

Alison Clark Efford. *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era*. Washington D.C.; Cambridge: German Historical Institute; Cambridge University Press, 2013. x + 267 pp.

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Before and after the Civil War, German immigrants had a key role in shaping the future of the United States. Scholars from both sides of the Atlantic, such as Bruce Levine, Stan Nadel, and Mischa Honeck, have acknowledged German-Americans' importance, and have contributed to explain the ways in which they influenced the history of the U.S. in one of its foundational moments.

German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era is a significant addition to this robust, yet still fruitful, body of literature. Alison Clark Efford's book reconstructs the history of German immigrants in the Mid-West during the central decades of the nineteenth century. The American scholar creates a coherent narrative based on the analysis of what she terms 'the German-language public sphere' (11), a vast area of public debate that involved German immigrant communities in big industrial centres such as Cincinnati, St. Louis, Milwaukee and was animated by American press in German language. The text benefits enormously from the expertise of an author possessing German language skills: this allows Efford to base the book on a vast range of first-hand sources.

What distinguishes Efford's book from previous literature is her attempt to seek answers to long-dated historiographical problems using a transnational and transatlantic methodology, in combination with the analysis of race and ethnicity discourses. The book starts in pre-unified Germany, where the author brings the reader to explain the concept of *Volk* and the mentality brought to the U.S. by the Forty-eighter generation (Chapter 1). It then moves to the U.S., where Efford explains the ways in which this mentality contributed to strengthen the anti-slavery coalition between 1854 and 1860 (Chapter 2), and animated the post-Civil War debate in the first phase of Reconstruction (1865-1869, Chapter 3 and 4). In Chapter 5 the focus shifts again to Germany, more specifically to the events connected with the Franco-Prussian War. Efford expounds the ways in which this event profoundly modified the German-American community. The remaining

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chapters detail how German unification impacted the debate on liberal Republicanism and the closing of Reconstruction in 1877.

Efford's transatlantic approach is key to answer the main research questions of the book: how did discourses of race and ethnicity influence German immigrants before and after the Civil War? Why were German-Americans abolitionists? What brought them to abandon the defence of African Americans after 1870? Efford contends that before and immediately after the Civil War German-Americans constructed their anti-slavery beliefs on discourses of immigrant citizenship. Drawing upon an expansive concept of liberalism, they equated their reality of immigrants who sought full citizenship in the U.S. with the circumstance of freed slaves who advocated the respect of their civil rights. Leaders like Carl Schurz framed their political message around an interracial and expansive idea of the country, where African Americans and immigrants were equally welcomed. After the Franco-Prussian war, though, the situation rapidly changed. The democratic and liberal idea of *Volk* that nurtured pre-Civil War abolitionist stances was no longer compatible with the widespread support for the Bismarck authoritarian regime, which irrepressibly exploded after 1870. The foundational idea of *Volk*, until that moment mainly conceived of as a permeable and evolving concept of cultural belonging, evolved almost to become a biology-based line of demarcation, or in other terms a *race*. German-Americans, in fact, embraced nationalist arguments to defend their 'German' essence. In doing that, they abandoned those principles of democratic liberalism which had put them on the same side as freed slaves. Furthermore, they applied their apprehended notions of nationalism to their adopting country: this meant marrying the cause of pacification between the North and the South promoted by Liberal Republicans at the expenses of radical Republicanism. In sum, according to Efford, German nationalism, brought to the fore by the Franco-Prussian war, had a role in divorcing German-Americans from the cause of African Americans and ultimately leading to the death of Reconstruction.

Efford's work convincingly integrates different levels of analysis: discourses about race, ethnicity and citizenship are intertwined with considerations about political economy, politics, and gender. The main argument of her book is a solid one, well rooted in primary sources and secondary literature, and a fruitful integration to the existing literature. On the other hand, the book at times seems indulgent on the limits and shortcomings of this generation of German-American immigrants. All the discourses about citizenships considered, the book is silent on possible personal interests and political commitments that led German-Americans to turn their backs to the quest for race equality. Furthermore, the text is arguably too simplistic in taking the three Midwesterner states on which it focuses (Wisconsin, Ohio and Missouri) as representative of the entire German-American community. Having said that, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War*

Era is an exemplar book for anyone interested in investigating the contribution of immigrants to the construction of nineteenth-century United States.