung* saw it, he had “fought a battle for life and death with the ‘little Giant’ and came out of the fight as victor because he conquered for his party in Illinois more votes than Douglas for his; and Douglas has only to thank the unjust apportionment.”<sup>2</sup>

Like Canisius in Illinois, another active Turner and Forty-Eighter, Theodor Hielscher of Indiana, played a crucial role at the Republican Convention in Chicago by effectively opposing Bates as nominee for the presidency. That opposition helped to win the Indiana delegates and thereby turned the tide in Lincoln’s favor. Lincoln’s alliance with the German-Americans thus achieved its most impressive result.

In New York, Sigismund Kaufmann, president of the newly established socialist Turner Society and, at the same time, leader of the national Turner Union, took on a leadership role in the labor movement and subsequently, after the provocative Kansas-Nebraska Act, in the fight against slavery extension. Not all Turner societies were as radical as the society of the New York Turners. Yet the controversy about Kansas caused many Turners and Forty-Eighters (predominantly from Boston and Cincinnati) to emigrate there to help make that state free of slaves. John Brown recruited the German revolutionaries for his small army, and K. F. Kob established a German paper with the aim of creating a belt of freedom from Kansas to Texas. Barely emerging from the struggle against proslavery adversaries, Kansas recognized the contributions of the German-Americans and the Turners by sending John P. Hatterscheidt as a delegate to the Republican Convention. Writing for the *Turn-Zeitung*, Wilhelm Rapp became an eloquent voice for German-Americans in shaping public opinion about the Republican path to the presidency. The halls of the Turners throughout the country, especially in the highly contested states of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, hosted the lectures of prominent German-Americans like Schurz, Koerner, Hassaurek, Solger, and Hatterscheidt, among others.

In the election of 1860, the Republican Party faced the challenge of capturing the states of Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Illinois, which it had failed to win four years before. The focus of Republican strategists was necessarily on these states; they considered the German-American population the key to victory. The perception of potential significance influenced the course of the

campaign. To emphasize that perception, German newspapers throughout the country conducted their own campaigns to promote an upsurge of interest and confidence: in Springfield (Canisius), Chicago (Schneider), Milwaukee (Domschke), St. Louis (Bernays and Münch), Davenport (Olshausen), Cincinnati (Hassaurek and Willich), Cleveland (Thieme), Baltimore (Rapp), Boston (Heinzen and Douai), and New York (Douai).

The *Turn-Zeitung* belonged to a category of its own. Representing a national network and transcending local political concerns, it took active part in the national debates about Seward and Bates and, at a very early stage, drew attention to Lincoln as a viable candidate. The editors of such papers, overwhelmingly the recent arrivals in America, Turners and Forty-Eighters, created a noteworthy presence in the national discourse. To assert that the German-American votes were indispensable for Lincoln's election cannot be sustained by the evidence available, but the political involvement and impact of this immigrant population was unprecedented.

When the refugees of the European revolution adjusted to the New World, they discovered political issues that reminded them of their bitter experiences as failed revolutionaries. Many reacted instinctively against the discrimination against naturalized citizens and the injustice of slavery. They participated in the emigration wave to Kansas and instinctively recognized a kindred spirit in the newly formed Republican Party. On the other hand, Lincoln might argue that he consistently saw in the Declaration of Independence protections for the rights of immigrants. As early as 1855 in his letter to Joshua Speed, he emphasized that the principle "All men are created equal" applied to the rights of naturalized citizens. In 1858, in the debate against Senator Douglas, Lincoln deplored the idea of making exceptions to the Declaration of Independence. He asked where that practice would stop. In other words, Lincoln based his reaching out to the immigrant population on a consistent principle and a matter of justice. In this respect Lincoln emerges as an energetic defender of immigrant rights.

In 1849, Lincoln participated in a meeting called to show sympathy with the cause of Hungarian freedom and supported a resolution about the "glorious struggle for liberty."<sup>3</sup> When he spoke in Belleville in 1856, Koerner recalled that Lincoln, "almost with tears in his eyes," praised the same desire for liberty in his German-American audience.<sup>4</sup> The revolutionary struggles of the German-Americans and the fight to prevent the extension of slavery were related on a fundamental level. The challenge was to raise this obvious convergence of interests to the national stage and transform them into political action. Although other, significant contingencies cannot be ignored, the quiet alliance between Lincoln and the German-Americans became one of the factors in the nomination and election of 1860.

Lincoln was not the only one to take notice of the voting potential of the German immigrants. Illinois voters had elected Koerner lieutenant governor. Koerner served from 1853 to 1857. Also in Illinois, another German-American, Francis A. Hofmann, served from 1861 to 1865. In Iowa, Nicholas J. Rusch served as lieutenant governor between 1860 and 1862. In 1857, Carl Schurz became the Republican candidate for the post of lieutenant governor of Wisconsin, though he did not prevail in the election. Jacob Mueller served in that capacity in Ohio in 1871. New York Republicans nominated Sigismund Kaufmann for the post of lieutenant governor, but he did not prevail in the election of 1870. Politicians in certain states established a predictable pattern to deal with the immigrant vote; they offered a position that lacked a guarantee of political power. By influencing the nomination and election of a president in 1860, the immigration factor, directly or indirectly, broke through established barriers of opposition and token representation. This time the stakes were higher, and the prize was not simply a deputy governorship, but in a time of unprecedented national crisis the office of the chief executive.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850s*, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix I.

<sup>3</sup> Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 2:62.

<sup>4</sup> McCormack, ed., *Memoirs of Gustave Koerner*, 2:33.

