

Miranda E. Wilkerson, Heather Richmond. *Germans in Illinois*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2019. 234 pp. \$24.50, paper, ISBN 978-0-8093-3721-7.

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Beginning in the mid-1800s, Illinois quite suddenly became the final destination for a wave of German immigrants searching for new beginnings. As these newcomers' numbers swelled in subsequent years, so too did their impact, which can still be felt today. Yet this story has largely been relegated to the footnotes of the state's rich and diverse history. In an effort to trace the German influence on Illinois' journey from its early days on the western edge of the United States to modern times, Miranda E. Wilkerson and Heather Richmond have produced a survey that charts the moments and places where Germans made their presence known. While the arguments presented are not necessarily new, the authors draw on the existing scholarly literature to introduce a wide range of topics. The resulting effort, which combines a storytelling sensibility with a sociological lens, produces a highly approachable general history.

Structurally, *Germans in Illinois* arranges topics of interest into a roughly chronological narrative. This approach allows readers to either access individual episodes or trace a particular theme as it weaves through the broader history. Each chapter takes on a general topic and then offers "side bars" and "side stories" that act as extended footnotes, allowing the reader to dive more deeply into individual characters and narratives aligned

with the chapter's subject matter. As the authors note, the book is not meant to provide an all-encompassing history but rather to serve as an introduction and a "highly condensed version of what scholars have learned" about German activity in Illinois (p. 11).

The study begins with a discussion of the push factors responsible for convincing Germans to leave Europe, including the liberal nationalist dissent that peaked in 1848, which, combined with famine and a series of economic downturns, acted as the primary culprits. It is here that Wilkerson and Richmond first provide the excellent data and mapping that recurs throughout the book to illustrate the complexity and diversity of the German community, charting places of origin, religious affiliations, and points of geographic concentration and linguistic clustering. One of the book's major strengths is the authors' willingness to perform yeoman's work in assembling and organizing a mountain of secondary sources and then present that information in a comprehensible format that the general-interest reader can jump into without a deep knowledge of the somewhat overwhelming historiography of German America.

Subsequent chapters continue to trace the varied immigrant experience, from urban Chicago to the expansive fields of rural southwestern

Illinois's American Bottom. Snapshots capture Germans adapting to American agricultural practices, and then shift to detail the "ethnic neighborhoods and communities that became the mainstay of German American life in Chicago" (p. 58). This rapid influx gave rise to nativism and with it the formation of the Know-Nothing Party, which was especially prevalent in Chicago where low-skilled Germans competed with native-born laborers.

Unfortunately, limited space is given to the Civil War era, perhaps the moment when Germans in Illinois made their voices heard most forcefully. Wilkerson and Richmond briefly engage in the long-contested debate over the impact of German voters in the 1860 presidential election, noting the exaggerated influence often attributed to the German community. Yet as the authors point out, Illinois offers an exception, where Germans did in fact play a central role in the political rearrangements of the sectional crisis. It is no surprise then that Germans enlisted in significant numbers, and Wilkerson and Richmond dutifully enumerate those ethnic regiments that represented Lincoln's home state. Overall, though, little is said about German contributions to the free soil and free labor movement, antislavery, and the Republican Party there. The authors instead offer a concise summation, noting that the end of slavery was a goal, but "not because of a moral opposition per se but rather out of concern for job competition," and point out that ultimately free labor was the true motivation (p. 82). There is no doubt this characterization applies to a significant number of Germans in Illinois, but such broad brushstrokes miss the chance to introduce nuance.

Wilkerson and Richmond do provide readers with the chance to explore Civil War politics further in a side story. Think of these side stories as detours on a cross-country road trip with opportunities to temporarily exit the highway in search of attractions. The Civil War chapter includes one on Gustave Korner, the young would-be European

revolutionary who became a rising star in the Democratic Party in Illinois before switching his allegiances to Abraham Lincoln and the young Republican Party during the tumult of the 1850s. It is a fascinating tale, and readers are provided enough of a snippet to pique their curiosity. A limitation of course is that these side stories tend to take the form of an encyclopedic entry and can therefore lack the context and analysis needed to fully flesh out the characters and episodes highlighted.

The Gilded Age and industrialization receive more thorough attention than the Civil War, with a side story on the German labor movement's role in the Haymarket Affair, but curiously, Reconstruction is mostly missing. Instead, the authors offer a sociological account of the cultural mark Germans left on religion, education, and the arts. These sections could act as stand-alone readings and are somewhat awkwardly positioned in the book. Still, Wilkerson and Richmond offer compelling stories and institutional information that taken together provide a larger picture of German life in Illinois.

The book then resumes its chronological path to track the dislocating effects of two world wars in which Germans played the role of villain. Wilkerson and Richmond explain how German Americans attempted to cope with being cast as potential enemies, particularly through linguistic assimilation. This offers a nice segue into modern times and the cultural legacy of the German language and culture in Illinois. A 2013 map of those with German ancestry gives visual evidence to drive home the book's goal of reminding Illinoisans of their deep German roots.

And in the end, this goal is largely accomplished. The authors' intent was to inform through an episodic account of an ethnic community's contributions and lasting influence. Readers interested in German America, particularly in the Midwest, will find this work to be an excellent *entr  e point* capable of spurring further inquiry. Ad-

ditionally, historians interested in the Land of Lincoln should walk away from this book with a desire to take the Germans out of the footnotes and fold them back into the larger narrative.

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