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Cover Page Footnote

Acknowledgements: To my family who have always been supportive, and to the outstanding faculty at UNK for providing excellent feedback and guidance

POLICY, PROPAGANDA AND PERSPECTIVE: THE EVOLUTION OF ANTI-GERMAN SENTIMENT DURING WWI IN TAMPA BAY

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ABSTRACT

The Era of the Great War was a turning point in the sentiments of many Americans who were left on the home front while the military went off to war on the Continent. At home, anti-German sentiment crept into numerous urban populations, and often resulted in dire consequences including public trials and even loss of life. This paper examines the growth of Anti-German sentiment in the Tampa Bay Area by utilizing primary newspaper articles throughout the period leading up to and including WWI.

INTRODUCTION

The Great War, which spanned from 1914-1918 conjures many images in American memory, including those of trench warfare, European battlefronts and, ultimately, allied victory. But World War I was not only fought on European soil. A large part of the war, in fact, was fought right here at home- the war for the hearts and minds of the American public. Many people who originally opposed American involvement became obsessed with the search for 100% Americans and devoted themselves to the war effort and the Wilsonian administration, acting to uncover and expose disloyalty to the cause wherever it may appear. Instead of tanks or rifles, this war's weapons were the printing presses which sprang to life nation-wide and became disseminators of America's propaganda machine – a machine which, among other functions – launched a campaign against hyphenated Americans, most notably of German heritage who posed a threat to the very fabric of American society through nefarious acts of disloyalty and even treason.

The areas which faced the worst examples of anti-German sentiment during the war seemed to center around the Midwest, and a growing crescendo reached its peak on April 5, 1918 in Collinsville, Illinois. It was here that Robert Prager – a German immigrant – was dragged from the local jail where he was being kept for his own protection, repeatedly forced to kiss the American flag and sing patriotic songs before finally being lynched in front of a crowd of at least 200 people.¹ Coercive patriotism and popular suspicion, however, were far from confined to a particular area of the country. Thanks to administrative policies of President Wilson and his government and a very efficient political propaganda apparatus, super-patriots and 100% Americans were everywhere, and they were being told repeatedly that hyphenated Americans were dangerous and potentially disloyal in addition to the stories that German spies could be anywhere.

¹ Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974) 10.

These messages created a frenzy that called for definitive action if society itself was to be spared.² While the lynching in Collinsville and other acts of mob violence often get an understandable amount of attention and analysis, greater questions are raised when the focus is moved elsewhere. What was lifelike for German-Americans in areas of the country that did not have such a concentrated immigrant population? What can be learned by studying the progression of anti-German sentiments in a typical population of one of these areas? By focusing on Central Florida's Bay area and tracing the evolution of anti-German sentiments there, it is possible to watch how the area's German-American citizens went from leading socialites to suspicious characters who may be disloyal solely based upon heritage within the process of a few years. This paper will argue that the evolution of anti-German sentiment there was endemic of a larger, national ethnocentrism, heightened by the fear and prejudice of war, and that the timeline of events locally could have – and indeed often did – happen regularly throughout the United States. There is a clear progression of attitudes leading up the entry of the United States into the war through to the conflict's conclusion, and examining these attitudes from the perspective of every-day American people in a town rarely connected to the events of WWI will serve as a microhistory of American society during a nationalistic and ethnocentric crisis of national conscience.

Primary sources from WWI highlight the shift in perspective towards German-American immigrants and citizens that mirrored the policy emanating from some of the nation's top politicians. Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson both condemned hyphenated-Americans, insisting that double allegiance was unpatriotic and that those who proclaimed loyalty to more than one nation were bordering on treason. Contemporary newspapers, officers and every-day citizens mirrored these sentiments as distrust and hostility continued to increase against German-Americans as the war progressed, despite the Government's original platform of neutrality. This hostility reached critical mass when the United States officially entered the war. German-American societies, churches and organizations appeared eager to proclaim their loyalty to the United States given such a climate of coercion and suspicion. While the press and many political leaders condemned the actions that led to mob violence such as Robert Prager's murder, others used it as a platform to proclaim America-first attitudes, further strengthening the divide between native American citizens and their immigrant neighbors.

Later authors, understandably, have largely condemned the divisiveness and dangerous precedent set by WWI propaganda against fellow citizens who were harassed – often violently – for even potentially opposing the patriotic national line. Authors like Celia Kingsbury paint a grim picture of the dehumanizing tendencies of the Great War's propaganda efforts, both on American soil and among the allied nations. Other authors like Alan Axelrod can sidestep the morality debate inherent in this time period by focusing almost exclusively on the propaganda itself, although Axelrod does mention in some detail the national campaign against hyphenated Americans set in place by presidential policy. Modern sensibilities require a modicum of decorum, separating the government of hostile nations from its people and creating a further dividing line between citizens of a foreign hostile power and those who have immigrated to another country and fully embraced its culture and citizenship as a new-found home.

FRAMEWORK

² Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 4.

To accomplish such an important goal, this paper will approach the topic in three sections. The first two sections will provide background information which is critical to understanding not only the contemporary mindset at the outset of war, but also for understanding the events that follow in the Tampa Bay area specifically. Section one will provide an overview of the official policies of Wilson's government, including and centering around the arguments against hyphenated Americans and the Sedition Act of 1917 which set the stage for distrust, suspicion and fear through all levels of American society. Section two will focus on a brief yet important overview of American propaganda aimed against Germans – both abroad and at home, which fed into pre-existing fear and often prompted good, loyal Americans into action. Only then can the progression of events in Central Florida be properly placed into context. The third section will be an examination from primary sources on the progression of local anti-German sentiments, from 1914 when the German-American society was a hallmark of social engagements to 1919 when one of the local chapters was ultimately disbanded, many were questioned for loyalty, and many prominent German-American citizens had their loyalty questioned, tried and discussed in the press. In closing, the paper will tie national sentiments to local ones, tying all of the topics together into a cohesive picture of Anti-German sentiments within the United States.

OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN ACTION

Anti-German sentiments did not begin at the level of local civilians. They were expressed outright from the highest levels of government, fed through the press, encouraged by an official and large-scale propaganda campaign and ultimately affected the lives of Americans of all ethnic backgrounds. Tasked with creating support for a largely unpopular war, the Wilson administration sought to give Americans a reason to fight, not only abroad but on the home front as well, and the local fight that swept the nation through the end of WWI in large part took the form of super-patriotism, Americanism and the quest for loyalty from its large immigrant population. “When the United States entered the war in April 1917, the Wilson administration was acutely aware of how much of the public remained hostile to the nation’s intervention. It responded with an aggressive campaign of intimidation and coercion designed to silence critics and root out opposition.”³ This campaign took many forms, and included practically all levels of federal government, state government and trickled down to the local level throughout the nation. It also found its way to the general public through the media, alerting the general public that there was an enemy, and this enemy had to be fought at home as well as abroad.⁴ Public suspicion was only heightened by the suspicion that was heralded by the government. “By 1917, President Wilson charged that ‘the military masters of Germany’ had ‘filled our unsuspecting communities with vicious spies and conspirators’ that sought to ‘diligently spread sedition among us.’”⁵ The president also insisted that loyal citizens had given up their civil liberties and that any form of disloyalty should be relentlessly crushed.⁶ In many forms throughout the WWI era, the “federal government expanded its control over the American economy and the daily lives of ordinary citizens as never

³ Alan Brinkley, “Civil Liberties in Times of Crisis,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 59, no. 2 (Winter, 2006): 27.

⁴ Petra Dewitt, “From the ‘Most American City’ to Seeing German Ghosts Everywhere: St. Louis During the Great War,” in *Degrees of Allegiance: Harassment and Loyalty in Missouri’s German-American Community During World War I* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012) 94.

⁵ Duncan Moench, “Anti-German Hysteria and the Making of the Liberal Society,” *American Political Thought: A Journal of Ideas, institutions and Culture* 7 (Winter, 2018) 112.

⁶ Geoffrey R. Stone, “Civility and Dissent During Wartime,” *Human Rights* 33, no. 1 (Winter, 2006): 3

before, all in the name of national security and achieving victory.”⁷ President Wilson was not alone in his suspicion and attempts to control the American public – Theodore Roosevelt also spoke out in a campaign against hyphenated Americans, arguing that all residents of the United States, regardless of ethnic background or country of origin should drop the hyphen from their identity and become Americans first. In a speech presented in New York City on October 12, 1915, Roosevelt argued that “there is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism...our allegiance must be purely to the United States. We must unsparingly condemn any man who holds any other allegiance.”⁸ Roosevelt also published documentation in 1917 which called for a nationwide ruthless war against German culture within the borders of the United States, arguing that “German Americans must become ‘Americans and nothing else. Those who maintained vestiges of German culture were ‘traitors who had no right any longer to be treated as American citizens.’”⁹ The governmental campaign against hyphenated Americans sought to minimize the threat of anti-American ideology or action and led directly to the passage of the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918.¹⁰

Four key pieces of legislation serve to highlight the federal government’s control not only over those of ethnic German descent, but also how native Americans viewed them. First, the Espionage act of June 15, 1917 made statements against the war effort illegal and equated them to disloyalty or treason and could be punishable by fines and/or prison.¹¹

Second, the Trading with the Enemy Act of October 6, 1917 allowed for the confiscation of property that belonged to Germans which included not only individual German citizens, but German-Owned businesses and business interests as well.¹² American citizens who had married Germans were not immune from the trade act, and could be equally subject to property and asset seizure from the government.¹³ In addition to property confiscation, the Trading with the Enemy act also dictated that no foreign-language publications could be sent through the mail without a translation being provided to the postmaster for approval.¹⁴ The Postmaster General Burleson clarified this law, stating that any publication critical of the government or its involvement in the war were considered illegal.¹⁵

Third, the Sedition Act of May 16, 1918 clarified aspects of the Espionage act, making it illegal to not only successfully obstruct the U.S. war effort, but also attempting to disrupt it.¹⁶ The act further made speaking or publishing statements against the government or the flag illegal, and those found guilty could spend up to 21 years in prison.¹⁷ More specifically, the Sedition Act

⁷ Petra Dewitt, “Clear and Present Danger: The Legacy of the 1917 Espionage Act in the United States,” *Historical Reflections* 42, no. 2 (Summer, 2016) 116.

⁸ Mary J. Manning, “Being German, Being American,” *Prologue Magazine* (Summer, 2014) 15-22. <https://www.archives.gov/files/publications/prologue/2014/summer/germans.pdf>

⁹ Moench, “Anti-German Hysteria,” 112.

¹⁰ Brian Levin, “Precarious Balance Between Civil Liberties and National Security: A Historical Perspective,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 27, no. 2 (2003) 21.

¹¹ Levin, “Precarious Balance,” 21.

¹² Dewitt, “From the ‘Most American City,’” 94-95.

¹³ Dewitt, “From the ‘Most American City,’” 95.

¹⁴ Peter Conolly-Smith, “Reading Between the Lines: The Bureau of Investigation, the United States Post Office, and Domestic Surveillance During World War 1,” *Social Justice* 36, no 1 (2009): 9.

¹⁵ Conolly-Smith, “Reading Between the Lines,” 10.

¹⁶ Conolly-Smith, “Reading Between the Lines,” 15.

¹⁷ Levin, “Precarious Balance,” 22.

made it against the law to use “any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States or the Constitution of the United States or the flag of the United States, or the uniform of the army or navy” or any spoken or written communication that may cause “contempt, scorn...or disrepute” on the institutions mentioned above.¹⁸ “With virtually all forms of protest now punishable by law, and with delivery of even first-class mail entirely at the mercy of the Post Office, the Sedition Act placed American’s freedoms of speech and the press under the harshest restrictions in history.”¹⁹

Lastly, “the year 1918 saw the codification of the alien enemy act of 1798. The government was now able to apprehend and intern aliens of enemy ancestry, upon declaration of war of threat of invasion and the president had blanket authority to prosecute.”²⁰ The Espionage and Sedition Acts are the most notorious in the study of the restriction of civil liberties during the Great War, making speaking out against the government or anyone employed by it illegal, and gave the government the power to seek out, suppress and punish any perceived acts or statements of disloyalty or subversion.²¹ The government went even further, with the Supreme Court upholding restrictions to civil liberties, including a guarantee to the protections of the First Amendment in a time of war.²² Those that found themselves arrested and prosecuted under the above acts often detained and denied legal representation or due process by the courts.²³

PROPAGANDA FOR PATRIOTS

As important as the four acts detailed above were, arguably more so were their impact on the general population of the United States. “This state-sponsored repression did not occur in a vacuum. It both encouraged and reflected a widespread popular intolerance of dissent that at times became highly coercive.”²⁴ For example, under the praise of government authority, the American Protective league spied on individuals they suspected of disloyalty and primarily targeted immigrants – particularly those of German descent in order to report their findings back to government authorities.²⁵ Even more bluntly, “in wartime the general public inevitably rallies around the flag. Patriotism is feverish. Anyone who speaks out against the war is tarred with disloyalty, accused of insulting the nation and putting the soldiers at risk...in time of war, the government naturally attempts to whip up a mood of anger and even hatred against those deemed disloyal.”²⁶ If official legislation was not enough to whip of a frenzy of super-patriotism among every-day American citizens, then the government-led and sponsored campaign of propaganda was sure to fill in any gaps and get the job done.

While official, government propaganda was not a new phenomenon to the World War 1 era, the unprecedented scale and scope of the propaganda machine was new and highly inflammatory, not only to the enemy abroad but also at home. “WWI, on all sides, saw the first massive organized propaganda campaign of the 20th century, the first deliberate and official effort

¹⁸ “The Sedition Act of 1918,” from the United States Statutes at Large, V. 40 (April 1917-March 1919), accessed from https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/supremecourt/capitalism/sources_document1.html.

¹⁹ Conolly-Smith, “Reading Between the Lines,” 16.

²⁰ Manning, “Being German, Being American,” 16.

²¹ Brinkley, “Civil Liberties,” 27.

²² Levin, “Precarious Balance,” 22.

²³ Levin, “Precarious Balance,” 23.

²⁴ Brinkley, “Civil Liberties,” 27.

²⁵ Brinkley, “Civil Liberties,” 27.

²⁶ Stone, “Civility and Dissent,” 3.

to manipulate public opinion, an effort that was largely successful, according to wartime statistics...national boundaries began to blur in the unified effort to vilify, and thereby defeat, the marauding Hun.”²⁷ For Kingsbury and many other historians studying the effect of propaganda especially in times of war, propaganda is the true enemy – not a foreign aggressor – due to its capacity to inhibit or remove integrity and individual thought.²⁸ Propaganda in the United States was multi-faceted and targeted almost every group in the nation, from men who would be compelled to enlist, to women and children. Propaganda aimed directly at the home made both women and children militarized in the fight of ideology at home while their husbands and fathers served abroad.²⁹ Given the lack of a direct attack on America to justify official entry into the war being fought in Europe, Wilson’s government required the creation of a population willing to sacrifice for the war effort, ultimately creating the Committee for Public Information which “produced a flood of inflammatory pamphlets, news releases, speeches, editorials and motion pictures all designed to instill a hatred of all things German and of all persons whose loyalty might be open to doubt.”³⁰ The American press, by and large, was more than willing to oblige and continue the constant flood of fear and suspicion, publishing propaganda that claimed incessantly that Germany had infiltrated not only the government but the country at large with spies and agitators whose purpose was to spread pro-German dissent.”³¹

The cultural and ideological war at home during the war years exasperated existing cultural tensions, the war acted as a catalyst and “revealed major fault lines with an increasingly divided American society.”³² The American people at large were waging their own war at home, accusing anyone who did not vocally support the allied war effort or purchase enough liberty bonds as disloyal and potential traitors to the nation and the salvation of democracy that the Wilson Presidency posited.³³ Disloyalty, in the WWI era, was practically indistinguishable from treason for the large majority of the native American public, especially when applied to those of ethnic German descent.³⁴ Governmental and federal policy easily found its way to the press, who pontificated on the need for loyalty and heightened suspicion, distrust and fear among the populace at large. German newspapers such as the *Westliche Post* tried to get ahead of this cloud of suspicion by suggesting to their subscribers to keep any and all critical thoughts private, hoping to assuage suspicion from their neighbors.³⁵ Despite the best efforts and deepest wishes of ethnic Germans throughout the nation, as the United States declared war on Germany there was no longer a safe middle-ground between the identity of American or German – the line had already been drawn in the sand by both official policy and the press.³⁶ Propaganda insisted that anything of German origin, be it music by German composers or books in the library, became more and more suspicious throughout the United States.³⁷ Much of the propaganda against Germany in the United

²⁷ Celia Malone Kingsbury, *For Home and Country: World War I Propaganda on the Home Front* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 6.

²⁸ Kingsbury, *For Home and Country*, 2.

²⁹ Kingsbury, *For Home and Country*, 10.

³⁰ Stone, “Civility and Dissent,” 3.

³¹ John Koster, “Hating the Hun at Home,” *American History* 51, no. 3 (August, 2016) 2.

³² Clifford Wilcox, “World War I and the Attack on Professors of German at the University of Michigan,” *History of Education Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (Spring, 1993) 60-61.

³³ Wilcox, “World War I,” 59.

³⁴ Wilcox, “World War I,” 59.

³⁵ Dewitt, “From the ‘Most American City,’” 88.

³⁶ Dewitt, “From the ‘Most American City,’” 88.

³⁷ Dewitt, “From the ‘Most American City,’” 88.

States was aimed at the German language and those who still used it regularly. For the press and many government officials, the continued use of the German language was a deterrent to the process by which those of German ethnicity could become 100% American.³⁸ After April 6, 1917, anyone speaking any language other than English were potentially disloyal to America and subject to distrust and suspicion.³⁹ The German language press was also of particular interest, and the press hailed it as a vector for pro-German propaganda aimed at destabilizing the United States and obstructing the war effort at home and abroad.⁴⁰ Propaganda served as a tool for demonizing not only the actual atrocities committed by the German state, but to also undermine and criticize all German culture, including the cultural aspects celebrated in the states by citizens of German heritage, regardless of their past connections with the United States or their former standing among their neighbors.⁴¹

Official propaganda was not only directed at those of non-German descent, however. George Creel's Committee on Public Information also sought through propaganda efforts to appeal directly and specifically to America's German immigrant population itself.⁴² To achieve this lofty aim, the CPI created 'loyalty leagues' purposed with Americanizing these immigrant communities 'from within.'⁴³ One of these groups, the 'Friends of German Democracy' was created by the CPI and specifically targeted the nation's German-American population.⁴⁴ The CPI appealed to ethnic groups by providing news that was particular relevant to that particular immigrant community, as well as organizing and leading public rallies and meetings.⁴⁵ For ethnic communities in the United States throughout the war, propaganda was primarily a crusade of ideologies – a "crusade for the idea of democracy (which was) worth fighting for, no matter the historical accident of one's place of birth."⁴⁶

Arguably the most troubling form of propaganda spread in the United States was that which was directed specifically at children. Children in allied countries were encouraged to do their part, to save their allowances, inform on those who seemed to be falling short of their patriotic duty, eat food other than wheat in order to save it for the soldiers fighting the war and encouraged them to hate anything of German origin.⁴⁷ In this sense, propaganda was insidious and in hindsight, incredibly dangerous. Historian Celia Kingsbury perhaps argues the point best in the following quote from her book.

“The problem with propaganda, especially that involving children, is the obvious fact that in its use of stereotypes, it dehumanizes. If the enemy is less than human, it is easier to kill. While this concept may serve the soldier on the front lines, it also enables ordinary citizens to stone German dogs to death or, as in the United States near St. Louis in 1918, to

³⁸ Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 251.

³⁹ Alan Axelrod, *Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 179.

⁴⁰ Dewitt, "From the 'Most American City,'" 107.

⁴¹ Moench, "Anti-German Hysteria," 111.

⁴² Axelrod, *Selling the Great War*, 180.

⁴³ Axelrod, *Selling the Great War*, 180.

⁴⁴ Axelrod, *Selling the Great War*, 183.

⁴⁵ Axelrod, *Selling the Great War*, 183.

⁴⁶ Axelrod, *Selling the Great War*, 187.

⁴⁷ Kingsbury, *For Home and Country*, 167.

lynch German-born Robert Prager, whose assailants were tried but acquitted. On a lesser note, this hatred enabled the governor of Iowa to forbid public use of the German language, including the words hamburger and sauerkraut, which became ‘victory sandwich’ and ‘victory cabbage.’ Functioning to protect the family unit that would act in the service of the state, propagandists justified the ethnic and racial stereotyping and the scatological humor used to amuse and instruct children. Stereotypes of course underscored the us/them dichotomy that solidified family units and loyalty to the state.”⁴⁸

By highlighting the very real dangers in creating a national narrative of superiority that not only implied but encouraged native American citizens to discriminate and condemn those of different ethnic backgrounds and immigrants, the propaganda war against German Americans took an officially sanctioned tone and encouraged further suspicion, mistrust and even violence.

ANTI-GERMAN SENTIMENTS IN TAMPA BAY

In 1914, ethnic Germans in Tampa Bay had not yet come under direct suspicion and accusation by their neighbors. In August of 1914, the Tampa Chapter of the German-American club voted to raise funds to be sent to Germany to assist widows and orphans of the war, and the public praised the plan and supported their efforts.⁴⁹ In fact, Tampa Bay won the next convention of the South Atlantic League of German Societies in May of 1914 for the second time, and the Tampa Tribune reported that the city fondly remembered the last convention meeting and the wonderful people that it brought to the city from around the country.⁵⁰ All local papers included announcements of social engagements and activities that hailed citizens of German descent as valuable members of high society, and praised their contributions locally and at a national level. Things began to shift, however, as the war continued into 1915 and beyond.

On June 11, 1915, the Governor of Florida Albert Gilchrist who expressed the often-unpopular sentiment that his constituents should be not only tolerant of but sympathetic to the plight of German-Americans who, he argued, naturally held concerns and support for their mother country on its brink of disaster.⁵¹ Readers responding to Gilchrist’s plea did not agree. One reply specifically criticized those of German ethnic origins, claiming that there was no such thing as a ‘German-American’ and that it is not possible to claim to equal loyalties. He writes “this class of residents is either American or it is German; if it is the former, it stands by the American flag, and if it is the latter it does not belong in America but on the battlefields of Europe, fighting for the

⁴⁸ Kingsbury, *For Home and Country*, 213-215.

⁴⁹ “German Club Will Raise Fund to be Given to Bereaved,” *Tampa Bay Times*, August 28, 1914, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/325804615/?terms=%2C%2B%22local%2BGerman-American%22>

⁵⁰ “The Germans are Coming,” *The Tampa Tribune*, May 16, 1914, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/325939613/?terms=%2C%2B%22local%2BGerman-American%22>

⁵¹ Albert W. Gilchrist, “International Questions,” *The Tampa Morning Tribune* (Tampa), June 11, 1915, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/325847209/?terms=international%2Bquestions%3B%2Balbert%2Bgilchrist%3B>

Kaiser.”⁵² It is obvious that this kind of sentiment was pulled directly from the rhetoric and speeches of top government officials, including President Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt in their campaign against hyphenated Americans that was previously discussed. As it filtered down through the media into the minds of the general public, it had a direct result on how people of German-American descent were viewed by their neighbors, regardless of their former status within society. The assault against hyphenism continued in August of 1915, claiming that those of hyphenated loyalties could not claim themselves to be ‘true Americans.’ It was not possible to equally share two distinct loyalties. An article insisted, however, that the majority of ethnic Germans who resided within the United States were loyal who truly put the interests of America over those of Germany – but on the other side of the coin, a select view have shown time and time again that their loyalties were elsewhere, and their rhetoric and actions have approached treason against the United States.⁵³ This mentality continued after Theodore Roosevelt’s speech in front of the Knights of Columbus in New York City in October, 1915. The local article made it plain that Roosevelt found it necessary that all loyal immigrants should be required to learn and use English in an effort to fully Americanize them and that a stubborn claim to a hyphenated identity was tantamount to betraying American values and institutions.⁵⁴ While it’s obvious that as early as 1915, local views towards those of German ethnicity had undergone a profound shift when compared to press coverage in 1914 and before, the true test of loyalty for Tampa Bay’s German Americans would not reach a fever pitch until the years of 1917-1918 when loyalty affirmations became more common, prominent citizens were criticized and put on trial, and the local clubs felt increasing pressure to publicly put on displays of loyalty to the flag, the military and the government of the United States of America.

Though attitudes towards citizens with German backgrounds was undergoing a shift, both of the local papers made an effort to stem the rise of anti-German sentiment growing throughout the region. In March of 1917, the St. Petersburg Daily Times sought to clarify local sentiment by making a statement that the involvement in of the United States in the war in Europe was a war, not against the German people at large, but rather against German autocracy.⁵⁵ Similarly, the Tampa Tribune reported on May 11, 1917 that although it has received numerous reports from concerned citizens about potential treacherous disloyalty from alleged local German sympathizers in regards to pro-German sentiments or sympathies, nothing has been published because a large majority have been completely unfounded and that anyone who would dare to display such disloyalty is not worthy of the attention that the publication of their treason would grant them.⁵⁶ The paper goes further to warn anyone guilty of disloyalty that “Uncle Sam is long suffering and slow to wrath but when he does move _____” the rest of the sentence is left up to the imagination

⁵² “Remarks By Our Readers: Replies to Albert W. Gilchrist,” *The Tampa Tribune* (Tampa), June 15 1915, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/325852087/?terms=Remarks%2BBy%2BOur%2BReaders%3A%2BReplies%2Bto%2BAlbert%2BW.%2BGilchrist>.

⁵³ “To Invite Disaster: Be Rich, Aggressive and Without Arms,” *The Tampa Daily Times*, August 26, 1915, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/325769080/?terms=%3B%2Bto%2Binvite%2Bdisaster>

⁵⁴ “Naturalized Yanks Must Be Americans,” *The Tampa Tribune*, October 13, 1915, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/325953051/?terms=%3B%2BNaturalized%2BYanks%2BMust%2BBe%2BAmericans>

⁵⁵ C. Peter Ripley, “Intervention and Reaction: Florida Newspapers and United States Entry into World War I,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (January, 1917) 261.

⁵⁶ “A Prussian Snarl at Loyal Germans,” *The Tampa Times*, May 11, 1917, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/332945949/>

of anyone acting with such arrogance as to be disloyal to the nation that they call their home.⁵⁷ State-wide, Florida newspapers all called for loyal Americans of German descent to decide where their loyalty fell, and that loyal Americans of all ethnicities should seek out the enemies of America and traitors in order to report them to the correct authorities.⁵⁸ The growing anti-German sentiment of Tampa Bay had, by this point, grown to more than just words and had evolved into actions with the firebombing of a Tampa boarding house which had two allegedly unnaturalized German residents, and a professor at a female college was fired for being a pro-German sympathizer.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, individuals of German heritage were seeking the press out to publicly proclaim their loyalty to their non-German neighbors, as in the case of Eugene Mugge. In March 1917, Mugge visited the Tampa Times personally in order to assert that his loyalty to America had been brought under question and to clear the air.⁶⁰ Mugge freely admits to having feelings of sympathy towards the German people who are undergoing hardships at home but he similarly insists that his loyalty is first to America, and that he is willing to do whatever it takes to demonstrate that loyalty to anyone who still desires to question it.⁶¹ Again in April 1917, Mugge approached the press to insist that he, as a prominent member of Tampa Society and a person of German ethnicity desired to publicly express his loyalty to the United States, and to further prove the point he and his family proudly raised an American Flag over the Bay View Hotel.⁶²

Not only individuals were willing to come forward with professions of loyalty to the flag, the government and the nation – German societies all sought to do their part to reassure their neighbors of the allegiance to the nation as well. On April 8, 1917 the St. Petersburg chapter of the German-American society sent correspondence directly to President Wilson in order to assure him of their organization's loyalty as well as the loyalty of all of its members.⁶³ In addition to their loyalty, the leadership of the society also insisted that anyone who is a member of the club is an American citizen, and that membership has not – and will not – be granted to anyone with German citizenship.⁶⁴ On April 9, the Tampa Tribune wrote that the St. Petersburg chapter sent additional correspondence confirming their acceptance to membership of only naturalized American citizens, and that they stood by the president ready to do their part for America's war effort.⁶⁵ On April 11, 1917 the Tampa chapter of the German-American society donated the use of their building to the Red Cross in order to be utilized as a hospital for wounded troops, and by doing so they demonstrated their loyalty to America first.⁶⁶

⁵⁷ "A Prussian Snarl at Loyal Germans," 4.

⁵⁸ Ripley, "Intervention and Reaction," 265.

⁵⁹ Ripley, "Intervention and Reaction," 265.

⁶⁰ "Eugene Mugge An American Citizen: Tampa Born German-American Stands for the Stars and Stripes," March 24, 1917, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/332935496/?terms=%3B%2BMugge>

⁶¹ "Eugene Mugge An American Citizen"

⁶² "German Patriotism," *The Tampa Times*, April 3, 1917,

<https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/332938471/?terms=%3B%2B%22German%2BPatriotism%22>

⁶³ "Germans are Loyal," *St. Petersburg Times*, April 8, 1917,

<https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/314629585/?terms=%3B%2BGermans%2Bare%2BLoyal>

⁶⁴ "Germans are Loyal."

⁶⁵ "St. Pete Germans Stand By President," *The Tampa Tribune*, April 9, 1917,

<https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/325856006/?terms=%3B%2BSt%2BPete%2BGermans>

⁶⁶ "German Club Offers Use of building to Red Cross Society," *The Tampa Tribune*, April 11, 1917, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/325858831/?terms=%3B%2BGerman%2BClub%2BOffers>

Local loyalty meetings included large numbers of German-American citizens, and featured prominent speakers of German descent to address the crowds and assure them of their loyalty to the United States. Stories on April 8, 1917 and April 11, 1917 both indicate that Tampa residents are proudly displaying American flags on their homes and businesses and the Tampa German-American society has set a vote to determine what they can do actively to assure the president, the nation, and their neighbors of their dedication to the United States and its effort in the war.⁶⁷ On April 11, 1917 a large number of German-American club members as well as their leader Charles J. Maurer will address the meeting in order to pledge loyalty to America on behalf of the club's members as well as for all of those of German-American heritage throughout the Tampa Bay area.⁶⁸ Judge Maurer was also set to address St. Petersburg's loyalty meeting in Williams' Park specifically about the duties of all citizens of German ethnicity in regards to patriotism and support.⁶⁹

The anti-German rhetoric descended to a new level after the United States officially entered the war in 1917. On November 21, 1917, in order to avoid any possibility of suspicion or accusations of disloyalty on the part of its membership, the St. Petersburg chapter of the German-American society disbanded and turned over the contents of its treasury to the American Red Cross.⁷⁰ On March 6, 1918 an article appeared that called into question the purpose of the Tampa chapter of the German-American alliance.⁷¹ The story admits that the club served a purpose prior to the war as a social organization, but during war it appears as nothing more than an organization dedicated to apologist arguments for the German military and its leadership.⁷² Two stories were published in local papers on April 16, 1918. The first appeared as a local treatise against sedition and those who would dare to spread it and the necessity of destroying unchecked German propaganda.⁷³ According to the article, testimony in front of the Senate had revealed alarming facts regarding the national German-American alliance that could no longer be permitted by loyal Americans.⁷⁴ The article continues by claiming that "loyal Americans, without waiting for the dilatory action of congress, are taking the punishment of these sedition spreaders into their own hands and making treason odious and unsafe – as it should be."⁷⁵ According to the testimony of Dr. Sperry, the primary goal of the national German-American alliance – in addition to German schools and German churches - was to spread German propaganda throughout the United States.⁷⁶ Additionally, the article claims that "German societies, German newspapers and the German

⁶⁷ "Patriotic Wave Sweeps Over City," *The Tampa Tribune*, April 8, 1917, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/325853925/?terms=%3B%2BPatriotic%2BWave>

⁶⁸ "Germans to Speak at Big Loyalty Meeting," *The Tampa Tribune*, April 11, 1917, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/325858483/?terms=%3B%2BGermans%2BTo%2BSpeak>

⁶⁹ "Patriotism of City to Rule Mass Meeting," *Tampa Bay Times*, April 12, 1917, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/314629814/?terms=%3B%2BPatriotism%2Bof%2BCity%2Bto%2BRule%2BMass%2BMeeting>

⁷⁰ "German-American Club at St. Pete Disbands," *The Tampa Tribune*, November 21, 1917, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/326092781/?terms=%22German-American%2BSociety%22>

⁷¹ "A Superfluous Organization," *The St. Petersburg Times*, March 6, 2018, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/314854165/?terms=%3B%2BA%2BSuperfluous%2BOrganization>

⁷² "A Superfluous Organization."

⁷³ "Sedition Spreaders Should Be Scotched," *The Tampa Times*, April 16, 1918, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/332951570/?terms=sedition%2Bspreaders>

⁷⁴ "Sedition Spreaders," 4.

⁷⁵ "Sedition Spreaders," 4.

⁷⁶ "Sedition Spreaders," 4.

language are the most pernicious influences working against a thorough Americanization of the Germans in this country” and that tolerance and leniency could no longer be tolerated.⁷⁷

The second article of note on April 16, 1918 details an official inquiry that the County Guard conducted against three men accused of Pro-German sentiments. One of the men investigated, Alexander Nurick, admitted to feelings of sympathy towards Germany since his mother was of German descent.⁷⁸ Nurick was asked by the Guard to fly an American flag at his home and to salute it and warned that any further suspicion of his words or actions would result in a direct action against him by the authorities.⁷⁹ None of the three men examined were provided with legal representation although their inquiry resembled a military tribunal.⁸⁰ Those conducting the inquiry, however, insisted that by appearing before the public, the men had the opportunity to clear their names in a fair manner, and that they could regain standing in the eyes of the community around them.⁸¹ On April 24, 1918, the *Tampa Tribune* reported a story that five local men of German ethnicity appeared at a meeting at Tampa’s courthouse square where they were all publicly questioned about their loyalty to the flag, the military and the United States.⁸² After a public inquiry by a crowd of several hundred people, the men were handed flags and swept into a procession which marched through downtown to the sound of the national anthem.⁸³ The five men were ordered to cheer three times for the flag to which they complied and were then warned that any future actions deemed disloyal would be punished.⁸⁴ “The time has arrived when pro-German activities are no longer to be tolerated in this country, and those who persist in aiding the Kaiser may expect punishment of the severest nature.”⁸⁵ Despite the growing prominence of anti-German displays affecting those of German descent in the Tampa Bay area, the *Tampa Tribune* still ran a story on June 18, 1918 warning against painting all citizens of German heritage with the same, broad brush.⁸⁶ The article goes on to say that “they (German-American citizens) are placed in a very trying position, and their every act is open to suspicion and misconstruction by some crazy fanatic whose patriotism outruns his discretion and common sense.”⁸⁷ Those who do act against America or the war effort should be punished accordingly, but many citizens who come from German heritage are unquestionably loyal to America.⁸⁸ The article concludes by saying “such men should be treated with consideration and not placed in the same category with spies and traitors.”⁸⁹

⁷⁷ “Sedition Spreaders,” 4.

⁷⁸ “County Guard Heads Probe Three Men in Pro-German Inquiry,” *St. Petersburg Daily Times*, April 16, 1918, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/314860872/?terms=%3B%2BCounty%2BGuard%2BH eads%2BProbe>

⁷⁹ “County Guard.”

⁸⁰ “County Guard.”

⁸¹ “County Guard.”

⁸² “They All Swore Loyalty,” *The Tampa Tribune*, April 24, 1918,

<https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/326150658/?terms=%3B%2BThey%2BAll%2BSwore%2BLoyalty>

⁸³ “They All Swore Loyalty.”

⁸⁴ “They All Swore Loyalty.”

⁸⁵ “They All Swore Loyalty.”

⁸⁶ “Do Not Do The True Men Injustice,” *The Tampa Tribune*, June 18, 1918,

<https://tbo.newspapers.com/image/332883413/?terms=%3B%2BTAMPA%2BGERMAN%2BaAMERICAN%2BSOCIETY>

⁸⁷ “Do Not Do the True Men Injustice.”

⁸⁸ “Do Not Do the True Men Injustice.”

⁸⁹ “Do Not Do the True Men Injustice.”

In perhaps the biggest display of anti-German sentiment in Tampa throughout the war period was the public trial of the Gainesville University professor L.W. Bucchholz in late 1918. The first announcement of his trial came on November 1, 1918, announcing that a board of inquiry would be convened in Tampa to discuss charges including alleged pro-German sentiments in the classroom.⁹⁰ The university was similarly criticized for keeping him on the payroll when his loyalty to the United States was in question.⁹¹ A question of the professor's loyalty was first raised by many citizens in February who signed a petition calling for his removal, resulting in the trial by the university board in Tampa.⁹² On November 8, 2018 the *Tampa Times* reported that Professor Buchholz's hearing would begin locally on the following Monday by an inquisitorial board.⁹³ The paper further reports that many Tampa citizens were expected to testify that Professor Buchholz affirmed the Lusitania sinking and upheld pro-German sentiments prior to the war.⁹⁴ Many other local citizens are expected to testify that the professor has not shown any unpatriotic tendencies.⁹⁵ On November 11, 1918 the *Tampa Times* reported on the facts of the inquisitorial board, indicating that more witnesses had testified in defense of Professor Buchholz than against him.⁹⁶ On November 12, 1918 the board announced that the charges of disloyalty asserted against Professor Buccholz were unfounded, and fully exonerated him of all charges pending against him.⁹⁷ The hearing, lasting from 9am to 7:30pm found in favor of the professor unanimously and over 25 citizens testified that, even in light of the charges, they would feel comfortable putting their children under his educational leadership.⁹⁸ The Buchholz incident was far from over, however, and on December 4, 1918 Senator W.A. Russell spoke at length and proposed a resolution demanding that no one of German ethnicity, or those who sympathize with Germany or make pro-German statements or anyone whose character is questioned to be allowed to work in any of the state's colleges or universities.⁹⁹ Senator Russell therefore presented a resolution that would allow any concerned citizens to submit affidavits to a board with any accusations against those employed within Florida's institutes of higher education.¹⁰⁰

CONCLUSIONS

The research and writing of this project make several things abundantly clear. First, anti-German sentiment on a national and local level did not crop up overnight. Violence, mistrust and suspicion did not generate themselves at the outset of Europe's war. Rather, it grew gradually from a variety of national, local and social factors, heightening existing ethnic tensions, social discord and a war-heightened sense of paranoia that was fed to the general public from the highest

⁹⁰ "Prof. Buchholz Under Charges," *The Tampa Times*, November 1, 1918, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/332904642/?terms=%3B%2BProf.%2BBuchholz>

⁹¹ "Prof. Buccholz Under Charges."

⁹² "Prof. Buccholz Under Charges."

⁹³ "Hear Buchholz Here On Monday," *The Tampa Times*, November 8, 1918, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/332906650/?terms=%3B%2BHear%2BBuchholz>

⁹⁴ "Hear Buccholz Here on Monday."

⁹⁵ "Hear Buccholz Here on Monday."

⁹⁶ "Buchholz Charges Being Sifted by the Board of Control Here Today," *The Tampa Times*, November 11, 1918, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/332906985/>

⁹⁷ "Buchholz Given an Exoneration," *The Tampa Times*, November 12, 1918, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/332907073/?terms=Buchholz>

⁹⁸ "Buchholz Given an Exoneration."

⁹⁹ "Wants No Germans in Any of Institutions Supported by Florida," *The Tampa Tribune*, December 4, 1918, <https://tampabay.newspapers.com/image/326123038/?terms=%3B%2BWants%2Bno%2Bgermans>

¹⁰⁰ "Wants No Germans."

levels of government. National anti-German sentiment did not begin with the Lynching of Robert Prager in Collinsville, Illinois on April 5, 1918. It began with calls to arms via a government-sponsored propaganda effort that required every loyal American to be mindful of the potential for disloyalty, and to keep a watchful eye in a growing war at home in addition to the war happening overseas.

Second, growing anti-German sentiment throughout the United States did not occur in a vacuum. Rhetoric from the President and many of the nation's top governmental leaders trickled down through the press and into the general public, creating super-patriotism, hypervigilance and a blanket cloud of suspicion. As propaganda and the national press continued to insist that the German leadership had inserted spies everywhere, any criticism against the government or the role that the United States was to play in the war itself was viewed as dangerous at best – treacherous at worst. Continuing propaganda efforts directed the American public to spy on their neighbors and to report any potential German sympathies to the authorities, making anyone potentially suspected of disloyalty or treason to the country at large. Official acts such as the Espionage Act and the Sedition Act further strengthened the national suspicion of anyone claiming dual allegiance, and those of ethnic German heritage had reason to be mindful of their words and actions both in public and in private and to feel a pervading sense of fear and unease. The outbreaks of violence or demands for public loyalty displays only made an already bad situation worse, creating a vicious cycle of suspicion, withdrawal and accusation. The government-sponsored eradication of German language and culture in the quest for 100% Americans and the push for Americanized immigrants of all nationalities created a culture within the United States that made any possible divided loyalty to be tantamount to treason, and it was the duty of every “true American” to be mindful of traitors, spies and German propaganda everywhere – from schools, to churches, to the neighbor down the street that may have always seemed just a bit “off.”

Lastly, while the Tampa Bay area may seem otherwise insignificant to the war effort, the area had a fair share of anti-German sentiment locally. While there was no public lynching, as there was in Illinois, violence certainly appeared at least once in the firebombing of a boarding house that provided a home for two unnaturalized German residents. There was at least one incident of mob-mentality when five men were required to publicly answer questions in the square outside the courthouse, participate in a patriotic impromptu parade, wave an American flag while marching to the national anthem and swear allegiance to the United States of America while simultaneously being warned in no uncertain terms what would befall them should they make any action or say anything that may potentially be viewed as disloyal to the flag, the military or the country as a whole. There were at least two public inquiries – one by the Florida board of higher education in a formal, official procedure, the other resembling a military tribunal against those of German ethnicity who were accused of sympathy towards Germany or vocal pro-German sentiments in the classroom. Tampa was not immune from the rising tide of anti-German sentiment that swept the nation during the global war, and by viewing this seemingly insignificant American town in context, it becomes clear that the ethnocentric crisis of America's immigrants – especially those of German descent – was not an isolated incident, nor was it merely a local problem in areas of high immigrant populations. Instead, it was a nation-wide, Government sponsored program of fear, intimidation and mistrust that trickled all the way down from the President himself to the general public and did not vanish at the time victory was declared. It was endemic of a much larger issue within the nation, as a whole, and a resounding win overseas did not negate the causes

or the effects of the crisis that the war on the home front took on native American citizens or of their immigrant neighbors.

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