ABSTRACT

“FIGHTING MIT SIGEL” OR “RUNNING MIT HOWARD”: ATTITUDES TOWARDS GERMAN-AMERICANS IN THE CIVIL WAR

By Adam Richard Ruschau

There is a disagreement over the role of the American Civil War in the acculturation and Americanization of German immigrants. Some have argued that the Civil War helped Americanize German immigrants. Others have claimed that the war only exacerbated ethnic tensions. Using newspapers, journals, diaries, letters, and memoirs, this thesis explores northern Americans’ attitudes towards German-Americans as they developed through the course of the war. It argues that two conflicting and coexisting stereotypes of Germans emerged during the Civil War: the German as a looter and a coward and the German as a fiercely loyal patriot. Eventually, the loyalty much of the German-American population showed to the Union overshadowed allegations of cowardice in the mindset of the American people, demonstrating that loyalty trumped courage in nineteenth-century American opinions of what qualities made one “worthy” of American citizenship.
“FIGHTING MIT SIGEL” OR “RUNNING MIT HOWARD”: ATTITUDES TOWARDS GERMAN-AMERICANS IN THE CIVIL WAR

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Adam Richard Ruschau
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Advisor  Dr. Andrew Cayton

Reader  Dr. Carla Pestana

Reader  Dr. Stephen Norris
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Introduction

It was getting to be late afternoon 2 May 1863, in an area of Virginia known as the Wilderness. Five brigades of the XI Corps Army of the Potomac were spread out in a defensive position along the Plank Road and the Orange Turnpike facing south. In front of their position, the men of the XI Corps could hear some gunfire as Daniel Sickles’ III Corps, with support from the XII Corps and Francis Barlow’s brigade of the XI Corps, harassed what the commanding general, Joseph Hooker, assumed was the rear guard of the Confederate army as it retreated west. Although there had been a few reports of Confederate troops massing just to the west of the XI Corps, General Oliver O. Howard, commander of the XI Corps, paid little heed, believing General Hooker knew better than he did.

A little after 5pm, a great number of deer, rabbits, and other forest creatures came pouring out of the woods to the west of the XI Corps’ position. Closely behind these animals came the butternut and gray clad men of Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson’s Confederate II Corps, almost 30,000 strong, in line of battle, attacking the weak right flank of the XI Corps. While many in the XI Corps resisted, the Confederate tide was too strong and too unexpected. Regiment after regiment broke and ran for the rear of the Union lines near Hooker’s headquarters, a house at a crossroads named Chancellorsville. Captain Thomas Osborne, Chief of Artillery 2nd Division, III Corps, witnessed this rout and described it in his official report:

As we passed General Hooker’s headquarters, a scene burst upon us which, God grant, may never again be seen in the Federal Army of the United States. The Eleventh Corps had been routed, and were fleeing to the river like scared sheep. The men and artillery filled the roads, its sides, and the skirts of the field, and it appeared that no two of one company could be found together. Aghast and terror-stricken, heads bare and panting for breath, they pleaded like infants at the mother’s breast that we would let them pass to the rear unhindered.¹

The XI Corps, the right wing of the Union army, had broken, leaving the Union forces, which vastly outnumbered the Confederates, in a dangerous, exposed position with a virtually unprotected flank and rear exposed to the enemy. While Chancellorsville would

go down in history as Robert E. Lee’s greatest victory, many would also remember it as one of the Union’s greatest opportunities, spoiled by the poor performance of the XI Corps.

Of the roughly 8,500 men in the Eleventh Corps line on that May afternoon, 4,600 of them were Germans. Most of these Germans were concentrated in the eleven German regiments (41st, 45th, 54th, and 29th New York, 27th, 73rd, 74th, and 75th Pennsylvania, 107th Ohio, 82nd Illinois, and 26th Wisconsin) and the two half-German regiments (58th and 68th New York) out of the twenty-seven total regiments in the corps. Three of the four artillery batteries attached to the corps were also composed of Germans. As Mark Dunkelman, author of a history of the 154th New York (a regiment in the XI Corps), points out, “no other corps of the Army of the Potomac had such a high representation of a single minority ethnic group.” Because of this concentration of Germans, the Eleventh Corps was known as the German Corps or the “Dutch Corps” (an English corruption of the German “Deutsch”) throughout the Union army and even by the Confederates, although less than half of the corps consisted of German regiments. For their performance at Chancellorsville, the Eleventh Corps received the derisive nickname “the Flying Dutchmen” and were made the scapegoat by many for the Union defeat.

Two months later, the XI Corps was one of the first two Union corps to arrive on the field at Gettysburg. Although most historians and eyewitnesses agree that the XI Corps performed better at Gettysburg than Chancellorsville, the XI Corps still broke and retreated rapidly through town on the first day of the battle. Many in the XI Corps were also briefly routed in the Confederate assault on Cemetery Hill the second day, causing their reputation to decline even further. After Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, Civil War veteran Alanson Nelson remembered, “when one of that corps was seen with their badge on passing through the camps or on the highways, they were sure to be accosted by soldiers of other commands thus: ‘You fights mit Seigal [sic] and runs mit Howard, you tam cowards.’” (This is a reference to the popular German expression, “I fight mit

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5 Alanson Henery Nelson, The Battles of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg (Minneapolis, MN: 1899), 78.
Sigel” referring to the most famous German-American general of the Civil War and former XI Corps commander: Franz Sigel.) As a member of the 157th New York, an American regiment in the XI Corps, put it, “the 11th Corps has fought hard and won a blackened eye on the pages of history.”

With a significant number of Germans and a less than stellar battlefield reputation, the Eleventh Corps offers an interesting case study in ethnic prejudice and Americanization during wartime. Approximately 200,000 Germans served in the Union armies during the Civil War, making them “the largest foreign-born group in the Union army.”

While some Germans fought for the Confederacy, their numbers in the Confederate army were almost insignificant. German troops and German regiments were dispersed throughout the Union armies. But its high concentration of German regiments made the Eleventh Corps the most visible representative unit of German-Americans in the Civil War. Thus, the Eleventh Corps is important in any study of Germans in the Civil War.

Many historians have claimed that the Civil War played a major role in the acceptance of ethnic groups as American citizens, due to their service in the military. One asserts that:

The Civil War was an important factor in Americanizing recent immigrants. The war itself proved an economic boon for the many immigrant farmers; their sons served in the Union Army; the long duration of the war, the anxieties about its outcome and about the fate of family members, anxieties which the newcomers shared with the old settlers, tightened the ties between the immigrants and the new country and detached them more and more from their old homelands.

Unfortunately, there is a problem in making this assertion with German immigrants. While the showcase unit of African-American soldiers, the 54th Massachusetts,

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7 Dean B. Mahin, The Blessed Place of Freedom: Europeans in Civil War America (Washington: Brassey’s Inc., 2002), 11. Some controversy exists over the exact number of Germans serving in the war. Early estimates by A. B. Gould put the number of Germans in the Union army at 176,817, but Wilhelm Kaufmann estimated at least 216,000 people born in the German states served in the Union army. Most historians today believe Gould’s number is way too low and Kaufmann’s number a little high. 200,000 is the general estimate of the German-born contribution to the Union army. See Kaufmann, 70-79 and Bruce Levine, The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 256.
distinguished itself by a heroic attack on Battery Wagner and the showcase unit of Irish-American soldiers, the Irish Brigade, displayed its fierceness and bravery on many battlefields, particularly Fredericksburg, the most visible representative unit of German-American soldiers, the Eleventh Corps, was routed at the pivotal battles of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. This raises an intriguing question; how did the perception of an ethnic group’s battlefield performance affect its acceptance as a group worthy of American citizenship? Furthermore, what was the impact of the Civil War on the Americanization of various ethnic groups, particularly the Germans? These are the two major questions this study seeks to address.

The first question speaks directly to nineteenth-century ideas of what made one “worthy” of American citizenship. Many scholars have linked courage or bravery on the battlefield to a person’s acceptance as a man and as an equal. In his study of the experience of combat in the Civil War, historian Gerald Linderman explains the emphasis nineteenth-century Americans put on martial virtues, saying “many soldiers called combat the test of manhood. They often speak of courage as the ‘manliest’ of virtues.”9 In addition, he states “the single most effective prescription for maintaining other’s assumption that one was a man of honor was to act courageously . . . Perfect courage was thus the best guarantor of an honorable reputation.”10 Other scholars have made similar claims about the importance of military courage in earning citizenship. Margaret Creighton claims “Courage under fire was the litmus test for American manhood, and a key to true citizenship.”11 Also, Judith Shklar argues that “for many Americans the virtuous soldier was the man most fit to be a citizen of a genuinely republican order.”12 This nineteenth-century connection between battlefield courage and “true citizenship” needs to be explored more fully. How courageous or cowardly did Americans see the German soldiers of the Civil War? Also, how important was battlefield courage in relationship to patriotism at the time of the Civil War in determining “worthiness” to be American citizens?

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10 Ibid., 12.
Historians continue to debate the second question, concerning the role of the Civil War in Americanizing Germans. Some scholars, such as Robert Henry Billigmeier, argue that the Civil War brought Germans and native-born Americans closer through the close ties and the common wartime experience shared by Germans and Anglo-Americans serving in the war.\(^{13}\) Other historians, such as Wolfgang Helbich, see the Civil War as exacerbating ethnic tensions rather than alleviating them.\(^{14}\) Historians who claim that German participation in the war greatly contributed to their acceptance as American citizens often ignore or overlook the prejudice and negative comments expressed towards Germans during the war. Meanwhile, those historians who focus on the negative prejudice Germans experienced and conclude that the Civil War only exacerbated racial tensions and did not bring Germans any closer to acceptance as American citizens, fail to account for why other historians have concluded the opposite. This historiographical disagreement calls for a closer examination of the role of the Civil War in the acceptance of Germans as citizens of the United States.

The two major works dealing with ethnicity in the Union army during the Civil War, Ella Lonn’s *Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy* and William Burton’s *Melting Pot Soldiers*, come roughly to the same conclusion: that the war helped Americanize the immigrants who fought in it. While Lonn’s book is a little more filiopietistic, concentrating on the contributions of each ethnic group to the Union cause and ultimate Union victory, Burton is more critical and focuses his study on how the various ethnic regiments became more American as the war went on. Lonn makes very few comments on ethnic prejudice and Burton, although he does note some of the prejudice faced by different ethnic groups, does not factor this into his conclusion. For Burton, the very participation of immigrants in the war altered their mentality, bringing them into the non-ethnic concerns of the larger nation and demonstrating that nativism, “a deep-seated

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14 Wolfgang Helbich, “German-Born Union Soldiers: Motivation, Ethnicity, and ‘Americanization,’” in *German-American Immigration and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Wolfgang Helbich and Walter D. Kamphoefner (Madison, WI: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, University of Wisconsin, 2004), 321.
American antipathy towards internal ‘foreign’ groups of various kinds,” had lost its power.\footnote{15}

The classic histories of Germans in the Civil War, Wilhelm Kaufmann’s \textit{The Germans in the American Civil War} and J. G. Rosengarten’s \textit{The German-American Soldier in the Wars of the U.S.}, while not emphasizing the degree to which Germans became more American, also emphasize the Civil War as an event that purchased the right of Germans to be American citizens. Both of these works concentrate on the contributions of Germans in the Civil War. Kaufmann mentions some of the harsh comments made towards Germans after Chancellorsville, but he dismisses them as inaccurate injustices and continues to tout the greatness of the German contribution to the Union cause. Meanwhile, historian James Bergquist echoes the sentiments of Lonn and Burton, claiming that Germans integrated into American society relatively quickly, compared to other ethnic groups, and points to the Civil War “as proof of their [Germans] deserved place in American society.”\footnote{16} Bergquist, however, ignores anti-German sentiment in his evaluation.

The view that the German experience in the war contributed to their acceptance as Americans is not universal among historians, however. Wolfgang Helbich, examining primarily German soldiers’ letters, and instances of court-martial, sees a wealth of anti-German sentiment in the Civil War. For him, this indicates that the Civil War did not boost the reputation of Germans or assimilate them into American society, but only made ethnic tensions worse and perhaps delayed the acceptance of Germans by Americans rather than accelerate it. J. A. Hawgood, another historian, argues in his work, \textit{The Tragedy of German-America}, that nativism and the temperance movements of the 1850s pushed Germans into a defense of their own culture and the creation of a distinctly German-American community within the United States, that, due to its avid defense of things German, was tragically destroyed because of World War I.\footnote{17} According to the

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views of Hawgood and Helbich, the Civil War only pushed Germans further away from mainstream American society.

Christian B. Keller, a historian of Pennsylvania Germans in the Civil War, has advanced this argument even further. He boldly asserts that Lonn and Burton are wrong in their assessment of German Americanization during the war. Instead, he states “the Civil War proved not to be a great ‘Americanizing’ influence on the Germans . . . rather than reducing their ethnic consciousness, the experience of the war heightened it.”

Looking at German reactions to the prejudice they faced, he concludes that while Germans were well on their way to acculturation before the war, their experience in the war made them more conscious of their German identity, bringing a diverse community of Germans closer together and slowing the process of Americanization. For Keller, it is clear that American prejudices of Germans brought Germans closer together, making them more German and less American, and that this trend outweighed any Americanizing influences they may have been exposed to by fighting side by side with Anglo-Americans for their adopted nation.

Even Kathleen Neils Conzen, one of the pre-eminent scholars of German-American ethnic history, seems divided and confused over the role of the Civil War in German acculturation and assimilation. In one article, she claims that the German contribution to the war “purchased in blood” their place in American society, but she also asserts that the Civil War marked a transition in German-American acculturation thought away from an idea of German contribution to an American identity and towards an idea of cultural plurality. In another article about a Minnesota county during and after the war, she argues that Civil War, while bringing the soldiers who fought in it closer to an identification with the larger nation, had the effect of alienating many German communities rather than assimilating them. Overall, Conzen may side with Helbich.

21 Kathleen Neils Conzen, “German Catholic Communalism and the American Civil War: Exploring the Dilemmas of Transatlantic Political Intergration” in *Bridging the Atlantic: The Question of American...*
and Keller on the overall influence of the Civil War on Germans, but with Lonn, Burton, and Bergquist on the impact of the Civil War on German soldiers.

All of these works on German ethnicity and acculturation have one thing in common: they all approach the subject of German acculturation and assimilation from the perspective of the immigrant, and not the larger society. Even Helbich and Keller, who study Anglo-American attitudes more than the others, focus their work on what Germans were claiming about the prejudice they faced. While it is undoubtedly important to see immigration and acculturation from the German perspective, a full understanding of Germans’ place in nineteenth-century American society and the impact of the Civil War depends upon an understanding of native-born American attitudes towards Germans as well, which is exactly what this study proposes to do.

When American attitudes towards Germans are analyzed, a more complicated and diverse picture emerges. Those historians who claim that the Civil War increased the acculturation of Germans to America neglect the bitter prejudice and nativist sentiment that was often expressed by Anglo-American soldiers, newspapers, and some civilians. At the same time, those historians who claim that the Civil War made ethnic tensions worse and slowed the process of Americanization of Germans focus their study on the negative prejudice expressed and often ignore the many accolades and defenses of German soldierly ability and patriotism also prevalent in newspapers and soldiers’ accounts. They also fail to address and dismiss the arguments of many historians of ethnicity that Germans integrated into American society with greater rapidity than almost any other ethnic group. Somehow a synthesis between these two views needs to be found. By looking at northern American attitudes (since most Germans lived in the northern states) and how they changed and developed from the Antebellum years and through the Civil War, we may gain a greater insight into exactly what the Civil War did or did not do for German-American acculturation and acceptance.  

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22 In regards to newspaper sources, for the purpose of this study I have chosen to look at several key newspapers from the cities of Chicago and New York, both major cities with large German populations, to gain not only an eastern perspective on Germans, but a Midwestern one as well.
A Note on Terminology

In some ways this thesis deals with identities which are being constantly constructed, contested, and changing. No unified German state or German identity existed until the late nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the United States, a nation made of immigrants from many different parts of the world, was embroiled in debate and battle over the identity of America and the meaning and extent of American citizenship. Even the idea of identifying oneself as a member of a particular nation, as opposed to a regional or religious identity, was a relatively new and developing concept in the mid-nineteenth century. Consequently, the terms “German” and “American” are problematic because they are constantly evolving and changing. Although problematic, these terms are still necessary to use. Therefore, it is important to understand that these terms are imposed to group certain peoples with certain common traits together in order to make some comparisons and evaluations. Throughout this paper I use the terms “German” and “German-American” to refer to first generation immigrants from the German states and those second and third generation immigrants whose primary language and culture remained German. The term “American” presents a greater problem, as there is no one easily defined American identity or culture, but it is the only useful term to describe those citizens of the United States who cannot be defined as being part of a particular ethnic group. Many of those that I refer to as Germans were naturalized citizens of the United States and therefore Americans, but, for the purposes of this study I use the terms “American,” “Anglo-American,” and “native American” interchangeably to refer to native-born American citizens who have no cultural or political ties to other nations.
Chapter 1: Germans in Antebellum America

In the 1850s the two-party system of American politics was breaking down. While the Democratic Party remained strong, the Whig Party was getting progressively weaker and splitting over issues like slavery. There was uncertainty over whether the Whigs could survive the decade and curiosity over what other political party might take its place.

In 1854 a new political party, officially titled the American Party, but more commonly known as the Know-Nothings, burst onto the political scene. The Know-Nothing platform was based on prejudice against foreigners and Catholics, calling for the limitation of political office to those American citizens born in the United States and a change in America’s naturalization laws, requiring a longer period of residence in the United States before immigrants could become citizens and vote.23 Party members who took the Know-Nothing oath swore that they would not vote or give their influence “for any man for any office in the gift of the people, unless he be an American-born citizen, in favor of Americans ruling America, nor if he be a Roman Catholic.”24 While some hailed the arrival of the Know-Nothings in politics, others lamented it. A Brooklyn newspaper republished a poem describing the Know-Nothing stance:

No Nothing!

No Popish plots
No Irish sots,
No Priest, no Jesuitical inveiglers;
No Ethiopian slaves,
No Democratic knaves,
No lager bier, no Israelitish higglers . . .
No foreign tatterdemalions
No aliens; . . .
No, vote, no liberty,
No chance for any son
Of Erin’s Isle, no welcome, naught but loathing;
No German wines,
No Norway pines,
No priestly benisons,

24 Ibid., 54.
Know-Nothings made the nativist sentiment that guided it had a major impact on American politics and society in the decade prior to the Civil War.

The Know-Nothings movement affected American attitudes towards German immigrants, but it was not the only factor. Prior to the Civil War, Germans experienced both nativist attacks on their foreign birth and Catholic faith (for those Germans who were Catholic) and public accolades of the great attributes of German character. They also experienced a growing political power that accompanied their increase in number, and various cultural clashes with the non-ethnic Anglo-American cultures. What was the overall dominant trend in Anglo-American opinion as expressed towards Germans in the Antebellum era? In what ways did American stereotypes of Germans meet or fall short of Anglo-American expectations of the qualities necessary to be “worthy” of American citizenship? These are the main questions this chapter seeks to address.

Germans were the largest single ethnic group to enter the United States in the nineteenth century. Germans had been coming to the United States since the colonial period, the first group arriving in Pennsylvania in the 1680s. After 1820, when the United States began keeping immigration statistics, the number of German immigrants more than doubled each decade up through the 1850s. By 1860, they were the second largest immigrant group in America, after the Irish, though German immigration surpassed Irish immigration in the 1850s. The Germans and the Irish together represented only the biggest chunk of a vast increase in immigration to the United States that took place around the middle of the nineteenth century. Overall, the period between roughly 1840 and 1860 saw “the largest proportionate influx of foreign-born in American history”: about 30 percent of the total population of free persons in 1840.

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25 Brooklyn Daily Eagle (Brooklyn, NY), 7 February 1855.
26 Levine, 4.
The 1860 census revealed that there were 1,611,304 Irish in America and 1,301,136 Germans. Of these Germans, 1,229,144 lived in Northern states, while only 71,992 resided in future Confederate states.²⁹ (These statistics only count first generation immigrants, people born outside of the United States. A count of people of German heritage would be almost impossible.) Unlike the Irish, who mainly congregated in eastern cities, the Germans in nineteenth-century America were widely dispersed across the Northern states in cities and the countryside. As historian Günter Moltmann puts it, “from New York through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois to Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri and Kansas ran a ‘German Belt.’”³⁰ Cities such as New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and St. Louis had large German populations. As with all immigrant groups, Germans came to America for many different reasons, ranging from religious and political persecution to economic hardship.³¹ Speaking a different language than the rest of the country, Germans naturally gravitated towards areas with other German speakers while they adjusted to American life.

The German population was never a unified block. Without a common state of origin, language and some common cultural customs were the only factors delineating what made an immigrant German. In addition to the differences between German immigrants from different German states, there were also differences between Germans based on when they arrived in the United States. Labeled “grays” (those who immigrated to the United States prior to the revolution of 1848) and “greens” (those who immigrated after 1848), these two German groups did not easily mesh, though some recent historians have pointed out that the division between these two groups has been exaggerated.³² Historian Steven Rowan emphasizes that Germans were “almost impossible to unite on anything, since they were profoundly riven by social class, religion, political persuasion,

²⁹ Mahin, 2.
³⁰ Günther Moltmann, ed., *Germans to America: 300 years of Immigration, 1683 to 1983* (Stuttgart: Published by Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations in cooperation with Inter Nationes, Bonn-Bad Godesberg, 1982), 15.
and past experience.” Unlike the Irish, who were mostly Roman Catholic, German immigrants to America were split over religion. Most were Lutheran or Catholic, but a very vocal minority considered themselves free-thinkers. Also, unlike the Irish, German immigrants came from a wide variety of social classes. Many were skilled craftsmen, able to make a better economic start in America than their Irish peers.

The failed 1848 revolution in the German states led to a new wave of German immigration: the exiled revolutionaries. Referred to as Forty-Eighters, these “newcomers included doctors of philosophy, graduates in theology, law and philosophy, . . . state officials who had lost their posts . . . students, lovers and practitioners of science and the arts . . . in short, able, educated, sincere enthusiasts for world reform, starry-eyed intellectuals and budding professional men.” These former revolutionaries came to America with the intention of returning to Germany when the next revolution broke out. When hope for a new German revolution finally died out, many Forty-Eighters turned to immersing themselves in the political life of America. Valuing freedom in all forms, many became abolitionists. Historian Bruce Catton referred to the Forty-Eighters as men who “were deadly serious about words which Americans took blithely for granted, words like liberty and freedom and democracy.” Although many Forty-Eighters were free-thinkers, or agnostics, they took leading roles in the predominantly Christian German-American community. Forty-Eighters started Turnverein societies, gymnastic societies for physical culture and intellectual and social development, in many cities and areas with large German populations. Historian James Berquist notes that many of these Forty-Eighters strove to develop a “broader sense of German ethnicity.” Although few in number, Forty-Eighters would play a major role in the shaping of both the German-American community and the attitudes of Anglo-Americans towards Germans.

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35 Wittke, 59.
While Irish and German immigrants were quite different from each other, there were occasionally areas where their interests were similar to each other and at odds with the larger Anglo-American cultures. One of these areas was their joint opposition to the temperance movements that received support from many native Anglo-Americans. While the purpose of temperance societies seemed, to those involved, a noble crusade against the dangers and vice associated with alcohol, it brought them into conflict with the immigrant population of Germans and Irish, for whom alcohol was a deeply imbedded part of their social culture. Because of their opposition to the restriction of the sale of alcohol, many native Americans regarded Germans and Irish as drunken revelers, the Irish with their whiskey and the Germans with their beer. The Germans were especially targeted by temperance natives. Not only did they oppose the restriction of alcohol, their customs celebrating the Sabbath clashed severely with those of Anglo-American Protestants.

Immigration historians Frank Coppa and Thomas Curran point out that “most Americans were not consistent church goers, but they nevertheless believed that the Sabbath was a day to be celebrated sedately. The Germans, especially the Lutherans, on the other hand, had their picnics and their beer gardens. They were considered by the nativists to be desecrating this holy day.” Germans had a cultural tradition of boisterous celebration that often included beer and music on Sundays, a extreme contrast to Anglo-Protestant views that Sundays should be days of solemn reverence and reflection. To enforce an Anglo-Protestant observance of the Sabbath, many cities, such as New York, passed laws, or attempted to pass laws, prohibiting the sale of alcohol on Sundays and closing entertainment establishments, like beer gardens, on that day. Germans protested these laws, often raising the cry of religious freedom. But they only earned greater animosity from Anglo-Americans. Scoffing over the German reaction to a recent law closing beer gardens and other places of entertainment on Sundays, the New

41 Coppa and Curran, 54.
York Times wrote “they are loudest in reprobation of a law that will shut them up to only six days a week of drink and play.”

Newspapers such as Harper’s Weekly sought to portray the German Sunday celebrations in the worst light; “here beer reigns with supremest power. It drowns all other thoughts. Its flow is constant and unrestrained.” On the front page of the 15 October 1859 issue of Harper’s Weekly there appeared a sketch of a “German beer garden in New York on Sunday evening.” (See Appendix A) The sketch depicts a loud, crowded, smoke-filled room where beer is present in abundance. Attached to the balcony is a sign requesting the audience not to stand on tables or chairs, but in the foreground a drunken looking man smoking a cigar is doing just that. Meanwhile, at the next table over a woman is holding her baby and appears to be feeding her baby a tankard of beer and next to her is a young girl holding another tankard, with her head tilted back, looking ready to guzzle her beer. It is a scene of debauchery and vice, and paints German Sunday festivities in their worst light. Not all Germans protested Sunday laws and the temperance movement and a few newspapers such as the New York Times drew attention to this fact. Overall, however, the general American impression was that Germans generally supported drinking and revelry on the Sabbath. This perception may have contributed to a rise in ethnic tensions and nativism.

Nativism has been a part of American history from its inception to the present day. It flourished in the two decades prior to the Civil War, making it an important aspect of any study of antebellum American attitudes. The great influx of Irish and Germans crowded into cities and the crime rate and associated costs grew tremendously. In the words of Christian Keller, “blaming the country’s troubles on foreigners, particularly Irish and Germans, was considered an ‘American’ thing to do for many non-ethnics.” Especially great was the fear that European nations were

44 Harper’s Weekly (New York) 5 November 1859. See also 15 October 1859 and 22 October 1859.
45 Harper’s Weekly 15 October 1859.
47 McPherson, 134.
48 McPherson, 131.
offloading their criminals and paupers on the United States or that these foreigners constituted a danger to the democratic institutions of the country.\textsuperscript{50} Samuel Busey, a noted nativist, claimed that “among the evils incident to immigration, crime and pauperism are not the least important.”\textsuperscript{51} As early as 1835 the \textit{Cincinnati Gazette} claimed “the Emperor of Austria, in conjunction with other European rulers, has conceived the plan of overthrowing our free institutions by pouring upon our shores a flood of emigrants.”\textsuperscript{52} Many nativists even saw support for their anti-foreign sentiment in the words of the founding fathers. Benjamin Franklin’s claim that “those who come hither are generally of the most ignorant stupid sort of their own nation” and Thomas Jefferson’s assertion that “foreigners will bring with them the principles of the government they have imbibed in their youth, or if able to throw them off, it will be in exchange for an unbounded licentiousness, passing as usual, from one extreme to another” were popular justifications for nativism.\textsuperscript{53} While nativism was a major issue country-wide, it was much more pronounced along the Atlantic seaboard, where the population of immigrants, especially Catholic immigrants, was denser, than in the Midwest.\textsuperscript{54}

While all foreign-born Americans were targets of nativism, Catholics received the most attention. The Catholic Church’s hierarchical structure and its political power scared many Protestant Americans. Nativists felt that “Popery always has been the ally and supporter of despotism; and it is fair to suppose that it always will be.”\textsuperscript{55} Calling Catholic immigrants “priest-controlled machines” and “men who will obey their priest first and the law of the land afterward,” nativists feared that a large number of Catholic voters would be equal to papal control of the United States.\textsuperscript{56} They even questioned

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Cincinnati Gazette} (Cincinnati) 12 April 1835, as quoted in Evangeline Thomas, \textit{Nativism in the Old Northwest, 1850-1860} (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 1936), 53.
\textsuperscript{53} Benjamin Franklin to Peter Collinson 9 May 1753, in Leonard and Parmet, 115; Thomas Jefferson, as quoted in Busey, 9.
\textsuperscript{54} Billington, 34, 394.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Startling Facts for Native Americans Called "Knownothings," or A Vivid Presentation of the Dangers to American Liberty, to be Apprehended From Foreign Influence} (Portsmouth: R. B. Marsh, 1855), 96.
\textsuperscript{56} Samuel Finley Breese Morse, \textit{Imminent Dangers to the Free Institutions of the United States Through Foreign Immigration} (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), iv; Thomas Richard Whitney, \textit{A Defence of the American Policy, as Opposed to the Encroachments of Foreign Influence, and
whether a Catholic could be a loyal citizen to the United States, saying, “we would ask, then, in what manner the oath of allegiance which is taken by foreigners in this country, can be binding on Catholics?—for it appears that the pope can at any time annul and cancel them.”

In 1855, nativists estimated “that there are in the United States 2,500,000 Papists under the government of the pope of Rome, all of whom are sworn enemies to this republic, and that the annual increase is about 150,000.” Since the Irish immigrants were almost exclusively Catholic, they received the brunt of nativist attacks, but with approximately half of the German population being Catholic, Germans ranked a close second on nativists’ lists.

Protestant Germans faced many nativist attacks as well. While the Irish had their strong Catholicism working against them, Germans had their language working against them. German language newspapers, schools, social societies, and their opposition to Sunday laws infuriated nativists as un-American practices. Samuel Busey referred to “the evils flowing from the existence of that great German organization in our midst . . . where they have distinctly avowed their object to be to change the Constitution of the United States and to abrogate all laws relative to the observance of the Sabbath.” He further claimed that “their organization as a society or a community of Germans is inconsistent with the institutions of the country.” Another threat the Germans posed to nativists were the Forty-Eighters. Those Forty-Eighters who were free-thinkers earned even greater animosity from nativists than the Catholics did because they represented a threat not only to Protestant America, but to all of Christian America. While nativists often attacked the Irish for their Catholic faith and poor economic standing, they often attacked Germans because their German customs and language seemed fundamentally un-American and un-assimilable.

Nativism reached its peak in the 1850s with the American or Know-Nothing Party. The party originated out of a secret nativist society known as the Order of the Star

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Especially to the Interference of the Papacy in the Political Interests and Affairs of the United States (New York: J. S. Ozer, 1971), 168.
57 Startling Facts for Native Americans Called “Knownothings,” 50.
58 Ibid., 61.
59 Coppa and Curran, 54.
60 Busey, 9-10.
61 Ibid., 29.
62 Evangeline Thomas, 88.
Spangled Banner which grew rapidly after 1852 when members of other nativist societies joined in.\textsuperscript{63} The precise origin of the term “Know-Nothing” is still a mystery, but the belief of many is that it arose from society members “feigning ignorance” when asked about their organization.\textsuperscript{64} In 1854, when the Know-Nothings arrived on the national political scene, they made impressive gains in the election for such a new party. Historian Tyler Anbinder argues that “anti-Catholic, anti-Nebraska, anti-liquor, and anti-party sentiment—not merely nativism—contributed to the Know Nothings’ popularity in 1854.”\textsuperscript{65} The Know-Nothings put together a political package that appealed to many people in turbulent 1850s, but their main political goals were still nativist in sentiment: lengthening the residency requirement prior to naturalization to twenty-one years and banning foreign-born citizens from holding public office.\textsuperscript{66}

As impressive as the Know-Nothings’ showing in 1854 was, it was one of the shorter-lived political parties in American history. After the 1856 presidential election, the American Party began to disintegrate. According to historian Oscar Handlin, “once the various groups in the party got together they found that they had nothing in common.”\textsuperscript{67} It turned out that nativism was the only thing uniting the Know-Nothings together and it did not have the power to hold them together for long with other strong forces dividing them. Civil War historian James McPherson claims that the main reason for the eclipse of the Know-Nothing party could be expressed in two words: “Bleeding Kansas.”\textsuperscript{68} In other words, “as had Whigs before them, the Know-Nothings stumbled on the slavery issue.”\textsuperscript{69} As important an issue as nativism appeared to be, it paled in comparison with the divisive issue of slavery. As the Know-Nothings faded into political obscurity, another new political party with the slavery issue defining its key platform, the Republican Party, was rapidly rising to take the place of the defunct Whig and American Parties.

\textsuperscript{63} See Anbinder, 20-21; McPherson, 135 and Desmond, 49.
\textsuperscript{64} Anbinder, 21-22.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{68} McPherson, 144.
\textsuperscript{69} Leonard and Parmet, 104.
While the Know-Nothing party enjoyed a brief heyday, it was not always widely supported. While the New York Times occasionally published letters in support of nativism and the Know-Nothings, it more often criticized the Know-Nothing stance. 70 The Times emphasized the importance of immigration and immigrants to the economy and well-being of the nation, saying “Do not such men know that almost the only thing now which makes farming in any degree profitable in our country is the great supply of foreign labor? . . . It is foreign labor . . . which lies at the bottom of our Chicagos and Cincinnatis and Pittsburgs. Without the foreigners, fewer railways and fewer canals would have been built.” 71 In 1855 the Times reported an event in Texas where a German man, woken at night by a group of Indians stealing his horses, mounted a pony unarmed and, wearing nothing but a shirt, chased after the Indians shouting in German. The Indians who had stolen the horses, out-numbering and out-gunning the German, were scared by shouts and, fearing they were being pursued by a large number of Texas Rangers, fled the scene leaving the horses behind. The Times entitled this story “Great Know-Nothing Defeat—Fifteen Natives Frightened by One German in His Sh—t T—l,” poking fun at the Know-Nothing movement. 72

Other newspapers also disapproved of the Know-Nothings. The Chicago Times stated “our readers do not require to be assured of our unblenching hostility and opposition to Know Nothingism in all its features.” 73 Meanwhile the Brooklyn Daily Eagle felt the need to assure its readers that “neither the Proprietor of the Eagle, nor any gentleman connected with it ever entered a Know Nothing lodge in his life, and never sought admission directly nor indirectly.” 74 By 1857, Harper’s Weekly reported that “neither proscription of foreigners nor antipathy to Papists have any open advocates of respectable character at the present day.” 75

Although nativism affected many Anglo-American attitudes towards Germans, many descriptions of the German character in the decades prior to the Civil War were very positive. In 1853, President Franklin Pierce acknowledged a remarkable German

70 See New York Daily Times (New York) 20 June 1854 and 9 February 1855 for letters to the editor supporting Know-Nothings.
71 New York Daily Times 31 December 1855.
72 New York Daily Times 7 March 1855.
73 Weekly Chicago Times (Chicago) 28 June 1855.
74 Brooklyn Daily Eagle 26 September 1855.
75 Harper’s Weekly 20 June 1857.
population, “so distinguished for their thrift, their industry, their integrity, their devotion
to civil and religious liberty.” The *Chicago Tribune* defended German character
against negative prejudice saying:

> The German, in the opinion of many is but a heavy, slow and stubborn man;
> perhaps a persevering plodder, or profoundly obscure and laborious thinker, lost
> in transcendental fog and disputation; but one, who with his solid clumsy frame,
> and hoarse guttural speech, has no clear and vigorous thought, but little tenderness
> or susceptibility, and no deep and strong impulse, and no lofty glow and
> enthusiasm of purpose. And yet the same German, if he be but a fair specimen of
> his country’s character and culture, will be found behind no man in fastidious
> taste or accomplishment; displays the rarest gifts in the expression of all that is
> fine or beautiful in literature and art; and shows in all his thought and life the
> influence of noble purpose, pure and generous impulse, and of the best and truest
> Christian faith. Germany is second to no civilized land in all the acts which adorn
> and elevate human life; and the history of no country is more illustrious with
> proofs of the rarest genius, the most loyal patriotism, the noblest humanity, and
> the purest religious faith.

The *New York Times* was also optimistic about the character and resourcefulness of the
German immigrant, saying “a German always gets on in this country, because he is
industrious and willing to work in any capacity, and is moreover cheerful and contented
where others would be sad and disappointed.” The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* called
Germans “the most thrifty and independent emigrants that come to our shores.”
Overall, many Americans credited Germans with being industrious, loyal, philosophical,
lovers of the arts, and champions of liberty. Some papers, such as the *New York Times*,
even commented on the excellent quality of German militia units.

In 1856, the *Times* called Germans “the natural allies of freedom everywhere.” Many Americans saw the Germans as an anti-slavery people. Historian Darrell Overdyke
notes that “in the Northwestern states eighty of the eighty-eight German newspapers
openly fought the Kansas-Nebraska Bill as a concession to slavery.”

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76 Franklin Pierce, as quoted in *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* 13 July 1853.
77 *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago) 26 May 1857.
78 *New York Daily Times* 4 November 1852.
79 *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* 27 June 1851.
80 *New York Daily Times* 20 September 1851.
81 *New York Daily Times* 15 October 1856.
Tribune, a newspaper supportive of the Republican Party, called for Germans to flock to the Republican banner:

The German population of this country are of that class who prize liberty above all other blessings, and when it is made apparent that the principles of equal rights and the brotherhood of man, separated from any issue involving their own political rights and privileges under the Constitution, are embodied in a party contesting for supremacy in this country, the German voters will be found ‘actively and perpetually’ on the side of freedom.\(^{83}\)

Although recent historians have effectively disproved that the vast majority of Germans held anti-slavery opinions, the fact remains that Anglo-Americans in the Civil War era overwhelmingly considered Germans natural abolitionists in sentiment if not in practice. This may have been partially due to the prominent anti-slavery rhetoric espoused by many of the Forty-Eighters in leadership positions in the German community.

In the political realm, the Germans remained divided, and religion often defined the dividing line.\(^{84}\) The election of 1860 bought many Germans into the Republican camp, however. With prominent Forty-Eighters like Carl Schurz actively campaigning for the Republican Party a larger than expected number of Germans voted for Abraham Lincoln in 1860. However, because many former Know-Nothings became involved with the Republican Party after the demise of the American Party, the Republican Party did not win as many German converts as sources might suggest. Some historians note that the level of local involvement of former Know-Nothing supporters in the Republican Party often determined whether Germans in that area voted Republican or stayed with the Democratic Party.\(^{85}\) While the German vote did not itself secure Lincoln’s victory, many people credited the Germans with enabling the election of Lincoln.

In the antebellum era an immigrant had to reside in the country for five years, declare their intention to naturalize three years before they would take the oath of allegiance, take an oath swearing their allegiance to the Constitution and rejecting any

\(^{83}\) Chicago Daily Tribune 3 November 1857.
\(^{84}\) Paul Fessler, “The Political and Pedagogical in Bilingual Education: Yesterday and Today,” in German-American Immigration and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective, 274.
\(^{85}\) See Donald DeBats, “German and Irish Political Engagement: The Politics of Cultural Diversity in an Industrial Age,” in German-American Immigration and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective, 180 and Levine, 252.
previous foreign allegiance, and offer proof of their good character to become a naturalized citizen in the United States.\textsuperscript{86} Nothing in this procedure required the conversion of foreign cultural attachments to American cultures. Still, many Americans expected immigrants to shed their own culture and adopt their new one with great rapidity.\textsuperscript{87} Even if an immigrant was legally naturalized, to some Americans, that immigrant was expected to Americanize culturally and needed to possess certain qualities to be considered “worthy” of American citizenship. According to scholar Veronica Ramos, it is and has been a dominant American idea that “legitimate ‘Americans’ are hard-working individuals who contribute something to the national community, be it labor or money.”\textsuperscript{88} The \textit{New York Times} made a reference to this aspect of “worthiness” in 1851 when it remarked that “if an Irishman or a German, or an Englishman is fit to be a \textit{citizen}, he is fit to perform all the duties and enjoy all the rights of a citizen, according to his capacity.”\textsuperscript{89} Did Germans in Antebellum America meet these standards of “worthiness?”

Although Forty-Eighter historian Carl Wittke and others have claimed that “in general, the German element was not highly regarded before the Civil War,” a study of what many of the newspapers of the 1850s were writing about German character indicates that there was at least as much positive commentary as negative.\textsuperscript{90} Nativist sentiment was clearly present in the 1850s, but this sentiment was not as all pervasive as some historians would seem to indicate. Americans occasionally lifted up their fellow Irish and German adopted citizens, but when they made distinctions between the Irish and the German, the German generally came off more favorably.\textsuperscript{91} The qualities of industriousness, loyalty, and love of liberty that many Americans associated with Germans fit many of the same qualities they saw as being important for Americans to have. This is not to call into question the theory of J. A. Hawgood that is shared by Christian Keller and other historians that the nativism that was present in the 1850s

\textsuperscript{87} Leonard and Parmet, 5-6.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{New York Daily Times} 10 October 1851.
\textsuperscript{90} Wittke, 15.
\textsuperscript{91} For examples of both see \textit{New York Daily Times} 4 June 1852 and \textit{New York Times} 24 August 1859.
promoted a backlash among Germans against Americanization and into a defense of everything German. Nativism may have induced Germans to react this way. But on the eve of the Civil War, nativism lay dormant and many Americans generally thought fairly highly of Germans. With the coming of the war, Germans would get a chance to prove whether they were fully “worthy” of being Americans.
Chapter 2: “I Fights Mit Sigel”: Germans in the First Two Years of the War

In May of 1861, after rebel forces had opened fire on Fort Sumter and President Lincoln issued his first call for troops to put down the rebellion in the southern states, the Chicago Tribune ran an article detailing the contributions of the German element of the population and what Germans should expect from their service in the war:

In this crisis in our national affairs, the adopted citizens of German birth have displayed loyalty, zeal and patriotic fervor that are worthy of all praise. At the first call to arms, they sprang at once to the defense of the country that they have chosen as their home, and of that Constitution under which they have enjoyed the rights of freemen. In New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati and Chicago—wherever in the Free States the German element is large—they compose a large minority, perhaps in some cases a majority, of the volunteers. In the cities of the Border Slave States—Wheeling, Louisville and Memphis—they have been the sheet-anchor of the Union men—always sure, always reliable, and always ready. In St. Louis they compose three-fourths of the Missouri contingent; and their recent conduct in the street fights in that city, shows that they do not carry muskets without the courage to fire when attacked. Accustomed as most of them are, wherever found; to the use of arms and to the restraints and obligations of military discipline; headed by officers who have done good service in the Liberal cause in Europe; and animated as they are to a man with the Sentiment and Idea which underlies this fight—they will make the valuable trustworthy soldiers upon whom commanders may rely in any peril or emergency.

We look forward to the termination of this rebellion as the end of the intolerance and proscription involved in that pestilent Know-Nothing heresy which yet lingers here and there in the popular mind. The men who are offering their time, their money, their labor and their lives in the defense of the Government, as freely as the Germans are, will not hereafter find any organized party bold enough or shameless enough to say that they are not by right, as well as by law, entitled to all the privileges and immunities which American citizenship can give.

They prove their devotion to the popular cause, to good order and good government, by deeds that will outweigh the theories of would-be statesmen or the prescriptive policy of intolerant politicians. They emphasize their oaths of allegiance in a way that leaves no doubt they are Americans, not only by the forms of law, but by the religious maintenance of the principles upon which the American Republic has its foundations. They will show that nationality, race and birthplace are nothing; but the faith which bids men respect others’ rights while maintaining their own, is the proper guide in estimating the value of citizens, whether to the manor born, or from over the sea.

To us who have been the constant and severe defenders of the German race and the German name, this proof of all that we have said of the patriotism and the steadfastness of the Germans of this country, brings great satisfaction.

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We knew that the day would come when their sterling virtue would be acknowledged, and when the most intolerant of the party of proscription would admit that we were right and that their political philosophy, founded on creed and birthplace, was wrong. That day has come.\(^2\)

This article sums up many of the positive accolades that many Anglo-Americans expressed about their fellow German-Americans. At the beginning of the war, Americans valued the Germans for their patriotism, loyalty, previous military experience, and willingness to serve. The vast outpouring of German volunteers for the Union army, and the continuing loyalty of many Germans in the Slave states to the Union caused Americans to celebrate and uplift their German adopted citizens. Beneath this initial burst of American pride in their Germans, however, lay the remnants and seeds of nativism and a rebirth of old American stereotypes of German soldiers. As the war ground on and some German soldiers were unable to keep pace with the exceedingly high expectations placed upon them, these undercurrents of prejudice against Germans began to surface.

When the Civil War broke out in April 1861, a spirit of excitement gripped the nation. For months the situation had been a tense waiting game as a number of the states of the deep South voted to secede from the Union and federal government wavered on how to respond. Once Edmund Ruffin fired that first shot at the federal garrison in Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, the wait was over. Anglo-Americans, German-Americans, Irish-Americans, and other European-Americans eagerly volunteered to put down the rebellion. For a while, the Civil War united the various immigrant groups with their native American brethren, and distinctions seemed to fade away. A German language newspaper emphasized this unifying trend of the war noting “all are of one heart and one soul; all of them have utterly forgotten that they are Germans, and they have flocked to the flag of their Fatherland as good, patriotic Americans.”\(^3\) Many immigrants saw service in the military as a way of securing their full-fledged right to American

\(^2\) *Chicago Tribune* 14 May 1861.
\(^3\) *Anzeiger des Westens* (St. Louis) 23 May 1861, as quoted in *Germans For a Free Missouri: Translations From the St. Louis Radical Press, 1857-1862*, trans. Steven Rowan (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 241.
citizenship and ending nativism once and for all. Americans echoed this sentiment noting “there is no distrust of Catholicism, and we shall get rid of our offensive nativism. . . Irish Catholics and German Catholics are fighting our battles now as they have done on the plains of Mexico.” Secretary of War Simon Cameron was also quoted as saying “when a Scotchman, or an Irishman, or a German comes to the United States, he merges his own nationality into the country that adopts him as a son; and so when this revolt is suppressed, and this war is ended . . . There will then be no more talk of Virginians, Marylanders, Pennsylvanians, or Mississippians. No gentlemen, thank God! we shall then be all Americans.” Early in the war, both Americans and immigrants looked forward to the unifying and Americanizing trends the war might bring.

Historians are divided as to how much patriotism and anti-slavery sentiment affected the average German volunteer in his decision to enlist. Dean B. Mahin emphasizes the traditional ideological arguments that Germans’ attachment to the new freedoms and opportunities of their adopted country, their desire to advance their status by demonstrating their patriotism, their need for any type of pay to support themselves economically, and their hated of slavery were the major reasons for German enlistment, but does acknowledge that the relatively few Germans cited emancipation as a reason for enlistment were mostly Forty-Eighters. Meanwhile, Wolfgang Helbich takes a slightly more pessimistic view, claiming “they did not know ‘what they were fighting for’ beyond their pay, their survival, and a vague hope for recognition and advancement in American society.”

Regardless of their personal reasons for enlistment, Germans contributed substantial numbers of volunteers in the first few months of the war and during the course of the war contributed roughly 200,000 men to the Union cause. (This number is only an estimate of first generation German immigrants and does not include those of German

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95 Brooklyn Daily Eagle 6 May 1861.
96 Simon Cameron, as quoted in Brooklyn Daily Eagle 21 June 1861.
97 Mahin, 11, 14.
98 Helbich, 311.
99 See Bergquist, 60 and Kaufmann, 70-76.
heritage.) This made Germans the largest foreign-born group in the Union army, even though they were only the second largest immigrant group in the United States.\textsuperscript{100} Wilhelm Kaufmann, author of \textit{The Germans in the American Civil War}, and other German scholars claim that the number of Germans serving in the Union army was a substantially greater commitment of men from the German population than should have been expected, based on the percentage of Germans in the population.\textsuperscript{101} Although historian Kathleen Neils Conzen argues that Germans were only over represented in draftee and bounty enlistments later in the war, the fact remains that Germans served in the Union army in large numbers.\textsuperscript{102} In contrast, very few Germans served in the Confederate army. Historian Walter Kamphoefner claims that their presence in the ranks of the rebel army was even smaller than their small percentage of the Confederate population and attributes this to German aversion to slavery and devotion to the Union.\textsuperscript{103}

Northern newspapers highly encouraged Germans to enlist in the early stages of the war, valuing their previous military experience.\textsuperscript{104} The \textit{New York Times} praised the German recruits, claiming “they have fought in Schleswig-Holstein, in Baden, in Italy, Hungary and the Crimea. The laws of their country have prescribed the most constant drill. They are hardy and vigorous men.”\textsuperscript{105} Many Americans saw Germans as a martial race of people and the mass conscription laws of many of the German states meant that many of the German immigrants had served in at least some military capacity in Europe.\textsuperscript{106} Therefore it was easy for Americans to assume that the Germans naturally made trained and disciplined soldiers. Robert McCook, an American serving as the commander of the 9\textsuperscript{th} Ohio, a German regiment, once remarked “I know the Germans will fight. Our American boys mean well enough, but they don’t know how.”\textsuperscript{107} This assumption of German martial superiority was both a blessing and a curse for Germans.

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\textsuperscript{100} Mahin, 11.
\textsuperscript{101} Kaufmann, 71.
\textsuperscript{102} Conzen, “German Catholic Communalism and the American Civil War,” 127.
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{New York Times} 10 May 1861.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{See New York Times} 29 June 1861.
\textsuperscript{107} Robert Latimer McCook, as quoted in Constantin Grebner, \textit{“We Were the Ninth:” A History of the Ninth Regiment, Ohio Volunteer Infantry, April 17, 1861, to June 7, 1864}, trans. and ed. Frederic Trautman (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1987), 183.
It made them well-respected in the early stages of the war, but it also set very high and unreasonable expectations.

While most of the 200,000 Germans who served in the Union army served in ethnically mixed or primarily Anglo-American regiments, an estimated 36,000 served in all-German regiments. These regiments did not carry the stigma of inferiority that later black regiments would face. Rather, they seemed a natural outgrowth of the American tendency to form entire military units from a localized area. German regiments were particularly attractive to those German-Americans who still felt more German than American, as most of the men, officers, culture, and language of the regiments were German. German regiments were known for their fine regimental bands, good food, and occasional rations of beer, a practice which was looked upon with jealousy by other regiments and disfavor by civil and military authorities. (This practice was eventually completely banned in May 1863.)

While the American public often admired the efficiency of some of these regiments, historians disagree over their impact on German Americanization. William Burton argues that ethnic regiments did little to preserve a separate ethnic identity and by the end of the war many German regiments were not so dominated by Germans anymore. At the same time Christian Keller and Wolfgang Helbich argue the opposite: that German regiments cultivated a distinct German identity that was separate from an American identity and many have helped delay Americanization. Keller also argues that although Germans faced prejudice in the army, Germans were often prejudiced against Americans within German regiments. German regiments, like American impressions of German martial superiority, proved to be a two-edged sword. Their existence brought greater attention to the contributions of Germans in the Civil War than would have been the case had Germans only constituted minorities in Anglo-
American regiments. However, they also kept Germans (and other groups with ethnic regiments of their own) isolated from the rest of the Anglo-American military, making cultural distinctions stronger and placing these ethnic regiments on pedestals so that entire ethnic groups could be judged on the performance of their most visible ethnic regiments.

Not only did Germans feel they had something to prove to native Americans, some had a superiority complex that stemmed from and complicated the problem of associating the German people with martial prowess and the pride of the German community in its ethnic regiments. “The German soldier is generally far more faithful, conscientious and zealous than the native-born American. This is part of the German nature . . .” wrote a Union German soldier from Kentucky, “The German soldier is obedient and loyal to duty without regard to reward or punishment. The American generally considers, only reward, or—the Guard-House.” 115 In analyzing a number of letters from German soldiers, Wolfgang Helbich found that a number of Germans felt that “German officers command better, German regiments fight better, German camps are cleaner, [and] German troops are healthier.” 116 This sense of German superiority may have stemmed from the reputation of the Prussian military, which was perhaps the best trained and disciplined army in Europe and the pride (or bane) of German speakers everywhere. Americans with nativist sympathies were not the only ones holding prejudice.

In spite of this, as German, Irish, and other immigrant volunteers went off to war in 1861, the predominant perception in the press was that these adopted citizens were bravely patriotic and loyal to the Union. A civilian judge from Ohio wrote “the Germans are among our best soldiers, and they are generally good Union men.” 117 Meanwhile, the Brooklyn Daily Eagle praised Germans, Irish, Englishmen, and Scotsmen for “being carried away by the patriotic enthusiasm now so prevalent . . . [and] tendering their

116 Helbich, 300.
services in all directions, in support of law and order.”

Also, the New York Herald hailed the “brave native American, Irish and German patriots who are enlisted in the glorious work of crushing out rebellion and re-establishing the institutions that have been imperiled by treason.”

The consent was generally strong among Anglo-Americans that “we can count upon our foreign element to a man.”

Nowhere was this more clear than in the actions of Germans in the slave states of Texas and Missouri.

The state of Texas was home to approximately 20,000 of the 70,000 Germans residing in Confederate states. Shortly after the state’s secession, eighteen German communities in Texas raised militias swearing loyalty to the United States. In June 1861, at Fredericksburg, Texas, a number of German Union sympathizers formed the Union Loyal League. Because of the activities of German unionists, martial law was declared in Texas in 1862 and Confederates attempted to force the Germans and other unionists to swear loyalty to the Confederacy. In response, the Union Loyal League raised several companies of militia, but superior Confederate numbers forced the German unionists to attempt to flee towards Mexico. The Confederates caught up to them on 10 August 1862 at the Nueces River and attacked the ill-prepared Germans. A number of Germans were killed in the action and more were murdered after surrendering to the Confederates.

Although those historians, like Andreas Dorpalem, who advocate that Texas Germans and other Germans of the South were entirely indifferent to the issue of slavery may be correct, it is clear that many held very strong anti-secession views. This is especially clear in the case of Missouri.

Missouri contained a German population greater than the German population of all of the Confederate states combined, with many concentrated in the area near St.
Historian Walter Ryle calls this German population “the most important foreign group in Missouri . . . who exerted far greater influence on state events in the early days of the Great Rebellion than any other single element in the population.”

In 1861 during the secession crisis, Claiborne Fox Jackson, a supporter of secession and the infant Confederacy, was the governor of Missouri. While Missouri was a slave state, it was unclear whether Missouri would secede or remain in the Union. The Germans of St. Louis were by and large pro-Union and the German press of the city advocated fiercely against secession saying “the Germans in the Western states—to which Missouri belongs—must take their stand on freedom and right and oppose this state entering the Southern confederation, so far as their strength reaches.” As the crisis worsened, Turner societies in St. Louis began to make military training obligatory for its members and the Germans’ militia drills took on a more serious edge.

The St. Louis federal arsenal was of key importance to both pro-Union and secessionist forces. In April 1861, the regular army officer commanding the arsenal’s small garrison, Nathaniel Lyon, a red-bearded, fire-breathing Unionist, swore in several local militia regiments for federal service and used them to help defend the arsenal against the secessionists. Most of these pro-Union forces were made up of German Turners. In response, Governor Jackson assembled a secessionist militia encampment, named Camp Jackson, near St. Louis, with the intention of using that force to seize the arsenal. After Lyon learned that the secessionist militia had been given several cannon by the Confederacy and spied on their encampment disguised as a woman, he decided to act. On 10 May, in a daring move, Lyon and Unionist congressman Francis P. Blair, led several Union regiments to Camp Jackson, surrounded the secessionist encampment, and demanded their surrender. As these “prisoners” were being led back through town, a mob assaulted some of the Unionists. After one soldier was shot and killed, they were

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125 The actual cited number of Germans in Missouri varies tremendously. John McElroy estimates 150,000 which seems too large and probably includes an estimate of people of German ancestry. Meanwhile, Walter Ryle claims that there were 88,487 Germans in Missouri in 1860, a more accurate number based on census data. See John McElroy, The Struggle for Missouri (Washington, D. C.: The National Tribune Co., 1909), 15; and Walter Harrington Ryle, Missouri: Union or Secession (Nashville: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1931), 21.

126 Ryle, 8.

127 Anzeiger des Westens (St. Louis) 17 December 1860, as quoted in Germans For a Free Missouri, 148.

128 Piston and Hatcher, 25.
forced to return fire, killing several civilians. Although an unfortunate ending to an otherwise bloodless Union victory, the Camp Jackson Affair demonstrated German loyalty to the Union and was a key event in keeping the state of Missouri in the Union.  

While many celebrated the Germans of St. Louis for their forthright actions and their loyalty to the Union, the news that some civilians had been killed incited a backlash against German soldiers. In its report of the Camp Jackson Affair, the New York Times said “the feeling against the Germans is most intense, the regular volunteers and Home Guards being composed mainly of that class of citizens, and through their acts so many innocent people have been killed.”

Meanwhile, a New York resident, George Templeton Strong, remarked on the same day the “the German element seems conspicuous among the Missouri Loyalists. This will appeal strongly to Germans, not only North, but in Southern states.” Some historians have claimed that the actions of the St. Louis Germans in the secession crisis only worsened the situation in Missouri and did little to keep Missouri in the Union, but these claims downplay the very real secessionist threat that existed in 1861 and fail to acknowledge the significant numbers of Germans among Missouri unionists in general. Germans and Americans could see in the actions of the St. Louis Germans great patriotism and an effort to preserve Missouri for the Union. In the words of the German paper Anzeiger de Westens, “But for what are the Germans to blame? That the South has declared war on the United States? That Claiborne Fox Jackson has tried to chain this state and this city, with sixty thousand Germans in it, to the South? No. But they are to blame for the fact that Claiborne Fox Jackson’s traitorous little game did not succeed.”

Back east, as German regiments were being formed alongside other ethnic and American regiments to put down the rebellion, several New York and Pennsylvania German regiments were brigaded together under the command of a German colonel,

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129 Historians disagree over some of the details, as well as the impact and significance of the Camp Jackson Affair. See Thomas Lowndes Snead, The Fight for Missouri: From the Election of Lincoln to the Death of Lyon (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1886), 166; Edward Conrad Smith, The Borderland in the Civil War (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 230-238; McElroy, 67-87; and McPherson, 290-293.

130 New York Times 13 May 1861.


132 See Dorpalem, 64; and Smith, The Borderland in the Civil War, 240-241.

133 Anzeiger des Westens (St. Louis) 23 May 1861, as quoted in Germans For a Free Missouri, 240.
Louis Blenker. It was the nucleus of what would eventually become the Eleventh Corps. The German Brigade served with distinction in Irvin McDowell’s ill-fated campaign of July 1861. Although the battle of First Bull Run was a disaster for the poorly trained Union forces, one of the bright spots was the German Brigade. The New York Times reported of the battle “when the retreat had been ordered, it was the masterly skill of the German Brigade, under Col. Blenker, which covered the movement, and prevented any accumulated disasters.”

With the reorganizing and rebuilding of the eastern Union army into George McClellan’s Army of the Potomac, after the defeat at Bull Run, the German brigade was expanded into a German Division and Blenker was promoted to general. In the spring of 1862, while McClellan was busy with his Peninsular Campaign, Blenker’s division was ordered to the Shenandoah Valley to support General John C. Frémont’s army. In a major military mix up, the War Department failed to give Blenker any maps or directions to get to Frémont’s position. As a result, the German division became lost in the Virginia countryside for several weeks and was forced to resort to foraging and pillaging as their supplies ran out. General William S. Rosecrans, who was sent to find Blenker’s missing division, finally found the lost division in poor condition near Harper’s Ferry and guided it to Frémont. In the valley, the German Division found themselves on the receiving end of Confederate General “Stonewall” Jackson’s brilliant campaign as multiple Union armies were defeated in separate engagements by Jackson’s smaller force.

Although the German Division received praise from General McClellan as “excellent troops” and Rosecrans remarked in his official report that he thought “well of the German division, and of General Blenker,” the foraging on Blenker’s march was the beginning of a reputation German soldiers acquired for looting and pillaging. Union General J. M. Schofield complained of the German forces at his disposal, claiming “if I trust them out of my sight for a moment they will plunder and rob friends and foes alike.” Meanwhile, Union officer E. A. Carr noted in a report that “men of mine who

were with the Germans today in foraging report great excesses on their part, going into
the private apartments of ladies and opening trunks and drawers, and ransacking
everything and taking away what they wanted.”

Union General Robert Huston Milroy was especially vocal in his accusations of German looting saying:

The Dutch brigades are composed of the most infernal robbers, plunderers and
thieves, I have ever seen, our army is disgraced by them. They straggle off from
their companies and Regts. for miles on either side of the road as we march along
and enter every house . . . and clean out everything—frequently open drawers,
trunks, bureaus etc. for plunder—leaving women and children crying behind
them—but no tears or entreaties stop or affect them, the only answer they make is
‘Nix furstay.’

While these accusations of German looting appeared in many theaters of the war,
Blenker’s division took the brunt of it. As the *New York Times* correspondent reported
“the depredations committed by the German Division have given a new word to the
language. When an article is missed under suspicious circumstances, it is said to be
‘Blenkered.’”

These accusations of German looting and pillaging, while having some basis in
fact, stemmed from a slowly growing rebirth of an old American stereotype of German
soldiers: the Hessians. Mercenaries from Hessen-Kassel and other German states who
served with the British Army in the American Revolution were collectively known as
Hessians. Throughout the Revolutionary War, American patriots saw Hessians as
inhuman, villainous plunderers and automaton soldiers. One American in the
Revolution described the Hessians as they plundered “and not only took away their
creatures but robed [sic] their Houses and ript [sic] open their Beds and turned out the
feathers and took away the Ticken [sic] and left the owners but very little to cover them,
or even to live on,” a description very similar to those accusations made against German

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139 Robert Huston Milroy, as quoted in James S. Pula, *The History of a German-Polish Civil War Brigade*
140 *New York Times* 18 June 1862. Note, the correspondent believes that Germans are being unfairly
singled out by this as he notes just as much looting among American soldiers.
141 See Rodneu Atwood, *The Hessians: Mercenaries From Hessen-Kassel in the American Revolution*
(Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 171; and Edward Jackson Lowell, *The
Hessians and the Other German Auxiliaries of Great Britain in the Revolutionary War* (Williamstown,
soldiers in the Civil War. The legacy of the impact of American attitudes towards the Hessians has been felt throughout American history in assumptions about the character and nature of German soldiers. The image of the mercenary Hessian still exists in American popular culture today.  It was even more pronounced in the Civil War. While Northern Americans never directly referred to their German soldiers as Hessians, often preferring to use the term “Dutch” when speaking of Germans derisively, they occasionally attributed “Hessian-like” qualities, such as plundering, drunkenness, and inhumaness, to German-American soldiers.

The South had no such qualms about equating all Germans with Hessians. While Northern attitudes towards Germans were mixed, Southerners expressed an extraordinarily hostile view of Germans. Referring to Germans as the Union’s “rascally Dutch allies,” “hired Dutch cut-throats,” and “German infidels,” Southerners echoed the sentiments of their Revolutionary fore-fathers that their enemy was sending foreign hirelings to do their dirty work. Southern newspapers repeatedly referred to German Union soldiers, as well as some Union forces in general, as “Hessians,” with all the negative connotations that word implied. This Hessian connection and Confederate hatred of Germans appears most clearly in a song written by Joseph Leddy, a Confederate soldier from Missouri, about the Camp Jackson Affair to a popular tune called “Happy Land of Canaan”:

The Invasion of Camp Jackson By the Hessians

It was on the Tenth of May, Kelly’s men were all away,  
When the Dutch surrounded Camp Jackson;  
Lyon was there, with Boernstein and Blair,  
To take our men from the happy land of Canaan.

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143 The image of Germans as mercenaries is amazingly still present in American society, especially among those with only passing knowledge of American History. I found this out when people I knew asked about my thesis topic. I responded that I was studying Germans in the Civil War. The first reaction I received from several people was “I didn’t know there were mercenaries in the Civil War!”
145 See Charleston Mercury (Charleston, SC) 22 June 1861, 30 April 1863 and 22 June 1863. See also quotations from Confederate newspapers in the New York Times 18 July 1861 and 5 September 1861.
146 Only the verses that mention Germans appear here. See Appendix B for the full song lyrics.
Chorus
Oh! Oh! Oh! Ah! Ah! Ah!—The time of our glory is a-coming.
We yet will see the time, when all of us will shine,
And drive the Hessians from our happy land of Canaan.

Our boys looked so nice neat, when they formed upon the street,
You could tell that sauerkraut was not their feeding;
Our men were straight and tall, the Dutch were thin and small
And a disgrace to our happy land of Canaan.

The people gave three cheers for the handsome Volunteers,
Which raised the Hessians’ indignation;
They fired on our brothers, killing sisters, wives and mothers!
But we’ll avenge them in the happy land of Canaan.

With Col. Kelly at our head, we will fight till we are dead—
Wherever he goes we will sustain him;
He has led us on again, to fight with might and main,
To whip the Dutch from this happy land of Canaan. 147

This song, infused with nativist sentiment, is excellent example of Southern prejudice against Germans. Although the Confederate army was not without any German volunteers, Germans as a whole were so heavily on the side of the Union that it was the Germans rather than the Irish that received the brunt of Southern nativism.

After the embarrassment caused by Jackson’s Valley Campaign to the Union, the War Department decided to rearrange the command structure in Northern Virginia. John Pope, a general who had achieved some success out west, was placed in command of the scattered forces in Virginia that were not actively participating in McClellan’s Peninsular Campaign. He named his force the Army of Virginia. Frémont was transferred because he refused to serve under Pope. Also, due to accusations of misappropriating government funds, Louis Blenker resigned his commission, leaving the German Division without a commander. 148 The entire organization of Frémont’s army was shaken up and the German Division ceased to exist as regiments were shuffled into different brigades and divisions. To command Frémont’s corps, the War Department appointed German General Franz Sigel, a notable Forty-Eighter who had commanded the Baden

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148 See Kaufmann, 100-102.
revolutionary army in 1848-49. Carl Schurz, another Forty-Eighter, personal friend of Abraham Lincoln, and former minister to Spain, was given a commission as a general and assigned a division in the new First Corps Army of Virginia.

Franz Sigel was, without question, the most famous and influential German general of the Civil War. He took a prominent role early in the war as he was intimately involved with the events in St. Louis during the secession crisis. During that affair Sigel raised and commanded one of the first German regiments in Missouri to answer the call of the Union. Later, he became Lyon’s second in command and was instrumental in organizing the Union retreat after Lyon was killed at Wilson’s Creek in the summer of 1861. In March 1862, Sigel “displayed his best generalship of the war” in the Union’s victory at Pea Ridge, Arkansas. Although Sigel was temperamental and prone to offering his resignation whenever he felt affronted or unappreciated, such as when he was passed over for overall command in Missouri after Lyon’s death, his influence and prestige among the German population made him indispensable.

“No German-American was more the ‘Damned Dutch’ to Americans than Franz Sigel, and yet no other German-American military leader possessed his enormous, albeit perplexing popularity,” writes historian and Sigel biographer Stephen D. Engle. His popularity among the Germans reached practically religious fervor. “I fights mit Sigel” became the German war cry as they went off to war, regardless of the commander under whom they served. Harper’s Weekly was even putting it mildly when it stated “General Sigel is universally admitted to be a splendid officer and is enthusiastically loved by the German troops.” The Chicago Tribune reported that “Sigel’s own countrymen passed into a proverb, ‘You fights mit Sigel? den you trinks mit me.’” Germans who did not fight under Sigel’s direct command, such as Henry A. Kircher of the 9th Illinois, also praised Sigel, claiming “his soldiers will follow him even if he goes with one against a dozen . . . Long live Siegel! [sic] And woe to him who hesitates to follow him or who

151 Harper’s Weekly 18 October 1862.
152 Chicago Tribune 11 January 1862.
places any obstacle in his modest, laboriously earned path to glory.” Sigel was even popular among the American soldiers who served under him. Lewis Warner, a member of the 154th New York, part of Sigel’s corps, wrote that “indeed we are all highly gratified and thank our lucky stars that, to use the Dutchman’s phrase, we are to fight ‘mit Sigel.’” Another member of that same regiment also wrote “we ‘fight mit Sigel’ now and the boys are well satisfied with their General.”

This reverence for Sigel is often difficult to understand. In spite of his popularity amongst the Germans and repeated proclamations of his great generalship, some historians and contemporaries were critical of his command ability. General-in-Chief Henry Halleck was especially critical of Sigel, calling him “unfit for the rank he now holds.” No matter Sigel’s failings as a general, the German element still supported him. Engle explains this phenomenon saying “despite his battlefield misfortunes, German-Americans viewed him as more than just a military commander. He became a symbol for their participation in the war, and Germans were extremely sensitive about the treatment of their esteemed general.” This tied Sigel’s reputation to the reputation of all German soldiers and vice versa, for better or for worse.

During the Civil War, a popular poem and a popular song linked the Germans and Sigel irretrievably. The poem “I Fights Mit Sigel” by Grant P. Robinson is written from the perspective of an American soldier’s occasional interactions with a particular German soldier. It contains elements of traditional stereotypes of Germans, such as the line “He’d ‘Blenkered’ these dainties, and thought it no wrong,” but is on the whole a rather sentimental poem expressing the German’s undying pride that he “fights mit Sigel.” On the other hand, the song entitled “I Goes to Fight Mit Sigel” by John F. Poole, is

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154 Lewis Warner, as quoted in Dunkelman, *Brothers One and All*, 187.
written in dialect to the tune of “The Girl I Left Behind Me” and deliberately pokes fun at Germans:

“I Goes to Fight Mit Sigel” by John F. Poole

I’ve come shust now to tells you how
I goes mit regimentals,
To schlauch dem voes of Liberty,
Like dem old Continentals,
Vot fights mit England long ago,
To save der Yankee Eagle;
Und now I gets my soldier clothes,
I goes to fight mit Sigel.

Ven I comes from der Deutsche Countree,
I Vorks some times at baking;
Den I keeps a lager beer saloon,
Und den I goes shoe-making;
But now I was a sojer been
To save der Yankee Eagle,
To schluach dem tam secession volks,
I goes to fight mit Sigel.

I gets ein tam big rifle guns,
Und puts him to mine shoulder,
Den march so bold like a big jackhorse,
Und may been someding bolder;
I goes off mit de volunteers
To save der Yankee Eagle;
To give den Rebel vellers fits,
I goes to fight mit Sigel.

Dem Deutschen mens mit Sigel’s band
At fighting have no rival;
Und von Cheff Davis mens ve meet,
Ve schlauch em like de tuyvil.
Dere’s only von ting vot I fear,
Ven pattling for der Eagle,
I vont get not no lager beer,
Ven I goes to fight mit Sigel.

For rations dey gives salty pork,
I dinks dat vas a great sell;
I petter likes de sauerkraut,
Der Schwitzer-kase und bretzel.
If Fighting Joe will give us dem,
Ve’ll save der Yankee Eagle,
Und I’ll put mine frau in breech-a-loons,
To go and fight mit Sigel.  

William Burton calls this song “a travesty of German-American speech, [which] reeked with contempt for the Germans.” From associating the Germans with the Hessians in the first verse, to lamenting the possibility of military service without beer and vowing to put his wife in pants to fight with Sigel (“Und I’ll put mine frau in breech-a-loons”), the song could hardly be called complementary to Germans. Although it is possible the Germans took the song in good humor, it is highly doubtful that it was a popular song sung by the Germans, as Stephen Engle claims. Instead, it represents a growing negative impression of the German soldierly contribution to the war.

Sigel’s first campaign in the east turned out to be a disaster for his commander, John Pope. Out-generated and out-maneuvered, Pope aggressively attacked when he should not have and led the Union army to its greatest defeat since First Bull Run: Second Bull Run. The reports in the papers were fairly positive in their evaluation of Sigel’s defeated corps. In the aftermath, Pope tried to blame most of his subordinates for the loss, eventually getting Fitz John Porter court-martialed, and casting doubt on the abilities of Sigel and his foreign troops. After Pope’s removal, McClellan was back in full command in the east and quickly merged Pope’s old Army of Virginia into the Army of the Potomac as Robert E. Lee began his first invasion of the North. In the reorganization, some of the corps were renumbered, including Sigel’s. Sigel’s corps was now officially the Eleventh Corps of the Army of the Potomac. The Eleventh Corps missed the Antietam campaign, as it was stationed in defense of Washington. Although with Burnside’s army at Fredericksburg, the Eleventh Corps did not partake in that engagement either. By the spring of 1863, Sigel’s Eleventh Corps had been with the Army of the Potomac for over two-thirds of a year, but was still an outsider because it

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160 Burton, 184.
161 Engle, Yankee Dutchman, 83.
162 See Brooklyn Daily Eagle 1 September 1862 and New York Times 4 November 1863.
had not fought with the Army of the Potomac as an integrated unit and because it consisted of many German soldiers.

Regardless of its reputation as a German corps, the fact remained that the Eleventh Corps had more than just Germans in it, and although they were in the same corps, Americans and Germans in the Eleventh Corps did not always get along together. Mark Dunkelman, a scholar of the 154th New York, an American regiment in the Eleventh Corps, found “in more than 1,300 surviving letters by members of the 154th, not one instance of friendship with German soldiers.”

One of the members of the 154th expressed his displeasure with being in a corps with many Germans writing “our Col. is trying to get us detached from this division as all of the rest nearly are dutch and the officers are all dutch, and they are very partial to the German Regiments.”

Accusations of favoritism for Americans over Germans or Germans over Americans flew from both sides. Germans claimed that they were more poorly supplied than their American counterparts, while Americans blamed German officers in the Eleventh Corps for displaying favoritism towards the German regiments in the corps. Both sides probably had legitimate grievances on occasion. The difficulty with the Eleventh Corps was that normal tensions between units were often exaggerated by ethnic prejudice, according to Dunkelman.

Although Germans were at first almost universally praised for their devotion to the Union and the number of soldiers they contributed, as Americans and Germans fought side by side, latent nativist sentiment began to surface. Some of this sentiment was expressed in officers’ desire to avoid having Germans in their command. In a request for additional reinforcements, the colonel of the 9th New York wrote “I should prefer if possible that you send me no Germans.”

Another officer claimed that “the kind of cavalry service I require could not be well done by German troops.” Meanwhile, Edward Wightman, a private in the 9th New York, characterized Germans as “quick

164 Dunkelman, “Hardtack and Sauerkraut Stew,” 78.
165 Joel Bouton, as quoted in Dunkelman, “Hardtack and Sauerkraut Stew,” 75.
166 See Brooklyn Daily Eagle 1 June 1861.
167 Dunkelman, “Hardtack and Sauerkraut Stew,” 76.
tempered and almost ungovernable.”¹⁷⁰ German soldiers speaking and issuing orders in
their native tongue proved another catalyst for bringing anti-German sentiment to the
surface. One New York cavalryman reportedly mouthed off to German major saying
“hold your barking and speak English, you damned Dutch son of bitch.”¹⁷¹ Another
issue Germans faced was in the realm of slang. With the German reputation for drinking
alcohol that stemmed from their opposition to temperance laws, alcohol in the army
camps was often referred to as “Dutch courage.”¹⁷² This unfortunate label made it much
easier for Anglo-Americans to see their German comrades as inherently cowardly.

Cowardice was not originally associated with Germans, but as defeats mounted,
some found it easier to attribute the poor performance of some units in battle with their
German heritage rather than extenuating circumstances or poor leadership. On the
Virginia Peninsula, Colonel Roy Stone and General George McCall made reference in
their reports to a German battery of Porter’s corps which “was deserted by its gunners at
the first appearance of the enemy.”¹⁷³ In another incident, General John Newton reported
that nearly 200 Confederate cavalrmymen broke through a German picket line in Blenker’s
division and the pickets “are positively alleged not to have fired a shot.”¹⁷⁴ Although
sporadic and interspersed with reports of the gallant conduct of Germans in some
engagements, these reports of German cowardice were ominous signs of what was to
come.¹⁷⁵

By the spring of 1863, Franz Sigel had had enough. Burnside’s grand divisions,
one of which Sigel commanded, were dismantled by the new commanding general
Joseph Hooker and Sigel reverted to commanding only the Eleventh Corps, one of the
smallest corps in the Army of the Potomac. This did not sit well with Sigel, and he

¹⁷⁰ Edward King Wightman, From Antietam to Fort Fisher: the Civil War Letters of Edward King
79.
¹⁷¹ Bell Irvin Wiley, The Life of Billy Yank; the Common Soldier of the Union (Garden City, NY:
¹⁷² See Philip Henry Sheridan, Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan, General United States Army, vol. 2
(New York, NY: C.L. Webster, 1888), 424; Fenwick Y. Hedley, Marching Through Georgia: Pen-
Pictures of Everyday Life in General Sherman’s Army, From the Beginning of the Atlanta Campaign Until
the Close of the War (Chicago, IL: M.A. Donohue & Co., 1884), 136; and J. S. Scott, Official Records,
series I vol. 30 pt. II, 530, for references to alcohol as “Dutch Courage.”
¹⁷⁵ For an example of a positive view of Germans in action see New York Herald 6 January 1862.
tendered his second resignation of the war. Sigel left his corps shortly before the start of Hooker’s new campaign. Carl Schurz, the senior division commander, assumed command temporarily, but he quickly reverted to his division command after Oliver Otis Howard, a pious West Pointer from Maine, was given the Corps’ command. The Germans in the Eleventh Corps were doubly upset by these events. First, they lamented the loss of their beloved General Sigel and second, they felt Schurz should have been given the permanent command of the corps. They regarded the appointment of Howard as evidence of nativist prejudice within the army against German commanders. Howard compounded the situation by bringing two other American generals with him to the corps: Charles Devens, a division commander, and Francis Barlow, a brigade commander. Howard had little time to get acquainted with his new command as Hooker set his army into motion in late April towards the upper fords of the Rappahannock River and crossroads called Chancellorsville.

Historians who claim that it was common for Americans to blame their defeats on cowardly Germans before Chancellorsville are only partially right. In the first two years of the Civil War, there were a wide variety of attitudes towards Germans. Overall, there was a gradual transformation of wholly positive affirmations of German patriotism, courage, and loyalty to very mixed impressions of German soldiers, some of them quite negative. As nativism was still present in the society and as some German units did not appear to live up to the exceedingly high expectations placed on them, Americans directed more and more criticism at them. Cultural memories of Hessian depredations during the American Revolution also resurfaced as some German troops broke into American houses to pillage and plunder, even though they were not the only ones doing it. On the whole, the first two years of the war offered a very mixed bag of commentary on German-Americans, but it also seems clear that prejudices grew through the course of

176 See Kaufmann, 262-266 on Sigel’s resignation.
178 See McPherson, 642; Creighton, 15; and James S. Pula, For Liberty and Justice: The Life and Times of Wladimir Krzyzanowski (Chicago: Polish American Congress Charitable Foundation, 1978), 56.
these years rather than dissipated. Chancellorsville, however, would polarize the population on the merits of Germans as soldiers.
Chapter 3: “I Runs Mit Howard”: Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Beyond

At first, Hooker’s new campaign met with startling success. Keeping Lee’s army occupied near Fredericksburg with only a couple corps, the main body of the Army of the Potomac crossed the Rappahannock up stream and threatened the Army of Northern Virginia from the rear. As Hooker’s forces pushed through the Wilderness, they ran into elements of the Confederate army that Lee was desperately trying to shift to face this new threat. After engaging the Confederates for a short while, Hooker ordered his advanced units to withdraw to defensive positions near Chancellorsville, a decision that almost every historian of the battle has called a terrible blunder. As Hooker concentrated his greatly numerically superior army in a defensive position in the Wilderness, Lee split his army and took the bulk of it towards the Wilderness to face Hooker. In this defensive position, Howard’s Eleventh Corps held the army’s right flank near the Wilderness Church and Dowdall’s Tavern. Prepared to face a Confederate assault from the south, the Eleventh Corps was taken completely by surprise when “Stonewall” Jackson’s entire corps launched an attack from the west on the evening of 2 May 1863.

The rout of the Eleventh Corps which ensued became an infamous part of the history of the Army of the Potomac. Many who witnessed it described scenes of mass panic and cowardice. Josiah Favill, an officer in the 57th New York of the II Corps, described these events in his diary, saying:

Howard’s men had stacked arms and were playing cards and loitering about without any thought of danger, when the enemy sailed right into them, driving them like flocks of sheep. Our lines were so close together that the flying Dutchmen came in streams right up to our lines, and deaf to all entreaties many of them actually ran right across into the arms of the very men they were trying to avoid. It was really ludicrous.


One soldier referred to the power of this overwhelming flight saying “we were ordered to stop them but we might as well have tried to stop a cyclone.” Very few men were able to offer positive descriptions of any part of the Eleventh Corps. One man saw General Howard and remarked that he “seemed to be the only man in his own command that was not running at the moment.” General Alpheus Williams, a division commander in the XII Corps, even reported an incident of an American officer firing his pistol at “some flying Dutchman” in a letter to his daughter. In all the Union officers’ reports on the battle of Chancellorsville the term “fugitives of the Eleventh Corps” appears quite often. This rout boded ill for American opinion of German soldierly ability.

Chancellorsville and, to a lesser degree, Gettysburg were key events in the shifting attitudes Americans had towards their German fellow citizens. While incidents of looting and misbehaving among some German soldiers had ignited nativist sentiment in the first two years of the war, Chancellorsville opened the flood gates to a great outpouring of nativist attacks on Germans. As vehement as the nativist onslaught was after Chancellorsville, not all Anglo-Americans blamed the Germans for the defeat. Several prominent generals and others spoke up to defend the Germans. As is the case for much of the history of German/American relations, attitudes remained mixed, but there is little doubt that there was a strong upsurge in negative commentary about German soldiers after Chancellorsville. After the battle, Germans became associated more and more with cowardice in the American mind. As Christian Keller argues, this had a disastrous effect on German support for the war and Germans’ desire to assimilate into American life. This seems a reasonable argument for the reaction of Germans, but how did Chancellorsville and Gettysburg affect American impressions of German “worthiness” to be Americans? Did they impact American attitudes towards Germans

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only in a negative light, or is the story more complicated? To answer these questions we must look at these battles and their impact on American public opinion.

The Eleventh Corps did not hold a particularly strong position on May 2. The three divisions of the corps were in line facing south along the Plank Road and the Orange Turnpike. Devens’ division, the brigades of McLean and von Glisa, held the extreme right of the position, Schurz’ division, Schimmelfennig and Krzyzanowksi’s brigades held the center, and von Steinwehr’s division, the brigades of Buschbeck and Barlow, held the left of the line and connected the Eleventh Corps with the rest of the army. There were no natural terrain features on which to anchor the right flank and, with only two regiments of von Glisa’s brigade drawn back from the main line facing west, the corps’ flank was, in military terms, “in the air.” In addition, the thick woods surrounding the position made it difficult to spot approaching enemy forces until they were practically on top of the position. Carl Schurz described this unfortunate position saying “our rear was at the mercy of the enemy who was at perfect liberty to walk right around us through the large gap between von Glisa’s right and the cavalry force which was stationed at Ely’s Ford.”

When Hooker reviewed this position his only remark was “how strong!,” an indication to Howard that his position had the full support of the commanding general. However on the morning of May 2, in an order to Howard and Slocum, commander of the XII Corps, Hooker directed both corps commanders to protect their right flanks in case of attack by the enemy. Howard claimed he never received the order, but Schurz distinctly recalled that he had woken Howard from a nap to tell him about it. Most historians believe Schurz’ story is more likely to be accurate. Nevertheless, nothing was done to strengthen the right flank, even though, according to Theodore Ayrault Dodge, a

186 See Appendix D for a map of the Eleventh Corps’ position at Chancellorsville and the approach of Jackson’s forces.
189 For the full text of this order, see Official Records, series I, vol. 25 pt. II, 360-361.
member of the 119th New York in Schurz’ division and historian of the battle, “there was not an officer or man in the Eleventh Corps that afternoon who did not discuss the possibility of an attack in force on our right, and wonder how the small body thrown across the road on the extreme flank could meet it.”\textsuperscript{191}

When Jackson’s attack came that evening, it was overwhelming. With his three divisions attacking in waves, Jackson’s line of attack extended well beyond both flanks of the meager two regiment line of von Glisa’s facing west. The Confederates also had overwhelming numerical superiority over the Eleventh Corps. (Confederate divisions and corps were much larger than their Union counterparts.) On top of this, Barlow’s brigade, the XI Corps’ only reserve, had been sent by Howard to support Sickles III Corps assault on what was thought to be the rear guard of the Confederate army as it retreated west. Devens’ division, surprised and immediately outflanked, broke quickly and ran for the rear. Schurz managed to form his division in a defensive line facing west and held out for a little while against the Confederates before being outflanked on both sides and joining Devens’ division in retreat. Buschbeck’s brigade of von Stienwehr’s division also fought gallantly, according to many accounts, before being overwhelmed. In explaining why he ran, one member of Schurz’ division wrote “I had no desire to ornament the inside of any Rebel prison-pen, and didn’t want to sit down on a bullet-hole, either.”\textsuperscript{192} In that hour and a half fight, the Eleventh Corps lost 1,429 killed and wounded and 974 captured or missing.\textsuperscript{193} These heavy casualties, including the fact that a good deal more men were killed or wounded than captured, would seem to indicate that Eleventh Corps did put up a fair amount of resistance before being overwhelmed.\textsuperscript{194}

Chancellorsville resulted in a crushing Union defeat, made all the more humiliating since up until the evening of May 2 the campaign appeared to be a complete success. While the battle of Chancellorsville lasted two more days after the rout of the Eleventh Corps (during each of which Hooker still greatly outnumbered Lee with better communication on interior lines), many saw the rout as the cause of the Union defeat. In

\textsuperscript{191} Dodge, 72.
\textsuperscript{194} Kaufmann, 199.
the aftermath of the battle, an explanation needed to be found for why the Eleventh Corps was so completely surprised and devastated.

While Howard blamed the Chancellorsville disaster on just about everything and everybody but himself, he made remarkably few derisive comments about Germans or the troops of the Eleventh Corps. Howard gave credit to some of his troops for holding out while criticizing others without making any unit or ethnic distinctions, saying “part of each division fought hard . . . part of it became wild with panic like the Belgians at Waterloo, like most of our troops at Bull Run.”¹⁹⁵ However, Darius Couch, II Corps commander at Chancellorsville, did recall that at a council of war Howard remarked, “that our present situation was due to the bad conduct of his corps, or words to that effect.”¹⁹⁶ In his official report, Howard blamed the dense woods, the absence of Barlow’s brigade, superior Confederate numbers, and the panic caused by troops being fired on from the rear for the rout at Chancellorsville.¹⁹⁷ According to Howard, he had done everything a commander was capable of doing and circumstances of surprise and an inadequately supported flank were not his fault.

Not all people saw it that way. Several members of the Eleventh Corps placed the blame squarely on Howard, making such comments as “the criminal negligence of Gen. Howard was the cause of our defeat.”¹⁹⁸ Veteran and battle historian Alanson Nelson was especially harsh on Howard’s conduct at Chancellorsville, saying that “Gen. Howard ought to have been tried by drumhead courtmartial and shot before the army recrossed the river.”¹⁹⁹ He also claimed that “all the sacrifice of lives since in battle and Southern prisons can and ought to be charged up to Gen. O. O. Howard.”²⁰⁰ A German from the 26th Wisconsin was far gentler, but still placed the blame on inept commanders saying “the fault of it is this: Sigel isn’t with us anymore, and the others are merely humbug

¹⁹⁸ Dwight Moore, as quoted in Dunkelman, Brothers One and All, 187. See also Stephen Welch, as quoted in Dunkelman, Brothers One and All, 188 and Peabody, 57.
¹⁹⁹ Nelson, 76.
²⁰⁰ Ibid., 71.
generals.”

Many in the Eleventh Corps believed that if Sigel had still been their commander, the disaster at Chancellorsville would never have happened.

Historians of the battle, particularly those who did not witness it first hand, do not hold this glowing view of Sigel, but do find fault with the commanders at Chancellorsville. They generally blame both Hooker and Howard for the Union defeat, and absolve the Germans and other members of the Eleventh Corps. Many would echo the sentiment of Samuel Bates: “could any equal body of men in a similar situation have long withstood the terrible onset coming upon it like an avalanche precipitated from an Alpine height?”

However, some historians have laid the blame for Chancellorsville on the common soldiers of the Eleventh Corps. John Bigelow writes of Schurz’ defensive line that “these men were capable of standing off all the infantry that Jackson had in front of them or could possibly put there.” He thus ignores the overwhelming numerical superiority and the vulnerability of Schurz’ line to attack. Also, one of Howard’s biographers, Gerald Weland, attacks the men of the Eleventh Corps in his efforts to exonerate Howard claiming “the ‘Damned Dutchmen’ had vaporized so wholly that only a few hundred were killed or taken prisoner . . . Even by the standards of a fleeing army in the 19th century, the ‘Damned Dutchmen’ had put on an Olympic-class performance.”

Those historians who cast blame on the men of the Eleventh Corps often ignore key facts of the battle, displaying a lingering prejudice against these foreign soldiers as poor quality troops.

The American public first learned about the battle of Chancellorsville through the newspapers. The newspapers’ initial reports on the engagement of May 2 were anything but positive on the performance of the Eleventh Corps. The New York Times reported that the Eleventh Corps “is composed of the divisions of Schurz, Steinwehr, and Devin [sic.], and consists in great part of German troops. Without waiting for a single volley from the rebels, this corps disgracefully abandoned their position behind their breastworks, and commenced coming, panic stricken, down the road towards

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201 Adam Muezenberger, as quoted in Sears, Chancellorsville, 276.
203 Bigelow, 304.
headquarters.”\(^\text{205}\) The *Times* correspondent further referred to the “panic-stricken Dutchmen” and claimed “as to the loss sustained by this corps, either in killed or captured, it could not have been great—they ran too fast for that.”\(^\text{206}\) Meanwhile, the *New York Herald* also blamed the defeat on the Eleventh Corps, referring to all members of the corps simply as “flying Germans.”\(^\text{207}\) The nativism expressed in these reports is striking. Both the *Times* and the *Herald* made it clear to their readers that Eleventh Corps consisted mostly of Germans (a slight exaggeration). They also both claimed that Schurz’ division (Schurz being the most prominent German general of the corps) was the first division to be assaulted and routed, while touting the personal heroism of Generals Howard and Devens (the two highest ranking native-born American commanders in the corps), pointedly ignoring that it was Devens’ division that was first attacked and routed, not Schurz’s.\(^\text{208}\)

Many newspapers across the country, including the Washington *Daily National Intelligencer*, New York *Evening Post*, Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, Philadelphia *Inquirer*, *Pittsburgh Gazette*, *Pittsburgh Post*, Chicago *Tribune*, Chicago *Times*, and the *Chicago Evening Journal*, initially published reports on the battle based on the *Times* and the *Herald*, since these two newspapers had correspondents with the army sending in their reports.\(^\text{209}\) With headlines such as “Gen. Howard’s Eleventh Army Corps Behaves Badly,” “The German Corps on Saturday, Throw Down Their Arms and Fly in a Panic,” and “Bad Conduct of the German Troops—Our Right Wing Turned” the message of cowardly Germans spread across the country.\(^\text{210}\) In some reports the issue of surprise was played down in order to make the Germans look even worse. *Harper’s Weekly*, in its report on the battle, claimed that “it was expected all day that the enemy would attack this wing in force, and there was plenty of time for preparation. The German troops, however, were not equal to the occasion.”\(^\text{211}\) At no other time had the Eleventh Corps

\(^{205}\) *New York Times* 5 May 1863.

\(^{206}\) *New York Times* 5 May 1863.

\(^{207}\) *New York Herald* 7 May 1863.

\(^{208}\) See *New York Times* 5 May 1863 and 6 May 1863; and *New York Herald* 7 May 1863 and 9 May 1863.


\(^{210}\) *Chicago Evening Journal* (Chicago) 5 May 1863; *Chicago Times* 6 May 1863; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* 5 May 1863.

\(^{211}\) *Harper’s Weekly* 23 May 1863.
been reported on as if it were composed entirely of Germans, as it was in the immediate aftermath of Chancellorsville.

While it initially published the same reports as the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* was one of the only newspapers to question the veracity of the reports of German cowardice within days after the battle. The *Tribune* denounced nativism and called for further investigation of the battle before jumping to conclusions, saying:

We are happy in believing that courage on the battlefield is not confined to one nation, or to one race, and that the bravest troops are sometimes liable to sudden, causeless, and inexplicable panic. If it is said that the Germans disappointed the expectations based on their valor, and fled just when they should have stood fast, let us hear all the particulars before we severely condemn. . . . The German names which, in all the battles of the war, appear in the lists of ‘killed and wounded,’ show the quality of the fighting that their possessors have done. How unjust then, admitting all that the telegraph charges; to make a single instance the ground of accusation against all men who are of German blood! We await further news with perfect confidence, that, when investigated, the case which has provoked these comments, will present quite another aspect. In the meantime, let our readers of American birth remember who they were who fled at Bull Run, who they were that made Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Pittsburg Landing, Murfreesboro and Vicksburg, scenes of disaster, if not, of disgrace? Were they all the ‘cowardly Dutchmen?’

This defense of Germans, by the *Tribune*, demonstrates that even in the wake of the strongest outpouring of nativist sentiment against Germans after Chancellorsville, there were still those who were willing to defend the Germans.

As time went on, more newspapers softened their attacks on German cowardice as the cause of the disaster. By June, the *New York Times* published a belated apologetic article on the Germans at Chancellorsville. In this article the *Times* concluded that “the inculpated Eleventh Corps was not in fault at all” and corrected their earlier misjudgments about the ethnic makeup of the corps and their reports that Schurz’ division had been the first to give way. At the same time, the *Times* emphasized the continual loyalty of the German population saying “men who have proved themselves so ready to shed their blood for the salvation of their adopted country, and who have generally been so faithful to the National cause in its darkest hours, have put their title to

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212 *Chicago Tribune* 7 May 1863.
all the privileges of American citizenship beyond all controversy.”

This apology seems to have reached far fewer ears than the earlier blame. Even in late June, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* still chastised the Germans for Chancellorsville, saying “it is singular how badly, on the whole, the Federal Germans have fought . . . The chief distinction they have gained in this war has been as proficients in the art of Blenkerism.”

In the army there was a great deal of blame cast on the Germans as well, and some of it was not as sanitized as the newspaper reports. A number of Union general officers placed the blame of defeat on the Eleventh Corps, and by association the Germans. In his official report of the battle, Chief of Engineers Gouverneur K. Warren wrote “the Eleventh Corps infantry . . . made no stand at all behind its breastworks, but ran away while yet the enemy’s bullets scarcely reached them . . . I tried in vain to assist some of the officers in rallying their men, but soon saw it was a waste of precious time.”

“The 11th Corps ran away to ‘fight mit Sigel’ in the rear,” wrote Provost Marshall General Marsena Patrick of Chancellorsville. General George G. Meade, V Corps commander and later commander of the Army of the Potomac, also remarked, “owing to the bad behavior of a portion of our troops, the Eleventh Corps, we had to fall back and draw in our lines.” While many generals had some negative opinions about the Eleventh Corps and used it as a scapegoat for the battle, most were fairly discreet with their language.

However, this was not the case among lower ranking officers and enlisted men, where harsher language was often used to describe the Eleventh Corps. “We certainly would have gained a great victory were it not for the cowardice of the 11th Corps,” wrote Colonel Patrick Guiney of the Irish 9th Massachusetts (V Corps) on Chancellorsville, “the Dutch corps ran. The rest of the army fought well. Hooker . . . was beaten by two things—want of numbers and the disgraceful flight of the flying Dutchmen.” Major

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219 Patrick Guiney, as quoted in Mahin, 126.
Henry L. Abbott of the 20th Massachusetts (II Corps) was particularly harsh, saying “and this is all, because the 11th Corps, Sigel’s Dutchmen, broke and run, all of them, at the first shot, as I always knew they would . . . Every man in Sigel’s Corps ought to be hauled off the face of the Earth.”220 Some claimed “the d—Dutch all ran away as usual.”221 The consensus among many was that Eleventh Corps Germans ran because they were poor troops. “‘I fights mit Sigel’ is played out,” wrote an assistant quartermaster from the III Corps, “tell S. that his Dutchmen can’t begin to stand up against the fury and rush of Americans, even if they are Rebels!”222 Another soldier wrote “we think very little of the dutch sons of bitches that used to brag that they ‘fight mit Sigel’ and I don’t know but they might have fought well with [Sigel] but they did not fight worth shit under Howard.”223 The claims of German military superiority at the outset of the war were beginning to haunt the Germans. Those holding any inkling of nativism found their disdain for foreign soldiers, especially Germans, bolstered by the events of Chancellorsville.

In the Eleventh Corps, a number of Americans defended the actions of the entire corps in the battle. Captain E. R. Monfort of the 75th Ohio wrote that “no equal force situated as they were could have done otherwise.”224 Eleventh Corps member Theodore Ayrault Dodge, in his history of the Chancellorsville campaign, criticized the blame placed on the Eleventh Corps, asking the question “what can be expected of new troops, taken by surprise, and attacked in front, flank, and rear at once?”225 Another Anglo-American in the Eleventh Corps defended the honor of the corps, claiming “the spontaneity with which the men rallied after the first shock gives the lie to those traducers of the Eleventh Corps . . . who sought a scapegoat on which to unload the burden of their

221 Andrew Jackson Butler to Benjamin Franklin Butler, 6 May 1863, in *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, During the Period of the Civil War*, vol. 3 (Springfield, MA: Plimpton Press, 1917), 71.
222 J. F. Rusling, as quoted in Bigelow, 478.
223 James Miller, as quoted in Engle, *Yankee Dutchmen*, 160.
225 Dodge, 93.
own sins and short comings and blundering.”

Col. John Lee of the 55th Ohio reported of the Eleventh Corps, “the men did and will fight when they have opportunity, but a rifle-pit is useless when the enemy is on the same side and in rear of your line.”

Meanwhile, a number of Anglo-Americans defended their unit’s actions, but leveled criticism on the Germans in the corps. A member of the 154th New York derided the Germans in the corps while praising several Irish companies of the 73rd Pennsylvania, saying “our battalion with the help of those brave sons of Erin, held the ground till every dutch ‘sour krout’ had retreated to the woods or fallen in the attempt. For my part, I have no confidence in the fighting qualities of the Dutch.” Another man from the same regiment reported that “just now it is a reproach for a man to belong to the 11th Army Corps and the Dutch part of it did behave like slinks in the fight on the 2nd inst.”

A number of Americans in the Eleventh Corps would probably have echoed the sentiments of Henry Nichols Blake, a captain in the 11th Massachusetts of the III Corps, who wrote “the few brave American regiments shed tears of mortification, and earnestly entreated that they might be transferred to brigades which were composed of their countrymen.”

Chancellorsville exacerbated ethnic tensions within the Eleventh Corps as Americans blamed the Germans for running first and vice versa.

Germans in the Eleventh Corps were outraged by the way they were treated in the press and the army. General Alexander Schimmelfennig, a brigade commander in Schurz’ division, was distraught over the treatment of the corps’ actions in newspapers and complained bitterly about it in his official report. At one point, he wrote, “I demand that the miserable penny-a-liners who have slandered the division be excluded, by a public order, from our lines, and that the names of the originators of these slanders be made known to me and my brigade, that they may be held responsible for their acts.”

Another German from the 26th Wisconsin reacted bitterly to reports of the Eleventh Corps’ cowardice, saying, “they say we ran away out of our trenches. I would have liked


Allen L. Robbins, as quoted in Dunkelman, “Hardtack and Sauerkraut Stew,” 82.

Henry Van Aernam, as quoted in Dunkelman, “Hardtack and Sauerkraut Stew,” 82.

Henry Nichols Blake, Three Years in the Army of the Potomac (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1865), 180.

to see some trenches. We were standing in front of a bush.”

In response to the negative press coverage, the Germans of New York held a mass meeting protesting the malicious treatment of the Germans in the Eleventh Corps. About two thousand Germans gathered to hear a number of different addresses by various German citizens defending the honor of German soldiers, expounding on German patriotism to the Union, and exploring the events of Chancellorsville in an effort to prove that Germans were only being used as a scapegoat for the Union defeat due to a lingering spirit of nativism in the country. Since the *New York Times* published their apologetic article only a couple of days after this meeting, it may indicate that the meeting accomplished some of its goals in presenting a more accurate picture of the Chancellorsville battle.

Perhaps no German was more upset with the accusations leveled at the Eleventh Corps Germans than Carl Schurz. Schurz was a Forty-Eighter and, along with Sigel, one of the two most famous German-Americans of the nineteenth century. Schurz, a friend of Lincoln, owed his appointment as a general more to his political connections than any actual military experience. But he proved himself a capable division commander and was with the Eleventh Corps in that capacity from almost its birth, until its death (its incorporation with the XII Corps to form the XX Corps). He had a high opinion of the men under his command. When he took command of his division, he claimed, “they are exceptional troops and I believe I shall be able to do something notable with them.”

Schurz did all that was in his power to protect the reputation of his troops. In his report on Chancellorsville, he went into detail about the unfairness and incorrectness of the blame on his troops:

> The Eleventh Corps, and, by error or malice, especially the Third Division, has been held up to the whole country as a band of cowards. My division has been made responsible for the defeat of the Eleventh Corps, and the Eleventh Corps for the failure of the campaign. Preposterous as this is, yet we have been overwhelmed by the army and the press with abuse and insult beyond measure . . . these men are no cowards . . . I have seen with my own eyes troops who now

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232 Carl Wickesberg, as quoted in Mahin, 127.
affect to look down upon the Eleventh Corps with sovereign contempt behave much worse under circumstances far less trying.\textsuperscript{235}

Schurz attempted to publish his report, exonerating the Eleventh Corps and the Germans, but was informed that no individual reports could be published until the commanding general, Hooker, submitted his report. Hooker never wrote a report on Chancellorsville, and Schurz’ report was never published.\textsuperscript{236} Schurz also attacked the correspondent of the \textit{New York Times}, L. L. Crounse, for incorrectly labeling his division as the first to break and run at Chancellorsville. He asked for a retraction. The retraction was printed, although in a somewhat backhanded way, insinuating that by exonerating Schurz’ division from the ignominy of being the first division routed, the \textit{Times} was not changing its story about the cowardliness of the Germans.\textsuperscript{237} Schurz also angrily challenged a man named Leslie Combs to join his headquarters during the next battle so he could see how Schurz behaved under fire. Combs had written a letter to the Louisville \textit{Journal} saying “Our children have fought in every battlefield and never once fled as Carl Schurz and his gang of freedom-shriekers did at Chancellorsville.”\textsuperscript{238}

Schurz and others of the Eleventh Corps were not the only ones to defend its actions at Chancellorsville. Henry Hunt, Darius Couch, Abner Doubleday, and David Hunter, also defended the actions of the corps, blaming its rout more on unfortunate positioning than on cowardice of the men. Both Hunt, Chief of Artillery, Army of the Potomac, and Couch felt the Eleventh Corps was forced into a rout by the circumstances. Hunt said, “the surprise itself was not the fault of the troops.”\textsuperscript{239} Couch explained that “no corps in the army surprised as the Eleventh was at this time, could have held its ground under similar circumstances.”\textsuperscript{240} Doubleday, a division commander in the I Corps, went a little farther to exonerate the Germans in his history of the Chancellorsville and Gettysburg campaigns, saying “the Germans were bitterly denounced for this catastrophe [Chancellorsville], I think very unjustly, for in the first place less than one-half of the Eleventh Corps were Germans, and in the second place the troops that did

\textsuperscript{240} Couch, 163.
form line and temporarily stop Jackson’s advance were Germans.”241 Doubleday blamed Howard for the disaster, writing, “there was no reason other than Howard’s utter want of appreciation of the gravity of the situation to prevent him from forming a strong line of defense to protect his right flank.”242 A number of other men also excused the rout of the Eleventh Corps due to its poor position and the overwhelming force and surprise of Jackson’s assault.243 Even though the abuse heaped upon the Eleventh Corps, and German troops in general, after Chancellorsville seems overwhelming, it was not as all pervasive as some historians have made it out to be.

Almost exactly two months after Chancellorsville, on 1 July 1863, the Eleventh Corps saw action again, this time in the open farmland of southern Pennsylvania, near the town of Gettysburg. On that July morning, two brigades of Union cavalry held up the advance of Confederate divisions, on a low ridge just west of town, until the infantry arrived on the field. The Union I Corps, under John Reynolds, arrived first and took up position facing west along the same ridge the cavalry held. The second infantry corps to arrive was Howard’s XI Corps. Originally intending to extend the I Corps’ line north to Oak Hill, Howard was forced to alter the position of his corps and face it to the north as Robert Rodes’ Confederate division arrived near Oak Hill and Confederate General Jubal Early’s division was advancing towards Gettysburg from the northeast. After Reynolds was killed early in the action, Howard took over command of both corps and Schurz was temporarily elevated to command of the XI Corps. The XI Corps took up a long line over flat, open ground that was completely dominated by the Confederate position on Oak Hill. Rode’s brigades attacked at the weak spot of the Union line where the two corps met at a right angle. Meanwhile, Early’s division arrived and attacked the XI Corps on its right flank.244 For a while, both Union corps were able to hold their own, but as superior Confederate numbers pressed down on them, both corps were forced to retreat rapidly through the town and regroup on the hills south of town. On that first day of the

242 Ibid., 25.
244 See Appendix E for a map of the Eleventh Corps’ position on 1 July 1863.
battle of Gettysburg the XI Corps lost approximately 3,200 men (300 killed, 1200 wounded, and 1400 captured or missing).\textsuperscript{245}

On the evening of 2 July, the XI Corps was engaged in a dusk battle with Confederates from Early’s division who assaulted Cemetery Hill. Surprised, some XI Corps units quickly broke and fled, but others and some reinforcements from another corps helped stem the tide and drive the Confederates back. That same evening, the 45\textsuperscript{th} New York and the 82\textsuperscript{nd} Illinois, two German regiments of the Eleventh Corps, were sent to support General Greene’s brigade of the XII Corps on Culp’s Hill, who was facing a similar evening attack by Confederates. After the fight was over, an unknown officer of the XII Corps approached Lt. Col. Salomon of the 82\textsuperscript{nd} Illinois. Not recognizing the corps to which Salomon belonged, he complimented Salomon’s men saying, “if you were here yesterday instead of that d—d 11\textsuperscript{th} Corps, we would not have been driven back!” Upset by this remark Salomon replied, “you are a miserable hound, sir. I and my regiment belong to that same 11\textsuperscript{th} Corps you are speaking of, and we did no worse fighting yesterday.”\textsuperscript{246} Although Gettysburg resulted in a Union Victory, it would prove another battle about which the Germans of the Eleventh Corps would have to defend their conduct.

Like Chancellorsville, most historians of Gettysburg defend the actions of the Eleventh Corps in that battle, blaming a poor defensive position for its inability to hold out against Confederate assaults. Prominent battlefield guide and battle historian Harry Pfanz concludes that “because of their poor position and inadequate numbers to defend it, the Eleventh Corps commanders faced an impossible situation.”\textsuperscript{247} Meanwhile, battle historian David Martin argues that “while much of the post-battle literature blames the retreat of XI Corps for the collapse of I Corps, the truth is rather that the I Corps collapsed largely on its own from pressure from three Confederate divisions and from exhaustion due to the day-long fight.”\textsuperscript{248} Still, some historians, like James McPherson,

\textsuperscript{246} This conversation is reported in Pfanz, 352.
\textsuperscript{247} Ibid., 351.
\textsuperscript{248} David G. Martin, “The Unlucky XI Corps,” 10.
refer to the “hapless 11th Corps” at Gettysburg and blame the Eleventh Corps for retreating first and uncovering the position of the First Corps.\textsuperscript{249}

In spite of this, newspaper reports of the Eleventh Corps at Gettysburg were generally favorable. The \textit{New York Times} reported the Eleventh Corps “most of it, fought well, and redeemed the disgrace of Chancellorsville.”\textsuperscript{250} The correspondent of the \textit{New York Herald} wrote “it affords me pleasure to say that this corps is reported to have fought well and lost many men.”\textsuperscript{251} Even a headline of the \textit{Chicago Evening Journal} read “Noble Gallantry of Howard’s 11\textsuperscript{th} Army Corps—Their Chancellorsville Disgrace Wiped Out.”\textsuperscript{252} Many other papers agreed; the Eleventh Corps had redeemed itself at Gettysburg.\textsuperscript{253} These otherwise glowing reports of the Eleventh Corps disguised some lingering disparaging feeling towards the Eleventh Corps Germans. First, by claiming that the Eleventh Corps “redeemed” its reputation, the newspapers further instilled the idea in the American public that the corps had acted cowardly at Chancellorsville. Second, in many of the newspaper reports of Chancellorsville, reporters went out of their way to describe the makeup of the corps as being composed “in great part of German troops.”\textsuperscript{254} After Gettysburg, all the papers that praised the actions of the Eleventh Corps made no mention of the German aspect of the corps. The newspapers exonerated the reputation of the Eleventh Corps at Gettysburg, but they were incapable of praising the German element of the corps as much as they had derided it after Chancellorsville.

While many members of the Eleventh Corps would echo the notion that the corps had redeemed itself at Gettysburg, some Anglo-Americans insisted that the German portion fought poorly. General Howard praised the actions of both the First and Eleventh Corps in the first day’s battle, which he commanded for the majority of the day.\textsuperscript{255} Also, a member of the 136\textsuperscript{th} New York, wrote in his diary “the 11\textsuperscript{th} Corps has got a good name this time. Our boys all fought well this time.”\textsuperscript{256} General Schurz expressed his pride in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{249} McPherson, 660, 654.
\item \textsuperscript{250} \textit{New York Times} 4 July 1863.
\item \textsuperscript{251} \textit{New York Herald} 3 July 1863.
\item \textsuperscript{252} \textit{Chicago Evening Journal} 3 July 1863.
\item \textsuperscript{253} See \textit{Chicago Tribune} 4 July 1863; \textit{Chicago Times} 6 July 1863; and \textit{Brooklyn Daily Eagle} 3 July 1863.
\item \textsuperscript{254} \textit{New York Times} 5 May 1863.
\item \textsuperscript{255} Howard, \textit{Autobiography}, 418-419.
\end{itemize}
the actions of the corps and his disappointment at the negative comments still expressed about the corps, saying, “the defamatory persecution of the Eleventh Corps might then have ceased. But it did not. The ‘foreign legion,’ as it was dubbed, was to serve as a scapegoat again for the retreat of the First Corps from a battlefield which could no longer be held against overwhelming numbers.”

Other members of the Eleventh Corps were highly critical of their German colleagues. One member of Ames’ brigade of Barlow’s division claimed that during the battle “the dutchmen run right through our regt. and broke us up.” Meanwhile, another member of that brigade claimed that von Glisa’s brigade at Gettysburg “composed of Blenker’s old division, true to their natural instinct, being hard pressed by superior numbers, gave way and thus left our Brigade . . . to an enfilading fire of the most terrible kind.”

Perhaps the most anti-German member of the Eleventh Corps was Francis Barlow. Barlow, a brigade commander in the XI Corps at Chancellorsville and division commander in the corps at Gettysburg, was outspoken in his disdain for German soldiers. After Chancellorsville, he wrote his mother saying, “I have always been down on the ‘Dutch’ & I do not abate my contempt now.” In his analysis of Chancellorsville, he spread the blame for the rout to all the members of the Eleventh Corps, but harbored a deep disgust and distrust of German soldiers. Upon taking command of Devens’ division after Chancellorsville, Barlow wrote, “one of the Brigades is wholly German and is commanded by Colonel Glisa (or rather it is now commanded by a Major as Colonel Glisa is away and I have the next Colonel in rank in arrest). I expect to have to arrest them all the way down.” Another time he wrote, “the Corps is in a state of continual excitement & quarreling. One Dutchman accuses another of misconduct in the last battles & the Dutch accuse the Americans & vice versa. I think that Schurz is intriguing to get command of the Corps & is trying insidiously to injure Gen. Howard.” It is interesting that Barlow defended Howard while attacking Schurz, even though Schurz

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259 Andrew Harris, as quoted in Pfanz, 246.
261 Ibid., 137-138.
262 Ibid., 133-134.
probably deserved the most credit for forming his troops into some semblance of a
defensive line at Chancellorsville. Shortly before Gettysburg, Barlow commented, “my
Dutch Brigade has just been detached for a few days . . . I suppose I shall have it again in
case of a battle but I don’t care much if I don’t.” Even at Gettysburg, Barlow had little
good to say of the Germans (and Americans) under him. Wounded and captured by
Confederates on 1 July, Barlow wrote of his division’s actions: “we ought to have held
the place easily . . . But the enemy skirmishers had hardly attacked us before my men
began to run. No fight at all was made.”

After Gettysburg, Barlow soured even more against the Germans, saying, “these
Dutch won’t fight. Their officers say so & they say so themselves & they ruin all with
whom they come in contact” and “I am convinced that we can do nothing with these
German Regts. They won’t fight & the whole history of the war has shown it. I never
will set foot in the 11th Corps again.” When he recovered from his wound, Barlow
returned to the army, but not the Eleventh Corps, taking command of a division in the
Second Corps. While with the II Corps, Barlow earned himself a reputation as one of the
best division commanders in the Union. His later record makes one wonder if Barlow’s
claims of cowardice and poor behavior on the part of the Germans have some validity, if
his distrust of Germans blinded him to seeing their brave deeds on the battlefield and his
own mistakes, or if his prejudice made him ineffectual in working with them. Barlow’s
biographer, Richard Welch, attributes Barlow’s dislike of Germans to their poor record
on the battlefield in addition to some inherent nativism within him. In this respect,
Welch is probably fairly accurate. Barlow undoubtedly had a low opinion of Germans
well before he came to the Eleventh Corps, but as he became more associated with them,
and in light of what could appear to be poor performance on the battlefield instead of bad
luck, his distaste for German soldiers intensified to the extreme.

In the rest of the army there was also some disdain expressed towards the
Eleventh Corps in general and the Germans of the corps in particular. Members of the
First Corps were most vocal about the failings of the Eleventh Corps. Division

263 Ibid., 143-144.
264 Ibid., 162.
265 Ibid., 168, 167.
266 Richard F. Welch, The Boy General: The Life and Careers of Francis Channing Barlow (Madison, NJ:
Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 2003), 78-79.
commander James Wadsworth reported of the first day that “at about 2:30 pm Major- 
General Schurz, who had been advanced on our right, fell back after partially engaging 
the enemy, and left our right exposed.”267 Another First Corps member blamed the retreat 
of his corps on their exposed right flank caused by “the skedaddling of a part of 
Howard’s Eleventh Corps.”268 One notable absence of First Corps criticism of the 
Eleventh is Abner Doubleday, First Corps commander on 1 July after Reynolds was 
killed. In his history of the Chancellorsville and Gettysburg campaigns, he defends the 
men of the Eleventh Corps in both engagements, but singles out Howard for poor 
generalship. (Doubleday may have had a grudge against Howard for Howard’s 
comments on his leadership at Gettysburg.)269 One story of First Corps criticism of the 
Eleventh has been passed down through the years. At the end of the first day of 
Gettysburg, a German soldier reportedly asked a First Corps officer where the Eleventh 
Corps was reforming. “Don’t know” the officer replied, “Nor does anybody else either I 
guess.” He then continued to give directions saying “1st Corps goes to the right & 11th 
Corps go to hell.”270

Col. Charles Wainwright, I Corps artillery chief at Gettysburg, is an excellent 
example of a soldier whose view of German soldiers was deeply affected by what he 
heard and saw at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. Early in the war, Wainwright 
remarked in his journal how well the 20th New York, a German regiment, was drilled.271 
After Chancellorsville, he wrote, “I have not much faith in the ‘Deutschman,’ however 
much I may like Howard.”272 Although Wainwright refused to pass judgment on the 
Eleventh Corps actions on the first day of Gettysburg, he was there to witness the 2 July 
attack on Cemetery Hill. He wrote of this engagement, “So soon as the rebels began to 
fire, the two lines of Deutschmen in front of the batteries began to run, and nearly the

268 Abner R. Small, as quoted in Christian B. Keller, “Pennsylvania’s German-Americans, a Popular Myth,” 
in Damn Dutch, 149.
269 Meade removed Doubleday from command of the I Corps after the first day at Gettysburg, possibly 
because of a report from General W. S. Hancock, II Corps commander, to Meade saying, “Howard says 
Doubleday’s command gave way.” (See Meade, vol. 2, 39.) This report was false, as the I Corps retreated 
at approximately the same time as the XI Corps.
270 Story related in Pfanz, 332.
271 Charles Shiels Wainwright, A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journals of Colonel Charles S. 
272 Ibid., 224.
whole of them cleared out.” Wainwright did notice the faithful service of a German battery however leading him to conclude, “this would show that the Germans have got fight in them; the fault must be in the officers, most of whom are adventurers, political refugees, and the like.” While Wainwright would seem to be beginning to exonerate the Germans, at the expense of their officers, his last comment on the Eleventh Corps after Gettysburg, “I begin now to believe the hard stories told of the Eleventh Corps’ behaviour at Chancellorsville,” indicates that his opinion of the Eleventh Corps, and German troops in general, had been lowered from his earlier high esteem for German units.

Outside of the First and Eleventh Corps, the nativism that had surfaced after Chancellorsville was still clearly around. When first receiving reports of the first days battle, a Union army informant told L. L. Crounse, *New York Times* correspondent, that “d—d Dutchmen of the Eleventh Corps broke and ran again like sheep, just as they did at Chancellorsville.” In his history of the battle of Gettysburg, Frank Haskell, a member of General John Gibbon’s staff, in the II Corps, wrote “the 11th Corps behaved badly; but I have yet to learn the occasion when, in the opinion of any save their own officers and themselves, the men of this corps have behaved well on the march or before the enemy, either under Sigel or any other commander.” Haskell’s entire history is filled with disparaging and sarcastic remarks about the conduct of the Eleventh Corps, at one point claiming “Howard, with the brilliant 11th corps, would have been trusted nowhere but a safe distance from the enemy.”

One incident of Gettysburg exemplifies the way in which actions by Germans, which could have been construed as heroism, were transformed into cowardice. On 1 July 1863 as the Eleventh Corps retreated through the town of Gettysburg, Alexander Schimmelfennig, temporary division commander in the Eleventh Corps, was separated from his command in the confusion and narrowly escaped capture by pretending to be

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273 Ibid., 245.
274 Ibid., 246.
275 Ibid., 247.
278 Ibid., 149.
dead after he was clubbed by Confederates while trying to climb a fence and hiding in yard of the Garlach family between a woodpile and a barrel. (Some reports have him hiding in a pig pen.)

Mrs. Garlach gave him some food that evening as she was going to feed the pigs, and Schimmelfennig stayed hidden in the town through three days of Rebel occupation. Instead of seeing this act as an heroic effort to escape capture, many lampooned the general for hiding like a coward. One American of the Eleventh Corps later remarked on Schimmelfennig taking command of his division by saying “he is the General who hid in a shop barrel in Gettysburg to keep from being taken prisoner. He is a poor excuse.”

Historian Margaret Creighton notes that Schimmelfennig’s actions were perceived as cowardly because “the very act of hiding . . . carried an unmanly stamp.” Anna Garlach Kitzmiller, a child at the time of the battle in the family that owned the yard where Schimmelfennig hid, defended him while at the same time acknowledging the accusations of cowardice leveled against him. “I have heard persons speak of cowardice when referring to General Schimmelfennig during the battle days,” she wrote, “I was only a girl then but I could see nothing cowardly in what he did. . . . He did the only thing it was possible for him to do. Any other course would have meant capture and perhaps prison.”

Today the National Park sign noting the location of Schimmelfennig’s hiding spot is fairly neutral in its interpretation of the general’s actions, but the myth of cowardice still surrounds Schimmelfennig at Gettysburg.

Although there was some negative prejudice expressed towards Germans after Gettysburg, particularly in the army, there was also those who praised their actions. General David Hunter claimed of Gettysburg that “the Dutchmen showed that they were in no way inferior to their Yankee comrades.” Also, a civilian college professor at Gettysburg College reported on the evening of 2 July that “the Rebels returned [from their attack on Cemetery Hill] . . . Some of them expressed their most earnest indignation at the foreigners—the Dutchmen—for having shot down so many of their men. This led
us to believe that the Eleventh Corps, of whom many were foreign Germans . . . had done their duty, and had nobly redeemed their character.”285 After Gettysburg, the reactions were mixed. Most newspapers praised the Eleventh Corps as having redeemed its reputation while some in the army still possessed some lingering nativism. Although Gettysburg did not entirely redeem the Eleventh Corps in the eyes of some, there was substantially less criticism after Gettysburg than after Chancellorsville.

Criticism of Germans and the Eleventh Corps continued, however. Some of it was light-hearted teasing. For example, on one occasion a private in the 2nd Vermont reported “a group of their [Eleventh Corps] men and ours [2nd Vermont] were talking together and laughing quite loud, when one of the boys mildly recommended, that we should be cautious and calm in our conversation for in case of too loud talk or excitement, we might ‘get the Eleventh Corps to running.’”286 Much of the criticism was more severe, however, such as when an American colonel responded to a German officer’s request to move his regiment to a better position, “We are comfortable enough here, . . . fill (the gap) with runaway Dutchmen.”287 Another soldier complained about assignments of various units claiming “the Eleventh Corps has this comparatively easy duty by virtue of their being such excellent skedaddlers in time of battle.”288 Meanwhile Germans complained that “as a rule, the German has to wade through the mud, while the American walks on the dry road. The German is a ‘Dutch soldier’ and as a ‘Dutchmen he is, if not despised, is disrespected, and not regarded or treated as an equal.”289

With Germans’ reputation as cowards and poor soldiers after Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, a number of Americans began seeing the Germans as the weakest immigrant group in their military, especially compared to the Irish. One nurse wrote of taking care of some Eleventh Corps men after Chancellorsville, “these men are all of the Eleventh Corps, and everyone was shot in the first moments of the attack. They are all Germans

285 Michael Jacobs, as quoted in Pula, The History of a German-Polish Civil War Brigade, 87.
287 Burton, 100.
288 Fisk, 154.
Theodore Lyman, a colonel from Massachusetts, was especially critical of the German soldiers he saw claiming “as soldiers, they are miserable. Actually, a Yankee regiment would drive a brigade of them. They have no grit as a rule. The Paddies, on the contrary, will go in finely, and if well officered, stand to it through everything.” He later elaborated that “the Germans are nearly useless; our experience is, they have no native courage to compare with Americans” At the same time, he praised the Irish and condemned black soldiers in addition to the Germans. By late 1863, the Irish had a decidedly better reputation as brave soldiers than the Germans.

In the fall of 1863, the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps were transferred to the West under General Hooker to aid the beleaguered Army of Cumberland in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In November, the Eleventh Corps participated in the battles of Chattanooga and was heavily involved in the battle for Lookout Mountain. After the battle, General George Thomas, commander of the Army of the Cumberland, sent his congratulations to General Hooker, saying “the bayonet charge of Howard’s troops, made up the side of a steep and difficult hill, over two hundred feet high, completely routing and driving the enemy from his barricades on its top . . . will rank with the most distinguished feats of arms of this war.” News reports of the battles of Chattanooga did not dwell on the performance of the Eleventh Corps, but when it was mentioned it was praised. The Brooklyn Daily Eagle reported that “the Eleventh Army Corps, under General Hooker, is said to have fought with splendid bravery in the recent battle near Lookout Mountain,” while the New York Times claimed “there was no panic in the Eleventh Corps this time; all the troops stood their ground and fought with great coolness and bravery.” There was no question that the Eleventh Corps fought bravely at Chattanooga. However, since Chattanooga was in the western theater and away from the spotlight that so scrutinized

292 Theodore Lyman to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, 8 August 1864, in Meade's Headquarters, 208.
293 Theodore Lyman to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, 16 August 1864, in Meade's Headquarters, 214.
294 George Thomas to Joseph Hooker, as quoted in Dodge, 104.
the Army of the Potomac, the battle did relatively little to change common perceptions of the Eleventh Corps. Eventually, due to their diminished size, the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps were merged together to form the Twentieth Corps and the stigma of being a member of the “flying crescent” (named after the crescent moon shaped corps badges of the Eleventh Corps) faded.

Chancellorsville and, by close association, Gettysburg had a major impact on American attitudes towards German soldiers. Previously muted condemnation of Germans as poor, looting, cowardly soldiers exploded visibly onto the scene after Chancellorsville. While some negative sentiment was expressed towards Germans prior to these battles, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg offered some Americans proof of Germans unfitness to be soldiers and therefore Americans. In the aftermath of Chancellorsville, people saw what they wanted to see. In general, the events of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg merely reinforced previously held views of Germans. Francis Barlow’s noted comment that he had always been “down on the ‘Dutch’” and Henry Livermore Abbott’s remark that the Germans had run “as I always knew they would” support this conclusion. Those with positive views of Germans could point, with justification, to extenuating circumstances causing the rout, while those harboring any semblance of nativism or distrust of Germans could seize upon the fact that they retreated in disorder, not once, but several times, as proof that Germans were of less value than native-born Americans. Historian Wolfgang Helbich echoes this idea, stating “the lowly ‘Dutch’ insisted on believing that they were better soldiers and would thus win the respect of Americans, whereas many of the latter eagerly seized on instances that would prove the clumsy foreigners were inferior to real Yankees.”

The battle of the Wilderness helps to illustrate this point.

Almost exactly a year after Chancellorsville, in May 1864, the Army of the Potomac again found itself engaged with the Army of Northern Virginia in the Wilderness near Fredericksburg. On the evening of the second day of the battle, Confederate General John B. Gordon launched a surprise attack on the Union right flank.

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296 Wolfgang Helbich, “German-Born Union Soldiers: Motivation, Ethnicity, and ‘Americanization,’” in *German-American Immigration and Ethnicity*, 301.
very close to where the Eleventh Corps had been positioned a year earlier. This time there was no “German corps” holding the right flank, instead there were several Anglo-American brigades of the VI Corps. Although smaller than Jackson’s attack at Chancellorsville, it had similar results at first, as the Union brigades of Truman Seymour and Alexander Shaler were quickly routed, with both brigade commanders taken prisoner.

The descriptions of this rout bore striking similarities to the rout of the Eleventh Corps a year earlier. A member of the 4th New York Heavy Artillery wrote “the men in front of us were so much surprised that they immediately ran, leaving the pork in the pan and the coffee on the fire and their arms.” 297 Meanwhile, a Confederate with Gordon’s attacking force remembered “we fired on volley at them, raised a yell, and charged them. They fled at once, leaving their guns, blankets . . . and, in fact, everything they had.” 298 However similar the rout of the right wing of the VI Corps at the Wilderness was to the rout of the XI Corps at Chancellorsville, the results were different. Ulysses S. Grant was no Joe Hooker and John Sedgwick was no Oliver Howard. The Wilderness was still technically a Union defeat. But Grant’s insistence on continuing to press south overshadowed the negative consequences of defeat. Still it is interesting to note that the American brigades routed in this engagement, under very similar circumstances to the rout of the Eleventh Corps, were never accused of cowardice or poor conduct.

In a number of Union reverses and defeats, the same held true. Remarking on the battle of Chickamauga, Carl Schurz noted that “the rout of our right wing in that battle was far more disastrous and discreditable than the defeat of the Eleventh Corps at Chancellorsville had been, but . . . nobody ever thought of branding that part of the Army of the Cumberland with cowardice on that account.” 299 There definitely seemed to be a direct correlation between accusations of cowardice and foreign birth since this connection was not made when native-born Americans were the ones running.

On the surface, it appears as if Helbich, Keller and other historians who argue that the Civil War had a negative impact on the Americanization of Germans are correct. It is

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298 George W. Nichols, as quoted in Rhea, 418.
easy to see how Germans may have reacted to this prejudice by turning inward and developing a separate German-American culture within the United States, as they argue. One must remember though, that perspective changes with time. The heaviest amount of anti-German sentiment appeared in the spring and summer of 1863, but the war was still not over. By the end of the war, this revived nativism was fading once again and earlier accolades of German-American patriotism took on new importance.
Conclusion

In the summer of 1863, shortly after Gettysburg, the bloodiest series of riots in American history occurred in the city of New York over the controversial draft law. While this riot included people of many backgrounds, the chief group associated with it were the Irish. Germans were much less associated with the rioting. New Yorker George Templeton Strong wrote in his diary “the Germans have behaved well and kept quiet. Where they acted at all, they volunteered against the rabble, as they did, most effectively, in the Seventh Ward.” While native Americans may have regarded the Irish soldier as braver and more courageous than his German counterpart, they still saw Germans as the more loyal of the two ethnic groups.

Although Irish bravery was rarely questioned, Irish loyalty often was. A historian of the Irish in the Civil War, Susannah Bruce, noted that “large numbers of Irish-Americans across the North concluded by 1863 that the cause of union no longer supported their interests as Irishmen, and they began to abandon support for the war.” The Chicago Tribune was especially vocal about the lack of loyalty it perceived from the Irish as opposed to the Germans:

There is but one class of people in this city who refuse to give their names to the enrolling officers—the Irish. They exhibit less loyalty than any other nationality. . . . A class of people that will not cheerfully fight in defense of free government are unworthy of its enjoyment. . . . The disloyal, whether foreign or native born, are not welcome. The Irish should make up their minds to obey the laws, and contribute their equitable share to the National defense, as do the Americans, the Germans, and other nationalities, or cease to exercise the high privilege of citizens.

In some cities, like Milwaukee, Germans were seen to oppose the draft just as much as the Irish, but over much of the country, Irish loyalty and patriotism were often questioned while proof of German loyalty was proclaimed. The New York Times echoed this idea during the 1864 election when it claimed that “The Germans feel much more the

301 Strong, 343.
303 Chicago Tribune 2 July 1863.
instantaneous hatred of slavery than does the Celtic nationality. . . . Unlike the Irish, all their
old leaders are on our side.”305

Germans, in spite of their prejudiced treatment by Americans, were especially
vocal about German-American loyalty and patriotism for the Union. Constantin Grebner,
member and historian of the 9th Ohio, a German regiment, claimed that “the Germans
distinguished themselves as patriotic citizens and brave and loyal soldiers in this perilous
era of American history.”306 The German-American chronicler Albert Faust argued that
“the Germanic element . . . shows superiority over the Celtic in the amount of its service
in the Civil War.”307 Another German Civil War veteran pointed to Missouri as proof of
German loyalty, saying “but for him [the German] Missouri would have been taken out
of the Union, and St. Louis, with its immense stores of wealth, made a confederate city.
When our President issued his first call for 75,000 men, Schneider [a personification of
the German-American element] was the only one in that state who responded like a
patriot, and in the shortest possible time organized four regiments for the Union.”308

It was not only Germans who espoused German loyalty and pointed to Missouri in
the secession crisis as proof. Contemporary Anglo-Americans and later historians did
as well. The New York Times in 1863 recalled that “from the earliest day, when the
Germans of St. Louis rallied under the lead of Lyon and Blair to strike that blow which so
effectually crushed the secession conspiracy in Missouri, no soldiers have been truer to
the flag.”309 “There have been fewer Secessionists in the South among the German-born
than among any other class of the population,” the Times continued, “fewer copperheads,
proportionately, can be found among our Teutonic population than any other class.”310
Chancellorsville historian Augustus C. Hamlin further claimed of the Germans:

305 New York Times 20 November 1864.
306 Constantin Grebner, “We Were the Ninth:” A History of the Ninth Regiment, Ohio Volunteer Infantry,
April 17, 1861, to June 7, 1864, trans. and ed. Frederic Trautman (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press,
1987), 184.
308 William Vocke, “Our German Soldiers,” in Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States,
Commandery of the State of Illinois, Military Essays and Recollections, Papers Read Before the
Commandery of the State of Illinois (Chicago: McClurg, 1891), 343.
“Missouri certainly would have drifted away with the southern tide, had it not been for the influence and resistance of these gallant men.”  

Other historians and scholars have echoed the sentiment that German actions in Missouri saved the state for the Union and offered vivid proof of German loyalty. Ella Lonn even mentioned that “at the top of the list of qualities to be approved stands the German loyalty to the Union.” Also, Dean Mahin claims that “the Germans in the North were the most reliable and consistent supporters of the Union cause.” Overall, two conflicting and coexisting American stereotypes of Germans developed during the course of the Civil War: the cowardly German and the fiercely loyal German. After the war, while Americans still remembered German cowardice, they also remembered German loyalty and patriotism. This memory of German loyalty and patriotism would prove to be as long-lasting and more powerful than the memory of German cowardice.

As stated earlier, there is a disagreement among historians as to the impact of the Civil War on Germans and on ethnic groups as a whole, and rightfully so. The Civil War was a time of heavily mixed emotions and attitudes towards all people. Those historians who claim that the Civil War furthered the Americanization of immigrants and brought immigrants closer to acceptance as equals by Americans, such as James Bergquist, Robert Billigmeier, Marcus Hansen, Ella Lonn, and William Burton, are naive in their assertions, but their arguments cannot be dismissed out of hand. Hansen’s argument that “four years of anxiety, binding the immigrant family by personal ties to the fortunes of the struggling nation, created a new attitude toward the society which their sons were fighting to preserve,” although too simplistic, seems valid on some levels. At the same time, those historians who claim that the Civil War only exacerbated ethnic tensions and halted or slowed Americanization, especially of Germans, such as Christian Keller,


314 Mahin, 20.

Wolfgang Helbich, J. A. Hawgood, and, to a lesser extent, Kathleen Neils Conzen, have some powerful claims as well, but their argument is also too simplistic and one sided. Attitudes of Americans towards Germans during the Civil War were both too positive and too negative for such one-sided arguments. A more nuanced understanding is needed.

Helbich, Keller, and Hawgood are most likely correct in their assertions that the Civil War helped to unify a disunified German-American population. Even William Burton agrees.316 Before the war, many German-Americans thought of themselves as Bavarians, Hanoverians, or Prussians. By the end of the war, they thought of themselves as Germans. Helbich, Keller, and Hawgood may also be correct in their arguments that the prejudice Germans faced in the war brought them together as a community and encouraged them to create a separate German-American culture, delaying the Americanization of Germans. Americanization, however, is a two way street. Not only do immigrants need to conform themselves to the larger, more accepted American cultures, those American cultures need to accept that immigrant group as legitimate. The irony of the Civil War in its role in German/American relations is that the prejudice Germans faced pushed many of them away from Americanization, while at the same time, the loyalty and patriotism that they showed in the war gradually won over Americans to acceptance of Germans as “legitimate” Americans.

As a result, those Germans not alienated by the prejudice they faced in the war, were able to assimilate more successfully into the larger American society. Meanwhile, those Germans who were alienated by prejudice were able to continue living in a German-American community that was no longer viewed with as much disdain by the general American public. This may have resulted in a phenomenon that a number of historians, such as Kathleen Neils Conzen and Thomas Sowell, have noticed, in which the dominant American culture began to absorb many parts of the German culture that originally made Germans distinct, such as Sunday celebrations, kindergarten, physical education in schools, and beer drinking.317

316 See Burton, 219.
317 Kathleen Neils Conzen, “Phantom Landscapes of Colonization: Germans in the Making of a Pluralist America,” in The German-American Encounter: Conflict and Cooperation Between Two Cultures, 1800-
But what about the relationship between courage on the battlefield, participation in war and American acceptance of a group as “worthy” of citizenship? There is still a connection here. Courage was indeed important in American perceptions of “worthiness,” but loyalty overshadowed it. Although ethnic tensions may have increased as a result of the poor showing of the “Dutch Corps,” Germans could still emphasize the loyalty of the German people to the Union during the course of the war, a trait that even those who criticized Germans’ battlefield performance could not deny. In addition, German cowardice was only perceived and not actual. Solid proof cannot be found to label even the Germans of the Eleventh Corps as unjustifiable cowards. Meanwhile, proof of German loyalty to the Union abounds, even if Germans were in actuality not quite as loyal as they were perceived to be. As more distance was gained from the events of the war, the patriotism that the German-Americans showed in the war overshadowed allegations of pillaging and cowardice. Perceived patriotism, it would seem, was just as important, if not more important, than perceived courage in determining a group’s “worthiness” as American citizens.

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Appendix A

“A German Beer Garden in New York City on Sunday Evening”

Appendix B

“The Invasion of Camp Jackson By the Hessians”
(by Joseph Leddy, to the tune of “Happy Land of Canaan”)

It was on the Tenth of May, Kelly’s men were all away,
When the Dutch surrounded Camp Jackson;
Lyon was there, with Boernstein and Blair,
To take our men from the happy land of Canaan.

Chorus
Oh! Oh! Oh! Ah! Ah! Ah!—The time of our glory is a-coming.
We yet will see the time, when all of us will shine,
And drive the Hessians from our happy land of Canaan.

Lyon came into camp with such a pompous tramp,
And said, “Frost, you’ll have to surrender;
One half hour I’ll give, that is, if you want to live,
To get out of this happy land of Canaan.”

Our boys looked so nice and neat, when they formed upon the street,
You could tell that sauerkraut was not their feeding;
Our men were straight and tall, the Dutch were thin and small
And a disgrace to our happy land of Canaan.

The people gave three cheers for the handsome Volunteers,
Which raised the Hessians’ indignation;
They fired upon our brothers, killing sisters, wives and mothers!
But we’ll avenge them in the happy land of Canaan.

With Col. Kelly at our head, we will fight till we are dead—
Wherever he goes we will sustain him;
He has led us on again, to fight with might and main,
To whip the Dutch from this happy land of Canaan.

‘Twas just three months that day, since the gloomy 10th of May,
When Lyon once again had us surrounded.
But we were fighting for State-Rights, and we proved it in the fight,
For we shot him in this happy land of Canaan.

From: Josephy Leddy, “The Invasion of Camp Jackson by the Hessians,” Cathy Barton and Dave Para’s “Civil War Music of the Western Border,”
Appendix C

“I Fights Mit Sigel” By Grant P. Robinson

I met him again, he was trudging along,
His knapsack with chickens was swelling:
He’d “Blenkered” these dainties, and thought it no wrong
From some secessionist’s dwelling.
“What regiment’s yours? And under whose flag
Do you fight?” said I, touching his shoulder;
Turning slowly around he smilingly said,
For the thought made him stronger and bolder:
“I fights mit Sigel!”

The next time I saw him his knapsack was gone,
His cap and canteen were missing,
Shell, shrapnel, and grape, and the swift rifle-ball
Around him and o’er him were hissing.
How are you, my friend, and where have you been,
And for what and for whom are you fighting?
He said, as a shell from the enemy’s gun
Sent his arm and his musket a “kiting:”
“I fights mit Sigel!”

And once more I saw him and knelt by his side,
His life-blood was rapidly flowing;
I whispered of home, wife, children and friends,
The bright land to which he was going;
And have you no word for the dear ones at home,
The “wee one,” the father or mother?
“Yaw! yaw!” said he, “tell them! oh! Tell them I fights”—
Poor fellow! He thought of no other—
“I fights mit Sigel!”

We scraped out a grave, and he dreamlessly sleeps
On the banks of the Shenandoah River;
His home or his kindred alike are unknown,
His reward in the hands of the Giver.
We placed a rough board at the head of his grave,
“And we left him alone in his glory,”
But on it we marked ere we turned from the spot,
The little we knew of his story—
“I fights mit Sigel!”

Appendix D

“Stonewall” Jackson’s attack on the Eleventh Corps at Chancellorsville around 5:00pm 2 May 1863

Appendix E

Position of XI and I Corps on 1 July 1863 at approximately 4:00 pm as the retreat began

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