

German for a Day? Festivals and Symbolic Ethnicity in Central Texas

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Although Central Texas retains much of its ethnic ambience, the proportion of its residents claiming German ancestry is decreasing. Surveys of participants in three of the region's German-themed festivals suggest that the events help to preserve, maintain, and recreate German-American identities in the face of demographic change. My research also supports the contention that ethnicity is becoming largely symbolic and voluntary for many white Americans, who are increasingly identifying with a non-differentiated "Europeanness" than with specific national origin groups. While the festivals invite anyone to temporarily become "German for a day," the boundaries of Germanness appear to be more flexible for non-German whites than for non-white participants. Therefore, I argue that German-themed events reflect the racialization of American society and landscape, despite their claims to inclusiveness. However, the flexibility of festive displays of ethnicity might, over the long term, help challenge the persistence of the "color line" in Central Texas. *Keywords: Central Texas, ethnic festivals, German Americans, racialization, symbolic ethnicity.*

On a sunny afternoon during the annual Oktoberfest in Fredericksburg, Texas, a musician takes the outdoor stage in the shade of a red and yellow tent. As he launches into an eclectic mix of German drinking songs, country and western ballads, Spanish-language conjunto melodies, and Beatles and Elvis Presley covers, the tent is quickly filled to standing-room-only capacity. Born in Bombay, Rajah Khan speaks and sings with a pronounced accent that reveals his South Asian roots. Because he lived in Europe for 15 years as a young man, he is fluent in German, but in his lederhosen t-shirt, Tyrolean-style felt hat, and khaki shorts he cuts a very different figure from the fair-skinned, more traditionally costumed Texans of German descent who predominate among the festival entertainers. Nevertheless, Khan is something of a Fredericksburg institution; he has appeared at Oktoberfest every year since its inception in 1980, and he also regularly performs in a local German restaurant. "We come to see Rajah every year," gushes the woman across the table before excusing herself to buy several CDs to give to friends as holiday gifts. When she returns, she raises her plastic cup of beer and sways to the music, enthusiastically singing along with the lyrics to both the traditional German melodies and Khan's

compositions. The set wraps with a country-flavored original called "Texan by Choice," detailing Khan's journey from India to his adopted homeland of Texas, which then segues into a medley of patriotic anthems he calls his "thank-you" to America for embracing him as a citizen.

Rajah Khan embodies German-American festivals' frequent claim that anyone, regardless of race or ethnic ancestry, can become "German" for a day. However, previous scholarship, such as Steven Hoelscher's research on New Glarus, Wisconsin, suggests that participation in celebrations of European-American heritage continues to be constrained by ethnicity and race. Hoelscher concluded that the broadening of ethnic boundaries to include non-Swiss in festive activities in New Glarus "has yet to reach beyond the extremely rigid walls of whiteness" and that "difference is welcomed, as long as it is a certain kind of difference" (2000, 70-71; 74). After five years of participant observation and analyzing hundreds of surveys from participants, I contend that in a more multicultural relative location, such as Central Texas, the boundaries of festive displays of ethnicity necessarily are somewhat more fluid and flexible, permitting and encouraging participation among some members of "visible" minority groups. However, participation patterns nevertheless underscore the continued significance of the black/white color line in the region.

Demographic Change in German Texas

Central Texas is an ideal laboratory for exploring festivals' role in maintaining and reconstructing ethnic identity in the face of demographic change. It lies at the confluence of Anglo, Hispanic, European, and African-American migration streams, and the region significantly contributes to the state's vibrant heritage tourism industry.¹ Despite the high visibility tourism development and promotion have afforded the state's German heritage, the German presence in Texas is waning as the state's Anglo-American and Hispanic populations expand outward from their traditional regions of settlement. Although German ancestry continues to be the most frequently claimed ethnic or racial classification by residents of most areas of Central Texas (Figure 1), a number of counties within the traditional zone of German settlement have been subsumed by the expansion of a multiethnic, multiracial "shatter belt" that has existed in the state since at least 1850 (Jordan 1986). I conducted a factor analysis of the ethnic and racial identifications reported by Texans in the 2000 Census and discovered that only seven of the state's 254 counties are distinguished from the others on the basis of their German populations.² As Figure 1 illustrates, these seven counties are clustered into a discontinuous region in the center of state, a region that includes the three communities I selected as case studies: Brenham, Fredericksburg, and New Braunfels.

The demographic trends that can be observed within the state mirror those

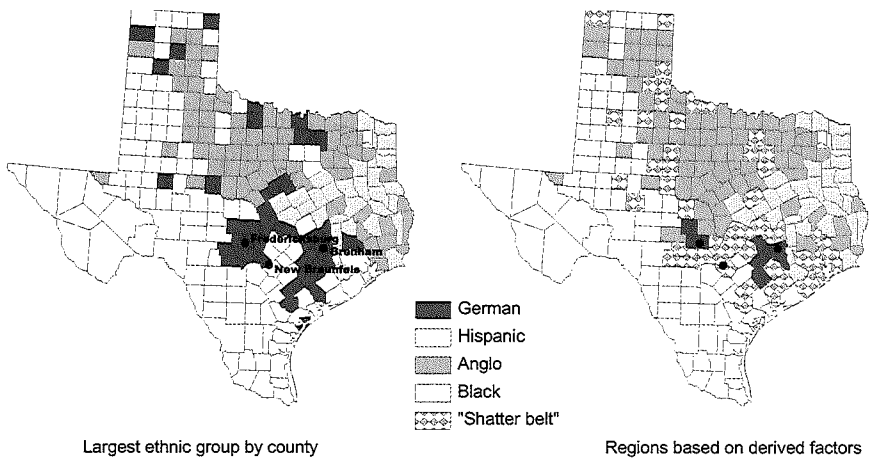


Figure 1. Locator map of study communities (Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000)

occurring at the national level. At last count, Germans continue to be the largest ethnic ancestry group in the U.S., representing 15 percent of the national population. However, like other European groups, the German-American population has seen a precipitous drop since 1990. The number of Americans claiming German ancestry declined by 23 percent overall, and the number claiming German as their first ancestry shrank by 43 percent.³ Nevertheless, events and attractions celebrating German and other European-American ethnic cultures are more popular and widespread than ever. A seemingly insatiable market of consumers increasingly seeks ethnic experiences to provide a context for a sense of group identity that is becoming distant from its ancestral origins in both space and time. Today, many seek their German roots with no factual basis upon which to build an understanding of their ethnic heritage. In this climate, tourism and special events help participants learn what it means to "be German" while also satisfying their need for traditional place-based experiences. Thus, tourism and recreation have become important contributors to the preservation, maintenance, re-creation, and construction of German-American identities and images among hosts, visitors, and places, as I will demonstrate.

Maintaining and Eroding Ethnic Boundaries through Tourism and Celebration

With the homogenization of cultures and the rise of placelessness in a globalizing

world, individuals are seeking to reaffirm their unique identities. Herbert Gans (1969) observed that, as the differences between subcultures have faded, ethnicity has gained importance as a means by which Americans demonstrate their individual and group distinctiveness. Today, as Steven Hoelscher (2000, 66) has argued, "travel has become the quintessential means by which ethnic heritage is aroused, maintained, and redoubled." For example, Celeste Ray (2001) observed that Scottish-Americans in the southern U.S. regard visiting sites of early Scottish settlement to be the next best thing to visiting the homeland itself and an important way to sustain ethnic ties.

While tourism is recognized as a means to maintain personal and group identities, concerns have also been raised about tourism's impact on the significance of ethnicity. In festive atmospheres where anyone is invited to be "ethnic for a day," ethnicity itself seems to become devoid of content (Hoelscher 2000). Indeed, the popularity of completely constructed German theme towns such as Leavenworth, Washington, appears to support this notion.⁴ However, it is important to note that, even though ethnicity appears ever more symbolic and the "cultural stuff" that its ethnic boundaries enclose (Barth 1969, 15) seems "largely interchangeable" (Sollors 1996, xxiii) from one group to the next, ethnicity has not completely lost its meaning. As Werner Sollors (1996, xviii) argues, "The fact of ethnicity, then, does not lie in its content, but in the importance that individuals ascribe to it." The popularity of ethnic tourism supports the idea that ethnicity continues to be an key locus of identity among Americans: the fact that so many travel, often over long distances, solely for the purpose of communion with others of shared descent underscores its continued significance.

Although Frederik Barth (1976) famously argued that the essence of ethnicity lies in the establishment of group boundaries, recent scholarship suggests that contemporary notions of ethnicity in America demonstrate a diminishing concern for some distinctions between "us" and "them." Over the past several decades, ethnic events that began as inwardly directed celebrations of group heritage have become more outwardly oriented. This trend reflects Americans' burgeoning interest in "ethnicity," broadly defined and not restricted to the particular customs of one's own ancestry group(s) (Zelinsky 2001). Steven Schnell's (2003) study of Lindsborg, Kansas, suggests that ethnicity is increasingly regarded as the town's shared heritage, not the exclusive domain of a specific ancestral subgroup. Schnell attributes this shifting sense of the meaning of Swedishness to residents' desire to revive historical and community bonds that are perceived to have eroded through the process of modernization. Other scholars have noted that the idea of "being ethnic" is widely considered a defining trait of the larger national community, thus creating a sense of shared heritage and experience among Americans of disparate ancestral origins.⁵ Furthermore, because modern notions of ethnicity are increasingly based on the consumption of ethnic commodities rather than shared social, cultural or linguistic

traits, ethnic events and attractions can foster a sense of common identity as consumers of heritage among participants who claim diverse ethnic backgrounds (Gruffudd et al. 1999, Bankston and Henry 2000). Carl Bankston and Jacques Henry (2000, 403) go so far as to conclude that success in the marketing of ethnicity may, in fact, hinge upon its very ability to extend feelings of belonging to the general public:

Vicarious ethnicity may actually be the key to much of contemporary resurgent ethnicity. Commodified ethnicity can provide a sense of being connected to a meaningful past (albeit a somewhat weaker sense) to out-group members as well as in-group members.

Despite their frequent claims to inclusiveness, tourism and festivals focusing on European ancestry groups have the potential to normalize whiteness within increasingly diverse host communities. It is interesting to note that German heritage only began to be consciously marketed as an attraction in Central Texas communities after significant numbers of non-Germans (including both whites and non-whites) began to move into the region. In ethnic-themed activities, Germanness, and whiteness more broadly, becomes a neutral backdrop against which other groups stand in contrast (Kobayashi and Peake 2000).⁶ Even in the increasingly non-white and non-German milieu of Central Texas, these displays of heritage portray Germanness as the “natural” identity of the community and its residents and thus, by extension, intentionally or unintentionally portray members of other ancestry or racial groups as “outsiders” or “others.” Further, the heritage and culture of European-derived ethnic groups, who typically share similar histories of immigration and settlement, are often depicted as portraying what it means to be “American.” This particular interpretation of the meaning of ethnic identity marginalizes the experiences of American ancestors who were brought to this country involuntarily or under duress, or whose presence predated the arrival of European colonists and explorers. Thus, the ostensible inclusiveness of German-themed festivals might actually reinforce the notion that the cultural practices and values of white ethnics are universal and “normal” among Americans (Frankenberg 1993; Kobayashi and Peake 2000). In this paper, I discuss the perceptions of festival participants in an attempt to determine where the boundaries of ethnicity are drawn within the festival context and how patterns of participation reflect larger trends in American ethnicity. I also evaluate participants’ assessments of the role of festivals in the maintenance of German-American ethnic identity.

Methodology and Geographic Context

From the many Texas communities that promote German-themed tourism attractions

and events, I selected three cases using a theoretical sampling strategy intended to illustrate the ethnic tourism process and its impacts in a variety of geographic and demographic contexts (Figure 1). Located within the German Hill Country, the city of Fredericksburg is undoubtedly the state's best-known German-themed tourism destination. Of the three study communities, Fredericksburg's population is the most ethnically and racially homogeneous; in the 2000 Census, it was 82 percent white and 45 percent of the total population claimed German ancestry. In contrast, the city of New Braunfels, another early locus of German settlement, is undergoing a significant demographic shift as it becomes increasingly tied to the expanding metropolis of San Antonio. With the continued northward and eastward expansion of Texas' region of Hispanic dominance, persons of Hispanic origin today comprise just over one-third of New Braunfels' total population, while fewer than one-quarter of the city's residents claim German ancestry. Nevertheless, New Braunfels continues to actively promote its German heritage as an important tourism attraction. The East Texas community of Brenham further illuminates the role of ethnic tourism in a multi-ethnic context. As in the other study communities, Germans have long been a significant component of Brenham's population, making up nearly one-fourth of the city's residents today. However, Brenham's most important distinguishing characteristic for the purposes of my research is its sizable African-American community, which currently accounts for 23 percent of the city's total population.

I surveyed participants in each study community's main German-themed festival (Brenham's Maifest, Fredericksburg's Oktoberfest, and New Braunfels's Wurstfest) in 2004 to learn about their participation in ethnic tourism and festivals. At each event, I asked individuals to fill out a card with their contact information, as well as answers to a few brief questions about their repeat attendance at the event, age, residency status, and ethnic background. The volunteers were later sent a full-length survey that included detailed questions about their experience at the festival, their ethnic identity and participation in ethnic activities, and basic demographic information.⁷ Data collected using both the short and long forms of the survey inform the following discussion.

German Heritage Festivals and the Maintenance of [Symbolic] Ethnic Identity

German-themed festivals appear to be important vehicles for the maintenance of ethnic identity among German-American participants. Nearly half of the survey respondents claimed at least partial German ancestry in response to the open-ended question "What is your ethnic background?" For the purposes of this study, any mention of German ancestry earned the respondent the designation of "German," whether reported alone or in combination with other ancestries. The factors that influence whether and to what degree a person will claim an ethnic identity present themselves in response to varying social situations, geographical contexts, or whims

of the individual (Okamura 1981, Zelinsky 2001). Thus, I classified respondents as German or non-German based on the belief that even those participants with very mixed ethnic backgrounds are likely to find themselves feeling temporarily "more German" when placed in the context of the festival.

As a group, the German survey respondents reported that their ethnic ancestry plays a significant role in their lives, with 28 percent describing it as "very important," 52 percent describing it as "somewhat important," and only 4 percent describing it as "unimportant."⁸ Many respondents also reported that attendance at the festivals has had a positive influence on their interest in their ethnic heritage. Nearly 47 percent of the German respondents reported that they were more interested in their background since attending festival, with one-fifth indicating they were "much more interested."⁹

The survey respondents' reported participation in a variety of ethnic activities further demonstrates tourism's role in the maintenance of German-American identity. As Table 1 demonstrates, more than half of all German survey participants responded that "attending festivals or special events" was an activity in which their families participate to learn about or celebrate their ethnic ancestry, and this item was second in popularity only to "preparing/eating ethnic foods." A high response rate for festival attendance was expected because the survey participants were recruited at ethnic-themed events, but the results reflect an interesting variation among participants in terms of their intention in attending. Some indicated that they attend purposefully to celebrate their heritage, while others appear to come for less overtly "ethnic" reasons.

Table 1. Participation by Germans in ethnic activities

Activity (multiple responses permitted)	Germans responding (%)
Preparing/eating ethnic foods	59.0
Attending festivals or special events	53.4
Researching family history/genealogy	52.2
Travel to ethnically important places outside the U.S.	34.8
Speaking/learning language	31.1
Celebrating ethnic holidays/religious observances	30.4
Travel to ethnically important places within the U.S.	26.7
None	15.5
Membership in ethnic organizations or clubs	11.8
Performing or visual arts (crafts, folk dancing, music)	8.7
Other	3.7

Ethnic festivals also support ethnic identity by providing German participants with opportunities to engage in other activities that were frequently reported as

means by which they engage with their German roots. Most importantly, festivals provide ample opportunity for the eating of ethnic foods (an activity selected by 59 percent of respondents). When German participants were asked what they liked best about the festival they attended, food and drink were by far the most popular responses and nearly 96 percent reported that they ate or drank while at the event. Additionally, festivals and other German-themed attractions can function as destinations for “travel to ethnically important places within the U.S.” This activity was reported by more than a quarter of survey respondents, further underscoring the importance of tourism to ethnic identity construction and maintenance. Finally, festivals provide opportunities for the use of the German language and venues for performing and visual arts that reflect ethnic traditions (cited by 31% and 9% of respondents, respectively). In sum, ethnic festivals provide a context for the expression of German-American identity that many Americans no longer encounter in their daily lives.

When asked to identify the purpose of the festivals, many survey respondents explicitly stated that the events help to sustain German identity for individuals and the larger ethnic group. A visitor to Fredericksburg’s Oktoberfest reported, “I am of German descent, and this is really the only opportunity that I have to connect with my family culture; this applies to my husband as well.” Many of those who did not report German ancestry themselves also perceived the festivals’ role in sustaining ethnic ties. One white New Braunfels resident explained:

It has been a tradition for 40 years now in New Braunfels, and I believe the residents as well as people from the surrounding areas really enjoy the celebration. There are many people in the area who come from German descent, and it is an important opportunity for them to express that, and to celebrate with the entire family.

A number of survey participants further observed that these events play a vital role in preserving the ethnic identity of the Central Texas region. A German resident of New Braunfels observed:

The German influence in New Braunfels is decreasing every year. In the 1960’s (my grandparents say) if you lived in New Braunfels and did not speak German you were still viewed somewhat as an outsider. Today that is definitely not the case and Wurstfest helps to honor the German heritage and traditions that were present during the founding of the city of New Braunfels. I am German, and both sides of my family have lived in New Braunfels for over 150 years. It is great fun to continue to participate in activities that are fun and culturally empowering, giving depth to the mostly Americanized, fast food society that exists in our normal lives.

Visitors, like residents, also appreciated the events' role in sustaining the region's ethnic character. A German-born resident of San Antonio reported:

Wurstfest is like bringing Germany back to us who have lived there and have grown up within the German tradition. There is not much of German heritage left in this area. It not only needs to stay but needs to grow.

Once again, these observations were shared by non-Germans as well as Germans, as a white resident of New Braunfels demonstrated:

Wurstfest is a strong tradition in the New Braunfels community and provides a sense of the community's German heritage that makes it a more interesting place to live. Plus, sausage is definitely worth celebrating.

While the above evidence supports the contention that ethnic festivals and other touristic activities play a significant role in the maintenance of ethnic identity for both participants and host communities, I argue that the survey responses also suggest that the ethnic identities prevalent among German-American people and places are of a largely symbolic nature. Herbert Gans advanced the idea of "symbolic ethnicity" to describe later-generation European-American ethnic identity. He argues that, because the differences between European ethnic groups are fading, ethnicity is becoming increasingly peripheral to the lives of white Americans. As such, a symbolic ethnicity is emerging that entails "a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior" (Gans 1979, 9). Thus, elements of the ethnic culture are transformed into symbols that are visible and can be clearly understood by the majority of later-generation ethnics and that can be easily expressed and felt without interfering in other aspects of life (Gans 1979). Put another way, "symbolic ethnicity is concerned with the symbols of ethnic cultures rather than with the cultures themselves" (Alba 1990, 306).

Data (see Table 2) regarding survey participants' motivations for attending the festivals support the notion that increasingly symbolic ethnic identities are developing among German Americans. Two trends are of particular interest: 1) the frequency with which certain motivations were or were not selected from a list of options and 2) the similarities between survey results obtained from German and non-German participants. As the results displayed in Table 2 demonstrate, the most popular motivations selected by German survey respondents were the consumption of German food and listening to German music, activities that are highly evocative of "German" heritage and demand little of the participant. Further illustrating the prevalence of largely symbolic activities was the third most popular answer choice, "just to have fun," selected by 84 percent of German respondents. Interestingly,

two items were chosen much less frequently than I had expected: "To show pride in community's history/heritage" and "To learn about German heritage and culture," chosen by only 34 percent and 15 percent of German respondents respectively. On one hand, these results bolster the argument that the form of ethnic identity encouraged by these festivals is a symbolic attachment; respondents appear to be more interested in the trappings of ethnic culture than the more substantive understanding that might be gained from other kinds of participation in the events. On the other hand, these responses might reflect a sophisticated understanding on the part of some participants regarding the contrivance and constructedness that often underlie touristic representations of ethnic heritage and culture, as frequently indicated by answers to questions elsewhere in the survey. Thus, a number of participants recognize that the largely constructed, entertainment-oriented atmosphere of a festival is perhaps not the ideal place to gain a deeper knowledge of what it means to be German.

Table 2. Motivations for festival attendance

Reason selected (multiple selections permitted)	Germans responding (%)	Non-Germans responding (%)
To eat/drink	87.6	81.8
To hear music/to dance	85.7	72.7
Just to have fun	83.9	75.2
To enjoy a family-friendly outing	59.6	47.9
To reunite with friends/family living in area	40.4	29.7
To see/hear cultural performances (folk dancing, theatre, etc.)	39.8	36.4
To show pride in community's history/heritage	33.5	15.8
To see/buy visual arts and crafts	29.8	24.8
To shop	29.2	21.8
To learn about German heritage and culture	14.9	14.5
Other	14.3	20.0

In comparing the results obtained from German respondents and to those of non-German respondents (Table 2), additional support is lent to the argument for the development of symbolic ethnicity among European Americans. Based on the survey results, German-American respondents appeared to have a slightly stronger interest than non-Germans in attending the festivals to partake in German food, music, souvenirs, and cultural performances. These findings suggest that ethnic festivals are a vehicle for providing the symbolic content from which contemporary European-American identities are increasingly being constructed. Curiously, German respondents were more likely than non-German respondents to select reasons for

attending the festivals that seemed to have little to do with ethnicity, such as “just to have fun” and “to enjoy a family-friendly outing.” Because participants were permitted to choose multiple responses, it is likely that these choices were made in combination with other options, including those with more explicitly ethnic undertones. Nonetheless, the propensity of German respondents to emphasize the recreational aspects of the events might further indicate the festivals’ symbolic status.

The results of the survey suggest that German-themed festivals in Central Texas play a significant role in the maintenance of ethnic identity for both German-American participants and for the region itself. Further, I contend there is ample evidence to suggest that the ethnic identities that are evolving in the region reflect the notion of symbolic ethnicity proposed by Gans (1979) and further developed by scholars such as Waters (1990) and Alba (1990). However, these conclusions raise further questions regarding the degree of flexibility within touristic expressions of Germanness. Perhaps most importantly, as ethnicity becomes increasingly symbolic and voluntary among white Americans, just who can play German for a day?

The Boundaries of Symbolic German Ethnicity

Research on symbolic ethnicity suggests that membership in an undifferentiated “European-American” ethnic group is becoming the most salient component of white identity. Richard Alba (1990, 312) observed:

The different European ancestries are not seen as the basis for important social divisions; instead, they create the potential for social bonds having an ethnic character, founded on the perception of similar experiences of immigration and social mobility.

The implication for this research is that participation in the ethnic traditions of other European-American groups is becoming increasingly appealing to white Americans. Alba's observation is borne out by the results of my data collection at German heritage festivals in Central Texas. It is apparent that German heritage events have a broad appeal to white participants, including those from ancestry groups other than German (Table 3). In response to an open-ended survey item (“Please describe your ethnic ancestry/background”), 34 percent of survey volunteers claimed German ancestry, either alone or in combination with other ancestries. However, an additional 20 percent of respondents identified themselves as belonging to one or more non-German, European national origin groups and another 28 percent described themselves using less specific ethnic terms such as “white,” “Caucasian,” or “WASP.” The large proportion of white respondents who identified themselves

at the "racial" level, rather than at the national origin level, corroborates Alba's (1990) assertion that, increasingly, it is the European identification that matters for whites, not their affiliation with a specific country of origin. It also suggests the persistence, and perhaps entrenchment, of racial boundaries in American society. An additional 4 percent of respondents did not specify their ethnic ancestry or reported that they did not know their ethnic background, while some respondents simply chose not to provide this information for personal reasons. I observed a number of instances in which white respondents who did not know their specific national origin group simply left this answer blank, supporting Ishmael Reed's assertion that "in the United States, ethnicity is interchangeable with being black" (Reed et al. 1989, 226) In other words, whiteness seems to be the norm against which ethnic difference is measured.

Table 3. Ethnic backgrounds claimed by survey volunteers

Ancestry group	Participants reporting (%) N=633
German (alone or in combination with other ancestries)	34.4
White, unspecified ancestry	28.3
White, non-German ancestry specified	19.7
Hispanic	9.0
Unspecified or unknown	3.9
Other	3.6
Black/African-American	0.9

The large proportion of non-German whites participating in German heritage festivals is not surprising. As Alba (1990, 85) has pointed out, ethnic activities, such as eating ethnic foods and speaking foreign languages, "foster a solidarity that transcends ethnic confines and is based on mutual appreciation of ethnic heritage, a recognition of the shared experience of being the descendants of ethnics whatever their specific origins may be." Ethnic festivals provide ample opportunities for such symbolic activities, and the survey responses suggest that these activities are especially important for many participants who lack a well-defined ethnic identity of their own. For example, one survey participant wrote of her experience at Wurstfest:

My family is kind of "cultural orphans." We don't seem to know [our ethnic background] ("Heinz 57," Mom always said). It would be fun to heartily identify with one specific group; on the other hand, we're pretty open to being a part of (and appreciating) whatever group is celebrating.

Non-German whites' participation in these activities is likely to go unnoticed and unquestioned due to the fact that most white Americans can "pass" as German due to their shared phenotypical traits. While whites of various ancestries might take for granted their ability to move into and out of a variety of ethnic roles within festive contexts, this fluidity is not as readily granted to the state's largest ethnic group, Hispanics, or to African Americans. Mary Waters observes that even if they choose to "play German" for a day or if they claim partial German ancestry, members of visible minorities might find that their ethnic or racial status is assigned to them by others. She explains:

Certain ancestries take precedence over others in the societal rules on descent and ancestry reckoning. If one believes one is part English and part German and identifies as German, one is not in danger of being accused of trying to "pass" as non-English and of being "redefined" English...But if one were part African and part German, one's self-identification as German would be highly suspect and probably not accepted if one "looked" black according to the prevailing social norms (Waters 1990, 18-19).

The percentages of blacks (less than 1 percent) and Hispanics (9 percent) among survey respondents are striking, as they suggest a serious underrepresentation of these ethnic groups among participants at German heritage festivals. Although Hispanics represent only 9 percent of Brenham's population, they compose 17 percent of Fredericksburg's population and 35 percent of New Braunfels's population. Perhaps more importantly, 72 percent of the survey respondents were not residents of the host community. Major tourist source areas for all three festivals include the major metropolitan areas of the state; Austin, Houston, and Dallas-Fort Worth are 20-30 percent Hispanic, and more than 50 percent of San Antonio's residents are Hispanic. African Americans appear to be even more poorly represented at the festivals. Although black residents account for 1 percent or less of both New Braunfels's and Fredericksburg's total populations, African Americans represent nearly one-quarter of Brenham's population. However, only two African Americans were among 75 people who enrolled in the survey at Maifest, and no other African Americans were observed participating in the event itself, although a significant proportion of those watching the Maifest parade earlier in the day were black. The black population of major tourism markets significantly exceeds the percentage of African Americans (less than 1 percent) among survey respondents: African Americans account for 6 percent of the population in San Antonio, 8 percent in Austin, 14 percent in Dallas-Fort Worth, and 17 percent in Houston.

Most survey respondents reported that they did not experience or observe overt discrimination toward non-Germans in attendance at the festivals. Both German and non-German participants generally agreed that participation in the events is

open to all, regardless of ethnic or racial background, but non-German survey respondents’ degree of agreement was somewhat weaker, with 57 percent of non-Germans strongly agreeing versus 73 percent of Germans (Table 4). Interestingly, disagreement that participation in the festival was open to members of all racial and ethnic groups was slightly more prevalent among Germans (4 percent) than non-Germans (2 percent). As the figures presented in Table 4 demonstrate, the responses received from non-whites were quite similar to those of non-German whites.

When asked to explain their answers, respondents from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds commented on the relative absence of visible minorities at the festivals, but they generally did not attribute this relative homogeneity to an overtly unwelcoming atmosphere. As one respondent noted, “Once you pay your money and walk through the gate-you’re German, if only for the day.” Other respondents remarked on the multicultural food and entertainment options offered during the

Table 4. Responses to survey item “Anyone is welcome to participate in [this festival], regardless of his or her ethnic ancestry or race”

Level of agreement	Germans (%) N=161	Non-German whites (%) N=103	Non-whites (%) N=29
Strongly agree	73.3	56.3	51.6
Agree	19.3	34.0	35.5
Neutral/Don’t know	3.7	7.8	9.7
Disagree	3.1	1.0	0.0
Strongly disagree	0.6	1.0	3.2*

* This figure represents a single respondent who was specifically concerned about the lack of representation in the Maifest’s Coronation pageant, which has become increasingly separate from the event’s German-themed activities.

festivals (a reflection of the more inclusive Texan context in which Germanness is frequently represented) as evidence of the events’ openness to hosting representatives of other ethnic groups. One respondent wrote:

I saw diversity in the attendees. A ticket was a ticket, regardless of who held it. There was tremendous diversity in the food and enough in the activities that anyone should feel comfortable.

In addition, the symbols on display at these events are clearly intended to extend a sense of belonging and welcome to German and non-German participants alike. Emphasis on the larger national and state contexts-as seen through the display

of flags, patriotic color schemes, and text and slogans that reference place-suggests that these events are not only about being German, but about being American and Texan as well. The participants themselves enhance this multicultural ambience through their personal attire, which occasionally communicates the wearers' affiliation with other national origin groups (e.g., buttons that proclaim "I'm Irish," "I'm Mexican," or "I'm Indian" along with those that read "I'm German") or reveals connections to the German-American community that are not based on lineage (e.g., a button reading, "Pray for me, my husband is German"). However, it is possible that, because they do not share in the "perception of similar experiences of immigration and social mobility" cited by Alba (1990, 312) as helping to cement the emerging pan-European ethnic identity, there is simply not as much interest in attending German-themed festivals among Hispanic and black Americans, despite efforts to portray these events as reflecting the experience of being "American." The participation patterns observed at the festivals might also reflect the fact that, for many Americans, socioeconomic attainment continues to be constrained by race. They survey results suggest that most participants in these events are solidly among the upper and middle classes.¹⁰ At the three events I attended, race-based class divisions were evident; all of the custodial and maintenance staff members that I observed were Hispanic or African-American. Furthermore, one German survey respondent reported dismay at a comment made during a past Wurstfest, when a featured musician called on the crowd to "thank the Mexicans for keeping the bathrooms so clean."

As the boundaries of ethnic identity have become increasingly permeable for white Americans, many scholars have observed that they have remained fairly impenetrable for Americans of color. As Mary Waters (1990, 156) argued:

The social and political consequences of being Asian or Hispanic or black are not symbolic for the most part, or voluntary. They are real and hurtful. So for all the ways I have shown that ethnicity does not matter for white Americans, I could show how it does still matter very much for non-whites.

Despite a general perception that the festivals are generally open to and welcoming of participation by non-Germans, the low proportion of non-white participants among survey respondents and respondents' frequent observation that non-whites were poorly represented among festival attendees suggest the persistence of race-based social segregation in the region. Kobayashi and Peake (2000) note that notions of whiteness are not necessarily explicitly racist, but they may simply ignore or deny indications of racism, such as the absence of racial minorities at the festivals. The repeated claim that anyone can be "German for a day," despite evidence to the contrary, supports this contention.

Although they were underrepresented among survey respondents, Hispanics'

reported rates of participation are more similar to those of Germans and other whites than to those of other visible minority groups. Among survey respondents who attended Oktoberfest or Wurstfest, the proportion of repeat attendees and the average times attended among Hispanic participants were similar to those of some categories of white participants. In fact, among Oktoberfest participants, Hispanics had a higher mean attendance rate (total number of years they had attended the event) and a lower proportion of first-time visitors than any other ethnic group, including Germans. At both Oktoberfest and Wurstfest, Hispanic symbols and hybridized elements of culture such as *conjunto* music and “Wurst tacos” are increasingly common, reflecting the 150-year history of interaction, intermarriage, and cultural cross-pollination between Germans and Mexicans in Texas. These trends were not observed at Maifest, where Hispanic participation fell somewhere between that of whites and other non-whites. The lower degree of Hispanic involvement in Maifest is likely due to Brenham's smaller Hispanic population and its greater distance from the predominantly Hispanic region of the state.

The above findings suggest that the ethnic boundary between Germans and Hispanics is more permeable than the boundary between Germans and other “racial” groups in Texas. Both Matthew Frye Jacobson (1998) and Mary Waters (1999) have observed that members of some phenotypically distinctive “racial” groups have attempted to “whiten” their status by portraying themselves as “not black.” In Texas, Mexicans have long occupied a liminal position when it comes to their racial status, with perceptions of “whiteness” often contingent upon the class of the individual or family in question (Montejano 1987). Neil Foley (1999, 15) observed that, in early twentieth-century Central Texas, “whiteness fractured along class lines and Mexicans moved in to fill the racial space between whiteness and blackness.” Thus, the most troubling implication of the differences in festival participation among ethnic and racial groups is the suggestion that the color line continues to distance black Americans farthest from the mainstream: perhaps the most important ethnic boundary in the region lies not between “white” and “non-white” but between “black” and “not black.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, German heritage festivals in Central Texas play a significant role in the maintenance of ethnic identity among German-American participants. Participants in these events include a large proportion of whites who claim “white” or other European ancestries, reflecting the emergence of a pan-European ethnic identity. The festivals' depiction of Germanness as the “natural” identity of the host communities disregards recent demographic shifts that have increased ethnic diversity and challenged the numerical and social dominance of Germans in Central Texas. Thus, despite their claims to inclusiveness, these festivals normalize whiteness

within the region, and patterns of participation in the events reflect the long-standing social segregation between whites and blacks within the state. Although the boundaries of symbolic German identity appear to be circumscribed by the color line at present, the continued diversification and creolization of Central Texas' population will probably require these events to become more inclusive if they are to remain viable.¹¹ This process already appears to be under way as festivals seek to expand their markets and their revenues by situating Germanness within the contexts of Texanness and Americanness and through occasional references to Hispanic contributions to local and regional cultures. In doing so, the festivals function as ephemeral spaces in which the boundaries of symbolic German ethnic identity temporarily become more permeable, even for some participants of color. In referring to himself as a "Texan by Choice" and by donning the trappings of Germanness, Rajah Khan demonstrates how socially constructed notions of ethnic difference can be challenged by festival participants. While not "passing" in the traditional sense of making his audience believe he is German by birth, he personifies the spirit of Oktoberfest: anyone can be German for the day.

Notes

1. According to the Texas Historical Commission (2003), heritage tourism is the fastest-growing segment of Texas' \$40.4 billion tourism industry.
2. In the factor analysis, four derived factors each accounted for more than 1% of the variance in the data set. Counties with high loadings on a factor (0.70 or higher, representing approximately half of the variance) were mapped as part of the ethnic region corresponding to that factor. Counties that did not have a high loading on any of the four derived factors were assigned to the "shatter belt."
3. The total population of the United States increased by 13% during the period 1990-2000.
4. The construction of German place identity in Leavenworth is documented by Frenkel and Walton (2000) and Sudderth (1997; 2001).
5. Werner Sollors (1996, xi) describes this phenomenon as follows: "[I]n America, ethnicity can be conceived as deviation and as norm, as characteristic of minorities and typical of the country" [author's emphasis].
6. Zelinsky (2001) has further demonstrated how many scholarly definitions of "ethnicity" specifically exclude the dominant culture as an ethnic group and how the concept of ethnicity has rarely been applied to largely assimilated European Americans. Such notions of ethnicity reinforce the normalization of whiteness and the designation of non-whites as "Others."
7. Of the 633 attendees who completed entry cards, 326 surveys were completed, for a response rate of 52% (not counting invalid addresses).

8. An additional 14% chose "neutral/don't know" and 3% chose "other" for this item. Percentages reported have been rounded to the nearest whole number.
9. Most of the remaining 53% of respondents selected "neutral/don't know" for this item. Less than 1% reported becoming less interested in their heritage as a result of attending the festival.
10. 84% of survey respondents reported an annual household income greater than \$30,000 per year. The most commonly reported income bracket was \$50,000-\$75,000 per year.
11. As of July 2004, Texas is the fifth state (along with Hawaii, New Mexico, California, and Washington, D.C.) to achieve minority-majority status, and Hispanics are expected to account for more than half of the state's population sometime within the next 15 to 35 years, according to various estimates (Petersen and Assanie 2005, Raymond 2005, U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000).

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