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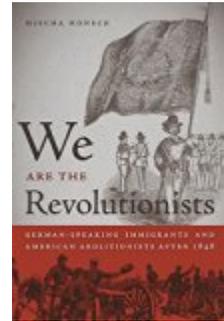
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Mischa Honeck. *We Are the Revolutionists: German-Speaking Immigrants and American Abolitionists After 1848*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011. 236 S. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8203-3800-2; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8203-3823-1.

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American Abolitionists, German Forty-Eighters, and Transatlantic Reform in the Nineteenth Century

Mischa Honeck's distinctive contribution is to place the American abolitionist movement in a transatlantic context that includes continental Europe, not just Great Britain. He does this by using detailed case studies to examine the web of relationships between German Forty-Eighters and American abolitionists in Texas, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and Boston. His impressive research finds interracial and multiethnic solidarities seldom explored by others, and his scholarship is enhanced by drawing on German-language sources rarely if ever used.

Honeck's case studies—constituting four of his six chapters—are interesting and informative. Frederick Law Olmsted, an abolitionist and future father of American landscape architecture, toured the South in the 1850s as a young man, publishing travel accounts that reinforced Northern public opinion in its view that the slave system debased not only slaves but also poor whites. Nonetheless, he was pleasantly surprised when he encountered the Germans who had settled in the hinterland of San Antonio; to him they had created a prosperous free-labor society on the edge of the slave system. Olmsted was particularly impressed with Adolf Douai, a Forty-Eighter who published a German-language newspaper appealing to this immigrant constituency. Douai organized a convention in San Antonio during the spring of 1854 that vocally endorsed the recent Louisville Platform, which articulated a comprehensive political program for liberal Germans in America. These opinions immediately created tensions for Douai with the more conservative

Germans who had arrived earlier and built a substantial place for themselves within slave-holding Texas, even if they did not own slaves themselves. Douai pressed on with his politics, in part sustained by aid from Olmsted's abolitionist friends in the North. When Douai published an article asserting the ultimate goal of the Forty-Eighter abolitionists—founding a free-labor state out of West Texas—native-born political leaders pounced. Violent political crowds attacked his paper, and local Germans abandoned him. In May 1856, he left Texas for good, in his mind retreating once again in the face of an implacable aristocratic enemy, similar to the sort that had driven him out of Europe. With the help of Olmsted and his circle, Douai fought on, joining the abolitionist movement in the North and achieving an economic security he never had in the South.

The main actor in Honeck's study of antebellum Cincinnati is its multi-ethnic plebian culture rooted in the city's craftsmen and small proprietors. In examining this culture he follows the lead of Bruce Levine.[1] Honeck highlights groups like the Turners and freethinkers, labor newspapers such as August Willich's *Cincinnati Republikaner*, and public celebrations of cultural and political heroes, particularly Tom Paine and Friedrich Schiller. Participants in this vital culture built alliances with the city's African American community over opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. Native-born white abolitionists, such as Moncure Conway, a Unitarian minister, were attracted to the popular ratio-

nalism of the plebian Left. German Forty-Eighters like Willich defended Conway when his views on scripture split his congregation, and in turn Conway and other abolitionists joined in the large celebration of the centennial of Friedrich Schiller's birth in 1859. It was a moment when abolitionists and Forty-Eighters could proclaim their common faith in liberating all workers, irrespective of race.

In the same year John Brown's raid created divisions among Cincinnati's abolitionists by raising the issue of using violence to achieve emancipation. Conway could not accept it, while Willich and the leader of the African American community, Peter H. Clark, thought it was an unavoidable part of revolutionary change. For Willich, fighting for interracial democracy was a cultural obligation growing out of his idealism and his national pride, if not ethnic chauvinism. While the allies of Cincinnati's antislavery movement moved along separate paths during the Civil War, Honeck claims that they had developed a "multiethnic vision of democracy" needed to build a new society (p. 103).

In his most engaging case study Honeck analyzes the personal and political saga of Mathilde Anneke, one of the most prominent Forty-Eighters in the United States, and Mary Booth, a religiously devout white abolitionist. Mathilde and her husband Fritz moved to Milwaukee from Newark in late 1858, living initially with Sherman and Mary Booth. A leading abolitionist and Republican, Sherman grew increasingly estranged from Mary because of an affair and the demands of his political career. Meanwhile, Mathilde's relationship with Fritz was strained by the deaths of two of their children and his inability to financially support his family. The two women developed a strong emotional bond, and perhaps a lesbian relationship.

In the summer of 1860 the two women went to live in Zurich, Switzerland, where they immediately joined the local community of Forty-Eighter exiles. To support themselves they wrote for newspapers and did translations. The small world of Forty-Eighter exiles in Zurich was intimate and factious, with Mary frequently defending the United States against the Europeans, who derided Americans for supporting slavery while claiming that their country was a beacon of liberty. Mary, and sometimes Mathilde, viewed America as the leader in the worldwide resistance to aristocracy, a claim aided considerably by the Emancipation Proclamation.

Mary and Mathilde were part of a transatlantic debate about the meaning of both the Civil War and the

heritage of the 1848 revolutions. Their most fascinating contribution to that discussion was a jointly written set of short stories and a novel about slavery and emancipation. They articulated a synthesis of European Enlightenment humanism and American abolitionist piety, while drawing on the melodrama of popular evangelical fiction in the United States. The authors presented their fictional protagonists as heroes whose democratic values and self-sacrifice made them true Americans, despite their foreign origins. The stories did not escape a common racial paternalism, presenting African Americans as passive recipients of higher culture. The work of these two women provide Honeck's most vivid example of the transatlantic character of the mid nineteenth-century abolitionist movement.

The story of Karl Heinzen and the Boston abolitionists starts in the 1850s and takes the reader into the Reconstruction era. Although Boston was not a center of German immigration, it did have a vital German ethnic community complete with the usual organizations of the *Vereinswesen*, including the Turners. Boston was also the center of the Yankee abolitionist movement, led most prominently by William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. The uncompromising Forty-Eighter Karl Heinzen, editor of the *Pionier*, was the leader of the German abolitionists. The two wings of the abolitionist movement found common ground when Garrison opposed an amendment to the Massachusetts constitution that would have limited the voting rights of naturalized citizens. In turn, Heinzen helped organize the Turners to protect abolitionist speakers, especially Wendell Phillips, from mobs. This protection service prompted the Yankee abolitionists to rethink their pacifism.

Heinzen's uncompromising idealism flowered during the Civil War as he criticized more moderate to conservative Germans, including the popular general Franz Sigel, as well as Lincoln himself. Heinzen was a key player in the effort within the Republican Party to replace Lincoln with John C. Frémont in the 1864 election, and he stuck by the radical program of this largely German effort after Frémont withdrew his candidacy. After Lincoln's assassination, Heinzen and Phillips continued their collaboration, opposing Johnson's Reconstruction policies while extending their support to other reforms, including women's rights. Honeck sees them influencing each other as they forged a "cosmopolitan democratic ideology whose promises remain relevant to this day" (p. 171).

In his concluding chapter Honeck argues that three events contributed to the decline of the multi-ethnic

and interracial abolitionist movement. Feminists broke with mainstream abolitionists when they refused to back the vote for women along with African American men. Meanwhile, the Liberal Republicans attracted Forty-Eighters, such as Carl Schurz, with their concerns for government corruption and their promotion of laissez-faire economics. Most important, Bismarck's founding of the Second Empire awakened a conservative ethnic nationalism that overshadowed the liberal nationalism of the Forty-Eighters. More generally, Honeck concludes that liberal Germans were caught up in the drive to assimilate into an American culture that was flawed by racism and wealth accumulation. In his last paragraph Honeck notes that, "Most Forty-Eighters had become abolitionists as Germans and democrats, but most ended up as white German Americans" (p. 188). And so the bright moments of "cosmopolitan democratic ideology" waned.

None of these conclusions are surprising or fundamentally alter accepted interpretations of the Forty-Eighters in the United States. Strongly antislavery, they were leaders of the Republican Party in the 1850s and 1860s and of its Liberal wing during Reconstruction; they founded and maintained vital institutions of German American culture, such as newspapers and Turner societies; they rejected the evangelical piety of their Yankee collaborators, making collaboration more difficult; and they were frequently obnoxious to their countrymen who had arrived earlier than they had.

Honeck could have been bolder with his generalizations. They would have benefited, for example, from building on the transatlantic themes that are at the center of his work. He does not take full advantage of the considerable secondary literature on the transatlantic Anglo-American reform movements of the nineteenth century, including abolition.[2] What similarities and differences were there between the Anglo-American phenomenon and the continental one he studies? Similarly, what

does the transnational experience of the German Forty-Eighters reveal about the strengths and weaknesses of their politics? Is there anything about their history in the United States that illuminates their experience in Germany? Certainly they were brilliant at agitation, and their ideals led them to articulate noble visions of egalitarian democracy. Yet they misjudged Lincoln. Were they prone to similar misjudgments in Europe? Finally, he could have explored more thoroughly the implications of his research for the role of liberal nationalism in transatlantic reform. How did liberal nationalism compare with evangelical piety as a basis for transnational movements in the nineteenth century? How did the history of liberal nationalism shape postwar reform movements, beginning with the interpersonal networks he examines? Although he raises such issues himself, he could have pushed further with them.

These criticisms attest to the fruitfulness of Honeck's research. He has significantly advanced our knowledge of the Forty-Eighters by placing them in a transatlantic context, and his book will be required reading for future students of the subject.

Notes

[1]. 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).

[2]. The best place to start is with David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975). More recent works include Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); and Van Gosse, "'As a Nation, the English Are Our Friends': The Emergence of African American Politics in the British Atlantic World, 1772-1861," *American Historical Review* 113 (2008): 1003-1028.

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