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German-Americans

The silent minority

KOHLER, WISCONSIN

America's largest ethnic group has assimilated so well that people barely notice it

ON A snow-covered bluff overlooking the Sheboygan river stands the Waelderhaus, a faithful reproduction of an Austrian chalet. It was built by the Kohler family of Wisconsin in the 1920s as a tribute to the homeland of their father, John Michael Kohler, who had immigrated to America in 1854 at the age of ten.

John Michael moved to Sheboygan, married the daughter of another German immigrant, who owned the local foundry, and took over his father-in-law's business. He transformed it from a maker of ploughshares into a plumbing business. Today Kohler is the biggest maker of loos and baths in America. Herbert Kohler, the boss (and grandson of the founder), has done so well selling tubs that he has been able to pursue his other passion—golf—on a grand scale. The Kohler Company owns Whistling Straits, the course that will host the Ryder Cup in 2020.

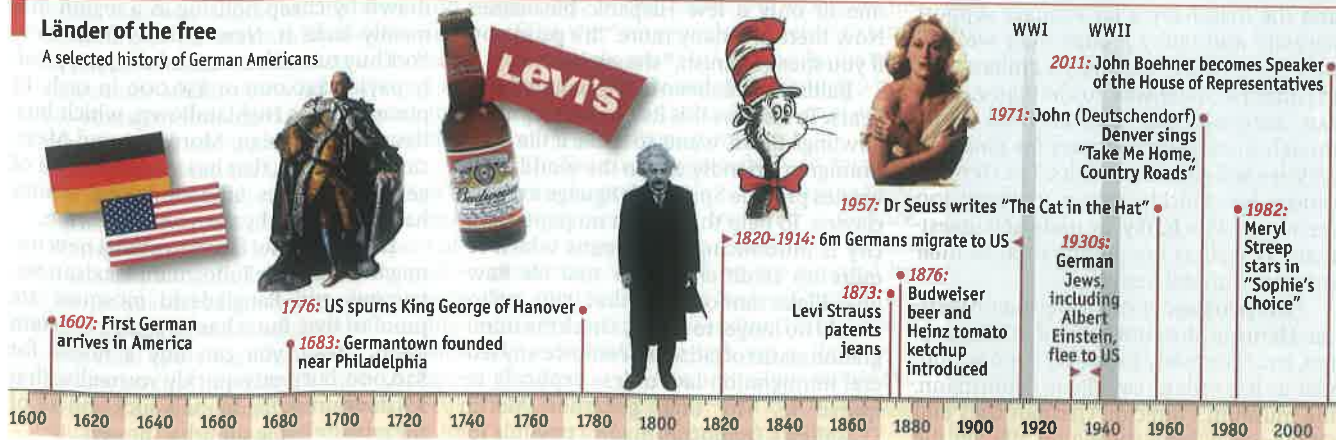
German-Americans are America's largest single ethnic group (if you divide Hispanics into Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, etc). In 2013, according to the Census bureau, 46m Americans claimed German ancestry: more than the number who traced their roots to Ireland (33m) or England (25m). In whole swathes of the northern United States, German-Americans outnumber any other group (see map on next page). Some 41% of the people in Wisconsin are of Teutonic stock.

Yet despite their numbers, they are barely visible. Everyone knows that Michael Dukakis is Greek-American, the Kennedy clan hail from Ireland and Mario Cuomo was an Italian-American. Fewer notice that John Boehner, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Rand Paul, a senator from Kentucky with presidential ambitions, are of German origin.

Companies founded by German-Americans tend to play down their roots, too: think of Pfizer, Boeing, Steinway, Levi Strauss or Heinz. Buried somewhere on their websites may be a brief note that "Steinway & Sons was founded in 1853 by German immigrant Henry Engelhard Steinway in a Manhattan loft on Varick Street". But firms that play up their Germanic history—as Kohler does, in a short film shown at the Waelderhaus—are rare.

German immigrants have flavoured American culture like cinnamon in an *Apfelkuchen*. They imported Christmas trees and Easter bunnies and gave America a taste for pretzels, hot dogs, bratwursts and sauerkraut. They built big Lutheran churches wherever they went. Germans in Wisconsin launched America's first kindergarten and set up *Turnvereine*, or gymnastics clubs, in Milwaukee, Cincinnati and other cities.

After a failed revolution in Germany in 1848, disillusioned revolutionaries decamped to America and spread progressive ideas. "Germanism, socialism and beer makes Milwaukee different," says John Gurda, a historian. Milwaukee is the only big American city that had Socialist mayors for several decades, of whom two, ▸▸



Migration policy

Going where they are wanted

WASHINGTON, DC

How Canada and Australia let regions sponsor immigrants

MOST immigrants to Canada must pass a points test, administered by the federal government. If you don't like the idea of collecting points, but wouldn't mind becoming a farmer in Saskatchewan or a carpenter in Alberta, you can apply to those provincial governments directly. Canada is one of a few Western countries to make special allowances for immigrants willing to move to particular parts of the country. Australia is another.

In Australia's case, the system exists to increase migration to places other than Sydney, where many newcomers congregate. Canada's evolved out of Québécois demands to be allowed to woo French-speaking immigrants. In Australia, 40% of economic migrants (as opposed to family-reunion migrants, students or refugees) have such visas. In Canada a quarter do. In places unused to much migration, the numbers are higher. In one Canadian province, Manitoba, provincial nominees are 91% of all economic immigrants.

Under both systems, most migrants ultimately get permanent residency and, with it, the right to work anywhere. But states and provinces try to nominate those who are likely to stay. Visas are typically limited to people who have specialist skills or else have already lived in a place on a temporary work visa (which Canada and Australia both issue plenty of). This tends to work: in 2008, around 70% of workers who had arrived under the Canadian scheme in the previous five years were still living in the province they arrived in.

An American scheme could work in much the same way, says Demetrios Papademetriou of the Migration Policy Institute, a think-tank. Many immigrants have temporary work visas that tie them to particular employers; new visas could tie them to states, which is less restrictive. A path to permanent residency could be provided for workers who can prove that they actually lived in a particular state for an allotted time.

One problem would be ensuring that migrants who are thus constrained can still thrive. Canada's and Australia's regionally-selected immigrants tend to be sent to specific regions and industries where the demand for their labour is high. Some parts of America lack jobs but want immigrants anyway, hoping they will buy up empty homes and pay local taxes. It's worth a try.

Ashton Carter

A brain in charge of the brawn

Barack Obama's nominee for defence secretary impresses the Senate

EXACTLY two years ago, an excruciating Senate hearing nearly did for Chuck Hagel, America's outgoing secretary of defence. Hapless, shaky on his brief and stumbling in his answers, Mr Hagel's performance in front of the Armed Services Committee undermined his authority at the Pentagon from the start, allowing the White House an opportunity to meddle that even it eventually tired of.

It was never likely that Ashton ("Ash") Carter's confirmation hearing for the same job on February 4th would be a repeat of that. Many consider him supremely qualified. He has served at every level of civilian leadership at the Pentagon (most recently as its chief operating officer until 14 months ago). When out of office, Mr Carter, a physicist, has been an influential national-security scholar with a particular expertise in nuclear strategy and technology. Although a lifelong Democrat, he enjoys a rare degree of support across the aisle, even from Republican hawks such as John McCain, the committee chairman.

That did not mean that Mr Carter's hearing was a cakewalk. Senate Republicans despise what they see as Barack Obama's passivity in the face of mounting threats from abroad and his reluctant use of American military power to confront them. Mr Carter managed not to be disloyal to his boss while hinting at a more robust approach in the future. For example, he said he was "very much incline[d]" to send defensive weapons to Ukraine. By the end, a mood of almost cosy bipartisanship had descended. Mr Carter is expected to be confirmed easily next week.

His hearing was preceded two days earlier by the president's 2016 budget request to Congress, which included a defence base budget of $534 billion, $35 billion more than the spending cap required by the controversial 2011 Budget Control Act, plus $51 billion for funding wars. Unless the administration can cut a deal with Congress, sequestration—automatic across-the-board cuts—will kick in, making a nonsense of Mr Obama's request.

Mr Carter and Mr McCain agree that military spending needs to rise. They are equally exasperated by the failure to find a solution to the problem of the caps, which Mr Carter has described as "purely the collateral damage of political gridlock".

Sadly, there is little chance of a grand bargain that would finally lift the threat of sequestration from defence. The Republicans want to pay for more of it with spending cuts elsewhere; the Democrats (and the president) want to pay for it with higher taxes or by adding to the deficit. Each approach is abhorrent to the other side.

Thus the task for Mr Carter in the slightly less than two years he has (unless Mr Obama's successor keeps him on) is to find a way to live with a budget that is too small, while dealing with everything else. This includes bringing some coherence to the campaign against Islamic State; improving deterrence against Russia; preparing for the consequences of the talks aimed at preventing Iran from building nuclear weapons; and supporting the new government in more-or-less forgotten Afghanistan.

At the same time, he must aim to leave America's defence establishment in better shape than he found it. This involves modernising its ageing nuclear forces and ensuring that America keeps its technological edge over potential enemies (the "offset strategy", now mainly concerned with robotics, miniaturisation, hypersonics, cyber-warfare and the handling of "big data"). High on the wish-list of new weapons are unmanned carrier-strike aircraft and stealthy unmanned underwater vehicles that can creep close to enemy shores.

To fund new weapons and technologies, Mr Carter will need help from Congress to reform military pensions and health care, axe legacy weapons (such as the A-10 tank-busting aircraft) and close unwanted bases: all horribly hard. He will need to be a consummate politician. ■

Plenty more fires to put out