"How the Germans Became White Southerners: German Immigrants and African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, 1860-1880"

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How the Germans Became White Southerners: German Immigrants and African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, 1860–1880

JEFFERY STRICKLAND

GERMAN IMMIGRANTS and African Americans enjoyed relatively positive social, economic, and political relations during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, especially when compared to relations between white and black southerners. The Germans were a middleman minority community, occupying a middle tier on the racial and ethnic hierarchy below white southerners and above African Americans. Exceptional relations declined in the 1870s, coinciding with the failure of Reconstruction and the so-called Democratic Redemption of 1876. It is my intention in this essay to provide some examples of positive relations between German and black Charlestonians, admittedly through the lens of the German community, and to demonstrate the ways Germans increasingly exhibited their desire to become white southerners after the Civil War, consequently degrading relations with African Americans. Relations between these ethnic groups shaped the social, economic, and political relations in the city.

Scholars have long studied European immigrants in the South, but their attention to German–African American relations remains scant. Ira Berlin and Herbert G. Gutman’s excellent essay, “Natives and Immigrants, Free Men, and Slaves,” offered the greatest inspiration for this author’s research on the Germans in Charleston, but the works of Walter Kamphoefner, Hartmut Keil, and Dennis Rousey also have inspired him to think about the special relationship between German immigrants and black southerners as well as the larger implications of the author’s study. It is difficult to explain the Germans’ transition to becoming white southerners without situating the case study within a few historiographical trajectories, mainly urban slavery; pre-industrial economic history; Reconstruction social and political history; and, of course, mid-nineteenth-century immigration history. As the title aptly suggests, this essay is interested in the ways Germans became white southerners. They never stopped being German, but they increasingly identified themselves as white southerners. White southerners as an ethnic group, in the main, remained committed to white supremacy.
pre- and postemancipation, and that commitment created tension between whites and blacks. White southerners were overwhelmingly wedded to the Democratic Party, and their social and political spheres were inseparable. By 1876, Germans identified with white southern Democrats, some faster than others, while some Germans migrated out, and others withdrew from public life altogether.

The size of the German population was small but demographically significant. In 1860 German immigrants comprised 5 percent of the total population and 9 percent of the white population in Charleston. By 1880 the German population had declined considerably. Most of the Germans in the interim had entered the United States at some other port and gradually made their way to Charleston. The German immigrant community was a distinct minority, outnumbered by both black and white southerners. (See Tables 1 and 2.)

German and general European immigration to South Carolina lagged far behind levels realized in the North and Midwest and even other southern states, including Texas, Louisiana, Maryland, and Virginia. In 1866 the South Carolina legislature created a Bureau of Immigration to recruit immigrants from European countries, but primarily Germany and Ireland. G. A. Neuffer, a German hotelkeeper in Charleston, argued that South Carolina immigration officials had botched the state’s post–Civil War efforts to increase immigration from Germany and Ireland. Neuffer also believed that although South Carolina had millions of acres of fertile land available, landowners were selling their land at prices well above the market rate so immigrant farmers went elsewhere. Some Germans immigrated to Charleston after the Civil War, but most had entered during the 1850s. The Charleston-born German

**Table 1.** German and White Population in Charleston by Nativity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Ireland</th>
<th>Foreign</th>
<th>Total White</th>
<th>% German</th>
<th>% Irish</th>
<th>% Foreign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>1,901</td>
<td>3,261</td>
<td>6,311</td>
<td>23,376</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>2,437</td>
<td>3,662</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>26,969</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>1,826</td>
<td>2,180</td>
<td>4,892</td>
<td>22,749</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>1,549</td>
<td>1,598</td>
<td>3,950</td>
<td>22,699</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.** German and Black Population in Charleston

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% White</th>
<th>% Black</th>
<th>% German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>23,376</td>
<td>17,146</td>
<td>1,944</td>
<td>40,522</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>26,969</td>
<td>21,440</td>
<td>2,437</td>
<td>48,409</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>22,749</td>
<td>26,173</td>
<td>1,826</td>
<td>48,956</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>22,699</td>
<td>27,276</td>
<td>1,537</td>
<td>49,984</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
American population was larger than the first generation, but its members largely identified with white southerners—they were southern whites first and German Americans second.

**ECONOMIC INTERACTION**

The Germans played an important intermediate economic role in Charleston, before and after the Civil War. Middleman minorities often fill gaps found in societies with large disparities between elites and the masses. Germans mainly worked as grocers, bakers, dry goods merchants, commission brokers, tailors, and shoemakers, occupations that most white southerners avoided. Charleston's society and economy revolved around slavery, and white southerners aspired to slaveholding above all else. In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, Charleston had a preindustrial capitalist economy ruled by a plantation aristocracy that comprised an impenetrable urban establishment. The newly arrived Germans did not have the same preoccupation with status, and the Germans freely traded with black and white southerners alike. Following the Civil War, Germans continued to sell to African Americans and native-born whites, although they were less likely than before to offer credit.6

German immigrants and African Americans exhibited a significant degree of economic interaction, primarily as sellers and buyers respectively. In 1860 several free African American women operated green groceries, a fruit store, and a small shop, and at least one black man operated his own store. Many more African Americans worked as hucksters, butchers, tailors, drayman, fishermen, and other entrepreneurial tradespeople. The majority of Charleston’s dry goods merchants and grocers were German immigrants. African Americans depended upon trade with them for a variety of daily necessities, especially groceries, and Germans often catered exclusively to African Americans.7 German shopkeepers sold their wares to enslaved blacks. This included the illegal sale of liquor and trading with slaves for items requisitioned from their masters. Slaves and free blacks downed gills (one-quarter pints) of liquor in the back rooms of German groceries and grog shops normally called "Dutch corner shops." These stores served as safe spaces where African Americans could escape from their daily toils and oppression, if only for a moment, and even converse with Germans. From the African Americans’ perspective, the Germans were willing to enter into economic relationships with them at a time when few native-born whites would, and for that they were grateful.
Middleman minorities often find themselves in conflict with the host society over economic matters, including disagreements with their clientele (in this case both black and white), native businesses (overwhelmingly white), and labor (increasingly black). First and foremost, white southerners opposed German trade with slaves, and it was a point of political debate. Second, blacks and whites clashed with German entrepreneurs over prices and credit terms. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the Germans were castigated for price gouging in the Charleston press. In 1871 African Americans rioted against German shopkeepers, in part for their refusal to extend credit to black Charlestonians. Conflict also arose because white southern businessmen, and to a lesser extent black southerners, found it difficult to compete with German grocers and dry goods merchants because the Germans had organized vertically, owning the shipping companies, wharfs, wholesalers, banks, and brokerage and commission houses.

When the Civil War broke out, some Germans enlisted in the Confederate army, but many more left the city or continued to operate their businesses. Following the war, many people credited the German community with reviving Charleston’s economy. Newspaper editor Francis Warrington Dawson informed his father that “our expenses, unlike those [German] merchants, cannot be reduced no matter how dull trade may be, hence . . . we are losing money heavily every week and shall continue to do so until October.” Charlestonians recognized the role of German businessmen in reviving Charleston’s economy. Friedrich Ratzel, a German journalist, wrote, “I have many times heard the Germans praised for being the first ones after the war to get to work energetically and in a short time to become economically established again.” Frederick W. Wagener, a native of Hanover, Germany, gained tremendous wealth as one of Charleston’s most successful businessmen. Wagener owned and operated a grocery before the war. The grocery grew quickly and Wagener later became a wholesaler in naval stores and cotton. By 1880 Wagener owned real estate and personal property worth nearly half a million dollars. German business success stories abounded after the war. The economic growth was stimulated by demand not only from within the German community, but also from white and black southerners. Thirty-two-year-old Oskar A. Aichel moved to Charleston from Prussia immediately following the Civil War. He and two Germans owned and operated John Hurkamp & Co., a profitable wholesale and retail grocery on Broad Street, a main thoroughfare in the heavily immigrant Second Ward adjacent to Charleston Harbor. Otto F. Wieters owned the largest wholesale liquor business in the city, worth about one hundred thousand dollars in 1876. His
brother, Fred Wieters, ran a retail grocery that catered almost exclusively to African Americans. J. C. H. Claussen, a wealthy German baker who began by baking bread for the Confederacy, financed his brother’s lager beer brewery located behind the Charleston Hotel. Over one hundred Germans attended the inaugural Bier Probe at the Freundschaftsbund, and according to one witness, the Germans “all joined in praising the home brewed article [and] proved by their deeds that they meant what they said.”

German businesses employed hundreds of Charlestonians, and as their businesses grew, they increasingly relied on white and black southerners to supplement their first- and second-generation German work force. The image of Germans, white southerners, and black Charlestonians working at German businesses challenged the traditional narrative of southern history in the nineteenth century. Aichel and his associates employed two African Americans, a porter and a driver, and two German clerks. J. C. H. Claussen employed thirty-five whites (mostly Germans) and twenty-one African Americans. Frederick W. Wagener employed twenty-five whites and two African Americans, a foreman to manage the drayage operations and a driver. There are numerous examples of small German businesses employing African Americans. Otto F. Wieters employed thirteen white clerks and bookkeepers and six African American drivers. The economic ties between blacks and Germans were reflected in Charleston’s social geography, as employers and employees, buyers and sellers, resided in the same households, streets, and neighborhoods.

SOCIAL RELATIONS

The Civil War and Reconstruction created new opportunities for racial and ethnic interaction, and many Germans exhibited a marked degree of racial tolerance. This was a brief moment in time when African Americans and Germans could live together without fear of persecution—and later prosecution. In 1860 there were very few examples of African American and German household interaction other than German households with slaves, though it was not uncommon for Germans to locate their businesses and live in African American neighborhoods. By 1870, however, numerous German men and women boarded with African American families or vice versa. Oskar A. Aichel, the German businessman mentioned in the previous section, lived adjacent to Esther Lorica, an elderly Prussian woman. Lorica was the only white woman living in her building, and she was listed as the head of household with two nurses, a fisherman, and a washer—all African
Americans. Casper Hart, a German dry goods merchant residing on the other side of Lorica, lived with his family, a young black woman boarder, and her infant son. This type of mixed-race living arrangement was common between Germans and African Americans in 1870.\(^{15}\) Not unexpectedly, relaxed social barriers allowed Germans and African Americans to enter into romantic relationships.

Sexual relations occurred between German men and black women and black men and German women. Some German men married African American women. Claus Heins, a baker from Hanover, lived with his black wife Emma and their two children, Elizabeth and William, and a female boarder. Elizabeth and William were identified as mulatto in the Census. Ten years later, Claus and Emma had five children, each of them classified as mulatto. Importantly, Emma’s classification changed from black to mulatto. By 1900 the Heins family had left the United States, probably settling in Germany. This effectively demonstrates the malleability of racial categories and associated historical and social constructions of race in the nineteenth-century urban South. In rarer instances, German women entered into sexual relations with African American men. In 1867 Augusta Finck left her German husband for William Overton, an African American Civil War veteran who had been boarding with the German couple. The local press normally censored such incidents, but in this case the account was fully documented in the Charleston newspapers—except the German *Deutsche Zeitung*. The police arrested Finck and Overton in Wilmington, North Carolina, aboard a Northeastern Railroad train bound for New York City and returned them to Charleston. The Charleston press speculated that the couple planned to marry in New York City and would face prosecution, but their names do not appear on the criminal docket. The author’s 1880 Census database reveals that sixteen blacks and fifteen mulattos identified a German mother and seventeen blacks and twenty-nine mulattos identified a German father. Rapes committed by German slave owners could easily explain the latter, but not the German mothers. By 1880 the number of mixed households had decreased. African Americans no longer lived in the buildings adjacent to Aichel’s residence.\(^{16}\) In 1870 two other German men lived with African American wives, but they do not appear in the 1880 Census, indicative of the increasing tension over interracial relationships that accompanied the failure of Reconstruction. In 1880 Peter Provost, a black South Carolinian, lived with his German wife Mary and their eight-year-old daughter Elvira. By 1900 the Provost family no longer lived in the United States.\(^{17}\)
CULTURAL EXCHANGE

In the face of nativism, the Germans rose above cultural differences emanating from their divergent religious, linguistic, and geographic origins to self identify as Germans in Charleston long before German unification in 1871. They created their own social and cultural institutions and consistently expressed their dual loyalties to Germany and South Carolina. Hanoverian John A. Wagener emerged as the leader of the German community. He had settled in Charleston in 1833 and helped organize various associations, including the German Fire Company; the German School; the German Lutheran Church; and Der Teutone, a German-language daily.\(^{18}\) The Turnverein held gymnastics exhibitions, and German dramatists and musicians performed regularly at German theaters. The Germans even held their own Fourth of July celebrations. As with German settlements throughout the United States, religion had an important role in the community. Most Germans worshipped at St. Matthew's German Lutheran Church or St. Paul's German Catholic Church. The majority of the Germans were Lutherans and a lesser number Catholics.\(^{19}\) A small community of German Jews attended the K. K. Beth Eloim synagogue. The German Friendly Society assisted recent immigrant arrivals, widows, and orphans.\(^{20}\) The Deutschen Artillerie, Schützen Gesellschaft, and Fusiliers militia companies boasted memberships composed entirely of Germans.\(^{21}\)

German Charlestonians maintained strong cultural ties to their homeland. Like German immigrants throughout the United States, first-generation German immigrants in Charleston rarely intermarried.\(^{22}\) Oskar Aichel lived with his German wife Margaret and four children, and two domestic servants in their twenties from Hanover and Oldenburg. It was common practice for German immigrants to hire German domestics because it helped maintain linguistic and cultural ties. Aichel, like other Germans, sent his children to the German School and hired German teachers who taught a variety of subjects, including music and language. Some Germans even sent their children to Germany for additional schooling. Aichel paid for his adolescent daughter Hannetta's education at a conservatory in Stuttgart, where she studied piano, dance, and singing. Oskar was an avid piano player himself, and he played the organ and conducted his church's choir. In one example of German-black cultural exchange, Oskar Aichel recalled a walk home from choir rehearsal: "Some negroes in a so called Meeting house in Tradd Str[eet] were singing their closing Hymn [and] as I was dreamily trodding along Mozart's Vaster Fugue intertwined with the Negroe Hymn until I remarked the ridiculous
combination passing by a Negroe Ice Cream Establishment." In this important revelation, Aichel acknowledged African American social organization, a taste for African American spirituals, the existence of a black business, and an opportunity for German—African American cultural exchange that existed in only a few North American cities.

A very public African American culture thrived in Charleston during the nineteenth century. And while Hannetta Aichel benefited from the rich German cultural activities that Germany offered, her father expressed disappointment with a decline in Charleston's German programming: "Alas! our musical feasts all seem over. Just one single, solitary concert. Poor Charleston! But I think things look a little better here now [and] in future we may reasonably expect a better treatment." As the first-generation immigrant community was rapidly replaced by a decidedly more southern second-generation community, Germans increasingly joined nonethnic organizations, intermarried with native-born white Charlestonians, and employed white and black southerners. Importantly, German cultural events did not disappear, and the Deutsche Zeitung continued to publish until World War I, but German culture in the city would never regain the high level it achieved in the early 1870s.

German social institutions filled a cultural void in the lives of German immigrants at a time when white southerners excluded them. In 1855 the Germans of Charleston organized a Schützen Gesellschaft, or German Rifle Club, that offered Germans a place to practice their marksmanship and socialize. The group was not committed to racial supremacy, and none of the founders owned slaves. The group held an annual Schützenfest until 1861, the year the Civil War began, and it was primarily attended by Germans. The festival became the "Mardi Gras of Charleston" and the premier annual cultural event in Charleston during Reconstruction. Thousands of Charlestonians attended the festival, and African Americans had a strong presence there. Federal authorities had allowed the festival to resume in 1868 because the Germans did not appear threatening to Reconstruction policy makers. Following each parade, thousands of Charlestonians traveled to the Schutzenplatz in the suburbs. African Americans not only participated in the various games at the festival, but they also provided theatrical and musical entertainment. At one Schützenfest, one hundred African American children formed a Saengerbund (singing society) and entertained the crowds on the grounds of the Schutzenplatz. Importantly, it does not appear that African Americans were invited to the shooting competition. The conservative press provided derogatory and racist accounts in a transparent objection to the presence of
African Americans at the festival. White southerners nearly always segregated their social events and did not allow African American participation. In response to the criticism, the Germans began to restrict African American access to the festival in the mid-1870s. Although the Schützenfest began as a harmless ethnic festival, its accompanying parade quickly turned into an exhibition of white supremacy. White rifle clubs, which the Germans invited to the parade, marched in their uniforms with guns and Confederate memorabilia. These martial displays were political statements that together contributed to the resurgence of white supremacy in the city.26

POLITICAL COOPERATION AND CONFLICT

The Germans' lack of commitment to the slave society in which they lived stimulated nativist sentiment among white southerners that manifested itself in antebellum municipal politics. Consistent with their middleman status, the Germans faced "host hostility," or nativism, in Charleston, strongest in the 1850s but persisting well into the 1870s.27 The Know-Nothing Party enjoyed a considerable following in Charleston during the party's heyday.28 The hostility originated with "incompatible goals," especially regarding slavery. In the 1850s the German community's ambivalence about slaveholding led to conflict with white southerners. Historian Walter Kamphoefner investigated slaveholding among Westfalian immigrants in Missouri with a view toward their socialization patterns, and he determined that German immigrants were underrepresented as slaveholders in nearly every wealth category.29 In his analysis of five Deep South cities, historian Dennis C. Rousey revealed that Germans had the lowest rate of slaveholding among individuals who owned at least $1000 of property in 1860.30 The Germans were more than two and a half times less likely than Charlestonians who claimed property to own a slave among individuals in Charleston who claimed property worth five hundred dollars or more. (See Table 3.)

The largely Irish police force continually harassed German immigrants, and in 1857 the mayor of Charleston, William Porcher Miles, reorganized the police force to better control "the practice of selling liquor to slaves, and of the illegal traffic with them generally." Miles believed that foreign shopkeepers "undermined the institution of slavery."31

Even more threatening than the sale of liquor to slaves were German abolitionists operating in Charleston. In August 1858, German shopkeeper Jacob Reils and his clerk, Henry Hussman, were arrested for hiding John, the runaway slave of James Copes, above Reil's grocery store for nearly six
### Table 3. Slaveowners by Nativity and Controlling for Property Holding ≥ $500

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Slaveowner?</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. South</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>1311</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>837.9</td>
<td>473.1</td>
<td>1311.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Nonsouth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>85</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
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<td>% of total</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>281</td>
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<td>Expected count</td>
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<td>101.4</td>
<td>281.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>138</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>138.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>143</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>143.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>1275.0</td>
<td>720.0</td>
<td>1995.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Expected count refers to the expected number to own or not own slaves if the tendency to own slaves were constant.*

...months. On January 11, 1859, Reils and Hussman were found guilty. Hussman was imprisoned for six months and fined five hundred dollars. Reils was imprisoned for one week and fined twenty-five dollars. Importantly, the trial was not covered in the newspapers because the Germans could not be portrayed as committed to slavery.

White southerners fought the Civil War to preserve slavery. The German Charlestonians' response to the Civil War was mixed, and most of the Germans who fought for the Confederate Army were not committed to a slave society. Captain W. F. Bachman wrote about the German Volunteers, "There was not a man in the company who owed allegiance to the Confederate States every man being a foreigner and unnaturalized." During the Civil War, many German businessmen remained in the city to protect their property. Sally DeSaussure wrote her sister, "The unexpected shelling of
the City has caused great excitement and indignation, and will perhaps help us, in bringing many foreigners in particular to think its now time for them to defend their lives and property, the shelling has caused great alarm, and a general move to the upper part of the City.” Warren Lee Goss recalled women, mostly German and Irish immigrants, who offered cigars, tobacco, and food to Union prisoners of war that camped overnight in Charleston on the way to the infamous Andersonville prison. That same day, a German cigar manufacturer offered the prisoners cigars and food. Following the Civil War, white southerners and German elites emphasized the Germans’ meritorious service while African Americans never viewed the Germans as former Confederates. When the Germans laid the cornerstone for the new German Lutheran Church after the Civil War, Confederate memorabilia were among the items included in the cornerstone’s vault.

Reconstruction Era policies opened the door for the Germans to nominate their own candidates for mayor and city council, and they consistently elected aldermen, both Republicans and Democrats, to represent them. Beginning in 1868, German political organizing on behalf of the Democratic Party undermined the efforts of black Republicans to maintain political power. Although German Republicans remained active, the Germans became increasingly dedicated to the Democratic Party. By 1871 German political efforts included luring moderate African Americans into their party and allegedly buying Republican votes with ten thousand dollars raised by German businessmen. That year the Germans helped nominate a German Democrat, John A. Wagener, a former Confederate general and slaveholder, for the mayoralty. Although native-born whites initially objected to his nomination, preferring one of their own, the Germans threatened to align themselves with the Republican Party. White southerners endorsed the nomination and Wagener was elected for a two-year term.

African American Republican politicians lashed out at the Germans for their efforts on behalf of the Democratic Party. On the night before the election, black Charlestonians rioted against German shopkeepers. Lieutenant Governor Alonzo Ransier, an African American, considered it “the basest ingratitude in General Wagener and the Germans to support a ticket in opposition to the rights of the colored people.” Ransier thought the Germans had betrayed the African American community: “So far as the negro is concerned—let the Germans remember when they came here in their blue shirts—you patronized them, traded with them, and through your patronage they are enabled to-day to raise their heads and now desire to govern us.” Following the election of Wagener, African Americans continued to target some Germans because of
the outcome, and the conservative editor of the *Courier* claimed that African Americans had "declared war against the Germans generally."40

Even then, the Germans had not completely abandoned the possibility of supporting the Republican Party. In the 1873 municipal election, the Germans threatened to throw their support to the Republicans and were lambasted in the conservative press. In the next municipal election two years later they took a firm Democratic stance, virtually taking over the Democratic Party machinery, but faced an alliance between conservatives and Republicans. The Germans failed miserably, leading Francis Warrington Dawson, the editor of the *News and Courier*, to endorse reconciliation with them. Given the Germans' economic influence in the city, representing taxable property valued at over five million dollars, he believed it was a disappointment that they did not have their usual representatives on the city council.41

In 1876 the Germans filled Freundschaftsbund Hall for their largest meeting in many years. The leaders of the German community preached solidarity and support for the Democratic Party. Captain Diedrich Werner, presiding over the meeting, said, "Many of our German citizens are of the opinion that it is necessary to declare for which party they intend to poll, and that, through such a declaration, the public here will understand us, and a favorable impression will be made upon our countrymen in the North and West." Major Franz Melchers argued that the Republican Party's corruption and the riots had endangered South Carolina, and he believed that whites and blacks had aligned themselves into the Democratic Party to overthrow the Republicans. Melchers summarized the German interests in the upcoming elections. In his view, the Germans wanted reduced taxes, protection of property, equal protection under the law, and economical government. Melchers requested their support for Democrats Samuel Tilden and former Confederate general Wade Hampton. Captain F. Von Santen, leader of the German Fusiliers, believed the "corrupt" Republican administration had "oppressed" the Germans in Charleston through burdensome taxation. Von Santen emphasized the necessity for the Germans to take an active part in the upcoming election. He argued that Republican leaders had misled the "uneducated" and politically inexperienced black population. Their efforts had produced "nothing else but misunderstanding and hatred between the two races in the South, and it is this misunderstanding and hatred by which these corrupt leaders retain their control and power over them." Von Santen acknowledged tension between German managers and black workers when he asked, "How can a land prosper, how can a people be happy, when the employer and employee are hostile to each other[?]" Captain Alexander Melchers identified political tension with
native-born whites when he stated, "We see with regret that a wrong impres-
sion prevails among some of our fellow-citizens in regard to the position
occupied by the Germans of Charleston in the present campaign."^42

Wade Hampton and the Red Shirts had waged a violent campaign on
behalf of the Democratic Party, and German elites recognized the dangers
in further dissent. Importantly, these elites refrained from white supremacist
discourse. However, the Germans, with the support of white Charlestonians,
nominated seven Germans for the state legislature. Overt white support for
the Republican Party in Charleston virtually disappeared.

In October 1879 three hundred Germans again met at the Freundschafts-
bund Hall to select their candidates for Democratic aldermen. They divided
into factions and eventually nominated four Germans, including Oskar Aichel,
who were later elected to city council.43 Aichel's complicated political alle-
giances were revealed in a letter to his daughter following Republican Presi-
dent James Garfield's election in 1881:

In regard to our new president Mr. Garfield, we of the South are very well
satisfied. I mean we Germans, because the Republicans are more steady as
financial managers [and] you might know that exactly like in the manage-
ment of a family or a business or a congregation, or a city, or a farm or a
ship, money is the life blood [and] as the heart is the most important organ
in the human body, so the Treasury of the U.S. is the most vital office in
our government. Just now it is splendidly handled [and] with Garfield we
are sure of a continuance, but had a democratic candidate succeeded, it is
almost certain that not only the Treasurer would have been changed but
with a democratic Congress they would have made all sorts of mistakes
in financial questions."^44

The fact that Aichel did not advocate the white supremacist part of the
Democratic platform reveals that not all Germans were committed to the
subjugation of African Americans. German businessmen had become dis-
enchanted with what they perceived as excessive public spending and cor-
rupption in Charleston, and they were committed to fiscal retrenchment. By
1876 white southerners made it socially and economically impossible for
the Germans to identify with the Republican Party any longer.

RACE AND REUNION

In February 1891 the City of Charleston endorsed the German Fusiliers’
invitation to the Veteran Zouaves rifle club of Elizabeth, New Jersey, to a
reunion of Confederate and Union veterans in Charleston. The Fusiliers had a century-long history of military service to South Carolina, beginning with the Revolutionary War. In 1861 the Fusiliers helped form the German [Confederate] Volunteers and fought in twelve major Civil War battles. The group disbanded after the war but re-formed in 1873. Commemorating their centennial anniversary in April 1875, they organized a large parade in which twelve white rifle clubs participated. A history of the organization boasted that

In 1876 when the white people of South Carolina were wearied and sick of the infamous rule of the alien North determined to rescue the State; when our affairs administered solely by the scum which the surges of party had rolled up on its face; when, as was said at the time by Governor Chamberlain himself, the civilization of the State was in jeopardy; the Fusiliers, under the command of Captain F. Von Santen, performed their share of duty, together with the other organizations of the City. In the month of October, during this year, an autograph letter was received from Governor Chamberlain ordering them to give up their arms to the Chief of Police and disband; it is needless to say that while this tyrannical order was nominally observed, the company organization was kept up with the highest state of efficiency, and that the Fusiliers were ready to fall into ranks at a moment's notice from their superior officers. On the establishment of the Democratic State Government in 1877, the Fusiliers were among the first of the then so called “Rifle Clubs” to offer their services to that great South Carolina patriot, Wade Hampton, and were enrolled as volunteer troops of the State.45

The majority of the Veteran Zouaves of New Jersey had served in the New York and New Jersey volunteer regiments during the Civil War. One speaker declared, “We are here to extend to you the hand of friendship, to unite the blue and the gray in bonds of an indissoluble union, and to tell you that New Jersey has no truer friends than the people of South Carolina.” The reunion was the first of its kind in Charleston and reflects the racial dynamics that historian David Blight has described, with northern and southern whites reuniting at the expense of African Americans.46 Although the German community had refrained from a racist discourse in 1876, they clearly identified themselves as white supremacists fifteen years later.

CONCLUSION

German immigrants in Charleston became white southerners only after nearly three decades of identity transformation. Many of them, including the refugees of the failed 1848 German revolution, had fled political persecu-
tion in their homeland only to settle in a slave society that rested upon the subjugation of African Americans. It is not surprising that many of them opposed slavery, as evidenced by their underrepresentation as slaveholders, illicit trade with slaves, and even abolitionist activities in a prototypical Deep South city. At the same time, the Germans’ entrepreneurial role filled a gap in Charleston’s economy, and their associated middleman minority status led to “host hostility,” or nativist sentiment. A property qualification and nativism largely restricted the Germans’ political involvement during the antebellum period. The outbreak of the Civil War led some Germans to enlist for the Confederacy, but the German community remained complacent, and many German businessmen continued operations. The post–Civil War social and political climate, accompanied by revolutionary Reconstruction legislation, allowed the Germans to enter the political arena with a fervor previously unknown in the city. German Radical Republicans allied with African Americans and served in federal, state, and local government capacities in Charleston. German Democrats were also active, and they nominated and helped elect a conservative Democratic mayor. German businesses achieved greater success than before the war. Importantly, German social relations with African Americans peaked in 1870. German and black Charlestonians lived in the same households, interacted at public cultural festivals, and even reared children together. Relations declined precipitously in the 1870s, however, and culminated with the German community’s pledge of support for Wade Hampton and Samuel Tilden in the 1876 gubernatorial and presidential elections, respectively. African Americans and white southerners equated support for the Democracy as support for white supremacy, but many Germans were merely fiscal conservatives. Still, they had become white southerners regardless of their lack of commitment to racial supremacy. The second-generation German American would identify with white southern ethnics and demonstrate a greater commitment to Jim Crow policies.

NOTES


8. F. W. Dawson to Father, August 26, 1868, F. W. Dawson Papers, Duke Special Collections, Duke University, Durham, NC.

9. Friedrich Ratzel, *Sketches of Urban and Cultural Life in North America*, ed. and trans. Steward A. Stehlin (New Brunswick, NJ, 1988), 161. A German journalist born in Karlsruhe on August 30, 1844, Ratzel traveled to North America in August 1873 and remained until 1874. The *Kölner Zeitung* (Cologne, Germany) financed his work. Ratzel believed that German business success promoted “closer cohesiveness within the community than is possible particularly in places, like the northeastern states, where the lower-class Germans overlap with the proletariat, while the upper classes belong to a rather cosmopolitan moneyed aristocracy.”


13. Oskar Aichel to Hannetta Aichel, February 1, 1880, Aichel Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society.

14. A. E. Sholes and C. F. Weatherbe, *Sholes Directory of the City Charleston*, vol. 4 (January 1881). Nine blacks and seven whites listed “baker” as their occupation. The clerk positions were reserved for white employees, and many of them were family members.
15. Federal Manuscript Census, 1870.
16. Ibid., 1880.
17. Ibid., 1880.
20. Minutes of German Friendly Society, Special Collections, College of Charleston.
21. Deutschen Artillerie, pamphlet, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.
23. Oskar Aichel to Hannetta Aichel, May 5, 1880, Aichel Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.
24. Oscar Aichel to Hannetta Aichel, February 1, 1880, ibid.
25. *History of the German Rifle Club* (Charleston), pamphlet, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
26. Jacob Schirmer Diary, April 1871, South Carolina Historical Society.
28. *Daily Courier*, November 5, 1855; November 9, 1855; October 31, 1857; November 3, 1857; November 6, 1857; Schirmer Diary, November 7, 1855, South Carolina Historical Society. In 1855 the Anti-Know-Nothings won the election by 416 votes. The municipal election campaign pitted a Know-Nothing candidate, F. D. Richardson, against William Porcher Miles, a native-born southerner running under the auspices of the Southern Rights and Anti-Know-Nothing Party. Miles won the close election. In 1857 the former Know-Nothing Party candidate, F. D. Richardson, made another unsuccessful attempt at the mayor’s office. In an apparent attempt to attract the German vote, F. D. Richardson published a letter written in German in the *Deutsche Zeitung* in which he announced he had severed ties with the Know-Nothing Party and was now an independent. The Southern Rights Democratic Party candidate Charles Macbeth defeated Richardson by only 124 votes.
32. Indictment 2809, L 10153 Court of General Sessions (Charleston County), South Carolina State Archives and History Center, Columbia.
33. Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1941) 33, 43, 65, 119, 120.
34. Sally DeSaussure to Mrs. Joseph Glover, 1863, DeSaussure Family Papers, Duke Special Collections, Duke University.
37. *Daily Courier*, December 27, 1867. A group of German Lutherans bought the old St.
Matthew’s Church and started the Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Saint Johannes Kirche in 1878.

41. *News and Courier*, October 9, 1875.
42. *Charleston News and Courier*, October 5, 1876. All speeches were in German.
43. Oskar Aichel to Hannetta Aichel, October 22, 1879, Aichel Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society; Oskar Aichel to Hannetta Aichel, December 27, 1879, ibid.
44. Oskar Aichel to Hannetta Aichel, January 19, 1881, ibid.
45. *A Sketch of the German Fusiliers*, pamphlet, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
46. Ibid.