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Carl Schurz: Myth and Reality*

In the lore of German-American success, Carl Schurz has always occupied a preeminent position. Wendell Willkie remembered that he learned to revere Schurz as a boy; James Ford Rhodes rejoiced that "such a brilliant man came to America and became an American citizen"; President Rutherford B. Hayes thought of him as a "gentleman of the purest character, and as an able patriotic and scholarly statesman," while Henry Watterson recalled that of "all the public men of that period Carl Schurz most captivated" him.¹ Allan Nevins admired his broad views, high motives, and unshakable courage, Charles Francis Adams believed Schurz understood American institutions better than anyone else, and James Russell Lowell was certain that Schurz's public service would rank with that of Albert Gallatin.² No wonder that Albert B. Faust, the well-known chronicler of the German-American experience, thought that Schurz was justly called "the greatest of the German-Americans."³

The myth of Carl Schurz was part of the German-American heritage. After all, what other immigrant succeeded within a short time of his arrival in the United States in becoming a candidate for lieutenant governor of his state, in being sent to Europe as minister to Spain, in being commissioned a brigadier and major general, elected Senator from Missouri, and appointed Secretary of the Interior? What other newcomer was on familiar terms with presidents, statesmen, writers, intellectuals, and leading reformers? So well-known was Schurz and so definitely was he considered the leader of his compatriots that by the end of the nineteenth century, hardly a German-American festival took place without his presence, and when he died, his family received condolences from both President Theodore Roosevelt and Kaiser William II.⁴ Idealist, reformer, model for his people, great writer—Schurz was all of these. When he died in 1906, his fame seemed secure.

Yet there was another side to the story. Did the myth correspond to reality? A number of questions come to mind which must be answered to solve this problem. What did Schurz actually accomplish? How did it

come to pass that the man who was called a friend of the slave and the oppressed so vehemently opposed the continuation of radical Reconstruction that he even voted against the Ku Klux Act, that the alleged advocate of the Indian could remove whole tribes by force and insist upon the unremitting assimilation of native Americans? What was the military contribution of a general who had to flee both at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg so that the army taunted Germans by shouting, "I fights mit Sigel and I runs mit Schurz"?⁵ How genuine was the commitment to civil service rules of a reformer who before he took up the struggle had himself first been disappointed in his search for patronage? How great a figure was a person who was so vain and conceited that he could claim to have spoken like a "god"?⁶ And finally, how effective was Schurz's leadership? To what extent did he really speak for the German-American community? Did he not divide it rather than unify it? Was his ethnic politics anything to be lauded? In view of such shortcomings, is it surprising that his fame has somewhat diminished? The problem certainly deserves examination.

That Schurz's career was unusual is beyond dispute. Born in 1829 in Liblar near Cologne, he was early influenced by his liberal father, a village school master, and his maternal grandfather, the tenant-in-chief of the local count. After attending schools in Liblar and nearby Brühl, he was sent to the *Marcellen-Gymnasium* in Cologne. Because of his parents' financial difficulties, he had to leave school before graduation but managed to complete his examinations on his own so that he could matriculate at the University of Bonn. There he fell under the spell of Gottfried Kinkel, professor of art history, flaming nationalist, and convinced democrat. The outbreak of the Revolution of 1848 found him at Kinkel's side as an active leader of the most radical faction, the democratic republicans. He delivered speeches, helped edit the outspoken *Bonner Zeitung*, and stood out as a revolutionary student leader. Finally he took part in an ill-conceived attack on the royal arsenal at Siegburg, an exploit which was so easily frustrated by a detachment of dragoons that he was deeply ashamed and sought to refurbish his tarnished reputation by joining the revolutionary army in southwestern Germany. Nearly captured by the Prussians after the siege of Rastatt, he managed to escape through a sewer and flee across the Rhine to France.

His stay abroad was to be brief. Hearing that his idol, Professor Kinkel, had been captured and condemned to life imprisonment, Schurz set out for Germany with a false passport in order to free him. After the professor's wife gave Schurz money collected by friends, he went to Berlin and succeeded in bribing a guard at nearby Spandau prison, Kinkel's place of confinement. The professor climbed down a rope lowered from the roof. Then, by relays of fast horses, Schurz spirited him away to the Baltic coast, where the two revolutionaries found a ship that took them to Scotland. The adventurous liberation of Kinkel made Schurz famous at the age of twenty-one.

After a brief stay in France and Great Britain, Schurz decided to emigrate to the United States. He was anxious to take part in politics—

something that would be difficult in any European exile. Having fallen in love and married a rich Hamburg heiress, he had enough money to tide him over the first few years in the new country. He arrived in New York in 1852, moved to Philadelphia and learned English—so well that he was soon able to deliver speeches in the new language. Then he made up his mind to settle in Wisconsin, in Watertown, where he had relatives and where he believed there were great opportunities for growth. Dabbling in real estate, journalism, and politics, he was noticed by the local Republicans. The talented young German could be useful to them. Anxious to woo his compatriots away from their habitual allegiance to the Democrats, Republican party leaders enlisted him in their campaigns. He spoke so well and seemed so effective that in 1857, before his naturalization had become final, they nominated him for lieutenant governor. His bid for office was unsuccessful, but in 1859 he tried again, this time for the governorship. Unable to get the nomination, he continued to support the party nevertheless, and the grateful Republicans made him chairman of their delegation to the 1860 national convention in Chicago. Although having first supported William H. Seward, he found it easy to switch to Abraham Lincoln, became a member of the Republican National Committee, and campaigned for the rail-splitter throughout the North.

His party's 1860 victory seemed to entitle him to a reward. After Schurz had made his wishes known, Lincoln appointed him minister to Spain. But war broke out, and, anxious to join the army, he stayed in Madrid for only six months. Again his request was granted when in 1862 he was appointed brigadier general of volunteers. Seeing action at the second Battle of Bull Run, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Chattanooga, he established a somewhat spotty record. Nevertheless, he became a major general and earned the gratitude of many of his fellow countrymen.

After the war, President Andrew Johnson sent Schurz on an inspection trip to the South. Because of his disapproval of the new President's Reconstruction policies, however, he broke with Johnson and actively supported the radicals. Earning his living as a journalist in Washington and Detroit, he finally became editor and co-owner of the *St. Louis Westliche Post*, a local German newspaper of considerable prestige. Within less than two years of his arrival in the state, he was elected United States Senator from Missouri.

As a member of the Senate in Washington, Schurz was very prominent. His speeches were widely read, although his influence began to wane after his break with President Grant, whose foreign and domestic policies he refused to support. In fact, he was one of the main leaders of the unsuccessful liberal Republican movement of 1872 and soon became an indefatigable spokesman for civil service reform. Appointed Secretary of the Interior by President Hayes, he distinguished himself by his introduction of civil service rules in the department, his reform of the Indian service, his pioneer efforts for the conservation of natural resources, and the establishment of the Geological Survey.

After the expiration of his term, Schurz never again held public office. Moving to New York, he occupied himself with journalism, politics, and business, and became a leading spokesman for liberal reform. In 1884, he was one of the most prominent Mugwumps opposing the election of James G. Blaine, and during the following years, true to his reputation as an independent, frequently switched his political allegiance. President of the National Civil Service Reform League, he believed that the abolition of the spoils system was second in importance only to the abolition of slavery. He was the main speaker at many German-American affairs, was widely considered the principal spokesman for his compatriots, and enjoyed the attention paid to him during his visits to the old country. During the 1890s he became an outspoken anti-imperialist. Opposing American colonial expansion in general and the annexation of the Philippines in particular, he collaborated with others in seeking to stem the imperialist tide. He died in 1906, mourned on both sides of the Atlantic.⁷

Schurz's career was certainly arresting. But what were his permanent achievements to give reality to the myth connected with his name?

In the first place, Schurz deserves credit for his courageous stand against slavery. A convinced democrat in the European—not the American party sense, he naturally considered human bondage a blot upon American institutions. It was therefore not surprising that he turned against slavery and its defenders. Yet most of his fellow German-Americans supported the Democratic party which was becoming ever more beholden to the slave holders. It became Schurz's task to wean his countrymen away from their ancient political moorings, a mission he performed to the satisfaction of his Republican sponsors.⁸

The task was not easy. Often collaborating with nativists and temperance forces, the Republicans were suspect of harboring inimical feelings toward the Germans. Schurz had to disabuse his compatriots of these suspicions and overcome their racist feelings.⁹ To some extent, he succeeded. His appeals were powerful and quotable and his inveterate attacks on the slaveholders undoubtedly increased his audience's awareness of the evil effects of the "peculiar institution." Whether he was really as effective with his countrymen as his sponsors believed is dubious; we know today that German Catholics and any number of Lutherans as well remained true to their old allegiance. In Illinois, however, the German vote may really have turned the tide, and in Missouri, the German-Americans played an important role in keeping the state from seceding.¹⁰ Schurz's voice was heard, not only by the Germans but also by the general public, and his efforts to overcome his countrymen's indifference to the horrors of slavery certainly deserve mention.

Schurz's antislavery efforts did not cease with the outbreak of the Civil War. On the contrary, allying himself with the radicals, he never ceased preaching the necessity of emancipation. "Free the slaves," he strongly counseled the administration from Madrid; "free the slaves," he urged when he came home, and it was with great satisfaction that he

observed Lincoln's growing support for a policy of freedom culminating in the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment.¹¹

Just as he had favored the slave before and during the war, Schurz continued to foster the freedmen afterward. Sent to the South by President Johnson in order to assess the effects of presidential Reconstruction, he courageously pointed out the injustices Johnson's policies inflicted upon the blacks. The White House rejected his advice. Congress, however, printed his report, which became an important radical campaign document.¹² He fully supported the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, served as temporary chairman of the convention that nominated U. S. Grant for President, and actively campaigned for the victor of Appomattox.¹³

These achievements may well justify the myth. Yet it may be said, "Is it not true that Schurz abandoned the freedmen, radical Reconstruction, and the Republican party when they needed him most?" In part, the objection is valid. When in 1869 Schurz broke with the Grant administration because of differences with the President about the projected annexation of the Dominican Republic, factional quarrels in Missouri, and civil service reform, he also began to oppose radical Reconstruction. Ending corruption in the South as well as in the North now seemed more important to him than upholding human rights, and later, he rationalized that the problems of the blacks in the South could be solved if only the freedmen joined both political parties. Seeking to reform federal policies toward the South, he opposed the Ku Klux Act, various measures to enforce racial peace, and in 1872, as one of the leaders of the Liberal Republican movement, made common cause with many former Confederates. Not even the failure of the Liberal Republican effort caused him to change his mind, and for some years to come, he maintained his equivocal attitude toward the Southern race problem.¹⁴

But the story does not end here. At the turn of the century, Schurz, noting the parallels between imperialist excesses in the Philippines and racial oppression in the South, returned to the faith of his young manhood. He supported black causes and in 1903 wrote to his friend, Moorfield Storey, later the first president of the NAACP, "I feel . . . that unless the reaction now going on can be stayed, we shall have to fight the old anti-slavery battle over again."¹⁵ And fight it he did. Influential published articles, private support, and friendship with Booker T. Washington put Schurz once again on the side of the oppressed. His article, "Can the South Solve the Negro Problem?" which appeared in *McClure's Magazine* in January 1904, delighted black leaders. "I feel that every American Negro owes you a debt of gratitude for your outspoken, manly statement at this critical moment when public sentiment is being welded so strongly against our race," George H. White, the last black Reconstruction congressman in Washington, wrote to him.¹⁶ Southern racists sharply attacked him, and it was not surprising that Booker T. Washington was one of the speakers at the memorial meeting in Schurz's honor at Carnegie Hall in New York.¹⁷ Despite the postwar lapse, he was justly celebrated as a defender of human rights.

Just as Schurz upheld the rights of the blacks, he also befriended the Indians. Long maltreated as the wards of the government, the native Americans found that a new system was introduced when Schurz became Secretary of the Interior. After cleaning out the proverbial corruption in the Indian Bureau, he attempted to induce the various nations to integrate into American society. Landholding in severalty seemed to him the best way of achieving this goal. If it was not achieved during his tenure of office, it nevertheless underlined his egalitarian outlook. He furthered Indian education by supporting the establishment of Indian schools at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Hampton, Virginia, and Forest Grove, Oregon, established an Indian police force, and prevented the take-over of the Indian Bureau by the War Department. After an Indian outbreak which might easily have led to more bloodshed, in 1879 he negotiated a favorable settlement with the Utes and earned the gratitude of Chief Ouray.¹⁸

Again objectors may, with justice, point out that good as this record was, it was marred by many shortcomings. The inept and cruel displacement of the Poncas from their ancestral homes, the inappropriate assumptions underlying the landholding policy, and the injustice of forced assimilation in the Indian schools might seem to puncture the myth. How can they be explained and Schurz's reputation upheld?

The first point concerns the Poncas. A small and unoffending tribe, they had inadvertently lost their Nebraska home to the Sioux, their inveterate enemies, because of an oversight in an 1868 treaty. Schurz carried out his predecessors' plans of moving the tribe to new homes in the Indian Territory, present-day Oklahoma, a region with which they were not familiar and which at first they did not find congenial. Some of them refused to stay and tried to return home, only to be arrested by Schurz. A great movement on their behalf sprang up in the East; Helen Hunt Jackson published her indictment of Indian policy, *A Century of Dishonor*, and the Secretary was cast as the villain of the piece. In the end, a settlement was reached which allowed those who preferred their old homes to stay there, but Schurz's reputation suffered. Yet it was the Secretary himself who had first pointed out the injustice done to the Poncas, and it was again Schurz who, after at first continuing the policy of moving whole tribes into compact areas far from their former homes, in 1880 recognized his error and henceforth decided to permit Indian nations to remain in their old abodes.¹⁹

The severalties policy and its concomitant of forced assimilation can similarly be condemned. It is true that native American youngsters were forced to speak English at the Indian schools and that landholding in severalty may not have been the most enlightened approach to the Indian problem. Yet for their time, these policies were progressive. Their proponents were the antagonists of those who believed that a "reservation six feet long, four feet deep and three feet wide" was the only fit place for native Americans,²⁰ and Schurz, who died in 1906, can hardly be expected to have been familiar with anthropological findings of the 1980s. All in all, his record in Indian relations was a positive one.

The Jews, too, found a champion in Schurz. As his father had told him in Liblar, a family acquaintance, Aaron, who was Jewish, was a far better man than many a Christian,²¹ and Schurz never forgot the lesson. Throughout his life, he had many Jewish friends, the best known example being Dr. Abraham Jacobi, the famous forty-eighter who became a well-known New York pediatrician.²² Consequently, the resurgence of anti-Semitism in the 1880s horrified Schurz. As he wrote in 1881 to his brother-in-law in Hamburg, "Your conditions over there make me feel very uncomfortable, in fact so uncomfortable that I do not like to think about them. What the papers here have been printing about your Jew-baiting we Germans could not read without being ashamed."²³ When in 1884 the German Reichstag deputy, Eduard Lasker, during a visit to the United States died suddenly in New York, Schurz delivered a eulogy in a local synagogue. "At a German's bier a German word is seemly," he said. Praising the departed statesman's liberalism, he continued:

It sounds like a slander of human nature when we have reports from the other side how fanatics for the renewed persecution of the Jews, this vile insult to the nineteenth century's vaunted enlightenment and humanitarianism, are even now, after casting gloom over the last years of his life, trying to besmirch the good name of the deceased because he was a Jew. Let us pity those who do not see their own shame and disgrace, for evidently they know not what they do.²⁴

He never ceased to denounce anti-Semitism in all its forms, to support Jewish causes, and to combat bigotry.²⁵ With all his faults, he was a friend of the oppressed.

Schurz's military achievements must also be mentioned. Without much formal training—his service as a lieutenant in the revolutionary army of 1849 was very brief—he had nevertheless utilized his time in Madrid to study military classics and during the Civil War did not hesitate to assume command of divisions and even of a corps.²⁶ Fighting with distinction at the second battle of Bull Run, he was one of the last to cross the stone bridge across the creek on the way back to Washington. If he was caught in the general rout of the right wing at Chancellorsville, a setback that his enemies never permitted him to forget, he was not to blame for Joseph Hooker's and Oliver O. Howard's faulty dispositions. He himself had warned Howard of impending danger before the battle, and he could no more halt the onslaught of Stonewall Jackson's troops than any other general in his position. And if during the first day at Gettysburg he was again driven back, he more than made up for it in the subsequent defense of Cemetery Ridge. Later, at Wauhatchie near Chattanooga, where Hooker accused him of dilatory execution of orders, he demanded a court of inquiry and was entirely cleared. His military record was somewhat uneven, but for a man of his background, his performance was not bad.²⁷

In reality, however, his contribution to the Union army was political rather than military. At the beginning of the war he raised German cavalry units; in 1864 he campaigned strenuously for the reelection of Lincoln, and he succeeded in gaining the grudging respect even of some

professional officers who had originally sneered at him as a "civilian."²⁸ His prominence was a reminder of the career opportunities open to his countrymen.

If Schurz himself had been asked what his greatest contribution was he probably would have pointed to his career as a civil service reformer. He hated the spoils system, which he regarded as subversive of true democratic government, and in the Senate forcefully supported and advocated reforms based on competitive civil service examinations.²⁹ After his retirement from Congress, he became more active than ever in the cause and was one of the contributors to the Pendleton Act of 1883, which marked the beginning of civil service rules in America. After the death of George William Curtis, he became President of the National Civil Service Reform League and never flagged in his advocacy of the extension of civil service reform in both federal and state governments.³⁰

Of course it might again be objected that Schurz's great devotion to non-partisan office holding became important to him only after he himself had failed to gain Grant's favor and patronage in Missouri. While this accusation is not without foundation,³¹ it does not vitiate the very real service he rendered. So pervasive was the spoils system during the late nineteenth century that it really constituted a cancer in the body politic, and Schurz deserves credit for exposing and ameliorating it.

The zeal with which Schurz fought the imperialists at the turn of the century also should not be forgotten. Originally a supporter of William McKinley because of his detestation of the monetary vagaries of William Jennings Bryan, Schurz broke with the President after the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. The acquisition of foreign territories as colonies was anathema to him. As he explained it to President Jacob D. Schurman of Cornell:

Recent events have touched me perhaps more keenly than they have touched others. Can you imagine the feelings of a man who all his life has struggled for human liberty and popular government, who for that reason had to flee from his native country, who believed he had found what he sought in this Republic, and thus came to love this Republic even more than the land of his birth, and who at last, at the close of his life, sees that beloved Republic in the clutches of sinister powers which seduce and betray it in an abandonment of its most sacred principles and traditions and push it into policies and practices even worse than those which once he had to flee from?

Actively cooperating with Andrew Carnegie and others in the Anti-Imperialist League, in 1900 he even went so far as to vote for the detested Bryan—anything to stop imperialist expansion. If his efforts were not immediately effective, they nevertheless must have contributed to the gradual waning of the imperialist urge and to the eventual granting of independence to the Philippines.³²

No doubt Schurz also deserves great credit for his efforts at conservation and the protection of the environment. Both of these practices were foreign to the exploitative tendencies of the Gilded Age, but Schurz not only sought to protect the country's forests while he was Secretary of

the Interior but continued the agitation for conservation after leaving office. Far ahead of his time and attacked for attempting to introduce Prussian monarchical methods into free republican America, he lived long enough to witness the realization of some of his projects.³³ The myth of Carl Schurz as a progenitor of the environmentalist movement is well founded in reality.

In spite of his interest in conservation, he remained a true nineteenth century liberal. Consequently, he opposed protective tariffs, inflationary theories, and the pretensions of special interests. Of course he never fully understood the problems of labor—he had met Karl Marx as a young man and was totally repelled by the famous revolutionary's unbearable arrogance—but he could and did sympathize with individual strikers. When the telegraph workers went out at the New York *Evening Post*, of which he was a co-editor, he defended their right to do so and broke with E. L. Godkin, who wanted to suppress them with utter ruthlessness.³⁴ Whatever his faults, Carl Schurz was a humanitarian.

It would be unjust merely to emphasize Schurz's political achievements. Generally recognized as one of the late nineteenth century's most effective orators, he was able to hold audiences spellbound for hours. Whenever he spoke in the Senate, the galleries were crowded. Charles Sumner, himself a famous public speaker, highly praised his friend's abilities, for whether Schurz spoke in English or in German, his style was simple, to the point, and yet polished.³⁵ In addition, he was very adept at quick repartees. When Senator Matthew Carpenter of Wisconsin tried to take him to task for allegedly denigrating the United States, he shot back: "The Senator from Wisconsin cannot frighten me by exclaiming, 'My country, right or wrong.' In one sense, I say so too. 'My country, right or wrong; if right, to be kept right, and if wrong, to be set right.'" This felicitous rendition of Stephen Decatur's slogan was often quoted throughout the country.³⁶

It is indisputable that Schurz was inordinately proud of his speaking ability. In 1859, after an address at Boston's Faneuil Hall, he did in fact write to his wife that he had spoken like "a god."³⁷ No doubt his vanity was hard to take; Presidents from Lincoln to Roosevelt had trouble with it;³⁸ yet the fact remains that he was effective, and so his personal foibles might well be forgiven.

What was true of his speaking ability was even more true of his literary achievements. The same simple yet polished style, the same economy of form, rendered his literary productions highly successful. His two-volume biography of Henry Clay, one of the volumes in the American Statesmen Series, was so well written that it has been called the only one of the group that is still readable today;³⁹ his essay on Abraham Lincoln contained so many insights that it has become a valuable source for further study, and his three-volume *Reminiscences*, partially published after his death, was an unqualified triumph on both sides of the Atlantic. Schurz was a facile writer. Articles and editorials, essays and small pieces flowed from his pen in great numbers, and even his worst enemies could hardly deny his literary expertise.⁴⁰

Schurz's greatest contribution, however, was that of an ethnic politician. Ethnic politics was the key to his political ascent, and he deserves to be identified as one of its earliest practitioners in America. His entire career was based on ethnic politics. He deliberately settled in Wisconsin in order to appeal to the many German-Americans there.⁴¹ Cleverly making himself useful to the Republican party with his attempts to woo his countrymen, he collected his first rewards with his nomination for lieutenant governor. Although defeated despite the success of his running mates, he remained loyal to his party which became deeply indebted to him. In 1859, when he was again rejected for the post he wanted, he once more refused to listen to those who counseled him to abandon the party. More beholden to him than ever, in 1860 the Republicans sent him to Chicago as the chairman of the Wisconsin delegation to the national convention, and he continued with his ethnic appeals in the subsequent presidential campaign. Addressing German-American audiences from Missouri to New York, he was certain of his effectiveness. "The Germans are coming over in shoals whenever they are judiciously worked with," he informed Abraham Lincoln. "I think I have succeeded in drawing over a great many wherever I have spoken."⁴² And when the Republicans won, Schurz, asking for a diplomatic post, wrote to his friend, Wisconsin Congressman John F. Potter: "I am generally looked upon as the representative of the German element. I consider it due to those I represent that I should not take an inferior place."⁴³ He succeeded in obtaining the legation in Madrid, only to return during the winter of 1861-62 and to secure a brigadier general's commission.

Again his ethnic appeals helped to assure his advancement. In March of 1863, he informed Senator Sumner that he had seen a list of nominees for major general in the papers. "To stand behind such men as Dan. Sickles and T. Steele . . . is rather a severe thing for me," he protested.

Were it not for the influence I want to possess in the Army, and the relations with my large constituency, with whom a certain kind of success gives prestige and power, I would perhaps care little for promotion. . . . But as matters stand, I do care. This time the jeers of the German pro-slavery papers . . . will be disagreeable to my ears.⁴⁴

He got his promotion a few weeks later.

The type of politics that served Schurz so well prior to Appomattox again helped him afterward. This time he settled in Missouri, once more a state with a large German population. His presumed standing with his countrymen did not impede his selection as temporary chairman of the 1868 Republican convention, nor did it stand in his way when after his party's victory he sought the senatorship. His opponents might taunt him with his pandering to the German vote; he simply replied that he was the candidate of all Americans. If the Germans took satisfaction in his rise, he said, he had no reason to be ashamed of it, for he was proud of his German birth and heritage. Had not the Germans in Missouri

risen to the defense of the Union when others were still dealing in human flesh?⁴⁵ Such allusions did his quest for office no harm.

When Schurz succeeded in securing the coveted seat, he was widely referred to as the "Dutch Senator." As a delegate of the German Republican General Committee who visited Schurz prior to a dinner tendered to him at Delmonico's in New York early in 1869 put it, "We recognize you as the representative of the German-American element,"⁴⁶ and the Senator did not disappoint his countrymen. Always available to them when they asked for favors,⁴⁷ he proudly spoke for them on the Senate floor. When Senator Frederick T. Frelinghuysen of New Jersey, alluding to Schurz's foreign birth, tried to question his patriotism, he replied:

Let me tell the Senator from New Jersey that although I am certainly not ashamed of having sprung from that great nation whose monuments stand so proudly upon all the battlefields of thought; that great nation which . . . seems at this moment to hold in her hands the destinies of the Old World; that great nation which for centuries has sent abroad thousands and thousands of her children upon foreign shores with their intelligence, their industry, and their spirit of good citizenship, yet I may say that I am proud to be an American citizen. This is my country. Here my children were born. Here I have spent the best years of my youth and manhood. All the honors I have gained, all the aims of my endeavors and whatever hope and promise the future has for me, it is all encompassed in this, my new fatherland. My devotion to this great Republic will not yield to any man born in this country.

He summed up his philosophy by stating that those who would forget their old mother could hardly be expected to be faithful to their young bride.⁴⁸

Schurz's subsequent appointment to Hayes's cabinet was also partly due to ethnic politics. When in 1875 Hayes was running for governor of Ohio, he depended on Schurz's help in winning the state's many German voters and he relied upon him again during the following year's presidential campaign.⁴⁹ After the President had appointed the German-American Secretary of the Interior, Joseph Medill wrote to him: "The Germans who had so generally left us came back en masse. . . . This defection broke the backbone of the Democracy. . . . Giving General Schurz a seat in your cabinet won the hearts of the Germans and made them feel kindly towards you."⁵⁰ Schurz's presumed influence with his countrymen had brought him to the pinnacle of his career.

Again, the myth must be tested against reality. First, the entire concept of ethnic politics may be denigrated. It may be called callous and divisive. But it is a fact of American life, and good ethnic leaders are useful. If Schurz perfected the technique, even if he benefited by it, he merely paved the way and deserves approbation for it.

Second, it has been widely questioned whether Schurz's influence with his countrymen was as great as he thought. That there were many of his compatriots who were immune to his appeals is obvious. This was doubtless true of the campaign of 1860, and his rapid rise occasioned

many jealousies then and later. German Democrats resented the successful Republican, and after he left the Republican party, many German Republicans resented his bolting. Some thought he was too American; others found him too German; still others, loyal church members, were offended by his free thinking, but he generally succeeded in convincing important members of the political spectrum that he was indeed the spokesman for the German-American community.⁵¹ And in the last analysis, the actual extent of his popularity with his compatriots was not as important as his exercise of ethnic leadership. In fact, he became a role model for many of his compatriots, and as an ethnic role model, Carl Schurz's achievements fully justify his lasting reputation in the German-American community. How many other immigrants could boast of such a career? German-Americans had every reason to take pride in Schurz, in his political and literary successes, and his standing among the intellectual elite of both continents. "Every real German is proud that in you we have the first representative of our people who has held and is still holding the two highest positions attainable by a naturalized citizen," wrote one admirer to the Secretary of the Interior.⁵² Naturally, German-Americans were highly satisfied when in Germany too he was recognized as a leading representative of their community. Prince Otto von Bismarck, who granted him several interviews, enjoyed talking with him, and these conversations increased his reputation with his compatriots. Even Emperor William II received him cordially, a welcome which again could not remain unnoticed in America.⁵³

This ethnic leadership carried with it certain obligations. Schurz could either be helpful to his compatriots or he could lead them into a dead end. It may even be argued that by preaching political independence he lessened their cohesive effectiveness. Whether this is true is difficult to determine. But it is evident that the Germans, divided as they were by origin, religion, social and economic position would probably have found it difficult to unite politically in any case.

As it was, Schurz led them well. In fact, his major contribution was his attempt to show them how to merge both their German and American heritage in a combination of what we today would call the "melting pot" and ethnic pluralism. Believing that immigrants ought to integrate and yet retain their own cultural traditions, he never tired of trying to set an example of the fusion of American and German ways. He wrote the first volume of his *Reminiscences*, the part that dealt with his life in Europe, in German, and the other two, dealing with his experiences in America, in English. He wrote English beautifully, but corresponded with all who knew the language in German; he spoke an excellent English but had a sign over his door, "Hier wird deutsch gesprochen."⁵⁴ At the same time, he always stressed the importance of Americanization, and he himself was the best example of the possibility of combining German cultural traditions with an active participation in American literary, cultural, and political life. As he said in 1897 on the

occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the *Liederkrantz* society in New York,

It is sometimes expected of our compatriots in America that they shall not only learn English, but that they shall entirely cast aside the old mother tongue. This is unwise advice. Nobody will dispute that the German-American must learn English. He owes it to his new country and he owes it to himself. But it is more than folly to say that he ought therefore to give up the German language. As American citizens, we must become Americanized; that is absolutely necessary. I have always been in favor of sensible Americanization, but this need not mean an abandonment of all that is German. It means that we should accept the best traits of American character and join them to the best traits of German character. By so doing we shall make the most valuable contribution to the American nation, to American civilization.⁵⁸

His prescription for the problems of a multi-ethnic society was a good one. It is valuable for us today.

Thus Carl Schurz became known as the greatest German-American of the nineteenth century. He had his faults; he annoyed many a superior, but he could also be seen as a genuinely liberal leader of America's largest non-English speaking ethnic group. The myth of the importance of Carl Schurz corresponds to reality.

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Notes

* Professor Hans L. Trefousse presented the lecture on Carl Schurz at the annual meeting of the Society for German-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin at Madison on April 28, 1984.

¹ New York *Post*, 30 November 1942; James Ford Rhodes to Agathe Schurz, 15 March 1906, in Private Collection of Arthur R. Hogue, Bloomington, Ind.; *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes, 17th President of the United States*, ed. Charles Richard Williams (Columbus: Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society, 1924), IV, 609-10; Henry Watter-son, "Marse Henry": *An Autobiography* (New York: Doran, 1919), II, 17.

² Allan Nevins, *The Evening Post: A Century of Journalism* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1922), p. 442; George S. Merriam, *The Life and Times of Samuel Bowles* (New York: Century, 1885), II, 131; James Russell Lowell to John W. Carter, 15 October 1890, Carl Schurz Papers, Library of Congress.

³ Albert Bernhardt Faust, *The German Element in the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), II, 155.

⁴ Hans L. Trefousse, *Carl Schurz: A Biography* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), pp. 275, 296.

⁵ James S. Pula, *For Liberty and Justice: The Life and Times of Wladimir Krzyzanowski* (Chicago: Polish American Congress Charitable Foundation, 1978), p. 92.

⁶ Joseph Schafer, ed. and transl., *Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz, 1841-1869* (New York: Da Capo, 1970), p. 191.

⁷ Trefousse, *Schurz*, passim.

⁸ Carl Schurz, *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz* (New York: McClure, 1907-08), II, 67-244; Allan Nevins, *The Emergence of Lincoln* (New York: Scribner's, 1950), II, 31, 163; Schurz to Mrs. Schurz, 13 February 1861, Hogue Collection; William Vocke, "Our German Soldiers," *Paper Read . . . Before the Commandery of the State of Illinois Military Order of the Loyal Legion* (Chicago: Dial, 1899), 349.

⁹ Schurz, *Reminiscences*, II, 116; La Vern J. Rippley, *The German-Americans* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), p. 55.

¹⁰ *Ethnic Voters and the Election of Lincoln*, ed. Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), xi-xxxii and passim; Rippley, *The German-Americans*, pp. 60-61.

¹¹ *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz*, ed. Frederick Bancroft (New York: Putnam's, 1913), I, 185-191; Schurz, *Reminiscences*, II, 324 ff.; Schurz to Mrs. Adolph Meyer, 2 January 1863, Schurz Papers; Schafer, *Intimate Letters*, pp. 314-15.

¹² Hans L. Trefousse, "Carl Schurz's 1865 Southern Tour: A Reassessment," *Prospects*, II (1976), 293-308.

¹³ Schurz, *Speeches*, I, 377-416, 419 ff.; St. Louis *Missouri Democrat*, 8 and 10 January 1869; Schafer, *Intimate Letters*, pp. 436-38.

¹⁴ Hans L. Trefousse, "Carl Schurz, the South, and the Politics of Virtue," in *Before Watergate: Problems of Corruption in American Society*, Abraham S. Eisenstadt et al., eds. (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1978), pp. 99-116.

¹⁵ Schurz to Moorfield Storey, 26 June 1903, Schurz Papers.

¹⁶ *Harper's Weekly*, 4 September 1897; Schurz, *Speeches*, VI, 311-48; George H. White to Schurz, 2 January 1904, Schurz Papers.

¹⁷ Frank Johnson to Editor, *McClure's Magazine*, 24 December 1903; David T. Duncan to Editor, *McClure's Magazine*, 21 January 1904; Woodville, *Mississippi Independent*, 2 January 1904, Schurz Papers; *Addresses in Memory of Carl Schurz*, Carnegie Hall, New York, November 21, 1906 (New York: Committee of the Carl Schurz Memorial, 1906), pp. 38-41.

¹⁸ *New York Times*, 8 January 1878; Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), pp. 271 ff., 242 ff., 234-35; B. M. Smith to Schurz, 21 December 1878, *The Christian Advocate*, 23 January 1879; W. S. Berry to Schurz, 28 January 1881, Schurz Papers.

¹⁹ Trefousse, *Schurz*, pp. 245-47.

²⁰ Grace Cook to J. Cook, 1 March 1882, Schurz Papers; N. G. Ordway to Rutherford B. Hayes, 18 December 1880, Hayes Papers, Spiegel Grove, Fremont, Ohio.

²¹ Schurz, *Reminiscences*, I, 35.

²² Rhoda Truax, *The Doctors Jacobi* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1952), pp. 184 ff.

²³ Schurz to Adolph Meyer, 2 January 1881, Hogue Collection.

²⁴ St. Louis *Westliche Post*, 9 May 1884. Copy in Schurz Papers.

²⁵ Hans L. Trefousse, "German-American Liberalism Against Bigotry: Carl Schurz and the Jews," in *Germans in America: Aspects of German-American Relations in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. E. Allen McCormick (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1983), pp. 31-46.

²⁶ Schurz, *Reminiscences*, II, 273.

²⁷ Elaa Lonn, *Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), pp. 180-82; Edwin B. Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign* (New York: Scribner's, 1968), p. 437.

²⁸ This was true despite the jealousy he engendered in certain German circles who resented his competing with Sigel. Lonn, *Foreigners*, p. 99; Wilhelm Kaufmann, *Die Deutschen im amerikanischen Bürgerkriege* (München: Oldenbourg, 1911), pp. 467 ff.; Karl Spraul to Redaktion, *Belletristisches Journal*, 9 March 1877, Schurz Papers.

²⁹ Claude M. Fuess, *Carl Schurz, Reformer* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1932), pp. 159 ff.

³⁰ Everett P. Wheeler, *Sixty Years of American Life: Taylor to Roosevelt, 1850-1910* (New York: Dutton, 1917), p. 277; Frank Mann Stewart, *The National Civil Service Reform League: History, Activities, and Problems* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1929), pp. 12-14; Ari Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), pp. 59 ff., 260.

³¹ Schurz to Grant, 14 April 1869, Hogue Collection; Arthur Hogue, "Civil Service Reform, 1869," *American-German Review*, 18 (June 1952), 7-8; Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*, pp. 60-61.

³² Trefousse, *Schurz*, pp. 277 ff.; Schurz to J. G. Schurman, 28 April 1902, Schurz Papers.

³³ *New York Times*, 22 August, 4 September 1877, 2, 13, 22, and 25 March 1878; *Cong. Record*, 45th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1717, 1721 ff.; Schurz, *Speeches*, V, 22 ff.

³⁴ Schurz, *Speeches*, V, 40-80, II, 473-533; Schurz, *Reminiscences*, I, 139-40; Schurz to Godkin, 9 August 1883, E. L. Godkin Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

³⁵ *Westliche Post*, 20 March 1872; Horace White to Carl Schurz Memorial Committee, 31 January 1910, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University; George William Curtis to Effie, 21 February 1872, Schurz Papers.

³⁶ *Cong. Globe*, 42nd Cong., 2nd sess., 1286; Fuess, *Schurz*, p. 213.

³⁷ Schafer, *Intimate Letters*, p. 191.

³⁸ Trefousse, *Schurz*, pp. 125-26, 153-59, 182 ff., 265, 291.

³⁹ John A. Garraty, *Henry Cabot Lodge: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1953), p. 567; Faust, *German Element*, II, 162.

⁴⁰ Schafer, *Schurz*, pp. 240 ff.; Schurz, *Speeches*, V, 82; Herbert Spencer to Schurz, 3 May 1892, Schurz Papers.

⁴¹ Schurz, *Speeches*, I, 19.

⁴² Schurz to Lincoln, 22 August 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴³ Schurz, *Speeches*, I, 165-68.

⁴⁴ Schurz to Sumner, 8 March 1863, Charles Sumner Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁴⁵ St. Louis *Missouri Democrat*, 13 and 14 January 1869.

⁴⁶ St. Louis *Missouri Democrat*, 3 March 1869.

⁴⁷ Max Weber to Schurz, 18 January 1870; Frederick Meyer to Schurz, 20 and 21 March 1870; Adolph Becker to Schurz, 17 December 1870; G. Heinrich to Schurz, 26 December 1870, Schurz Papers, are a few examples of German-American reliance on Schurz for help in the Senate.

⁴⁸ *Cong. Globe*, 42nd Cong., 2nd sess., App. 111.

⁴⁹ *New York Times*, 20, 22 and 28 September 1875; Carl Wittke, "Carl Schurz and Rutherford B. Hayes," *Ohio Historical Quarterly*, 65 (October 1956), 337-55.

⁵⁰ Joseph Medill to Hayes, 4 April 1877, Hayes Papers.

⁵¹ Kaufmann, *Die Deutschen*, pp. 466-67; *New York Times*, 2 July 1872; St. Louis *Missouri Democrat*, 12 August 1872; *Harper's Weekly*, 24 August 1872 (with Nast cartoon); William F. Whyte, "Chronicles of Early Watertown," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, IV (March 1921), 289; Georg von Bosse, "Karl Schurz: Deutschlands Beste Gabe an Amerika," *Zeitfragen des christlichen Volkslebens*, 33 (1908), passim; W. Jones to Schurz, 24 October 1894, William H. Carpenter to Schurz, 18 January 1898, Schurz Papers.

⁵² A. H. Luettwitz to Schurz, 10 May 1879, Schurz Papers.

⁵³ *New York Belletristisches Journal*, 14 February 1868; Schurz, *Reminiscences*, III, 263 ff., 416-17; Schurz, *Diary*, 29 October 1888, Schurz Papers.

⁵⁴ *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 31 May 1906, in *Carl Schurz, der Deutsche und Amerikaner*, eds. Anton Erkelenz and Fritz Mittelmann (Berlin: Sieben Stäbe, 1929), p. 208; Walter Vulpius, "Carl Schurz, the Man and Friend: Personal Reminiscences," *American-German Review*, 7 (December 1940), 11.

⁵⁵ Schurz, *Reminiscences*, V, 334-38.

