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Don Heinrich Tolzmann. *The German-American Experience.* Amherst and New York: Prometheus Books, 2000. 466 pp. $35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57392-731-4.

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German-American History as Written Decades Ago

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To begin with a personal note, I first met the author in 1980 and have met him at professional meetings a dozen times since. I have always found him to be friendly, modest, unassuming, and entirely likable in person. He is a tireless promoter of German-American studies–a field stigmatized for much of the twentieth century and, even after the ethnic revival which began in the 1970s, much under-studied by American historians. Don Tolzmann is also a fellow librarian. As a librarian, he has done much to gather, improve access to, and promote the use of German-American written materials. Thus it is a quite distasteful task to report that the book reviewed here is in no way up to the standards its author has set in his work, as the long-time president of a scholarly organization, and as a librarian.

About half of both the substance and the wording of the first 180 pages of this book duplicate Theodore Huebener's, *The Germans in America* (1962). This process begins on page 36 of the work, where several lengthy sentences are repeated from page 3 of Huebener's book. By page 39 of Tolzmann, only twenty-nine of about 400 words on the page do *not* appear on pages 5 and 6 of Huebener. The next page of Tolzmann (page 40) has, by my count, only nine words that are *not* on pages 6 and 7 of Huebener.

To be sure, Tolzmann acknowledges Huebener. In the preface, he says, "I leaned heavily on Huebener, especially for the period from the American Revolution through the Civil War" (p. 12). But this is an entirely inadequate and quite misleading description of what was done in the production of this book. Most of the text on pages 65-78 directly duplicates pages 25-41 of Huebener, and this material concerns the period *before* the Revolution. Wherever he uses a long passage from Heubener, Tolzmann omits an occasional word, phrase, sentence or even a couple of paragraphs. For example, on page 97, by my count, only five of the approximately 400 words on the page do *not* repeat pages 44-46 of Huebener, but at one point two paragraphs of the original are omitted and at another point, a sentence of the original is dropped. Sometimes Tolzmann inserts a word, sentence, or even paragraph of his own. Occasionally he reverses the order of two of Huebner's phrases. Even in the first half of this book, there are sections as long as twenty pages that do not come from Huebener.

Huebener's words are not put in quotation marks or indented. In addition, there are several cases where Huebener's words are given with references to endnotes listing other sources. For example, the first sentence of the first full paragraph on page 39 of Tolzmann is identical to a sentence in Huebener. But the endnote following that sentence in Tolzmann cites two of Tolzmann's own publications.

The second half of the work under review does not repeat Huebener, although a passage of approximately 400 words on pages 374-375 directly duplicates material on pages 29-30 of Volume 2 of Albert Bernhardt Faust's, *The German Element in the United States with Special Reference to its Political, Moral, Social and Educational Influence* (rev. ed., 1927). The remainder of the book has not been checked for correspondence with Faust's text.

Even that portion of the text which does not repeat the words of another writer is often quite problematic. The factual errors, large and small, are so numerous as to be quite disconcerting. We are told that the Black Death in Europe "was followed in the fifteenth century by the Reformation, revolutions, and the Counter Reformation" (pp. 52-53). It need hardly be mentioned that the Reformation, the German Peasants' Revolt and the Catholic Reformation were in the sixteenth century. Many of the errors in this book come from over-generalization or over-statement. For example, "Almost every German-American community had its own Turnverein" (p. 391). Many cities and towns did in the second half of the nineteenth century, but most rural German settlements, in-

cluding quite large ones, did not.

Some of the author's errors result from simply misreadings of his sources. Tolzmann tells us that in 1859, Abraham Lincoln purchased the *Illinois Staats-Zeitung*, which was an important Chicago German newspaper (p. 207). For this the author cites Carl Wittke, *The German Language Press in America* (1957). But in fact, Wittke makes it clear that the German paper Lincoln bought was the small *Illinois Staatsanzeiger* of Springfield (p. 145). Lincoln never owned the larger German paper. Another example of Tolzmann being unable to read his sources correctly concerns the memorial service held for Carl Schurz in Chicago in 1906. The speaker quoted at length was not, as Tolzmann says, "President James of the University of Chicago" (p. 174), but rather was the former President of the University of Illinois, Edmund J. James. Tolzmann cites A. E. Zucker, ed., *The Forty-Eighters: Political Refugees of the German Revolution of 1848* (1950) (p. 250). In fact, on that page is a speech by Mark Twain. The speech by James that Tolzmann quotes is on pages 67-68.

Misinterpretations abound, many caused by the author's lack of understanding that so many people of German heritage in the United States have fully assimilated into the cultural mainstream of white America.

The problems in this book begin at the beginning. In the first paragraph of the introduction, we read, "Everyone in the United States is either an immigrant or a descendant of one" (p. 17). Although Oscar Handlin could get by with a related statement half a century ago (*The Uprooted: The Epic History of the Migrations That Made the American People* [1951]), there are, in fact, full-blooded Native Americans whose ancestors have been on this continent 10,000 or more years. How can any historian who has made any effort to keep abreast of trends within the discipline in the last few decades ignore the Native Americans?

We read on page 31, "The first permanent colony in the part of the New World that became the United States was the settlement at Jamestown, Virginia." What of the Spanish settlement in St. Augustine, Florida, during the sixteenth century? The author believes that "the early Spanish predominance in the New World was short-lived" (p. 29). Is 250 or more years a short period of time? The author complains incessantly about the failure to recognize the presence and accomplishments of Germans in America. Yet, he shows little sensitivity to other ethnic groups. In fact, the tone of this book sometimes moves beyond filiopietism to ethnic chauvinism.

Unwarranted ethnic advocacy leads the author to ignore German-American faults and failures and to ignore, all too often, the fissures and divisions between Germans on this side of the Atlantic. We are told that as early as 1856, although somewhat reluctant to join at first, "German-Americans generally saw the Republicans as the party holding the greatest promise for the future and felt that it was in their best interest to make a commitment to them" (p. 205). This is nonsense. To be sure, many Germans, especially in urban areas, were voting Republican by 1860. Yet, German Catholics in this country and conservative German Lutherans (except in the state of Missouri) have generally voted for the Democrats. Likewise, the author ignores Victor Berger's socialist movement in Milwaukee and all other German-American socialist activity. He omits any discussion of German-American organized labor activities except for brief coverage of the Haymarket affair in Illinois. He omits reference to any of the publications stemming from the Chicago German Workers Project.

In fact, the author seems completely unaware of all but a few of the best monographs on German-American history published over the last thirty-five years including those by Carol K. Coburn, Kathleen Conzen, David Detjen, Stephanie Grauman-Wolf, Walter Kamphoefner, Bruce Levine, Stanley Nadel, Linda Schelbitzki Pickle, A. G. Roeber, and Edmund Spevack, to name only a few important writers on this side of the Atlantic. Again and again Tolzmann cites his own edited and republished versions of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century works. Thus, far too much of the book takes a "contributionist" approach to German-American history that is at least two generations out of date.

The second half of the book, while out-of-date in its "contributionist" approach, is thoroughly up-to-date in that it is a part of the contemporary American culture of competitive victimization. Most scholars who study German-Americans recognize that Germans in America are not strong players at this game. Of course, there was considerable nativist pressure against the Germans in the 1850s, heavy persecution in many areas of the nation during the First World War and the internment of 6,362 aliens and citizens, many with their families, during the Second World War. Today, the legacy of the Holocaust continues to taint things German in the minds of many Americans. Yet, Germans have generally found it relatively easy to assimilate into Middle America, if they chose to do so, at least by the second generation. Tolzmann's account of the First World War relies on Frederick Luebke, but instead of Luebke's calm and judicious way of the letting the sometimes appalling facts of those few short years speak for themselves, Tolzmann takes a very

shrill tone.[1] The facts Tolzmann presents about interning Germans during the Second World War are not well known. Here the author could have made a real contribution to enlighten his readers, but so much problematic material precedes the discussion of World War II that few discerning readers will get to that section.

Many other objections to this work are possible but would be redundant. All in all, one is at a loss to explain why someone in the author's position would attempt to publish such a book.

Note

[1]. Frederick C. Luebke. *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and the World War* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974).

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