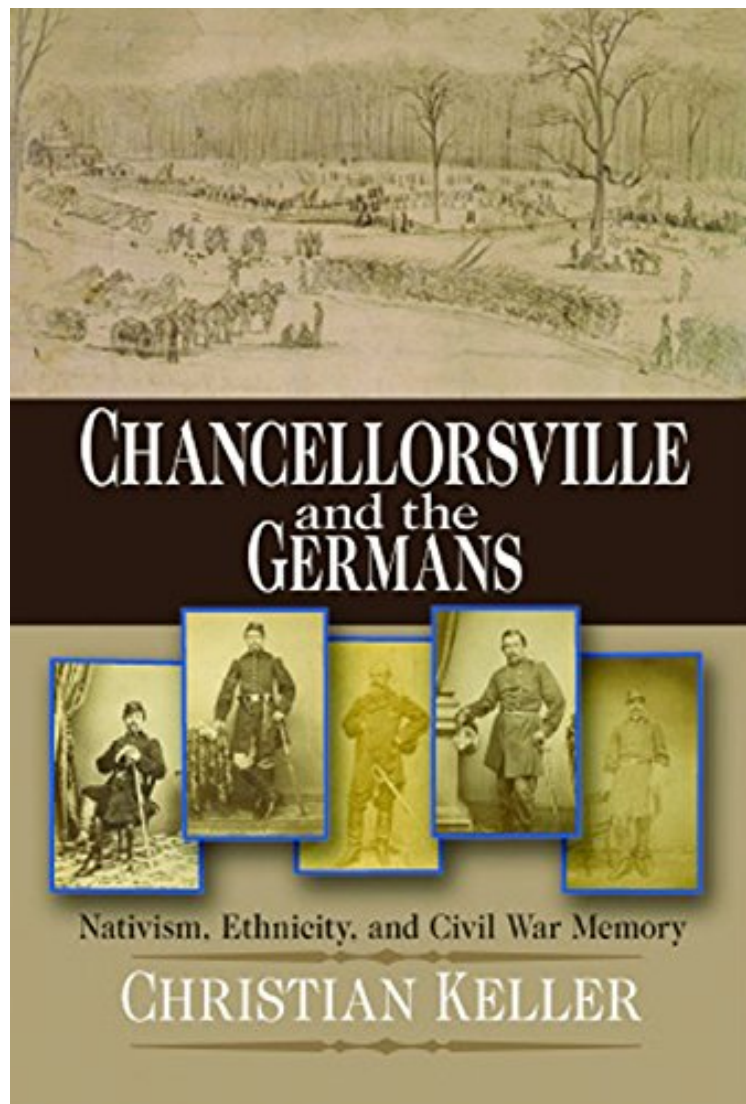


[Mobile book] Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory (The North's Civil War)

Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory (The North's Civil War)

Christian B. Keller

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Christian B. Keller : Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory (The North's Civil War) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory (The North's Civil War):

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Anti-German Bias in the Civil War and Delayed AssimilationBy

Brett R. Schulte Christian B. Keller. *Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory*. New York: Fordham University Press; First Edition (May 15, 2007). 244 pp., 4 maps, notes, index. ISBN: 978-0823226504 \$65.00 (Hardcover w/DJ). How serious a blow was the Battle of Chancellorsville to the collective German-American psyche? Christian B. Keller attempts to answer precisely this question in *Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory*. Pulling from German-language newspapers and looking at his subject from a German-American viewpoint, Keller argues somewhat persuasively that not only did the rout of the "German" XI Corps at Chancellorsville severely damage German-American support for the Northern war effort, it also significantly delayed assimilation of this ethnic group into mainstream American culture. In addition, the attacks on German-American units, specifically the XI Corps, served as a unifying force for a hitherto disparate German-American presence in the United States. German-Americans flocked to support their adopted homeland in 1861, eventually composing close to one fourth of all soldiers who fought in the Union army. Many of these men formed companies and regiments composed almost entirely of German-Americans. Some of these units played a large role in keeping Missouri in the Union in 1861 and fought well at First Bull Run and in many western battles. Many German-Americans, including Franz Sigel and Carl Schurz, assumed roles as Union generals. Blenker's all-German Division was treated rather badly in March 1862 when it was forced to trek through the mountains of western Virginia on the way to Charles Fremont's aptly-named "Mountain Department". Poor weather and lack of food led to some foraging, and this behavior was reported rather negatively in the Anglo-American press as stereotypical German behavior. German-Americans were understandably outraged by this characterization of their fighting men, and believed nativism was at work when Blenker and his men were not supplied with adequate rations. Unfortunately, this negative stereotype of German-American troops would soon grow worse. The Army of the Potomac's XI (Eleventh) Corps, including Blenker's former division, had only been officially "created" about eight months before Chancellorsville. These troops had originally been members of Fremont's Mountain Department, but had been dubbed "I Corps, Army of Virginia" when John Pope arrived in the Eastern Theater in mid-1862. The new I Corps was led by German-American hero Franz Sigel. The troops were involved in the campaign that culminated at Second Bull Run, encountering much hard fighting trying to crack Stonewall Jackson's line along the Unfinished Railroad there. After Pope's defeat, the unit was finally redesignated as "XI Corps, Army of the Potomac" on September 12, 1862. The unit did not again see large scale action until Chancellorsville. By May 1862, just before that battle, the XI Corps had gained a distinct German flavor. It was even widely known as the "German Corps" despite containing only thirteen German regiments out of a total of twenty-seven. German-Americans had come to see the unit as their own and took great pride in its performance and its leader Sigel. Attacks against the XI Corps were perceived as attacks against German-Americans as a whole. Unfortunately, Sigel resigned over several trivial matters in early 1863 and the thoroughly religious and decidedly non-German Oliver O. Howard was his replacement. The German troops were not impressed and had not formed a good relationship with their commander by the start of the Chancellorsville Campaign in late April. On May 2, 1863 the XI Corps was hit with a staggering surprise flank attack in the horrible terrain of the Wilderness by Stonewall Jackson and 28,000 men of his II Corps, Army of Northern Virginia. This attack and follow-up assaults on May 3 and 4 led to the eventual withdrawal of Joseph Hooker's entire Army of the Potomac north of the Rappahannock River. Keller spends a good deal of time discussing the tactical military history of May 2, 1863. Using analysis of German and other units, he successfully demonstrates the mostly German regiments fought as hard as Anglo-American units and were not at fault for the defeat. Keller argues that the placement of the XI Corps units prior to the attack were the responsibility of General Oliver O. Howard, the XI Corps commander, and Charles Devens, the 1st Division commander whose right flank was open to attack. Keller also argues against charges that most if not all of the XI Corps ran without doing any fighting. He found at least two documented instances of resistance approaching half an hour, once near Wilderness Church and once further east on the line of Buschbeck's Brigade. Rather than fleeing rapidly, Keller argues, the men of the XI Corps bought just enough time and deflected just enough of Jackson's energy to allow other Federal units, most notably the III Corps and XII Corps, to set up a final defensive line near the Chancellorsville crossroads. Keller's conclusion is that the men of the XI Corps fought as well and as long as they could from a deeply flawed tactical position. In the wake of the defeat, a search for scapegoats ensued. Nativist predilections of the old Know Nothing party of the 1850s came roaring to the forefront as the "Dutchman" of the XI Corps were blamed. In a thorough look at both English and German language newspapers of the day, Keller found several major New York English-language newspapers incorrectly blamed the Germans, and many other papers ran with this erroneous account. Only the Chicago Tribune tried to dispute the account in any way initially. After some time, these accounts were mostly retracted, but Keller argues the damage had already been done. German language newspapers fought back, defending the combat record of the mostly-German regiments, (correctly) blaming Anglo-American generals such as Howard and Hooker for the defeat, claiming Franz Sigel would have done much better at the head of XI Corps, and denouncing the massive resurgence of nativism in mainstream American newspapers. Interestingly, Keller discusses how the scapegoating of XI Corps rebuilt the morale of the non-ethnic Americans in the Army of the Potomac as well as on the home front. Unfortunately, according to Keller, this simultaneously took a massive toll on German-Americans in the XI Corps and in the general population, destroying their faith in and support

of the Union war effort and causing many Germans to strengthen their ethnic identity and shrink from assimilation. From this point forward, says the author, German-Americans were highly sensitive to even the slightest criticism of their troops in the field. He believes Gettysburg did not have the same effect as Chancellorsville because it was a Union victory and no one had to be "blamed". Germans tended to interpret events through a more ethnically tinted lens than they ever had in the past. Although nativism in the Anglo press was greatly muted following Gettysburg, it still continued at greater levels than earlier in the war. In the fallout the XI Corps was broken up after Gettysburg, with one division sent to South Carolina and the other two to Tennessee. Carl Schurz, a division leader in the XI Corps, eventually lost his command in part because of his later issues with Joseph Hooker, the union army commander at Chancellorsville. Germans also tended to unify more politically than they ever had in the past, even going so far as to back Fremont's candidacy for President in 1864, but this would have caused the destruction of the Union and in effect would have meant many thousands of German-Americans had died in vain. In earlier looks at ethnic regiments, Ella Lonn (*Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy*) and William Burton (*Melting Pot Soldiers: The Union's Ethnic Regiments*, see my review of this work here) contend the ethnic regiments tended to lose their ethnic "flavor" by the end of the war. This is a theory which Keller disputes. In his look at five predominantly German regiments organized in Pennsylvania, particularly the 74th and 75th regiments, he found they tended to preserve their "Germanness" through the end of the war by monopolizing all of the officer positions in these regiments. I am not sure maintaining ethnic homogeneity among the officers constitutes the preservation of ethnic flavor as meant by Lonn and Burton. In addition, I would have liked to have seen a more all encompassing study of this nature for the German regiments, especially those which did their fighting predominantly in the west. I'm sure the author's earlier book on German-Americans in Pennsylvania regiments at Gettysburg was the reason he chose those five regiments as a sample here. In any case, more work remains if we are to overturn Burton's claims in my estimation. Standard works have often contended German-Americans assimilated after the war. Recent work, including Keller's book and a study of letters written by German-Americans edited by Helbich and Kamphoefner, argue against wartime assimilation. Keller goes even fuller by stating he believes Germans had only finally gotten over the sting of Chancellorsville by 1910. He discusses cultural pluralism and the necessary entanglement of two main post-war themes for German-Americans: memory of the war and Americanization. Keller cites their continued efforts to remain German, including the retainment of the German language, German customs, and the efforts of cultural pluralists to resist assimilation as evidence of the continued influence of Chancellorsville on the German-American psyche. I thought this might have overemphasized the specific Battle of Chancellorsville to some extent and the expense of other factors which occurred during the war such as the sacking of German-American generals and other examples of nativism. In addition, I have to believe the 1871 unification of Germany had more to do with resistance to assimilation postwar than any lingering effects of the battle. Moving on, Keller cites the modern-day example of Muslim-Americans after 9/11 as a situation somewhat analogous to the Germans and Chancellorsville. I immediately thought of Japanese-Americans after Pearl Harbor as another example while reading, and Keller did indeed mention this as an example as well. Both groups served as scapegoats when others were to blame, and in both cases a rise in nativism was seen. While these examples provide some food for thought, the situations are different enough that we do not necessarily benefit from comparing them to the book's subject. More specifically, our units at Pearl Harbor were not composed of mostly Japanese-Americans and we did not have an all-Muslim-American flight wing attempting to shoot down any hijacked passenger jets on 9/11. On the other hand, it IS interesting to compare the rises of nativism in each example. In any case, this is a minor quibble in what is a very fine book. Chancellorsville and the Germans is not a lengthy book, weighing in at only 244 pages. There were not too many maps, but those which were included added immeasurably to the author's discussion of the fighting on May 2. Keller consulted many German language newspapers, many which had never been used before, to look at these events from a uniquely German-American viewpoint. His research was solid and offers a good start for those looking to continue studies of German-American involvement in the Civil War. Unfortunately the book is highly priced at \$65, which is very costly for the average Civil War book buyer. Another reviewer mentioned his disappointment with only one chapter on the actual fighting on May 2. I never thought this was an issue, and a glance at the subtitle "Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory" should give readers a good idea of the focus of the book. The information in Chancellorsville and the Germans is presented logically and explained thoroughly. Keller writes in an entertaining and informative style. This book is definitely not a dry read. I did disagree in several small cases with some of the author's minor points and believe he might have overstated Chancellorsville's role in delaying German assimilation after the war. With that said, Chancellorsville and the Germans breaks important new ground in looking at Civil War historiography from an ethnic perspective and for that alone deserves high praise. Thankfully, Keller did more than just break new ground. I highly recommend this book to those interested in Civil War memory and in the history of German-Americans of the late 19th Century. For others, the price may be a deciding factor. Special thanks goes to Kathleen O'Brien at Fordham University Press. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. The impact on America's large German immigrant community was nothing short of devastating. By Midwest Book Review "Chancellorsville And The Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, And Civil War Memory" by Christian B. Keller (Associate Professor of Military History, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Belvoir,

Virginia) is a seminal contribution to the growing library of Civil War literature. The focus is on the decimation of the Union's Eleventh Corps (composed of large numbers of German-speaking volunteers) by General Robert E. Lee's forces at what became known as the Battle of Chancellorsville. Poorly deployed, the unit was overwhelmed by the Confederate cavalry and foot troops led by Stonewall Jackson. The unit blamed for the unexpected Northern defeat at Confederate hands. The impact on America's large German immigrant community was nothing short of devastating. Professor Keller draws upon German-language newspapers of the period, soldiers' letters, memoirs, and regimental records to reconstruct the battle and its aftermath from both military and civilian German-American perspectives and in doing so reveals the valor of the German troops. An impressively informative and very highly recommended work of original scholarship, "Chancellorsville And The Germans" traces the effects of the conflict and its aftermath on the dynamics of German immigrant inclusion and assimilation in American life. No academic library American Civil War reference collection can be considered complete or comprehensive without the inclusion of Professor Keller's "Chancellorsville And The Germans". Also very strongly recommended for Civil War reference collections and supplemental reading lists is Professor Keller's earlier work, "Damn Dutch: Pennsylvania Germans at Gettysburg". 5 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Be advised...By BW Brockenbrough Be advised that this book is almost entirely about public opinion in the German-American community. There is one chapter that contains a good, detailed narrative of the battle but the rest of the book concerns the post-battle controversy that surrounded the Eleventh Corps' performance at Chancellorsville. That material is good for deep background but the book does not have the history of the Corps itself that I hoped for. And to get on my soap box for a moment -- \$65 is an exorbitant price for a book that contains just 160 pages of narrative. Shame on its publisher.

Often called Lee's greatest triumph, the battle of Chancellorsville decimated the Union Eleventh Corps, composed of large numbers of German-speaking volunteers. Poorly deployed, the unit was routed by "Stonewall" Jackson and became the scapegoat for the Northern defeat, blamed by many on the "flight" of German immigrant troops. The impact on America's large German community was devastating. But there is much more to the story than that. Drawing for the first time on German-language newspapers, soldiers' letters, memoirs, and regimental records, Christian Keller reconstructs the battle and its aftermath from the German-American perspective, military and civilian. He offers a fascinating window into a misunderstood past, one where the German soldiers' valor has been either minimized or dismissed as cowardly. He critically analyzes the performance of the German regiments and documents the impact of nativism on Anglo-American and German-American reactions and on German self-perceptions as patriots and Americans. For German-Americans, the ghost of Chancellorsville lingered long, and Keller traces its effects not only on ethnic identity, but also on the dynamics of inclusion and assimilation in American life.

A truly groundbreaking work of research and analysis. (Civil War Books Authors) Discusses the events and aftermath of the May 1863 battle, in which the Union Army's Eleventh Corps, a force largely composed of German-speaking volunteers, was routed by Confederate troops; documents the role of nativism in criticism of the corps and explores responses in the German-American community. (The Chronicle of Higher Education)... German American studies, which flourished a century ago and were nearly moribund fifty years later, flourish once again. (Robert W. Frizzell Journal of American Ethnic History). . . Superbly-written and detailed . . . Keller outlines with a clarity which few have done before him . . . (Defense and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy) Keller's finely-crafted study offers a wealth of insights into the Civil War . . . (Civil War Book) Christian B. Keller makes a powerful case for the battle of Chancellorsville's centrality to the German-American experience in the Civil War. Addressing questions relating to military and ethnic history, as well as to how the battle reverberated in German-American memories of the conflict, it reveals a complex dynamic of patriotism and alienation that played out over many years. Readers interested in the Civil War, German-Americans, and the formation of national allegiance and identity will turn to it with profit. (Gary W. Gallagher author of The Confederate War) Keller has added a highly valuable and much-needed revisionist work to Civil War historiography and to the study of ethnicity in nineteenth-century America. (The Journal of Southern History) About the Author Christian B. Keller is Professor of History at the United States Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Along with many scholarly articles focusing on the ethnic experience in the Civil War, he is author of Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory (Fordham, 2007) and coauthor of Damn Dutch: Pennsylvania Germans at Gettysburg (Stackpole, 2004). He is currently editing and translating the memoirs of a German American soldier in the 41st New York