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“A Nation of Orders”: Authoritarian Rhetoric and the Missouri Council of Defense in World War I

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In wartime, demographic groups with a greater resemblance or relation to the populations of adversarial powers often bear the brunt of social pressure on the homefront. To a degree, even the oft-hated proponents of peace -- who sometimes do coincide and overlap with the aforementioned sort of demographics -- seem to receive comparably less vitriol from the rest of the public. Indeed, wartime powers frequently persecute portions of their population for the sake of uncovering a "fifth column" -- an idea made popular by a fascist general in the Spanish Civil War who claimed that the march of his four columns on the capital had been aided by another column formed by citizens within the city.[1] During the Second World War, the United States government, believing that its western coast was at risk to similar sabotage, interned its own citizens of Japanese descent, many of whose families had existed peacefully in the country for decades by that point. Such perceptions of a demographic's subversive potential are often fabricated entirely, as they were during World War I when various powers incorrectly viewed their Jewish citizens as being agents of their opponent nations. Similarly, the Ottoman Empire predicated its atrocities against Armenians on such paranoia, ultimately resulting in genocide. All of these instances fly in the face of the fact that any given demographic -- whether it be ethnic, racial, or cultural in nature -- holds in itself a great many attitudes, motivations, and objectives. In essence, no demographic is monolithic in the sense that it may be prone to a single approach in its wartime attitudes and activities.

During the First World War, Americans of German descent certainly did not stray from this principle, especially as they engaged in endeavors that ranged from actively supporting the

[1] Glyn Prysor, "The Fifth Column and the British Experience of Retreat, 1940," *War in History* 12, no. 4 (November 2005): 423. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26061828.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A83331cf810e1cbf1ff2309fddf722c21&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=.

Germanic-dominated Central Powers, to serving against them on the Western Front, to disparaging their fellow German-American citizens in acts of "superpatriotism."[2] Nevertheless, the American establishment on the homefront frequently viewed the entirety of this demographic as being particularly susceptible to acting out as fifth columnists, who were expected to rise against the United States and aid in the German and Austro-Hungarian military efforts. To reduce the perceived probability of this, as well as to ensure the comfort of Americans outside of the Germanic demographic, various departments of the government clamped down on the vestiges of German-American cultural expression that united them, especially churches and schools, which supposedly fostered or signaled disloyalty to the nation. In Missouri, the governor at the time, Frederick Gardner, assigned a state council of defense with this special task, as he himself had been instructed to do per the guidelines of the National Council of Defense.[3] In turn, the Missouri Council of Defense engaged in rhetoric that was deliberately authoritarian and further incited American society to conduct grassroots campaigns against the civil liberties of any nonconformists, especially German-Americans.

Traditionally, scholarship on the German-American experience in World War I holds that the campaigns of anti-German proponents were deliberately harsh and fueled primarily by popular paranoia, which resulted in negative cultural effects for German-Americans across the homefront. In his article, "The War against German-Americans: The Removal of German Language Instruction from Indianapolis Schools, 1917-1919," Paul Ramsey claims that anti-German proponents acted so vehemently against the demographic that the effort could be

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[2] Paul J. Ramsey. "The War Against German-American Culture: The Removal of German Language Instruction from the Indianapolis Schools, 1917-1919," *Indiana Magazine of History* 98, no. 4 (December 2002): 285, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27792420.

[3] Petra DeWitt, *Degrees of Allegiance: Harassment and Loyalty in Missouri's German-American Community During World War I* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012): 5-6.

considered as a sort of "crusade."[4] Similarly, G.J. Meyer, author of *The World Remade: America in World War I*, posits that a sort of "war fever" came over almost all sectors of society in its endeavor to rid the United States of German-American traditions in which linguistic ties apparently signaled disloyalty.[5] Consequently, much of the existing scholarship on the topic focuses on which portions of the German-American population seem to have been impacted the most. Indeed, the pre-eminent study of German-American experience in the Great War, *Bonds of Loyalty* by Fredrick Luebke, indicates that "the most harmless and apolitical groups [of German-Americans]… were the ones who suffered the most severe persecutions."[6] With such a dynamic in play, scholars tend to agree that Anglo-American society, manifested in agencies like the councils of defense, did not distinguish the individual elements of the German-American demographic, opting instead to paint the population in a purely black-and-white dichotomy of patriotism and treachery.

Furthermore, significant portions of the existing scholarship on the topic examine the degree to which Germanic heritage played a motivating role in the actions and rhetoric against German-Americans. In other words, much of the discourse focuses on the degree to, as well as the reasons for, which othering took place as a cultural phenomenon. Kamphoefner simplifies the matter by stating that the Anglo-American mainstream tended to mistake "cultural loyalties or mere language preservation with political loyalty to the Fatherland," and as such, he focuses much of his study on the reality of a wide chasm that separated German-Americans and

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[4] Paul J. Ramsey. "The War Against German-American Culture: The Removal of German Language Instruction from the Indianapolis Schools, 1917-1919," *Indiana Magazine of History* 98, no. 4 (December 2002): 285, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27792420.

[5] G.J. Meyer, *The World Remade: America in World War I* (New York: Bantam Books, 2016), 148.

[6] Frederick Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974); Petra Dewitt, *Degrees of Allegiance: Harassment and Loyalty in Missouri's German-American Community During World War I* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012): 2.

Germany itself in the decades prior to the Great War.[7] In large part, DeWitt -- in her book *Degrees of Allegiance: Harassment and Loyalty in Missouri's German-American Community in World War I* -- contradicts the view of cultural othering by claiming that social, political, and economic conflicts primarily on the local level motivated German-Americans' domestic opponents, which included other German-Americans.[8] In fact, she asserts that this motivation ought to cause reclassification of the German-American experience as being "harassment, not persecution."[9] To a degree, Katja Wustenbecker reinforces the sort of claim made in Dewitt's work, as she highlights the fact that Americans who were clearly of German descent also participated in the scapegoating of other German-Americans -- even in violent instances.[10]

While the existing scholarship focuses largely on these physical realities as well as the motivating factors behind them, a relatively lesser amount of focus seems to have been devoted specifically to authoritarian-leaning strategies. At the same time, though, the issue is not necessarily unrecognized in the general discourse surrounding the United States in World War I. With prominent legislation limiting civil liberties at the national level in 1917 and 1918, a great many demographics became subjected to "an atmosphere of heightened anxiety" in which the federal government aimed "to silence dissent among the general population," especially in publications that tended toward criticism of the war effort.[11] Frequently, attention on these

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[7] Walter D. Kamphoefner, "Language and Loyalty among German Americans in World War I," Journal of Austrian-American History 3, no. 1 (2019): 1-25. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.5325/jaustamerhist.3.1.0001.pdf.

[8] Petra DeWitt, *Degrees of Allegiance: Harassment and Loyalty in Missouri's German-American Community During World War I* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012): 1-7.

[9] Ibid, 3.

[10] Katja Wüstenbecker, *Deutsch-Amerikaner im Ersten Weltkrieg: US-Politik and Nationale Identitaten im Mittleren Westen* (Stuttgart, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007), as quoted in Walter D. Kamphoefner, "Language and Loyalty among German Americans in World War I," Journal of Austrian-American History 3, no. 1 (2019): 2-3.

[11] Peter Conolly-Smith, "Reading Between the Lines': The Bureau of Investigation, the United States Post Office, and Domestic Surveillance During World War I," *Social Justice* 36, no. 1 (2009): 8-17.

legislative acts and their effects is geared toward discussions of the suppression of feminist advocates, Marxist ideologues, and other such groups that lacked conformity with traditional American society. Even in civil histories of World War I, the federal government is noted as having "militarized" citizenship for the benefit of the war effort, which essentially incentivized a dogmatic sense of "honorable service" in exchange for social and political acceptance.[12] While this issue is sometimes addressed in regards to German-Americans, it is rarely done so outside of works specifically addressing the struggle of that particular demographic. In one such work, Wustenbecker emphasizes the degree to which the German-American experience corroborates this trend, as "any form of dissent was… considered pro-German and thus unpatriotic" by the councils of defense.[13]

However, rather than looking at the actions of the Missouri Council of Defense in relation to the German-American experience in the First World War, this paper deliberately examines the actions of the Missouri Council of Defense in relation to the dynamics shared between wartime dissent, authoritarian rhetoric, and civil liberties. On the surface, these dynamics can be thought of much in the same way that the concepts of policy, strategy, and tactics generally are. While the anti-Germanic sentiment can be viewed as a part of a larger wartime policy, so too can the grassroots nature of linguistic erasure be viewed as a sort of on-the-ground tactic that would help bring about the policy's overall objective of Germanic defeat. In turn, authoritarian rhetoric can be viewed as the strategic bridge meant to make these two operational levels work together cohesively. Essentially, in conducting a transatlantic war effort, the United States sought not only to combat Imperial Germany, but also to quell those cultural

[12] Christopher Capozzola, "Legacies for Citizenship," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 4 (September 2014): 714.

[13] Katja Wüstenbecker, "German-Americans during World War I," last modified August 22, 2018. https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/german-americans-during-world-war-i/.

tendencies that perhaps indicated some manner of dissent and potential interference in the war effort and domestic political stability. While German-Americans did not exist as the only targeted category as a consequence of this strategy -- especially as political deviants like Marxists were active -- their experience with agencies like the Missouri Council of Defense serves as one of the best case studies of authoritarian rhetoric in American military history.

This perspective leads to some basic agreements and key disagreements with major scholars in the field -- mainly DeWitt, who notes that in many cases, no legal or immediate physical action was taken by the Missouri Council of Defense and its proponents. Instead, she notes that they sometimes opted for the "friendly coercion" of German-Americans.[14] At the same time, however, such a tactic could be defined as the subtle application of duress while declarations of non-duress are made. Even if no physical or social action was taken on a large scale, the implication of its possible use was inherently present -- regardless of disclaimers made by Anglo-Americans and their organizations. For this sort of action -- persuasion by the means of implied might -- is the definition of coercion. In the case of World War I, even if many German-Americans willingly and enthusiastically complied with denials of their heritage and its language, many others did so under immense social pressure.

In the decades prior to the war, no such dynamic had even been hinted at, as Americans of German descent were frequently viewed as a valuable segment of the overall population. Even in spite of their significant distinction as a cultural demographic, German-Americans "had been spared much of the discrimination, abuse, rejection, and collective mistrust experienced by so many racial and ethnic groups in the history of the United States."[15] Indeed, German-Americans

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[14] Petra DeWitt, *Degrees of Allegiance: Harassment and Loyalty in Missouri's German-American Community During World War I* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012): 1-7.

[15] Katja Wüstenbecker, "German-Americans during World War I," last modified August 22, 2018. https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/german-americans-during-world-war-i/.

had been allowed to flourish and culturally proliferate throughout the history of the United States, especially in the "German triangle" formed by Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and St. Louis during the 19th century.[16] Within the smaller region outlined by these Midwestern cities, many German-Americans exerted a large degree of influence in both economic and cultural affairs -- a trend represented exceedingly well by the rather high number of newspapers and other periodicals published using the German language.[17] In Indianapolis alone, multiple newspapers published in German held a readership of over 10,000, which in turn signaled the strength of German educational and social institutions throughout the Midwest.[18]

The distinction of such German-American institutions in the pre-war years is typified by small rural settlements like Hermann, Missouri, which was noted in early 20th century accounts as being linguistically diverse, especially in the schools and churches.[19] Even as nearly all in this community spoke German, not all necessarily spoke the same Germanic dialect, including those like Hanoverian or Westphalian, and not all German speakers could even understand each others' choice of dialect, meaning that on some occasions they had to "compromise on a neutral ground, poor English."[20] Indeed, while they maintained strength and pride in these linguistic and cultural traditions, German-Americans set themselves aside from the Fatherland in many ways. Notably, German-Americans began to adopt the predominant language of the United States -- English -- which, by the second generation of most German-American family lines, had supplanted German

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Paul J. Ramsey. "The War Against German-American Culture: The Removal of German Language Instruction from the Indianapolis Schools, 1917-1919," *Indiana Magazine of History* 98, no. 4 (December 2002): 289-290.

[19] Bek, William G, "*Der Geist Des Deutschtums' in the State of Missouri*," Western Historical Manuscript Collection. State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri-Columbia.

[20] Ibid.

as the preferred language of the individual.[21] This was especially the case as most transatlantic exchanges of correspondence between European Germans and German-Americans lasted a mere six years, thus signaling a certain dissipation of social and political ties between the two groups.[22] In turn, by the eve of the Great War, German-Americans had established a fairly prominent sense of "nostalgic love" for their Fatherland, but ultimately, that was all it amounted to -- for publicized political loyalty to Imperial Germany remained a rarity for those integrating into American society.[23]

This, however, did not indicate that German-Americans felt a complete lack of sympathy toward Germany in the early years of the war, nor did it prevent the Anglo-American mainstream from leveling tense accusations of these sympathies being dangerous and unreasonable. In private correspondence, German-Americans often reflected on the new fate of their old country, with some remarking that they believed the war had been "forced upon Germany and not brought about by the Kaiser."[24] Such sentiments further represent some German-Americans' sincere doubts regarding the reliability of stories, especially those covering developments on the Western Front. At times, German-Americans' reservations about the news, such as those stories regarding German war crimes in Belgium, stemmed from the idea that they had been composed from or colored by British propaganda.[25] In essence, without European sources of information

[21] Walter D. Kamphoefner, "Language and Loyalty among German Americans in World War I," Journal of Austrian-American History 3, no. 1 (2019): 2-3. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.5325/jaustamerhist.3.1.0001.pdf.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Katja Wüstenbecker, "German-Americans during World War I," last modified August 22, 2018. https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/german-americans-during-world-war-i/.; Walter D. Kamphoefner, "Language and Loyalty among German Americans in World War I," Journal of Austrian-American History 3, no. 1 (2019): 2-3. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.5325/jaustamerhist.3.1.0001.pdf.

[24] Benecke Family Papers, Collection 3825, Folder 1777, Western Historical Manuscript Collection State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

[25] Katja Wüstenbecker, "German-Americans during World War I," last modified August 22, 2018. https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/german-americans-during-world-war-i/.

that they viewed as trustworthy, some German-Americans lambasted England early in the war for putting Germany in a stranglehold with its naval blockade and and publicly prayed for the Kaiser's ultimate victory in 1914 and 1915 -- a time when such an end to the war would have meant relatively little to the neutral United States, at least in the official short-term capacity.

Additionally, German-Americans frequently addressed the war in increasingly formal methods that emphasized the American component of their identity and engaged in various activities befitting of the democratic processes of governance. More specifically, they expressed concerns over the United States' position as a neutral nation through their correspondence with political representatives, and they responded to American policies that affected the war with both assent and dissent.[26] The matter of international trade policy served as a particular flashpoint for many German-Americans, especially as they criticized arms sales and financing that contributed to the English war effort and the naval blockade of Germany in particular, which had the potential to hamper the economic and physical well-being of German civilians and soldiers alike.[27]

Indeed, throughout the entirety of World War I, the attitudes of German-Americans did not fit any single preconceived perspective. Instead, they followed the principle of demographic variation as it relates to immigrants and the generations that follow them. Carl Schurz, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior during the Civil War and a German immigrant himself, had previously articulated the sort of choice faced by German-Americans in World War I: one between estranging either the country comparable to their mother, Germany, or the country comparable to

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[26] Benecke Family Papers, Collection 3825, Folder 1777, Western Historical Manuscript Collection State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

[27] Katja Wüstenbecker, "German-Americans during World War I," last modified August 22, 2018. https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/german-americans-during-world-war-i/; Walter D. Kamphoefner, "Language and Loyalty among German Americans in World War I," Journal of Austrian-American History 3, no. 1 (2019): 9-14.

their wife, the United States.[28] As a result, German-Americans often, though certainly not always, sided with the United States' neutrality early in the war while also engaging in discourse sympathetic to Germany.[29]

Nevertheless, such expression still caused discomfort for their Anglo-American neighbors in a way that would be remembered quite well after the sinking of the Lusitania, the Zimmerman Telegram, and the American entrance into the Great War.[30] In April 1917, when the United States issued its official declaration of war against Imperial Germany, the tide of goodwill -- having already begun to shift with news from the Western Front -- officially and almost entirely turned against German-Americans, whom many Anglo-Americans now viewed as potential fifth columnists. In fact, by that point, anti-German mania had rooted itself so deep into the Anglo-American mainstream that it drove many citizens to the point of pure paranoia. In letters written in both 1916 and 1917, a St. Louis entrepreneur expressed the concept that many German-Americans directly contributed to the German war effort by way of subversive networking.

As if German-Americans were in direct correspondence with the German Army's High Command, the entrepreneur claimed in February of 1917 that "they are posted in advance of every move Germany makes."[31] While certainly outlandish, the base claim that Germans kept in contact with German-Americans does hold true to a degree, as relatives from the motherland sometimes did continue past the aforementioned average of a six-year exchange and keep sparse

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[28] Ibid, 6.

[29] Katja Wüstenbecker, "German-Americans during World War I," last modified August 22, 2018. https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/german-americans-during-world-war-i/.

[30] Katja Wüstenbecker, *Deutsch-Amerikaner im Ersten Weltkrieg: US-Politik and Nationale Identitaten im Mittleren Westen* (Stuttgart, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007), quoted in Walter D. Kamphoefner, "Language and Loyalty among German-Americans in World War I," *Journal of Austrian-American History* 3, no 1 (2019): 2-3.

[31] William Clark Breckenridge. *Letter of William Clark Breckenridge to William Porter, February 1, 1917*. Online Collections, Missouri Historical Society, A0170-00015, http://collections.mohistory.org/resource/939394.

correspondence with those who had emigrated prior to the war years.[32] Furthermore, the subversive bend of this claim also matches a wildly more radical notion in a letter the entrepreneur wrote in August of the previous year: "Our Teutonic citizens (???)... are preparing to elect as many men to office as possible who are PRO-GERMAN, so that when the collapse of the Central Powers comes all the power of these office holders [*sic*] can be used to force this country to step in and save Germany from punishment."[33] Even as the United States remained neutral at the time of these writings, citizens such as this entrepreneur held many fears that German influence -- in any form -- would soil the integrity of both the United States and the Entente war effort it had joined.

On June 15th, 1917 -- just over two months after the United States' entry into the war -- the federal government enacted legislation that set the groundwork for much of the authoritarian rhetoric that would villainize German-Americans in an official capacity and lead to the violation of their civil rights. Much of this action served as a disproportionate response to mysterious accidents, later discovered to be foreign hostilities, that had already briefly touched the continental United States, especially several acts of sabotage by German agents throughout 1916.[34] In particular, the destruction of a munitions facility on Black Tom Island in New York Harbor during July 1916 motivated much of the country to a popular sense anti-German panic -- as well as to legislative processes intended to better secure the nation from additional attacks and

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[32] Walter D. Kamphoefner. "Language and Loyalty among German Americans in World War I," *Journal of Austrian-American History* 3, no. 1 (2019): 14-16. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.5325/jaustamerhist.3.1.0001.pdf.

[33] William Clark Breckenridge. *Letter of William Clark Breckenridge to Gilbert Parker, August 1, 1916*. Online Collections, Missouri Historical Society, A0170-00020, https://mohistory.org/collections/item/A0170-00020.

[34] Peter Conolly-Smith, "Reading Between the Lines': The Bureau of Investigation, the United States Post Office, and Domestic Surveillance During World War I," *Social Justice* 36, no 1 (2009): 8-9, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.1525/lal.2011.23.2.262.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A29513c5b995e048f85dbf6ea798aef4a&ab_segments=&origin=.

the prospect of a fifth column.[35] Just under a year later, Congress passed the Espionage Act, which "called for a fine of up to $10,000 and imprisonment for a period up to 20 years for anyone found guilty of having 'willfully obstructed' the United States' war effort or supported those of its enemies in speech or in print."[36] Furthermore, the Trading with the Enemy Act, passed by Congress just a few months later in October 1917, formalized the distrust of those speaking or publishing in a foreign language, essentially requiring that all foreign-language publications be monitored by the government for any sort of news regarding the war.[37] As a result, those expressing dissent in any fashion found themselves in a precarious position in which simple sympathies for a cause could serve as grounds for legal ramifications.

Even prior to this point, however, government officials began preparing the nation for "the hardships that must be endured" in the anticipated times of war.[38] Indeed, public figures like the Governor of Missouri in 1917, Frederick Gardner, issued rhetoric that served as deliberate justification for censoring dissent on the homefront, which he proposed as being one of the aforementioned hardships that would be necessary in conducting an efficient war effort. In fact, Gardner stated in a speech during February 1917 that "our Government at peace and our Government engaged in international warfare are two entirely different institutions" -- a claim he reinforced with the idea that all civil functions were to be subordinated to the country's wartime objectives.[39] To this end, he also stated that "those in authority must and should wholly disregard

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[35] Katja Wüstenbecker, "German-Americans during World War I," last modified August 22, 2018. https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/german-americans-during-world-war-i/; Peter Conolly-Smith, "Reading Between the Lines': The Bureau of Investigation, the United States Post Office, and Domestic Surveillance During World War I," *Social Justice* 36, no 1 (2009): 8-9, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.1525/lal.2011.23.2.262.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A29513c5b995e048f85dbf6ea798aef4a&ab_segments=&origin=.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Missouri Council of Defense Papers, Collection 2797, Folder 373d, Western Historical Manuscript Collection State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

[39] Ibid.

laws and customs that are wise and just in times of peace" so that the war effort could be won in the shortest amount of time possible.[40]

Furthermore, in a way, this served as an expansion of the war to a new theater -- one in which the "outward looking and deterritorializing" nature of the American war machine was reversed so that political opponents might be neutralized as well, albeit temporarily in most cases.[41] Essentially, Gardner's rhetoric indicated that the state deserved to be unopposed in its prosecution of the war effort. This was especially the case as Gardner requested that citizens "not be moved to captious criticism because of personal inconvenience" caused by special wartime policies on the homefront, such as the aforementioned Espionage and Trading with the Enemy acts that would be passed just a few months after this speech. In this way, Gardner and other officials essentially asked their constituents to censor their genuine concerns about wartime policies for the sake of perceived political stability, and when groups like German-Americans did not immediately comply, the government began engaging in "wholesale repression."[42] In fact, so overwhelming was this disregard for free speech that the U.S. Attorney General during the war, Thomas W. Gregory, remarked that "it is safe to say that never in its history has this country been so thoroughly policed."[43]

When paired with the Espionage Act and the Trading with the Enemy Act, such rhetoric weaponized the dynamics of political assent and dissent, as can be seen in the social and political policing done by the Missouri Council of Defense. Formed specifically in accordance with

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[40] Ibid

[41] Leif Dahlberg, "Pirates, Partisans, and Politico-Juridical Space," *Law and Literature* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 267. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.1525/lal.2011.23.2.262.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A29513c5b995e048f85dbf6ea798aef4a&ab_segments=&origin=.

[42] Peter Conolly-Smith, "Reading Between the Lines': The Bureau of Investigation, the United States Post Office, and Domestic Surveillance During World War I," *Social Justice* 36, no. 1 (2009): 12.

[43] Christopher Capozzola, "Legacies for Citizenship," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 4 (September 2014): 722.

guidelines from President Woodrow Wilson's administration, this new state institution immediately began working toward higher military recruitment rates as well as increased safeguards against additional instances of sabotage, among other objectives.[44] In doing so, the Missouri Council of Defense also fostered councils of defense that were to be run at the municipal and county levels, thus bringing in an aspect of grassroots involvement that would further fuel the anti-German fears afflicting the nation. Indeed, documentation of the Missouri Council of Defense's communications paints a picture of an organization with loose administrative structures that allowed for a large degree of independent action at the local levels of operation. In some instances, this organizational flexibility and mass involvement led to missteps toward the objectives of the councils, such as one in which the authorities of Jefferson City, Missouri, passed an ordinance prohibiting the speaking of German in public. While such actions occurred throughout the state with significant support from the public and the councils that organized them, many of them -- including the one in Jefferson City -- also met resistance from legal authorities due to poor planning as well as the fact that they originated on the fearful whims of a manic populace.[45]

In any case, such actions were common and encouraged by the Missouri Council of Defense and its subsidiary councils. This is hardly surprising, considering that government officials, defense councils, and the citizens supporting them often held a widespread belief in German-Americans as saboteurs and German language instruction as "Prussianized' education,"

[44] Katja Wüstenbecker, "German-Americans during World War I," last modified August 22, 2018. https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/german-americans-during-world-war-i/; Peter Conolly-Smith, "Reading Between the Lines'

[45] Missouri Council of Defense Papers, Collection 2797, Folder 373d, Western Historical Manuscript Collection State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

which would supposedly militarize the youth and leave them in favor of Germany.[46] In fact, this perception surrounding German-Americans proved itself so prevalent that, in April 1918, the Department of Education actually issued guidelines featuring the prohibition of German language instruction in both public and private schools.[47] Such guidance likely stemmed in large part from the nativist sentiment common to the United States in the 19th century as well as in European societies throughout the 20th century.[48] As a result, one can also see the currents of nationalism -- a contributing factor key to the rise of some authoritarian regimes -- coursing through the rhetoric of the councils of defense, especially as there was a significant emphasis on efforts bringing about a cultural environment in which "every one residing in the United States uses nothing but the American language."[49] Even in the work of translating German-language newspapers, the councils of defense ensured that the work was "done by American women who are in each case thoroughly conversant."[50]

In turn, such rhetorical emphases also indicate a level of cultural othering so common to European states with authoritarian policies, such as Imperial Russia with its treatment of languages in its own communities of ethnic minorities.[51] Although the case of German-

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[46] Paul J. Ramsey. "The War Against German-American Culture: The Removal of German Language Instruction from the Indianapolis Schools, 1917-1919," *Indiana Magazine of History* 98, no. 4 (December 2002): 285-287, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27792420.

[47] Missouri Council of Defense Papers, Collection 2797, Folder 373d, Western Historical Manuscript Collection State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

[48] Christopher Capozzola, "Legacies for Citizenship," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 4 (September 2014): 718-719,https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26376598.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A8db743e583dec85b0c4df0ca76a6e607&ab_segments=&origin=; Paul J. Ramsey. "The War Against German-American Culture: The Removal of German Language Instruction from the Indianapolis Schools, 1917-1919," *Indiana Magazine of History* 98, no. 4 (December 2002): 285-287, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27792420.

[49] Missouri Council of Defense Papers, Collection 2797, Folder 373d, Western Historical Manuscript Collection State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Christopher Capozzola, "Legacies for Citizenship," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 4 (September 2014): 718-719,https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26376598.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A8db743e583dec85b0c4df0ca76a6e607&ab_segments=&origin=.

Americans proved itself much less severe than this example and other outpourings of authoritarian rhetoric, it nevertheless followed the practice of scapegoating frequently found in such politically-volatile states. In the very same memorandum from the Department of Education -- and amongst four other points of advice regarding German language instruction -- a restriction on textbooks was recommended: "Books used in the schools should not contain material antagonistic to the principles of the Government of the United States or principles or sentiments out of harmony with our democratic ideals."[52] With the inclusion of this guideline alongside those regarding German instruction, the Department of Education -- and therefore the Missouri Council of Defense -- equated German-speaking Americans with unpatriotic traitors. Accordingly, such policies allowed Missouri and the nation as a whole a social diversion much more convenient to the war effort than the building movements of feminism and Marxism, the latter of which had interrupted the Russia's effort against Germany and perhaps intimidated the Americans conducting their own.

Again, this sort of paranoia served fears of German-Americans that were quite real in the mind of the Anglo-American mainstream, which in turn were typified in the efforts of the Missouri Council of Defense as it worked to disrupt the traditions that created commonalities amongst German-Americans as a cultural demographic. More specifically, the Council often sought an all-or-nothing approach where German-Americans were concerned, and its Secretary Chairman, William F. Saunders, spread throughout the local councils an attitude in which "no man can be neutral… between the interests of America and the Imperial Government of Germany" -- even if that man found these two countries to be equally his own.[53] This, in turn,

[52] Missouri Council of Defense Papers, Collection 2797, Folder 373d, Western Historical Manuscript Collection State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

[53] Missouri Council of Defense Papers, Collection 2797, Western Historical Manuscript Collection State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

meant that city and county councils of defense, as well as the Missouri Council of Defense itself, only needed to reach a low threshold -- indeed, a mere denial of compliance or any criticism from German-Americans -- for domestic sanctions to be further ordered and carried out upon them. It is this sort of absolutist, authoritarian rhetoric that connected and pervaded both the policies and actions of the Missouri Council of Defense, which in turn steamrolled much of the constructive criticism and cultural sympathies posited by German-Americans throughout the course of the war.

Ironically, in nearly achieving this objective, the councils of defense also engaged in conduct similar to the ones it criticized German culture for; principally, this included the bypassing of democratic processes for the sake of military efficiency, which the stereotypical Prussian, and therefore German, was oftentimes associated with. Even on an individual level, the irony of the situation presents itself in the aforementioned efforts by the councils of defense to utilize German translators in keeping tabs on the activities and attitudes of German-Americans.[54] As a whole, the councils of defense found their rhetoric and means in a contradictory position that had been adopted simply for the reassurance of those who feared a small minority that largely aided the war effort in an enthusiastic manner. Even on a policy level, this essentially limited not only German-American cultural expression, but also any nuanced political expression by them. This is further evidenced by the numerous efforts to ban the speaking of the German language in the public, such as on streets and in schools, but also in the privacy of churches.[55]

However, perhaps the most notable aspect of the Missouri Council of Defense's rhetorical strategy that proved itself authoritarian was its use of "friendly coercion," as DeWitt

[54] Missouri Council of Defense Papers, Collection 2797, Folder 373d Western Historical Manuscript Collection State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

[55] Ibid.

termed it.[56] This method of anti-German action oftentimes bordered on being more within the realm of on-the-ground tactics and simple relations with German-Americans, though they subtly exuded some manner of authoritarian rhetoric. In correspondence to Saunders from a German-American pastor in St. Louis, the latter is noted as having promised and subsequently provided the former with a "list of all officers, Pastors, Professors, and Teachers of the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church."[57] Consequently, this allowed the Missouri Council of Defense "to ascertain whether a pastor or teacher, who may happen to be under a cloud, [was] a member of [the] synod or not."[58] Again, the German language was equated here -- in this case by an actual German-American -- with a higher potential for disloyalty, thus further contributing to an othering of a cultural group that was noted by many other writers in Council documents to have been quite the opposite.

Indeed, German-Americans are occasionally noted in the Missouri Council of Defense's correspondence -- mostly by council officials on the local levels -- as being "absolutely loyal in every way and upon all occasions."[59] Yet with the rarity of such statements in official communications, as well as with popular instances of harassment and violence against German-speakers in public, German-Americans doubtlessly felt the immense pressure and intimidation that lie latent in the social and political environment of the American homefront in World War I. Indeed, by whipping and shaming a man who had spoken German publicly in St. Thomas, Missouri, the grassroots proponents of the anti-German movement provided German-Americans

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[56] Petra DeWitt, *Degrees of Allegiance: Harassment and Loyalty in Missouri's German-American Community During World War I* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012): 1-7.

[57] Missouri Council of Defense Papers, Collection 2797, Folder 373d, Western Historical Manuscript Collection State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

with a fearful example of the possible outcomes if cultural deviancy and political dissent persisted any further into the war.[60]

Similarly, the lynching of a German-American man for his "disrespectful remarks" regarding President Wilson further served as a cautionary tale to other German-Americans.[61] As a result, as well as due to the legal ramifications of the Espionage Act, the repercussions of being "under a cloud" of dissent or sympathy for Germans posed immense dangers to expressive German-Americans, and thus also rendered some strategies by the Missouri Council of Defense pointless.[62] In particular, with seemingly-ironic efforts to keep the anti-German movement within legal boundaries, Saunders recommended that the Boone County Township Council of Defense "not threaten, simply advise" in its friendly coercion.[63] As a whole, with both subtle and more emboldened warnings to German-Americans, such instructions proved themselves both contradictory and meaningless, especially since violations in spite of them required repercussions on behalf of the Espionage Act and brought out the public's anger.

In return for all of this anti-German policy and authoritarian rhetoric, the Missouri Council of Defense and its popular proponents received almost exactly what it had requested since its inception in 1917 -- the erasure of the German language in Missouri. With some officials from the Missouri Council of Defense also fostering an attitude that "those who cannot understand any English whatsoever… are a negligible quantity," the government and its popular proponents neglected and even abused a sector of its own population. Accordingly, the actions of the Missouri Council of Defense naturally took on an unjust quality befitting of authoritarian

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[60] Petra DeWitt, *Degrees of Allegiance: Harassment and Loyalty in Missouri's German-American Community During World War I* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012): 1-7.

[61] Ibid, 59.

[62] Missouri Council of Defense Papers, Collection 2797, Folder 373d, Western Historical Manuscript Collection State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

[63] Ibid.

movements, since grassroots-level efforts at ensuring security oftentimes merely reassured some concerned citizens while depriving others of their rights -- namely their First Amendment rights. Indeed, the federal and state governments in the later years of World War I loosely curtailed liberty for the sake of efficiency and a false sense of security in the domestic scene. Even the Governor of Missouri in 1917 indicated that this ought to have been the official policy adopted by all citizens during the course of the war, as he stated in a February of that year that, in times of war, "those in authority must and should wholly disregard laws and customs that are wise and just in times of peace."[64]

As a result, the German-American experience in Missouri during the Great War frequently entailed surrendering one's long-held linguistic tradition -- in nearly every setting and context -- to the government. Although the Missouri Council of Defense did act in this way with the direct sanction of the state and federal governments, it still engaged in activities that essentially proved authoritarian and unfair, regardless of whether or not it was intended as such. In attempting to "win this war with the minimum amount of friction," the state of Missouri and its Council of Defense ultimately created additional social and political tension that conveniently served the self-interests of the United States government and forced German-Americans to choose between their heritage and unnecessary compliance with "a nation of orders."[65]

[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

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