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Noel Iverson

University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

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ETHOS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE: (A STUDY OF
SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GERMAN-AMERICAN
COMMUNITY OF NEW ULM)*

NOEL IVERSON

University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

INTRODUCTION. Current investigations of immigrant communities have largely failed clearly to isolate the problems of ethos from those of social structure. The present researches were inspired by the idea that the isolation of these two types of phenomena will help solve some hitherto unsolved problems in social change.

THE CONCEPTS OF ETHOS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE. Almost every study of community change (such as the changes undergone by an immigrant community in an alien environment) tends to use a variety of concepts such as "point of view", "institution", "Weltanschauung", "social structure", "attitudes", and the like. These various concepts clearly have distinct dimensions—some of them refer to psychological references or magnitudes, others refer to behavior. Nevertheless, some relation (usually unspecified) is assumed to hold between them.

The basic hypothesis of the present study flows from these considerations: the value of spelling out the meaning of the concept ethos and indicating its relation to social structure is that it acknowledges the difference in dimension of these two types of concepts and permits more exact formulation of their relations.

Ethos is here taken to denote a set of basic assumptions about the world that is shared by the members of a culture. The latent assumptions which underly the manifest attitudes and behavior of a people may form a coherent system, with more influence on the life of a people than their self-conscious moral or religious or political opinions. The latter, in fact, are often mere expressions of this ethos. The manner in which a people define and solve their problems, the opinions they form, the ways in which they react to situations all constitutes, in some measure, expressions of their ethos. Ethos implies "a distinct system of world and self-views" (Honigmann, 1949: 15) which encompasses, as a sort of "dominant theme", the beliefs

*The writer's interest in the problem of ethos which he has increasingly come to view as critical to the study of community was aroused by Professor Robert Spencer. The study of the New Ulm community was conducted under the advice of Professor Don Martindale, whose *American Social Structure* (N.Y., Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960) provides the theoretical basis for this study of community change.

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of a people. Their attitudes and opinions relating to all spheres of life—economic, religious, political, familial and the like—are formed and subtly shaded by the “master configuration” of ethos. Edward Sapir, writing about the concept of culture, saw ethos as a sort of *Weltanschauung* (1951:83).

Though it has been variously called “spirit”, “genius”, “theme”, “temper”, and “world image”, ethos need not be endowed with mystical meanings and moods impossible to analyze scientifically. While not presuming in the study to construct an ethos quotient or to offer a neat and precise way to measure ethos, one hopes to demonstrate its usefulness as a concept to an analysis of social change. It is well to emphasize that ethos is not the acting agent in social change, as was assumed by idealistic philosophies such as the Hegelians in the 19th century. Only people influence others. Ethos is their set of assumptions when they wield such influence. Ethos is an analytical concept, and the concern is with the relation between ethos and social structure.

While under such names as *Volksgeist* (the genius of a people), milieu, and climate of opinion social scientists have been discussing ethos for a hundred years or so, empirical studies of the properties of a given ethos are conspicuous by their absence. Yet, an ethos may change in time, strain and tension may develop within it. Taking ethos to refer to the characteristic psychological orientation of the members of a community, it is possible to express more precisely the relation between the various concepts frequently used in community study.

In the present research into the relation of ethos change to social change the concepts ethos, institution, community formula, and core institution are taken in the following meanings:

Ethos: The set of largely unconscious assumptions (or axioms or premises) underlying the outlook of the members of a given community.

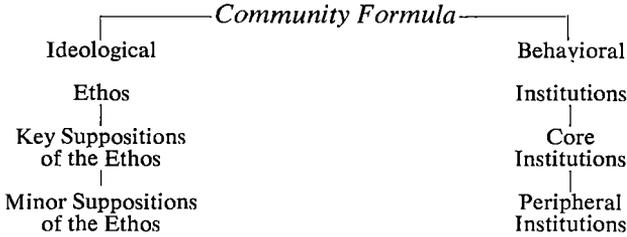
Institutions: the collective solutions to a collective problem (the basic unit structures of a community).

Community Formula: The conjoined ethos and institutional arrangement which defines the community.

Core Institutions: Those institutions in terms of which the total institutions of a community are ordered.

It is evident from this series of definitions that the idea of ethos isolates the conceptual and ideological dimensions of the behavior of members of a community; institutions, by contrast, represent structures of behavior. The concept of a community formula is a hybrid term referring to both the ideological and behavioral dimensions of the social life of a community's members. Hence, the relations between these various concepts can be shown in the following diagram:

Components of a Community Formula



A STUDY DESIGN FOR THE ETHOS CHANGES OF AN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY. For strategic purposes in the study of the relation between ethos and institutional change, it was deemed desirable to choose an empirical situation in which both ethos conflict and institutional change were involved. The transformations within an immigrant ethnic community seem ideally suited for such purposes. In the nature of the case the movement of members of an ethnic community from one nation to another has shifted them from the context of one milieu to another. Meanwhile its members have had to develop institutions adapted to new social conditions. Under such circumstances it should be possible to relate the changes in the ethos of the ethnic community with some exactness to its institutional transformation. The German-American subcommittee of New Ulm was chosen as a vehicle for such study.

The study of ethos change under such circumstances has two major aspects: (1) the tracing of the general historical and environmental contrasts, on the one hand, and (2) the ascertainment with some precision of social structure and ethos changes in the immigrant sub-community, on the other. The study of ethos change cuts through the current methodological inhibition that haunts sociology whenever it tries to combine historical with statistical study. In the following pages the history of the New Ulm Turners who formed the core of the German-American community will first be traced and the contrast between the general 19th century German and American milieus will be summarized.

The second major part of the study, the ascertainment of the social structural and ethos changes among the New Ulm Germans, rests upon field research and statistical analysis. In this phase of the study a questionnaire was designed to be given to four sample groups from the New Ulm community: a group of the first generation New Ulm Turners, a group of the second generation Turners, and, finally, two groups of non-Turners from New Ulm. (The present study concerns only males.) The primary comparison which was intended to reveal the changes in ethos among the New Ulm Turners was that between the generations—the hypothesis that guided the study was that the ethos of the Turners undergoes a systematic displacement away from the form it had acquired originally under conditions of 19th century Germany and toward that of the American environment.

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The role of the sample of non-Turners was to serve as control groups representing the general American milieu in pure form.

Historical Changes and General Social Contrasts. In 1811, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn simultaneously organized both the *Turnverein* and the national student leagues (*Burschenschaften*); both developed with the intention of overthrowing foreign rule and the power of the German aristocracy. A nationalist gymnastic association, the *Turnverein* was part of the widespread movement for national unity and independence of early 19th century Germany. Stimulated by such teachers as the romanticist philosopher Fichte, this movement, as a continuation of the cultural nationalism of the 18th century, was transformed into an active political force by the organizing genius of *Turnvater* Jahn.

Though most writers stress the *Turnverein's* gymnastic activities, this was the least important aspect of their program for reform. Failure to recognize the predominantly political nature of the Turner movement leads one to miss the significance both of its place in the 19th century German environment and of its ideological roots and thus to misunderstand changes in the ethos of the Turners. As we shall see, these changes are the result of a series of compromises worked out between the Turner ethos and the milieu of its host community, America.

The Turners occupied a revolutionary and precarious place in the world of German politics. Their initial political success was due to the fact that their immediate aims agreed with those of the German governments, which used the *Turnverein* movement to strengthen their own position for the day when the French could be routed. Later, however, the Austrian government arrested Jahn and banned all gymnastic societies; the War of Liberation had dispelled the illusion of unity and the conflict between the ultimate goal of the Turners and the basic interests of the governments became painfully clear.

The changing political fortune of the *Turnverein*, from 1817, when its membership reached a peak of 1,074 and Jahn received honorary degrees from two important universities, to 1819, when the King of Prussia was persuaded by Metternich to close down the gymnastic fields and Jahn was jailed for dangerous radicalism, tells something of the nature of the 19th century German environment. Its main structural features important to the study can be summarized under four headings: (1) The governmental system was segmented, unstable, and authoritarian; (2) an iron yoke of political, economic, and military power was welded by upper class princes, Junkers, and Prussian officers; (3) political activity by the middle-class took the form primarily of agitation for rights and privileges; (4) German society was rigidly organized in a complex of anciently formed kingdoms, duchies, principalities, and free towns. The ideological landmarks of the 19th century German environment important to an understanding of the Turner ethos have been given

the labels "particularism", "despotism", "nationalism", and "romanticism" (Lowie, 1945:23-29).

These features of the 19th century German environment meant that, as middle class migrants to urban areas—many of them students, a few literati and petty officials—the Turners (1) occupied a marginal and unstable position in society, being exposed to the vicissitudes of the political climate, (2) could not hope successfully to oppose the power of the ruling classes, and therefore (3) had to resort, in the absence of legitimate, parliamentary means, to deviant means to achieve their aims, but, because of the revolutionary nature of their aims, (4) were not allowed to experiment openly with their ideas.

The Turners were thus disinherited romanticists working for national unity and ultimately concerned with the establishment of the *Volk* as the basis for constitutional government. They favored popular education, a redistribution of power, the creation of a new nobility of merit (which called for the abolition of class privileges and feudal traditions), mass participation in government, universal national citizenship and military training, the free ownership of land by all, and the setting up of a "common public-school education for children of all classes" (Viereck, 1961:69-74). It should be made clear (because it is almost unanimously misunderstood) that neither the *Turnverein* nor the Revolution of 1848 (with which the Turners are commonly associated) was primarily liberal, in the ordinary sense of the word. Both the Turners and the Liberals of the Revolution of 1848 were split into two basically antagonistic factions, the romanticists like Jahn who wanted to establish a supreme state to be served by the individual (Viereck says he was the "first storm trooper"), and the rationalists like Carl Schurz who worked to safeguard the rights of the individual (1961:63). The effect of the romanticist philosophy of its founder on the ethos of the Turners needs to be considered in the present analysis of ethos change.

The *Turnverein* in Germany was a peripheral institution formed to explore and collectively solve the main problem of the unification of the German empire. In this it opposed the interests of the two main core institutions of Germany, the states of Prussia and Austria, who feared the formation of an empire dominated by one or the other. Even when the actions of the Turners supported for a time the interests of the states, their long-range interests were contradictory. The *Turnverein* was in fundamental tension with the core institutions of German society.

The movement of an influential branch of the Turners to America following the bitter disappointment of nationalist hopes after the Revolution of 1848 marked the beginning of their transformation from a political minority in Germany to an ethnic minority in the New World. This shift in milieu could not fail to have a profound effect on both the ethos and the social structure of the *Turnverein*. The rough outlines of this change in milieu can be suggested in a few

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general contrasts between the German and the American 19th century environments.

In America, "movement became a virtue, stability a rather contemptible attitude of mind" (Brogan, 1959:5); in Germany, movement was as little a virtue as it was a possibility, and stability was a popular dream: "Now, as in the days when Goethe called order more important than justice, German culture has been more concerned with stability and with fear of disorder than has the rest of western civilization" (Viereck, 1961:xvi). In Germany land was scarce and costly, and those who held it, the Junkers, grew powerful and wealthy; in America the abundance of cheap land precluded the possibility of a gentry living off rents. While both America and Germany achieved nationhood in the 19th century, the nature and the result of their achievement was quite different. Germany was an ancient land with a firmly rooted authoritarian political system, while America was a land barely settled and engaged in an unprecedented experiment in democratic government. The emerging German middle class was caught in a rigid socio-economic hierarchy, with the voiceless peasantry at the bottom and the powerful gentry at the top, leaving them as little hope of gaining political power as of improving their economic lot. On the other hand, the large American middle class, not having to contend with either a great peasant class or a ruling aristocracy, was the locus of political power, and they enjoyed not only the liberty but also the real possibility of increasing their status, wealth, and esteem. Neither landowners nor peasants, the German Turners were members of the new middle class migrants to urban areas whose position in society was uncertain and marginal for they had little power to challenge the existing order and lacked the prestige of family heritage that would open doors to economic or political opportunity.

Though partial and rather selective, this comparison of the German and the American 19th century environments indicates generally why the ethos and the social structure of the *Turnverein* had to change when the Turners migrated to America.

Generational Changes in the Ethos of the New Ulm Germans. A part of the nearly three million immigrants from northern Europe, the majority of the first generation German-American Turners arrived in the New World during the ten-year span beginning 1846. They tended to settle in urban areas, Milwaukee, Chicago, New York, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, and St. Louis, thus accounting for the bulk of the early Turner population. *Turnvereine* were organized in the 1850's in each of these cities, the first (1848) in Cincinnati under the guidance of "the popular hero of the Revolution in Baden, Friedrich Hecker" (Prah, 1950:92). Closely identified with the exiles of the Revolution of 1848, the Turners shared many of their political and religious views. For example, "largely because of the reactionary attitudes of the German state church, the Turner and the Forty-eighters in general had become anticlericals, freethinkers of the aggressive sort who set up free schools in opposition to parochial

schools" (Johnson, 1950:55). In the early days many were openly hostile to the Catholic Church. And, at the National Conference of Freethinkers in 1871, the Turners proposed that a suitable textbook be written for their Sunday Schools; the result was the *Leitfaden*, "a fascinating catechism of humanitarianism" (1950:57); used by the Turners as late as the turn of the century.

Politically hyperactive, they were repeatedly attacked by Know-Nothing mobs; they opposed prohibition, nativism, and slavery (at a National Convention in 1855 they took a public stand against slavery and thus entered national politics); they campaigned, in their publications and in the daily press, for individual equality and political freedom; and, in 1861, under orders from Washington, three companies of Turner militia succeeded in wresting the arsenal in St. Louis from the control of the Secessionists (Prahl, 1950:95, 100, 106-107).

These examples of Turner activities in 19th century America show them to have been an unusually well organized group deeply concerned with questions of a political, religious, and educational nature. Their concern for education is seen in their motto (adopted from the Roman author Juvenal), *Mens sana in corpore sano* (*Ibid.*, 79); they still equate mental with physical exercise, calling the former "mental gymnastics", which is doubtless derived from the name that one of Jahn's disciples; in an attempt to purge the German language of all un-nordic words, gave to the "university", the "Institute of Mental Gymnastics" (Viereck, 1961:77). The nature of their political ideals is revealed in their early statement of purpose: "Cultivation of rational training, both intellectual and physical, in order that the members may become energetic, patriotic citizens of the Republic, who could and would represent and protect common human liberty by word and deed" (Prahl, 1950:93). The early socialistic element in Turner politics is suggested by the name given to the national association in 1851, *Socialistischer Turnerbund*. At that time two factions disagreed over what should be the main purpose of the *Turnerbund*, one wishing to promote socialism, the other advocating physical training. Remnants of these two points of view (the latter is by far the most evident today) can still be found among the New Ulm Turners.

One of the group founders, Wilhelm Pfaender, left Germany in 1848 because of political repression and came to Cincinnati, becoming one of the original members of the first Turner society in America. While there, "he conceived the idea of a settlement of workers and freethinkers . . . where a socialistic society . . . could flourish, free from the evils of unemployment and want" (Johnson, 1950:71-72). With another Forty-eighter, Jacob Nix, Pfaender succeeded in enlisting the support of Western Turner societies at an annual convention, drafting the *Settlement Society of the Socialistic Turner League* and heading a committee of three to locate a suitable site (1950:72). The idea did not originate with Pfaender, however, for in 1853 the *Chicago Land-Verein* was organized by six German-

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Americans with the intention of creating a model town; they established the first settlement, of German workingmen, at New Ulm, and were later joined by the Turner group. Backed largely by the Cincinnati *Turnverein*, they intended "to build a little empire of their own, where narrow sectarianism could not find a home, but where freedom to all honorable people . . . might be enjoyed" (Fritsche, 1916:135). As acting land agent for the Cincinnati Society, Pfaender joined the Chicago group to form the consolidated *German Land Association of America* in 1857. The object of this new association was to "procure a home for every German laborer, popish priests and lawyers excepted, in some healthy and productive district, located on some navigable river" (Fritsche, 1916:466). It became a joint business enterprise complete with stocks, stockholders, and elected officers who were to preside over the affairs of the new settlement.

Incorporated in 1857, New Ulm became the only urban community in the United States founded and settled by Turners. Most of the early settlers were sent to New Ulm by the Cincinnati and Chicago *Turnvereine*. By the 1860 census, the community had increased from a little over 100 to more than 2,000 residents (it now numbers about 12,000). Almost exclusively a German town ever since, it had soon lost its socialistic character and, within a year or two after settlement, began to practice a form of economics better suited to frontier conditions, private enterprise. Frontier life in America favored the entrepreneur, and so the land association was eventually dissolved.

In the beginning the Turners were the socially, economically, and politically predominating element of the community: "Because of their overwhelming numbers, they had great influence in matters of school and town government. This fact also caused considerable friction between the so-called freethinkers and the church people" (Schlinkert, 1944:12-13). Informants, both Catholic and freethinker, agree that the original Turners were able, for a time, to discourage lawyers and clergymen from settling in New Ulm; they were also temporarily successful in prohibiting the building of a Catholic Church within the village limits. One informant pointed out that "the early Turners forbid (sic) any of the churchmen in New Ulm from becoming members of the *Turnverein*". In 1858 they built the finest building in town, the *Turnhalle*, in which a variety of physical, cultural, and educational programs were carried on for the benefit of the entire community. This hall became "the center of the social and political life of the settlement" (Petry, 1956:5). It no longer is, either for the entire community or for the Turners. They have long been members of a number of outside organizations such as the well-known American Legion, the Rotary, Masons and Knights of Columbus, Lions, Isaac Walton League and the V.F.W. Turners of all ages belong to these and many other organizations, averaging slightly more per person than the non-Turner group, 2.73 and 1.95 respectively, with a somewhat higher average membership in other

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organizations for the younger Turners (those under 45 years of age) than for any other group.

One would expect, as a result of the change in the milieu of the Turners, that their ethos would change. Changes in the ethos of the New Ulm Turners over the past several decades are evident in the responses given by present members to the question, "As a system for the planned production and distribution of goods and government ownership of the major utilities and means of transportation, what do you think of socialism?"

Attitudes of the Turners Toward Socialism

<i>General Response</i>	<i>First Generation</i>	<i>Second Generation</i>
Somewhat Favorable	23.9%	15.4%
Clearly Unfavorable	66.6	77.0
No Response	9.5	7.6
Total	100.0%	100.0%

This pattern of responses corresponds closely to that of the non-Turner groups and indicates how far the Turners have moved from their early political philosophy.

To the statement, "The good society is based on free competition and private ownership", little difference was found between the responses of the second generation Turners and non-Turners, while the difference between the first and second generation Turners suggests a change in belief, or in the certainty of belief.

Attitudes of the Turners Toward Capitalism

<i>Response</i>	<i>First Generation</i>	<i>Second Generation</i>
Strongly Agree	42.8%	77%
Agree	33.3	23
Disagree	4.9	—
Undecided or No Response	19.0	—
Total:	100.0%	100%

It is expected that the largest discrepancy in belief would appear between the first generation Turners and the second generation non-Turners. This is clearly the case with regard to the Turner motto of "a sound mind in a sound body." Asked to give their estimate of the truth of this expression, the difference between their responses is striking.

Attitudes of Turners and non-Turners Toward the Motto of the Turnverein

<i>Response</i>	<i>1st Generation Turners</i>	<i>2nd Generation non-Turners</i>
"It is very true":	76.1%	28.5%
"It has some truth":	23.9	66.6
No Response	—	4.9
Total:	100.0%	100.0%

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Further indication of the change in the ethos of the Turners is seen in the composition of *Turnverein* membership; Catholics are no longer excluded and freethinkers or agnostics, once relatively numerous, are scarce. Of the 56.6% whose faith is known, 36.1 are Protestant, 16.4 Catholic, 0.8 Jewish (one person), and 3.3 (four persons) agnostic. The known religious composition of the present membership shows a considerable change from the days when Rev. Schlinkert observed (1866) that "there were hardly twelve families in New Ulm proper, who cared for neither church nor priest" (1944:19); today, many of the Turners are Catholics.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS. Following their move to America the Turners became an ethnic community whose point of identification, the *Turnverein*, began to take on a significance in their lives not possible in the Old World. At this time occurred the first major shift in the place of the *Turnverein* in the ethnic community. A peripheral institution in Germany, it became the core institution of the transplanted immigrant community. As such, its functions expanded and diversified to fill not only the former political but also new economic, social, and religious needs.

The second shift in the place of the *Turnverein* in the ethnic community has since occurred. Once the predominant institution of the New Ulm community as well as the core institution of the ethnic subcommunity, the *Turnverein* has become a social club no more important to either community than many others. Once again it is a peripheral institution. Having turned for the satisfaction of their needs to the core institutions of the New Ulm community, which consist of its dominant political and economic structures, the Turners are no longer a distinct ethnic subcommunity. Their outlook and interests have joined with those of the members of the New Ulm community to extend beyond the narrow confines of their ethnic group to the dimensions of the nation and even the world.

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