

Counter-propaganda and spy fever. Germans in Washington, DC, during
the First World War

On 27 March, 1917 *The New York Times* reported that, according to stories in Washington DC, prominent local businessman Christian Heurich was an active German agent threatening the US capital. According to rumors, the *Times* reported, Heurich was involved, along with other prominent members of Washington's German immigrant community, in treasonous activities. In a front-page story, the *Times* noted:

According to report (sic) around Washington, it was found that the principal man (Heurich) concerned had built concrete foundations for German siege guns on his country estate outside the city, placed to enable them to demolish the Capitol and disguised as fish ponds or similar landscape gardening, and that a secret wireless outfit was found on the estate, with which he had secured valuable information and conveyed it to the enemy.

The *Times* article continued, noting that an 'officer of the Secret Service' said he 'paid no attention' to this and similar reports. In reality, the 'concrete foundations' on Heurich's farm in suburban Maryland were the burial vault for Heurich's second wife, Mathilda, who had died in 1895.¹ Such rumors were not uncommon and centered on the entire DC German community, not just on Heurich, although he was a frequent target. One congressional wife noted in her diary in February 1917 that '*The Washington Post* is ... full of silly gossip'² This "silly" gossip was part of a much more serious phenomenon, an anti-German hysteria that resulted in non-naturalized German-Americans being banned from Washington DC out of fear the city's German population was sheltering numerous spies and saboteurs. This xenophobic panic in the US from 1917-1918 affected all of the nation's German-American communities, but arguably did the most damage to Washington's. When the war began in 1914 it had been the most visible and civically-engaged immigrant community in the area. By 1920 the local German organizations were far less active

¹ 'Germans Here Safe If They Obey Law; No General Internment, Baker Announces', *New York Times*, 27 March 1917. p. 1; Christian Heurich, Sr., *From My Life: 1842-1934* (Washington, 1934), p. 48.; Heurich, *I Watched America Grow*, p. 133.

² Tomatso Shibutani, *Improvised News* (Indianapolis, 1966), p. 133; Ellen Maury Slayden, *Washington Wife: Journal of Ellen Maury Slayden from 1897-1919* (New York, 1962), p. 292.

and visible, the German-language newspaper had barely survived, and the largest local business, Christian Heurich's brewery, was reduced to only producing ice.

Following a century of mass emigration, Germans had settled and formed communities in nearly all parts of the world by 1914, including Washington. The outbreak of war had detrimental effects on ethnic life on a global scale. In many host societies Germans were now regarded as 'enemy aliens', facing official measures which could include expropriation, exclusion from public life, restrictions on movement, repatriation, and internment. They were often represented as potential spies and saboteurs, posing a threat to internal security. Discrimination in everyday life and rioting of premises, both private and commercial, occurred in many countries. It is only since the 1990s that comprehensive research has appeared on 'enemy aliens' in countries such as Russia, Italy, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.³ Other relevant countries such as France, South Africa or India remain a blank spot on the research landscape. Whereas the bulk of existing scholarship is defined by national parameters both geographically and methodologically, more recent approaches have stressed transnational connections, comparisons and transfers between different empires and states.⁴ These show that, after a century of relatively liberal minority and migration policies, the First World War acted as

³ Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire. The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003); Daniela L. Caglioti, 'Why and How Italy Invented an Enemy Aliens Problem in the First World War', *War in History* XXI (2014), pp. 142-69; Gerhard Fischer, *Enemy Aliens: Internment and the Homefront Experience in Australia, 1914-1920* (Brisbane, 1989); Andrew Francis, *To be truly British we must be anti-German': New Zealand, Enemy Aliens and the Great War Experience, 1914-1919*, (Bern, 2012); Panikos Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain. German Civilian and Combatant Internees during the First World War* (Manchester, 2012); Boghdan Kordan, *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War: Internment in Canada during the Great War* (Montreal, 2002).

⁴ Panikos Panayi, ed., *Germans as Minorities during the First World War. A Global Comparative Perspective* (Farnham, 2014); M. Stibbe, 'Ein globales Phänomen. Zivilinternierung im Ersten Weltkrieg in transnationalen und internationalen Dimensionen', in Christoph Jahr and Jens Thiel, eds., *Lager vor Auschwitz. Orte von Internierung, Zwang und Gewalt im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2013), pp. 158-76.

a global accelerator for those clear-cut definitions of legal citizenship, cultural belonging, and ethnic boundaries which would become constitutive for the twentieth century and beyond.⁵

Within this wider framework of minority persecution, the United States represents a salient case in point. This is not least due to sheer numbers. The 1910-census counted eight million who were either born in Germany or had at least one German-born parent.⁶ Nearly all urban centers boasted a ‘Little Germany’, most prominently New York and Baltimore, as well as Midwestern cities such as Milwaukee, Cincinnati and St Louis. Rural America was equally represented. Eleven per cent of American farms were owned by Germans who, in turn, constituted almost ten per cent of the country’s agricultural employment.⁷ After the outbreak of war in August 1914, tensions with the host society gradually built up. They experienced a temporary climax in May 1915 when the passenger liner *Lusitania* was sunk by a German U-boat, with 128 American citizens among the casualties. This sparked a wave of anti-German protest and violence not just in America, but throughout the Anglophone world. Germanophobia then erupted again after the United States entered the war in April 1917, triggering state surveillance, repression of ethnic life, and internment. We can thus differentiate three phases, each being triggered by a war-related occurrence that constituted a step change in pressure building around a beleaguered minority group. We argue, however, that these phases cannot be neatly separated from each other. The following article is thus not strictly chronological but structured by overarching themes such as surveillance and spy fever that cut through the entire duration of the First World War. The phases have to be seen as a spectrum that culminated in the

⁵ Andreas Fahrmeir, Olivier Faron and Patrick Weil, eds., *Migration Control in the North Atlantic World* (New York, 2003).

⁶ US Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States* (1910), vol. I.

⁷ The best overview is still K. N. Conzen, ‘Germans’, in Stephan Thernstrom, ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), pp. 405-425.

last phase between April 1917 and the end of the war. Discrimination in public life and anti-German demonstrations were now everyday occurrences. The most notorious case of public violence was the lynching of Robert Prager in Collinsville, Illinois, on 5 April 1918. He was tarred and feathered, forced by an agitated crowd to kiss the American flag and sing patriotic songs, and finally hanged from a tree in front of two hundred on-lookers.⁸ German ethnic presence and visibility in the United States was significantly reduced through wartime pressures.

Critical academic engagement with xenophobia and racism has a longer tradition in the United States than in most liberal European countries, with John Higham's classic *Strangers in the Land* (1955) providing a springboard for a plethora of further studies. Frederick C. Luebke's *Bonds of Loyalty* (1974) took up the baton for the German-American community during the First World War. He not only described blatant Germanophobia, but also the complex patterns of transnational allegiance that connected parts of German-America to the Fatherland. Within a host society which was predominantly pro-Allies, public proclamations of support for the Kaiser added to the vulnerability of this minority group during wartime.⁹ A range of more recent studies have elaborated on Luebke's approach from different thematic and methodological angles. Those with a geographical approach have analyzed the social impact of Germanophobia in localities such as Missouri, the Mid-West generally, Chicago and New York.¹⁰ They agree that ethnic life

⁸ Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty. German Americans and World War I* (De Kalb, Ill., 1974). For the Prager case see pp. 3-26.

⁹ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land. Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, 1955); Luebke, 'Bonds'.

¹⁰ Petra Dewitt, *Degrees of Allegiance. Harassment and Loyalty in Missouri's German-American Community during World War I* (Athens, Oh., 2012); Ingeborg Gundlach, *Die Westliche Post und der Erste Weltkrieg. Eine deutschsprachige Zeitung in den USA zwischen 'Vaterland' und 'Adoptivvaterland'* (Frankfurt, 2004); Katja Wüstenbecker, *Deutsch-Amerikaner im Ersten Weltkrieg. US-Politik und nationale Identitäten im Mittleren Westen* (Stuttgart, 2007); Leslie V. Tischauser, *The Burden of Ethnicity. The German Question in Chicago, 1914-1941* (New York, 1990); Barbara Wiedemann-Citera, *Die Auswirkungen des Ersten Weltkrieges auf die Deutsch-Amerikaner im Spiegel der New Yorker Staatszeitung, der New Yorker Volkszeitung und der New York Times, 1914-1926* (Frankfurt, 1993).

did survive, albeit on a more modest level. Others have concentrated on German-American leadership and its oscillation between propagating quick assimilation and, on the other hand, calling on compatriots to stick to a pro-German stance despite pressures from the host society.¹¹ Jörg Nagler's comprehensive study adds the distinct, and previously underexplored, aspect of state surveillance and internment. The Alien Enemy Bureau was established in the early days of the war with a brief to identify and arrest disloyal foreigners. It was headed by J. Edgar Hoover, then a young civil servant in the Justice Department. Those 'enemy aliens' deemed to be a threat to internal security were detained in two internment camps: Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia, and Fort Douglas in Utah, holding approximately 2300 civilian inmates between them.¹²

Despite its physical presence in the vicinity of US government and military facilities, and therefore being a potential security threat, the German American community in Washington DC has received little scholarly attention. What exists are two essays concentrating on ethnic community formation in the second half of the nineteenth century, but mentioning its wartime disintegration only in passing.¹³ The following article is therefore not only a hitherto unexplored case study of minority disintegration during wartime. It also constitutes a contribution to the literature on homeland security in a strategically vulnerable environment. For the latter aspect, a substantial body of personal files collected by the Justice Department's Bureau of Investigation (BI) and its subdivision, the Alien Enemy Bureau, has been investigated. Not least the personal

¹¹ Phyllis Keller, *States of Belonging. German-American Intellectuals and the First World War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979); Charles T. Johnson, *Culture at Twilight. The National German-American Alliance, 1901-1918* (New York, 1999); H. J. Schmidt, 'The Rhetoric of Survival. The Germanist in America from 1900 to 1925', in Frank Trommler, Joseph McVeigh, *America and the Germans* (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 204-16.

¹² Jörg Nagler, *Nationale Minoritäten im Krieg. 'Feindliche Ausländer' und die amerikanische Heimatfront während des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Hamburg, 2000).

¹³ K. N. Conzen, 'Die Residenzler. German Americans in the Making of the Nation's Capital', in Alan Lessoff, Christof Mauch, eds., *Architect Adolf Cluss. From Germany to America* (New York, 2005), pp. 55-67; M. E. Dingle, 'Gemeinschaft und Gemütlichkeit. German American Community and Culture, 1850-1920', in Francine C. Cary, ed., *Urban Odyssey. A Multicultural History of Washington, DC* (Washington, 1996), pp. 113-134.

continuity through J. Edgar Hoover points to the long-term significance of the First World War, setting in motion a process which would ultimately lead to the surveillance apparatus of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). For a balanced argumentation, however, it is crucial not to see the minority group as a passive object of xenophobia and state surveillance. Rather, the community itself enters the stage as a political actor, engaging with day-to-day politics and producing pro-German counter propaganda which stood at odds with the political course of the host society. The main source-base of the article to trace the arguments of ethnic leaders and opinion-makers is the German-language *Washington Journal*. This triggered a conflictual interplay with the mainstream local and national press, which will be investigated through a number of titles including the *Washington Post*, the *Evening Star*, the *Washington Times*, and the *New York Times*. These sources allow us to identify the main patterns of counter-propaganda and spy fever in wartime Washington from a number of different vantage points.

The pre-war community

In 1910 Washington DC had a population of 331,000, which placed it among the twenty largest cities in the US. Its small but active German-American population comprised 5179 German-born residents. There were another 13,000 with at least one German-born parent.¹⁴ This was a small percentage of the total population, but it still made Germans the second-largest foreign-born group in Washington, only a few hundred behind the Irish (5347).¹⁵ Pronounced ethnic Associationalism was a feature of German diasporic life. As an observer of London's Little Germany remarked: 'Wherever a dozen Germans meet there is sure to be a *Verein* (club) of some

¹⁴ 'The District of Columbia' *1910 Census Report*, Chapter 1, Table 5 'Foreign White Stock by Nationality' p. 291.

¹⁵ *Abstract of the Thirteenth Census, 1910* (Washington, 1913), p. 210.

sort.¹⁶ The same was true for Germans in the United States, including Washington. In the capital there existed a dense network of organizations based on language, religion, education, philanthropy, and sociability. The Concordia German Evangelical Church was one of fifteen Protestant congregations. Catholics were served by St. Mary's German Catholic Church, and Jews by the Washington Hebrew Congregation. The Columbia-*Turnverein* (gymnastics association) and the *Sängerbund* (choral association) also organized a range of other social activities such as balls, theatre productions, and English classes. Philanthropic activity included a German-American Beneficial Society, the German Orphan Asylum, and the Christian and Eleanora Ruppert Home for the Aged and Infirm. Separate organizations existed for occupations (e. g., butchers, brewers, bookbinders) and regions of origin (e. g., Bavaria, Hesse, Baden, German Switzerland). The *Schützenverein* (shooting association) operated a park, organizing popular entertainments on Sundays.¹⁷ Adverts in the *Washington Journal* give an insight into a differentiated ethnic economy, catering both for compatriots and the host society. Examples include Hugo Worch Pianos, Offterdinger Cigars, Mayer Bakery, the Union Savings Bank, the Christian Heurich Brewing Co., J. B. Schroth Butchers, Ernst Gerstenberg Restaurant, Endres Parkhotel, Fischer Saloon, Gasch & Birge Estate Agents, Brentano Books, the German-American Fire Insurance Co., and many more.¹⁸

¹⁶ Count E. Armfelt, 'German London', in George R. Sims, ed., *Living London* 3 (London, 1903), p. 60.

¹⁷ Washington Historical Society (henceforth WHS), P1399, Centenary Jubilee of Concordia Lutheran Evangelical Church, 1833-1933; WHS MS536/129, History of St. Mary's Church of the Mother of God, Washington, DC, 1845-1945; WHS MS536/158, K. G. Wust, *German Immigrants and Their Newspapers in the District of Columbia*, 1959; Frank H. Pierce, *The Washington Saengerbund. A History of German Song and German Culture in the Nation's Capital* (Washington, 1981); Library of Congress, Deutsche Historische Gesellschaft für den District Columbia, Berichte 1905-6; Conzen, 'Residenzler'; Dingle, 'Gemeinschaft'; John C. Proctor, 'The Schuetzen Park and the home of Asda Whitney,' *Proctor's Washington and Environs* (Washington DC, 1950), n. p.

¹⁸ Advertisements in *Washington Journal*, 13 January 1913; WHS MS536/79, N. Pierce, 'Germans in the Commerce of the Nation's Capital', manuscript n. y.

There were, however, cracks in the structure. Immigration figures from Germany were falling after the heyday of the 1880s, and the community was thus both dwindling and ageing. Beer drinking was an important element of social life, but pressure for prohibition was particularly strong due to Washington's unusual status as a federal enclave under direct congressional control. Alcohol licenses were restricted, including Sunday sales, and fees increased.¹⁹ An additional indicator of disintegration and division came from within the community itself. From 1901, the German American National Alliance had been agitating at a national level for closer ties with the emerging German Empire and the preservation of ethnic culture. It also aimed to infuse German Americans with a good dose of pride in their achievements in the United States. This was embraced by some, but not by others who found the approach detrimental to integration.²⁰ In Washington this conflict played out at a local level. When, for example, a group of Prussian army officers dedicated a statue of Frederick the Great in 1904, the *Sängerbund* refused to participate.²¹ The ground was prepared for these cracks to open up after August 1914, and then more widely after the American entry into war in April 1917.

Ethnic Counter-propaganda

When war broke out in Europe in August 1914, President Woodrow Wilson asked Americans to be 'impartial in thought as well as in action.'²² The sentiment was well-intentioned, but for many it was unheeded as Americans were divided between those who favored the Allies, particularly

¹⁹ Dingle, 'Gemütlichkeit', p. 130; 'The Jones-Works Excise Law' *The Western Brewer* (August 1913), pp. 74-79.

²⁰ Johnson, 'Culture'; Stefan Manz, *Constructing a German Diaspora. The 'Greater German Empire', 1871-1914* (New York, 2014), pp. 141-5.

²¹ Dingle, 'Gemeinschaft', p. 131.

²² Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality, 1914-1915* (Princeton, 1960), p. 66.

Britain, and those who supported the Central Powers, especially Germany. In Washington, ‘bonds of loyalty’ (Luebke) were clearly visible, tying in with Robin Cohen’s theoretical criterion that diasporic connectedness includes ‘an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety, and prosperity.’²³ As Sheffer explains, however, the question of belonging and loyalty is never either black or white for a given diaspora. It depends on individual and collective choices and is usually ambiguous, dual, or divided.²⁴ It also depends on situational aspects such as political constellations. The local German community favored the Central Powers and participated, for example, in fund-raising to provide aid to the wives and children of fallen German and Austrian soldiers. These fund-raisers were reported in a matter-of-fact tone by the local press on the society pages, along with other charity events. For example, in February 1916 the *Washington Post* reported that ‘much interest is manifested in the charity bazaar in aid of German and Austrian war widows and orphans to be held in the Odd Fellows Hall...under the patronage of the German Ambassador.’²⁵

Other examples of diasporic bonds were not as benign. When the war began in August 1914 the German-language *Washington Journal* placed a large portrait of Kaiser Wilhelm II on the front page with a poem, in English, ‘Wilhelm II, The Prince of Peace’ which included such stirring verses as,

The star of Frederick guide thy hand,

The God of Bismarck be thy shield!

Against the fell Barbarian horde

²³ Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas. An Introduction* (Abingdon, 2001), p. 26.

²⁴ Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics. At Home Abroad* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 9-10, 225-30.

²⁵ *Washington Post*, 12 February 1916, p. 14.

They people stand a living wall;
Now fight for God's peace with thy sword,
For if thou fail a world shall fall! ²⁶

Written by George Sylvester Viereck, who would act as the main propagandist for Germany in the United States during the war,²⁷ 'Prince of Peace' was indicative of Viereck's outspoken pro-German stance. It appeared in his own paper, *The Fatherland*, as well as in other papers including *The Literary Digest*.²⁸ Other articles were designed to remind readers of past German American ties, such as the dedication of a statue of Revolutionary War hero Major General Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben in Utica,²⁹ New York on 3 August 1914, the same day Germany and France declared war on each other. A number of articles attacked Britain and its allies, some of them in English in order to reach a wider audience which would otherwise have been exclusively exposed to the pro-British American press. England, one author noted, loved to have other nations do the fighting for her, and had sent a 'nominal' to France, just enough to guarantee London a share of the spoils of war should the allies win. Germans fought for the patriots in the American Revolution, the same author noted, while the United States had fought Britain in the Revolution and the War of 1812, and London had sympathized with the Confederacy during the Civil War. A separate article listed eight ways Britain had aided the Confederacy. Other articles carried war news of German victories. Interestingly, the English language articles focused on Britain, with only perfunctory mentions of Russia and France. Clearly it was pro-British

²⁶ George Sylvester Viereck, 'Wilhelm II: Prince of Peace', *Washington Journal*, 22 August 1914, p. 1.

²⁷ Keller, 'States', Part Two.

²⁸ "Current Poetry" *The Literary Digest*, 29 August 1914, p. 354.

²⁹ *Washington Journal*, 22 August 1914, 'Steuben Denkmal'.

sentiment in America that was most worrying and worthwhile countering.³⁰ In this vein, speakers at the German Day celebrations on 6 October 1915 in the *Sängerbund*-hall stressed that it was ‘our most important duty ... to ensure that German spirit is on a par with Anglo-Saxon spirit in the whole country.’³¹

One of the biggest frustrations for the German-American community in America³² was the issue of arms shipments to the Allies. Under international law, the United States as a neutral nation had the right to sell weapons and munitions to belligerent nations. However, the British navy controlled the Atlantic Ocean, bottling up the German merchant fleet. German civilian vessels were forced to find refuge in neutral ports or risk being captured by Allied war ships. As a result, Germany and its allies could not reach the United States to buy any arms or raw supplies. With Germany shut out of the American market the United States was, in effect, arming only the Allies, a seeming contradiction with Washington’s official policy of neutrality. The German-American community began demanding that the United States cut off all arms shipments to any nation at war. Neutrality Leagues began to spring up in cities around America, gaining support not only from Germans and their allies, but from some Irish-Americans as well.³³

DC’s German-American community took advantage of their proximity to Congress, organizing to express their anger at American arms sales to the Allies. A mass meeting was held at the Polis Theater on Sunday evening, 24 January 1915. Advertised in the weekly German-

³⁰ *Washington Journal*, 29 August 1914, ‘Some Facts about England’, ‘England’s Friendship for US’, ‘Von Bernstorff Denies War Tale’.

³¹ *Washington Journal*, 22 October 1915, p. 4. This and subsequent quotes in German have been translated into English by the authors.

³² It was not just a sore-point for the Germans, but also for those from Austria-Hungary. However, the German community in the US took the lead on this issue simply because it was the largest and most influential of the immigrant communities in the US as well as in the capital. In Washington in 1910 there were only 459 residents born in Austria and 159 born in Hungary. See 1910 Census, p. 210.

³³ Clifton James Child, *The German-American in Politics, 1914-1917* (Madison, WI, 1939), pp. 44-6, 52.

language *Washington Journal*, the rally was organized to promote the proposed Hitchcock-Bartholdt-Vollmer Bill which aimed to stop the export of war materials ‘whose victims will be our relatives in the old fatherland.’ The rally notice continued: ‘Please attend en masse, including women, bring your American friends... Some Members of Congress and other speakers of national importance will speak.’³⁴

On 30 January 1915, Congressman Richard Bartholdt (R-MO), a native of Germany, hosted a meeting of embargo supporters at the New Willard Hotel in DC. Fifty-eight delegates representing all of the major German-American organizations in the United States attended, as did several local leaders of the German community.³⁵ Their complaints went beyond arms sales. While not mentioning Britain specifically, they noted the Allies’ violations of American rights, including seizing travelers off American-flagged ships, that goods normally allowed to be shipped in wartime had been declared contraband, and that there existed ‘foreign control of our news service and of our communications by sea.’ This latter point referred to British control of the telegraph cables crossing the Atlantic, having severed the German ones. As a result of official British and French censorship and British control of the cables, American news services were receiving largely news that favored the Allies over Germany. The meeting’s attendees decided to form a new organization, the American Independence Union, to lobby for an arms embargo. They considered electing an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ to head it, to make it appear as if it were not pro-German. Unable to decide on a suitable candidate, however, they chose Representative Bartholdt as President at their next meeting in February in New York City. The Union issued a statement of principles, requiring that members be citizens of the United States, that their loyalty

³⁴ *Washington Journal*, 23 January 1915, ‘Deutsche Heraus!’, ‘The Neutrality Question’.

³⁵ United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA,) *Records of the Department of State Relating to World War I and its Termination, 1914-1929*, RG 59 M367 ‘Statement of Horace L. Brand,’ 3 February 1915; ‘In Germany’s Cause,’ *The Washington Post* 31 January 1915, p. 8.

was to their new nation, and that the United States should be truly neutral by abandoning the existing policy which they believed favored the Allies.³⁶

Bartholdt was also the featured speaker at the DC *Sängerbund*'s annual carnival a week after the initial meeting at the New Willard. In his speech he repeated the same themes: freedom of the seas, a 'cessation of the shipment of arms and ammunition to the warring states,' and an America-owned telegraph cable 'from a neutral country for transmitting news of the conflict abroad', bypassing the British-controlled lines. The Congressman also claimed (three months before it was sunk) that the British liner *Lusitania* had been flying the American flag, thus claiming an undeserved status as a neutral vessel for itself. Not everything at the event was so solemn. It was, after all, a carnival as part of the pre-Lenten celebrations. According to the *Washington Post*, 'songs and jollity were rampant.' Guests wore costumes, the *Sängerbund* performed, as did a band. The decorations, however, had a wartime theme. A 'model of a formidable submarine hung above the entertainer's platform.' Moreover, the 'speaker's rostrum was modeled in the shape of a 42-centimeter shell and so designated.'³⁷

The submarine display was especially poorly timed if the German community wished to influence the Wilson administration. On 4 February 1915, just a few days before carnival, the German government announced that they had established a 'war zone' around the British Isles. Any enemy-flagged vessel that entered this zone was liable to be attacked and sunk. Complicating the situation, ships belonging to belligerent nations sometimes flew the flags of neutral states to avoid destruction, so that legitimately neutral ships also fell under suspicion. Berlin disavowed any responsibility for the safety of neutral vessels in the war zone because it was

³⁶ Child, *German-American*, pp. 54-55.; 'German-American League Organizes,' *New York Tribune* 21 February 21 1915, p. 2.

³⁷ 'Hear Bartholdt Warn,' *The Washington Post*, 9 February 1915, p. 3.

often impossible to determine if a ship was truly neutral or not. Reaction to Berlin's announcement in the American German-language press was mixed. Some papers hailed it: the German U-Boats were 'liberators of the world from British tyranny over the high seas.' However, others were more concerned how the decision might affect American relations with Germany.³⁸

On 2 February, a few days after the initial meeting at the New Willard, President Woodrow Wilson was asked if he had given consideration to Representative Bartholdt's plans for neutrality. Wilson brushed it aside, 'he hasn't presented them to me.' A week later Wilson was asked about the *Lusitania* using the American flag, and what he thought of the German declaration of a war zone around Britain. He dismissed the flag issue, noting that it was a 'privately owned ship' and that flying another nation's flag did not necessarily violate international law, calmly brushing aside one of the German-American community's concerns. He also reserved judgment on the German declaration, noting that he was still waiting for clarification from James Gerard, the US Ambassador in Berlin. The ambassador had, however, already sent a message to Wilson that would have undermined the German societies' attempts to influence the administration. When Gerard spoke to German Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Arthur Zimmerman the latter noted that 'in case of trouble' between the United States and Germany, there 'were five hundred thousand trained Germans in American who would join the Irish and start a revolution.' Gerard noted that at first the thought Zimmermann was joking, 'but he was actually serious.' Wilson highlighted Zimmermann's quote in the message and marked the paragraph. In a cover note to his advisor Edward M. House, Wilson wrote 'is not the last

³⁸ Carl Wittke, *German Americans and the World War* (Columbus, 1936), pp. 67-69.

paragraph (the one with Zimmermann's threat) amazing?'³⁹ Wilson certainly did not take the threat of a revolution by half a million Germans in the United States seriously, but he had to be concerned that Berlin (and Vienna) thought they could use supporters in America to act in their homelands' interests against the United States. This was still fresh in Wilson's mind as the first German-American meetings were held in DC

Then there was also counter propaganda for consumption by German Americans themselves. After all, they had to be fed with the 'right' arguments supporting Germany's cause, and their resolve had to be bolstered. War poems glorified the heroics of the German army and denigrated other nations, particularly England. The pages of the *Washington Journal* abounded with bellicose poems such as '*Stürm an, Germanenheer!*' ('Attack, German Army!') and '*An Kitchener!*' ('To Kitchener!'). Articles such as 'Des Deutschen einziger Haß' ('The German's singular hate'), reprinted from the German military newspaper *Parole*, explained that 'our fury is primarily, and time after time, directed at the English. They instigated the war and set peoples of all colors on us, betraying the white race and aiming to strangle us.'⁴⁰ The regular column 'Kriegschauplatz' ('Theatre of War') reported in a factual way on frontline occurrences, stressing German victories. The issue on 9 January 1915 carried the representative headline (in German): 'New German Attack against Verdun. Russian Attacks beaten back on entire West Galician Front. Failed French Attack in Alsace.' Some of the pitches were genderised. Front pages regularly carried an 'Appeal to the German Women of the City of Washington', with knitting instructions, to provide gifts such as mittens, shawls and waistbands. These would be

³⁹ 'Remarks at a Press Conference,' 2 February 1915, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* ed. Arthur S. Link. 30 (Princeton, 1980), p. 174 (hereafter PWW); 'Remarks at a Press Conference,' 2 February 2 1915, PWW, 30 p. 200; Woodrow Wilson to Edward Mandell House, (January 28, 1915) PWW 30, p. 145; Wilson had a tendency to feign ignorance to deflect embarrassing questions from the press. See, for example, his handling of questions about the Mexican Revolution in Mark E. Benbow, *Leading Them to the Promised Land: Woodrow Wilson, Covenant Theology and the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1915*, (Kent, OH, 2010), p. 71.

⁴⁰ *Washington Journal*, 2 January 1915.

sent to the front for soldiers 'who defend the border of our Fatherland, risking their lives to protect spouse and child.'⁴¹ The 'Damen-Hilfskomitee' (Ladies' Charitable Support Committee) held a well-attended meeting in January 1915 to discuss ways of support.⁴² Pictures of wounded German soldiers suffering in Belgium stood in direct contrast to Allied representations of Germans as perpetrators, committing atrocities against defenseless civilians.⁴³

Gatherings and ethnic media utterances were important platforms for the minority to negotiate its own sphere of national belonging. Before 1914, mainstream America hardly bothered to listen to suchlike expressions of ethnic self-definitions.⁴⁴ This changed within the more sensitive atmosphere during wartime. Any hint of a 'hyphenated' identity was seen with suspicion. Attempts by the ethnic group to, first, strengthen resolve internally and, second, influence public opinion externally had detrimental effects. There is no indication that ethnic counter propaganda influenced the American public, or policy making, during the war. If anything, it demonstrated to the general public that there existed a stubborn minority sticking to the guns of a distant military power – with the potential to develop into an enemy in the own midst should war be declared. The ethnic home front in the United States was yet another propaganda battle lost by Germany.

The German-language DC *Journal* was not an outlier in cheering Berlin. German-language papers throughout the US cheered on Germany and denounced England before April 1917. Christopher Capozzola notes that between August 1914 and April 1917 "the war prompted a burst of German nationalism among *Deutschtum* abroad." The New Haven *Anzeiger* in the summer of 1915 "urged readers to 'Speak German; write German, think German; walk

⁴¹ *Washington Journal*, 9 January 1915.

⁴² *Washington Journal*, 18 January 1915.

⁴³ For example *Washington Journal*, 26 September 1914; John Horne, Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities 1914. A History of Denial* (New Haven, 2009).

⁴⁴ Orm Øverland, *Immigrant Minds, American Identities. Making the United States Home, 1870-1913* (Urbana, Ill., 2000).

German; behave German!" Observers should not take this support for Germany in the war for a love of the Kaiser or his government. German-American opinion makers were divided in their attitude towards the Hohenzollerns. However, they were united in protecting and showing pride in German culture, and a desire to preserve specific elements of their diasporic culture.⁴⁵

The anti-German reaction did not suddenly arise from nowhere in April 1917. There had been numerous anti-German riots in the US in the mid-nineteenth century, and while anti-German suspicions had significantly lessened, they had not gone away. There had been suspicion of German-Americans among nativists in the US. The community's continued use of the German language in its newspapers and civic groups, as well as the pride in German culture suggested that they were not truly assimilating. The anti-German issue, coded as a campaign against "hyphenated Americans" in the 1916 election, further stoked these long-banked fears back to life. Woodrow Wilson's 1916 campaign centered not just on "He Kept us out of War" but on which candidate was preferred by Berlin. The Democrats labeled Republican Charles Evans Hughes as "the Kaiser's candidate." This was not just a cynical political ploy. Wilson seemed genuinely concerned about German-American groups trying to influence the election, and many of these groups were supported covertly by the German government. Wilson's trusted secretary, Joseph Tumulty, told Wilson that Hughes' campaign would enable the creation of a pro-Berlin political bloc in the US, which Tumulty described as "an effort...to debase our politics."⁴⁶

Surveillance and spy fever

As anti-German sentiment grew in the United States, prominent local DC German-Americans became objects of suspicion. The Justice Department's Bureau of Investigation (BI) took the lead on investigating private citizens in DC. Curiously, they did not initiate reports for all the leaders of the local German community, but relied on tips from concerned, suspicious citizens.

Sometimes these tips were about German-American leaders, but most often they were about

⁴⁵ Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 180-181.

⁴⁶ Zachary Smith *Age of Fear: Othering and American identity During World War I* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 57-63.

average people. While the BI's files reveal that it took little to spark an investigation, it also seemed to take little effort to dismiss many of the allegations. For example, the Bureau inspected the hotel room of a man accused of violating neutrality laws. All they found were documents in 'Bohemian' in the room and the investigation was dropped. In August 1915 a local postman reported that Armien Keffler, a patent lawyer, was writing to Count Dumba (Dr. Konstantin Theodor Dumba, Austro-Hungarian Ambassador to the United States) and was 'constantly writing in a tent behind his house and that no one else was allowed to go in there.' The BI agent investigating spoke to a clerk in the Patent Office who knew Keffler's boss, and he swore Keffler was a good American. The agent made a report to his supervisor and then went about other duties. In April 1916 local saloon owner Carl Hammel was investigated for hosting German plotters in his bar on Pennsylvania Avenue. The investigating agent reported that it was an established local 'meeting place for Germans.' He went to the bar, but because he did not speak German, he did not know what the customers were saying. While the agent noted that he would continue to investigate, there were no follow-up reports.⁴⁷

The investigations also took on a different character after the U.S. entered as a belligerent. Of course, after April 1917 there was less concern over violations of American neutrality, although the U.S. did not declare war on Austria-Hungary until late 1917, and never did declare war on Bulgaria or the Ottoman Empire. However, most investigations both before and after April 1917 were focused on Germany, rather than on its allies. In both periods there were investigations of spying and sabotage. After the U.S. declared war on Germany there were also investigations of draft-dodging ("slackers") and of encouraging resistance to the draft,

⁴⁷ NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, L.S. Conness, 'Re Dr. Armien Keffler, Alleged Breach of Neutrality,' 25 August 1915; NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, George W. Lillard, 'In Re German Neutrality Matter, Carl Hammel' 3 April 1916.

which did not exist until May 1918. Statements of support for Germany became far more serious, proving disloyalty to the U.S. rather than just suggesting it.

The investigations did not seem to have a regular pattern, although some factors came into play repeatedly. Not every report indicated the suspect's employment, although it often came up as a reason for concern. For example, there were multiple examples of investigations of men working at the Washington Navy Yard, certainly a sensitive job during wartime. Other investigations stretched the bounds of what jobs might be considered sensitive. One hotel employee came under suspicion because he asked too many questions of military officers who were guests at the hotel. The man was fired. In October 1917 the Bureau investigated a local musician named O. J. Sonneck after a tipster complained that he might be using musical notes as a form of code to pass information to the Germans. After talking with his employer, who assured the agent that they did not play any German music, Sonneck was cleared.⁴⁸ A good recommendation from a suspect's employer carried a lot of weight. In August 1917 an anonymous letter sparked an investigation into William Neuenhahn, an accountant for the Southern Railway. The letter-writer claimed Neuenhahn was taking documents home to pass to Germany. Neuenhahn's supervisor told the agent his employee was a loyal American and the matter was dropped. Former brewer Albert Carry, now manufacturing ice cream after prohibition had taken its toll, vouched for multiple employees who had worked for him at his brewery.⁴⁹

The suspects' jobs do not fit any particular pattern, other than the Bureau's understandable interest in men working in the Navy Yard. There was some class bias, though. Other than prominent local brewers Christian Heurich and Carry, most of those investigated were

⁴⁸ NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, Warren W. Grimes, 'Wolf, Paul,' 11 October 1917; NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, George W. Lillard, 'RE: O.J. Sonneck (Alleged German Agent)' 5 October 1917.

⁴⁹ NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, J.B. Wolverson, 'Neuenhahn, William' 8 August 1917; NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, E.O. Irish 'RE: Albert Carry (Vice-President Capital National Bank)' 10 November 1917.

either laborers or professionals without special status in DC society. Among the laborers, most had some sort of training required for their job, such as mechanic, wagon driver, window trimmer, or tailor. Unskilled laborers were of less interest. In contrast to reporting on employment, the reports do not mention suspects' marital status, although in one case, the suspect was vocally pro-German, but his wife was French, and the agent noted that they had separated after numerous arguments over the war. The reports also do not record the suspects' religion and only rarely noted if they drank. Nor do the reports normally indicate the suspect's domestic politics, unless he was believed to be a socialist. The majority of suspects were male. The main issues, so far as can be judged from the reports, was if the suspect was pro-German and if he supported the US war effort. The question of whether the suspect could actually injure the interests of the United States was rarely considered. It was taken as a given that if he was disloyal, that made him a threat.⁵⁰

Some of the supposed dangers were ludicrous. A car with an odd-looking hood was seen driving around, and may have picked up a package from a German-owned store. The blotter in a hotel room recently occupied by a German seemed to have impressions of the words 'submarine' and 'mine' on it. A young woman with German parents was thought to have been 'too eager' to rent a room from the wife of one of General John Pershing's staffers. A suburban Maryland sheriff arrested a man for possessing a list of canning plants. The agent found that the suspect was on a vegetarian diet and the list was brands of corn which were safe for him to eat. One tipster complained about the quality of Albert Carry's ice cream. Finally, simply speaking German might spark an investigation. In September 1918 a northern Virginia farm worker named

⁵⁰ Most were men, so the 'he' is appropriate. NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, F.C. Baggarly, 'RE: Henry Mueller, German Suspect' 23 March 1918.

Joseph Nohlens was placed in custody after he was heard speaking German. He was detained until the Swiss embassy sent a representative to affirm that he was indeed a Swiss native, not a German.⁵¹

Sometimes an investigation uncovered a genuine crime, although not one associated with the war. A discovery of stolen sticks of dynamite in a shed led the Bureau not to a nest of German saboteurs, but to two thieves who claimed they were using the explosives for fishing. They were turned over to local law enforcement. One supposed spy turned out to be planning a robbery of his employer, who sold automobile tires. Embarrassingly, a suspicious apartment in the District seems to have been an apartment rented under an alias by a widower so he could hide a relationship with an old girlfriend. The spy nest was apparently a love nest. The agent's report contains a copy of a letter the man received from his old flame informing him that she was no longer married and that she would like to see him sometime.⁵²

While the Bureau did not find any spy rings in DC, their reports did keep men of suspect loyalty out of sensitive government positions. If the investigator found that someone had vocally supported Germany or opposed the war, they were refused clearance to work in government positions. Twelve were interned as enemy aliens and thirty-five were imprisoned. Private mail was copied, and the copies kept, even if the person turned out not to be disloyal. Neighbors were questioned, undoubtedly sparking rumors. Some employers told the Bureau that they would fire

⁵¹ NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, George W. Lillard, 'Alleged Plot to Dynamite Navy Yard' 2 April 1917; NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, George W. Lillard, 'RE: George D. Dery (Austrian Suspect)' 19 June 1917; NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, George W. Lillard 'RE: Miss Paula Sies (German Matter)' 14 June 1917; NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, Manuel de Aguero, 'RE: H.G.M. Marashleian (German Suspect)' 16 August 1917; NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, Warren W. Grimes 'In RE Albert Carry (German Matter)' 5 March 1918, NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, W.W. Wright 'Joseph Nohlens (Alleged Enemy Alien)' 27 September 1918.

⁵² NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, J. E. Elliott 'RE: George Tiverny (Alleged Dynamite Plot)'; NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, George W. Lillard 'RE: Dr. J.D. Eggleston (Alleged German Spy)' 15 August 1917; NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, J.B. Wolverton 'RE: Dave Gardner-Alias Clyde Giddeon - (Suspect)' 2 July 1917.

their suspect employee if the Bureau wanted even if the man was loyal. As will be noted below, the German community in DC was put under tremendous strain to prove their loyalty and the investigations spread fear throughout the capital.

The case of brewer Christian Heurich

The single largest exception to the Bureau's focusing most of their investigations on those outside of the city's elite was local brewer Christian Heurich.⁵³ He had immigrated to the United States in 1866, became a citizen in 1872, and was one of the District's most prominent businessmen as well as the largest private landowner. Heurich noted that when the war began his 'sympathies were with Germany, as were the sympathies of thousands of German-born people in this country who were loyal Americans, but who could never forget that Germany was the land of their birth.'⁵⁴ In September 1915 a Washington resident sent a letter to the bureau claiming that he heard that Heurich was building concrete gun emplacements at his Maryland farm, which had an unobstructed view of Washington. The Bureau sent local agent George W. Lillard to Heurich's farm. Lillard submitted a detailed report in mid-September 1915. Lillard examined the farm at length and was most concerned with the amount of concrete. Heurich was a pioneer in building fireproof structures out of concrete after his brewery on 20th Street NW suffered numerous fires. Lillard found the number of such building suspicious. Heurich had several ponds designed to drain swampy land and to water the cattle. Lillard found these 'lakes of special concern', noting in his report that one had a small island in the middle with 'a suitable base for a

⁵³ For more details on Heurich see Mark Benbow, *Washington's Brewmaster: Christian Heurich and Washington, DC*, (Jefferson, North Carolina, 2017).; Mark Benbow, "Christian Heurich." In *Immigrant Entrepreneurship: German-American Business Biographies, 1720 to the Present*, vol. 3, edited by Giles R. Hoyt. German Historical Institute. Last modified September 25, 2014. <http://immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entry.php?rec=38>

⁵⁴ Christian Heurich, Sr., *I Watched America Grow: As Told to W.A.S. Douglas* (Unpublished manuscript), p. 131.

large gun' and 'the other parts of the lake would be suitable for intrenchments' (sic). He was also suspicious of metal posts set in concrete that were used to make a fence around the property: 'These posts are suitable for barbed wire entanglements.' Lillard took photos of some of the structures and concluded: 'The general idea as it appears to me is that these buildings, etc., are for some purpose other than for which it is claimed they are to be used.'⁵⁵ The Bureau took no action against Heurich after Lillard submitted his report. Perhaps one of the agent's superiors realized that dairy farms commonly held ponds and wire fencing. It was not the last such investigation, however.

Lillard was not the most discerning judge. In 1917 he investigated a native born American physician of German descent in Virginia, Anton Dilger. The doctor had just returned from Germany and the Bureau suspected his loyalty. Lillard was friends with Dilger's brother and his report cleared the man of any wrongdoing, accepting Dilger's claim that he was going to operate a manganese mine on his farm in western Virginia. In reality Dilger was a German agent, working to infect horses sold to the allies in America with anthrax and glanders. He fled to Mexico and then Spain before he could be arrested. Lillard's judgement had been clearly misguided.⁵⁶

Wilson won reelection with the slogan 'He Kept Us out of War' but even before he could begin his second term in March 1917, the crisis with Germany reached a head. As tensions mounted and America drew closer to war, the capital's German-American community became

⁵⁵ NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, George W. Lillard, 'In Re Construction of Foundations for Large German Guns' 25 October 1915.

⁵⁶ Robert Koenig, *The Four Horsemen: One Man's Mission to Wage The Great War in America* (New York, 2006), pp. 201-203.; Theodore Kornweibel, Jr., *Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty during World War I* (Bloomington, IN, 2002), p. 200.

the target of more frequent, often absurd, rumors. They began to appear not just in letters from suspicious neighbors, but in the press as shown in the introductory vignette to this article.

In early March 1917 another informant told the Bureau that Heurich was having concrete work done on his farm. Agent E.S. Underhill went to meet Heurich at his home, and rode with the Heurich's in their limousine to the farm. Underhill's report indicated that there were concrete structures that could be used as gun emplacements, but that 'I found nothing to indicate that they were constructed for that purpose.' For example, he found that the concrete barn had been built over twenty years before, and his report noted that Heurich was a 'pioneer in concrete construction in this country.' There were ten men who worked on the farm, Underhill found, but only one was German.⁵⁷ Underhill also visited the Heurich's home. The family had received a postcard from Philadelphia telling the elderly brewer that he should go to the Department of Justice 'and confess about his pro-German activities.' To clear his name Heurich asked that the department interview him. Agent Underhill went to the Heurich mansion on New Hampshire Avenue and was allowed to go through the house. Heurich and Amelia admitted that they favored Germany over Britain, but that allegiance to the United States 'stood ahead of everything else.' Heurich noted that he had lived in America for over fifty years, showed the agent his naturalization papers from 1872, and claimed to be the biggest taxpayer in the District, having paid \$37,000 in taxes in 1916, aside from the excise taxes his brewery paid. Underhill did find a wireless transmitter, but noted it had already been inspected. The Heurich's cook was English, and there was a 'Colored' male servant who had previously worked at the British embassy. 'The attitude of the whole establishment' noted the agent, 'was such as to disarm suspicion.'⁵⁸ This

⁵⁷ NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, F.S. Underhill, 'Christian Heurich, Neutrality' 21 March 1917. The investigator does not specify if it were just a receiver or included a transmitter.

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*

did not end the rumors. Heurich also had to deal with the credulous Agent Lillard again at the beginning of April when the agent inspected the brewery. He did not report anything suspicious, despite the plethora of concrete in the facility, but did note that ‘it is impossible to state that there is nothing concealed there which should not be.’ There were, he warned, ‘many places in the brewery where arms and ammunition might be stored.’ However, it would take ‘several men four or five days’ to completely inspect the facility.⁵⁹

‘Enemy Aliens’

As events escalated from January into April 1917 the tone of the press in Washington markedly changed. War news had been understandably prominent since the summer of 1914, but it now took on urgency and, in many cases, a militant tone warning of a German threat to the U.S. Rumors began to appear in the press along with more reliable news. On 26 March 1917, *The Evening Star* reported a sermon given at the Washington Soldiers Home by a local Methodist minister. Abandoning his original text, the minister warned the old soldiers that ‘Washington is filled with German spies.’ On the same day the *Star* reported that ‘large communities’ around the U.S. were preparing for a possible ‘uprising on part of Teuton (sic) sympathizers.’ On 29 March the *Star* and the *Washington Times* claimed that the head of the American Red Cross’s Atlantic division confirmed that while ground glass had been found in ‘one or two instances’ in bandages, it was not true that ‘medical supplies ... had been found tampered with by spies and that bandages had been discovered soaked with poisonous chemicals.’ Meanwhile, the paper stated

⁵⁹ NARA, RG 65.2.2, Old German Files, George W. Lillard, ‘RE: Chris. Heurich: Neutrality Matter’, 2 April 1917.

that ‘officials at the Department of Justice’ would ‘neither confirm nor deny’ the reports that they were searching for German spies working in parts of the executive branch.⁶⁰

Provocative stories continued in April as the United States declared war on Germany and although authorities sometimes denied rumors were accurate, the stories became more frightening. The *Star* reported that Germans were trying to ‘incite Negroes’ in Alabama and North Carolina against the U.S., but that the ‘agents of the Imperial German government’ were unsuccessful. The Justice Department reported that ‘tens of thousands of tips’ had been sent to them in just a few days, and the superintendent of police in DC was quoted as denying ‘that men were sent to the Capitol grounds ... because of a reported plot to destroy the building.’ In a clear case of panic, a minister in Fairfax County Virginia, just across the Potomac River to the west of Washington, called the police to report that several men were taking photographs of the Great Falls, a local scenic tourist site. Police noted that ‘pictures of Great Falls have been taken by hundreds of residents of this city’ and that ‘they are at a loss to understand what is expected to be accomplished with photographs of the river at that point.’⁶¹ Paranoia was overcoming common sense judgments about realistic threat levels.

The *Times* ran a small box on their front page entitled ‘In Justice to Some Germans in Washington.’ The paper noted that it had ‘completed a most careful investigation’ of rumors involving local business men reportedly engaged in pro-German activities, and had ‘failed to discover the slightest foundation for these reports.’⁶² The effect of this announcement was

⁶⁰ ‘Rev. Dr. Martin Tells Veterans City is Filled With Spies’, *The Evening Star*, 26 March 1917, p. 3; ‘Planning to Block German Partisans’ *The Evening Star*, 26 March 1917, p. 1; ‘Ground Glass Found in Bandages, He Says’ *The Evening Star*, 29 March 1917, p. 1; ‘Another German ‘Plot’ Comes to The Surface’, *The Evening Star*, 30 March 1917, p. 9; ‘U.S. Probing Activities of Spies, It Is Believed’ *The Evening Star*, 4 April 1917, p. 2; ‘German Plotters Joining Red Cross’, *The Washington Times*, 29 March 1917, p. 3.

⁶¹ ‘Germans Try to Incite Negroes Against U.S.’ *The Evening Star*, 5 April 1917, p. 18; ‘Knows of No Plot to Destroy Capitol’ *The Evening Star*, 9 April 1917, p. 1; ‘Flood of Spy Data’ *The Evening Star*, 8 April 1917, p. 16; ‘War Scare at Great Falls’ *The Evening Star*, 8 April 1917, p. 3.

⁶² ‘In Justice to Some Germans in Washington’ *The Washington Times*, 27 March 1917, p. 1.

apparently lost amid the clamor as bold and alarming headlines announced the latest developments to Washingtonians as the United States entered the war against Germany. On 24 March the *Times* headline announced ‘Activities of German Sympathizers Here Lead War Department to Consider Call on District Troops for Local Guard Duty.’ The next day the front page warned of an ‘army of spies’ even as the editorial page noted that there was ‘no need for anti-spy panics.’ The *Times* investigated how many ‘alien’ teachers were in the district schools and found five. Three were French and two were preparing to become citizens. The paper also lauded local students who replaced a photo of the Kaiser with one of President Wilson in a German-language teacher’s classroom. The high school students crawled through a transom to enter the room, took down the Kaiser’s picture, destroyed it, and then put up a photo of President Wilson. The students were not punished. The teacher was chastised for her ‘indiscretion.’⁶³

The public had been primed for such hysteria by a genre of invasion thrillers before the war. Stories about an invasion of an unprepared nation by an aggressive foreign power were widespread in Britain, sparked by the popularity of *The Battle of Dorking* (1871) in which a German-speaking empire defeats the UK. Such stories were also common in the US, gaining popularity after the war began in 1914. A four-book series, *Uncle Sam's Boys at The Invasion of the United States* (1916) by H. Irving Hancock warned of a German invasion, as did Cleveland Moffett’s *The Conquest of America* (1916). Movies played on, and reinforced, the same fears. The hero in *The Battle Cry of Peace* (1915) supports ‘preparedness,’ the rearmament campaign then current in the United States. His father is a prominent peace activist and supports

⁶³ ‘Activities of German Sympathizers’, *The Washington Times*, 24 March 24 1917, p. 1. ‘First Separate Battalion is Ordered’ *The Washington Times*, 25 March 1917, p. 1. ‘No need for Anti Spy Panics’, *The Washington Times*, 25 March 1917, p. 9; ‘Five Aliens Teach in Capital Schools’ *The Washington Times*, 5 April 1917, p. 13. The story did not indicate the citizenship of the other two teachers, or which of the five were planning to become citizens; ‘President’s Photo Displaces Kaiser’s’, *The Washington Times*, 19 March 1917, p. 1; ‘Hanging of Picture Called Indiscreet’, *The Washington Times*, 20 March 1917, p. 12.

disarmament. When an unnamed enemy (clearly Germany) invades an unprepared America, the hero and most of his family are slain. His sweetheart is killed by her own mother to save her from being raped. The film was screened at the Naval War College in August 1915 and was featured in a special showing sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution in Washington DC in early 1916. The showing was attended by numerous officials and members of Congress. After the United States entered the war in 1917 it was re-released with a new title, *The Battle Cry of War*.⁶⁴

A related genre of books were not fiction, or at least were not sold as such, but were promoted as exposes of German treachery, including warning of the disloyalty of German-Americans. One striking example was written before the United States entered the war, but was released in early May 1917, just weeks after Congress declared war in Germany. D. Thomas Curtin's *The Land of Deepening Shadow* claimed that a programme of 'sowing' Germans into foreign lands was begun by Prussia in 1866. The immigrants retained their loyalty to Germany, despite taking citizenship in their new homelands. Once established overseas they acted as spies reporting on matters of interest, including commercial activities. Curtin even hints that this is the reason for German's remarkable industrial progress after 1871. No German immigrant could be trusted in Curtin's view. Businessmen, academics, laborers, hotel porters, even musicians and those working in the theatre, could be spies, regardless of their position. 'It is also true that Germans of social distinction will often take positions far beneath their rank in order to gather valuable information for their Government' he warned.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Eric Van Schaack, 'The Coming of the Hun!: American Fears of a German invasion, 1918', *The Journal of American Culture*. 28/3 (2005), pp. 287-288.

⁶⁵ D. Thomas Curtin, *The Land of Deepening Shadow* (New York, 1917), pp. 202-206.; For reviews see 'Critical Reviews of the Season's Latest Books', *The (New York) Sun*, 12 May 1917, p. 6.; 'In the Land of Deepening Shadow' *The (Philadelphia) Ledger*, 19 May 1917, p. 7; See also the advertisement for the book in *The New York Tribune*, 18 August 1917, p. 4.

The District of Columbia

DC was in a unique situation among American cities. The most obvious was that as the nation's capital, there was an added level of security concerns that even other places such as New York that hosted important military and financial institutions did not share to the same degree. Besides the obvious civilian government institutions, there were also military facilities, such as the Navy Yard in south-east DC. Fort Meyer across the Potomac in Alexandria County was the site of the Three Sisters, the radio towers that allowed the Navy to communicate with ships around the world, and the Army to communicate with the American Expeditionary Force in Europe. The presence of foreign embassies in Washington was also a security concern. Of course the German ambassador and his staff were sent home when the US declared war in 1917, as were the Austro-Hungarians later that year. But the US never declared war on the other Central Powers, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, and there were diplomats from neutral states sympathetic to Germany, such as the Netherlands, in the city as well. As such fears of spies within the capital were not unfounded. After all, intelligence gathering is one of the major roles of an embassy. Even the odd status of the city, controlled and run by the US Congress, played a role. Congressmen had long used the city as a way to signal their own constituents back home: the city was forced to go "dry" in October 1917 by a vote of Congress, despite the feelings of the city's residents. That allowed representatives to court the dry vote without alienating any wet voters back home. Without their own local officials to turn to for help, residents of DC depended upon sympathetic members of Congress from elsewhere to voice their concerns. The German population of DC were thus cut off from any political aid. A German-American resident of St. Louis or Cincinnati had recourse to their own elected officials. It was not always effective, but it

was there. DC German-American residents could, however, lobby Congress through local rallies featuring members of Congress as speakers. Beginning in April 1917, however, this tactic became less and less feasible as the anti-German hysteria grew.

The day after war was declared, 7 April, the *Washington Times* ran an editorial entitled 'In Words of One Syllable.' The editors noted that those 'who were technically alien enemies of the United States resident therein should follow a simple rule, 'Obey the law; keep your mouth shut.' Insinuating that many German-Americans did not know English, further labeling them as outsiders, the paper concluded that family members who did know English should 'translate that into German.' Perhaps, the editor suggested, 'school children can be requisitioned for the task.' Finally the *Times* noted that the German language press should 'print it in box-car type.'⁶⁶

In the face of the rumors of disloyalty and growing fears on 28 March several prominent members of DC's German community issued 'formal statements pledging their allegiance to the Stars and Stripes.' Martin Wiegand, head of the city's United German Societies, noted that he came to the United States as a child, that members of his family had fought in the Civil War, and that a stepbrother had died in the war. A local German-American hotel owner declared 'Now that this country seems to be on the verge of war, I want it plainly understood that my sympathies are with the land of my adoption, and that my loyalty knows no conditions and no reservations.'⁶⁷ Brewer Christian Heurich noted in his statement to the press that 'His loyalty as a citizen was so far beyond question that he regarded the sensational rumors as being beneath his notice.' This did not quell the stories. In his memoirs Heurich noted that rumors of his disloyalty were rife throughout much of the war. 'I was' he wrote, 'in the opinion of these people, a master spy, an

⁶⁶ 'In Words of One Syllable', *The Washington Times*, 7 April 1917, p. 8.

⁶⁷ 'Allegiance Only to United States', *The Evening Star*, 28 March 1917, p. 2.; 'Pledge Loyalty to US', *Washington Post*, 29 March 1917, p. 5.

intriguer, a German propagandist, a fearful and dangerous person.’ Besides the rumor of the gun emplacements, Heurich recounted inviting the newspaper that claimed he had built a wireless station to send secret messages to Germany to inspect his property for such a facility, an offer they failed to accept. One paper reported erroneously that the brewer had committed suicide. The editor offered to print a retraction but Heurich told him to ‘let me remain dead. Leave me in my grave where you have got me for the remainder of the war, and I won’t sue you.’⁶⁸

The District’s German community, however, had far more serious thing to worry about than rumors, as hateful as they could be. Although they did not suffer through some of the violence seen in other parts of the country during the war, they found their activities increasingly restricted. Congress declared war on 6 April. Immediately President Wilson issued a proclamation designating German citizens living in the United States as ‘enemy aliens’, defined as German males at least fourteen years old who were not American citizens.⁶⁹ The proclamation forbade them from possessing weapons or wireless sets as well as more obvious items such as code books. Germans in the District had until 23 April to turn in any weapons to the local police. They were also forbidden from going within one half mile of government military and other sensitive facilities. Within Washington this included the Navy Yard as well as numerous other facilities.⁷⁰ The *Washington Journal* seemed actually relieved at the comparative mildness of the restrictions. Before the American declaration of war there had been worries that all Germans would be mass-interned. The paper noted that any government at war would apply these comparatively minor restrictions to ‘enemy aliens’ in their midst.⁷¹

⁶⁸ ‘Pledge Loyalty to U.S.’ *The Washington Post* 29 March 1917, p. 8.; Heurich, *In My Life*, pp. 133-134.; Heurich, *I Watched America Grow*, p. 135.

⁶⁹ This was extended to women in April 1918. *Annual Report of the Attorney General of the United States for the Year 1918*, (Washington, 1918), pp. 29-31.

⁷⁰ ‘Wilson Issues Proclamation: Aliens Warned to Obey Laws’, *The Washington Herald*, 7 April 1917, p. 5; ‘Germans Must Surrender Arms By Tomorrow Noon’, *The Washington Herald*, 22 April 1917, p. 8.

⁷¹ *The Washington Journal*, 22 April 1917.

These restrictions were, however, only the start. On 16 November 1917 Wilson issued a second, more far-reaching proclamation regarding 'enemy aliens'. They were banned from staying in either the District of Columbia or the Panama Canal Zone and they were forbidden from being within one hundred yards of any canal, dock, or pier used for shipping. No enemy alien 'shall ascend into the air in any airplane, balloon, airship, or flying machine.' Enemy aliens had to register with the US Attorney General and receive permission to move or to travel. As Washington had not yet declared war on Austria-Hungary, these restrictions still only applied to Germans within the United States. Those from Alsace-Lorraine could register as Alsatian Lorrianers, and not enemy aliens, with considerably loosened restrictions.⁷² German men who had been living in Washington before the United States declared war had until 15 December to leave the city. Those who had come to Washington after 6 April, labeled 'Teuton (sic) Transients' by *The Washington Post*, had to leave before 22 November or be arrested.⁷³ This was not an absolute requirement. It exempted men who were physically or mentally incapacitated as well as some residents of the Washington Veteran's home.⁷⁴

The German-language *Washington Journal*, desperate to prove its patriotism, supported these measures as reasonable and mild. On 30 November 1917 the paper commented that these restrictions were justified, 'Our government (i.e. US-government) has long remained passive towards espionage and sabotage. It's good they're now taking action against those Germans who betray their adopted fatherland.' In December the paper asked local Germans to keep quiet and follow orders to leave DC; these orders were not, the *Journal* noted, any worse than those

⁷² 'By the President of the United States of America A Proclamation' *The Washington Post*, 20 November 1917, p. 4; *Annual Report of the Attorney General*, p. 30.

⁷³ 'Ousts 1,000 Germans', *The Washington Post*, 20 November 1917, p. 1.

⁷⁴ William Barnes Glidden, 'Causalities of Caution: Alien Enemies in America, 1917-1919' (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1970), 104.

enacted by other governments against enemy aliens. They blamed not the Wilson administration for the restrictions, but a few sabotaging Germans. The majority of the American-German community was loyal to their adopted nation, they asserted, and the government was right to take action to make the home front safe. Despite these reassurances, the *Journal* ignored the Bureau of Investigation's continued activities, probably because it was simply too sensitive to discuss.⁷⁵

On 19 April 1918, Wilson issued a new proclamation that Austro-Hungarians and women were now also classified as enemy aliens. American-born wives of enemy aliens were included. The 1907 Expatriation Act stated that an American woman who married a non-U.S. citizen took on the citizenship of her husband. Besides, it was noted, German ambassador Bernstorff had an American-born wife. Such a broad proclamation could, and did, lead to embarrassments. James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, wrote to Wilson asking him to exempt almost two-dozen Catholic nuns who would have to leave their cloister in Washington, in at least one case for the first time in years. The administration agreed to consider an exception for those sisters from Alsace-Lorraine. Otherwise, no exceptions could be made. In June 1918, German and Austro-Hungarian women registered as had the men earlier. The Swedish minister, who represented Austrian interests in the United States, asked for several concessions be made for any enemy alien woman taken into custody. Many of his requests, such as the women not being left alone with male guards and that they should not be held in jails, were agreed to by the Justice Department. His request that they be detained in quarters with their husbands was refused.⁷⁶

For DC the total numbers directly affected were low. There were 2743 adult German-born males in the District in 1910. Eighty-nine were registered as enemy aliens during the war.

⁷⁵ *The Washington Journal*, 30 November 1917; *The Washington Journal*, 14 December 1917; *The Washington Journal*, 21 December 1917.

⁷⁶ Glidden, pp. 116-119.

Of those, only twelve were interned. However, this was 13.5%, the second-highest percentage in the country. Only North Carolina, with 21.6% had higher, but that was also part of a small population—30 of 139 total. The states with the most German-born adult males, New York, Illinois, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, interned between 1% (Ohio, 96) and 0.2% (Illinois, 92 and Wisconsin, 54) of their male German citizens.⁷⁷

Wives of German nationals were affected by these proclamations because they lost their American citizenship upon marriage, but German-born naturalized citizens were not. As a result, some members of the German-American community in Washington remained. However, their lives were disrupted as well, in matters both large and small. Several local churches stopped giving sermons in German and a newly arrived German Catholic priest transferred from DC to a parish in Maryland. The local German singing club, the *Sängerbund*, first substituted English titles for German and then suspended all its activities in 1918. Washington schools eliminated German courses in 1918 after enrolment dropped. The city's German language newspaper, the *Washington Journal*, self-censored to avoid printing any 'pro-German' news.⁷⁸ It lost much of its advertising and had to appeal to local readers for financial support to survive. It continued publication after the war, arguing for a merciful treaty with Germany in 1919. Brewer Christian Heurich later wrote that, being of German birth, he had to beware of 'people intent on witch-burning.' He was careful not to 'express opinions of any sort' and was mindful of how he spoke.⁷⁹ Like other local German-Americans, he was angry over the rumors of his disloyalty, but continued living and working in DC although his brewery closed. Heurich retired from public

⁷⁷ Jörg Nagler, 'Victims of the Home Front: Enemy Aliens in the United States during the First World War' in *Minorities in Wartime* Panikos Panayi, ed. (Oxford, 1993), p. 210.

⁷⁸ Dingle, *Gemeinschaft und Gemütlichkeit*, pp. 131-132.' Frank H. Pierce III, *The Washington Sängerbund: A History of German Song and Culture in the Nation's Capital* (Washington, 1981), pp. 77-79.

⁷⁹ Heurich, *I Watched America Grow*, p. 138.

view for the remainder of the war, although his company continued making ice so that he did not have to lay off his workers.⁸⁰

The Espionage and Sedition Acts of 1917 and 1918 also added to the hysteria. Laws originally intended to stop opponents of the war from hindering the draft were used to crush all dissent, even if only, at best, slightly connected to the war effort. Postmaster General Albert Sidney Burleson used his ability to restrict mailing privileges for publications to suppress any publication of which he did not approve, of which there were many. An old-fashioned Populist Bryan supporter, Burleson was suspicious of pacifists, unions, and socialists, and had an exceptionally broad definition of the latter. By late 1917 any foreign language publication had to first submit any article that might be seen as touching on the war in any way in English translation for clearance by the Post Office. The required effort and cost effectively silenced the German-language press. Attorney General Thomas W. Gregory likewise used the 1918 Sedition Act to punish any “un patriotic” speech, which was often defined as anything short of enthused support for the war. Wilson occasionally issued what might be generously defined as weak protests to Burleson and Gregory, but did nothing to stop them.ⁱ

Conclusion

Amongst the multitude of Little Germanies that dotted the United States before and during the First World War, the one in the capital stood out through its politically sensitive location. Although it had developed extensive cultural, social, charitable and religious networks in the prewar decades, there was little political activity. The District of Columbia was unique, having no Congressional representation and no elected local officials. As a result, there was little

⁸⁰ Klaus G. Wust "German Immigrants and their Newspapers in the District of Columbia" (Washington, DC: Washington Journal, 1959), p. 59-60; Heurich, *In My Life*, pp. 133-134.; Heurich, *I watched America Grow*, p. 135. As an American citizen, Heurich could remain in the city, but he chose to leave. His brewery had been closed by local prohibition laws (the ice plant remained operational), so his business interests in the city were less demanding.

impetus to form political structures, and when the minority attempted to influence US government policy between 1914 and 1917, ad hoc organizations relying on leaders from elsewhere had to make up for the vacuum. These included members of the House of Representatives and officers from national organizations such as the National German American Alliance. During the period of American neutrality, the ethnic newspaper *Washington Journal* was much in line with the gist of the German American press throughout the United States, supporting the cause of the German Empire and attempting to counter the dominance of the Anglophone media. The inherent bellicose undertones did not go unheard in the host society and contributed to the perception that the German minority posed a threat to internal security. This perception ultimately led to spy-fever, Germanophobia, state surveillance, internment, and temporary expulsion from the District of Columbia. Ethnic organizations were weakened or disbanded. The German American community in DC never again enjoyed the status they held before the war and, even though the hysteria was not repeated in the Second World War, the rumors of 1917 remained an unpleasant memory of a local community whose role in the larger community remained permanently diminished.

The bulk of scholarship integrates the topic of ‘enemy aliens’ in the United States during the First World War into the national narrative of American immigration and ethnic history.⁸¹ Although the present study constitutes an empirical, and through its location highly relevant, contribution to this field, we argue that it also serves corroboration and broadening of further historiographical frames on the nature of war. In recent years, scholars have convincingly argued for a wider understanding of the First World War which goes beyond the primary focus upon military aspects of the European frontlines. According to older interpretations, the war became

⁸¹ See footnotes 6 and 8.

only truly global after the United States entered the conflict in April 1917;⁸² and it was primarily a ‘soldiers’ war’ between conflicting armies.⁸³ In actual fact, the war was not one between nations, but between globally operating empires, and therefore had inherently global implications from the start. Its impact did not only extend to combatants, but also to civilians in both conflict and non-conflict zones.⁸⁴ The fact that Germans had settled, in the pre-war decades, in many countries which would become opponents of the German Empire generated a multitude of ‘mini conflict zones’ around the world. Expressions of diasporic connectedness and transnational allegiance from within ethnic communities served to aggravate tensions with host societies. Washington DC was only one of these conflict zones but highlights the extent to which the reverberations of war impacted on civilians in places far removed from the frontlines. Studying the totality of war must include the study of diasporas and ‘enemy minorities’.

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⁸² See, for example, Hew Strachan’s critique of this position in his *The First World War* (London, 2003), pp. 67-71.

⁸³ See, for example, Tammy Proctor’s critique of this position in her *Civilians in a World at War, 1914-1918* (New York, 2010).

⁸⁴ Robert Gerwarth, Erez Manela, eds., *Empires at War, 1911-1923* (Oxford, 2014); John Horne, ed., *A Companion to World War I* (Malden, 2010); Proctor, ‘Civilians’; Panayi, ‘Germans’.

ⁱ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 75-81.