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Review of Festkultur und Gedächtnis: Die Konstruktion einer deutschamerikanischen Ethnizität 1848-1914, by Heike Bungert

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Festkultur und Gedächtnis: Die Konstruktion einer deutschamerikanischen Ethnizität 1848–1914.

By Heike Bungert. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016. 637 pp. €69,00.

In this lengthy, dense study, Professor Dr. Heike Bungert of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster closes a gap in research on German-American social history. Applying Jan Assmann's notion of festivals as "[d]ie Urform des kulturellen Gedächtnisses" (18), Bungert's *Habilitationsschrift* examines the roles of *Vereine* and *Festkultur* in the formation and maintenance of German-American ethnic identity. Since identity construction occurs within historical, cultural, and social contexts, this work traces the history of *Festkultur* with reference to German, German-American, and American culture and history, focusing on the years 1848-1914.

In her first chapter, "Einleitung," Bungert lays the study's methodological foundations, explicating the importance of associations and festivals for the construction of ethnicity. Noting that "Vereine waren der Motor deutschamerikanischer Feste" (45), the author explores how associations reinforced group affiliations and values and rewarded members with economic and social capital (53-54). Relying on scholars such as John Bodnar, Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann, and Gerhard Martin, Bungert stresses the significance of festivals as cultural performances that support group identity internally by promoting affiliation and cohesion, and externally through differentiation and exclusion (23).

The author foregrounds her study with important questions about the functions of *Festkultur* in maintaining an adaptable German-American identity (34-37). For instance, what types of festivals did German Americans celebrate collectively? What festivals did specific subgroups celebrate? What symbols, rituals, myths, and theories legitimized festivals? How did festivals promote cohesion among German Americans of different ages, religions, classes, and regional origins? How did German-American festivals afford alignment with the Anglo-American mainstream and differentiation from other ethnic groups? What aspects of *Festkultur* remained constant, and which ones evolved over time? How did Anglo-Americans and Germans perceive, influence, and/or exploit German-American festivals?

To answer these questions, Bungert examines the history of German-American *Festkultur* in four cities: Milwaukee, "prototypisch...eine von Deutschamerikanern dominierte Großstadt im stark Deutsch besiedelten Mittleren Westen"; New York City's borough of Manhattan, "[wo] Hunderttausende von Deutschamerikanern wohnten"; San Francisco, "[das]...den noch jungen *Far West* [repräsentiert, und wo] die Deutschamerikaner...zeitweise die stärkste nicht-englischsprachige Einwanderergruppe [stellten]; and San Antonio, "das den US-amerikanischen Süden [vertritt]" (38). Because Milwaukee and Manhattan had the largest number of German Americans, this study focuses on their *Festkulturen*, dipping into those of San Francisco and San Antonio for comparison. Bungert utilizes a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, including German-American newspapers, festival programs, newspapers, annual reports, *Jubiläumsschriften*, and other documents held in private collections, city, county, and state historical societies' archives, and current German associations' archives; as well as letters, primarily from the *Auswandererbriefesammlung* in the Universität Erfurt's *Forschungsbibliothek* Gotha.

Bungert proposes four periods of *Festkultur* development that she treats in individual chapters. Chapter two, "Zaghafte Anfänge einer deutschamerikanischen Identität: Von der Einwanderung der Achtundvierziger bis zum amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg," describes the

founding of German-American *Vereine* (e.g., *Turn-, Gesang- and Schützenvereine*). In this chapter, Bungert derives five principal reasons for German-American celebration of festivals, i.e., to promote ethnic identity and group cohesion, recover from daily life, honor Germany, encourage mainstream acknowledgement of German-Americans' positive contributions to their adopted country, and recognize German-American culture as *Importgut* (132-133, 146-147, 152, 176).

In chapter three, "Zusammenwachsen der deutschamerikanischen Gemeinde: Vom amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg bis zur Gründung des deutschen Reichs," Bungert notes the importance of the Civil War, the Franco-Prussian War, and the founding of the German Empire in reinforcing German Americans' affiliations with their adopted and former homelands. German Americans successfully constructed an identity that superseded distinctions of class, religion, and regional origin, reflected in regional, superregional, and national associations and festivals.

Bungert's fourth chapter, "Flexible Adaptation an Wachstum: Ethnizitätsbildung durch neue Feste und das Jubiläum der deutschen Einwanderung," describes the growth and diversification of German-American associations and festivals during the period of increased immigration from 1880-1890. Associations were founded to meet the needs of newcomers, including workers, radicals, women, and immigrants from different German regions. Festivals marking the bicentennial of German immigration (1883) helped to affiliate these new citizens with a German-American ethnic identity that honored German and American traditions, celebrated German-Americans' contributions to America, and recognized Germany as a powerful and important homeland.

The fifth chapter, "Wachsende ›Nationalisierung‹: Von den 1890er Jahren bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs," treats the decline of a uniquely German-American *Festkultur* in response to waning emigration from Germany, increased integration of German Americans into the cultural mainstream, and the growing commercialization of both German- and Anglo-American festivals. German Americans adapted their celebrations to mainstream expectations in order to draw second- and third-generation German Americans, Anglo Americans, and other ethnic groups. Yet German Americans retained a strong ethnic self-consciousness that they continued to celebrate in institutionalized festivals into the mid-twentieth century.

This study represents a valuable contribution to German-American social history, describing the evolution of *Vereine* and *Festkultur* and their roles in the construction of ethnic identity. In addition, the analysis enables a reconsideration of migration historians' conclusions about German-American culture and assimilation. For instance, while Anglo-American nativists, Sabbatarians, and *Temperenzler* opposed German American festivals, Bungert notes mainstream approval of the celebrations' *Festlichkeit*, *Feierlichkeit*, *Gemütlichkeit*, and *Familienfreundlichkeit* (531). In fact, Anglo-Americans adapted so many aspects of German-American *Festkultur* via cultural transfer that "[d]ie größere Zahl angloamerikanischer Feste lässt sich...teilweise auf das deutschamerikanische Vorbild zurückführen" (533-534). Finally, Bungert's study demonstrates a much slower acculturation of German Americans than scholars have hitherto assumed. German Americans resisted assimilation to the Anglo-American mainstream for over seventy years, relying on cultural practices like festivals to create and maintain an ethnic identity that was adaptable and capable of integrating religious, class, gender, generational, and regional subcultures. Indeed, German-American *Festkultur* lives on in American notions of celebration and commemoration that support identity and cultural memory in our time (533-534).

