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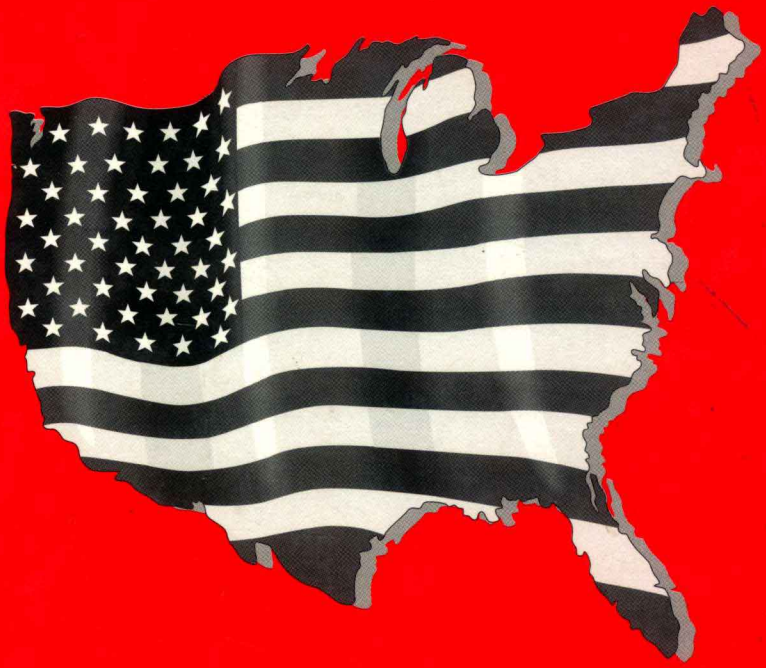

Focus on the USA

EDITED BY *Edgar W. Schneider*

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Contents

INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH TRENDS IN THE STUDY OF AMERICAN ENGLISH

Edgar W. Schneider

The present volume, modeled upon earlier *Focus* volumes in the "Varieties of English Around the World" series, is intended to mirror the breadth of research activities, to provide a fair selection of ongoing high-quality investigations in the analysis of American English (AmE), and thus to contribute to current discussions in the field. Whether "the study of AmE" can be seen as constituting an academic "field" in the traditional sense remains open to discussion. Probably not, given that such a field is defined not only by its topic but also, and perhaps even more so, by its common theoretical background and methodology. Thus, many scholars would probably feel more comfortable in affiliating themselves with fields such as "American dialect geography", perhaps "sociolinguistics" (an area which, however, is more likely to be labeled something like "the study of language variation and change"), "lexicography", "usage", and others.

However, I claim that a sense of community is growing that encompasses all disciplines having to do with "the study of AmE". Some thirty years ago, traditional camp affiliations were strong—so-called "dialect geographers" and so-called "sociolinguists" would have held conflicting opinions on questions such as principles of informant selection, the nature of reliable data, or the origin of what then was coming to be called "Black English". Today, boundaries between sub-fields have become blurred, as can be observed in matters such as attendance at meetings, data and methods chosen, or submission to journals and other publication outlets (of which the present volume is an example: I am proud of having almost all the major research schools and approaches represented in it). What we see emerging is a complex research continuum, with sub-disciplines influencing and fertilizing each other, a process which is certainly a very welcome development. In this introductory essay, I will attempt to provide a brief survey of this field, not to draw dividing lines but to sketch different directions and trends, a procedure which, taking all together, should teach us where we stand and where we might want to proceed. I will do so by listing and discussing three aspects of the topic: first, a selection of classic sources and earlier research summaries; second, some publication

statistics, and third, some current strands of research (including brief introductions to the papers in this volume).

McDavid's "bibliographic essay" (1979) deserves to be recommended as a most useful guide to the classic sources. Here the reader will be referred to the well-known introductions and handbooks by Mencken, Krapp, Pyles, or Marckwardt, the dictionaries, the three dialectological monographs which have shaped our understanding of the regional division of AmE (Kurath 1949, Atwood 1953, Kurath and McDavid 1961). In linguistic geography, the Linguistic Atlases and their handbooks published so far have obviously enjoyed a special status (Kurath 1939; Kurath *et al.* 1939-1943; Allen 1973-76; Pederson *et al.* 1986-91; most recently Kretzschmar *et al.* 1994), and so has *DARE* (Cassidy 1985; Cassidy and Hall 1991). Comprehensive expert surveys of earlier research mostly within this tradition are available in Allen (1977) and Pederson (1977). The traditional tripartite division of AmE dialects was challenged by Carver (1987). On the other hand, the sociolinguistic tradition has built upon the classic model of the early work by William Labov, in particular his dissertation (Labov 1966) and the work described in Labov (1972a). This tradition was continued by applying the same methodology to analyses of some white dialects (notably by Wolfram and Christian 1976 and Feagin 1979) but, more importantly, to work on the speech of African Americans (Labov *et al.* 1968; Wolfram 1969; Labov 1972b; Fasold 1972; and many more). Subsequently, Labov's team at Pennsylvania has pursued the study of sound change in AmE, culminating in Labov (1991) and Labov (1994). A history of this discipline remains to be written, however, and it would have to take into consideration recent trends towards a "sociolinguistic dialectology", as suggested by Chambers (1993) and as realized by Guy Bailey in his projects in Texas and Oklahoma and by Labov in his current nationwide telephone survey. On the occasion of the recent centennial of the American Dialect Society, Preston (1993) gave a survey of current research activities, mostly of an introductory nature and with a strong emphasis on methodological procedures. Fairly comprehensive bibliographic coverage of almost thirty years of research into AmE, with indexes, is provided by Schneider (1984) and Schneider (1993). Jay Robert Reese of East Tennessee State University is planning a computerized, annotated bibliography of American dialectology from 1887, to be published electronically.

The two bibliographies just mentioned permit a quantitative assessment of research topics since the mid-1960s: Schneider (1984) covers the period of 1965-1983; Schneider (1993) continues the coverage from 1984 through 1992/93. On the basis of the indexes of these compilations, table 1 documents the number of publications on selected regions, states, cities, and ethnic groups of the US per period. Certainly such a listing is not without its problems: some

items may have been missed, or failed to have been classified adequately in the index; individual publications are far from equal in weighting (with book-length studies being counted in the same fashion as brief lexicological notes); the number of publications on a certain topic is not necessarily indicative of its possible significance for central research questions; and so on. Still, with all

Table 1: Number of publications on regional or ethnic entities in American English, 1965-1992/93
Source: indexes of Schneider (1984) and Schneider (1993), respectively

States	65-83	84-92
Alabama	8	6
Alaska	2	6
Arizona	4	2
Arkansas	16	1
California	18	7
Florida	14	2
Georgia	14	9
Illinois	11	11
Indiana	13	4
Kansas	3	4
Kentucky	14	3
Louisiana	11	3
Massachusetts	7	0
Mississippi	10	0
Missouri	9	9
New Mexico	8	1
New York	7	3
North Carolina	15	8
Ohio	6	3
Oklahoma	4	5
Pennsylvania	14	15
South Carolina	10	11
Tennessee	20	8
Texas	27	31
Virginia	7	7
Wisconsin	1	7
Cities		
Atlanta, GA	4	0
Austin, TX	5	0
Boston, MA	9	0
Chicago, IL	16	10
Dallas/Ft.Worth,TX	4	0
Detroit, MI	9	4
El Paso, TX	4	0

Cities, contd.	65-83	84-92
Los Angeles, CA	7	4
New York, NY	42	8
Philadelphia, PA	17	4
San Francisco, CA	5	1
Tallahassee, FL	4	0
Tuscaloosa. AL	4	0
Washington, DC	14	0
Regions:		
Appalachians	37	26
Gulf States	15	18
Middle & South Atlantic	12	12
Midwest	18	23
New England	13	5
North Central	18	5
North	1	4
Northwest	5	0
Ozarks	0	8
South	43	58
Southwest	19	3
Upper South	5	1
West	6	4
Ethnic groups:		
African Americans	513	205
Chinese Americans	5	1
Finnish Americans	4	1
Gullah	17	38
Italian Americans	5	0
Jewish Americans	7	4
Mexican Americans	96	41
Native Americans	44	29
Puerto Ricans	19	10
Yugoslav Americans	6	0

these reservations in mind, I believe such a comparison will make some sense and suggest fashions and trends in research. In all cases, the cut-off line for inclusion in the table is a value of more than three entries in either bibliography, i.e. states, cities, etc. which are not in this list were the topic of individual publications quite rarely, no more than three times at the most per study period. When looking at these figures, remember that the first column covers a period of 19 years, the second one less than 10 years.

The state of Texas is clearly the "lone star" amongst the states of the Union in terms of the number of scholarly publications devoted to its dialect. Other states which have been frequent topics of research include Illinois, Pennsylvania and South Carolina, followed by California, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, and Tennessee. The interest of the research community has gone down with respect to Arkansas, Florida, Massachusetts, and Mississippi, and, conversely, increased in the cases of Alaska, Kansas (though on a low level), Oklahoma (like Texas the site of some recent studies by Guy Bailey and his team) and Wisconsin.

The second section of the table suggests that urban studies were much more fashionable in the first phase than in the second. This may have to do with Labov's original impact, but also the turning interest of his school to more general questions of variation and change. New York City clearly ranks first, with Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles and Philadelphia, in the first phase also Washington, being frequent topics of interest.

A look at the regional distribution of large-scale areal studies is equally telling. Not surprisingly, the areas where the "strongest" dialects are spoken figure most prominently: the South comes first (with the Appalachian and Ozark mountains as distinctive parts of it, and the Gulf States and the Middle and South Atlantic States as related subdivisions which have also been studied quite frequently), followed by the Midwest and North Central areas and New England, with the presumably "homogeneous" speech areas of the North and West lagging far behind.

Amongst ethnic groups, the table reveals clearly that African AmE has been the most prominent topic of writings on AmE in general, with more than five times as many publications devoted to it than to any other group or, in fact, category of the list. Chicano English and the language spoken by Native Americans have also been frequent topics of research, but in general the interest in smaller ethnic groups seems to have decreased after a more supportive phase in the 1970s.

Let me now outline the major strands of current research and relate the contributions of the present volume to these. By necessity, any such classification must be seen as tentative and to a certain extent subjective, and I apolo-

gize to those who feel that their own field of activity and interest is underrepresented. Still, my sketch is based upon experience and observation, so it is meant as a preliminary guideline and could be helpful in surveying the territory. What is most noteworthy, and in line with my introductory statement that camp affiliations are disappearing, is that most of the papers could be classified in alternative ways, and I will try to do justice to that by some cross-referencing in the following descriptions.

"Traditional" dialect geography, the discipline which after early lexicographical notes initiated the interest in AmE language varieties, continues to be thriving, though in strongly modified and modernized clothing. The early decades of the discipline focussed upon data compilation for several regional atlas projects. Work on these has been completed in some cases, abandoned in others, with the materials being archived and accessible to interested researchers. Three large-scale projects, all represented in this volume, have been actively pursued and have been the pride of the discipline for the last ten years: the *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States* (*LAGS*; see the paper by Pederson), the *Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States* (*LAMSAS; see* Kretzschmar), and the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (*DARE*; see von Schneidemesser). Successful work on these projects has been possible only because they have made use of advanced technology: the data were fully prepared for and stored in *computers* and are accessible on-line, which has made completely new types of analysis possible. In particular, it became possible to analyze immensely large data sets simultaneously by means of quantitative techniques, so the use and assessment of *statistics* plays an increasing role in the field,[1] as can be seen in the contributions by Kretzschmar and Davis and Houck (cf. Kretzschmar and Schneider fc.).

Lee Pederson has left his imprint of the discipline as the founder and director of the recently completed LAGS project, an immense wealth of data that shapes and dominates our knowledge of Southern speech, arranged and stored electronically in an extremely systematic fashion. In earlier publications and in the LAGS volumes, Pederson has referred to the "Piney Woods", a dialect area of the South which he discovered in the course of this project but which has never been systematically described. Thus, I am very happy to have persuaded him to provide a comprehensive and authoritative description of this area. In the manner familiar from other LAGS publications, Pederson outlines the historical and cultural background and lists the distinctive features of this dialect region and its subdivisions on the levels of vocabulary, pronunciation, and morphology.

[1] It is perhaps noteworthy that the very idea of quantifying linguistic data and of using statistical techniques in their analysis and presentation was introduced by Labov's early studies and can thus be seen as an example of the mutual influence of the sub-disciplines.

William Kretzschmar's statistical analyses of the computerized LAMSAS data constitute the most advanced and sophisticated applications of the tools of modern technology to traditional Linguistic Atlas data. In the present paper, he builds a bridge between these modern techniques and a time-honored concern of American dialectology, the impact of colonial settlement patterns and the regional diffusion of linguistic forms. Using lexical *LAMSAS* databases from ten colonial cities, he asks for their role as focal areas and centers of lexical diffusion, and provides fascinating results both on general processes of dialect spread and on the impact of individual cities in the formation of AmE.

Lawrence Davis and Charles Houck continue to apply statistical techniques in their search for dialect divisions in the Midwestern US. In the present paper, they test the hypothesis of a North-to-South dialect continuum along three linear "tiers" in the heart of the continent, using lexical and phonological items from both *LAGS* and *LANCS*, the *Linguistic Atlas of the North Central States*. In addition to insights into degrees of linguistic relatedness in this area, their study suggests important consequences for the comparability of the two regional Atlas projects, and thus, by implication, for American dialect geography in general.[2]

Luanne von Schneidemesser's contribution uses the lexical database of *DARE* as a baseline but compares it with data from a recent investigation of her own. She finds that in the three decades since the collection of the *DARE* material many of the terms recorded then for children's games have been weakened or have disappeared—a result which has wider implications for assessing the presumed impact of the media and the increasing homogeneity of American speech patterns. This paper combines conventional dialect lexicography with the study of *language change* in real time as initiated by the Labovian school.

Timothy Frazer's contribution also provides a link between traditional and later research directions, drawing materials from both fields to give a comprehensive survey and state-of-the-art report of the study of language variation in the Middle West, the American "heartland". Scrutinizing earlier studies, he reviews the problem of the dialectal division of the region, a classic "transition zone", and inquires into the existence of a boundary between the North and the Midland; but he also describes the regional dynamism resulting from the complexities of settlement history in the area, and discusses sociolinguistic studies of sound change in the area and the question of contact-induced change due to foreign influence.

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[2] Notably, their results find parallels in other papers of this volume. The occurrence of presumably "northern" forms deep down in the South is also described by Pederson, and the question of the consequences of the time depth of dialectological projects, the loss of regional vocabulary in recent decades, is also addressed by von Schneidemesser.

The school which revolutionized the study of AmE and introduced the very notion of systematic language variability as a central research topic in the 1960s still lacks a simple and unifying name. It used to be called *sociolinguistics*, but that label ignores the claim that any realistic form of linguistics should not ignore the realities of socially and stylistically determined language use, and it fails to reflect the fundamental theoretical interests of its practitioners. On the other hand, "the study of *language variation and change*", a label mirrored in a journal title and the name of the NWAV conference series, sounds a bit clumsy, lacks linguistic and conceptual uniformity and underrates the descriptive value of these studies. *Labovian* it all is, and perhaps might best be called, going back to William Labov's pioneering model and acknowledging his continuing leading role in and influence on the discipline. Anyway, I am happy to present samples of some of the best work recently done in this framework in the present volume.

The paper by Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes is a case in point. In their current research they study the linguistic pressures towards modernization leading to language change in the formerly isolated island community of Ocracoke, off the coast of North Carolina. In such communities, maintaining dialect helps people preserve their traditional identities, but the social and economic forces leading to change are strong. The authors provide an ethnographic outline of the community and its dialect, compare its features to other varieties of AmE, and then carry out a sophisticated analysis of two linguistic features, a phonological one (the vowel /ay/, a local shibboleth in the pronunciation *hoi toiders*) and a grammatical one (the regularization of *weren't*). The sound change under scrutiny leads to a reassessment of some of Labov's principles operating in sound shifts; the grammatical change suggests important implications for the interrelationship between "laws" of morphological change (such as the force of analogy) and factors such as the social significance and the perceptual saliency of competing forms. Finally, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes insist on what they call "the principle of linguistic gratuity", the need to let sociolinguistic research have positive consequences for the community.

Erik Thomas also addresses an issue of fundamental importance: the question of whether speakers' usage is shaped more strongly by parents or by peers. For this purpose, he studies phonological and lexical variables in the speech of sixth-graders and their parents from Johnstown, Ohio, combining insights from dialect atlas surveys with his own sociolinguistic data, analysed to some extent by means of experimental phonetics. The results are surprising and somewhat inconclusive, suggesting that explanations of linguistic change need to go beyond acknowledging the role of group identities and may have to consider perceptual contrasts between vowels more seriously.

The papers by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, by Thomas, and by Frazer also serve to illustrate a strand of research within the sociolinguistic framework which characterizes the most recent work of William Labov himself and which is most likely to have a strong impact upon general linguistics, the study of principles of *sound change* (Labov 1991; 1994). Labov is conducting a nationwide telephone survey of American pronunciation, a project which was partly foreshadowed by Guy Bailey's PST (Phonological Survey of Texas) and his Survey of Oklahoma Dialects.

Another major subdivision within the sociolinguistic school has been the analysis of *ethnolinguistic variation.* As was shown in table 1, the variety studied far more often than any other one in AmE was *African American English.* In fact, this strand of research is so broad that it makes sense to distinguish subdivisions and distinct developments within it. Descriptive studies of the features and properties of the dialect have been around for decades, a tradition reflected by Edwards in this volume. Another age-long concern has been educational problems, combined with the role of language in establishing one's identity and in creating social (in-)equality—taken up here by Baugh's contribution on speech perception and ethnic identification. The emergence of the variety has met with some renewed interest in recent years (Schneider 1989; Bailey, Maynor and Cukor-Avila 1991), a discussion which is seen in a new light by Mufwene in this volume (to be discussed in the next section). Finally, there is the recent "divergence" controversy (Fasold *et al.* 1987; Bailey and Maynor 1989; Butters 1989), to which the work by Edwards described here makes a contribution.

John Baugh returns to the question of dialect detection and ethnic identification on the basis of speech. He describes an empirical study, a "linguistic sensitivity test", in which judges had to rate speech samples on a continuum between standard and nonstandard English, and to assess the speaker's ethnicity. The results are interpreted in the light of social consequences of linguistic behavior, for instance with respect to housing discrimination.

Walter Edwards presents some results of two sociolinguistic studies of the speech of working class African Americans in Detroit. In particular, his focus is on the role of sex as a factor which determines speech behavior. In each study, he examines four phonological variables, yet the results support familiar models of sex-based speech differences only in part. Therefore, his findings are subsequently interpreted in the light of linguistic, sociological and socio-psychological concepts, including Labovian principles, conflict theory, and the notion of speakers' identities and cultural affiliations—approaches which are found to be better suited to explain the results than traditional social class models. Edwards concludes that older black women in Detroit are leading in a change towards convergence with white vernacular pronunciation norms.

As was shown before, Mexican Americans and Native Americans are amongst the ethnic groups whose speech patterns have also received a great deal of scholarly attention. The assessment of Hispanic varieties of English in general is obviously important, given the demographic developments in the American Southwest. Surprisingly enough, the English spoken by Cuban Americans has hardly ever been studied so far.

Frank Maas presents first results from an ongoing dissertation project the aim of which is to determine the level of linguistic competence of Cubans in AmE, and to describe and account for the variation found in their speech. He discusses principles behind their patterns of noun plural formation, using quantitative techniques, including a VARBRUL analysis, and explicitly testing hypotheses proposed in the psycholinguistic literature. This combination of language acquisition theory and variationist methodology is innovative and provides new insights into the nature of second language varieties.

Another innovative trend in AmE research appears to be an increasing interest in the *history and historical documentation of nonstandard varieties*. A case in point is Michael Montgomery's research on the diffusion of Scotch-Irish speech patterns to the Southern US, in particular into the Appalachian mountains, and, more recently, into earlier African American English, work which is continued in the present volume. Further examples of this type of research are Guy Bailey's investigations into the origins of Southern English, or the recent studies of diaspora communities and speech islands by Shana Poplack and Sali Tagliamonte. Recent evidence of earlier African American English (mentioned before, and represented in Montgomery and Fuller's paper) has led to an investigation of the issue of the reliability of texts and sources of several kinds, a question which has also been a fashionable topic in creole studies in recent years. Mufwene's paper combines several of these aspects with a fresh and challenging theoretical perspective, paying due attention to another central issue of recent discussions, the impact of *language contact* and dialect contact. The study of *dialect diffusion patterns* needs to focus on the fundamental question of which features of a parent variety are selected in an emerging dialect, and why certain features suvive but others do not—a problem of some theoretical significance for the study of language change. Fennel and Butters exemplify this orientation by weighing several possible origins of the Southern double modal construction.

The contribution by Michael Montgomery and Janet Fuller is a fine sample of the diachronic orientation just described. Based upon 19th-century letters written by African Americans, plantation overseers, and Scotch-Irish immigrants, they posit as many as six functionally distinct types of verbal *-s* endings and show that there is a high degree of uniformity across these

varieties—findings which will have major implications for further research and will suggest reanalyses of some older data sets in the new light proposed here.

Salikoko Mufwene's contribution is programmatic in nature, suggesting that research into AmE has failed to acknowledge the fact that all dialects of AmE, black and white alike, are products of language contact. Building upon notions drawn from creole studies, he surveys the historical backgrounds of white American varieties of English and of African AmE, and suggests that a "competition-of-features"-hypothesis can account for a common ground of all of these dialects. Thus, in a manner quite different from Kretzschmar's paper, Mufwene returns to the same old question about the emergence of dialects in contact situations, a question which underlies the foundations of AmE.

Barbara Fennell and Ronald Butters pursue the same issue, albeit in quite a different manner, by specifically concentrating on a single linguistic feature. They outline the distribution and attempt to trace the sources of the double modal construction, basically a hallmark of Southern AmE. They review a variety of possible origins, including creoles, British dialects, the possibility of spontaneous generation in the South, and the history of the English language (and other Germanic languages) in a Chomskyan grammatical framework, concluding that the mechanism of double modal production is likely to go back to older British sources, whereas the formation of lexical choices appears to be an idiosyncratic development in particular dialects.

Certainly the above listing of research trends and topics is by no means exhaustive. Amongst other directions, two more are represented in this volume: dialect lexicology, and perceptual dialectology.

Connie Eble's work stands in a tradition which is older than most other research activities, *viz.* the search for and classification of distinctive lexical items in varieties of AmE. Beginning with regional word lists of a hundred years ago and continuing with the quest for the etymology of individual lexical items, this tradition continues to the present day, including current searches for new words and an annual "word-of-the-year"-selection by the American Dialect Society. Slang and argot have been central concerns in that context, manifested in the shape of major slang dictionaries. Eble's article in this volume comprehensively defines and surveys the slang of American college students, discussing some of its general properties and giving a variety of examples that illustrate the creative character of this lexical stratum.

Dennis Preston's work on folk linguistics and perceptual dialectology, the beliefs of ordinary people on language and language varieties, has been well known and esteemed as an imaginative field of study for years. His contribution in this volume thematizes folk beliefs on the most distinctive of the AmE dialects, Southern English. In the first part, he summarizes quantitative studies —hand-drawn maps of dialect regions and computer-generated summaries of

these, and respondents' ratings of degrees of dialect distinctiveness (cf. Baugh's essay) and pleasantness along a North-South dimension, similar to Davis and Houck's "tiers". In the second part, he quotes conversational statements by speakers on properties of regional varieties, in particular Southern speech, and on observed patterns of dialect adaptation.

Amongst further research directions, we find traditional ones, such as lexicography, onomastics, usage studies, and the like, but also recent innovations and applications of dialect study, such as the emerging interdisciplinary field of "language and law". Taking it all together, we can state that research into AmE is lively as ever, in a healthy state, and continuing to produce fresh and important insights.[3]

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[3] The present volume is a collaborative effort, and thus the editor owes a debt of gratitude to a wide range of people. Most of all, of course, I am grateful to the contributors to this volume, who have accepted my invitation to join the project and have entrusted some of the products of their research to me and, in some cases, accepted my suggestions for modifications. The proposal to prepare a *Focus* volume on the USA in the VEAW series goes back to the series editor, Manfred Görlach. Petra Bernecker meticulously checked the contributions for bibliographical and formal consistency; Alexander Kautzsch and Clemens Fritz converted files from a variety of different formats and assisted in unifying the layout; Melanie Schäfer assisted in proofreading. Heidi Eidelloth maintained address files, knew how to handle serial letters, and kept us all in a cheerful mood. To all of them I would like to say thanks. It goes without saying that any remaining faults are my own responsibility.

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