Integration and Identities: The Effects of Time, Migrant Networks, and Political Crises on Germans in the United States

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INTRODUCTION

> Was mir fehlt, fehlt ja alles
> Bin so ganz verlassen Hier,
> Iß zwar schön in fremden Landen
> Doch zur Heimath wird es nie[1]

The personal letters accountant Christian Sydow sent between 1857 and 1899 from across the United States to his family in Templin, in the Prussian province of Brandenburg, convey how quickly he integrated into the American economy and his enthusiasm about seeing different parts of the country through his various jobs. Yet this little poem testifies to the ties he maintained with Germany and his doubts about how to relate to his new homeland. His letters repeatedly voice his appreciation for the German communities across the United States and emphasize the emotional roots connecting him to his German family and friends in Europe.[2]

[1] What I am lacking, that is everything / I feel all alone here / Although it's nice in foreign countries / it will never be like home (112_A_18600520).

[2] In 1870 he feared that his family and friends might consider him as having disappeared (*verschollen*) when he agonized about how hard it was to get news from them.

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The relationship between migrants and their host societies, which Christian Sydow's personal experience exemplifies, is a central concern in migration studies and contemporary policy-making. Our research on the German-speaking[3] migrants in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries analyzes the interlinked dynamics of integration and belonging over an extended period of time. Based on longitudinal textual data consisting of about a thousand letters written by German migrants in the United States, this article contributes to several strands of scholarship: contemporary and historical research on immigrant integration generally; historical research on the "assimilation" of German migrants in the United States and claims that this was a "quick" process; and methodological discussions about how to study migrant integration and the sense of belonging to both new and old homelands.

Our first section will frame our research on these letters by drawing on the relevant strands of the social science literature on transnationalism and immigrant integration. We then introduce our corpus of German migrant letters and our method of analysis. We place our analysis of how "ordinary" migrants communicated their experiences of integration and their sense of belonging, in dialogue with the existing historical scholarship on German immigration in the United States.

In line with the social science research on transnationalism and immigrant integration, we hypothesize that the time spent as a migrant, the involvement in migrant networks, and political events linking the places of origin and settlement matter most for individual migrants' sense of belonging in the new homeland and their engagement with the old one. We argue that international crises affecting both the origin and destination countries are a key cross-temporal factor capable of changing a migrant's perception of integration. Such moments of crisis can renew migrants' identification with their old homeland and lead them to reassess their attachment to their new one. This problematizes any strict empirical or conceptual distinction between migrant generations.

DYNAMICS OF INTEGRATION: TIME, NETWORKS, EVENTS

Waters and Jiminez argue that because of the lack of sociological research on the nineteenth-century German and Irish migrations to the United States current scholars lack a starting-point from which to comparatively assess the role of chain-migration (2005: 119). We help fill this empirical gap by analyzing across time the self-reported integration of German migrants, understood as their active participation in U.S. economic, social, and political life. We analyze the dynamics of integration along three dimensions: changes over

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[3] The boundaries of Germany remained in flux during this period, as did the content of the label "German" as used in both the homeland and the United States. We use both "German-speaking" and "German" here to make the text more readable, but do not imply a particular border regime or nation-state.

time, the role of migrant networks, and political events. The conceptualization of integration we adopt here does not assume a linear path of integration: as Martiniello and Rath observe, "Processes of integration follow a different pace, take different forms, and have different outcomes in different settings" (2014). We draw on research on transnationalism, understood as an analytical lens, which allows for a more flexible framework with which to study integration over time (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1992; Levitt 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011; Portes and De Wind 2004: 834).

We examine here three explanatory factors. First, in research on migrants' homeland engagements, time spent in the host country often serves as a proxy for integration and generally correlates with socialization into the host society and disengagement from the homeland (Alba 1985; Gordon 1964). However, empirical research findings remain inconclusive regarding the effects of long-term migration on transnational engagement (Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003; Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002). Our research is based on a corpus of letters from German migrants to the United States that allows us to trace their patterns of engagement with their homeland over a long period. We draw upon this to empirically develop Levitt's and Glick Schiller's assertion that "assimilation and enduring transnational ties are neither incompatible nor binary opposites" (2004: 1003).

Our concern here is with the migrants' own perceptions rather than exogenous measures of integration or homeland engagement. Levitt and Glick Schiller usefully distinguish between "ways of being," which refer to "the actual social relations and practices that individuals engage in rather than to the identities associated with their actions," and "ways of belonging," referring to "practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group" (ibid.: 1010). Our study contributes to a better understanding of how migrants combine "ways of being" and "ways of belonging" over time, and the coexistence of transnational belonging and integration (Morawska 2003).

Second, social networks are closely linked to a sense of belonging and migrants' political engagement with their home and host countries (Ahmadov and Sasse 2015; Burgess 2012; Careja and Emmenegger 2012; Soysal 1997; van Tubergen, Maas, and Flap 2004). Careja and Emmenegger show that migrant flows channeled through family and community networks preserve cultural identities (2012). Yet we know too little about the formation and evolution of migrant networks and the role those networks play in maintaining or changing identity. Our corpus of letters provides insights into the establishment, purpose, and meaning of migrant networks, and in particular the role they play in shaping the sense of belonging groups of migrants express over time.

Behind the issue of the social networks stands a bigger question, or paradox, which this article addresses: German migrants in the United States

seemingly integrated quickly—and descendants of migrants frequently affirmed a sense of integration in terms of learning English and adopting American "ways of doing things" (Faust 1909; Skal 1910)—against a backdrop of relatively closed migration trajectories, concentrated settlements, and a vibrant German American cultural and associational life (Grams 2013: 23; Helbich 1988: 46; Kazal 2004).

Third, we address how concrete political events confronting the origin or host society, or both, and the general political environment in both places, affect migrants' senses of belonging. The characteristics of origin countries have featured in the perennial debate about push and pull factors motivating migration (Bade 2003; Hollifield 2004). Some analyses of migrant political participation in host countries have included broad origin characteristics as an explanatory variable, for example whether a country of origin is or is not an advanced industrial democracy (de Rooij 2012: 460). Empirical research on transnational political engagement has further distinguished between rural and urban places of origin, and between political and economic push factors, or forms of homeland politics as control or explanatory variables (Ahmadov and Sasse 2015; Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003; Guarnizo and Chaudhary 2014: 8–9; Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002).

The extent to which a host society's political environment provides opportunities for inclusion and participation also matters in how migrants politically relate to their home country (Burgess 2014; Eggert and Pilati 2014; Escobar, Arana, and McCann 2014; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010). These opportunities can shape migrant identities, which may be expressed in their partisan preferences, voter turnout, and voting behavior in homeland elections (Ahmadov and Sasse 2016; Doyle and Fidrmuc 2004; Lafleur and Sánchez-Domínguez 2014; Leal, Lee, and McCann 2012).

Ethnographic migration research and urban studies have highlighted the diversity of lived experiences within and across locations (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2009; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), but quantitative analyses of integration have only recently started to emphasize the significance of destination characteristics, and their actual effects remain unclear. For instance, Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller found no citizenship effect on transnational engagement in their study of Latin American migrants in the United States (2003), while others have found that naturalization depresses homeland engagement (Kessler 1998; Motomura 1998). Building on these efforts to capture the role of the host and origin country characteristics, we focus here on concrete political events that link the two places in order to gauge their joint significance. Our longitudinal data also reveal within-case variation in host society policies by covering periods of easy and more restrictive access to U.S. citizenship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, respectively.

In sum, we probe these three explanatory factors that have recurred in the transnationalism and immigrant integration literature: temporal aspects (time

spent in the host country), migrant networks, and political events that affect the host society and the homeland simultaneously.

Migrant letters are an evocative and as yet underexplored source:[4] "Emigrant letters supply facts, assertions, and responses to experience which cannot easily be found elsewhere, and which often provide a salutary corrective to glib generalizations from statistical aggregates" (Fitzpatrick 1994: 25). Also important is that letters had a major impact on their recipients, especially before the twentieth century, since they conveyed information that potential migrants perceived as trustworthy, and therefore as something they could base their migration decision on (Serra 2009: 133). Other sources tended to be written for a specific purpose, such as the often state-sponsored guidebooks about emigration or travel accounts about life in the United States, which were partly written by intellectuals and liberals recruited by the German authorities. During the nineteenth century these guidebooks provided, for example, practical guidance on farming (Marshall 1859) or detailed maps of places to migrate to (Bromme 1846). They often also contained a deliberate negative bias, expressing a fear of change linked to migration that was felt by those who commissioned them. During the interwar period, for example, guidebooks increasingly emphasized the patriotic duties of migrants to their host society (Barney Buel 1924) and the risks attached to emigration (Razovsky 1922).

Letters enabled "ordinary" people to directly share their impressions of life across the Atlantic and to build and preserve emotional bonds (Cancian 2010). The information, and experiences and judgments passed on via this transnational field of communication underpinned migrant identities and conveyed them to others, a process that is quite different from keeping a personal diary (Gerber 2006). The letters provided migrants with what was received as "authentic" information about their places of origin. This source of information enabled them to distinguish themselves from the dominant host culture and other migrant groups. For small groups especially, letters proved paramount to preserving their cultures (see Attebery 2007 on Swedish migrants; Liu 2005 on Chinese migrants; Serra 2009: 134 on Italian migrants; and Krabbendam 2009 on Dutch migrants). The exchange of letters also helped migrants to cope with unsettling aspects of migration (Fitzpatrick 1994).

Helbich estimates that at least 250 million letters were sent to Germany from the United States between 1820 and 1914 alone, of which about 100 million were private and the rest business mail. This intensity of transatlantic communication is staggering given that an estimated nine out of ten migrants

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[4] For a recent overview of research drawing on migrant letters, see Borges and Cancian 2016.

had only rudimentary schooling upon arrival in the United States (1987: 1–2). Until around World War I, private letters circulated between groups of people in both the host and home societies and only rarely did they constitute a private exchange between individuals. Families and village communities widely shared their letters and local newspapers reprinted some of them. Both practices illustrate the significance that recipients attached to these letters (Serra 2009: 138). As Barclay and Glaser-Schmidt put it, letters "prompted peaceful mass contacts" (1997: 11). Analyzing migrant letters as a primary source recognizes "the average immigrant as an active individual" (Baily, Ramella, and Lenaghan 1988: 2), something typically undervalued in explanations that highlight structural economic or social factors.

Migrant letters as a source come with methodological strengths and also pitfalls (Elliott, Gerber, and Sinke 2006). No letter collection is truly random or representative of the large, diverse population of migrants and their letters. Too little is known about ways in which descendants preserved letters through accident or choice. Indeed, given repeated possibilities for censorship throughout the process of writing, sharing, and collecting them, one might suppose that letters of delicate content remain underrepresented.

The corpus analyzed here began with a call in German newspapers over thirty years ago for people to share letters in family possession written by or addressed to German migrants. Today, the *Forschungsbibliothek Gotha* houses the collection.[5] Our analysis is the first to make systematic use of it, through a sub-section of around a thousand of the seven to eight thousand letters. This large corpus allows us to look beyond instructive case studies or editions based only on letter extracts.[6] The sub-section on which our analysis is based (as well as the overall letter corpus) closely maps onto the waves of German emigration, and covers both urban and rural areas, and therefore reflects both the wide spread and the geographical concentrations of settlements in the United States. There are no obvious discrepancies that would suggest a systematic bias. Further analysis by Helbich, who started the letter collection, suggests that the writers of these letters did not diverge significantly in socioeconomic terms from the overall population of migrants (Helbich and Kamphoefner 2006: 49).

Our corpus for the present analysis includes letters from the 1830s to the 1970s, with concentrations around 1850–1890, around 1900, the interwar period, and the early post-World War II period (figure 1). It includes thirty

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[5] For details, see http://www.auswandererbriefe.de/sammlung.html. Wolfgang Helbich started the collection, which Ursula Lehmkuhl now administers. We are grateful for the extensive access we were granted. Our complete dataset is publicly available at https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.4516772.

[6] In general, the process of accessing letters stored in archives on a larger scale is extremely time- and resource-intensive. Most exist only as hard copies. We studied some of the letters in digital form or as typescripts of the handwritten originals.
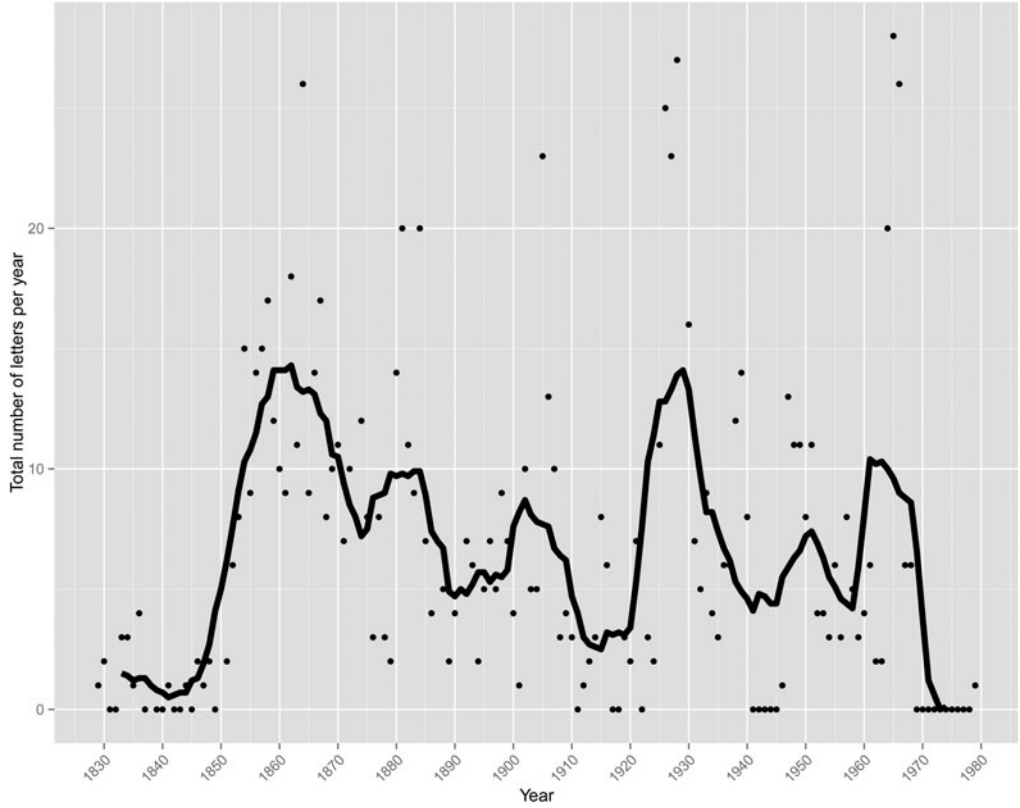
FIGURE 1   Letters sent between the United States and Germany.

series of letters. Some of these consist of letters sent by different generations within a family, sometimes over a period of a hundred years. According to the available data, during the nineteenth century the writers included small craftsmen, peasants (independent farmers and farm laborers), roofers, shoemakers, clockmakers, butcher, bakers, brewers, and millers. Between the wars, writers also worked in the American service sector, often in private homes, or in factories as technicians or laborers.

Geographically, the collection as a whole reflects the patterns of German migration across the United States, with concentrations in New York (City and State), Detroit, Wisconsin, and Texas.[7] Around 86 percent of the letters were sent from the United States to German-speaking lands, 12 percent were from German-speaking lands to the United States, and the rest were sent from Canada, South America, Mexico, Australia, or places of transit. Here we analyze only the letters with a "German" connection.[8] The geography of emigration shifted over time: initially concentrated in the southwest of German-speaking Europe, the Alemannic-Palatinate region, it gravitated to the north and then to the east from the 1830s (figure 2).[9]

NAVIGATING THE ANALYSIS OF LETTERS

With 5.5 million migrants between 1820–1920, the Germans remained the single largest group of the approximately thirty million migrants that entered the United States (Fairchild 1913: 189). In the 1820s, migrants from the German-speaking lands accounted for less than 5 percent of all immigrants, but by 1900 they were almost 25 percent of the entire U.S. foreign-born population, at just over ten million people (Immigration Commission and Dillingham 1911: 409–16). Between 1836–1845, about twenty thousand Germans, or German-speakers, arrived annually, and, exceptionally, five hundred thousand came from 1852 through 1854 (Conzen 1980). At that time German migration accounted for over half of the overall immigration into the United States.

Emigration from German-speaking lands to the United States constitutes a case of mass chain-migration par excellence. It occurred over a long time, from different locations, and upon arrival German settlements spread across the country. This case is important to understanding migrant integration and migrant's sense of belonging across time, due to these immigrants' diversity and their organizational strength in terms of extended family networks and

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[7] An interactive version of this map is available at: https://livedataoxford.shinyapps.io/german-migrantletters/. Different colors in the map indicate different letter series.

[8] Overall, 90 percent of German migrants during this period went to the United States; the rest went to Canada, Argentina, Brazil, or Australia (Helbich 1988: 19).

[9] In 1840–1844, Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria accounted for 50 percent of German migrations, stabilizing at around 25 percent by 1871–1910. Between 1871 and World War I, the northeast of the German Empire accounted for about 35 percent, and the southwest for 25 percent (Helbich 1988: 20–21).

Letters sent from 1850 to 1870

Letters sent from 1914 to 1945

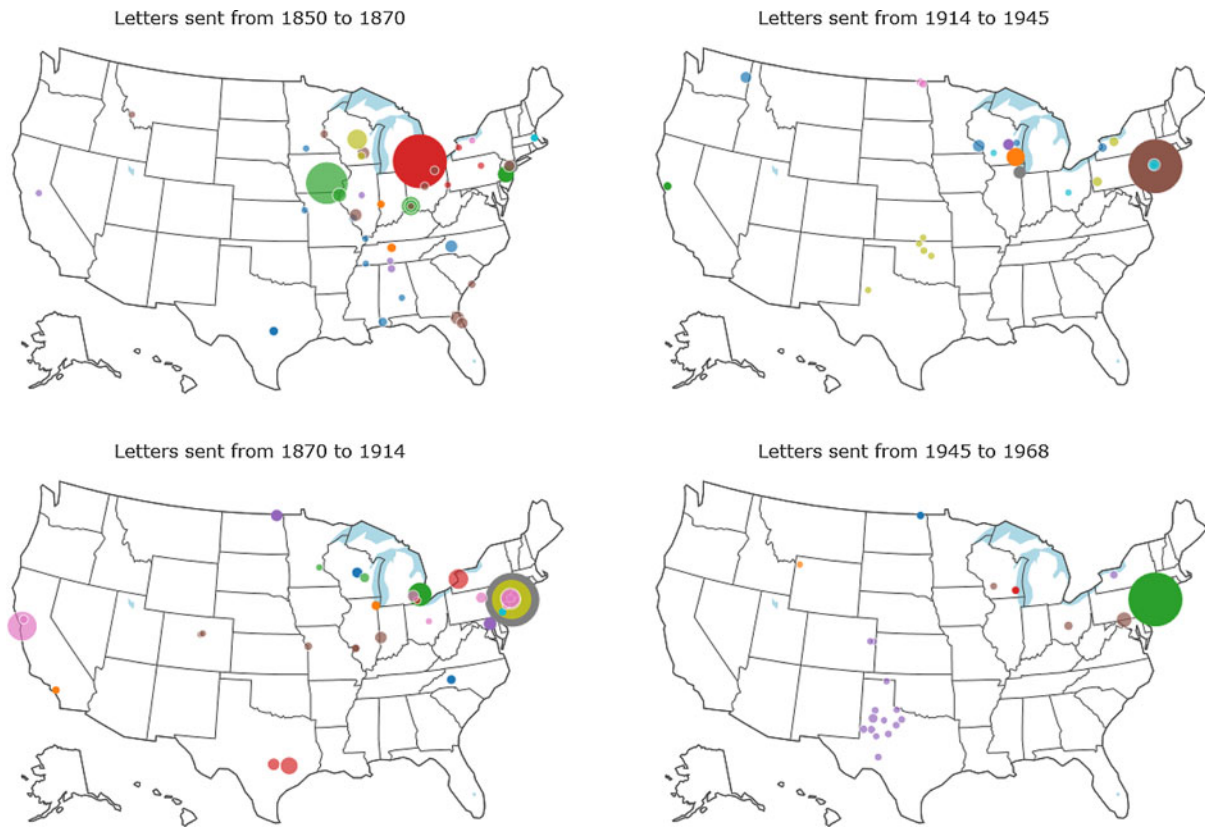Letters sent from 1870 to 1914

Letters sent from 1945 to 1968

FIGURE 2   Origins of letters over time.

associational life. It is also significant due to changes that occurred across this period in the U.S. political environment regarding immigration and Germany's rising nationalism and changing position in international politics.

To address the idiosyncratic nature of the writings of nineteenth- and twentieth-century migrants, many of whom became literate through the process of writing letters, we have developed a multi-stage method of text analysis that combines a deep level of qualitative interpretation of individual letters with a structural, quantitative examination of the corpus.[10] We hand-coded the one thousand letters based on a coding scheme we developed through an iterative process detailed in the appendix. We created the initial set of codes based on a close reading of a random sub-set of one hundred letters, and then further specified the scheme before beginning our interpretive analysis of the entire corpus. We read the individual letters focusing on key words relating to the interpretive categories of interest. For these key terms, we partly drew and expanded on a list of relevant terms that is part of the collection in the Gotha archive. The content of the letters relevant for our research was in this way condensed into code categories that, in turn, formed the basis for our quantitative and qualitative analyses. The most relevant coding categories, such as "Involvement-Integration," or "Comments-US" and "Comments-Germany," allowed us to systematically capture remarks about American and German political, economic, social, and cultural life through the various sub-codes. At an aggregate level, these code-categories help us understand the broader development of transatlantic communication. In the next section we provide structural insights into the results of the coding process and illustrate them through examples of typical letters to illustrate our methodology.[11] (The letter labels include the date, given as year, month, day.) In total, we attributed about 5,800 hits to our 150 codes. In principle, this coding process has no natural endpoint, but by working closely with the texts and given our thematic focus, there is an increasing saturation. We develop our findings in close dialogue with the existing historical scholarship on German immigration in the United States and comparative cases.

MIGRANTS' TRANSNATIONAL LIVES: THE SIMULTANEITY OF LIVED EXPERIENCES

From the 1840s to the 1870s, German-speaking migrants predominantly posted positive views about their experiences in the United States. Mass migration from Europe to America primarily reflected "the excess of unskilled labor and the demographic increase on one side, versus the fast process of

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[10] For details of a fruitful corpus-linguistic approach to analyzing Irish migrant letters, see Moreton 2012.
[11] We have refrained here from translating the often idiosyncratic German used in the referenced letters into English, since our focus is thematic rather than linguistic.

industrialization and the wide possibilities offered by a growing country on the other" (Serra 2009: 11). But, as our analysis illustrates, alongside the prospect of easily accessible agricultural land, higher salaries, and tolerance in the United States (Helbich 1988: 17), what also appealed to migrants were social equality, religious freedom, and political democracy (Taylor 1971). These latter factors were often cited in their enthusiastic writings about life in America.

The letters contain extensive commentary about the degree to which migrants felt integrated into or separated from the host country. Figure 3 summarizes the main trends in that respect, namely the relative frequency of remarks in the letters about being integrated (or not) as well as the aggregate of these values expressed by a smoothed curve over time.[12] To highlight patterns across our corpus, we express the number of hits per code as a proportion of the total number of letters sent per year. In this way we identify how many letters as a proportion of all letters in the corpus were concerned with a particular topic. We assume that within each letter the writer or writers could have written about, for instance, their positive social integration, or instead difficulties they encountered in that regard.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the majority of letters commenting on integration highlighted a feeling of belonging in the United States. The primary driving factor behind this was the ease with which migrants could become independent economic actors. The writers also referred to their social integration, frequently citing interactions in their neighborhoods, whether predominantly German or not. In particular, throughout the century an increasing feeling of neighborhood solidarity was illustrated in writings about emotional personal experiences, such as the premature death of a child (115_C_18530707) or a serious illness (115_D_18670222).

Positive remarks about integration existed alongside descriptions of adaptation difficulties, ranging from a perception that people in the United States were greedy (200_F_18810608) or had a lower work ethic (320_A_18671023) to migrants' disappointments about the new relationships they had formed (160_I_18990612). However, until the turn of the century such negative remarks tended to not call into question the dominant view of feeling at home in the United States. Only at the beginning of the twentieth century, and especially during the interwar period, did the balance between feeling integrated and feeling separated change (201_A_19270503). Following World War II, the balance tipped again when even those Germans who had made the effort to keep in touch with people "back home" no longer expressed a sense of separation from U.S. society (221_A_19660725; 281_C_19621207).

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[12] The curve linking the individual observations is calculated with a moving average of twenty years, which captures longer-term trends without losing sight of local trends.
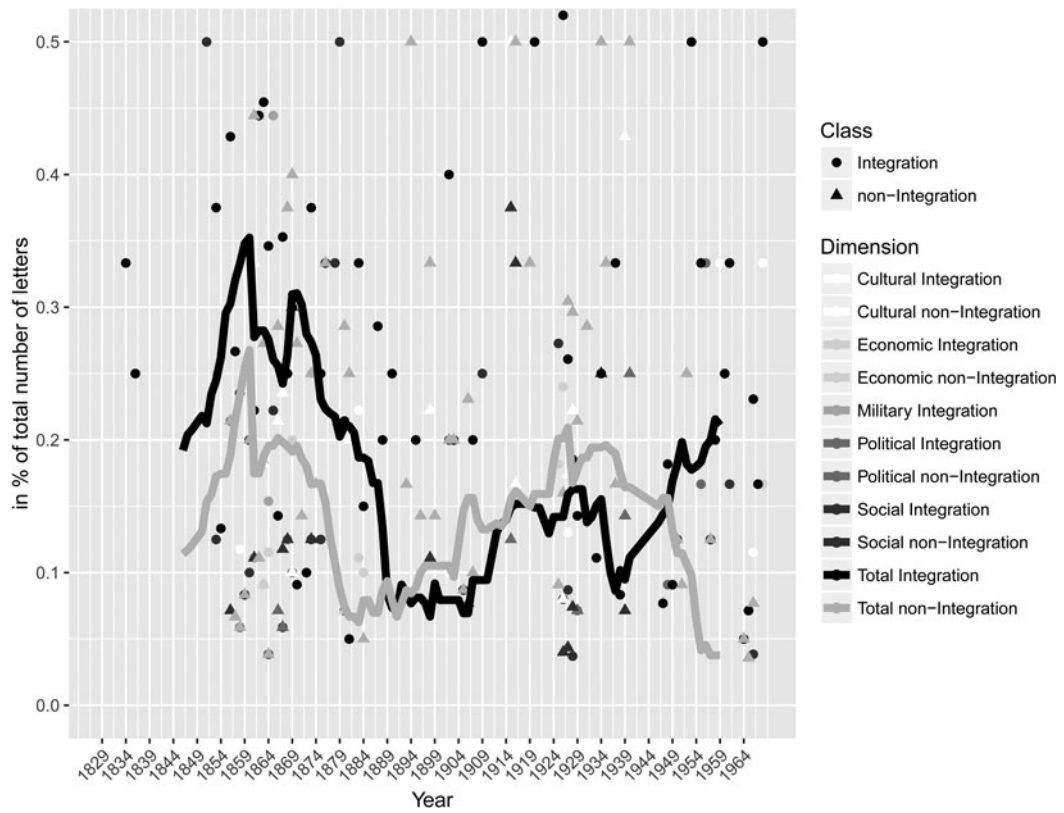
FIGURE 3   Feeling integrated or not-integrated in the United States.

Hawgood's work is an exception among the many case studies on particular localities of German immigration in the United States (see Doerries 1986: 75) in that he embeds his analysis in a threefold periodization centered on the host society environment and the organizational characteristics of the migrant community (1940). According to his periodization, during a first phase (1830–1855) settlers concentrated in Missouri, Wisconsin and Texas, deliberately maintained a distinctive German culture and considered American culture inferior to their own. During a second phase (1855–1915), Hawgood suggests, migrants increasingly realized that geographical concentrations did not prevent processes of assimilation. As a result, efforts to preserve a sense of being German increasingly privileged psychological over geographical borders, even if upholding this cultural identity could mean foregoing economic opportunities. During World War I, Hawgood and others have argued, German identity ceased to exist as a distinct entity in public life. The German language press gradually disappeared and churches switched to holding services in English. From 1870 to World War I, comparisons of life in Germany and that in the United States shifted from rather black and white contrasts to shades of grey. The general image of America as a free country prevailed, but letters also referenced the longer working hours, the effects of the (agricultural) depression, strikes, modern technology destroying traditional crafts, political corruption, lack of social security, crime in big cities, and discrimination against Germans (Helbich 1997: 127–28).

These temporal markers of the integration trajectory of German migrants cover significant variation that resonates in our cross-temporal analysis of different dimensions of integration. In the next three sections we will address the three guiding themes derived from the literature on integration and link them with studies of the speed with which German migrants assimilated.

Political and Economic Integration over Time

The letters in our corpus convey that those German-speaking migrants who arrived during the first half of the nineteenth century felt swiftly integrated into and identified closely with the United States. Leaving an authoritarian and only loosely connected union of German states behind, migrants endorsed the experience of a comparatively "free" and "democratic" political reality and generally disapproved of German politics. Scholarship has shown that among ordinary German migrants the glorification of American values was widespread, against the backdrop of the military conscription and feudal, state, and church dues and taxes that people suffered at home (Roeber 1997: 40). During the interwar period, many objected to German politics but also expressed their hope that the Weimar Republic would consolidate and defeat the rise of Nazism. At the same time, increasingly critical comments about the United States became more widespread, in particular in response to the anti-German propaganda that was rife at the time.

It is noteworthy that political topics were a central concern in migrants' letters irrespective of the time period or the writers' socio-economic backgrounds. Judgments were informed by explicit comparisons of the origin and the host countries. Figure 4 visualizes the extent to which the content of the letters includes such political discussions, and distinguishes between explicitly "positive" and "negative" views related to politics in the United States and Germany, respectively.

The early wave of approval of U.S. politics included general appraisals of the United States as a free country (115_E_18500125; 154_E_18721006.1; 162_A_18541022; 270_A_18561128) that was not overly bureaucratic (154_E_18730318), and was open to migrants (140_H_18601109). Often highlighted were the low levels of compulsory church taxes (*Abgaben*), the absence of "*Fürstengesindel*" (literally, "aristocratic rabble"), and a perceived equality between people (140_C_18540129; 115_E_18500125). Some migrants who were religious felt that the freedom of conscience in the United States amounted to a genuine liberation (115_E_18510126; 140_G_18571028).

Such early impressions often led to decisions to affirm a new identity by volunteering to fight and defend the new home country (112_A_18650324; 115_E_18510126; 162_A_18620202), in sharp contrast to the military conscription practiced in the places of origin (154_E_18721006.1), and indeed some had emigrated precisely to avoid conscription (154_E_18730318). One also encounters remarks about migrants volunteering to fight in the Civil War (140_C_18610910) or the Spanish-American War (160_I_18980429). One letter writer opined that "human beings" (*Menschen*) rather than soldiers fought for the United States (320_A_18630330). Others conveyed pride in the Civil War achievements of Germans (140_I_18620330) and their contributions to the "greater good" in the United States (320_A_18650312).

Until around 1870–1871, positive political images of the United States were often accompanied by negative remarks about Germany (162_A_18541022; 152_C_18540716). Migrants valued the opportunity to participate in democratic politics and emphasized that Americans could govern themselves (270_A_18561128).[13] They described the openness they encountered in the United States and some enclosed newspaper clippings in their letters to exhibit the freedom of the press (115_A_18520613; 115_E_18510126).

Comparing this with German-speaking lands, migrants emphasized that people there suffered under its monarchy, which had entrenched a hierarchical mentality (115_E_18510126; 115_E_18590415; 140_H_18760525; 270_A_18561128). They criticized the lack of freedom of expression there (115_E_18560413; 170_F_187X0114), and the excessively high taxes and

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[13] Some, however, emphasize the potential violence stemming from "the voice of the people" (112_A_18640802) and the conflicts that are part of democratic negotiations (140_H_18641002; 200_D_18740104).
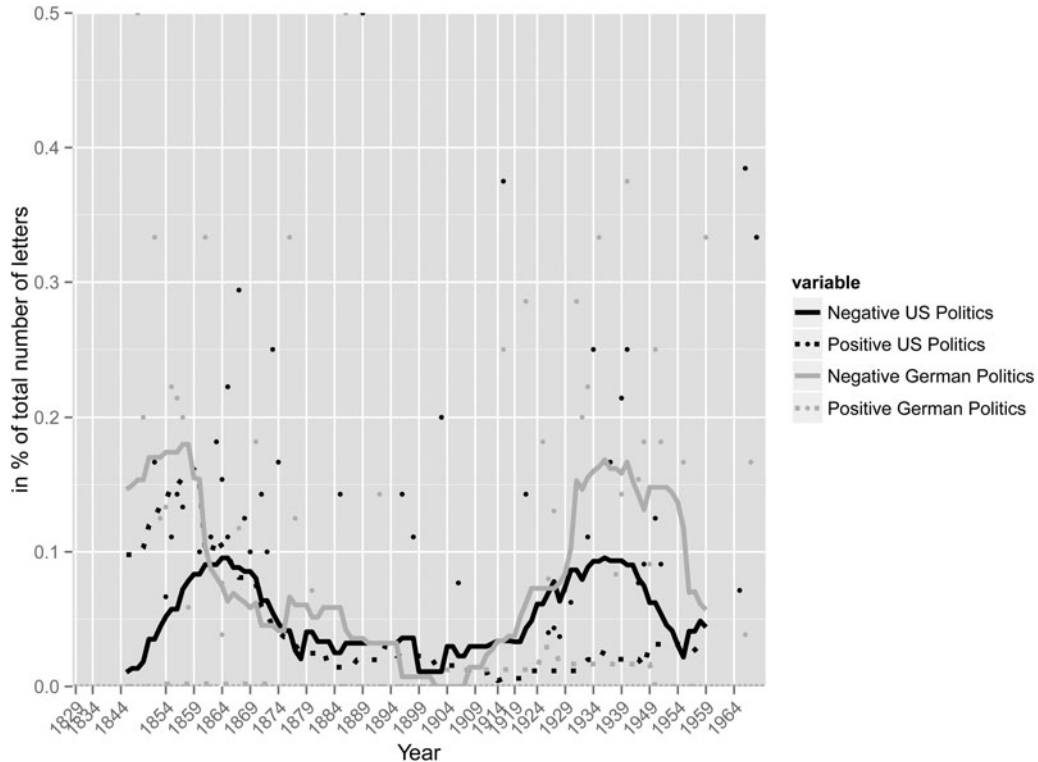
FIGURE 4   Negative and positive views of two political systems.

various municipal fees that had impoverished the population (116_A_18860105; 152_C_18550407; 162_A_18541022). In a context of comparatively fewer state constraints on individual freedoms, migrants stressed their opportunities, noting for example that it was easier to build a new life if one was prepared to work hard (112_A_18690328). Even those who failed economically acknowledged their newly gained freedoms (220_B_18850724).

As the nineteenth century progressed, the patterns in how writers identified with the political system become more diffuse. The differences between the political systems became less stark as Germany democratized and developed. The transatlantic discourse came to include more critical remarks about U.S. politics, including the increasing restrictions on immigration (115_E_18540614), incompetent politicians ignoring their constituents, the failure of leaders to govern the economy (115_G_18601118; 140_H_18580214; 140_H_18641002; 320_A_18670324), and the gap between elected representatives and the population at large (200_D_18740104; 270_A_18561128; 320_A_18670615). The internalized expectations borne out of a growing familiarity with U.S. democracy are apparent in letter-writers' criticisms of politics there. Political reforms were now also underway in their places of origin, and the increasingly mixed descriptions of U.S. politics may well have shaped the expectations of those who did not or had not yet emigrated.

Starting in the interwar period, a more critical attitude vis-à-vis politics in general prevailed in the letters. Such criticisms emphasized disillusionments with the realities of U.S. democracy: its inability to respond to the problems affecting ordinary people in times of crisis (221_A_19391109; 280_B_19330503; 281_C_19340626; 281_C_19491221), the growing tax burden (221_D_19660324), and the inflated bureaucracy (221_A_19380112). Criticism of politics often cuts both ways during this period. Migrants complained about Germany's incompetent and divided political leadership (113_B_19250814; 221_A_19400106) and voiced concerns about the future of the Weimar Republic in light of ongoing political quarrels (280_B_19310219; 320_M_19211205).

Personal financial situations and views about the economic system more broadly are prominent in many letters in connection with the writers' sense of participation in U.S. society. From early on, many emphasized the opportunities for economic progress they encountered. Throughout the nineteenth century, the possibility of quickly setting up one's own small business or farm fostered a sense of integration (115_D_18550128; 140_H_18570726; 150_B_18920124; 162_A_18550617). Many letters highlight that little in the way of savings was required to succeed since land remained cheap. The potential for economic independence was not determined by the time of arrival or the length of time that had passed since. Some newly arrived migrants enthusiastically described the conditions of the American labor market, with its shorter working days and flatter hierarchies, both of which contributed to

feelings of quick integration (250_C_18840529). Societal modernization and technical progress reinforced these initial personal impressions. Across factories and farms, migrants admired technical advances that promised a better quality of life. Thanks to mechanization, household work, too, became easier (140_C_18540129), which allowed for leisure time, something largely unknown in the migrants' places of origin (140_H_18630824). Although discussions of economic topics became fewer over the course of the century, positive attitudes prevailed. Personal economic success frequently featured prominently when migrants described their integration into U.S. society and their perceptions of distance from the "old fatherland" (150_B_19060320).

Despite reaping quick benefits, migrants maintained that "real" economic integration took time. One had to learn the language in order to succeed. Positive views of the U.S. economy were also tempered by criticisms. The letters emphasized that one had to become accustomed to the "*Sitten und Gebräuche*" (manners and customs) (112_A_18690328; 152_C_18540716; 154_E_18670202), that economic success could be short-lived (112_A_18580118), that prices for vital goods had increased (112_A_18640802; 115_B_18590605; 115_E_18560413; 140_I_18640916; 152_C_18641103), and that a lack of social protection led to exploitation and an individualization of risk (162_A_18641113; 200_E_18800926).

In the aftermath of World War I, perceptions of integration changed across the different generations, from the descendants of those who had arrived in the nineteenth century and for those who came after 1918. The latter frequently acknowledged their advantageous economic situation, even during or after times of economic crisis (113_B_19260916; 113_B_19270507; 113_D_19281105; 113_D_19290107; 201_A_19270503; 201_A_19280619; 221_A_19371024), but they also complained about their separation from the homeland (*Heimat*) (221_A_19260314). They stressed that they clearly felt "German" (221_A_19390921) and did not feel culturally integrated. More generally, they complained that people in the United States generally had low levels of cultural awareness (201_A_19270920). The development gap that had initially sustained feelings of integration throughout the previous century now led to concerns about a personal laziness that migrants perceived among their fellows who had grown accustomed to the comforts of modern life (113_C_19251213). The economic crisis after 1929 evoked still more critical evaluations of the U.S. economy. Even before the onset of the Great Depression, migrants had expressed frustrations about difficulties in finding work and the low salaries they received (113_A_19311204; 113_D_19301008; 201_A_19270920; 221_A_19260610; 281_C_19281226). One newly arrived migrant reported in 1929 that the United States was no longer "a land flowing with milk and honey" (*Schlaraffenland*), though they still praised the lower U.S. taxes compared to Germany (113_D_19290107).

As with all historical primary sources, one must consider what might not have been mentioned or archived. That only those who had a connection to Germany wrote letters certainly accentuates the ambiguous impact that time spent as a migrant had on feelings of integration. Moreover, our corpus contains few observations by second-generation migrants about integration, probably partly because they maintained less contact with relatives and family friends in Germany. When our data source is letters, attachment to the homeland is an inherent selection bias and they tell us nothing about those who did not write "home."

Overall, the letters show that the time spent in the host country is a poor indicator of integration. The sense of economic and political integration felt by first-generation migrants was dependent on the perceptions of significant differences between the home and host societies. Economic participation and political satisfaction reflect those larger dynamics more than do shifts in the views of individual migrants over time. The gradual increase in criticism of U.S. economic and political conditions expressed in the letters does not suggest a lack of integration. In fact, many of those critical remarks resulted from a longer exposure to the system and a resultant sense of integration that enabled the critique in the first place. Depending on the political and, to a lesser extent, the economic climates in the country of origin and the country of destination, the balance shifts back and forth between the two poles of this transnational identity. At least so long as these letters were being written, the simultaneity of belonging remained a constant.

Migrant Networks and Integration

The long period of mass migration illustrates the importance of social networks. Family, friendship, and neighborhood networks, sustained by the letters, fundamentally affected the decision to emigrate and facilitated mass chain-migration. Thomas and Znaniecki were among the first to draw attention to the importance of ethnic networks and transnational links. Examining experiences of Polish peasant migrants in the United States, they traced how a distinctive Polish-American society emerged over the nineteenth century that blended U.S. and Polish values: "It is this Polish-American society, not American society, that constitutes the social milieu into which the immigrant who comes from Poland becomes incorporated and to whose standards and institutions he must adapt himself" (1927: ix). Their research suggests that the social networks of migrants in the host country engender a distinctive sense of belonging grounded in a particular, group-based migration experience. Our research confirms the complexity of migrant identities, but also highlights the parallel importance of linkages to the homeland, German-American networks, and social interactions beyond this community in shaping integration and identities.

The letters provide ample evidence of the role that German-American networks played in integration. By 1900, German-speaking districts were part of almost every large American city (Bergquist 1984: 9). Daily encounters between migrants from German-speaking lands grounded a seemingly self-contained community.[14] A sense of "Germanness" was further enhanced by a shared interest in preserving the German language, or opposition to the Anglo-American prohibition of alcohol, which was an integral part of German associational life (Kazal 2004: 40).

The reliance on networks of family members and acquaintances during migration strengthened a German identity. Like many other Europeans, Germans lacked a clearly defined and recognized nation-state identity for most of the nineteenth century (Berger 1997; Dann 1996). Migrants arrived in the United States without a strong self-identification as "Germans" by nationality, but with specific cultural and regional German identities. Moreover, "Deutsch-Amerika" included migrants from Austria, Luxembourg, and Alsace, as well as Romanian and Russian Germans and Swiss (Helbich 1988: 48). Miller argues that "Irish immigrants' correspondence, memoirs, and other personal testaments not only reflected but even helped create the categories of 'Irish' identity that emerged in contemporary political discourse on both sides of the Atlantic" (2003: 9). A similar dynamic is apparent among the German-speaking migrants in the United States.

Letter writers often emphasized the support they received through German-American networks. Such reports reassured those who were contemplating emigration, and their families and friends around them. Such support could be practical (113_D_19281105; 140_I_18621226; 320_G_19581210) or psychological, compensating for "*Heimweh*" (the longing for home) (200_F_18801029). Close networks of families and friends also provided a buffer against culture shock (Helbich 1988: 27).

Through their transnational networks migrants formed an idea about the political, economic, and social situation in the United States. The large movement of people "could take place only when the alternatives were clearly pictured in men's minds" (Taylor 1971: 66). Grabbe argues, "Ironically, those with little or no access to published information were often the best informed" (1997: 82). Personal word-of-mouth advice could be lifesaving, given widespread attempts to take advantage of ill-informed migrants (Guillet 1963). Writers also warned prospective migrants of the risks they faced if they could not rely on such networks (320_E_18830529).

In the first half of the nineteenth century whole family units migrated, either together or over time. They sometimes set up their new lives together, for example by jointly buying a farm (140_I_18621226). In the century's

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[14] The diverse job profiles of the German migrants enabled an almost completely German service sector in some areas (Helbich 1988: 50–51).

second half, as migration patterns changed, networks included members of extended families, who tended to feel responsible for supporting the newly arrived, whose journeys they had often encouraged and co-financed (282_C_18610715; 112_A_18680920; 221_A_19260525). The trends are similar to those Wells identified in his study of Irish migrants, in which he highlights how, in the absence of institutional assistance, many migrants left home with prepaid tickets and pocket money sent by relatives or friends in the United States (1991: 12).

The letters recount many experiences of being treated well, and being invited into people's homes upon arrival (154_E_18670202). Family networks also helped migrants to weather financial crises beyond the arrival period (140_J_18521020). By the 1920s, such experiences were no longer typical, but were still featured in the letters written from areas of concentrated German settlements. Newly arrived migrants' letters tell of a range of acquaintances from "home" visiting them, of going to a German barber, or consuming German food and beer (113_D_19281105; 201_A_19280420; 221_A_19260525).

Once they had arrived, the migrants in their letters distinguished deep friendships and family links from more superficial ties to acquaintances in German circles (282_B_18340716; 200_D_18690329). "Old" German networks were maintained and "new" ones formed, for instance through marriage to other Germans, either acquaintances from "home" or members of the migrant community. There were calls for help to identify suitable marriage partners back home (140_H_18580214; 113_F_19270512), or in the German migrant community (140_H_18670912). In the absence of their closest relatives, the majority of migrants actively maintained links with extended family members in the United States, for example by making them godparents to their children (140_I_18600417) or by establishing new traditions, such as spending major holidays with a particular set of acquaintances (201_A_19280420). Visits by German acquaintances often evoked a nostalgic sense of "*Heimat*" (homeland) (282_A_18340412; 154_E_18670202), particularly around special occasions such as Christmas or New Year's Eve (200_E_18801226; 221_A_19281230; 113_B_19270104).

Old neighborhood ties were reactivated in migration: for instance, meetings of fellow "Neukirchner" (inhabitants of the German town Neukirchen) in Milwaukee or Buffalo (113_D_19281105) are recorded as significant, pleasant experiences. Others wrote that they often met people they had previously known from Germany (152_C_18690117). Remarks about how these regional ties facilitated integration into the new economic system are striking. At times, former colleagues still worked together, which enabled the continuation of German professional networks (281_A_19261022). In sum, geographical concentration and socio-economic networks fostered both integration into the host society and a "German identity."

Many letters reference German churches, associations, and neighborhoods as key spaces for activating or preserving a shared sense of belonging. Both Lutherans and Catholics maintained German-language services, and bigger religious communities founded private schools, but German lessons were also available in many state schools. Mentions of social gatherings after church involving meals, beer, and games at a German brewery or restaurant, and dances or other events organized by German associations, are often interspersed with reports about difficult working conditions (140_H_18630824; 140_I_1866091; 201_A_19290218; 221_A_19260426; 281_C_19501112). References to a diversity of associations, from churches and Sunday schools to gymnastics clubs, choirs, and book clubs, reveal the density of these organizational networks (200_D_18691022; 200_B_18790308). The letters convey the wide availability of organized networks, especially throughout the nineteenth century (115_E_18610107; 200_D_18691022). The writers tried to reassure family members "at home" with mentions of the many German newspapers, which also served as places to find jobs (221_A_19260426). In part, the Germans self-organized in response to the as-yet-underdeveloped American state presence in education and other spheres of public service provision. Nineteenth-century American society proved open to migrant self-organization and encouraged it. In turn, the cultural solidarity of an internally diverse migrant group was invoked, for instance when state policy changed to pressure schools to stop the teaching of German, around the century's turn (Gerber 1984: 32).

The migrant community was made up of active members of German organizations as well as those who only opted into certain events (160_I_19070618). Regular encounters based on formal membership could bring considerable peer pressure to bear. For instance, all members of one German choir joined the German Regiment in the 1860s. Key reasons given for signing up were that German officers were in charge, that the pay was good, and a fear of being singled out as cowardly (320_A_18610912).

Recent scholarship has highlighted the role of women's organizations as a long-overlooked pillar of the German-American community (Ortlepp 2004). German women organized for many different causes, from the Ladies' Auxiliaries to the male gymnastic clubs engaged in fundraising, to Freethinkers' associations, labor unions, and socialist organizations. Some of the associations were built on traditional gender roles, while others actively called them into question: "Both approaches overlapped with the idea that women had a crucial function as cultural mediators who would pass the banner of German-American cultural traditions to the next generation" (Ortlepp 2003: 442). The family-based authorship of the majority of letters blurs the lines between the gender roles in the German networks and emphasizes a collective experience of being part of a community. Letters written by women, especially single women, frequently contrast their new sense of liberation and self-confidence with their lives "back home." Kate, writing to her friend Mary in

the interwar period, explained throughout her letters how she participated in social activities, how delighted she was to be able to interact freely with men, and that divorce could be filed easily in the United States, which protected women from domestic violence (e.g., 113_B_19250814; 113_B_19260501; 113_E_19270920). Other women wrote about how caring their husbands had become in America (115_C_18510126), and they contrasted their own independence with the situation of their German mothers (320_A_18650312).

By the interwar period, there were still frequent references to German social events (201_A_19280420), but the letters now conveyed a sense of having to make an effort to seek out German neighborhoods (221_A_19270112; 221_A_19380109; 221_A_19390102; 221_A_19400106). They mentioned the lack of occasions on which to celebrate German traditions, which reveals a combination of weakening organizational ties, an overall decrease in the bottom-up demand for and willingness to maintain organizations, and more diffuse patterns of settlement and intermarriage (281_C_19281226).

Families and acquaintances often dispersed widely across the United States. Distances unimaginable to inhabitants of a small German village became "normal" dots on the migrants' mental maps. The developing postal system (John 1995) was an important factor that enabled Germans in the country to stay informed about the whereabouts and activities of extended family members and acquaintances, even though there were fewer reported visits (281_C_19471120). Personal networks remained important nonetheless, both as a form of insurance and as mental reference points.

The concentrated settlement of migrants was not synonymous with either community homogeny or harmony, and the German migrant community displayed neither (Nadel 1990). Analyzing the socio-economic conditions in Chicago toward the end of the nineteenth century, Keil emphasizes differences within and between parts of the city with regard to employment opportunities, age, and qualifications (1984: 75). The urban setting also fractionalized German-America, and intergenerational relations were sometimes strained, just as Miller illustrates for the Irish migrants (1985). In some letters we find complaints about fellow Germans. For instance, newly arrived migrants who were economically successful tended to look down on those Germans who had been in the United States for longer (221_A_19280429). These divisions do not map directly onto migrant generations.

Migrants increasingly complained about the expectation that they would support family members and acquaintances financially (140_J_18521020; 160_I_18960626). Amidst economic uncertainty, there were warnings that even family members could prove unreliable (113_D_19280103) or powerless to help (140_J_18521020). The letters also record the initial frustrations of struggling newcomers, sometimes directed at relatives who had encouraged them to migrate (154_E_188503XX).

Our analysis confirms the importance of social networks at all stages of the migration process, starting with the preparations ahead of emigration, and then on to the practical and ideational support of both family and friendship-based networks and German-American cultural and religious organizations. The latter created a focal point for both practical support and a sense of community belonging. While historians have focused mostly on one type of network or a set of organizations at a time, our corpus highlights both the coexistence and interplay of personal (family- and friendship-based) and associational networks. Both fostered integration into the economic and political system of the host society but also maintained identities or built new ones.

Political Events Involving Origin and Destination Countries

German migrants retained an interest in the politics of their home regions and the German-speaking lands in general. Some 15 percent of the letters reference particular events "back home," and clear patterns are evident. Migrants told of regularly following the news in German newspapers in the United States and, where accessible, via radio. They frequently asked for detailed updates on what they had read or heard. In moments of crisis, especially, they were eager for trustworthy information from families and acquaintances. During major international events pitting the United States against Germany, especially the two world wars, this need for "unbiased information" was expressed with great urgency (160_I_19150101; 320_H_19331215).

By the mid-nineteenth century, an "America for the Americans" attitude began to take hold, based on a presumed link between migrants, crimes, and pauperism. Formal deportations from the United States began in 1855 (Coleman 1972: 227). The "Know Nothing Movement" conveyed the changes in popular mood after 1853 (Anbinder 1992). Such movements fostered skepticism, but migrants initially saw anti-immigration rhetoric as unrepresentative of thinking across the United States (115_E_18560413). Nevertheless, letters echoed American political discussions about restricting immigration or making naturalization more difficult (160_I_18960626). Overall, though, during the nineteenth century new migrants continued to emphasize the "*freudenstrahlende Zukunft*" (a joyfully prosperous future) they expected to achieve (160_G_18880117).

Increases in migration from Italy, Poland, Russia, and the Balkans around the turn of the century fostered a hostile attitude, rooted in German feelings of superiority vis-à-vis other migrant groups. German "ethnic" community leaders, such as the editor and businessman Heinrich Rattermann, emphasized how dependent the United States was on German migrant culture (Dobbert 1980: 80–94). In certain states, like Wisconsin and Illinois, the use of foreign languages was already being actively discouraged by 1890 (Kloss 1966). Meanwhile, policy proposals circulated according to which foreigners

would have to live in the United States for twenty-one years before becoming eligible for naturalization (Coleman 1972: 220). Despite changing attitudes toward migrants, integration through naturalization remained relatively easy until about 1920. After three years, migrants could declare their intent to naturalize, and after five they could become citizens (Grams 2013: 22).

Moments of political crisis reactivated links to the country of origin and heightened a sense of transnational belonging. During World War I, "hyphenated Americans" came under severe pressure, particularly once the United States entered the war in April of 1917 (Wüstenbecker 2007). But even before that letters indicated how hard it was to obtain accurate information about Germany, and expressed distrust in the U.S. media (160_I_19150101). Judging by our text corpus, many Germans in the United States clearly identified as Germans again and expressed solidarity with Germany, sometimes even second-and third-generation migrants (320_M_19150104).

The rise of European nationalism before, during, and after World War I coincided with assimilation pressures in the United States (Scheffer and Waters 2011: 224). Contemporary U.S. publications expressed critical and even hostile views of migration before the war. Frank Julian Warne, former secretary of the New York State Immigration Commission, stoked fear about an "invasion" by migrants from Russia, Poland, Austria, Hungary, or Italy (1913: 53). One commentator stated, "Whereas the German importations were at first of good class, people of substance, now they were the refuse of the country" (Fairchild 1913: 44). Later Warne emphasized the need to take precautionary measures: "By all means, this great movement of peoples should be restricted by legislation within the narrow channel of the legitimate demand of our industries for unskilled labor" (1916: 360).[15] Fears that European conflicts might lead to unrest among different migrant groups fed into state efforts to integrate them into a single, collective identity. In 1915, 4th of July festivities ran under the motto "Many People but One Nation," a precursor of the "America First" policy of 1916. The war subsequently shattered the belief that American society could easily integrate its migrant peoples (Higham 2002 [1955]).

World War I was a key political event for both the country of origin and the country of destination. It was a moment when migrants explicitly reflected upon their identity and their relationships with both places. Letters reveal that the process of identification with Germany proved significantly more complex than any clear-cut rupture. The constant fear of losing loved ones and actual news about war deaths provide the clearest examples of this (320_M_19151012). The wars also interrupted travel links, reduced migration flows, and made transnational communication less certain

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[15] For an overview of contemporary proposals to restrict immigration, see Phelps 1920.

(160_I_1916XXXX.1). These factors together increased the awareness of both the links and the distance between the letter writers.

In the midst of crisis, some migrants described their astonishment at feeling more "German" and hoping for German victory when they had thought of themselves as already "American." They also highlighted how agitated Germans in the United States were about what was happening in Europe (154_G_19150106; 160_H_19151011). Transnational identities could turn into split identities. Second-generation migrants, for example, expressed regret and disapproval of U.S. policies "prolonging the war," while they still embraced the United States as "our country" (320_M_19151012). The letters in this way point to the importance of political crises as moments when "ways of being" become "ways of belonging." Connections with families and friends intensified through letter writing, more targeted exchanges of information, fundraising, and care packages. Organizationally, the two world wars and the postwar periods also provided an impetus for German networks to regroup through fundraising efforts to help war widows, orphans, and the wounded in Germany (160_I_19160319).

During and after the war, the space for public expressions of a German-American identity eroded (Kazal 2004: 172). Various states across the country (including Ohio, Indiana, and California) forbade teaching German in schools and public expressions of Germanness in general (Capozzola 2008: 181). The National German-American Alliance, and to a lesser extent its successor the German American Citizens League of the United States, strove to keep the younger generation within its ethnically defined fold. That said, the Alliance's efforts conflicted with older divisions within the migrant communities related to class or geographical origins (Kazal 2004: 130). Higham called the disintegration of the German migrant community after World War I "the most familiar and spectacular case of collective assimilation" (1981: 9). The "100 percent American" campaign of the 1920s obliged Germans to retreat from their ethnic identity, while "being white" offered an alternative collective identity based on citizenship.

In the interwar period, the ties between the migrants and their home countries reemerged on the European political agenda. The Weimar Republic established a *Reichswanderungsamt* (Reich Emigration Office) (O'Donnell, Bridenthal, and Reagin 2005), which worked to discourage Germans from leaving the country (Fisch 2010: 73). As one contemporary observer noted, "Each European nation, to strengthen further its own nationalism, is sending out a call to its own well-to-do migrants in other countries to return home, at least temporarily" (Kellor 1920: 69). Critical contemporary observers in the United States warned of potential political consequences of the incomplete nature of immigrant integration. Kellor found that "a fourth generation of native-born Germans of native stock favor the fatherland in preference to

America" (ibid.: 25). She insisted that "foreign influence" on migrant communities was significant across generations.

Our corpus reveals diversity and contradictions in the reactions and orientations of the migrants. It contains ample references to migrants trying to resist the erosion of their associational life by continuing to congregate in explicitly German circles (113_D_19281105, 113_F_19270512, 201_A_19280420, 221_A_19270112). Those who had emigrated to the United States during the period of the Weimar Republic, possibly based on political motivations, wrote in their letters how quickly they felt at home in the United States (221_A_19260321), and sometimes referred to the "holy U.S.A." (201_A_19270503). Some letters expressed deep disappointment at German politics and, as one put it, "German culture sinking to a level of 100 years earlier." The writer saw in it the cause of the waning of a once-respectful attitude toward German immigrants in the United States (281_C_19330803).

As mentioned earlier, the World War II period is not one of the main periods covered by our corpus, which therefore provides only glimpses into identities at that time. The 1939 World Exhibition in New York, which Germany did not take part in, provided a focal point in discussions about politics. Some migrants expressed regret that Germany was not represented, while others welcomed Hitler's decision to decline to participate in view of Roosevelt's attitude toward Germany (221_A_19390429). Moreover, German-Americans frequently asked in their letters how best to help those at home from afar, and offered to send scarce products or money. Some letters mention local and national initiatives of German societies in the United States to collect money for those affected by the wars, and some describe migrants' confusion, sympathy, concern, or helplessness regarding the plight of their home country (221_A_19390921).

During the war, Germans in the United States had to hide pro-German attitudes. Comments in favor of the Nazi regime or denunciation by a neighbor risked an entry in the FBI's Custodial Detention Index (Krammer 1996: 583). Krammer conducted interviews with the descendants of people arrested and mentions that linguistic difficulties sometimes delayed negotiations with detainees who hardly spoke English. Despite public pressure to assimilate, and contrary to public perception, the private side of integration was clearly complex and English language knowledge continued to vary, as Wilkerson and Salmons highlight (2008).

Some letters from the World War II period reference the "anti-German" American media (221_A_19390903; 221_A_19390924) and the difficulty of discussing German affairs (221_A_19390924), especially for those not living in urban areas with concentrated German settlements (221_A_19390921; 221_A_19390728). There were more explicit remarks about a deep "hatred of Germans" in the United States and a belief that one had to keep quiet in public so as to avoid arguments or physical violence (221_A_19390924).

Thus, even though most migrants had retreated from publicly "being German" before the war, sometimes when wartime letters complain about U.S. anti-German attitudes the writers suggest they are politically motivated and intended to distract from domestic problems such as unemployment. Letters also express disapproval of U.S. political actions, and some migrants declare their solidarity with Germany (320_M_1932120; 221_A_19390921; 221_A_19390924). This was remarkable given the risk that letters might be read by the U.S. security services (Krammer 1996). These expressions of sympathy for German politics were infrequent, and overall migrants reinvigorated their links with the homeland. This was true even among some who had migrated in the nineteenth century but renewed their links to Germany, and maintained them even after the war's end. Letters of the 1940s and 1950s often tell of individual and collective efforts to organize support for people in Germany. Postwar expressions of hope for German reunification and peace accompanied initiatives such as assembling care packages (281_D_19490603). People were greatly concerned over the possibility that German soldiers might end up fighting against each other across the inner-German dividing line (281_C_19501112; 281_C_19480421).

CONCLUSION

The historical letter collection at the heart of this article is a fruitful primary source through which to explore hypotheses that have been central to social science scholarship on migrant integration and transnationalism, namely the effects of length of time spent in the host country, of migrant networks, and of the roles and characteristics of the places of origin and destination. The letters map a transnational space of communication where "ordinary" German migrants in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shared their sense of integration and belonging with their families, friends, and entire village communities "back home."

Our analysis adds to historical research on German immigrants in the United States, and to the historical scholarship on individual letters or series of letters. While there have been historical analyses of small selections of letters, and social science studies that capture particular moments or episodes based on survey or qualitative data, our multi-stage text analysis of a thousand letters spanning about a century gives us greater empirical traction on the non-linearity of integration. While this idea is not new, it is hard to pursue in the absence of truly longitudinal data. Processes of perceived integration and belonging unfold in cycles over extended periods of time. First-generation migrants discuss the process of integration most vividly, since they experience the shifts and continuities most directly, but the non-linearity of such perceptions holds for later generations as well. This puts in perspective the common distinction made between migrant generations, a conventional way of conceptualizing the time spent in the host country.

Within and across migrant generations, time spent in the host country is not linked directly to perceptions of integration and belonging. Our analysis has shown that a sense of integration depends more on the differences in the political or economic conditions between the destination and origin countries. Affirmative assessments of integration into and identification with the United States, and an overall very positive image of the country, prevailed in the nineteenth century when the gaps between in the United States and Germany in terms of personal and collective liberties and economic and technological developments were most pronounced. Such views declined sharply when the two countries' political and economic development paths began to converge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Our letters clearly show that migrant networks, varying with degrees of geographical concentration, are an important factor strengthening perceived integration. Networks can have a decisive impact on whether migrants "succeed." Intra-group migrant networks made up of extended families, "old" acquaintances from "home," and some "new" German acquaintances in the United States, also served an identity function. They compensated for the absence of close family members and friends and enacted migrants' identity bonds with the places of origin while they also rooted them in a migrant community in the host society. Our longitudinal micro-perspective illuminates the link between seemingly contradictory findings in contemporary empirical analyses of the role played by migrant networks: they do not serve only one or another function, but rather fulfill different ones simultaneously. Nor do shifts in their functions over time follow any clear-cut, obvious pattern.

Finally, the relatively open political and economic culture of the United States in the nineteenth century encouraged perceptions of integration and belonging among migrants. Nonetheless, the resilience of an underlying or reactivated identification with the homeland, and its dependence on combinations of destination characteristics, was exhibited in the impacts of gradually more restrictive U.S. immigration policies and international political events that pitted the sending and receiving countries against each other. Here, period effects seem more important than generational effects in explaining perceptions of integration. Future research should systematically probe the applicability of our findings regarding the first generation of migrants for future generations (which are less represented in our data source).

Beyond our key arguments, our case study speaks to the relationship between group size and organizational field density, on one hand, and integration and identity on the other. Social and organizational fractionalization is a fundamental aspect of large migrant communities. A lack of internal cohesion can facilitate integration into the host society, but it also leaves space for multiple "ways of belonging" that can be activated by policies and events from either "inside" and "outside," as many migrant letters in our collection put it. One general premise within the historical scholarship on immigration into

the United States, that Germans assimilated quickly despite their numbers, requires far more nuance: in places they integrated, and felt integrated precisely because they were part of a large German-American community. Still, English language knowledge among the German migrants, a decrease in their public visibility, and weaker associational ties within the German-American community cannot be understood as representing a linear, clear-cut deepening of their identification with the United States.

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APPENDIX: DESIGN OF THE CODE SYSTEM

Crucial for coding textual data is the design of the coding scheme. We developed this scheme by iteratively drawing on a process akin to approaches informed by grounded theory. At the initial stage we drew a first random sample of fifty letters from the overall corpus. The two researchers independently read this sample and each derived a coding scheme which was exhaustive enough to account for the nuanced languages of the letters and capture the diversity of topics covered in the letters. Afterwards we jointly determined the codebook. This iterative process ensured that the coding scheme provides a close fit with the actual data. In a second stage we tested the validity of the codebook. Both researchers manually coded a second random sample of fifty letters each to further refine the coding scheme. The final coding system is fine-grained and reflects the theoretical and empirical interests of this research, whilst also providing good coverage of the range of issues discussed in the letters. We remained open to rectifying the coding system when required. In a third stage, we manually coded each letter of a corpus of about a thousand letters which allowed us to also be attentive to irony, metaphors and implicit meanings.

The coding scheme consists of nine categories which are composed of a total of 150 codes: (1) "references" to understand the various political events mentioned by the letter writers; (2–3) "comments" with many sub-codes to capture their opinions about the United States and Germany; (4) categories that cover different types of "integration" and migrant engagement with the homeland, remarks about the use of migrant networks.

The letters were not read individually but analyzed by sections that correspond to keywords. In a first iteration the keywords were derived from an index that accompanies the letter collection and which we extended during the coding process. In order to trace the social and political remittances the migrants posted across the Atlantic, a targeted reading strategy is adequate which excludes some parts of the letters from the analysis. The advantage of this approach is that it allows for working with a large quantity of letters that could hardly be analyzed systematically with a more conventional interpretative approach. We supplemented this corpus-oriented approach with references to individual letters that were chosen as typical examples of the various codes considered in our research. They help us to spell out the logic and style of the data at large. Each letter has an individual reference number: the first three numbers refer to the letter series, the following character identifies the particular author, and the subsequent eight digits the year, month, and day the letter was written.

Most Relevant Sections of the Code System

1. References
    1.1. References/European events other
    1.2. References/Cold War
    1.3. References/World War II-German fascism
    1.4. References/World War I
    1.5. References/US-People
    1.6. References/US-Institutions
    1.7. References/US-Events
        1.7.1. References/US-Events/Strikes
        1.7.2. References/US-Events/World Exhibition
        1.7.3. References/US-Events/1898 Spanish-American War
        1.7.4. References/US-Events/Civil-War
        1.7.5. References/US-Events/Elections
        1.7.6. References/US-Events/General
        1.7.7. References/US-Events/National-Holiday
    1.8. References/US-Events/Vietnam
    1.9. References/US-Events/World-Economic-Crisis
    1.10. References/DEU-People
    1.11. References/DEU-Institutions
    1.12. References/DEU-Events
        1.12.1. References/DEU-Events/1864 German-Danish War
        1.12.2. References/DEU-Events/1870/71 German-French War
        1.12.3. References/DEU-Events/1866 Prussian German War
    1.13. References/DEU-Events/1848
2. Comments-US
    2.1. Comments-US/Negative-Cultural
    2.2. Comments-US/Negative-Ecclesiastic
    2.3. Comments-US/Negative-Economy-Personal
    2.4. Comments-US/Negative-Economy-System
    2.5. Comments-US/Negative-Education
    2.6. Comments-US/Negative-Media
    2.7. Comments-US/Negative-Military
    2.8. Comments-US/Negative-Miscellaneous
    2.9. Comments-US/Negative-Political-System
    2.10. Comments-US/Negative-Societal-Backwardness
    2.11. Comments-US/Negative-Societal-Death-Penalty
    2.12. Comments-US/Negative-Societal-Diversity
    2.13. Comments-US/Negative-Societal-Gender(Private)
    2.14. Comments-US/Negative-Societal-Gender(Work)
    2.15. Comments-US/Negative-Societal-Health
    2.16. Comments-US/Negative-Societal-Modernization-Critique
    2.17. Comments-US/Negative-Societal-Quality-of-life-(general)
    2.18. Comments-US/Neutral-Societal
    2.19. Comments-US/Positive-Cultural
    2.20. Comments-US/Positive-Ecclesiastic
    2.21. Comments-US/Positive-Economy-Personal
    2.22. Comments-US/Positive-Economy-System
    2.23. Comments-US/Positive-Education
    2.24. Comments-US/Positive-Media

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Abstract: This article offers the first large-scale analysis of the interlinked dynamics of integration and belonging based on perceptions of "ordinary" German-speaking migrants in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Our analysis draws on a corpus of over a thousand letters from the North American Letter Collection held at the Forschungsbibliothek Gotha in Germany. Through computer-assisted text analysis, framed by research on transnationalism and immigrant integration, we explore patterns in integration and identities over time. We show how the migrants continuously redefine their identities vis-à-vis their homeland and the host society, and their letters thereby shape the image of the United States and the homeland for their recipients. Our analysis establishes more comprehensively than have previous historical and social science studies that integration into a host society is a non-linear process. Immigrant identities are influenced less by the time they have spent in the receiving country than by critical political events that affect both the country of origin and that of destination. Such events can reactivate migrant's identifications with their homeland. Immigrant networks filter this dual process in that they can facilitate migrants' integration while also reminding them of people and places left behind.