Pennsylvania Dutch Tune and Chorale Books In The Early Republic: Music as a Medium of Cultural Assimilation


Abstract

The Pennsylvania Dutch Kirchenleute (Lutheran and Reformed “Church People”), who spoke a dialect of German (“Pennsylvania Dutch”), were the largest ethnic group in early America outside of the English-speaking population. Like all ethnic minorities, they went through a process of change in relationship to the dominant English-speaking society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This sequential process (i.e., full ethnic retention, adaptation, acculturation, and amalgamation) is reflected in the Pennsylvania Dutch tune and chorale books that supported various stages of this evolution, depending on location and editor. Details of each music publication between the 1790s and 1850 contributed to this change linguistically, theologically, and musicologically through their content and appearance. Books that supported and promoted full ethnic retention retained the German language entirely, had a simple preface outlining the purpose of the book, employed a pure European repertoire, utilized unrealized figured bass or a harmonization on three staves, were printed from engraved or punched plates, and sought to retain German theology from the Reformation era. Some later examples of retention were not produced for ethnic reasons, but for theological reasons that resulted in the retention of traits of European chorale books. Tune books participating in ethnic change moved away from the use of the German language and European repertoire. They employed singing-school introductions and were resultant of the type-set printing process. Assimilating publications embraced revivalist theology and a type of consumerism that made the books and their users look more like their English-language equivalents than their European predecessors. All the while, Pennsylvania Dutch culture and all of its peculiarities were disappearing. This dissertation is a study of Dutch retention and assimilation, analyzing the tune and chorale books in the context of other folklife including visual art, food, manuscripts, and other publications.

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Cultural assimilation may be a voluntary process or a forced one, depending on the situation in which the communities interact. A minority community may voluntarily choose to become a part of the majority culture, if this is viewed as being superior, or provides them with a route to improve their status in society. In this situation, such assimilation occurs if the dominant culture in the host country shows less tolerance for other cultures. However, this ideology has an increasingly negative perception among people, and is being substituted for a pluralistic or multicultural approach, which views diversity as beneficial for the country. Cultural Assimilation Examples: Native Americans.