

Linguistic Marginalities: Becoming American without Learning English

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Introduction

National identity in the United States is intertwined tightly in the popular mind with language, though we have no official national language. Those who cannot speak English are depicted as not American—regardless of their citizenship, actions, and/or identities. In a recent speech, former Representative Tom Tancredo asserted that “people who could not even spell the word ‘vote’ or say it in English” were responsible for the results of the 2008 elections.¹ Interpretations of history propel the myth as well, as with U.S. English, Inc.: “Immigrants of many nationalities built our nation, but the ‘melting pot’ melded us into one people. This long tradition of assimilation has always included the adoption of English as the common means of communication.”² This appeal to language as a key unifier of US identity is widespread.³ U.S. English, Inc., argues further for the economic marginality of non-English speakers: “Life without English proficiency in the United States is a life of low-skilled, low-paying jobs. . . . Knowledge of English leads to the realization of the American dream of increased economic opportunity and the ability to become a more productive member of society, which benefits everyone.”⁴ Michael Reagan put it starkly for earlier immigrants: “It was a case of sink or swim. If you couldn’t speak English, you couldn’t get by, go to school, get a job, or become a citizen and vote.”⁵

This and similar rhetoric seeks to portray non-English speakers in the US as profoundly marginal along demographic, economic, geographic, and social parameters. In recent years, a few scholars have begun to probe historical patterns of English learning among immigrants.⁶ In fact, many communities, including prototypical “good old immigrants,” lived here for decades—and in fact generations—without learning English, like the Wisconsin German communities treated here.⁷ To date, however, no work known to us has systematically examined

how and to what extent such monolinguals were actually marginal, in the various senses mentioned above and defined below. This paper begins to fill that gap.

We juxtapose traditional assumptions about immigrant monolingual marginality against historical evidence, taking both literal and figurative marginalities into account, beginning with some literal ones:

- Were German monolinguals demographically marginal? Were they, for example, newcomers to the US and not yet integrated or assimilated?
- Were they economically marginal, working in occupations that insulated them from the broader English-speaking community?
- Were they geographically marginal within the community, i.e., isolated in relatively rural areas or within neighborhoods in towns and cities?

The answers to these questions are relatively straightforward, often readily quantifiable. After presenting evidence on those points, we turn to the figurative marginalities, which require more context:

- Did German monolinguals belong to separate institutions, such as churches? What kinds of contacts and relationships did they have in those institutions to bilinguals or presumed English monolinguals? Religious institutions have often been seen as key bastions of immigrant language and places of ethnic/cultural refuge, so one might expect great segregation of groups here.
- Did they attend school? If so, how did they get by without becoming proficient in English? Schools, especially public schools, are often considered important vehicles for Americanization and for learning English, so that one might expect school attendance to correlate with learning English.

Finally, we use this body of evidence to broach an even larger question:

- Did German monolinguals present themselves as “American” and, if so, how? That is, whether or not they lived on the margins, in various senses, and

whether or not English-speaking Americans saw these monolinguals as “foreign” or “American,” how did they represent themselves publicly?

The methods used here reflect the range of evidence and types of evidence needed to build a broad picture of the lives of monolinguals in this community and many similar communities throughout the Midwest. It includes quantitative data—primarily from the United States Census—as well as mapping triangulated against sources from local and regional history, using both text and image. More generally, we approach this problem as linguists and focus directly on language. As Schlemper rightly notes about another Wisconsin German community, “Language likely played a role in promoting a broader community identity.”⁸ That said, we contextualize our discussion with reference to key work by historians and geographers.

Evidence shows that German monolinguals in communities like Hustisford were not marginal in most of the ways contemporary discourse would suggest. These findings have implications for present-day discussions about language and immigration and also points to an American identity that is not inextricably linked with an ability to speak English.

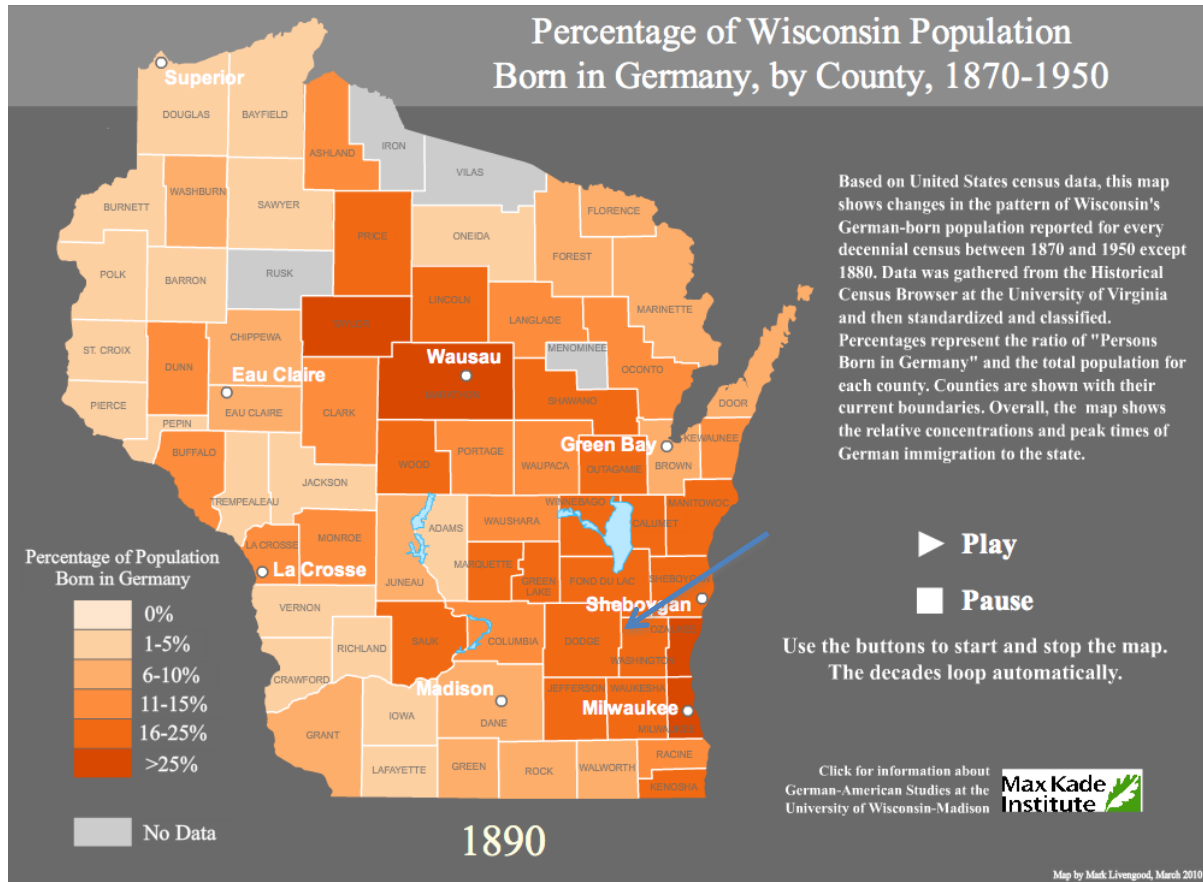
To introduce the historical and social setting, we begin with a brief overview of Wisconsin’s settlement history. We then address the demographic and economic conditions of German monolinguals in Hustisford and surrounding areas, drawing on data from the 1910 Census. These data provide a necessary backdrop for the next section, which concerns the geographical distribution of these monolinguals. Looking at the 1910 Census from a different perspective, we detail reported language ability by household, as opposed to individual, and construct a cartographic representation of language ability (knowledge of German and/or English) within the community. In an effort to better understand the community’s social structure, and to contextualize the census data, the next section examines church records relevant to language, followed by a parallel discussion of what is known about language in local schools. We then illustrate how Wisconsin Germans, including Hustisford monolinguals, publicly represented their “Americanness.” We conclude with a comment on how this might inform contemporary discussions on language, immigration, and identity.

Wisconsin: Settlement History

Permanent European American settlement of Wisconsin began in the early nineteenth century by Anglo-Americans, commonly referred to as “Yankees” because they came to Wisconsin from the northeastern region of the US. It was not until the 1830s that waves of European immigrants, in particular Germans, settled in Wisconsin.⁹ The majority of German settlers to Wisconsin came from northwestern and northeastern German-speaking regions like Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein, the Rhineland, and Pomerania. Hustisford, a township within Dodge County in

southeastern Wisconsin, was no exception to the general settlement pattern of Wisconsin as discussed here and illustrated in the map below, constructed for this project.

Map 1. Native-born German Population in Wisconsin over Time



The animated map available online shows the number of German-born residents in counties across Wisconsin from 1870 to 1950, with the blank map for 1880 reflecting a lack of data.¹⁰ The blue arrow shows the approximate location of Hustisford in Dodge County.

John Hustis, an Irish American lawyer from New York, bought land in 1837 and “laid out the town of Hustisford, developed water power, built mills and became the patriarch of the place.”¹¹ It was not until around 1850 that German immigrants began to settle in Hustisford. So, given the considerable, established Anglo-American presence in Hustisford prior to German immigration, the town never was altogether German-speaking. That is, German speakers were never truly isolated and did not form a “language island” in the traditional sense. From its beginnings, Hustisford had

a thriving Anglo-American community. This case study, therefore, treats a community where monolinguals might be expected to be particularly on the fringes and in a variety of ways.

Monolingualism: Demographics and Economics

While research examining the maintenance of immigrant languages in the US abounds, relatively little is known about when and how well immigrants initially learned English during earlier waves of immigration, especially the mid-nineteenth century. In an approach building on that employed by Wilkerson and Salmons, this paper examines the learning of English and the shift to English in Hustisford by using data from the 1910 Census.¹² Apart from the usual census queries about matters such as birthplace, birthplace of parents, and so on, the 1910 Census asked the following in column 17 of persons ten years of age and older: “Whether able to speak English; or, if not, give language spoken.”¹³ Data about a person’s ability to speak English opens the door to looking at language maintenance from a new perspective: the focus shifts from the retention of imported languages to the first learning of English.

Elsie Kobow was fourteen years old and born in Wisconsin just as her parents were. Her census entry is shown in line three, reporting her as a German monolingual.

Figure 1. 1910 Census

ENUMERATED BY ME ON THE 25th DAY OF April 1910.

NATIVITY.			CITIZENSHIP.		OCCUPATION.		
Place of birth of each person and parents of each person enumerated. If born in the United States, give the state or territory; if of foreign birth, give the country.			Age at last census.	Whether naturalized citizen or alien.	Whether able to speak English; or, if not, give language spoken.	Trade or profession of, or particular kind of work done by this person, as spinner, weaver, farmer, laborer, etc.	General nature of industry, business, or establishment in which this person works, as cotton mill, dry goods store, farm, etc.
Place of birth of this person.	Place of birth of Father of this person.	Place of birth of Mother of this person.					
10	11	12	13	14	17	18	19
Ger. German	Ger. German	Ger. German	1881	Na	German	Laborer	Alber Mason
Ger. German	Ger. German	Ger. German	1881		German	None	
Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin			German	None	
Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin			English	Laborer	Farmer
Wisconsin	New York	Wisconsin			English	None	
Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin			English	None	
Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin			English	None	
Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin			English	None	

Elsie Kobow, a documented Wisconsin-born German monolingual in Hustisford, Dodge, Wisconsin, in 1910. (Source: United States Census Bureau, “1910 United States Federal Census,” Hustisford, Dodge, Wisconsin, National Archives and Records Administration microfilm, Roll T624_1706, p. 3A; Enumeration District 0018; FHL microfilm 1375719. Available online at Ancestry.com.)

Table 1 summarizes select data from the 1910 Census on German monolinguals in Hustisford.

Table 1. Reported Language, Gender, Birthplace, and Date of Immigration for German Monolinguals in Hustisford in 1910¹⁴

	Number	Percentage (%)
Reported Language		
English	965	76%
German	310	24%
Other/None*	2	>1%
TOTAL	1277	
Gender		
Male	127	41%
Female	183	59%
TOTAL	310	
Birthplace		
US	108	35%
Overseas**	202	65%
TOTAL	310	
Date of Immigration		
Pre-1860	42	21%
Pre-1880	111	55%
Pre-1910	32	16%
Unknown***	17	8%
TOTAL	202	

* Adults who (1) reported a language other than German or English or (2) did not report a language at all.

** 188 emigrated from Germany, 9 from Switzerland, and 5 from Russia.

*** Years of immigration for these residents went unrecorded.

What first catches the eye is that a quarter of all adult residents in Hustisford could not speak English. Among those 24 percent, over half of the monolinguals were

female and a third of them were born in the US. Of those born overseas, and leaving aside those whose immigration dates went unrecorded, a clear majority (76 percent) had lived in the US for thirty or more years. In short, significant numbers of these immigrants did not necessarily acquire English over their lives.¹⁵

As indicated above, current debates about language and immigration assert that one had to learn English if for no other reason than for economic survival, which raises the question as to what occupations these German monolinguals had and could have had. Table 2 displays a selection of professions held by Hustisford monolinguals as well as monolinguals from a selection of communities across southeastern Wisconsin. Given the immediate goal of showing the range of jobs, we omitted some reported occupations in this table, such as farm and/or other labor, factory work, and domestics, i.e., housekeeper, servant, janitor, for which monolingualism would not have been surprising.

Table 2. A Sampling of Self-Reported Occupations among Adult Monolinguals in Hustisford, Germantown, Kiel, and Sheboygan¹⁶

	Hustisford	Germantown	Kiel	Sheboygan
Professional		Teacher Preacher	(Music) Teacher	Clergyman
Trades/Crafts	Blacksmith Tailor Stonemason Beekeeper Cheese Maker	Blacksmith Seamstress Stonemason (House) Mason Bartender Butcher	Teamster Tailor Stonemason Contractor Cheese Maker Laundress Carpenter Wagon Driver Cabinet Maker Yard Foreman	Teamster Tailor/Sewer Cobbler Contractor Painter Laundress Carpenter Florist Gateman Surveyor
Commerce	Peddler Merchant			Manufacturer (Retail) Merchant Salesman

Hustisford was not as economically diverse as some other larger communities in eastern and southeastern Wisconsin, where we find German-monolingual teachers and preachers. This lack of diversity may have something to do with the fact that Hustisford was relatively small and, as such, offered limited economic diversity, regardless of one's linguistic abilities. It is also the case that there were not many new arrivals to Hustisford. Monolingual teachers and preachers, as found in Germantown, for example, were relatively recent arrivals to the community and had not grown up there. The occupational profile of German monolinguals, in Hustisford and across the region, does not appear to differ dramatically from that of English speakers, though we have not yet undertaken quantitative analysis on this point: this region was (and remains to a large extent) heavily agricultural, and most people were involved in farming. Still, larger communities showed a greater division of labor and German monolinguals were found across that spectrum.¹⁷ Monolinguals do not appear to have been excluded from particular domains and thus were not obviously economically marginal.

Social and Geographic Distribution

The most literal form of marginality is geographical. On discussing our earlier findings on German monolingualism with people in Wisconsin German communities, it has been suggested to us that monolinguals must have lived outside of towns, while those in town presumably had to speak English. Using the 1910 Census records, we look at that geographical distribution based not on individual reports of language ability but by reconstructing to the extent possible the language ability or patterns of use within the household.

Mapping out geographical distribution by way of explicit household language categorizations goes beyond the individual to shed some light on just how socially integrated the German monolinguals really were. Households were often indicative of family units, although not always. In many cases boarders or employees, such as farmhands and maids, shared a residence with a traditional family unit. For that reason, we use the term household, not family, to describe individuals living in a shared residence.

Households were divided into five language categories as described below:

1. **Exclusively Monolingual German:** All adult members of the household were reported German monolinguals.
2. **German-Speaking:** German was the only common language among adult members of the household. This category applies to two-person households in which one person was a reported German monolingual.

3. **Presumed Bilingual:** At least one member of the household was a reported German monolingual. Although German may not have been the dominant language, at least a few (if not all) members of the household spoke German.
4. **Possibly Bilingual:** German was likely spoken alongside English although no member of the household was a reported German monolingual. This category represents potential bilinguals as based on kinships with reported German monolinguals.
5. **Presumed Monolingual English:** All adult members of the household were presumed English monolinguals. This category includes recent arrivals from England or the eastern US as well as individuals with typically British or Irish family names.

The first category is straightforward as it only applies to households in which all members were listed as German monolinguals. The second category consists only of households in which German was the sole common language. Households belonging to this category were by and large two-person households. While one person reported an ability to speak English, the other person, typically the person's spouse, parent, or adult child, was identified as a German monolingual, signifying a German-speaking household. The third category consists of larger households with at least one German monolingual. It is impossible to determine from the available data whether all members of the household spoke German, but it is likely that many or all of them did. One example of a household belonging to this category is that of the widowed parent, a German monolingual, living with his or her English-speaking adult child and spouse. Undoubtedly, the widowed parent's adult child spoke German, but it may have been the case that the spouse did not.

This third category extends to other, more complex household constellations as well. We documented numerous accounts of households in which adult children lived with their German-monolingual parents. What this means is that while German was indisputably spoken in the home, it may not have been the preferred language between the bilingual adult siblings. They may have preferred to speak English, not German, with each other. We should note too that, although much less frequent, there were a few accounts of households in which the adult children, not the parents, were documented German monolinguals. Other instances of third-category households involve children who were recorded in the census schedules as German monolinguals. Although this was an oversight given their instructions to obtain information on the English ability of residents ten and older only (paragraph 133 of "Instructions to Enumerators"), enumerators often recorded whether children could

speak English.¹⁸ The three-person household of William Graunke is one case in point. William and his wife, Mary, reported an ability to speak English, whereas Edwin, their six-year-old son, was recorded as a German monolingual. The fact that the enumerator mistakenly documented Edwin, a resident younger than ten, as a German monolingual reveals a layer of detail about the Graunke household that would otherwise be lost. German, not English, was the dominant language in the home. Indeed, knowing the language ability of children is valuable for what it tells us about language use and the learning of English at the level of the household.

The fourth category consists of possibly bilingual households. It is made up of households in which there were no German monolinguals but where some evidence suggests that its members spoke German too and were therefore bilingual. For instance, the household of Lewis and Emma Dornfeld, a married couple in their mid-twenties, typifies the majority of households belonging to this category. Lewis and Emma, born in Germany, reported an ability to speak English. Whereas birthplace can hardly be seen as a hallmark of bilingualism, the fact that the young couple lived next door to Lewis's father, a documented German monolingual, is. Lewis, as the son of a German monolingual, must have surely spoken German and the likelihood that Emma, his wife, also spoke German is quite high.

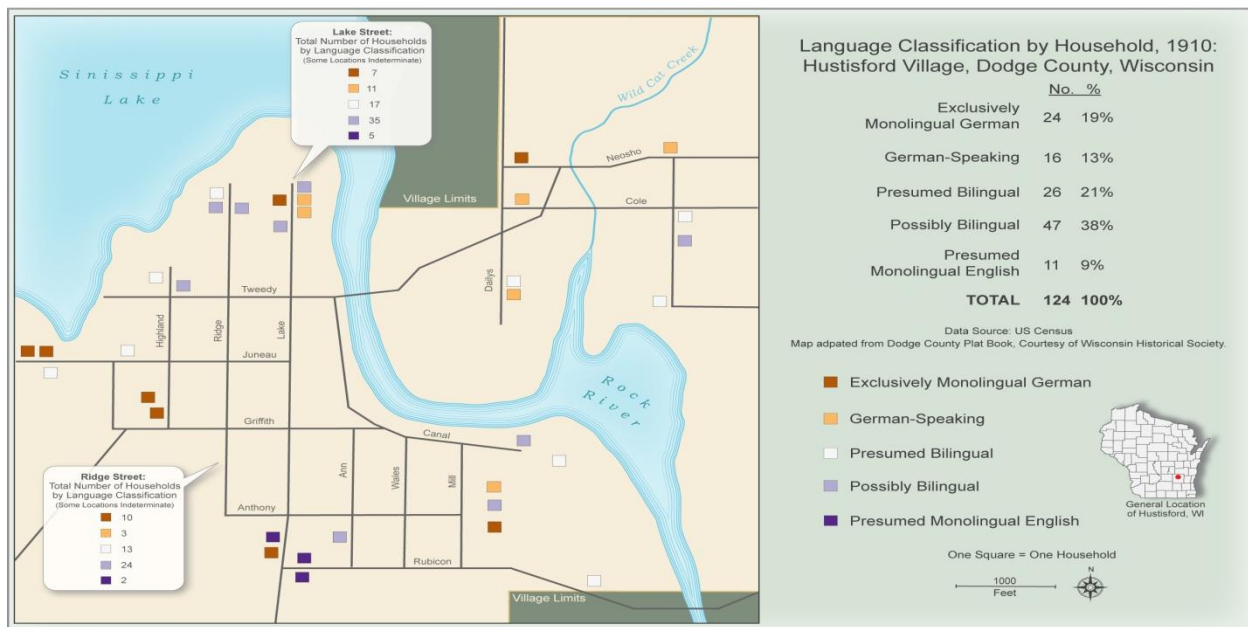
The fifth category consists of presumed English-monolingual households. Given that Hustisford was initially settled by Anglo-Americans, one might presume that households with Irish and British family names, such as Monaghan,¹⁹ Randall, Kennedy, and Baker, did not house any bilinguals. And when we consider that recent arrivals to Hustisford were from states located in the northeastern region of the US, like Maine, New York, or New Jersey, or from points of origin abroad, such as England, Canada, or Ireland, the likelihood that these individuals also spoke German diminishes. And yet there is ancillary evidence to suggest that some number of these residents in Anglo-American households could, in fact, speak German. The extended Randall family, made up of three separate households headed by the brothers Byrne S. Randall (fifty-one years), Ernest Randall (forty-eight years), and Edgar Randall (forty-six years) respectively, is a prime example of presumed English monolinguals apt to be bilingual. The brothers and their sister, Flora E. Ruder (thirty-six years), were born in Wisconsin, as were their own children, although their parents came to Hustisford from New York and Maine. Byrne's wife, Anne E. Randall, and Ernest's wife, Cara M. Randall, were born in England. We have reason to believe though that Chester Randall, the twenty-two-year-old son of Byrne and Anne, spoke German. As discussed in the next section, church records list him as a confirmed member of a German-speaking Lutheran congregation. It seems likely that if Chester spoke German then some other members of the Randall family as well as other families of English-speaking background also spoke German. Therefore, the number of households belonging to this fifth category is surely an overestimate.

With that conceptual framework in place, let us return to the geographic perspective. Where did the German monolinguals live in respect to each other and

others in terms of whole households? One might assume that they were grouped in isolated pockets or perhaps scattered along the far outskirts of town. Closer observation of the data, however, reveals a community in which German monolinguals, bilinguals, and presumed English monolinguals lived interspersed. In fact, they lived right next door to each other as shown in the following two maps of Hustisford in 1910.

The first map illustrates the language classification by household for Hustisford Village with two of its central streets, Lake and Ridge, described in further detail in two respective insets.

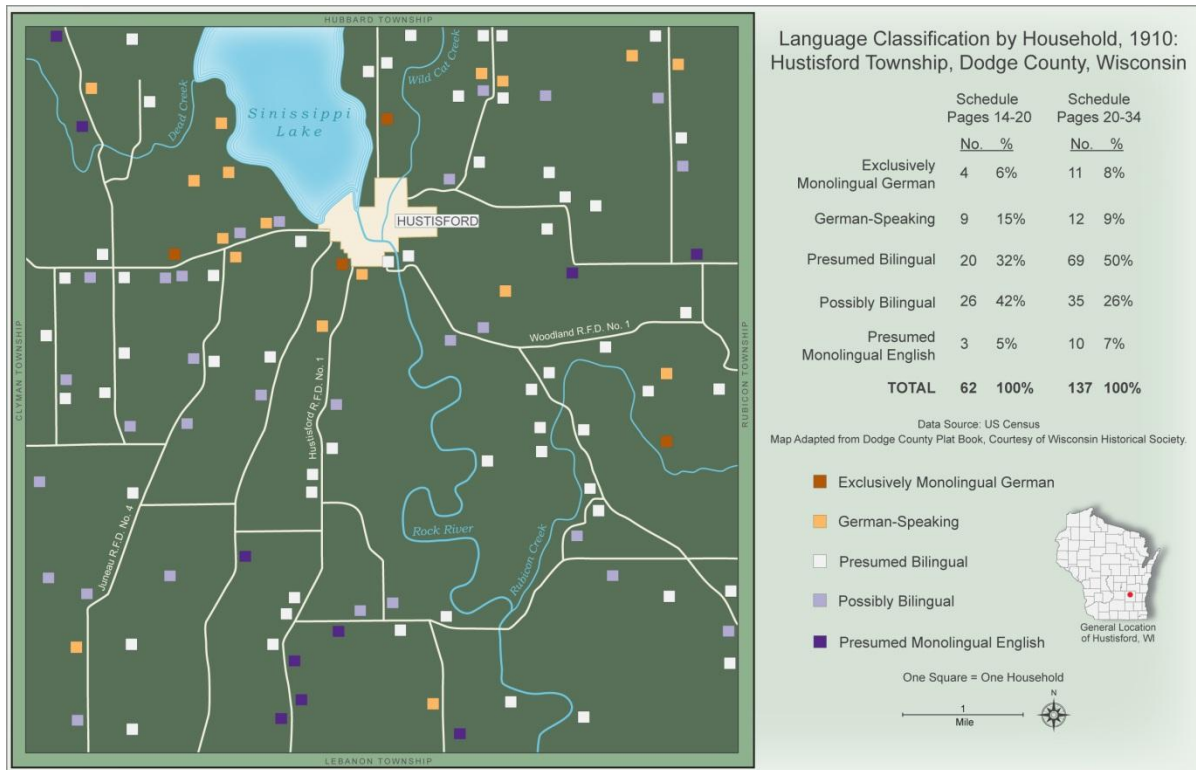
Map 2. Language Classification by Household, Hustisford Village, 1910



There are notably more exclusively German-monolingual households, particularly in the western part of the village, compared to presumed English-monolingual households. Moreover, Lake and Ridge Streets illustrate just how predominately bilingual Hustisford really was with seventeen households documented as exclusively German monolingual and fourteen others as German-speaking. Only seven households were presumed English monolingual. Thirty households housed presumed bilinguals, and another fifty-nine had ties to German monolinguals and bilinguals.

A second map shows an enlarged snapshot of the distribution of households in the broader administrative unit, Hustisford Township.

Map 3. Language Classification by Household, Hustisford Township, 1910



It is evident that exclusively German-monolingual households were not confined to the fringes of town as illustrated in this map. In fact, the network distances from the geographic means of the five categories to the center of Hustisford Village are suggestive. Mark Livengood, the cartographer who prepared our maps, found that the means of the most German-speaking households (category 2; category 1 was not represented in this sample) were closer to the village, with the means of presumed monolingual English households (category 5) furthest from the village center.²⁰ To be sure, the only obvious linguistic concentration is a pocket of presumed monolingual English households in the southern and southwestern portion of the map.

These maps demonstrate that Hustisford’s German monolinguals appear to have been generally integrated into the broader fabric of local society. The number of households belonging to each of the five respective language categories is displayed in Table 3 and expressed in percentages.

Table 3. Households by Language Classification in Hustisford, 1910

	Number	Percentage (%)
1. Exclusively Monolingual German	49	13%
2. German-Speaking	40	11%
3. Presumed Bilingual	128	34%
4. Possibly Bilingual	132	35%
5. Presumed Monolingual English	26	7%
TOTAL	375	100%

German was spoken as the home language in 24 percent of the households examined, judging from the census data. Of those, 13 percent was classified as exclusively German monolingual while the other 11 percent consisted of a mix of German monolinguals and bilinguals. At least a third (34 percent) of all households examined in Hustisford was unquestionably bilingual as there was at least one German monolingual, if not more, in each of the households put into this category. At least 35 percent of households was possibly bilingual as determined by family ties to German monolinguals. Although only 7 percent of households consisted of people presumed to be English monolingual, we know that this percentage, although low, is likely inflated. All in all, Hustisford was a profoundly bilingual community, a place with a social structure that did not exclude German-monolingual participation.

Churches

Religious affiliations in the US are often good indicators of national or ethnic ancestry. Americans worship even today with those they identify most closely with. In Wisconsin, for instance, Irish and German Catholic churches are often located directly across from one other. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously referred to Sunday at eleven o'clock as "the most segregated hour in America," and that pattern has remained to the present.²¹ Churches thus provide a good testing ground to establish just how integrated German monolinguals were with bilinguals and presumed English monolinguals.

In this section, we examine the church records of Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church, which was founded in 1858 and by 1868 operated a school.

Excerpts from the congregation’s historical records are shown in Table 4 and exemplify how prominent German was in the congregation.²²

Table 4. Excerpts from the Historical Record of Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1983

Year	Excerpts
1871	resolution that all subjects in the church school be taught in German
1872	permission granted allowing instruction in reading and writing in English for the upper grades of the school
1893	first mention of a sermon delivered in English (isolated event)
1917	resolution permitting an occasional English service but only in the evening
1926	congregation agreed to having both German and English services every second Sunday in the morning
1944	German no longer used in the school
1946	transition made to recording congregational meetings in English
1964	request for two services in English each Sunday and fewer German services
1975	no more regular German services

In short, the congregation’s transition from German to English took a hundred years and did not get underway until well after 1910, the year from which our census data are drawn. One might imagine, then, that many members of the congregation in 1910 were German monolinguals. To test this assumption, we cross-referenced the published listings of the members of confirmation classes with individuals from the 1910 Census. To our surprise, we were unable to identify any German monolinguals listed in the congregation’s records. That is, members of this congregation appear to have reported themselves as English speakers in the census and therefore can be considered bilingual.

The example of Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church allows us to see patterns of bilingualism from another angle. It is clear that in 1910 German was the exclusive language of the church. They did not even allow the teaching of reading and writing of English in their school in 1871 but loosened requirements to allow it in “the upper grades” in 1872. During World War I, in 1917, they passed a resolution

“permitting an occasional English service, but only in the evening” and only began regular English services a decade later.

Striking is that a number of those confirmed in the congregation during this era had English and Irish surnames and/or forenames. We cite some non-German family names along with their corresponding confirmation year to illustrate our point:

1899	Lillie Stewart
1901	Adelheide Stewart
1911	Walther Dyer
1913	Chester Randall
1918	Mabel Baldwin

The church services and, as far as we can tell, all church business, including confirmation classes, were done in German. This means that Chester Randall and Mabel Baldwin must have been proficient in German. From this, we draw two conclusions: first, among many bilinguals in Hustisford, German was the dominant language; and second, at least a handful of Anglo-American families was proficient in German. As the earlier discussion of presumed English speakers shows, evidence such as this strongly suggests a profoundly bilingual community with even presumed English-monolingual households, such as the Randall household, showing characteristics that imply they were bilingual.

These conclusions are further underpinned by the historical accounts of another church congregation. The Union Church (now Presbyterian) was “established when the Yankee settlers of the village merged with a group of the Germans, perhaps German Methodists.”²³ Even this congregation, which was founded by Anglo-Americans, was likely bilingual, at least in the first few decades as indicated by the following quotation: “In the cornerstone are two Bibles, one German and one English” (23). Those who were not German monolingual were predominately bilingual, and institutional life was conducted in German. That is, members of the ethnically and linguistically Anglo community were in close contact with German speakers and worshipped in a setting that must have been to some extent bilingual.

Even churches in Hustisford do not show as much separation as one might have thought. In this sense, one’s identity or belonging in the community was not dictated by language (or ancestry).

Schools

School has been traditionally seen as an instrument for the promotion of English, in particular during the “Americanization crusades” of the era under discussion here.²⁴ This no doubt helps drive often intense struggles over bilingual education and related topics today. Evidence on schooling in Hustisford and on language in schools is then

especially valuable for understanding how marginal German monolinguals may have been.

German Americans, in comparison to Anglo-Americans, were especially committed to sending their children to school.²⁵ It may at first seem paradoxical that German immigrants to Wisconsin emphasized their children's education and yet did not prioritize their learning of English (or even learn English themselves). This can be partially explained by the fact that schools in the nineteenth century were run locally. Thus, every district was considered "a separate, independent republic."²⁶ This independence meant that in most of the German communities "every subject was taught in German."²⁷ Indeed, it was not until 1915 that Wisconsin created a state Board of Education, so control of schooling was very local until that time.²⁸ Although there were various laws and directives prescribing English as the language of instruction prior to this date, in practice no one was generally in a position to oversee this. Teachers and school administrators for the most part continued to teach in German.

The first school in Hustisford, a so-called "select school" (private school), taught the children of John Hustis and his acquaintances in 1846 and by 1850 was converted into a public school, as noted above. Members of the Bethany Church founded their own school in 1868, and by 1877 there was in addition a "free German school," that is, a quasi-official, nondenominational school. Available records report the existence of nine schools in and around Hustisford during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although we know very little about most, it is clear that German was not quickly or willingly abandoned in favor of English. A teacher's contract in 1917 from the school in Sloping Valley (near Hustisford) stipulated that "the children shall be advised to talk the English language at school as much as possible."²⁹

Despite all this, many people today assume at the very least that children had to learn English as a school subject. Indeed, some teachers were fully qualified to teach in German but lacked in English proficiency. Three excerpts from Joseph Schafer's classic work *Four Wisconsin Counties* illustrate experiences from the region east of Hustisford:

An old settler in the town of Fredonia, District No. 1, testifies that "the years that he and his wife attended the school . . . up to the year 1875 the school was conducted in the German language, *the teacher could not teach [speak] the English language well enough to teach others.*

To many of [the teachers] *English was decidedly an alien tongue, handled with difficulty.* The necessity of explaining, in German, to the German children many points arising in the study of reading, arithmetic, and the other prescribed

subjects, created a strong temptation to use that language almost exclusively even where it was forbidden by law.

In other schools, where the work is done exclusively in the English language, you will find a great many of the German children absent, some inconsiderate parents saying they want their children to learn German not English, but the more intelligent urging that they can learn English only through the medium of German.³⁰

In communities where teachers themselves could hardly speak English or spoke it grudgingly, and where parents insisted that their children learn German, not English, it is no wonder that in 1927 it was reported that “in a number of districts the German children are unable to understand or speak English” (240). In 1930, similarly, Ebert and Zurstadt report movement toward English but the persistence of “islands” of German where children still came to school speaking only German:

Vergleichen wir den gegenwaertigen Stand der deutschen Sprache in unsern Kreisen mit dem vor einem Jahrzehnt, so finden wir, dasz sich in den meisten Gegenden ein bedeutender Umschwung vollzogen hat. Die englische Sprache hat die deutsche verdraengt. Das sieht man auch in unsern Schulen. Waehrend frueher die Anfaenger zum groszen Teil die deutsche Sprache sprechen oder doch verstehen konnten, so ist jetzt das Gegenteil der Fall. Die Landessprache ist die Muttersprache der Kinder geworden. Es gibt allerdings noch Sprachinseln, in denen die alte Ordnung herrscht, doch wird dieser Zustand an solchen Orten sich mit der Zeit aendern.

If we compare the current state of the German language in our circles with that of a decade ago, we find that in most areas, a significant change has taken place. English has displaced German. One sees that in our schools, too. While earlier beginners mostly could still speak or at least understand German, the situation is now the opposite. The language of the land has become the language of our children. There are still language islands where the old order still holds, but this situation will change in such places with time.³¹

Given the circumstances, it is not surprising that German American children at the time were able to remain German monolingual even while attending school.

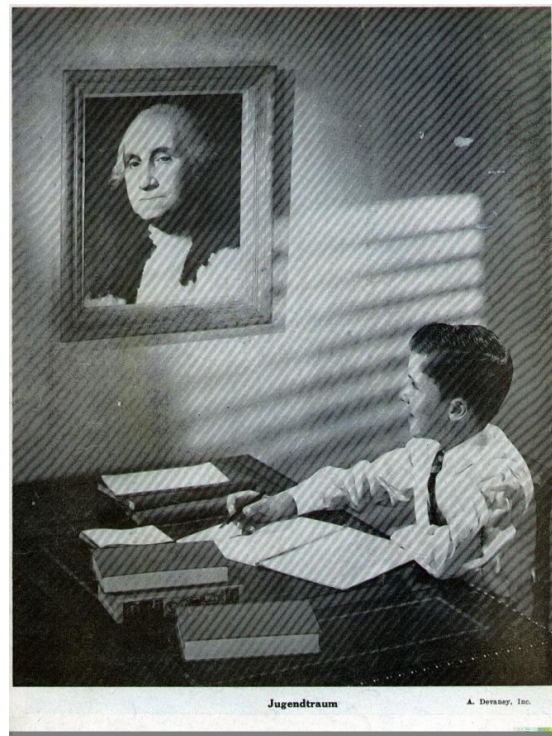
More generally, German children were reported more likely to attend school than “Yankee” children, so that if we think of schooling as a gauge of integration into broader society, Anglo children may have been more marginal in some limited sense.

American Identity

English is widely seen today as a global lingua franca, and it is unquestionably displacing a vast number of other languages, as speakers shift to English along with a few other languages. A century ago, its status must have appeared quite different in some parts of the American Midwest, where immigrants remained monolingual long after their arrival in many areas. In communities across southeastern Wisconsin, the Upper Midwest, and far beyond, German was widely spoken and, as shown above, remained the only language of surprising numbers of people—people who were not geographically or economically marginalized, and people who sometimes were better educated than their Anglo neighbors. Letters and published sources alike suggest that they identified strongly with German culture, sometimes with hubris; statements about superiority to Anglo-American culture abound, often underscored by mention of Goethe, Schiller, or other canonical literary figures. This took place in the context of debates over immigration to the United States. For German Americans, immigrant identity was most famously at issue during the World War I era, but their place in American society has been contested since Revolutionary War times. Most relevant here are the Nativist and Know Nothing movements of the mid-nineteenth century, the time of large-scale immigration to Wisconsin, and the turn of the twentieth century, just before the period under discussion here.³²

Scholars have rightly drawn attention to the ways that immigrant identities of this type are constructed and maintained in diasporic settings.³³ As Kristine Horner recently stated, such communities engage in both “internal struggle” and “external projection.”³⁴ Like all people, German-speaking immigrants to Wisconsin and their descendants identified themselves in multiple, socially negotiated ways.³⁵ And this widely—if not universally—included an emphasis on being American. This identification was manifested in many ways publicly, and evidence of that survives today in graphic images. Two covers from the women’s magazine *Die Hausfrau* (The Housewife) illustrate the point (see Figures 2 and 3). This magazine was long published in Milwaukee, not far from Hustisford, and was widely read in eastern Wisconsin and nationally. On the covers and in their pages, the tone was often hyperpatriotic from the nineteenth through the twentieth centuries.

Figures 2 and 3. Hyperpatriotic Images from *Die Hausfrau* in 1917 (left) and 1957 (right)



Left: German translation of “The Star-Spangled Banner” with flag imagery from *Die Hausfrau*, 1917. (Source: Cover of *Die Hausfrau*, June 1917. Image from the digital collections of the Max Kade Institute, University of Wisconsin–Madison.)

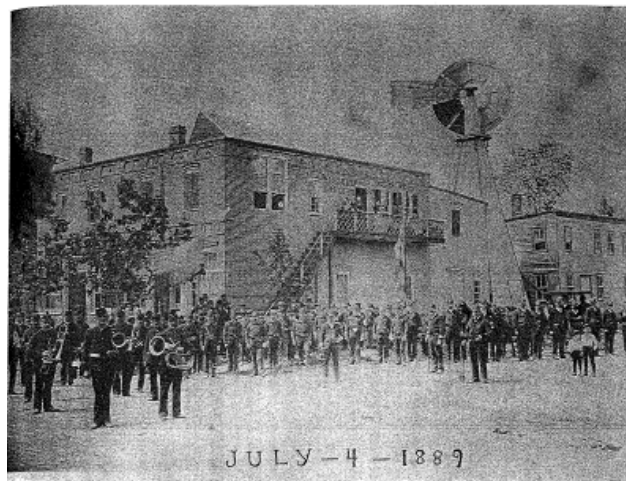
Right: “Youthful dream” of a boy staring at a portrait of George Washington. (Source: Back cover of *Die Hausfrau*, February 1956. Image from the digital collections of the Max Kade Institute, University of Wisconsin–Madison.)

The cover on the left shows a German translation of the Star Spangled Banner from the summer of 1917. While it typifies the constant flag imagery in the magazine throughout its history, this example appeared while World War I was well underway and the United States was about to enter the fight against Germany.³⁶ The photo on the right, from the Cold War era, depicts a diligent young boy and his *Jugendtraum* (childhood dream) as he admires George Washington, who served as the commander of the Continental Army in the American Revolutionary War and as the first president of the US. This boy’s esteem for one of America’s most symbolic patriots, as captured in this photo, epitomizes his American pride.

Indeed, similar images abound in Hustisford’s local publications, particularly around national holidays. German speakers are noted, especially in the American

context, for their love of festivals.³⁷ Scholars like Hoelscher have documented that German speakers eagerly adopted and adapted principal American festivals, like the Fourth of July.³⁸ Hustisford was clearly part of this pattern. The image below shows the local band at its 1889 Fourth of July performance, twenty-one years before the census data discussed above. With little doubt, many of those pictured here were German monolinguals.

Figure 4.



The Hustisford Band gathered in front of F.J. Steinborn Furniture and Picture Gallery S.W. corner Lake and Griffith Sts. — the wooden windmill drove the machinery. saw. etc.

Hustisford Band, gathered for the 4th of July, 1889. (Source: Gloria Hafemeister, Mary Zastrow, Lois Van Dyke, et al., *Celebrating Hustisford's 150 Year Heritage* (Portage, WI: O'Brion Agency/Hustisford Sesquicentennial Committee, 1987), 141.)

The aim in showing these “external” projections of identity is to emphasize that, while German Americans may have strongly identified with their imported culture and language, they also constructed and even embraced American identities.³⁹ And these identities were not mutually exclusive. One group, the *Amerikanisch-deutsche Katholiken Versammlung*, wrote that they were “echt deutsch und echt katholisch zugleich . . . und obendrein hierzulande auch gute Amerikaner,” that is, “genuinely German and at the same time genuinely Catholic . . . and on top of that good Americans here in this country.”⁴⁰ Early twentieth-century residents in Hustisford, we can conclude, enjoyed a time when it was possible to be both a German monolingual and a “good American.”

Conclusion and Implications

Contrary to a whole set of beliefs and claims found among the public, commentators, and occasionally academics, the findings presented here show that a German-monolingual life in the early twentieth century was entirely possible—even in a township founded by Anglo-Americans. Wisconsin German monolinguals appear to have been generally integrated into the broader fabric of local society socially, economically, and geographically. Even the most important institutions in the township, namely churches and schools, enabled and supported a German-monolingual existence. Whatever the extent to which these data can be generalized, learning English in the US has at least not always been a precondition for one's national identity as American nor of one's integration into a given community.

While German monolinguals were not, by the measures we have explored here, obviously marginal within Hustisford or other parts of southeastern Wisconsin, there may be some contexts where they were on the fringe. Future work will explore such contexts more fully. For example, in this particular community we have not seen any clear evidence to date of monolinguals in major political offices or as owners of large businesses. If this pattern is borne out, Hustisford, in this regard, was quite possibly still an exception within the region, since there were German-speaking politicians in other communities.

Hustisford, as best we can surmise, is typical of many towns in America's heartland. In light of increasing globalization, multilingualism, and multiculturalism, the historical disconnect between the reality of immigrant monolingualism in the early twentieth century and the view so widespread today that learning English has been a foundational aspect of becoming American is directly relevant to current discussions about language and immigration in the US.

After a presentation on this topic in Wisconsin, an older gentleman spoke up and explained that he had worked in and around the Hustisford area that had remained monolingual for generations. He offered the following: "You know, those folks have turned out to be perfectly good Americans."⁴¹ Indeed, this work suggests that they considered themselves to be "good Americans" already a century ago—before many of them had acquired English. Knowledge about immigrant monolingualism represents an entry point to recognizing that an ability to speak English has never characterized an American identity nor made a person a better citizen. The challenges and opportunities ahead are to ensure access to accurate information about the linguistic experiences of earlier immigrant groups in the US and, in so doing, to correct some of the misconceptions about non-English speakers that exist today among educators and policy makers.

Notes

Parts of this project were presented at Universität Bielefeld (February 2009), at the Germanic Linguistics Annual Conference (GLAC) in Banff, Alberta (April 2009), and at the University of Waterloo, Ontario (December 2010). The project has grown into several distinct papers: this one, another focusing on the socio-historical conditions under which an immigrant language can influence a “majority” language, and one on structural effects over time. The papers overlap in some background data. In addition to the audiences at those talks and the editors of and reviewers for this journal, we extend our thanks especially to Mark Livengood for creating the maps used here and discussions about cartography; without him, this would be a far different paper. We are also grateful to the following for comments and discussions on the topic: Angela Bagwell, Joshua Bousquette, Marianne Egger, Ben Frey, Mark Loudon, Felecia Lucht, Ben Marquez, Mike Olson, Antje Petty, Carol Pfaff, Kristine Stilwell, and Dilara Tepeli, but we alone are responsible for errors.

¹ “Tom Tancredo Opens Up Tea Party Event (Racist?) Literacy Test for Voters (LotsofSecrets.com),” YouTube video, 4:44, opening address at the National Tea Party Convention, Gaylord Opryland Hotel and Convention Center, Nashville, TN, February 5, 2010, posted by “LOSNewsTeam,” February 8, 2010, <http://youtu.be/u27YopczkF4>. The relevant passage begins at 48 seconds.

² U.S. English, Inc., “Official English: Why Is Official English Necessary?” accessed March 6, 2010, <http://www.us-english.org/view/10>.

³ While it is true in some sense that immigrants have always adopted English, many of them were monolingual for literally centuries—Pennsylvania Germans, New Mexican Spanish speakers, and others, and of course much of the shift to English has been driven by tremendous governmental pressure. For discussion and references, see James Crawford, *At War with Diversity: US Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety* (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2000).

⁴ U.S. English, Inc., “Official English.”

⁵ Michael Reagan, “English: The Vanishing Language,” *Human Events*, August 25, 2006, <http://www.humanevents.com/2006/08/25/english-the-vanishing-language/>.

⁶ See, for example, Miranda E. Wilkerson and Joseph Salmons, “‘Good Old Immigrants of Yesteryear,’ Who Didn’t Learn English: Germans in Wisconsin,” *American Speech* 83, no. 3 (2008): 259–83; Teresa G. Labov, “English Acquisition by Immigrants to the United States at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” *American Speech* 73, no. 4 (1998): 368–98; and Walter D. Kamphoefner, “German American Bilingualism: *cui malo?* Mother Tongue

and Socioeconomic Status among the Second Generation in 1940,” *International Migration Review* 28, no. 4 (1994): 846–64.

⁷ Wilkerson and Salmons, ““Good Old Immigrants.””

⁸ Mary Beth Schlemper, “The Regional Construction of Identity and Scale in Wisconsin’s Holyland” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2003), 6.

⁹ On the experience of German immigrants in Wisconsin, see Heike Bungert, Cora Lee Kluge, and Robert C. Ostergren, eds., *Wisconsin German Land and Life* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006). For a more general synopsis of ethnic and immigration history, see also Frederick C. Luebke, *Germans in the New World: Essays in the History of Immigration* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

¹⁰ The animated map is available online at Mark Livengood, “Percentage of Wisconsin Population Born in Germany, by County, 1870–1950,” Wisconsin Englishes, University of Wisconsin–Madison, March 2010, <http://csumc.wisc.edu/wep/mapping/GermansinWiscSEPT29.html>.

¹¹ Joseph Schafer, *Four Wisconsin Counties: Prairie and Forest* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1927), 76.

¹² See Wilkerson and Salmons, ““Good Old Immigrants.””

¹³ United States Census Bureau, “1910 United States Federal Census,” available online at Ancestry.com, <http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=7884>.

¹⁴ Wilkerson and Salmons, ““Good Old Immigrants.””

¹⁵ Discussion and further references can be found in Wilkerson and Salmons, ““Good Old Immigrants.””

¹⁶ A more detailed discussion of these reports can be found in Wilkerson and Salmons, ““Good Old Immigrants,”” 271.

¹⁷ See Joshua Bousquette, “On Immigrant Language Maintenance in Randolph Township, WI: The Interaction between Modernization, Verticalization and the Division of Labor” (unpublished manuscript, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2010).

¹⁸ This was noted also by Wilkerson and Salmons, ““Good Old Immigrants,”” 280; and Labov, “English Acquisition,” 394.

¹⁹ Ancestry.com lists Monaghan as a possible alternate spelling of Monaghan.

²⁰ Mark Livengood, personal communication to authors, June 3, 2011.

²¹ See, for instance, George H. Gallup Jr., “The Most Segregated Hour,” *Gallup*, July 9, 2002, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/6367/most-segregated-hour.aspx>.

- ²² Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church, *By God's Grace, Bethany, 1858–1983: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (Hustisford, WI: Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1983), 5–15.
- ²³ Gloria Hafemeister, Mary Zastrow, Lois Van Dyke, et al., *Celebrating Hustisford's 150 Year Heritage* (Portage, WI: O'Brien Agency/Hustisford Sesquicentennial Committee, 1987), 23.
- ²⁴ See Elena Vesselinov, "Americanization," in *Encyclopedia of Social Problems*, ed. Vincent N. Parrillo (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 44–45.
- ²⁵ Schafer, *Four Wisconsin Counties*, 240.
- ²⁶ See Richard N. Current, *The History of Wisconsin*, vol. II, ed. William Fletcher Thompson (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1976), 163.
- ²⁷ Current, *History of Wisconsin*, vol. II, 165.
- ²⁸ See John D. Buenker, *The History of Wisconsin*, vol. IV, ed. William Fletcher Thompson (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1998), 392.
- ²⁹ Hustisford Public Schools, *Proud Heritage: Hustisford Schools, 1846–1976* (Hustisford, WI: Hustisford Public Schools, 1976), 3.
- ³⁰ Schafer, *Four Wisconsin Counties*, 235, 237, 239, emphasis ours.
- ³¹ E. Ebert and H. M. Zurstadt, *Lehrplan für den Unterricht in der deutschen Sprache in den lutherischen Elementarschulen und Anleitung für den Gebrauch desselben: Verabfasst im Auftrage des Lehrplankomitees der Allgemeinen Schulbehörde der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1930), 2, translation ours. See also Wilkerson and Salmons, "Good Old Immigrants," 273.
- ³² For the history of xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States with a focus on language, see Crawford, *At War with Diversity*. On the Know Nothings in Wisconsin, see Robert C. Nesbit, *The History of Wisconsin*, vol. III, ed. William Fletcher Thompson (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1985), 144–45, 231–33, and elsewhere; and on turn-of-the-century anti-foreign sentiments in the state, Buenker, *History of Wisconsin*, vol. IV, 184–85, and elsewhere.
- ³³ See Janet M. Fuller, "Language and Identity in the German Diaspora," in *German Diasporic Experiences: Identity, Migration, and Loss*, ed. Mathias Schulze, James M. Skidmore, David G. John, Grit Liebscher, and Sebastian Siebel-Achenbach (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), 3–19.
- ³⁴ Kristine Horner, "Language, Citizenship and (Trans)nationalism in Multilingual Luxembourg" (paper presented at the WUN Conference on Representing and Experiencing Transnationalism: Germanic Languages and Cultures in Global Perspective, Madison, WI, March 25–26, 2010).

³⁵ See Anya Peterson Royce, *Ethnic Identity: Strategies of Diversity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

³⁶ For a broad historical overview of German Americans in the Midwest during World War I, see Katja Wüstenbecker, *Deutsch-Amerikaner im Ersten Weltkrieg: US-Politik und nationale Identitäten im Mittleren Westen* [German Americans in World War I: U.S. politics and national identities in the Midwest] (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007).

³⁷ On the centrality of celebration to defining German American identity, see, for example, Kathleen Neils Conzen, “Ethnicity as Festive Culture: Nineteenth-Century German America on Parade,” in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 44–76; and Heike Bungert, “Deutschamerikanische Sangerfeste und Lieder als Medium der Ethnizitatsbildung, 1849–1914,” *Lied und populare Kultur/Song and Popular Culture* 55 (2010). On the differences across various “German” groups in how they celebrated, see Heike Bungert, “Regional Diversity in Celebrating Regional Origin: German-American Volksfeste, 1870–1920,” in *Regionalism in the Age of Globalism*, vol. 2, *Forms of Regionalism*, ed. Lothar Honnighausen, Anke Ortlepp, James Peacock, Niklaus Steiner, and Carrie Matthews (Madison, WI: Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2005), 93–115.

³⁸ See Steven D. Hoelscher, *Heritage on Stage: The Invention of Ethnic Place in America’s Little Switzerland* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

³⁹ One exploration of the role women’s groups played in the assimilation and preservation of German immigrant identity and culture in Wisconsin is Anke Ortlepp, “Auf denn, Ihr Schwestern!” *Deutschamerikanische Frauenvereine in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1844–1914* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2004). For a thorough treatment of how German Americans viewed their own status as “new Americans” in post–Civil War America, see Alison Clark Efford, “German Immigrants and the Arc of American Citizenship during Reconstruction, 1865–1877,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* no. 46 (2010): 61–76, <http://www.ghi-dc.org/files/publications/bulletin/buo46/061.pdf>; and Alison Clark Efford, “New Citizens: German Immigrants, African Americans, and the Reconstruction of Citizenship, 1865–1877” (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2008).

⁴⁰ *Allgemeine Amerikanisch-deutsche Katholiken-Versammlung. Verhandlungen der ersten allgemeinen amerikanisch-deutschen Katholiken-Versammlung zu Chicago, Ill.* (Cincinnati: Rosenthal, 1887), 27.

⁴¹ Joseph Salmons, “German Heritage” (presentation, Middleton Area Historical Society, Middleton, WI, September 2008).

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