

**The German Element in America:  
With Special Reference to its Political, Moral, and Social Influence<sup>1</sup> Contrary to  
What we Hold as True**

Amber Heyman-Valchanov  
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Professor: Dr. Michele Reid Vazquez  
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<sup>1</sup> Albert Bernhardt Faust, *The German Element in the United States: With Special Reference to its Political, Moral, Social, and Educational Influence*, (Boston, The Riverside Press, 1909) Title

The numerous early passages made to the American colonies were made mainly for religious freedom and for colonial expansion. As the Protestant Reformation murderously swept through Europe and Empires sought to expand, the American colonies became prime real estate for exile, experimentation, commerce, and power. American historiography gives credit to the Anglicans and the Puritans, for having the most profound influence on the social, political, and religious ideas of America. However, I argue that the Germans, by way of the Quakers made the largest impact on these ideologies in America. If religious freedom for the Puritans and expansion for the Anglicans had any impacts on American or European culture, they directly reside in the radical opposition to their testaments.

By way of William Penn, a Quaker, the early German immigrants provided several notable citizens that impressed their sense of freedom and religious beliefs upon the evolution of American politics and society. Starting in 1688, Francis Daniel Pastorius was the first to petition against slavery in the colonies. Although, it made no initial impact, it did however provide a platform of resistance that inspired and supported future abolitionist movements inside and out of the colonies. Peter Zenger was another important German immigrant that made a mark on American freedom by way of the printing press. Later, the American Revolution inspired revolts throughout the Atlantic world. After several failed attempts at unification in Germany, revolutionary refugees known as the 48ers were exiled to America. Upon arrival they saw the discrepancies with the American sense of freedom that they felt was the leading factor in their failed attempts at freedom at home. Mostly militant intellectuals, the 48ers violently criticized religious fundamentalism and political corruption as the culprits of ignorance that perpetuated the false sense of freedom and equality. Their contributions lay heavily in the intellectual movements that cultivated political discourse that educated many and

provided the most populated regiments that supported the Union Army during the Civil War.

Whether these contributions were intentional or by the passive resistance of the German settlers, the first step to accepting their legacy in American heritage, it is important to understand how and why the Germans came to settle in the New World in the first place. As seen by the English as ethnically equal, they were permitted to immigrate to the colonies and establish land and propriety. The Germans that came to settle were from different classes and positions in life. Some were feudal workers, while others were Nobility. However, once in the New World they became equal in their goals with regard to peace and prosperity. This commonality allowed the Germans to settle while maintaining their own ethnic heritage. Their refusal to assimilate to English tradition provoked an awakening in American culture.

### **Why the German came to settle in the American Colonies**

Since the 1500's, Western Europe was amidst war, poverty, and religious persecution. With the Protestant Reformation, Lutherans were massacred and suffered cruel charges from the Catholics. Disastrous, the Thirty Years' War raged through the principalities of Germany with murder, pillaging, robbery, and bloodshed from 1619-1648. Following the war came years of poverty, famine, political uncertainty, economic instability and the bubonic plague. All together, these circumstances had reduced the population by half and in some areas by three quarters. According to Hermann Wellenreuther, German emigration should not only be considered as individual efforts to escape economic and social deprivation, but also as a protest against rulers' ability to

act according to the ideal of a good ruler, and should be seen as a political act.<sup>2</sup> German emigrants, Wellenreuther states, were united in two goals: they wanted to better their circumstances and wanted to retain those features of their old “fatherland” to which they had grown accustomed. It is precisely these goals that linked to two countries, cultures, and belief systems trans-Atlanticly over time. Wellenreuther makes this distinction in contrast to American historian Bernard Bailyn, who believed that the migration to America was meant to sever ties to the Old World completely. Wellenreuther refutes Bailyn’s argument and states that, at no time during his research did he find that German emigrants were going to assimilate into Anglo-American notions of community, politics, and economic life. On the contrary, he suggests that the German’s maintained their old world habits with great success. The protest against rulers’ whether Anglican or Germanic is substantiated by their successes in both of their goals: maintaining their identity and bettering their circumstances in a new world.

### **What were the German’s intentions?**

The reasons that German settlers came to the New World has been established and identified as both a political act in conjunction to creating a new German settlement that maintains a connection to old tradition and kin that remained in the homeland. However, upon arrival they would have to contend with different ideologies that would force them to redefine the linkage to their “fatherland”. Initially through passive resistance to English rule, the German settlers ushered in the radical sentiments that inspired the true meaning of freedom, peace, and prosperity in two ways. From the very

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<sup>2</sup> Hermann Wellenreuther, *Contexts for Migration in the Early Modern World: Public Policy, European Migrating Experiences, Transatlantic Migration, and the Genesis of American Culture*, article in, *In Search of Peace and Prosperity: New German Settlements in Eighteenth-Century Europe and America*, edited by Hartmut Lehmann, Hermann Wellenreuther, and Renate Wilson, (Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania University Press, 2000), P.34

beginning they abhorred the notion of slavery and were not only the first to petition against it, they also inspired many abolitionist movements thereafter. Another contribution was to American politics through their fight for freedom of press. During colonization, the German settlers provided the largest population, next to the English. Benjamin Franklin was concerned about German immigrants not becoming Anglicized and becoming a potential subversive threat in the 1750s. He feared that their insistence on using German and their increase in numbers would eventually force the Pennsylvania Assembly to hire German translators to “tell one half of our Legislators what the other half say.”<sup>3</sup> It was because of their numbers and refusal to assimilate to the English customs, Germans were responsible for the majority of newspapers printed in the colonies. These newspapers not only created discourse between German settlers, but also maintained discourse across the Atlantic. It was because of this transatlantic dialogue that perpetuated radical ideas that would later end monarchical rule and create revolutions in both the Old and New Worlds.

### **German and Quaker Notables and their Contributions**

It all began with Francis Daniel Pastorius, a well-known Quaker preacher, who made his way through Germany converting many to the Society of Friends and encouraging religious peace and tolerance. He was from there commissioned by the Frankfurt Land Company. By way of William Penn, he was able to establish and settle “Germantown” in the colony of Pennsylvania. In his commission he started settling several Mennonites, Quakers, and Pietist's in the colony. Regardless of class or position, they made their way to the New World for a new beginning. Based on the

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<sup>3</sup> Jonah Goldberg, *Ben Franklin and Public Education*, (National Review Online: The Corner, June 13, 2007) <http://corner.nationalreview.com/post/?q=YWEzMjFiZTg0NmI2MWRINDI2ZTU2ZDIzMThiNGUzZTc=>

foundation of religious tolerance, their philosophy took on a more radical character than that of the Puritans and Anglicans. By living in diversity, peace, and by humble example, the German settlers passively radicalized the initial credo that led them and the Puritans from religious persecution and the empirical expansion of the Anglicans.

Unknowing their impact on the future of the colonies and radicalism of the “religious experiment”, Penn and Pastorius would open the floodgate to a culture that would forever leave its mark on a nation. Many see William Penn as America’s first great champion for liberty and peace. Penn not only protected freedom of conscience, but also led by example. Almost everywhere else, colonists stole land from the “savages”, but Penn traveled unarmed among the Indians and negotiated peaceful purchases. He insisted that women deserved equal rights with men and he gave Pennsylvania a written constitution, which limited power of government and guaranteed many fundamental liberties<sup>4</sup> that are still upheld to this day. Penn’s contributions to liberty extended across the ocean between the Old World and the New. His fervor for freedom not only made him champion in America, his radical philosophy inspired works of many, that led to future discourse on the topic of equality in Europe. Penn had become a famous defender of liberty and would attract several thousand people for a public talk. He traveled in Germany and Holland to see how Quakers there were faring. Holland made a strong impression on Penn. It was a commercial center where people cared mainly about peaceful cooperation. Persecuted Jews and Protestants flocked there and Holland was where Penn began to form a vision of a community based on

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<sup>4</sup> Jim Powell, *William Penn, America’s First Great Champion for Liberty and Peace: The Freeman Ideas on Liberty*, <http://www.quaker.org/wmpenn.html> Mr. Powell is editor of *Laissez-Faire Books* and Senior Fellow at the *Cato Institute*. He has written for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Barron’s*, *American Heritage*, and more than three dozen other publications. Copyright © by Jim Powell. Reprinted on [www.quaker.org](http://www.quaker.org) by permission.

liberty.<sup>5</sup> Even though Penn was fueled by the philosophy of the Quaker religion, the fundamental attribute that would link all people regardless of race, religion, and sex, was the rationalism of human nature. Other than a solid radical reaction, this was what separated the religious influence of the Puritans and the Anglicans from having any real contribution to the development of America.

William Penn was only the precursor of the future of Pennsylvania and the philosophy of religious tolerance. His relations abroad led to the emigration of German settlers to his colony by way of Francis Pastorius. Pastorius made his initial venture to the colonies on the ship, "America". He along with ten other German families were the first Germans to arrive in Philadelphia on August 20, 1683.<sup>6</sup> Penn with whom he negotiated the purchase of 15,000 acres to lie out his settlement greeted him and the new settlers. Pastorius was born in Sommerhausen, Germany as a Pietist Lutheran, but then was converted to Quakerism by Penn and became one of the most dedicated members of the Society of Friends. As a Lawyer, he became Germantown's burgomaster and in 1687 a member of Pennsylvania's assembly. Along with actively participating in the legislation and political matters of Germantown, Pastorius taught Grammar at his own school and was also a member of staff at the Quaker School in Philadelphia.

His contribution to the American dream has been indispensable. He wrote several books and pamphlets in his career as a German-American colonist including, *Methodical Directions to Attain the True Spelling, Reading, and Writing of English* in 1698. Pastorius was adamantly opposed to slavery and it was therefore banned in Germantown. Because of his convictions, Pastorius wrote on many occasions, on the institution of slavery, "Which he saw in existence all around him." He called forth his

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<sup>5</sup> Jim Powell, *William Penn, America's First Great Champion for Liberty and Peace: The Freeman Ideas on Liberty*, <http://www.quaker.org/wmpenn.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.progenealogists.com/palproject/pa/1683amer.htm>

earnest opposition, and at a time when in Massachusetts, they were selling Indians, and white people of other creeds, to be sent to Barbados, and when even the Quakers had not yet given their testimony against the traffic in negroes, he wrote the famous protest of 1688 and later a poem in German and English verse on account of his personal belief,

“If in Christ’s doctrine we abide,  
Then God is surely on our side,  
But if we Christ’s precepts transgress,  
Negroes by slavery oppress,  
And white ones grieve by usury,  
Two evils, which to Heaven cry,  
We’ve neither God nor Christ His Son,  
But straightway travel hell wards on.”<sup>7</sup>

Pastorius wrote the petition with three other men. The petition was based on the bible’s Golden Rule. However it does not make reference to God or Jesus, but argues that every human, regardless of belief, race, and ethnicity, has rights that should not be violated.<sup>8</sup> His bidding did not stop there as he also campaigned against it in other German colonies, even in the south.



<sup>7</sup> Francis Pastorius edited by Samuel Whitaker Pennypacker, *Settlement of Germantown Pennsylvania and the Beginning of German Emigration to North America* (Samuel W. Pennypacker, 1899), P. 61-2 <http://www.archive.org/details/settlementofgerm01penn>

<sup>8</sup> Raymond M. Lane, *In Pennsylvania Slavery Protest Came Early*, article in *The Washington Post*, (April 22, 2009)



When the German settlers began to arrive in the colonies, they too found the exploitation of slaves exceptional. Although from the shortage of labor, they were able to discern why their British neighbors relied on slaves for prosperity. Slaves and indentured servants were a valuable asset for a farmer because they were unpaid. Yet the German settlers from the beginning resisted this mentality. They refused to buy slaves themselves and quickly saw the contradiction in the slave trade and in farmers who exploited men for labor. Although in their native Germany, fellow settlers had been persecuted because of their beliefs. Only people who had been convicted of a crime could be forced to work in servitude. In what turned out to be a radical leap of insight, the Germantowner's saw a fundamental similarity between the right to be free from persecution on account of their beliefs and the right to be free from being forced to work against their will. Pastorius' petition was a direct resistance not only to Anglican assimilation, but also a radical gesture in response to the hypocrisy of freedom in the colonies. However, the German settler's refusal to use slave labor and moreover ban the selling of slaves in their townships was an example of passive resistance. This allowed them to maintain their freedom through acknowledging the freedom of others.

La Vern J. Rippley retains the argument of a distinct German character through traditions and practices, as well as an appreciation of religious and political freedom, that carried on into the development of American life. "Without the economic benefit of slave labor, the Pennsylvania Germans developed business, industry, fairs, farms, and factories of their own. Thus, the German settlers became in many respects, model citizens for subsequent immigrants, German as well as others."<sup>9</sup> While as the early German settlers were examples of more radical pacifists and self sufficient, Rippley provides a great contrast to the later German Settlers. The 48ers came to the U.S. as

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<sup>9</sup> La Vern J. Rippley, *The German-Americans*, (Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1976), P. 21

political and social refugees. They were political philosophers and intellectuals unused to the physical labor or their predecessors. “Although unsuccessful at farming”, Rippley states, “these Latin farmers” contributed to the cultural life of many small towns throughout the U. S.”. City libraries, reading societies, discussion groups, and debating clubs began to spring up. As liberal intellectuals, they were militant critics of the many religious sects and organized churches, and they proclaimed their interest in new ideas and freethinking. They were opposed to fundamentalist religious groups who tried to enact state and local laws. The nineteenth-century German emigrants grew up under different political worlds and brought different experiences and different cultural notions to their new abode: they infused and enriched American culture with new and other ideas, habits, and knowledge.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the only thing that these new German settlers had in common with the earlier generations was their language and that they were opposed to slavery, and violently at that.

By the time this new brand of German settler came to America, the newly found country was amidst racial turmoil. The 48ers were failed revolutionaries in their homeland ready to spread true democracy, equality, and freedom. Because America was still unable to abolish slavery, her influence on the revolution for German unification and the Napoleonic Wars were useless. From the moment that these men landed in the United States they were ready to right America’s wrongs. Unhappy with the corruption and racism of the Democratic Party, they helped establish its Republican counter that would elect Abraham Lincoln as President. Shortly after, they would fight for the Union in the Civil War. Out of 6,000 Union Troops, the Germans made up over 2,000 alone. As much as they were violently apposed to slavery, their intellectual ideology embraced

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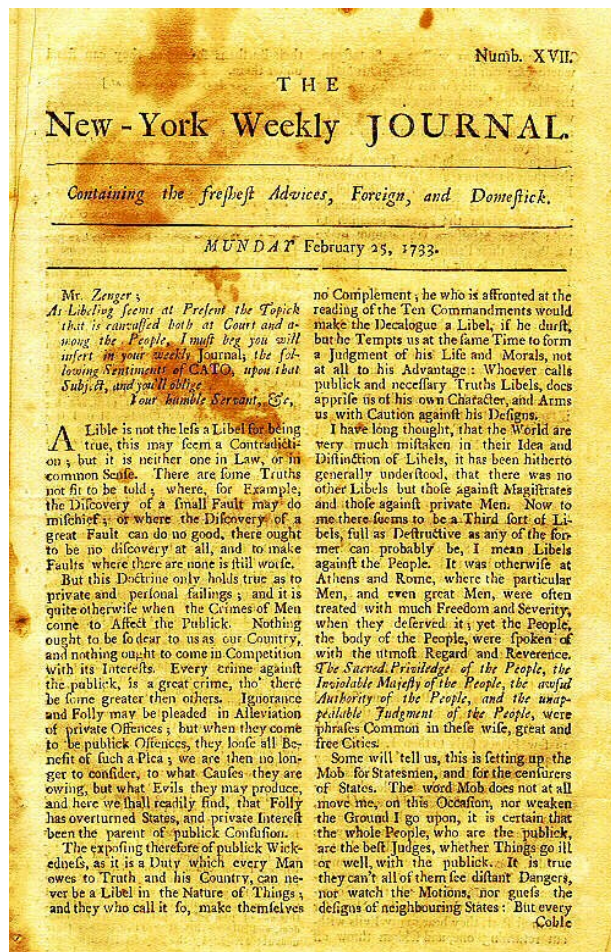
<sup>10</sup> Hermann Wellenreuther, *Contexts for Migration in the Early Modern World: Public Policy, European Migrating Experiences, Transatlantic Migration, and the Genesis of American Culture*, article in, *In Search of Peace and Prosperity: New German Settlements in Eighteenth-Century Europe and America*, edited by Hartmut Lehmann, Hermann Wellenreuther, and Renate Wilson, (Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania University Press, 2000), P.35

true freedom in all of its extremities. Their fight in the Civil War rested on the concept that true freedom consisted of an uncorrupt government, equality for all, freedom of press, and complete separation of church and state. They believed that all must live accordingly to this conscience in order for the words to be substantiated. They fought against this contradiction for freedom in their new home, but also to ensure the success of democracy in their homeland. Carl Wittke contends that many of the 48ers never became completely adjusted to their new home; and extreme social reformers like Weitling, Sorge, and Weydmeyer advanced a thoroughgoing social revolution according to their own plan for Utopia.<sup>11</sup> However, these cosmopolitan liberals frequently cooperated to advance their common cause of human brotherhood and political liberty, and gave movement to international character and significance. It was through German settlers like John Peter Zenger that directly impacted American politics. Zenger began the printing of a newspaper in 1733 that was opposed to the imperial governor, William Cosby of New York. Through a number of satirical articles contributed by political leaders, the paper helped develop a strong popular resistance to the governor, who then accused Zenger of printing seditious libels. Zenger spent over eight months in prison before he was seen in court. In the trial Zenger's lawyer, Andrew Hamilton, argued that satire could not be construed as libelous if it was based on truth, and that its truthfulness should be determined by a jury, not the governor's hand-picked judges. The jury agreed and acquitted the printer.<sup>12</sup> However the consequences of this ordeal remain imprinted in our politics and culture to this day. It was because of Zenger that Freedom of Press became part of legislation and the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment to the Bill of Rights.

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<sup>11</sup> Carl Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution: The German 48ers in America*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1952)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=4848>



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Historian Henry A. Pochman points out that there are few important men, movements, or ideas of modern Germany that failed to impress themselves upon American cultural development.<sup>14</sup> There are several opportunities that lend itself to German-American identity. German's brought to America not only their thriftiness, skill, common sense, sturdiness, and love of life, but also a true sense of loyalty and devotion to America.<sup>15</sup> Although the Puritans came to the New World in hopes to practice their religion freely, they ultimately condemned themselves to failure through their own persecution of future settlers. As for the expansionists, they too failed to see the

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/bookmarks/zenger/>

<sup>14</sup> Henry A. Pochman, *German Culture in America 1600-1900*, (The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1957) P.40

<sup>15</sup> Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *America's German Heritage: Bicentennial Minutes*, (German-American National Congress, Inc., Cleveland, 1976), P. 12

opportunity that was at their grasp and were triumphed by the radical notion that one must live by their ideology, not just dictate it. Men like Penn and Pastorius made their experiment in religious tolerance work in the new world, because of their mindset prior to arriving. Moreover, it was their ability not only to act upon their own conscience, but also allow the freedom for others to act as their own conscience dictated as well.

The German settlers from the beginning came from a position of persecution and complete devastation that affected every class structure across every principality in their homeland. Their successes in the colonies were specifically due to their refusal to compromise their traditions, culture, or sacrifice their principles. While in the beginning they passively resisted the hypocritical nature of the colonists. Their example by making their statements against slavery, refusing to own any themselves, and banning anyone in their townships from the sale of slaves, was one of many non-violent responses in opposition to the disfranchising colonists. With men like Zenger, who was willing to put himself on the line and publicly speak the uneasy truth, led to the incorporation of Freedom of Press in the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment.

The philosophies of 18<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary ideas started in America and were imprinted in the hearts of citizens throughout the world. Being that America was the champion of freedom and equality, the German settlers felt a patriotic duty to America and their homeland to see the follow through in the promises made in the Revolution of Independence. To the 48ers, the ideology and the words printed on the Constitution were worth fighting for. The freedom that the 48ers fought for here in America during the Civil War, perpetuated to seeds of change, that later amended the Constitution to reflect the freedom from slavery and gave way for German Unification and substantiated the meaning of democracy after National Socialism two centuries later. From the beginning German settlers with their Quaker foundations used “the sundry forms of protest and

dissent that have challenged the exclusions and inequalities that have always existed. The Result? An overdue recognition that many of the most cherished ideals of American history have been hard fought for and hard won by people who otherwise would have been excluded from the democratic process.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John McMillian, *The Radical Reader*, (Canada, Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John McMillian, 2003), P.1-2

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File: 1688 Germantown Quaker petition against slavery.jpg,  
Photos taken by conservators of the original document for Germantown Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends.

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Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John McMillian,

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The two sides of the 1688 Germantown Quaker Petition Against Slavery after conservation in 2007. It was written in iron gall ink and has substantially faded. The document was the first public protest against the institution of slavery, and represents the first written public declaration of universal human rights. The original document is 9" x 14".

Source: Photos taken by conservators of the original document for Germantown Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends. Fair use. The document is a classic, more than 300 years old, and Germantown Monthly Meeting would like the world to see it freely. Not for commercial distribution except by permission of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting or Germantown Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends. According to John Greenleaf Whittier, the original document was discovered in 1844 by the Philadelphia antiquarian Nathan Kite and published in *The Friend* (Vol. XVIII. No. 16).

ii

Latin Farmers is reference to the German 48ers that could not farm but knew Latin and read the classics.