

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03193-7 - German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era

Alison Clark Efford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

*Naturalized Citizens, Transnational Perspectives, and the Arc of Reconstruction*

On a June day in 1906, thousands of St. Louisans gathered in Forest Park for the unveiling of a statue of General Franz Sigel.<sup>1</sup> A group of immigrants, having commissioned the bronze likeness of their Civil War hero, now displayed the pageantry for which German Americans were renowned. Elderly veterans who had fought “mit Sigel” marched in formation, choirs of men sang German folk songs, and local dignitaries addressed the crowd from a platform decked with American flags. One after another, they recounted how “our naturalized fellow-citizens of German birth” had helped defeat the Confederacy, saving the Union and securing its “free institutions.”<sup>2</sup>

The entire dedication celebrated the nineteenth-century nation-state. The officiants made much of Sigel’s decision to swear his loyalty to his adopted country. They also linked his battle to preserve the United States in the 1860s to his efforts to unify Germany in 1848. Yet the proceedings largely neglected the political ideology that the general had considered inseparable from his nationalism during those years – liberalism. Sigel, like revolutionaries and reformers around the world, had assumed that nation-states would enshrine the individual rights of their male residents in law. Although the speakers in Forest Park referred obliquely to Sigel’s “noble ardor for human rights,” no one explained that the German republic he had envisioned in 1848 was altogether different from the authoritarian German Empire that Otto von Bismarck had eventually founded in 1871. No one mentioned his opposition to slavery or his support for African-American suffrage after emancipation. Indeed, the only man who alluded to the postwar years expressed relief that Americans had put the troublesome

1 On the sculpture itself, see Caroline Loughlin and Catherine Anders, *Forest Park* (Columbia: Junior League of St. Louis and University of Missouri Press, 1986), 97, 261.

2 *St. Louis Mississippi Blätter* [Sunday edition of the *Westliche Post*], June 24, 1906. All translations are my own unless a translator is identified.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03193-7 - German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era

Alison Clark Efford

Excerpt

[More information](#)2 *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era*

issues of the conflict behind them. “Those who once fought each other,” he said, “now stand together, unified.”<sup>3</sup> Most white Unionists were pleased that the federal government no longer antagonized white Southerners by upholding black citizenship.<sup>4</sup> Contemplating the Civil War era from their vantage point at the turn of the century, the immigrants testified that the nationalism of 1848 and the 1860s had prevailed. Liberalism was more in doubt.<sup>5</sup>

This book argues that the activities of German Americans not only reflected the rise and fall of liberal nationalism in the mid-nineteenth-century United States, they helped ensure it. I take up the subject that the ceremony in Forest Park pointedly ignored: the debate over African-American citizenship. Black rights were most fiercely contested during the twelve years that followed the American Civil War, the extraordinary period known as Reconstruction. Between 1865 and 1877, white Republicans first threw themselves into equal rights for black Southerners and then quickly retreated from the cause.<sup>6</sup> The German-American Republicans who animate this study – men such as Franz Sigel – played a unique role in these developments for two main reasons, both of which were on display decades later in Forest Park. As new American citizens themselves, they possessed a distinctive insight into citizenship, and as people who had lived on two continents, they brought a transnational perspective to Reconstruction politics. Ultimately, German Americans, who were politically divided but formed by far the largest immigrant group in the ruling Republican Party, would see to it that the fate of the nation-state and individual rights in North America on the one hand and in Europe on the other were intertwined.

German Americans suggest a new interpretation of the arc of white commitment to African-American citizenship, which ascended during the 1860s, reached its zenith around 1870, bowed downward during the 1870s,

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> For a similar framing, see Thomas Bender, *A Nation among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006). See also David M. Potter, “The Civil War in the History of the Modern World: A Comparative View,” in *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 298, which emphasizes Lincoln and Bismarck’s “contrasting styles of nationalism.” Approaching the subject with a focus on the Confederacy, Carl N. Degler has pointed out that Lincoln and Bismarck each in his own way forged national unity with blood and iron. Degler, “One among Many: The United States and National Self-Determination,” in *Lincoln, the War President: The Gettysburg Lectures*, ed. Gabor S. Boritt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 91–119.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen D. Engle, *The Yankee Dutchman: The Life of Franz Sigel* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 226.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03193-7 - German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era

Alison Clark Efford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

3

and sunk to its nadir at about the time of the festivities in Forest Park in 1906.<sup>7</sup> Of course, the freed people themselves propelled lawmakers forward, demanding equality and asserting control over their work, leisure, relationships, sexuality, mobility, religion, and education.<sup>8</sup> Since Southern whites generally resisted these endeavors, however, the attitudes of the Northern whites who controlled the federal government became vitally important. Republicans in Congress, it turned out, would recognize suffrage as the “fullest manifestation” of American citizenship.<sup>9</sup> In 1866, they drafted the Fourteenth Amendment, which conferred national citizenship on all persons born or naturalized in the United States. Congressmen then passed legislation requiring the states of the former Confederacy to enfranchise African-American men and proposed the Fifteenth Amendment to outlaw racial discrimination in electoral law. But soon after the states ratified this final amendment in 1870 the Northern will to protect black men’s suffrage began to subside. Although Republicans did not repudiate the revised Constitution, it became difficult for them to muster enough support to defend African-American rights. Republicans essentially ended an era in

7 The so-called post-revisionist historians flattened the arc of Republican Reconstruction, emphasizing that Northern racism and constitutional conservatism hampered it from the outset. C. Vann Woodward, “Seeds of Failure in Radical Race Policy,” in *New Frontiers of American Reconstruction*, ed. Harold M. Hyman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 125–47; William S. McFeely, *Yankee Stepfather: General O. O. Howard and the Freedmen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); William Gillette, *The Right to Vote: Politics and the Passage of the Fifteenth Amendment* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969); Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869–1879* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); Michael Les Benedict, *Compromise of Principle: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction, 1863–1869* (New York: Norton, 1974); Benedict, “Preserving the Constitution: The Conservative Basis of Radical Reconstruction,” in *Preserving the Constitution: Essays on Politics and the Constitution in the Reconstruction Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 3–22; Phillip S. Paludan, *A Covenant with Death: The Constitution, Law, and Equality in the Civil War Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975); Earl M. Maltz, *Civil Rights, the Constitution, and Congress, 1863–1869* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1990).

8 Kate Masur’s distinction between equality and citizenship is useful here, although immigrants offer good reasons to focus on the latter. Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 3–7. Examples of an extremely rich literature include W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1935); Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979); Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Leslie A. Schwalm, *Emancipation’s Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

9 Mitchell Snay, *Fenians, Freedmen, and Southern Whites: Race and Nationality in the Era of Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 163; Derek Heater, *A Brief History of Citizenship* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 65–87.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03193-7 - German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era

Alison Clark Efford

Excerpt

[More information](#)4 *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era*

1877, when they settled the previous year's disputed presidential election by agreeing to withdraw federal troops from the South almost completely.<sup>10</sup>

During Reconstruction, German-American Republicans were motivated to promote and then abandon racially inclusive policies for many of the same reasons as other white Unionists. Most of them were initially adherents of "free labor ideology" who believed that arming black men with the vote would allow African Americans to exact fair compensation for their work and remake the South as a region of independent farmers, craftsmen, and shopkeepers. As historian Eric Foner has argued, when industrialization and labor conflict in the North eroded this vision during the 1870s, Northern politicians' sympathy for Southern workers dissipated.<sup>11</sup> German Republicans were also intent on unifying the war-torn country. During the 1860s, they thought that African Americans would safeguard the Union by acting as a political counterweight to disloyal white Southerners, but as time passed, they increasingly longed to reconcile with former Confederates. The unveiling in Forest Park showed how this latter urge could undercut the war's emancipatory legacy.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the most violent white opponents of black rights wore down the resolve that would have been necessary to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment.<sup>13</sup>

10 Some scholars point out that Republicans continued to make some attempts to defend African-American rights. See for example Xi Wang, *The Trial of Democracy: Black Suffrage and Northern Republicans, 1860–1910* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997); Brooks Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998). More than half the essays in a 2006 historiographical collection argue that the issues of Reconstruction persisted past 1877. Thomas J. Brown, ed., *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7.

11 Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 525. Foner drew on a generation of revisionist work written on Reconstruction during the 1970s and 1980s, but he was especially inspired by Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*. Foner distinguished his position from David Montgomery's argument that Northern labor conflict undid the Republican coalition. Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872* (New York: Knopf, 1967). Extending Foner's interpretation, see Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865–1901* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850–1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); David Quigley, *The Second Founding: New York City, Reconstruction, and the Making of American Democracy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004); Nancy Cohen, *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865–1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

12 Blight, *Race and Reunion*. For alternative views of reconciliation, see Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Robert W. Burg, "Amnesty, Civil Rights, and the Meaning of Liberal Republicanism," *American Nineteenth Century History* 4, no. 3 (2003): 29–60.

13 Allen Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); George Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984); Richard Zuczek, *State of Rebellion:*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03193-7 - German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era

Alison Clark Efford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

5

Although German-American Republicans valued free labor and reunification just as their colleagues did, their peculiarities would also influence the trajectory of Reconstruction. First of all, the immigrants were, like the people freed from bondage, new citizens. In fact, I propose that immigrants from Europe were the *archetypal* new citizens in the eyes of Americans.<sup>14</sup> Individuals such as Sigel declared that they embodied citizenship's essence. Their naturalization, as feted in Forest Park, symbolized the liberal notion that men who pledged their fealty to the nation would be guaranteed individual rights. Sometimes immigrant men's acquisition of citizenship could even serve as a template for other aspiring citizens. During the 1860s, leading German-American Republicans explicitly argued that emancipation should bring the freedmen the same political rights that naturalization had effectively secured for male immigrants. Black men should be able to tread the path to voting citizenship that they had pioneered.<sup>15</sup>

While describing the emergence and then eclipse of arguments likening immigrants and African Americans, I probe the limitations inherent in an understanding of citizenship centered on German immigrant men. Preconceptions about race, gender, and political economy inhibited German-American Republicans. Many historians have found that as male Europeans claimed American citizenship, they acted to reinforce the rhetorical line between whiteness and blackness.<sup>16</sup> During Reconstruction, German

*Reconstruction in South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996); LeeAnna Keith, *The Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror, and the Death of Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

14 James H. Kettner argued that the development of naturalization in Britain's North American colonies influenced the model of "volitional allegiance" adopted in the independent United States. Kettner, *The Development of American Citizenship, 1608–1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 9–10, 106–28.

15 Donna R. Gabaccia uses the label "immigrant paradigm" for the idea that the experience of male Europeans was normative and represents the thrust of American history. She points out that scholars are quite aware that white men were exceptionally privileged, so historians are suitably skeptical of this paradigm. Gabaccia, "Is Everywhere Nowhere? Nomads, Nations, and the Immigrant Paradigm of United States History," *Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 1115–34. Another historian discusses a similarly self-congratulatory approach to the immigrant past, the "Ellis Island paradigm." Paul Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 4–11.

16 Descriptions of immigrants using this technique can be found in Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, but they have been further developed under the rubric of "whiteness studies." Significant contributions include David R. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). For evidence of historians' reception of whiteness studies, see Jon Gjerde, "'Here in America There Is Neither King nor Tyrant': European Encounters with Race, 'Freedom,' and Their European Pasts," *Journal of the Early Republic* 9 (1999): 673–90; Eric Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," *International Labor and Working Class History*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03193-7 - German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era

Alison Clark Efford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 6 German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era

Republicans denounced their Democratic countrymen who appealed to immigrants as white men, but they perpetuated more subtle discursive distinctions between European immigrants and black Americans. At a time before ethnicity and race were clearly differentiated, German immigrants insisted that they belonged to an ethnic group. As scholars of the twentieth-century have observed, ethnicity, viewed as cultural and malleable, was defined in contradistinction to race, which was understood as more biological and fixed.<sup>17</sup> Even the German Americans who attacked this dichotomy championed ethnicity in ways that inadvertently encouraged the belief that race constituted a more legitimate basis for exclusion. An ethnic identity predicated on the difference between culture and biology encumbered their work. German-American constructions of ethnicity and their effect on Reconstruction politics consequently form central themes of this book.

Privileging the experience of immigrant men also produced a narrow form of citizenship that revolved around male voting rights during the 1850s and 1860s. Few Americans supported women's suffrage, but German immigrants were especially keen to prevent it. Unpropertied men had first won the right to vote as potential soldiers and heads of household, roles that any man could theoretically assume precisely because no woman could.<sup>18</sup>

60 (2001): 3–32. On German Americans and whiteness, see Russell Kazal, "Irish 'Race' and German 'Nationality': Catholic Languages of Ethnic Difference in Turn-of-the-Century Philadelphia," in *Race and the Production of Modern American Nationalism*, ed. Reynolds J. Scott-Childress (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 149–68; Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

On the general argument that the inclusion of some was predicated on the exclusion of others, see Linda K. Kerber, "The Meanings of Citizenship," *Journal of American History* 84 (1997): 833–54; Barbara Young Welke, *Law and the Borders of Belonging in the Long Nineteenth Century United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Rogers Smith, "The 'American Creed' and American Identity: The Limits of Liberal Citizenship in the United States," *Western Political Quarterly* 41 (1988): 225–51; Ned Landsman, "Pluralism, Protestantism, and Prosperity: Crevecoeur's American Farmer and the Foundations of American Pluralism," in *Beyond Pluralism: The Conception of Groups and Group Identities in America*, ed. Wendy F. Katkin, Ned C. Landsman, and Andrea Tyree (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 105–24; Eric Kaufmann, "American Exceptionalism Reconsidered: Anglo-Saxon Ethnogenesis in the 'Universal' Nation, 1776–1850," *Journal of American Studies* 33 (1999): 437–57; Uday Mehta, "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion," *Politics and Society* 18 (1990): 427–54.

17 Victoria Hattam, *In the Shadow of Race: Jews, Latinos, and Immigrant Politics in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Hattam, "Ethnicity: An American Genealogy," in *Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States*, ed. Nancy Foner and George M. Fredrickson (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 42–60; Mae Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924," *Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 67–92; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

18 Nancy F. Cott, "Marriage and Women's Citizenship in the United States," *American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 1440–54; Kerber, "The Paradox of Women's Citizenship in the Early Republic: The Case of *Martin vs. Massachusetts*, 1805" *American Historical Review* 97 (1992): 349–78; Joan R. Gunderson, "Independence and Citizenship and the American Revolution," *Signs* 13 (1987): 59–77; Nancy



Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03193-7 - German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era

Alison Clark Efford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

7

Men's rights rested on their authority over women who were subordinated according to heterosexual social norms.<sup>19</sup> Traditional family structures held a special place in a community dislocated by migration. German Americans prized their reputation for harmonious male-headed households. The fact that many Anglo-American feminists sought to curb social drinking also distanced immigrants from the campaign for women's rights, leading the majority to conclude that gender equality was antithetical to ethnic and racial inclusivity. The Republicans among them advocated patterning the citizenship of African-American men after that of male immigrants, *not* non-voting women.

Finally, immigrant men's tendency to see their own experience as normative discouraged a view of citizenship that included economic rights beyond the freedom to enter a labor contract. German Americans were thus ill prepared to support the freed people in their quest for economic justice. Most of them, familiar with Europe's hereditary nobility and North America's government-sanctioned slavery, believed that state interference in the marketplace profited only the wealthy. Protections for workers encroached on the principle of limited government, most German Americans thought during the 1860s, and were unnecessary at best. German-born socialists complained that even struggling working-class immigrants accepted the "delusion" that free markets and political rights were enough to give every industrious individual a fair shot at wealth.<sup>20</sup> Those very socialists, of course, provided a counterpoint to the reigning liberal nationalism of the Civil War decade.<sup>21</sup> A small yet vocal cast of German-American activists critiqued liberal ideology and followed their own political strategy. It is not incidental to this book's argument that they decided to collaborate with liberals and black Southerners *up until* about 1870. Political economy was as relevant to Reconstruction citizenship as race or gender.

Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 6–13, 22–23, 28–32; Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

19 Specifically on sexuality, see Martha Gardner, *The Qualities of a Citizen: Women, Immigration, and Citizenship, 1870–1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Welke, *Borders of Belonging*, 145–46, 150–51.

20 North American Federal Council to the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA), Aug. 20, 1871, reel 1, fr. 1013, IWA Papers (microfilm), Wisconsin Historical Society (hereafter WHS), Madison.

21 On the constraints of free labor ideology, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), xxxv–vi; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 236–37. Arguing that free labor ideology did not preclude government action to advance economic equality, see Adam Tuchinsky, *Horace Greeley's New-York Tribune: Civil War Socialism and the Crisis of Free Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009). On liberalism's theoretical compatibility with state action, see James T. Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 13–14.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03193-7 - German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era

Alison Clark Efford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 8 German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era

German-American Republicans such as Sigel were not only conscious of being new citizens, they were also instinctively transnational in outlook. This second proclivity contributed to Republican Reconstruction's astonishing rise and precipitous fall.<sup>22</sup> The women and men who fled German Europe after the Revolutions of 1848 – dubbed “Forty-Eighters” – infused the American Republican Party with a passionate liberal nationalism.<sup>23</sup> In Europe, they had found it difficult to conceive of a united Germany that would not recognize the rights of men to participate in their own governance and freely dissent, organize, worship, work, and trade. In the United States, naturalization only reaffirmed the refugees' conviction that the nation-state and individual rights were tightly bound. Forty-Eighters were quick to concur with Abraham Lincoln that the survival of the Union intact was essential to the maintenance of its free institutions.<sup>24</sup> Largely lacking the president's moderation, however, they argued that abolishing slavery and, later, enfranchising African-American men would strengthen the nation still further.

22 On transnational histories of the period, see W. Caleb McDaniel and Bethany L. Johnson, “New Approaches to Internationalizing the History of the Civil War Era,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 2 (2012): 145–50; David Armitage et al., “Interchange: Nationalism and Internationalism in the Era of the Civil War,” *Journal of American History* 89 (2011): 455–89; Douglas R. Egerton, “Rethinking Atlantic Historiography in a Postcolonial Era: The Civil War in a Global Perspective,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1 (2011): 79–95; Mark M. Smith, “The Past as A Foreign Country: Reconstruction, Inside and Out,” in *Reconstructions*, ed. Brown, 117–40; Jay Sexton, “Toward a Synthesis of Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era, 1848–1877,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 5 (2004): 50–73. Examples include Andre M. Fleche, *The Revolutions of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Philip Katz, *From Appomattox to Montmartre: Americans and the Paris Commune* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Snay, *Fenians, Freedmen, and Southern Whites*; Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Frederick Cooper, Thomas Holt, and Rebecca Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Steven Hahn, “Class and State in Postemancipation Societies: Southern Planters in Comparative Perspective,” *American Historical Review* 95 (1990): 75–98.

23 There is a substantial literature on the activities of the Forty-Eighters before and during the Civil War. Daniel Nagel, *Von republikanischen Deutschen zu deutsch-amerikanischen Republicanern: Ein Beitrag zum Identitätswandel der deutschen Actundvierziger in den Vereinigten Staaten, 1860–1861* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 2012); Mischa Honeck, *We Are the Revolutionists: German-Speaking Immigrants and American Abolitionists after 1848* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Bruce Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Charlotte L. Brancaforte, ed., *The German Forty-Eighters in the United States* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989); Carl F. Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution: The German Forty-Eighters in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1952; reprint, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970); A. E. Zucker, ed., *The Forty-Eighters: Political Refugees of the German Revolution of 1848* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950). On the broader repercussions of the European revolutions in the United States, see Timothy Mason Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

24 Bender, *Nation among Nations*, 124–27.



Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03193-7 - German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era

Alison Clark Efford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

9

More significantly, I contend that the same German immigrants who connected liberalism and nationalism facilitated their decoupling. Just months after the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, Forty-Eighters were transfixed by an undisputedly illiberal nationalist, Bismarck.<sup>25</sup> My argument hinges on the German-American response to the Franco-Prussian War, which united Germany on the terms dictated by Bismarck's Prussia. Proud of Germany's manifest might, German Americans would toy with a model of national greatness that privileged racial hierarchy over individual rights. In the United States, the immigrants who had campaigned for African-American suffrage would lead the Liberal Republican challenge to Republican race policy.<sup>26</sup> Defending the citizenship rights of African Americans, the Liberal Republicans said in 1872, had become an obstacle to national unity. Although the name of the new party suggested otherwise, Liberal Republicanism subverted liberal nationalism well before the Compromise of 1877.

The immigrant story, with its emphasis on citizenship and international comparison, generates a new narrative of postwar politics that integrates ethnicity, race, gender, and political economy. German Republicans accentuated cultural trends and tightened political turning points, making the contours of Reconstruction much more dramatic than they would have been in the immigrants' absence. This feat was possible only because their actions were, at times, decisive.

German immigrants overestimated their influence, exaggerating their political clout and overrating Sigel's military skill, but they did indeed play a crucial part in Reconstruction. The Irish were the largest immigrant group in the country, but the second-place Germans outnumbered them considerably in the Union Army. At the beginning of the Civil War, more than 1,300,000 residents of the United States hailed from Europe's German-speaking lands.<sup>27</sup> By its end, about one-tenth of Union soldiers had been German-born.<sup>28</sup> Although sizable numbers of Germans settled along the

25 The existing work does not address how the immigrant reaction affected American politics. John G. Gazley, *American Opinion of German Unification, 1848–1871* (New York: Columbia University, 1926; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1970); Hans L. Trefousse, "The German-American Immigrants and the newly Founded Reich," in *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year History*, ed. Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 1: 160–75.

26 For a brief German-language article on the German involvement in the Liberal Republican movement, see Jörg Nagler, "Deutschamerikaner und das Liberal Republican Movement, 1872," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 33 (1988): 415–38.

27 U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Abstract of the Eighth Census* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1865), 620–23.

28 Engle, "Yankee Dutchmen: Germans, the Union, and the Construction of a Wartime Identity," in *Civil War Citizens: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in America's Bloodiest Conflict*, ed. Susannah J. Ural

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03193-7 - German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era

Alison Clark Efford

Excerpt

[More information](#)10 *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era*

eastern seaboard, the heart of German America lay in the Middle West.<sup>29</sup> The immigrants made up a particularly high proportion of the population in the region's "German triangle." This area stretched from Cincinnati in the east to St. Louis in the west and then north to Milwaukee, incorporating broad swaths of land in between.<sup>30</sup> I concentrate on the states at the tips of the triangle, Ohio, Missouri, and Wisconsin. In 1860, 7.2, 7.5, and 16.0 percent of the people living in these respective states had emigrated from German Europe, and Germans were overrepresented in the largest cities.<sup>31</sup> When observers factored in the immigrants' American-born children, they reckoned that Milwaukee was roughly half German and Cincinnati and St. Louis were each around a third Teutonic.<sup>32</sup>

To Anglo-American politicians, German-American Midwesterners appeared to be an important bloc of swing voters. Republicans would attest to their interest in a German constituency by inserting a pro-immigrant plank in their 1860 platform and commissioning numerous German-born army officers. One of the generals, Carl Schurz, gave the keynote address at the Republican national convention in 1868. In private letters, Republican politicians would fret revealingly about losing immigrant support in 1872 and 1876. That a little more than half of all German-American voters probably continued to side with the Democrats only made German Republicans more valuable to their party.<sup>33</sup> It is important to acknowledge that the opposition attracted immigrants too, but the Republicans seized the initiative during the Civil War era. Democrats had to scramble to respond.

The partisan allegiances of German Americans varied from state to state. Ohio, overwhelmingly white and densely populated, was an electoral battleground whose German residents were as politically divided as Ohioans as

(New York: New York University Press, 2010), 19; William L. Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers: The Union's Ethnic Regiments* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988), 110.

29 Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Germans," in *The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, ed. Stephan Thernstrom, Ann Orlov, and Oscar Handlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), 311–13.

30 Colman J. Barry, *The Catholic Church and German Americans* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1953), 44.

31 U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Abstract of the Eighth Census*, 620–23.

32 Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836–1860* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 15–19; James G. Heller, *Isaac M. Wise: His Life, Work and Thought* (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1965), 242; Henry Boernstein, *Memoirs of a Nobody: The Missouri Years of an Austrian Radical, 1849–1866*, trans. and ed. Steven Rowan (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1997), 247. For the actual numbers, see Conzen, "Germans," 413; U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Abstract of the Eighth Census*, 539, 381, 297.

33 Walter D. Kamphoefner, "German-Americans and Civil War Politics: A Reconsideration of the Ethnocultural Thesis," *Civil War History* 37 (1991): 232–45. For some comparison to other immigrant groups, see Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *Ethnic Voters and the Election of Lincoln* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973). Much less numerous than the Germans, Scandinavian and English immigrants also tended to vote Republican. The more numerous Irish were confirmed Democrats.