

**Johann Peter Weiss. *In Search of an Identity: Essays and Ideas on Anglo-Australians, German-Australians and Others.* (German-Australian Studies/ Deutsch-Australische Studien Vol. 15). Bern: Peter Lang, 2000, 601 pp.**

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The German-Australian Studies series is designed to offer a forum for the discussion of all aspects of Australia. Peter Weiss' collection of essays (1990-1998) is the first contribution to this series written by a non-academic writer. It would have been the general editor's obligation to revise and shorten the raw manuscript prior to publication. This volume should not have been published in its present form, because the study lacks a coherent structure, the written style is ponderous, the English is not always idiomatic, and, worst of all, the study is infiltrated by personal opinions, speculations and stereotypes. Presumably, this manuscript was accepted on the basis of Weiss' status as a contemporary witness and an expert on the history of the Australian Lutheran Church. Since "emigration from Germany to Australia was connected from its beginning to the Lutheran church" (11), Weiss could give valuable insights into the history of immigration and the Lutheran Church. He was born 1928 in Berlin, immigrated to Australia in 1956, and now works as a full-time researcher of German-Australian history. So the struggle for an "Australian" identity is unfolded from both a personal and ecclesiastical history perspective. *In Search of an Identity* is meant to present the immigrants' quest for a national identity and culture, focusing on German-Australians, Anglo-Australians and Others (cf. subtitle).

The heavy volume consists of nine chapters: Chapter 1 presents German immigration to Australia from the beginning in the 1830s to the 1990s, concentrating on the German-Lutheran congregation, which is introduced as the German "mainstream" in Australian society. In Chapter 2, Weiss accurately claims that Australia has not yet found its identity; instead, he argues, Australians hold on to myth making and continually rewrite their own history. The author identifies a "conflict in the Australian character" that results from two contrary urges: the force of habit to be mothered by Britain (and later the USA) and the desire to become an independent nation. This part of the study is acceptable because it combines a thorough analysis of Australian identities and cultures with valid reflections on possible reasons for a lacking national identity. Focusing on the European immigrants, Weiss observes "all migrant groups quite happily accept[ed] to be, or to become, Greek-Australians, Italian-Australians [...], but they were not prepared to become English-Australians under the guise of Australianness" (153). In this context it is essential to reflect on the different aspects of "nationality" as a category. Hence in Chapter 3 the question of nationality and associated issues – also with respect to the author's own definition of "German" emigrants - are raised. These reflections serve as a basis for Chapter 4, which describes the mass migratory movements to Australia in the last two centuries with the focus on German migration. Here Weiss heavily draws upon his own experiences that are often redundant. In Chapter 5 he continues the discussion, this time offering a typology of different immigrants and their relationship towards one another and their new environment. The section called "a short twentieth century European history" (pgs. 303-312!) can only be accepted as a joke, because no one can seriously believe that an adequate analysis of such a complex matter can be given within a subchapter. In the following two chapters the author draws the reader's attention back to the Australian Lutheran Church: The role of Lutheran pastors and their accomplishments as well as the "changing face" (313) of the Australian Lutheran Church are discussed in Chapter 6. The next chapter shows how 150 years of church co-operation came to a sudden end when German-Australians and other declared enemies were taken into custody. The First and Second World Wars with their internments are partly held responsible for the decline of the German language and identity. A description of internments during the Second World War concludes the analysis of the immigrants' search for an identity.

Chapters 8 and 9 are meant to describe contemporary Australian history and its possible future. The proclaimed aim to describe "the general state of Australia in economic, political, cultural, religious and social matters" (pgs. 411-501) is doomed to failure, because the author again makes promises

he cannot keep. Moreover, in these two chapters especially, speculations and personal evaluations supersede sound analyses. At this point at the latest the reader's initial interest in the fascinating topic deteriorates because the next two hundred pages merely present the author's opinion on many aspects of contemporary Australia. Even worse, the author starts lamenting over the general decline of "decent values, religion" (426) in Europe, democracy and society producing "a few winners and a lot of losers" (431), the "Me-Generation" of the 1970s (437) and finally over today's "oversupply of information" (501). Apart from the fact that a six hundred pages-volume hardly is a page-turner, the last two chapters abuse the reader's patience. After having read this volume, one question immediately comes to one's mind: did the general editor present this manuscript to his editorial board? *In Search of an Identity* is probably not the best study that has ever been published within the German-Australian Studies series.